

Easter at Traders Point | Believe... Again

Aaron Brockett | John 19:38-42

Hi everybody. How are you doing? Good to see you.

Man, if you are new to our church, we are one church that meets in multiple locations. So I want to say hello to each and every one of our campuses gathering with us right now. Let's give them a hand. The other campuses joining us, good to have you. Love you guys.

If this is your first time or the first time in a long time that you have been to church, can I just say that we are absolutely thrilled to have you here? Maybe you came today because it's a holiday. It's a good reason. Maybe you came because somebody who you just really like invited you and you wanted to be polite and you said, "Yes, sure I'll come."

And you weren't quite fully sure how this was going to work. I get it. To be a new person in a new place can be a bit awkward. I mean, it's an intimidating thing, especially when that new place is a church.

I don't know, maybe you didn't know how it was going to go down when you got here tonight. Maybe you didn't know if we were going to card you at the door—you know make sure you have enough faith before you get in. Or that we would have a little questionnaire of beliefs before we would allow you to come in.

And I just want you to know that is never the case. Regardless of what you believe about God or wherever you might be on your spiritual journey, whatever has gone on in your past or whatever you are currently walking through, you are always welcome here as you are.

In fact, we like to say that this is a safe place for you to belong before you come to believe. Here's why. We believe that God loves you as you are, he receives you as you are, and he cares about you just as you are. But here's the really, really good news, he loves you so much he refuses to leave you as you are. He isn't going to leave you there. He wants to come along side you, he wants to walk with you.

And if you've got doubts and questions and struggles, and if your life is messy—if it's anything like mine—where else are you going to go just to be able kind of ponder some of those things and hopefully meet the God who loves you that much.

I just want to invite you to come back. I don't know, maybe that's asking a lot for some of you. I'd love for you to come back and here's what you can expect. I don't like it when people waste my time. How many of you are with me? You don't like it when people waste your time. That should be most of us, alright? I don't want to waste your time.

So when I ask you to come back, we're going to be together for about an hour every weekend. Usually we do a series of talks—maybe anywhere from three to six weeks tops. We'll look at a passage of Scripture or we'll look at a topic and I want to teach it.

I want to explain it and most importantly, I want to apply it and I want to show you why it matters and I want you to be able to leave every week saying, "Hey, regardless of what I currently believe about God or wherever I am at in my spiritual journey, that was helpful and that was hopeful. That's just what I want to give you every week.

So I want to invite you back next weekend. We're going to do a four-part series of messages called *Four by Eight* and we're just going to look at my favorite passage in the New Testament of the Bible: Romans, chapter 8. I'll just pull out four foundational truths out of that one chapter.

And then in June we're going to do a series called *At the Movies*. Jesus' favorite way to teach was by telling stories. And his stories were called parables. And today, Hollywood is really, really good at telling stories. So we're going to leverage that and show you that at the heart of every good story is the gospel message. So man, I'd love for you to come back for one or both of those series in the coming weeks and months. We always love to have you.

If you have a Bible right now or maybe a device with a Bible on it, go ahead and get to John, chapter 19. We're going to read verses 38 to 42. If you didn't bring a Bible with you but you have a device you can actually, real quickly, download our church app and there's a free Bible on there that you can use and follow along.

As you're turning there... Several years ago I had a car that I needed to sell. So I posted it in the paper and there was this gentleman who came over to look at it and he wanted to test drive it. So I gave him the keys and he got into the driver's seat. I got into the passenger side and we take off down the road, which is a little bit awkward because this is a complete stranger.

I'd just given him my keys to the car. I'm in the passenger seat and so we're trying, awkwardly, to make small talk. He says to me, "What do you do for a living?" Which, if you are me, is always a loaded question. I just never know the kind of response I'm going to get back when I tell you.

You should try it sometime. If you're bored and you're on an airplane and somebody asks, "What do you do?" just tell them you're a pastor, even though it's not true. Just tell them you're a pastor and just sit back and buckle up, alright? It's just an amazing time. It's a lot of entertainment.

And so I said, "I'm a pastor." And without even looking at me, he was just looking straight out the windshield, no expression on his face he goes, "Oh." Then he asked me this question. He goes, "Are you sure you're in the right line of work?"

I love this guy. I said, “Yes, I think so. Something tells me that you don’t think so.” I said, “Yeah, I think so.” And he goes, “Oh, okay.” Then he goes, “Well, I guess that means that you’re a Christian.” And I’m like, “Well, yes. That’s usually how it works,” right? Like one usually comes before the other. Probably don’t want to get those reversed.

Then he said this: Great question. He goes, “Why?”

Man, that’s a phenomenal question. See, you and I can make decisions and declarations about all kinds of things in life—and we often do—without really giving much thought to why. Why are you a Christian?

Well, first of all let me define what we mean by the term Christian. I’m not going to assume that everybody is on the same page with that terminology. That word, unfortunately, has a lot of baggage associated with it.

It’s actually never really found in the New Testament. The very first Christians, so to speak, weren’t necessarily called Christians until years later. They were just called disciples or followers or followers of The Way.

And so when I say: Are you a Christian. I’m not talking about necessarily your religion. I’m not talking about the set of beliefs that you have. I’m not talking about the way that you vote. When I’m talking about: Are you a Christian—what I mean is are you a follower of Jesus?

Some of you are like, “What does that mean?” I would just simply say that it means that you trust Jesus, you look to Jesus, you’re seeking after Jesus in every area of your life. That’s what I mean by Christian.

I would say that maybe some of you watching this or listening to this right now would be like, “Yeah, I can get on board with that. I’m I Christian. I’m a Christ follower.” Man, fantastic.

Why?

I’ve heard a lot of people be like, “Well, because.” Or, “That’s the way that I was raised.” I hear that one a lot. Or, “I grew up in a Baptist church.” Or, “I grew up in a Catholic church,” Or, “I think it’s probably right.”

And I would just simply say that those things might be true. I’m not even saying that those things are wrong—those responses are wrong. I am saying that those responses aren’t strong enough to stand up to the scrutiny of others or the storms of life. You’ve got to come up with a better answer.

There may be many of you listening or watching this who would say, “No, I’m not a Christian. I’m not a Christ follower. I’m out on all of that, but I wouldn’t necessarily call myself an Atheist.

I believe that there probably is a God. I believe in a higher power out there somewhere, I just don't know which religion has the right one and I've got all kinds of questions and I've had some bad experiences and I've just met some weird and mean and judgmental Christians. So I wouldn't necessarily say that I'm a Christ follower."

And I would simply say, "Okay, man. Thank you for your honesty. That's great that you're honest. Can I just simply ask you this question right here?"

Why?

Can you come up with a good reason and can you articulate that reason? And some of you might be able to, but can I just ask you... Some of you walked away from what you thought Christianity was, maybe when you were a teenager. And that's fine. That's the story that you had then.

Or maybe you walked away in your mid-twenties or whatever. But now you're in a different season of life. So when was the last time that you really thought through the reasons why you walked away or the reasons why you are not a Christ follower?

Some of you might be like, "Well, I used to be a believer." Or, "I used to follow after Jesus." And I would simply just present this to you. Did you really or was what you rejected, what you walked away from just religion? Because those are very, very different things.

Jesus did not come to establish another religion. He didn't come to just set up a particular belief system for you. He came to have a relationship with you. The very thing that Jesus was doing and currently is doing is he is mediating. He's your advocate between you and a perfect God.

So there is a restaurant that I have lunch at on a weekly basis. I usually go there with my executive pastor. We'll have a weekly lunch meeting. So we've kind of developed some relationships with the waitresses who are there. They know who we are and we're trying to talk to them, getting to know them.

Several months ago we invited one of them we're getting to know—we invited her to church. And here was her response. She said, "Oh, man. That's so nice of you. Thank you guys so, so much." Then she goes, "I'm not religious." She thought, "Well, I've got to be religious in order to go to church." And I looked back at her and I said, "Fantastic! We're not either."

She looked at me like I had green skin and was from another planet. She was like, "What are you... You're a pastor. You like at the front of the line of being religious."

It's like, "No, no, no. Jesus didn't come to make you religious. Jesus didn't ask you to necessarily subscribe to a whole list of doctrinal beliefs. I'm not saying doctrinal beliefs are unimportant, I'm just saying that's not where you begin with Jesus.

Jesus didn't ask you to become a republican or a democrat. Jesus isn't asking you to get your act cleaned up. He's not asking you to come up with answers to all of your questions. Jesus isn't asking you to figure out how to work the words blessing and fellowship into all of your conversations. Jesus isn't asking you to act like Ned Flanders from *The Simpsons*. He's not asking you to do any of that.

For some of you, you've never heard that before, because maybe what you grew up with was a kind of a rigid, kind of a legalistic, religious experience, which is not anything that Jesus comes to represent.

So, one of the things that I've found that people get hung up or help back on is these two questions right here. It's what keeps them from God.

What about...? And: Why would...?

Just think of all of the ways that you can actually finish those two questions. Well what about world suffering? And what about world hunger? And what about cancer? And what about all of these things that I just can't fully explain?

And then: Why would? Why would God allow that? And why would this happen?

Can I just simply say that those two questions are good questions and all of us ask them regardless of what we believe? But many of these questions are unanswerable. There is a mystery to them. There isn't any worldview, there isn't any belief system—including the thing where you just make your own way—that give answers to those questions. Some of these questions, if not most of them, we'll go to our grave without an answer. It's not enough to keep you from Jesus.

I think the better questions to ask are these two right here:

Who is...? And: What happened...?

Who is Jesus? And who did he claim to be because he never once claimed to be another good prophet or another good teacher. He never claimed to make a new religion.

And then: What happened?

What happened 2,000 years ago because Christianity is not based upon a set of doctrinal beliefs. It's based upon an event that either happened or it didn't. And if Jesus isn't who he said he is, and if the event didn't happen then this can be the last Easter service that you ever go to because all of it is false. You shouldn't be just a little bit religious because Jesus was either a fraud or he was crazy.

But if he is the Son of God, and if he did die on a cross for your sin and my sin and our shame, and if he did walk out of a grave so that we could one day walk out of ours? Then actually you should be here more than just on Easter. This should actually transform your entire life, because Jesus didn't just claim to be a good guy. He claimed to be the Son of God. That's a pretty tall statement that's either the truth or it's not.

So I want to look at two individuals in John 19 who really were wrestling with questions. I hope I gave you long enough to turn there. If not, I can keep going. Okay, I'll take that as get to the text.

So John 19, versus 38 – 42, these two men—they're really wrestling. They're hung up on some questions about Jesus and they actually go to him with these questions. And I love that because Jesus isn't defensive. Jesus allows it and we actually don't get any evidence that they ever get their questions answered. And yet we see a pretty remarkable thing happen. We see that they actually go public with their affection and their devotion to Jesus at a really, really interesting time.

Let me just set it up here. Jesus has just breathed his last on the cross. His lifeless body is hanging there. Verse 38, "Afterward," after Jesus' death, "Joseph of Arimathea, who had been a **secret disciple** of Jesus" disciple just means follower. So this guy is a secret follower. He's an undercover brother. He's a cameo Christian, alright?

Here's why, in parentheses "(because he feared the Jewish leaders)," Well, okay. That's an understandable reason. So Joseph of Arimathea was a very wealthy man, he was a member of the council, which explains why he was a secret follower of Jesus. He had a lot to lose.

He goes and "asked Pilate," now Pilate was the guy who oversaw Jesus' crucifixion. They had to get permission from Pilate for that to ever happen. And some of you might know the story. If you don't that's totally fine. But basically the people go to Pilate, they demand that Jesus be crucified, Pilate was like: Well you've got to give me a reason. We can't do this just because you want to.

So they argue it and Pilate is sort of like: I don't see it. I don't see what this man has done wrong. But they are pressuring him. Pilate understood that another election was coming up. He was actually fearful of the people's opinion. So he basically said: Alright, I'll give you what you want but I'll wash my hands of this.

And Joseph goes back to him after Jesus has died and he asks, "for permission to take down Jesus' body." Now what happens next is astounding. "When Pilate gave permission, Joseph came and took the body away."

Now you and I might read that and be like, "What's the big deal?" This is a huge deal because that never happened. Romans only crucified two kinds of people. They crucified common thieves—the two men who were crucified on either side of Jesus were thieves. The second kind

of person they would crucify would be one who is a threat to the Roman Empire. And that was the category Jesus fell into.

So they crucified Jesus and it was basically meant to be a billboard to anyone else to say: Don't cross the Roman Government. If you end up getting sideways with us, that will be what will happen to you.

So if you were crucified on a Roman cross, you did not get the dignity of a proper funeral or burial. They would just take your body down off of the cross and they would throw your lifeless corpse out on the garbage dump outside of town where it would rot in the open air.

So Joseph goes to Pilate and he says: Would you please give me permission to take Jesus' body down off the cross and Pilate grants him permission, which indicates to me that deep down inside Pilate didn't really believe that Jesus had done anything wrong, because if he did he wouldn't have let Joseph take the body.

Verse 39, "With him came," another guy, the second man in this text, "Nicodemus, **the man who had come to Jesus at night.**" You can read that story in John, chapter 3, "He brought about seventy-five pounds of perfumed ointment made from myrrh and aloes."

So Nicodemus is a member of the Pharisees, he's also a member of the Sanhedrin, which meant that he was like a big dog. And he has a lot to lose as well. And he goes to Jesus back in John 3 with some significant questions, basically around new birth. He just didn't understand how somebody could be born again. We never, ever see evidence that Nicodemus had answers to his questions.

But here we find him coming with Joseph of Arimathea. It's actually cost him something significant financially with these expensive myrrh and aloes to help bury the body of Jesus.

Verse 40, "Following Jewish burial custom, **they**" the two of them together "wrapped Jesus' body with the spices in long sheets of linen cloth. The place of crucifixion was near a garden, where there was a new tomb, **never used before.** And so, because it was the day of preparation for the Jewish Passover and since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there."

What this means is that they were in a rush. It was the Jewish Passover. The sun was going down. They couldn't do any work for the next couple of days. So they are like: We've got to hurry. We've got to get Jesus body at least wrapped in some kind of spice or linen because it will begin to decompose over the weekend and stink. We can't have that happening.

We've got to get him into a tomb. There was a garden nearby the crucifixion. There was a tomb there. How did they know that? Because it's Joseph of Arimathea's plot. It's the one he purchased for himself. Only wealthy people had those. He's like: We'll put him in there.

And they were rushing. They were trying to get this done quickly. And so, like typical men, they didn't do the job right. That's why the ladies had to go back on [Monday](#)¹ to do the job right that the men should have done in the first place and that's when they discovered the empty tomb. So that's how all of that went down, alright? So they are in a rush, they put his body in the tomb.

Here's the question that I have. Both of these individuals were fearful of going public with their affection and devotion to Jesus when Jesus was alive. And now that he is dead, that's when they choose to go public with it.

Here's another question I have. Why was it Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple, who went to Pilate to ask for permission for Jesus' body—why wasn't it one of Jesus' public disciples like Peter, James, or John? Where were they? Why didn't they ask Pilate for Jesus' body? You would think that they would have stepped up. But they've actually, ironically gone into hiding.

And it was Joseph and Nicodemus, these guys who we never saw or read any account of their conversion, we never read any account that they finally got all of their questions answered, everything settled and put to bed. No, no, no—but these guys choose to go public with Jesus at a time when you wouldn't think that they would.

Why?

Well, because Jesus was dead. What we have to understand is that nobody then was expecting a resurrection. They weren't all huddled up outside the tomb on Sunday going: Ten, nine, eight, seven... No, they were all like in hiding. They stumbled upon the empty tomb by accident. And the ladies had to go back and tell Peter: Hey, come and see this thing. And then they had to run to check it out for themselves. Nobody was expecting it.

Joseph and Nicodemus—this would have been the perfect time for them to shrug their shoulders and go: Well, I guess the whole thing is a sham. Jesus really isn't who he said he was. Jesus talked a big game but he's dead.

So, why? What would motivate them to go public with their affection and devotion to Jesus?

Here's what I think. I think that both of these individuals spent time with Jesus without any agenda. And I think that they had looked Jesus in the eye, and they had asked their questions and they had seen how real he was with them and they could see his authenticity.

Could I say it this way? There was something believable about Jesus that even in the face of something that they couldn't get their minds wrapped around they go: we believe this guy. And we don't know how, and we don't know when, but we believe that he's actually going to somehow do what he said he was going to do.

¹ This reference to Monday is an unintentional mistake by the speaker. The women went back on **Sunday**.

That's astounding to me. That humbles me, because I wonder if I would have had their faith. And that's what it was—it was faith.

Now here's the thing that you and I have going for us today that Joe and Nick didn't have going for them then. We have an empty tomb. I thought somebody might celebrate that. We have an empty tomb! Right? We have a conquering king. We have a risen Savior.

There were over 500 witnesses who saw Jesus alive. We have that as evidence. And yet for many of us it's still not quite enough. And I would just simply say that your life doesn't get changed as you get answers to your questions. Your life gets changed when you meet a person. The person of Jesus. And that's what he was offering then and that's what he is offering to us today.

Jesus never once asked you to clean up your act or your behavior. He never asked you to believe all of the right things. He never asked you to get all of your questions answered. He never asked you to become religious in order to be received by him.

He says: Just come to me right as you are, baggage and everything. His invitation was and is always personal. And he says: All you need to do is trust me. All you need to do is look to me. All you need to do is follow me. Just meet me in that place and let me do what only I can.

See, it's much, much better to work on a relationship than it is to work on being religious. And many of you are just working on being religious and that's what you walked away from when you turned eighteen and got out of mom and dad's house, because it was crushing. You thought you weren't going to have any fun and you had all of these questions and it was legalistic.

You walked away from religion. And I don't blame you. I'm inviting you back into a relationship because the differences between those two things are monumental. Let me define it. Religion is this:

Acceptance/love that is based on my effort and my behavior.

And that right there is impossible. It's crushing. Let's just say that you manage to get a few of them—all that will lead to is spiritual arrogance, which makes other people not want to be around you. And eventually, you'll come to find that you can't live up to it and it will crush you.

See relationship is this:

Acceptance/love that is based on what Jesus has already done for me.

And he just simply says: Let me open up your heart so that you can accept it. So you can receive it.

Religion is effort that is required for me to feel better about myself. Salvation through grace is effort that Jesus has already extended. And he says: I just want to invite you into that.

For many people... It's astounding to me how many people I meet who say, "Well, I can't come to church and I can't receive, and I can't get baptized and I can't change my life until I'm 100 percent convinced.

Who told you that? You don't make other decisions that way. Those big, monumental decisions in life—you never get 100 percent certainty on anything before you jump into major decisions.

What ends up happening? Well, things get personal. At some point you have to do everything that you can do to get all of the data you can and you're not going to grow until you move—until you take a step.

So let me just give you a couple of examples. How about this question that everybody asks at least once in their life—whether the question is yes or no. Should I get married? You've probably asked that question at some point in your life.

For some of you, you said, "No, I'm not going to get married. I'm going to be a single adult." There's nothing wrong with that.

Other's of you are like, "Yeah, I got married." Alright, well think about all of the doubts and fears and the questions that come with that one. What if I marry the wrong person? What if I lose my freedom? I'm afraid of commitment. I can't afford it. And, other married people that I know—well that's reason right there. I look at them and they don't seem very excited. All of these questions can be crushing.

So those of you in the room who got married, did it happen because you got all of your questions answered? Well, maybe some of them. But not all of them. What happened? Those questions got smaller because you met a person and things got personal. And you responded to the person instead of getting an answer to your questions.

What about this one? Should I take that new job? Some of you are contemplating that right now. And you're thinking, "Man, should I make a move to another state? (That depends—if it's Arizona? Yes. Get out of this weather.) Is it going to be a fit? Am I going to be able to do it? What if it doesn't work out? Are the people I work with—is it going to be good chemistry?

You can't possibly get 100 percent certainty on any of that. No. What happens? It gets personal. You meet the people. You do the interviews. And you think, "Well, I think I can." So you're responding to that rather than getting all of your questions answered. That doesn't mean that you're lazy about it. It means that you answer what you can—not everything can be answered before you make the decision.

How about this one? For those of you who already have kids, this is an interesting kind of debate/argument within your marriage—how many kids should we have? You married somebody and he wants eight, and you want one. So you've got to sort all of that out. Answer the questions, figure out the why.

Let's just say you decide on two kids. And then you end up having a really, really nice Valentine's Day and number three comes along. What do you do then? Do you give him away? No. You have fears and concerns, "Can I afford it?" No. A person comes.

It's amazing to me. I have four kids. When we had our first one, I looked at him and I was like, "It's impossible. I can't love another human being more than that." And then my daughter came along. And it's like my heart grew. And then another daughter came along, and my heart grew. And a fourth comes along—it just expands. Why? Because I got my fears addressed. No, I still have them. I have three girls at home, alright? It's because it got personal.

That's why Jesus came. That's why God put flesh on to walk among us so that we might have a personal relationship with him.

Here's what I'm saying. It's not that your questions aren't important. And it's not that you shouldn't ask them. I'm just saying that some of you—they are keeping you from a God who gave everything for you. And what he's saying is: Bring your questions with you. Just cross the line of faith, enter into a relationship with me.

Well, how much faith should I have? Should I have this much faith, should I have that much faith? Jesus one time addressed that. He goes: Have you ever seen a mustard seed. And if you haven't just google it. It's really small.

He goes: That's all you need. Just that amount of faith. That doesn't seem too convincing. He goes: That's enough for me, the faith of a mustard seed.

Cross that line of faith. Bring your questions with you and watch what he does. He'll either answer them over time or they'll get smaller over time. And you'll look back and you'll go, "Man, I can't believe those questions were keeping me from Jesus. Jesus is way better than my questions."

So my wife and I, when we were dating 20 years ago got to this place in our relationship where we were either going to kick it into overdrive and get super serious and walk the aisle and get married or we were going to split up. And I was sort of in the camp of let's get married, which obviously means that she was in the camp of I don't know. And that's not a very fun place to be in.

I remember, I could feel it. I could sense it from her that she was sort of distancing herself from me a little bit. A little cool toward me. And I know that's astounding to so many of you. You're like: What was she thinking? By the laughter, maybe not.

I remember I went to her and she just let it all spill out—all of these questions that she had been keeping to herself. She was like, “I don’t know if I’m ready to be married yet. And what about school? And what about money? And I don’t know if you’re the right one.” All of this stuff that just came out—just normal stuff.

I was like, “Man, I don’t have any answers to any of that, but I’m really glad that you told me. And I’ll just kind of give you your space and let you kind of sort through it.”

Now, here’s the thing. It wasn’t long after that—like I think it just helped her to vocalize all of that. But within the next year we ended up walking the aisle and saying I do.

If you were to ask her (which don’t ever do this if you see her at Meijer), but if you were to ask her, “Hey, were those questions worth keeping you from the last 20 years of marriage and the family you’ve created?” She’d go, “Oh, no way. I’m really glad that those questions didn’t keep me from moving ahead.”

Now, 20 years into the marriage she has a whole different set of questions, alright? But the ones that she was wrestling with then, what happened? They either got resolved or they got smaller.

It’s not a perfect analogy, but it’s close. When it comes to your relationship with Jesus, man, I don’t doubt that you have questions and issues and concerns. That’s why Jesus is so personal. That’s why Jesus looks at you with that moistness in his eyes and a smile on his face and he says: Hey, just come with me. Just come follow me and just bring your questions with you.

Romans, chapter 8, verse 1 says, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those,” and it doesn’t say who believe all of the right things, who become religious, who start attending church, who do all of these external things. What does it say? Say these three words with me out loud: who are in, “...**who are in** Christ Jesus.”

What I’ve found is even longtime Christians have such a hard time with that one because we keep wanting to divert back to religion, we keep wanting to divert back to prove to me or show me or help me believe all of the right things.

All that it says here in Romans 8:1 is that there is no condemnation for those who are in Jesus. What does that mean? Those who have a relationship with Jesus, those who are connected to him, because you can’t bring anything to the table. He brings it all.

And once you start working on that relationship, rather than working on being religious, then you’ll discover the joy that comes with being a Christ follower.

And some of those questions may be a mystery until you go to your grave, but they are not worth keeping you from a God who would give everything for you.

So what does it practically mean to follow Jesus? Well let me give you three statements that just show you what it means to follow Jesus. Here's the first one:

I trust you.

If you can just simply bring yourself to this. Like, "Man, I've got questions and I've got doubts." Of course you've got doubts. Jesus knew you'd have doubts. That's why he said have faith. What is faith? Trust, "I just trust you, Jesus. I trust you are who you say you are. I trust that you came to fix what is undeniable broken within me and the world. I trust that you are advocating between me and God. I trust that you are my Savior, you're the Son of God."

I'll look to you.

That's statement number two. I'm going to look to you instead of looking on the internet. I'm going to look to you instead of looking to my own reasoning or feelings. I'm going to look to you and your word. I'm going to look to you throughout my day. I'm going to look to you when I need strength and hope. That's statement number two.

Here's the third:

I'll join you.

I'll join you in bringing hope to others. I'll join you in being part of something much, much bigger than myself. That's the work and the mission of the church. I'll join you in allowing you to change me from the inside out.

Listen. Don't make this any harder than it needs to be. Following Jesus means saying, "I trust you. I'll look to you. I'll join you." And all it requires is the faith of a mustard seed.

In Acts, chapter 16 we read about this lady named Lydia who gave her life to Jesus. And it was because Paul and Silas explained the gospel message to her. And I love what it says in verse 14, "As she listened to us," us is Paul and Silas, catch this, "**the Lord opened her heart**, and she accepted."

That's always how it happens. The Lord opened her heart and she accepted. Not once did it say that she was convinced, not once did it say that she went and cleaned herself up. Not once did it say that she got answers to her questions.

Now, I'm not saying that those things are unimportant and that it didn't happen after. I'm just saying for her to come to Jesus that God opened her heart and she accepted, "...what Paul was saying. She and her household were baptized, and she asked us to be her guests." Then she makes this fascinating statement. She said, "If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord..."

In other words she was probably wrestling with is it really this easy? Is it really this simple? I didn't have to take a class. I didn't have to go to something. I didn't have to get confirmed. Is it really this easy?

She said if you really think that I am a true believer, if you really believe what you just told me, then "come and stay in my home."

I love the fact that she said that. And maybe some of you today are going, "Man, is it really this easy?" Or, "Should it really be this easy?" And I would say, "Man, if it isn't this easy then none of us stands a chance." Jesus did all of the heavy lifting. Let him do it.

I've shared this story with our church family around here before but many of you haven't heard it. And I could tell hundreds of these stories but this one, by far, is my favorite.

Several years ago I was in the middle of preaching a sermon on a Sunday morning and contrary to popular belief I can see all of you—that's fun. I'm going to wear a go crow some time just to show you what you look like when you listen to me, alright?

Half way through the sermon I noticed that there was a guy who came in the back and he walked in mid-way through and sat down in the back. And I couldn't help but notice him because he was a big guy. He was a Samoan man, bald head, two gold loop earrings, covered in tattoos. He looked like Mister Clean (you know on the cleaning bottle) come to life. You couldn't miss him.

He sits right down in the back. I'm looking at him. And he crosses his arms; he looks really upset to be there. I would try to make a joke and he wouldn't laugh. And I thought, "I'm going to meet that guy."

As soon as I got done preaching, I ran off the stage and in a full-blown sprint I run to the door that I know is the door that people leave out of when they don't want to talk to the pastor. I know which door it is, alright? I will see you after.

So I go run to that door and he's walking out as I get there. And I'm all out of breath. And I was like, "Dude, it's good to have you today." And I stuck my hand out to shake his hand and he did not extend his hand. He just kind of glared at me and he turned and walked out of the door. And I thought, "Well, that didn't go well. I'll probably never see him again."

The next Sunday I'm half way through my sermon, Mr. Clean walks in, sits down in the back, crosses his arms. He doesn't look any happier to be there. So I thought, "I'm going to give him some space." So I was out in the lobby and he walks up to me. And he looks at me and he says, "You the preacher?" And I go, "What tipped you off Sherlock?"

“Yes, I am.” And he goes, “I thought so.” He’s like, “Hey man, do you pray?” And I’m like, “Yeah, yeah I pray.” And he was like, “Well, would you be willing to like pray for me?” I was totally shocked by that. And I was like, “Yeah, man. Absolutely. What’s going on?”

And he goes, “Well, me and my girlfriend just broke up. She just moved out of our apartment. And I just put a down payment down on a house. And I just found out yesterday that my blankety, blank landlord isn’t going to let me out of my apartment lease. And if he doesn’t let me out of my apartment lease, then I’m going to be, financially, in a really difficult spot.”

And he goes, “Would you pray that my blankety, blank landlord would let me out of my lease?” And I was like, “I’d be happy to,” alright? I go, “Hey, what’s your name?” And he goes, “What does that matter?” And I was like, “It doesn’t. It doesn’t. Just stand there and I’ll pray in this vicinity for the Lord to beam down his Holy Spirit powers upon you.”

So I started to pray. And I prayed. I said, “God, would you please do something to let his landlord let him out of his lease.” And I forget what all I said about that situation. But while I had him I just kind of snuck one in on him.

I said, “And, God, I don’t know my new friend’s name and I don’t know what he’s going through and I don’t know his past. And I don’t know where he stands with you, God, but I just pray that before the end of the year that he would come to know that he is loved by you and that he would come to meet your Son, Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ name I pray: Amen.”

And then I took a big step back because I didn’t know if he would come out swinging. And I looked at him and he had some mist in his eyes. And I was like, “Hey, man. You alright?” And he was like, “Man, these stupid allergies are killing me, man.”

And he walked out. The next Sunday, same deal. He comes in half way through the sermon, sits down, I can’t get a read on him—if he’s happy or sad. And I’m standing out in the lobby and he walks right up to me, no expression on his face. I’m bracing myself.

He comes right up and then he gets this huge smile that came across that big Samoan head of his, it was a smile that I would see so many times from that day forward. And he looked at me and he goes, “Dude! My landlord let me out of my lease, man!”

And I was like, “Man, that’s awesome, dude. That’s great.” And then he goes, “Dude, God like listens to you, man.” And he goes, “I’ve brought a list today.” And he whips it out and he’s like, “I need you to get me a new girlfriend and I need you to get me a set of hair...” All of this stuff on his list. And I was like, “Dude, slow down man.”

And since he was in a good mood I was like, “Hey, man. What’s your name?”

“Eli.”

“Eli, it’s good to meet you. I’m Aaron.” And I said, “Eli, do you have plans for lunch.” He’s like, “No.” I’m like, “Man, you want to join us.” So he did.

And then a couple of weeks later we invited him over to our home. Our kids were really, really little then. And we’re sitting around the table and he’s telling us his story about how he grew up in Hawaii in an abusive home and as soon as he was old enough to get out of there, he was out of there.

He joined the military, served in the military for a while and then he got out. He’d been bouncing from job to job. And he’d been arrested a couple of times. In and out of multiple broken relationships. Had a little bit of Catholic faith from his upbringing but he’d been running from God for a really long time. And he was broken and he was depressed and he was lonely.

And I said, “Eli, we’d love to have you back every week. And he said, “Man, you just need to know that I’m not religious. I don’t think I’m worthy of it.”

And I said, “Well, Eli, every single Sunday I need somebody to pick up some chairs and move them from this side of the room to this side of the room.” I really didn’t. I just made it up so that he would come and just pick up chairs and just move them to the other side.

I was looking for any excuse I could find, “Eli, just come and just help me set this thing up and then you can kind of sit there during the service.” And he did. He did that for weeks and months. And he would just go to lunch with us after church every week and we would just work on our relationship. He would hang out with us and go on hiking trips.

I will never forget the Wednesday afternoon when he just showed up in my office unannounced. He walked in and he slunk down in a chair and he dropped his head and he goes, “Would you just tell me how to get it.” I was like, “What are you talking about, man? Get what?”

He was like, “I’ve been hanging around you guys for like six months. Can you just tell me how to get what you have? I know you’re not perfect. I’ve been around you long enough to see that. But, man, you’re joyful and there just seems to be this strength. I don’t know where it comes from. Would you just tell me how to get it? What do I have to believe? I’ll believe it. What do I have to do? I’ll do it. Just give me the list and I’ll start working on it.”

And I just go, “Eli, look at me, man. You don’t have to do anything. It’s not based on what you do. It’s based on what Jesus did for you.”

And I had the privilege that day of getting down on my knees with my brother and leading him to Christ. And he just broke; and sobbing he gave his life to Jesus Christ, the mess that he was. And then a couple of days later I got to baptize that brother in a hot tub, which is my favorite kind of baptistry. Man, I just love it.

And do you know where Eli is today and what he's doing? Eli works on the streets of Sacramento, California reaching out to teenage boys who come from abusive backgrounds and he's trying to instill hope and a future for them because of the love of Jesus. And man, he wears that big ole smile across his big, bald head all of the time.

It's not because of what he could bring to the table. Listen, Eli was a mess when he came to know Jesus. But as he crossed that line of faith—to see what Jesus has done in his life to grow him has been astounding.

See, here's a dangerous prayer for you. I wonder if you'd be willing to pray it this Easter weekend, "God, would you just open my heart? God, would you just open my heart so that I might receive it? God, I want to know you more than I want to be right." And some of you wanted to be right more than you wanted to know God.

And if you're willing to pray those two dangerous prayers, God will meet you right in that moment. See there are two questions that you just need to respond to to cross that line of faith. Here's the first one:

Is Jesus the Son of God who died the death that you deserved to die so that you could live the life that you could never earn on your own? The word for that is Savior.

And if the answer is yes, here's the next question:

Because of that Jesus can be trusted to be your Lord. So will you go where he tells you to go and do what he tells you to do? Yes or no? If the answer is yes to both of those things, God will open your heart and you'll accept it. And he'll meet you right there and then you'll grow.

And the response across all seven conversion accounts in the book of Acts when somebody did that was to be baptized, which is kind of a weird thing. It means to be dunked under water and come back up. All it simply means is a cleansing and a new birth.

It's amazing to me how many people think that they've got to like accomplish some things or get a bunch of faith before they can step into the waters of baptism. Baptism was never meant to be that way. Baptism was meant to be a starting line, not the finishing line of your faith. You are a spiritual infant when you come out of the waters of baptism.

How many of you have ever been in a delivery room where a lady gave birth to baby with a full-grown beard? That would be so weird. And so when you go into the baptistry, you're a spiritual infant and it's intimidating and it's scary, but God meets you in that moment of incredible courage and incredible vulnerability.

So I want to give you the opportunity if you said yes to both of those questions right where you're sitting, man, you're ready to be baptized. And before your inner attorney can talk you out of it, I just want to ask you to respond to it by stepping out and coming down.

We've got everything that you need. We've got shorts, we've got shirts, we've even got dry underwear, so you don't have to go home in wet undies. I know that's super weird, but we have it. And we've got dressing rooms and all of that and people who would just love to meet with you and talk with you about your decision.

Some of you are like, "Well, it's super weird to get baptized on Easter weekend. We're going to have dinner afterward. I've got like really nice clothes on. Didn't come expecting to do this.

I can't think of a better time. Your spiritual birthday would be on resurrection weekend. Man, that would be amazing. That would be awesome.

Listen to me. You are not your past. You are not that divorce. You are not that abortion. You are not that breakup. You're not that bankruptcy. You're not that DUI. You're not your internet history. You're not that addiction.

And some of you would say, "Pastor, you just rattled one or two or three things that have actually been the biggest things that have ever happened in my life because they define my failure.

Look at me now. They are not. Those are not the biggest thing in your life. They are not the biggest things that define your life. The biggest thing that has defined your life is that there is a God who created you and loves you and he sent his Son to nail your sin and shame to the cross so that you can face your future with confidence. That's the biggest thing that has ever happened to you.

Jesus is a far better Savior than you are a sinner. Some of you are pretty good at sinning. Jesus is a way better Savior. So I just want to invite you to come right where you are right as you are, questions and all. Mess and all, because that's Jesus' favorite kind of people to begin a relationship with. The word for it is authentic.

Father, I come to right now and I just pray that your Spirit would be in this room and in the rooms of all of our campuses. That you would do a work that only you can.

God, I pray that if there are some right now sitting here who are wrestling, they feel uncomfortable, I pray that you would open up their hearts and that they would have the faith to accept it, even if all they can muster is the faith of a mustard seed.

So we just give the rest of our time to you to as a celebration of new life because of what Jesus did 2,000 years ago for us. We ask this in Jesus' name: Amen.

What I want to ask at the other campuses—the campus pastors are going to give you instructions. Here at this campus, we're all going to stand to our feet and worship. If you would like to be baptized, just walk right out of those double doors that they are opening up where

the exit sign is. We'd love to meet you and receive you as you are. So would you please stand to your feet as we sing together and let's celebrate.