

# THE MOST HUMAN HUMAN

EASTER 2021



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Easter Message  
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A guy walks into his doctor's office with a serious complaint. "I'm dead, doc. I'm a corpse."

The doctor thinks for a moment about how to handle this situation. Finally, he says, "Well, are corpses ticklish?"

The guy responds with a laugh, "Of course not, doc!"

So the doctor tickles him, and he giggles and squirms away. "See?" says the doctor with a satisfied look on his face.

The guy is apologetic. "Wow, you're right!" the guy exclaims. "Corpses are ticklish!"

That joke is told in a book I recently finished called *The Most Human Human*. The book describes an annual competition in the field of Artificial Intelligence called the Loebner Prize. At this event, various computer programs try to pass what computer scientists call The Turing Test. In that test, an artificial intelligence has five minutes to convince a judge through text-based chat that it is, in fact, human.<sup>1</sup>

The winner at the competition is given the title The Most Human AI. But each artificial intelligence is competing against an actual human as well. There's a secondary prize given to the human who convinces the most judges that they are, in fact, a human. That person is given the title The Most Human Human.<sup>2</sup>

In his book, author Brian Christian discusses this challenge. Given five minutes of text-based chat, what is the most human thing you could do to convince a judge that you are, in fact, human?

I think this is one of the most critical issues addressing our culture today. Whether it's machine learning or bioengineering or gene editing or life extension efforts, modern technology keeps bumping up against the most basic of questions: What does it mean to be human?

Today is Easter Sunday. I think the story we celebrate today helps us answer that question. When Jesus Christ rose from the dead, he showed us what it really means to be human. It's in the story of Easter where Jesus gives us his perspective on how to be The Most Human Human.

In the past year, some of us feel like we've forgotten what it means to be human. Some have lost jobs. Some have struggled with mental health. Some have lost their lives. Now that things are opening up, there is a hunger for activity—a hunger for social connection. A hunger to be human again.

I believe this is an opportunity for the message of Jesus Christ. Whether it's the philosophical questions presented by our technology or the dehumanizing effect of a year of pandemic, people want to know how to be human. Jesus gives us an answer. For those of us who believe, we have the great privilege of inviting others into that new life as well.

Today, we're going to follow Jesus' footsteps in the last few weeks of his life. First, he was executed on a hill for all to see. Then he was buried and rose again in a garden. Several weeks later, he went back up to a different hill where he gave his followers a mission.

Let's travel with Jesus from a hill to a garden to a hill.

## The tree of shame

The Easter story begins not on Sunday but Friday. If you participated in our Good Friday service, you heard some powerful reflections on the words that Jesus said from the cross. This morning, there's one particular thing about Jesus' death that I want us to understand.

Listen to this description of his crucifixion.

**John 19:16-20:**

**So they took Jesus, 17 and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. 18 There they crucified him, and**

**with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. 19 Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” 20 Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek.**

Jesus was crucified at a place called Golgotha. There is some debate about the exact spot of Golgotha, but it was definitely on an elevated area. A hill. The Romans wanted everyone to watch Jesus die.

Pilate wrote an inscription calling him “the King of the Jews.” This wording wasn’t to honor Jesus. It was to humiliate him and discredit the Jews. Here’s your king, hanging on a Roman cross to die like a criminal for all the world to see.

Listen to what one of our missionaries, Nolan Sharp, wrote about the nature of crucifixion:

*Public mocking, nudity, and wounding were all deeply shameful. Delirium and agony caused the victim to cry or beg. Over the many hours it took to die he was covered with his own urine and feces. His broken body was usually left on display and denied an honorable burial. The victim not only died but also was thoroughly humiliated. In the ancient Mediterranean, this particular kind of dishonorable death meant, simply and unavoidably, permanent disgrace.<sup>3</sup>*

The Roman consul Cicero referred to the cross as “the tree of shame.” Jesus wasn’t just killed; he was cancelled. His reputation was destroyed. How could anyone follow him now?

Today, I wear a cross around my neck. But early Christians didn’t use a cross in their art because the image was just too shameful. They couldn’t get over the shame. It took 400 years before the cross appeared in Christian art.

Perhaps this was Jesus at his most human moment. What could be more human than blood and sweat and suffering and death? What could be more human than nakedness and shame? Isn’t this what the Romans were trying to do? Reduce this supposed Messiah to nothing more than the body of a man who could die?

Did Jesus become his most human on that hill called Golgotha?

Some of us have concluded that this is what it means to be human. After all, when someone makes a mistake, what do we say? We say, “well, they’re only human.” Why do we think that doing something wrong is the best example of humanity?

If you had to prove that you were human, would you make a mistake? Is shame and suffering and sorrow the most human thing?

## **The life of resurrection**

During his life, Jesus was talking about what it means to live—truly live—and people had a hard time understanding it. Actually, he did that a lot. But listen to what he said:

**John 12:24:**

**Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.**

I’m always amazed by how elegantly nature works. Within a peach is a large pit. After I’m done eating a peach, I throw that pit away. But if I were to plant it in the ground, something magical would happen. The dormant life inside of that pit would break free. The hard outer shell would literally be torn apart from the inside as the seed dies. But in its place is the beginning of a tree. And on that tree, many more peaches will grow.

It’s amazing, but it’s something we generally accept. In the next verse, though, Jesus applies that process to us.

**John 12:25:**

**Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.**

Somehow hating life in this world is compared to the seed falling into the earth and dying. Just like the seed bears much fruit, Jesus says that if you give up your earthly life, you’ll experience something called eternal life.

Shortly after this, Jesus dies on a hill in abject humiliation. One of his followers took his body and put it in a new tomb within a garden.

The corpse of Jesus buried in a garden. Now, we know that corpses aren’t ticklish. We also know that corpses

aren't like seeds. When you bury them in the ground, you don't expect anything to come out. And yet, three days after Jesus' death, a group of women came to the tomb to properly prepare his body.

But instead of a corpse, they encountered two men in dazzling apparel who said this to them:

**Luke 24:5-7:**

**“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.”**

He is not here but has risen. Why do you look for the seed when you should be looking for the tree? Remember how he told you? This is how it was going to be. Jesus would take on our sin, absorb our shame, and bring it all to the grave.

In its place would come new life. If it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. This is what the resurrection means. Eternal life is available to all who would follow Jesus.

Some people think eternal life means that you'll go to heaven when you die. That's not untrue, but it's only part of the story. Eternal life doesn't just happen after this life. Eternal life isn't just a different length of life. It's an entirely new quality of life. Eternal life begins here and now as a whole new experience and stretches out forever.

But it begins by dying in a garden.

About five years and three children into our marriage, my wife and I seemed to fight all the time. Conflict was rarely productive. It seemed that we circled the same drain over and over again. But I was in seminary preparing to be a pastor. I thought that meant that I had to figure out how to live life well so I could tell other people how to do it too.

When someone said that we needed to go to marriage counseling, that seemed impossible. It felt like complete failure. I was supposed to be good at this marriage stuff. To go to counseling felt like death.

But we went, and it felt like death. And out of that death, God brought new life. God healed and restored

and transformed us. Over the next several years, our marriage grew stronger and bore much fruit.

The biblical word for that kind of death is repentance. In fact, the invitation to follow Jesus is usually summed up in two words: “Repent and believe.” It begins with repentance. The old has to die. You have to face your shame. You have to admit your sin. New life doesn't come unless you lose your life, unless the grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies. Resurrection can't happen without the shame of dying on a cross. Are you ready to repent? Repent.

Are you ready to die so that you can live? Are you ready to walk away from all your old habits and patterns and assumptions that have gotten you nowhere and move forward into the eternal life that Jesus offers? Jesus tells us that this is the first step to truly living.

It may feel like death. It may feel like you're giving up everything. But once you are willing to follow Jesus onto the cross, your old self is buried. And from that seed, new life can begin. You put your faith in Jesus instead of yourself. And something within you bursts the outer shell of your old life and takes over. You enter into eternal life. Having repented, you believe in Jesus. Believe.

Then you bear much fruit. In the garden, life is transformed. Death is defeated. New life begins, and that new life is fruitful. Something else comes of it.

If this is something you haven't experienced, there is no better day to decide to follow Jesus than Easter Sunday. Today, you can repent and believe. Today, you can allow your old self to be buried so that something new can be born.

The story of Jesus doesn't end with him rising from the dead. There's one more hill we have to look at.

## **Purpose of the ascension**

We started with shame on a hill for all to see. Then we saw new life spring up in a garden. Before Jesus' time on earth is over, he takes his followers up to one more hill, called the Mount of Olives. It stands right outside the city of Jerusalem, with the Kidron Valley in between. Jesus took his disciples up to this hill and he said this:

**Acts 1:7b-9:**

**You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my**

**witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.**

I imagine Jesus pointing to the area around him as he’s talking. “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem” as he points to the city. “In all Judea and Samaria” as he points beyond the city to the land of Israel. “And to the end of the earth” as he lifts his hands and draws the attention of his disciples to the horizon.

There’s a hill near my house that I run up at least once a week. It’s not that tall—not even 100 feet high. If you watched the welcome video that we recorded for the Easter service, you saw me standing up there.

From that vantage point, I can see a lot of the Bay Area. Google’s new tent headquarters is right next door. Stanford’s Hoover Tower is easily seen. You can just pick out Facebook in the distance. Mountain View and Palo Alto are spread out before me.

When I stand on that hill, I often look around and think about this place where we live. The Silicon Valley. I think about the wealth and influence and power. But also the deep need for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus’ followers stood on the Mount of Olives, I think they could see Golgotha. They could see the place of his humiliation. But now, they were looking down on it. They were higher than it.

I don’t think Jesus was his most human when he died on the cross. That might be the kind of humanity we are most familiar with, but it isn’t what God intended when he created us. We weren’t created for shame and suffering and sorrow.

When Jesus led his followers up to that hill just before he rose into the clouds, he gave them a picture of what it truly means to be human. I am absolutely convinced that at that moment, Jesus was the most human human that had ever lived.

Also, in that moment, he gave his followers a mission: share this news. Bring the good news of new life to others. To Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and the

ends of the earth! You have repented; you have believed. Now be fruitful.

On Easter Sunday, Jesus gives us an incredible picture of what it means to be human. To get there from here, we have to be willing to die. That’s repentance. But we are given the promise of a new kind of life. That’s belief. And then we are given a mission. Share the news—be fruitful.

## Conclusion

Two hills and a garden. The hill of shame. The garden of new life. And the hill of purpose.

Jesus didn’t come to earth so that you could become a Christian. The path of following Jesus isn’t about becoming a good Christian, conforming to some religious mold. Jesus’ mission was far greater. He came to restore humanity. Jesus came to earth so you could become the most human of humans. He should know. He invented it.

If you don’t know Jesus, you have the opportunity to see your life transformed by a relationship with him. It begins with repentance— casting aside the old life, admitting your sin and brokenness, and calling out for help.

Then you believe. You believe in the man who defeated death. The one who took our shame so that we can have new life. The most human human who offers you the chance to see your own humanity restored.

Then you climb that second hill. You look at your world—the place where God has put you. You have a mission. You have the good news. Our world desperately needs it, especially now.

The resurrection of Jesus makes you fully human. Repent. Believe. Be fruitful.

## Endnotes

1. Brian Christian, *The Most Human Human* (New York City, NY: Anchor Books, 2011), 4-5.
2. Ibid.
3. Nolan Sharp, “Jesus’ Crucifixion as Transformation of Honor and Shame.” In *Zbornik Biblija i knjizevnost*, (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, Ogranak u Rijeci, 2014).