This sermon includes a visual that you must understand or certain paragraphs and sentences won’t make sense. When I did the rope illustration from Francis Chan I used a long rope with 21/2 inches of red tape on one end. The red represented life on earth. The rest of the rope represented the rest of eternity. I go back and forth between “this” pointing at the red part, and “this” holding up the length of the rope.

I would encourage you to look up “Francis Chan rope illustration on Youtube”.

**Ol’ Mo**

I love competitive sports. I love to play and I love to watch. There’s an adrenaline rush that doesn’t require any artificial stimulants and doesn’t have lasting negative effects, other than maybe the disappointment of losing.

Sometimes one team or competitor begins so well so quickly that they take momentum and control the game throughout.

         In the 90’s when the Bulls were the dominant team in the NBA they had many games won from the opening tip. They scored so quickly and often that the contest was essentially over early.

         At the 1997 Masters Golf Tournament Tiger Woods attacked the course for a 12 stroke victory.

         Sometime in the Olympics a runner immediately runs far out ahead of the pack so quickly the rest are racing for second place.

         Even in volleyball. A girl can begin with an unreturnable serve six or seven time in a row, capturing momentum and demoralizing the other team.

Those situations aren’t all that exciting, but often enough there is a crucial moment where one competitor does something that changes the whole tenor of the game. Momentum, often called “Ol’ Mo” shifts from one team to the other.

         Feb. 6, 2010 The Colds led the Saints 10-6 at half time in Super Bowl 46. New Orleans opened the second half with an on-sides kick that bounced off Hank Baskett for a Saints recovery. “Ol’ Mo” shifted on that play and the Saints went on to win 31-17.

         In a race, one runner seems to have it won when another kicks in a different gear and sprints past and on to the tape.

         With bases loaded and two outs in the sixth inning and his team trailing by two, a batter gets a clutch triple swinging “Ol’ Mo” to his team and they go on to victory.

Momentum shifts like that are super exciting. I think that’s what makes competition fun. It’s not always who is the better team. It’s who plays the best when it counts the most. Who does “Ol’ Mo” favor at the end of the game?

Life can be like that.

         One year a teacher takes special interest in a student and she all-of-a-sudden become very serious about history or science and goes on to a career in that field.

         Someone showed a boy of 13 how things work. That turned on an interest in him. He studied and went on to become an engineer who can fix anything

That happened to me around this time of year in 1972. I was a college freshman, a C+/B- student when Dr. Paul Mc Alister, a professor at our college challenged my faith. Can you imagine that? I grew up in church. We were there for everything. I was attending a Bible college. What more is expected of me?

Paul recognized that the momentum of my spiritual life was stagnant at best and failing at worst. He forced me to ask myself some difficult questions.

         What really matters?”

         What am I living for?

         Do I really believe Jesus?

         Do I believe in theology or do I believe that Jesus is God?

         Am I simply a religious person or am I a follower of Jesus?

More than that he forced me to answer those questions. That was when “Ol’ Mo” shifted in my life. It wasn’t easy for me. I had to change from being a dork who playing games with Christian faith to being a dork who was serious about faith.

What really did it for me was when, in a class, Paul took us to 1 Corinthians 15. That became the crucial moment that changed the rest of my life. The writer, the Apostle Paul wrote:

*What I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.*

*After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living…last of all He appeared to me also.*

1 Cor. 15:3-6, 8

So far, so good. Of course I believe that Jesus died for me sins (although I wasn’t really a bad sinner). He died for my sins, He was buried, and rose from the grave on the third day.

Now here’s what got to me. Paul went on with these words…

*If it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our faith is useless.* 1 Cor. 15:12-14

I’m not typically a fan of the King James Version of the Bible but this sentence rings resonates with me: *If Christ be not risen your faith is in vain*. “Ol’ Mo” shifted when Paul explained that passage.

I knew then it was time for me to get serious or get out. Either I was going to quit playing around the edges of faith and surrender my life to Christ, or I was going to stop even pretending to care about it.

Today we celebrate Jesus’ resurrection, Easter. We sing songs about Jesus overcoming death, coming back to life, defeating Satan and sin. We rejoice at the idea that He is our Risen Savior.

Is what really matters that we come to church sing songs on this day? Is being a Christian about going to church on Easter or maybe also Christmas? It’s not!

I want you to think about this with me. Christian faith comes down to one question: **Did Jesus rise from the grave?** If He didn’t then what we’re doing here today doesn’t matter. No one doubts that Jesus died. If He remained dead, then what we say we believe doesn’t mean a thing. It’s vain. It’s useless.

If He did rise from the grave, well that certainly changes things. It validates His claim to be God, the Messiah, the Savior.

I ask you, what do you believe, **Did Jesus rise for the grave?**

         If you don’t believe Jesus, is it because you have carefully considered the issue or is it because you just don’t think about it?

         If you do believe Jesus, is your faith real and life-changing?

Yes, you go to church, and you read the Bible sometimes. You can quote John 3:16 and Acts 2:38 and Ephesians 2:8 (*It is by grace you have been saved by faith*…). You’re familiar with 1 Corinthians 13 – the love chapter. Has the significance of Jesus resurrection captured your heart and mind?

**Did Jesus rise for the grave?** To answer this question is that crucial moment that should change the rest of your life. This is the moment when you choose what you will live for. Do you live for eternity, or do you live for now?

Why are you here today? Is it just the thing you do on Easter? Or is it because you celebrate that moment when “Ol’ Mo” shifted?

I believe that Easter is the most important time of the year, not just for Christians but for all people, because Easter confronts us with this question, **Did Jesus rise for the grave?**

We’re forced to choose, either I believe that Jesus is God or I don’t believe that Jesus is God. To not choose is to choose “I don’t believe”.

Now this is key, it doesn’t matter what we say about what we believe. What matters is how we live in response to what we say we believe. The truth is, what we live for reveals what we really believe.

So now I’m going to speak to each person here individually. I’m asking you. Not the person next to you. Not your husband or wife. I’m asking you: What are you living for? Are you living for now or for eternity?

Allow me to use this illustration Francis Chan shared several years ago. I’m certain it’s been used thousands of times across the world.

Rope – **imagine this goes on forever**. It is the timeline of your existence. This red part is your time on Earth.

**Some people think only of this**.

         They’re consumed by it.

         It’s all they think about.

         I’m going to work hard so I can enjoy this part.

What about the rest of it?

**What I do in this will determine how I spend all of the rest of this** – millions and millions of years.

         Why would I put all my focus and energy into enjoying this as much as I can but ignore the rest?

         Why would I work hard to make myself as comfortable as possible, enjoying this little part as much as I can?

Some might say I’m crazy focusing on this instead of this. Really? I think it’s crazy to put all my energy into this but sacrifice this.

Here’s kind of a paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 9:24-27:

*In a race all the runners run, some run only for this. Some run for this. Run in such a way as to get all of this. Everyone who competes in games goes into strict training. They do it to get this, something that will not last. What I do, I do to get all of this that will last forever. I don’t run aimlessly. No, I choose to live for this, so that after I have encouraged others, I myself will not be disqualified from this. 1 Cor. 9:24-27*

In other words, I’m going to live my life, this part, in such a way that I get to enjoy all of the rest of this. I’m going to invest this part of my life for that moment when I pass over into this.

I’m going to forget about all this to think about this. I’m not going to look at this and forget about this. I’m going to be like a runner getting to the end of the race. That’s the moment I face God. That’s when the bill for what I did in this gets paid in all of this. I’m going to live in such a way that I get to enjoy all of this.

Paul wrote in Philippians 3:13f: *I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

I’ll paraphrase that for our context: *Forgetting this and straining toward all of this, I press on toward the goal to win           all of this for which God has called me in Christ Jesus.*

With a sense of urgency Paul wrote, *I’m straining for all of this*. επεκτεινομαι means to stretch out, like Usain Bolt leaning into the finish line at 100 meters. The great Apostle says, *I’m not just running. I’m stretching to cross that finish line*.

Let’s read what he wrote in verses 18-20:

*I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.* Philippians 3:18-20

Now I’ll paraphrase:

*I can’t say this too much. Many people live for this. I weep for them because they’re sacrificing all of this for this. This is their god. This is all they think about. They are enemies of the cross of Christ.*

*But we think about all of this. We wait excitedly for that day when Jesus returns to take us out of this and into all of this*.

I skipped verses 15-17 but we can pick them up now. *All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.* Vv. 15-16

He’s assuming that our answer to the question, **Did Jesus rise for the grave?** is that we believe He did. We may not understand all that it means; we may wrestle with the implications of that belief, but we can live up to what we do know and understand.

Then he offered this: *Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.* Vs. 17 He encourages us to follow his example. Forgetting this, and keeping our eyes on all of this, stretch out to acquire all of this. In 1 Corinthians 11:1 he wrote, *Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*

*Imitate me*. *Imitate how I live for all of this, not distracted by this*.

My friends, and Ben and our Elders and I commit to you that we will do our absolute best to show you an example that you can imitate. We know we’re not perfect. We will fail, but we will strive to serve as models that you can follow to live like Christ.

Not because we want a bunch of clones of ourselves, but because we believe we’re called to serve as examples, just Paul told Timothy, *set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.* 1 Timothy 4:12

*Follow me as I follow Jesus*? That’s a powerful thing to say. I say it not because I’ve got it all together, but because I’m not thinking about this. I’m thinking of all of this. *Follow my example, as I pursue this.* Keep your eyes on people like Carl Savich, and Oscar Loveless, and Ron Knickrhem, and Dennis Duschek, and Garrett Cadwell, and Kevin Wood, and Ben Crostreet.

I remind you, we don’t get any “do-overs”. We get one chance at this, to prepare for this. This part can end at any moment. Then we’re into this. The decisions we make today affect this. More importantly, they affect all of this. I’m not going to sacrifice all of this, just to enjoy this. Maybe you think I’m stupid for some of my decisions because they’re going to affect this. No, stupid would be to make decisions for how they affect this but as a result lose all of this.

You know, there are two kinds of professing believers in this room today. Those who are living for this, and those who are living for this. .

Easter reminds us of that crucial moment when everything changed. When the stone rolled away from the entrance of that tomb “Ol’ Mo” shifted. Satan used to rule the Earth. He was called “the prince of this world” (John 12:31). When Jesus rose from the grave everything changed. Momentum shifted from sin to righteousness. Satan is still active and he does enjoy minor victories, but we know who will win the contest. “Ol’ Mo” has shifted.

There are two important questions everyone must answer:

**Did Jesus rise from the grave?**

And if He did, **What are you living for, this, or this?**

Choose to live for this, not this.