

Christos anesti! **(LCD) Christ is risen!** Today, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. In His resurrection, we see the power of God to restore the dead to life. Only God can do this. Let me ask you: do you know Him? He knows you...by name. Do you know His power in your life? The resurrection is not meant to be a nice holiday – it's an invitation to new life, eternal life. And that life is found in only one place – the resurrected one: Jesus Christ. And when you meet Him, everything changes.

One great example of the powerful impact of Jesus to restore lives is shown in the crowd-funded TV show **(LCD) The Chosen**. It tells the story of Jesus' life and is based on the Bible. Now they take creative license with the text, but it is done so well and doesn't contradict the scriptures at all. One of the most interesting things they do is interweave the stories of **(LCD) two people: a woman named Mary and a man named Nicodemus**. They couldn't be more different. Mary is a demon-possessed woman leading a tortured, awful life. She's at the bottom of society. Nicodemus is a highly-respected religious leader who is living in luxury and righteousness. He's at the top of society. Now the Bible doesn't say much about either one of them beyond this, but I love how The Chosen brings them together.

It starts with Mary who is called Lilith in the first episode. As I said, she's a mess. Demons have destroyed her life. She is filthy in more ways than one and is beyond despair. When the demons come upon her, she has flashbacks to when she was a little girl, and her father would tell her not to be afraid. He would tell her to remember God's words from the prophet Isaiah, **(LCD) "Thus says the Lord who created you, and he who formed you: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine."** Powerful words of reassurance...except that at this point in her life, they aren't working. The demons are destroying her, and she acts out, causing a commotion.

A Roman soldier goes to summon Nicodemus to do something about the disturbance in the "sinner" section of town. He goes there, a place he would never usually frequent, goes to Lilith's home, and begins his prayers of exorcism and waves his incense. He commands the demons to flee but she just looks at him and says, "We are not afraid of you! You have no power here!" Realizing his impotent, he cowers away and begins doubting his faith. Is this religion he's so good at just for show? Is there no power to it?

In the meantime, after this latest tortured, demonic episode, Lilith has had enough. Ever had enough? She goes to the local bar to steady herself for what will be her final act. She then goes to a cliffside where she is going to end it all. First, she rips up the scripture from her father. Then, as she's contemplating jumping, a dove flies over her head and she follows it...right back to the bar! As she's about to take a drink, **(LCD) a hand stops her**. She looks up and sees a strange man and then feels pain in her head. The demons are coming! She says, "Leave me alone," and flees out into the night. As she's walking away, she hears from behind her, **(LCD) "Mary."** How could he know her real name? She turns and says, "How do you know me? Who are you?" And he says, **(LCD) "Thus says the Lord who created you, and he who formed you: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine."** She's stunned. Jesus then comes to her, puts his hands on her head and exorcises the demons. **(LCD) He holds her in his arms**. She is redeemed. She is known. She is loved.

It's not long before Nicodemus hears about this miraculous deliverance. Did my prayers work? He immediately heads down to try and find Lilith and does. Watch their encounter. (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HRIUdfoSAqA&list=TLPQMTUwNDIwMjKkXOs0tU7KKA&index=1>

I love what she says there, (LCD) "**Here is what I know. I was one way and now I am completely different and the thing that happened in between was Him.**" Wow. It wasn't religion that transformed her, it was Jesus. It was resurrection power coming out of Him and into her. Do you know him? Nicodemus is dumbfound. Who is this one? What kind of power is this?! He goes searching and finds that it's the one they call Jesus, an itinerant, poor preacher. He arranges to have an appointment with (LCD) **Jesus at night**, on his rooftop. Now this conversation is recorded for us in scripture. It's in the gospel of John chapter 3. Turn there with me. (LEAVE THE PICTURE UP UNTIL BRETT COMES UP TO SPEAK)

"Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him." 3 Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

4 "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

5 Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

Jesus essentially tells Nicodemus that he can't earn His way to God, to a transformed life. The idea is that there is a need for a whole new nature. The flesh, our own human efforts, can never inherit the kingdom of God for it is of God. Only the Spirit can. Trying harder to be good doesn't give us the nature we need to live in the kingdom. Just as a baby can do nothing to be created and born, so we can do nothing to be spiritually reborn. It is God's seed working in the cradle of the Spirit that produces new life in us. It's as mysterious as the coming and going of the wind.

Verse 9, "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. 10 "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? 11 Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

Nicodemus knows the scriptures inside and out, but he still doesn't know God or the power of God. You can't find God on earth, even in the best religion. You have to look up to find God. Jesus then talks about a familiar story in the Old Testament when Israel had sinned against God and God sent poisonous snakes to punish them. They were dying and they cried out to God who

told Moses to create a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. All who looked up to it would be saved, delivered from death. Think of the faith it took to look away from the snake crawling over to you and to look up at a pole! Yet those who believed God's Word and who looked up, were saved. Salvation came from above, from looking up.

John then summarized what Jesus was saying to Nicodemus. Verse 16, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."* Believing in **(LCD) Jesus as the Son of God** sent from heaven to die for our sins on the cross is the means by which we are given eternal life which is the life of God. It's the life that Mary entered into when she responded to Jesus calling her by name. Do you believe in Jesus?

What's interesting is that it isn't clear if Nicodemus believes in Jesus. He has too much to give up. We do see him two more times in the Bible: once trying to defend Jesus with other Pharisees, and another helping to bury Jesus. It seems like he believes but we're not sure. As for Mary, she definitely believes in Jesus and sees the power of God flow through Him as she travels with Him. However, when Jesus is crucified and buried, she seems to be falling back into a dark place. Sometimes, even after we've believed in Jesus, we can fall back into dark places. The last time we see her in the Bible is when she heard that Jesus' tomb was empty. She runs to check it out and we read what happened in John 20. Go ahead and turn there.

"Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." 14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

15 He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary."

How cool is that? He says her name. Hope restored. God transforms lives. He resurrects hope. He does, we only need to believe, to look up at Him. Will we? I want you to listen now to the story of one of our beloved brothers: Brett Carlson. He recently celebrated the twentieth anniversary of his own deliverance. Mary, Nicodemus, and Brett all had appointments with God that changed their lives. How about us? Come on up Brett.

Brett share his testimony. (about 20 minutes)

(LCD) The tomb is empty. Jesus is risen! Do you believe? Maybe you're like Mary and need total transformation. Maybe you're like Nicodemus and are religious and are missing the power of God in your life. Maybe you're like Brett – you believe but aren't walking in the power of God. Let's close our time in prayer.