

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE | EASTER WITH TRADERS POINT

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Happy Easter to everybody. It is good to be with you today. I want to welcome everybody across all of our campuses. This is the last of five services. I call it the empty the tank service. Right? Any thing else I have left in the tank, I'm going to empty it out. I have no time constraints with this service. Alright? Alright, man. Alright.

Hey, hopefully you've got your Easter survey card in hand right now. I really would appreciate it if you'd participate in this. And here's why. What this is is some vital information that we take every year at Easter that helps us know how to serve and how to pastor you better. That's all that it is for.

And some of you might be like, "What kind of world? Why are we doing a survey on Easter?" That's simple. This is the one weekend when you all decide to show up at the same time. So, we're going to get some information from you. So if you would, just go ahead and pull this out. I'm going to walk you through it. It's going to take 60 seconds.

At the top there it's the year of your birth, male or female. Here's the first question. How would you describe your relationship with Jesus? Check one box and just be completely honest. This is anonymous. So you might say, "I'm a committed follower," or, "I'm just beginning my relationship," or for many of you this might be true, "I'm a Christian but if I'm being really honest, I'm not growing. I've just kind of strayed a bit." And then the last two responses, "I am ready to respond," or, "I have no intention of responding." Just check one box.

The next is: What area of your life presents the greatest challenge right now? That could be a single word. You might write in: anxiety, or addiction or money—whatever it is. Or you might even write a simple sentence. Just what is the biggest challenge right now in your life.

The next question: What would help you take your next step in knowing and following Jesus? And you just check all that apply. So if it's getting into some sort of group, if it's learning how to read your Bible every day, if it's teaching on certain books of the Bible or topics—just check all that apply. And there is even some space there to fill in your own.

Flip it over on the back. This is meant for those of you who call Traders Point home. And if you're here on a regular basis (we've been filling up on the weekends) and if you've been here lately you've probably seen that. So we're just wondering, would you be willing to switch services from the service you normally attend to a different one. Just mark yes or no.



And then the last question: If yes, which of the following new times would you most likely attend regularly. There are two options there: Thursday p.m. service at 6 o'clock or a Sunday 8 a.m. service. This is the 11 o'clock crowd so you are like, "No way." I get that. Or you might just say, "Hey, neither of those work for me." Just be honest. Fill that in and drop this off with somebody before you leave today. Thank you for taking the time to fill this out. This is honestly more helpful than you can possibly know.

I'm so glad that you are here. If you've got a Bible go ahead and grab it and turn to John, chapter 20. I don't know about guys, but one of my pet peeves when I'm listening to somebody giving a talk or a message of any kind is when I have no idea where they are going with it. Ever been to one of those talks? "I can't figure out the outline. I don't know where he's taking us. This seems like a bunch of random thoughts. It doesn't even seem like he's prepared." That is a pet peeve of mine.

What I hate worse than listening to a talk like that is giving one. So what I want to do today is I just want to tell you where I'm going. I don't want to blind side you. I don't want to surprise you. This isn't a *gotch you* kind of moment. I just want to be very, very clear about my intended purpose in this talk today.

After we walk through the passage, I just want to provide you an opportunity, whoever you are, however you got here, whatever is going on in your life to stand to your feet and to simply say, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God and I desire for Him to be Lord and Savior of my life." That you would literally stand up and say, "I believe."

And then, for many of you, if you haven't been baptized or you don't remember your baptism, a lot has happened since that baptism, you need this idea of security of where you stand with God, that you'd be baptized today. That's my end—I'm just telling you.

And some of you are going, "Challenge accepted." I don't intend on doing any of that stuff. And I'll be like, "Alright. That's totally fine." I just want to be honest. I just want to be totally up front with you.

And maybe as you kind of consider all of that, "What in the world would that take? For me to say that?" For some of you, you're like, "Man, you're going to have to navigate a whole bunch of things that are blocking the way of me getting there."

I know for me, I grew up in church. And if you're anything at all like me, I was utterly confused by all of this. I mean it just seemed like there were so many religions, so many people claiming to know the way. How do you know which one is the right way? How do you know the truth?

Even with the Christian God, I was like, "Man, there just seems to be so many rules and so many regulations and so many dos and so many don'ts." And I didn't really know what God expected of me, "God, what do You really want from me?"

One of the things I want you to know about Jesus is that Jesus—it's not easy to follow Him but it should never be complicated. If it's complicated, then we are following



somebody else's expectations or maybe even our own false narratives of what that means. Jesus is very clear as to what it is that He wants from us. In fact He says it in John, chapter 5, verse 29:

"Jesus told them, 'This is the only work God wants from you:'" It's the only thing that He wants from you. Believe. *"Believe, in the one he has sent."*

For some of you, you are like, "You're going to have to try harder than that, because that doesn't clear anything up at all for me. What do you mean by believe? You believe that He existed? Like I believe in unicorns and fairy tales. Just because I believe, now all of a sudden that makes everything great? What in the world does that mean?"

When Jesus says *believe* this is relational talk not transactional. So He doesn't say, "Hey, believe in a religion." He doesn't say that. He didn't say, "Believe in rules and regulations or even theology or doctrine as important as they are." Jesus said, "I want you to believe upon Me."

One of the things that I will never, ever do is try to argue you into faith. Not that I don't think that there are good arguments. I think there are. I just don't think that that should be the primary thing that we should use to get you into a relationship with Jesus. I think they come after your decision to follow Jesus. They are supplemental.

The fancy word for it is *apologetics*. It's this idea that there are good answers to some of the questions that you have. But listen, man. If I could argue you into faith, all it's going to take is a better argument to get you out.

It's a relationship that changes things. And one of the things that we see all throughout the New Testament is any time anybody's life was radically changed, and we're talking about people who were demon possessed, we're talking about prostitutes, we're talking about thieves and liars and cheats and murders, the thing that changed their life was not a set of theological pre-suppositions. And it wasn't them getting an A+ on the doctrine test. It was this. They had an encounter with Jesus and they put their trust in Him.

One of the most famous of these is this conversation that Jesus had with a thief on the cross who was hanging next to Him. Now, the Romans crucified thieves and criminals. So Jesus is crucified between two of them. And one of them ends up having an encounter with Jesus. Never went to church. Jesus didn't walk him through the plan of salvation. It was a radical change in this guy's life. He had an encounter.

And one of my favorite preaching clips of all time, and when I say clips, I mean... One of my favorite things to do, I'm just going to kind of nerd out on you for a minute, is that I'll get on YouTube and I'll follow the YouTube rabbit trail. It's usually preaching clips. Doesn't that sound nerdy? It's like the ESPN of pastors, "Look at that highlight. Oh, man. I could perfect my shot."

And one of my favorite preaching clips of all time is a 60 second clip from a guy Alistair Begg. He talks about the thief on the cross and I want to show it to you. Take a look at this 60 second clip.

Video

Think about the thief on the cross. I can't wait to find that fella one day to ask him, "How did that shake out for you? You were cussing the guy out with your friend. You'd never been in a Bible study. You never got baptized. You didn't know a thing about church membership and yet you made it! You made it! How did you make it?"

That's what the angel must have said, "What are you doing here?"

"Well, I don't know."

"What do you mean you don't know?"

"Well, 'cause I don't know."

"Whoa. Excuse me. Let me get my supervisor?"

You get the supervisor angel, "Son, we've just a few questions for you. First of all, are you clear on the doctrine of justification by faith?"

The guy said, "I've never heard of it in my life."

"What about, let's just go on the doctrine of Scripture immediately."

This guy is just staring. And eventually this angel says, "On what basis are you here?"

And he said, "The man on the middle cross said I could come."

Aaron

Isn't that so good? And by the way, that clip is why I don't have people sit behind me when I preach. Did you notice the look on the guy's face on the right? He needs Jesus.

So, it was an encounter that changed him. And can I just submit this to you? An encounter is what will change you if you have not had one. It's not a sermon. It's not understanding theology. It's not getting the right doctrines right. It is an encounter with the living Jesus.

And honestly, guys, that's what I've been praying for you today. All week long I've been praying that you would have an encounter with Jesus. And maybe for you right now you're like, "Well, I'd really love to have that, but there is baggage in the way."

And I would just simply say that's totally fine. All of us are human beings. We're going to have baggage in the way. And your baggage could be something that you did a long time ago or something you are currently doing that makes you feel like you are



unworthy. Maybe your baggage is a church hurt of some kind. Somebody broke your trust.

It doesn't matter. Whatever it is it is sitting in the way, there is a prayer that you can pray. In fact, it reminds me of this father in Mark chapter 9. His little boy is possessed by a demon and Jesus comes in and the father says to Jesus, "Have mercy on us if you can." And that word *if* triggered Jesus. And He turns to the guy and He's like, "If?" And He goes:

"Anything is possible if a person believes." The father instantly cried out, 'I do believe,'" And then he gets honest, "but help me overcome my unbelief!"

And maybe that's a prayer that you can utter right now under your breath, right where you are sitting, "I do believe. I want to believe. Would you help me overcome my unbelief?" That is a prayer that Jesus will respond to. And He responds by sending His Spirit, His Holy Spirit, to help you overcome your unbelief.

By the way, guys. None of us come to Jesus on our own. None of us come to Jesus because we see it ourselves or hear it ourselves or come to understand it ourselves. If you came to Jesus it's because the Holy Spirit prompted you, convicted you, and led you to Him.

You can't do it on your own. So right now maybe what you need is to say, "God, would You help me overcome my unbelief? Right now I don't know if I buy what this guy up front is saying. I don't know if I believe. There are a whole bunch of challenges, but right now would You send Your Holy Spirit, if You are real at all, to help me overcome my unbelief." And He will.

This is why Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Truth. He'll tell you the truth. And the truth will initially hurt. The truth will bring conviction. And then the truth will set you free. The truth brings life. And He refers to Satan as the father of lies. So the question is, who is influencing you the most? The Spirit of Truth or the father of lies. And for some of you, you're going to be deceived no longer and you're going to have an encounter with Jesus today. That is what I'm praying.

Listen. If you are tired of life, you are ready for Jesus. And in John, chapter 20 the disciples, they were tired of life. They had been beat up. For the last three years they had been following Jesus around. And they were confused most of the time because they thought Jesus was bringing about an earthly kingdom.

And they just don't understand what He means. He kept talking about His death and resurrection, but He never did it. And then the Romans arrest Him and they crucify Him. Murdered in front of them. That would have been traumatizing. Think about that for a minute. Somebody you've been spending every waking minute with for the last three years and He is murdered in front of you. That would rattle you to your core.

And in John, chapter 20, verse 19 John writes and says:

That Sunday evening,” the Sunday evening is the Sunday evening after Jesus’ bodily resurrection, “the disciples were meeting behind,” what kind of doors? Locked doors. And here’s why, “...they were afraid of the Jewish leaders.”

Why were they afraid? Well if the Jewish leaders could kill Jesus, they were likely next. It’s amazing what fear does to our lives and the grip that it has upon us. It’s amazing what fear does to deafen our ears to good news.

If you go back to verse 18, Jesus has already physically appeared to Mary Magdalene. And then she runs back to the disciples and she was like, “Guys, I’ve literally seen Jesus resurrected. He’s alive.” And it’s amazing to me that they don’t immediately run out with her and try to find Him. Instead, they are behind locked doors. Fear had deafened the news that Mary had come to bring.

So there they are, locked doors and it says next:

“Suddenly,” like that’s what it means. Right then and there, “Jesus was standing there among them!”

I love that so much. It doesn’t say that Jesus called ahead. It doesn’t say that Jesus knocked on the door. The visual that I get is that the disciples have the lights down low. They are all huddled behind the locked door, “Hey, man. James, do you hear anything outside?” And all of a sudden Jesus is just standing behind them. He’s like, “Hey, guys? What are we listening for?” And they are like, “JC! Where did You come from? You’ve got to stop sneaking up on us like that.”

And He’s just standing there. Now, notice the very first word out of Jesus’ mouth. Some of you need to hear this word today. Peace.

“Peace be with you,’... As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side.”

Why say the word *peace*? Because He knew that they didn’t have it. Why show them the wounds in His hands and side? Because He knew that they needed to see them because they were struggling to believe. And as He did this:

“They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! Again he said,” second time of three times in this passage Jesus is going to say this word, “Peace be with you.”

You’ve just got to understand, man. The disciples were not expecting to ever see Jesus alive again. If they did, they would not have been in a locked room. They would have been running out searching to find Him. They thought He was dead. And this is one of the many reasons why I believe that the resurrection narrative just rings true.

Now, listen. If you are struggling to believe that somebody could come back from the dead, I totally get that. That is not crazy. That is hard to believe. And yet, you've got to read the narrative and say, "Well, okay. If isn't true, if it is fiction, then the guys who were writing it would have written it differently."

There are a whole bunch of things that I could point out, but it would take some time. I don't have time to go through the whole list. Let me just point out two. If you were going to make up this resurrection narrative, the very first person that you would have had Jesus appear to would be somebody really, really important whose voice would have carried weight all throughout the land. Somebody like, I don't know, Pontius Pilot. Have Jesus show up to him. All of a sudden he's the one declaring that Jesus has resurrected.

But instead the very first person that Jesus showed up to, and I love this so much, was Mary Magdalene, a woman. And in that day and time (many of you know this) a woman's testimony was not viable in a court of law. I'm not saying that is right, I'm just saying that's how it was. If they were making it up they wouldn't have had a woman be the first one to see Jesus. They would have had somebody whose voice carried weight. The second thing is that if they were making it up, the disciples wouldn't have made themselves look so bad. If you're making it up you would go, "Oh, we totally knew that He was going to resurrect from the dead. That's why we were all camped out around the tomb all night long." It's like, "The sun came up on Easter morning and we were all huddled around, and the stone began to roll away, and we were counting down: ten, nine, eight..." And the stone rolls away and Jesus comes out and they are like, "Yeah, we did it!" They would have been celebrating.

But instead they were like, "Oh, He resurrected. He appeared to Mary. We're locked behind doors because we're afraid." Man, that just rings true. And then it says in verse 24:

"One of the twelve disciples," (some of you may have heard of him) "Thomas," oh Thomas. "...was not with the others when Jesus came." We don't know where he was. But I totally get this. It always seems like I'm missing the main event. "Aaron, did you see the big game?"

"No, I totally missed it. Didn't even know it was on."

"Did you see..."

"I was out."

And Thomas misses the main event. That would have been so bad. He comes back in, he came back from Meijers or something—with more chips or something, and they were

like, "Thomas. You will never believe this. Jesus was just here." And for whatever reason, *Jesus had already left. So, in verse 25 they tell him:*

"We have seen the Lord!" And here was his reply. Some of you are really going to resonate with him, "I won't believe," unless what? "...unless I see," And I don't know about you, that sounds totally reasonable. "I won't believe unless I see," what? "the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side."

And I would imagine that the disciples were all standing there and they are slightly offended, "You don't believe us? We literally just saw Him. Mary saw Him. You're not going to believe our testimony about this? We put our fingers in the wounds in his hands and his sides." And I would imagine that Thomas is like, "Great. Did you take a picture? Did you think to get a selfie with Him? That would help back up your story." And they were like, "No."

Then, how John writes the narrative, it just kind of stops there. And you pick up in the very next verse and we see that a week goes by. There is no resolution to this until: *"Eight days later the disciples were together again," they are going to run it all back, "and this time Thomas was with them." Thomas made sure not to leave. "The doors were locked;" because they are still in fear a week later, "but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them."*

And then He says this for the third time in the passage:

"Peace be with you," And then He turns His attention to Thomas. He's like, "Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!'"

Now, I just need to point this out. I think that Thomas gets a bad rap. Some of you know what I'm talking about. Maybe you grew up in church. You know the Bible story. What's Thomas' nickname? Doubting Thomas. Come on man. One time, one time and you get a nickname that sticks with you forever. I would imagine Thomas is really annoyed by that.

This is a little pro tip. When we get to heaven, and we see Thomas out on the street, don't say anything about this. Don't bring it up. I think he's probably going to be a little touchy about it.

Here's the thing that we need to know. Thomas, actually, was not a coward. Thomas was one of the bravest disciples. Lest we forget, he was the one who said, "Let's go to Jerusalem and die with Jesus." Thomas isn't necessarily a doubter, he's a realist. And I can respect that about him.

Why is he a realist? Because he saw Jesus die. He was standing there and he watched Him die on a cross. He didn't watch Him swoon. He didn't watch Him pass out. He saw

the Romans who were excellent at murder, by the way, they knew what they were doing, take a spear and run it into his heart. And dead people don't walk again.

Thomas is just being real. And Thomas is like, "Man, I'm not going to believe it until I see it." And Jesus gives him the evidence that he needs. Now, check out Thomas' audible response, verse 28:

"My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed."

And I just want you to underline that, circle it, highlight it, recognize that there was an audible response that came out of him. He didn't touch Jesus hands and sides and go, "Hm. Let me contemplate that for a while." No, his response was, "My Lord and my God!"

Now, here's the thing that you may not be expecting. Did you know that you and I are in this passage as well? Jesus brings us up in the very next verse. Look at verse 29. This is where we are going to end the passage:

"Then Jesus told him, 'You believe because you have seen me.'" And Thomas wasn't the only one. There were 500 other eye witnesses who all saw Jesus alive, physically. He goes, "You believe because you have seen me." And then He says this, "Blessed" in other words, I'm offering a blessing, "are those" that's you and me, He was referring to us. "Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."

And what I love so much about this is Jesus... If you are struggling to believe, Jesus is acknowledging how hard that might be—to believe. And He's saying, "Thomas, you get the opportunity to see me alive, physically, and to touch Me, but there are going to be millions and millions and millions of people who are going to come after you who do not have that opportunity to see me physically, and I'm offering a blessing upon them if they put their faith in Me and choose to believe without being able to see me physically." And then there is the reason why Jesus then provides something called His Holy Spirit. He's like, "I'm going to leave the gift of the Holy Spirit to help those who can't see Me physically put their trust and believe in Me." So, through the Spirit you can have an encounter with Jesus even though He isn't physically standing in front of you. And Jesus offers a blessing.

So in the next few moments what I want to do is to give you three very tangible things that putting your belief in Jesus gives you. This is not just a go to heaven when you die card. If you put your belief in Jesus, now your eternal future is secure but it makes an immediate impact right here and now. Let me give you three, really quickly. Number one: **Believing in Jesus gives me the hope I need for the fragile future I face.**

Your future is fragile. And I think most of us know it but we just don't like to think about it. You know, we're so busy making plans. Our calendars are full. We're always saying we

have spring break plans and we've got summer plans and we've got plans for the fall and what we're going to do next Tuesday. And all of that is fine and good. But how often do we stop and just really give some thought to our eternal future and where we are going? We get so prepared to live, but are we prepared for our future in eternity? Jesus would say it this way in Mark, chapter 8. He would go:

"And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?"

Is anything worth more than your soul? There are so many things that are outside of our control and putting our belief in Jesus offers us hope for this fragile life that we all face. Here's number two:

Believing in Jesus gives me peace when I face anxiety and fear.

Jesus says the word three times in this passage because He knew that they needed to hear it: peace, peace, peace. And anxiety and fear are huge issues in our culture today. I'm not going to do an extended treatment of addressing those. I have. In fact, you can find recent sermons where we've spent a whole hour talking about anxiety and fear. I'll just simply say that when we are so wrapped up in fear, it not only robs us of life, it just ushers us right into death.

In John, chapter 14, verse 27 Jesus says:

"I am leaving you with a gift — peace," peace of what? "...peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give." In other words you can't find it anywhere else. And He goes, "So don't be troubled or afraid."

Here's the third thing:

Believing in Jesus gives me the courage I need to face every challenge that comes. And there is just going to be a challenge around every corner, isn't there? You know, have you ever said this? "Hey, man. When life settles down, then I'll get serious about this. When life settles down, then I'll turn my attention over here."

When does life ever settle down? There is always another challenge. I'm reminded of the words of that great theologian Mike Tyson. He said, "Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth." There is a challenge around every corner.

And the issue isn't to be challenge free, the issue isn't to escape challenges or to wait for things to settle down. The issue is to plug into the power that will sustain you through the challenge. That's what Jesus would say. "What should we do? What should we do?" And Jesus goes, "Here's an analogy, you just be the branch. I'm the vine. And



the branch doesn't provide nutrients. The branch's only job is to stay connected to the vine. That's where the power source is."

So we stay connected to Jesus as we just know that life is going to throw us all kinds of challenges. And He promises to sustain us through them. In fact, the same power that resurrected Him from the dead is the same power that is available to you and me. The question is, are we plugged in.

Not long ago I went into our pantry and I was trying to make some toast. It was in the morning. And I pushed the button down and I waited for the toast to pop up. And nothing ever happened. It never heated up. No toast. So I'm shaking it, banging it—you know the stuff you should do. And trying to figure out how to fix it. And I put it down again. It's not working.

So I go out and I'm kind of frustrated. I tell my wife, "Okay, on the way home from work tonight I'm going to stop at the store and get a new toaster." She's like, "Why?" "Because it's broken." She's like, "I don't think it is broken." I'm like, "Yeah, it's broken. I banged on it and it didn't work." And she goes in and she says, "It's unplugged. You just need to plug it in."

And that sounds silly and that sounds crazy and that just shows you how bright I am. Hopefully your confidence in me... I'm dividing the Word of God; I can't even plug in a toaster. Alright?

The same question... Here's just a pastoral observation. This is not an accusation. This is an observation. And I say this with great empathy and understanding because I've done this. My pastoral observation over the last three years is that there have been a whole lot of people through the pandemic and everything we've been through over the last three years who whenever life has gotten really messy and painful and complicated, have unplugged.

I've talked to so many people who see me and they are just like, "Yeah, I have a marriage problem. I haven't been to church in a while. My marriage is falling apart." Or, "I've really been going through these bouts with mental health. So I had to stop serving in this ministry and I've just kind of pulled away. And I need to get back. I'm about ready to get back." Or, "I lost my job." Or, "I've had this health thing." Or, "I've just sort of retreated." Now, please don't misunderstand what I'm trying to say here. Is there ever a time for you to take a break. Absolutely. Is there ever a time for you to Sabbath? You bet. I don't want anybody burning out serving in a ministry.



But why is it that every time life begins to fall apart we think that the answer is to unplug and to retreat instead of leaning in and staying plugged in to the power that God provides to the community of faith? And I want to invite some of you to plug back in. In Ephesians, chapter 1 it says:

“I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who,” what? “believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead.” Do you understand what that passage is saying? The same power that raised Jesus up from the grave is available to you no matter what you are facing. You just plug into it. So how do we get it? How do we get it? I’m going to run through this really, really quickly. How do you put your faith in Jesus? Well, first of all:

You need to believe that you are a sinner worth saving.

All of us are guilty of sin. All that sin means... It’s an archery term that means to miss the mark. To be out with your crossbow and you’re shooting at a target and you’re just off center. It’s missing God’s best for your life. That is a good definition of sin. It’s just missing God’s best.

He’s creator God, He knows how your life works best. He knows how your sex life works best. He knows how your thoughts work best, your relationships in life, money—all of that stuff, He knows what works best. And when we say, “Uh, I think I know,” that’s sin. Here’s how Romans describes it. When I begin to worship money, sex, and power over Creator God, those are good gifts that He gave to us, but when we worship the creation over the Creator God—that’s sin.

Luther would use this term to describe it.

Incurvatus in se - Latin for “turned/curved inward on oneself.” A theological phrase describing a life lived “inward” for oneself rather than “outward” for God and others.

It’s a Latin term that means life turned in on itself. You are only focused on self rather than God or others. And all of us are guilty.

In fact, the law in the Old Testament is so extensive that it’s basically saying, “If you took all of the law of God,” which goes way beyond the Ten Commandments, by the way. I don’t know about you guys, but I fail at all of the Ten Commandments and the law is much more extensive than that. It’s there to basically show us what righteousness looks like.

If you want to know about how good enough you have to be to get into heaven, just follow all of the law perfectly and completely. And by the way nobody can do it, nobody has ever done it. The only exception is Jesus.

In fact, in Romans, chapter 3 it says:

"For no one can ever be made right with God by doing," that's the definition of religion. Just do enough. We can't, "...be made right with God by doing what the law commands." Well, why do we have the law? Well, "The law simply shows us how sinful we are." It's a mirror.

And then it says this"

"But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law," that's one of my favorite sentences in the Bible. That's like saying I can get fit because the calories in a donut don't count. It's like saying, "We can be made right with God without keeping all of the law, "as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago."

Verse 22, memorize this. Write this out. Put this on your mirror. Tattoo it on your arm: *"We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ."*

That's it! That's it. We are made right with God by putting it all on Him. Now I know some of you, the inner attorney right now is going, "No, no, no. That doesn't sound right. You're telling me somebody who is just a jerk to other people who lies and cheats and they just say, 'Now I believe in God,' and somehow that's their trump card to get out of jail free?" No! It's not. Because when you place your faith in Jesus, that should be a transformational thing. All of us know some people who are a really, really good people but they haven't yet put trust in Jesus. And we all know people who are really, really crummy people who use this as a trump card. And Jesus knows the difference. He'll sort it out.

He says, "You are made right with God, not by believing in set of presuppositions, coming to church every week or being religious. You are made right with God when your life is hidden in Jesus Christ. He paid the debt so that you could be set free, no matter what. This is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.

It doesn't matter where you've been. It doesn't matter what you've done. Some of you are having an affair right now. That doesn't matter. God is beckoning you, calling you out of that because you are so loved. Some of you right now, you're up to your eyeballs in addiction. Some of you right now are doing things unethically, immorally. At work you are cheating people out of money. You know it and you are ashamed. You feel like the roof is going to cave in because you are here. It is for you.

Some of you are like, "No, no, no. Aaron, you don't understand. You don't understand what I've done. You don't understand where I've been." And I would just simply say, you are over estimating your sin and you are under estimating the power of a Savior who walked out of a grave so that you could be set free.



Number two:

I need to believe that Jesus died for my sins on the cross.

Some of you are like, "Why is this? Honestly I think that all of the world's major religions are essentially the same. They get a few of the details wrong. It's kind of like the big elephant. And Christians are holding onto the trunk and Hindus are holding onto the tail and Muslims are holding onto the leg. We've all got pieces of the truth and put them all together."

You've never studied all of the religions because they are fundamentally different. So Hindus believe that we are all on a big merry-go-round and we're working toward perfection. When we die we get reincarnated. We just come back as another animal and we take another round. Buddhism believes something similar but they just believe that eventually you get off the ride and you're just sort of done. It's called Nirvana. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all believe, just like M & M, you've only got one shot. (I have not given up on that joke all weekend and you guys responded the best.) Hebrews 9 says, "You live once." You live once. So it's not like this idea, "Well, I'm going to live and I'm going to be reincarnated as this thing. And I get another opportunity to take what I learn here..." No, no, no. You live once.

Look at what it says in Hebrews 9. "Just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment." That's going to be a really, really good day or a really bad one. "And so also Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again. Not to deal with our sins but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for Him."

So what's the difference between Jews, Christians, and Muslims? Well for the Jew, their hope is that God will be pleased with how well they've lived their life. It's so admirable. But that is such a tall task. It's impossible. For the Muslim, their hoping that they have done enough to appease Allah. For the Christian, it's Romans 6:23:

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God," that transforms you, by the way, "is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."

Number three:

I need to believe that Jesus rose from the dead.

You need to believe that Jesus physically rose from the dead. You need to believe that. Because if you don't the power isn't there for whatever it is that you are facing. Listen. I've been to a lot of graves of well-known people. I've been to George Washington's grave. I've been to Charles Spurgeon's grave, it's kind of tucked in the back of this cemetery. It's kind of sad. It's been neglected.

I've been to Red Square in Moscow and I've visited Lenin's grave. You actually walk through this thing. His corpse is there behind glass and under lights. He's kind of leaned up a bit. His arms are crossed. He's got a goatee. Very creepy. You walk through there, you see him.

And last month I was in Israel and I got to visit Jesus' grave. There was an hour long wait to get in. People were walking in. And the reason why you could go in is because it's empty. He's not there. He has walked out of the grave. And if you are struggling to believe that, I love how intellectually honest Paul is as he writes this in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul says:

"And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless," so this is all just a big waste of time. Christianity completely falls apart if Jesus didn't walk out of a grave. And then he says this. This is really sobering. He says, "and you are still guilty of your sins."

And by the way you are still on the hook for your sins. You better start trying to pay them off now. It's a futile effort. There is no way you're going to be able to pay them off. The only way your sins are paid off and you are redeemed and restored is because Jesus walked out of a grave. And then he says this in verse 20:

"In fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of the great harvest of all who died."

Do you know what that means? That means because Jesus walked out of the grave, one day, if you put your trust in Him, you will too. That's what that means.
Number four:

I need to believe Jesus is both Savior and Lord.

I need to believe that Jesus is both Savior, He saves me from my sins, but He's also asked to be Lord. And that just means that you invite Him into every area of your life. None of this your life is a dresser. You pull out the sock drawer and say, "Jesus, you can have that. But you stay out of my bedroom. You need to stay out of my bank account. You need to stay out of my personal life." No, Jesus wants to be the dresser that all of the other drawers fit into. Why? Because the IRS is trying to audit you for the way that you live? No. It's because He wants to bring blessing into every area of your life. He wants to be involved as Lord.

So how do you put your faith in Jesus? Well, when we look through the Scriptures we see that there are two very physical, tangible things that people did. Here's the first one: They made a public and audible declaration.



They made a public and audible declaration of it. Thomas putting his hands in Jesus hands and side and then going, "My Lord and my God." He didn't just contemplate it. He said it.

Listen. Your faith is personal for sure. But it's never meant to be private. In Romans, chapter 10, verse 9 it says:

*"If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead," notice how definitive this is, "you will be saved."
And for so many of you right now, you're doubting your salvation, you're questioning, wondering if you've done enough. You're wondering if the first one took. You are like, "I don't know if I was sincere enough."*

Right there, it's as simple as you can make it. He says if you openly declare Jesus as Lord and you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you can have confidence to know that you are saved. It is not a work that you do. It is a work that Jesus has done on your behalf. You're just simply claiming it as a gift. And he goes:

"For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved."

Jesus would say this in Matthew 10, "Everyone who acknowledges me publicly here on earth, I will also acknowledge before My Father in heaven."

You get the picture there? It's where you stand up and you go, "I believe." And then Jesus nudges God and He's like, "Yeah, they are with me. They declared My name. I'm declaring their name before You."

Then He says in verse 33, "If you deny Me here on earth, I will deny you before My Father in heaven."

So, here is just a minute, I'm going to give you an opportunity, whoever you are, wherever you are, to stand to your feet and just simply say, "I believe." This is an invitation for those of you who have never done it.

But it is also an invitation for those of you who have been a Christian for a number of years but maybe you've grown stagnant in your faith, you've wandered away, you've unplugged from the power or maybe you've questioned your salvation. I'm going to give you the opportunity to put those doubts to bed once and for all. You just stand up being as obedient you can to the Scriptures and say, "I believe."



Listen. When I do a wedding, when I officiate a wedding with a bride and a groom, I ask them, “Do you receive each other for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health until death do you part?” And something audible and positive better come out. If I say that and the groom is just like, “I’m agreeing with you in my heart.” She’s probably going to have a hard time with that. This is that multiplied by 1,000. If Jesus died a public death for you on a cross, you can publicly declare that He is Lord and Savior over your life. Some of you are like, “Well, that makes me really, really nervous.” Well, man. Of course it’s going to make you nervous. It’s the biggest decision of your life. I was nervous. But you know what? When the words come out, Jesus says the Spirit then comes in. Number two:

They were baptized by immersion.

They were baptized by immersion. It’s an act of obedience. One could argue it’s the first act of obedience as you begin to follow Jesus. In Acts, chapter 2 when Peter preaches this sermon it says that Peter’s words pierced their hearts. That’s conviction. And they said to him and the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do? How do we respond to this?”

And Peter did not say, “Well, agree in your heart and pray a prayer, fill out a card, walk an aisle.” He said, “Repent of your sins.” That means you turn around from where you are going and turn to God. And then, “Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” And then you’ll receive this gift that Jesus has been talking about, the Holy Spirit.

We make baptism way more complicated than it needs to be. Baptism... We can ask all day, “Why did God think up baptism? Why was Jesus baptized?” I don’t really know. Honestly, I don’t really care. It is something that He has asked us to do and it is powerful. It’s powerful and here’s why. Because it symbolizes your watery grave and you need that to become a new person in Christ.

So it’s not what saves you, it’s actually a picture of what saves you. You’re being lowered in the water—it’s a grave. And you’re being brought up out of it. It’s not a work that you do. It’s being done to you. You’re being brought up as a new creation. 1 Peter says this represents a cleansing. (Not of dirt from the body. But we’ve had a lot of baptisms and it’s a little dirty. Don’t let that deter you though.) It’s a pledge of good conscience toward God.

And, man. We just jump through all kinds of hoops on this, “Well, let me wait for when the time is right.” “Let me wait ‘til life settles down.” “Let me wait ‘til I overcome this addiction.” “Let me wait ‘til I end this relationship.”



Guys, I had a conversation with a lady backstage. It was beautiful. She said, "I've been running from God for 30 years. I didn't come here today intending to be baptized." But she said, "It just felt that if I didn't do it today, if I didn't put my trust in Jesus, I'd never do it."

For some of you, that is where you are. Right now you need to respond, because every time you feel that sense of conviction and you resist it, your heart just grows a little harder toward Him.

Some of you are like, "Well, you know. I was sprinkled as a baby and confirmed later. Does that count?" Well, of course it counts. And that's a beautiful thing. You should thank your grandparents or your parents, whoever had you sprinkled, because what they were doing is they were trying to establish a spiritual foundation for your life. You should thank them for that.

But here's the issue with sprinkling. There are two main ones. The first one is that the Bible never prohibits it. The Bible also never commands it. But the Bible does command immersion for the reasons that I just mentioned. The second is that they have memory of your sprinkling, you don't.

And you say, "Well, I was confirmed later." Fantastic. But you should have a memory of that day when you laid down your life. You died to your old self. You became a new creation in Jesus Christ. There is something really, really powerful about it.

So, here's what we are going to do right now. I'm just going to ask you if you are ready. It's not one of these instances where the first will be last. This is an instance where the first will be bold.

I'm just going to ask you to stand to your feet whoever you are wherever you are. If you're ready. If you need to recommit. Whatever. You just say, "I believe." You determine the volume. Just stand to your feet right now and go, "I believe." So all over the room, as people do this, saying, "I believe," you can stay standing on your feet. For those of you who are standing up for the very first time, we celebrate that with you. I know that is not an easy thing to do.

Now, if you have never been baptized. If you need certainty around your baptism, you can just step out from the aisle where you are. You can walk out these double doors. I'll be out there. And we would love to receive you, to baptize you. Your campus pastors will give you instructions at your campus.

Go ahead and stand to your feet. We're going to worship together. If you'd like to be baptized just step out from where you are and follow me out the doors. Let's go.

