

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

JESUS IS _____ | THE HOPE OF NEW LIFE

AARON BROCKETT | APRIL 17, 2022

How are we doing? Happy Easter to all of you. This is such an amazing thing to see and experience. I was just recalling that two years ago, I did Easter in this room, an empty room, and now just to see it filled up—in fact, last hour we had over 400 people in overflow at this campus—it’s amazing to see everybody.

We’ve had dozens and dozens of baptisms so far over the weekend, and we’ve got more to go in this service.

I’m thrilled that you are here. I want to say hello to everybody gathered across all of our physical locations, anybody joining us online, maybe from another state.

And if you happen to be in the room because somebody invited you to come, a friend or a family member, and you’re not normally a churchgoer but you came today, man, I’m so thrilled that you are here.

Hopefully, you’ve gotten one of these cards in your hand. I want to ask everyone to grab one of these, it doesn’t matter your age, it doesn’t matter if you’ve been in our church for 20 years or 20 minutes. I want to ask you to take just a few minutes to fill out this Easter survey card.

Now, this is not a gimmick. We’re not going to sign you up for anything. We’re not putting your name on an email list. And I will not show up at your front door, unless you want me to, alright? This is general information here that we want to get from you and here’s the purpose behind it. We just want to know how to care for you better.

Some of you may be like, “Why in the world are we taking a survey on Easter?” Very simple. This is the one weekend you all decide to show up at the same time. So we want to get some good content from you while you’re here. So if you’d just take this.... We built this time into the service so that you can take 60 to 80 seconds, just do it right now. Just fill out some of these boxes.

You’ll see that there are some questions here about general life pressure, what are you uncertain about? Relationship struggles? What would be really helpful to you to take your next steps in your personal and spiritual growth?

In about six weeks I will go on what I just call my annual study break between Memorial Day and the Fourth of July. And I just get away, out of town, and just seek out God’s direction for the upcoming year’s worth of sermon series. They usually get laid out a year in advance.

And this content is going to be really helpful for me as I prayerfully lay out where we're headed over the next year. So, I really appreciate you taking the time to give us a little bit of this information.

While you are finishing your card up, I've got a couple of things that I want to let you know about. In September of this year we're going to be relaunching our Northeast campus. And we are super excited about that. You can see where our current campuses are, [map of the city and suburbs] and the Northeast campus will be in the Fishers area.

Those of you who have been in our church for a while might recall that we launched this campus about 30 minutes before COVID and made the really gut-wrenching decision to push pause on that. It was a hard decision. It was the right decision. But now it's the right decision to relaunch.

So if you live on the northeast side, or you know somebody who does, you want to be a part of that campus launch, be looking for more information about that coming very, very soon. And, obviously, be praying about it.

Second thing I want you to know is.... I want to invite you back next week. We're going to be kicking off a five-week series of messages beginning next weekend called Significant Other.

And I think that all of us would agree that one of the things that makes life so rich and rewarding is the relationships that we have: friends, family, and a significant other whatever that looks like.

I think that you would also agree that one of the things that makes life so challenging and even painful is the relationships that we have: friends, family, and a significant other. So we're going to talk about why that is, what went wrong, and what God is doing to redeem them.

Now, I want to say a couple of things. This is not a marriage series—we will talk about marriage within the series—it's not a marriage series so don't write it off as that just yet. It's a relationship series and you're going to see what I'm going to talk about next week as we open this up.

The other thing I want to say is, if you're not normally a churchgoer, like you came on Easter because it's Easter or somebody invited you or threatened you, so you came, I just want to ask you to give this next series a shot. Just give it a shot: five weeks, reserve your judgment on it until the fifth week and after the fifth week judge away, but just come and see what might happen in this series.

I promise you that you'll hear some things that you don't agree with and that is okay. If you agreed with everything, then we're wasting our time. You'll come and there will actually be some things that you will learn that you just weren't aware of. You'll have some of your assumptions challenged.

We're going to speak very directly to some things that culture is speaking very directly to. And at the very end of the series, here's what I guarantee you, you'll find it helpful and hopeful regardless of where you stand with God or regardless of your relationship status. So I want to encourage you to be back next week for that.

Alright, I hope I've given you enough time to finish up the Easter survey card. Thanks for dropping that off right now or on your way out.

We are actually wrapping up a series today that we have been in over the last few weeks. We've been talking about this question around who Jesus is, really.

And the big idea behind this is that pretty much all of us have some sort of preconceived notion in our minds as to who Jesus is that has been informed by something or someone.

Some of would be like, "Jesus is the Son of God. I believe that." Others of us would be like, "Ah, not so sure. I think Jesus was just a good teacher, He was a good rabbi, He was respected. Certainly, He impacted things, but I'm not quite sure that He was the Son of God."

One of the things we have a tendency to do, even those of us who grew up in church, we have a tendency to sort of recreate Jesus in our own image. Meaning that Jesus certainly sounds a lot like me, and talks like me, and looks like me, and listens to all of the same music that I listen to. Strangely, Jesus is so much like me.

We just have these preconceived notions and what we've been doing is just walking through and saying, "Well, who is Jesus, really?"

Now, we didn't have video cameras or cameras 2,000 years ago so we don't really know what He looks like. We do know this, the prophet Isaiah said that there was nothing that would have drawn your attention to Him. Meaning that He wasn't much of a looker, pretty average.

There have been a lot of artists who have tried to draw these depictions of who they thought Jesus is. And all of this has sort of informed our understanding of Him.

Some of these are just crazy. You've got veterinarian Jesus. Just very concerned about the lamb and giving it a vaccination or something. You've got ripped Jesus. He clearly spent a lot of time in the gym getting six-pack abs getting ready for that cross.

You've got dreamy Jesus. You just get lost in those big, brown eyes of His—that's creepy. You've got Prozac Jesus. He seems really sad, kind of down.

And a few of us nowadays are interested in Jesus as Savior and Lord, what we really want is homeboy Jesus. We want Jesus to be our buddy. We want Him to make a better version of ourselves.

So what we've been doing in this series is we've just simply been setting all of the assumptions aside and say, "Well, who did Jesus say that He was?" Just kind of walking through some of the I Am statements of the Scripture.

Jesus said that He was The Way. He didn't say, "I'm one of several ways, pick the one that you want to go." He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life."

We don't like that. None of us like that because it sounds so exclusive. But the reason why is because He's the only one who exclusively went to a cross. He's the only one who exclusively walked out of a grave. And because He walked out of a grave, you and I can have hope beyond ours.

So today, as we begin to wrap this series up I want us to walk through a conversation that Jesus has with a guy named Nicodemus in John, chapter 3. What Jesus is going to do is He is going to let Nicodemus know that he can experience a fresh start and a brand-new beginning.

And I'm just curious if there is anybody listening to this today and that sounds pretty good. After the couple of years that we've been through, anybody need a fresh start? Anybody need a new beginning? You wish you could just hit a reset button on that relationship, wish you could have a do-over or a mulligan on that marriage or that career. All of us are looking for a fresh start.

I don't know how many of you have heard of something called a cold plunge, but I've been hearing a lot about them lately. A cold plunge, I think we've got an image of this, is where you fill up a container full of ice water and then you get in on purpose. And you sit there for several minutes.

There are a lot of health benefits to this. It will boost your immune system, give you better sleep, pulls inflammation out of your body. I've been reading a lot about these cold plunges.

I don't have one, but I do have a pond behind my house. So several months ago it was starting to get cold out, it was getting into the winter months, there was a little bit of ice on the pond, and I'd been thinking about this. I've been wanting to try it. I was home by myself, I was sitting at the back door drinking my coffee in my shorts and I just said, "You know what? I'm going to do it."

So I walked out to our pond. We have this little dock that goes out to the edge. And I walked out to the edge. Nobody was home. And I was like, "Alright I'm going to do this before I talk myself out of it." So I set the coffee down. I didn't even test the water to see how cold it was, I just jumped in.

I don't recommend this. It immediately took my breath away. The world started spinning. And I turned around to get out, because that was all I could think of was to get out. And I had actually jumped a lot farther away from the dock than what I thought. So it was a little bit of a swim.

And as I'm swimming my limbs go numb and I remember thinking that you can get so cold that your body stops functioning even though you remain conscious. And I thought to myself, "I might not make it back to the dock."

And then there were two groups of people that flashed through my mind in that moment as I'm facing down death—a little dramatic, alright? My wife and my kids, naturally I thought about them.

And I just want you to know this. I thought about all of you. Not because I love you, although I do love you, but because I thought to myself, "I have got to survive this because if I pass away from this what in the world are you all going to think?"

Local pastor found dead in pond wearing shorts in the middle of winter.

And maybe you would be like, "What in the world was he into?" I was like, "I've got to survive this thing to tell the story."

My wife made me promise that I would never do it ever again in an uncontrolled environment like that. So I will do it, just not in the pond. I highly recommend it, alright. It felt refreshing.

In John, chapter 3, Jesus is going to tell this guy named Nicodemus how to experience a fresh start. Now, here's the thing that I want you to know about Nic, he didn't know that he needed it because he was pretty well-accomplished, like many of us.

He drove a nice camel. He worked a nice job. The dude had it all together from the outside looking in. And yet, Jesus sees past all of the exterior that we try to prop ourselves up with. He knew the condition of his heart.

What you may or may not know about the gospels, which are just the first four books of the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—is that they are the biography of the life of Jesus. They tell us what God wants us to know about who Jesus is, what He did and what He said.

Now, they were written either by the eyewitnesses themselves, or by interviewing eyewitnesses. And the first three gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke are known as the synoptic gospels. All that means is that they were written relatively around the same time period, which means they likely would have compared notes.

Mark would have been like, "Hey, Matthew. Are you going to put that story in?" And, "Here's what I'm going to say about it." And they would give us different versions of it because they are giving us their perspective on it, it gives us more of a 360 truth.

John's gospel is different. John's gospel was written much, much later and it was written by, obviously, John. What you need to know about John is that he was a teenager when Jesus went to a cross.

He was a disciple. He was a really close friend. He was part of the inner three: Peter, James, and John. And he was later an apostle. He pastored several churches in Asia Minor.

I tell you all of that to say this. John was not in a rush to write his gospel and I love that. He waited. A lifetime of service. Decades of faithfulness. The ups and the downs. The spiritual deserts. John is a seasoned veteran, a sage of an old man when he writes his gospel.

The other gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke were primarily concerned with getting all of the details right so that way future generations would know what Jesus said and did.

John's not nearly as interested in that. John writes to help you move from unbelief to belief. John is the most theological of the four gospels, but he's arguably the most accessible because he wants you to know that Jesus is God.

This is why anybody who comes to me, and he says, "Hey, I'm really interested in beginning to read the Bible. Where do I start?" I'm like, "Why don't you read a Proverb a day, there are 31 of them, and why don't you start in the gospel of John to get familiar with this man named Jesus."

I'm just wondering if there is anybody here today and you're more than skeptical, like you've rejected....

Maybe there was a time in your life when you believed. Maybe growing up, maybe in college, maybe there was a certain season and you believed but somewhere along the line, maybe it was a painful experience, maybe it was somebody who betrayed you, maybe you began to get a bit jaded because it felt like God was so distant. And you moved into the category of unbelief and that's where you've been living for a while.

Maybe for some of you, you used to attend, you used to be involved but with the pandemic you developed new routines and habits and church really isn't a part of that anymore. You're here because it's Easter.

Maybe you used to walk with God but somewhere along the line you walked away.

And John states his overall purpose for his gospel in chapter 20, verse 31. He said:

"But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name."

In John, chapter 2, verse 25, I love this, it says:

"No one needed to tell him," Him is Jesus—no one needed to tell Jesus "about human nature, for he knew what was in each person's heart."

What I just want you to know is that God knows you, like the real you, not the you that you present to others, not the you on social media, not the you that when somebody

says, “Hey, how are you doing?” you put a fake smile on your face and say, “I’m fine, blessed and highly-favored,” and you’re lying through your teeth.

He goes, “No, I know what you’re going through. And I see you right where you are. And, man, I love you so much.” And it is with that truth that we are ready to hear what Jesus has to say to Nicodemus. Look at it in verse 1. It says:

“There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee.”

A couple of things I just want to break down. By the way, if you’re new around here, I’m just going to read and explain, read and explain, read and explain, apply and be done. That’s what I’m going to do.

So Nicodemus is a religious leader known as a Pharisee. Now, maybe you’ve heard that term before. A Pharisee was a prominent religious leader, but Nicodemus is more than that. Nicodemus was known as a part of the Sanhedrin. And basically all that means is that he was like the Navy SEAL of the Pharisees. The guy has reached the top. There are no more rungs in the ladder for him to climb.

What I also want you to know about him is that he was likely in his mid-60s during this conversation. Jesus would have been in His early 30s, so he is 35 years or so Jesus’ senior, which means, and you’re going to see this in the conversation, he’s respectful for sure, but he’s somewhat condescending in the way that he speaks to Jesus. Look at what it says in verse 2:

“After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus.” John, for whatever reason, wanted us to know what time of day it was. We don’t really know why. Now, we do know that light and darkness are a big theme in John’s gospel, but he says, “Hey, after the sun went down, late into the evening, that’s when they talk.”

We don’t really know why. Lots of commentators like to speculate. The biggest one is that people just assume that Nicodemus was sort of ashamed of Jesus and he didn’t want other Navy SEAL Pharisees to know what he was doing so he meets in the shadows of the dark.

We’ve even got some corny preacher jokes that say, “Nic at night,” and all of that stuff. Never heard that one before? There’s a reason.

I like to assume the best. I don’t know that Nicodemus was embarrassed to be seen talking to Jesus. I almost even wonder.... He is a very prominent religious leader in the community, Jesus is the new rock star rabbi, and I think if they got together at a sidewalk café for coffee in the middle of the afternoon, they’d probably be hounded by paparazzi.

So I think he waits until it gets dark so that way they can have a private conversation. And he says to Jesus:

“Rabbi,” first time Jesus is called Rabbi in John’s gospel, by the way. He’s called Logos. He’s called Messiah. He’s called the Lamb of God. First time He’s been called Rabbi, and it’s a respectful term, and it’s a true term. But it’s horribly insufficient. Jesus is much more than a Rabbi. And he says to Him:

“... ‘we all know,’” who’s we? Likely the other guys in the Sanhedrin. They’ve been talking about this rock star rabbi who is sort of making them a bit nervous.

And he goes, “Hey, I just want you to know we all recognize: “that God has sent you to teach us.”

True, not entirely true. For sure Jesus came to teach. He came to do much more than that:

“Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.”

True, not the entire truth. God wasn’t just with Him, He was God.

Here’s what Nicodemus is saying, in somewhat of a condescending way, “Jesus, hey we’ve all been talking, and we just want to recognize that you’ve got game. We can acknowledge that God’s doing some stuff through You, You’ve got some skills with a ‘z,’ and we’d like to invite You to bring Your skills on to our team.” As if he is like some kind of Marvel superhero and they just discovered a new one and they want to bring them in to be part of their crew.

Here’s what Nicodemus is saying, “Hey, Jesus. Why don’t You let me disciple You for a while? Hey, Jesus. Why don’t You let me take You under my wing and I’ll teach You some things that You’ve never learned before.”

I love the fact that Jesus doesn’t acknowledge a single thing Nicodemus says. He looks right at him, and He says, verse 3:

“Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth,’” just imagine the steely gaze in His eyes, “I tell you the truth,” old man, “unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

Notice He didn’t say enter. He said see. That’s important to note. You’ve got to be born again to even see it. And Nicodemus’ question is maybe a question that you have. He goes:

“What do you mean? ... How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?”

Now, can I just say that is downright disserving. And I don’t think that Nicodemus is being serious. I think that he’s being facetious. And when are you facetious? When you’re annoyed. When you’re a little bit uncomfortable and you’re somewhat defensive.

So I think he pulled out this crazy picture and says, “Jesus, how in the world can this happen? And once again Jesus isn’t deterred by this. He knows what is in Nicodemus’ heart and so once again, He looks him right in the eye. In verse 5 He says:

“... ‘I assure you,’” notice the steely gaze, “no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born,” two things here, if you’re taking notes or drawing in your Bible, water and wind, water and the Spirit.

“Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don’t be surprised when I say, “You must be born again.” The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can’t tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can’t explain how people are born of the Spirit.”

I’m going to hone in on that last sentence. Here’s essentially what Jesus said. He said, “You can’t explain how somebody becomes a Christian. It’s a miracle.”

I don’t think we say that enough. It’s a miracle when somebody becomes a Christian. Here’s what I mean. No amount of knowledge will get you there. No amount of behavior modification will get you there. You didn’t just wake up one day and be like, “I, in my own ingenuity and my own desire, I just decided to lay my life down and follow Jesus.”

Jesus is saying that it is a spiritual rebirth, which means that the Holy Spirit chases you down, it’s the Holy Spirit that prompts you, it’s the Holy Spirit that convicts you, it’s the Holy Spirit that gives you the understanding of this, it’s the Holy Spirit that seals you and secures you.

Jesus is using metaphors here of wind and water to describe what it means to become a Christian.

And He uses the analogy of actual childbirth. At the birth of a child, there is water, the embryonic fluid that the fetus is in, and then the water breaks and when the water breaks you know that the baby is coming.

I’ve been in the room for all four of my kids’ births and as they emerged, I’ve been there when they took their first breath.

And even now, the sign of life is water and wind. Your body is mostly made of water and how do you know if you’re alive, are you sucking in air? So, water and wind. These are the signs of life.

And He says it’s the exact same thing when it comes to a spiritual rebirth. And it’s an absolute miracle, meaning you cannot do it to yourself. Are you there? Yes. Are you involved? Yes.

In the same way that a baby is there and involved in its birth, but it didn’t do any of the work. I need to hear from you mummies right now. Can I get a good amen? That baby did nothing. Husband, get out of the room.

You did all of the pushing. The baby was just there. The baby didn't say, "I've decided to be born today. I'm going to claw my way out of here." No. The baby did nothing. It's just there.

Jesus says the exact same thing happens when a person becomes a Christian. You just can't understand it because it's a move of the Spirit.

Let me say it this way:

A new beginning that we're all looking for requires a spiritual birth.

Think about all of the ways we try to get around that because we don't like that. We all want a new beginning. We all want a fresh start, "I just want to go about it on my own terms. So, I'm going to try harder. I'm going to attend more. I'm going to read my Bible. Do my best. Lean in. Show up. Be a better version of me. Turn over a new leaf. Achieve all of my goals."

There isn't anything wrong with any of that. But Jesus says, "It won't stick. You've got to be born again." And He describes it as a miracle.

And after about 25 years of full-time ministry—I know I don't look that old, I started when I was 12, sort of a child prodigy thing, it's a whole other deal, I'll tell you another time—after 25 years of ministry I cannot tell you why somebody becomes a Christian. I do not know.

Here's what I mean. There have been some people who I have invested an exorbitant amount of time, energy, and prayer for—I've been there for them in a time of need, they've had questions, I went and did research, I came back with eloquent answers, I prayed and prayed for them and I tried to be a friend and the result was that they just kind of looked at the invitation to follow Jesus and went, "Eh," and walked away.

I've been around people, I was just talking to some people even earlier, godly people, raised their kids in the church and they were as consistent as they could be (there is a hypocrite in all of us)—they were as consistent as they could be and yet their kids chose to walk away. You can't even explain it.

Then I've been around other people and honestly, as a pastor, I felt guilty because I felt like I should have given them more of my time and I told them I'd pray and I really didn't and they asked me a question and I really messed it up, I kind of fumbled it, I wasn't very clear. And yet they gave their life to Jesus. And it's like a real, authentic, life-transformation thing. It's like, in spite of me they gave their lives to Christ.

I've met other people who didn't grow up in church at all, they were involved in a really, really dark lifestyle and God rescued them out, pulled them out of it. And you look at it and you go, "This doesn't make any sense. I can't understand it."

There is a mystery to when somebody becomes a Christian, which means that the pressure is off of me. This is my 15th Easter at Traders Point. And in my earlier days, some of you have been around long enough to remember this, on these special days I would try way to hard. I would swing for the fences and foul it off.

I felt all of this pressure. “Oh, man. It’s got to be a perfect sermon and I’ve got to be funny, and I’ve got to use these great illustrations and I’ve got to anticipate all of the arguments and I’ve got to come back with air-tight defenses, and I’ve got to convince you to become a Christian.”

I’ve come to this place where I’m just kind of like, “Nah, I just need to deliver the mail.” I just need to lay it out there because there is this mystery to it.

I had a church planter, a guy who just planted a church in Miami, Florida, a couple of months ago, texted me Friday night so nervous about Easter, “Do you have any advice for me?”

I texted him back and I said, “Man, relax. This is the easiest weekend out of the year. Everybody shows up and the sermon is already written—the resurrection. So just get up and say that.”

So, I just want you to know all I’m going to do, I’m not trying to eloquently try to convince you, because if I could eloquently convince you, you’d respond for all of the wrong reasons.

Now, I’m not saying that aren’t eloquent responses. There are. Some of the most brilliant minds in history have been Christ followers. Some of the most brilliant minds in history have not been. There’s a mystery to this that you just can’t fully explain or put your finger on.

Many of you may recognize the name Brian Welch from the band Korn. He is a guitarist for the band Korn. I remember when I was in college hearing about this band, listening to them, seeing them on MTV. Quite honestly, they scared me. They still do, actually. Dreads and tattoos and they just came out of really, really dark places.

Many of you may know Brian’s story. Brian has been to our church before. He just dramatically gave his life to Christ and even he couldn’t fully explain it to you. It’s not like he went on some spiritual journey trying to figure it out. God chased him down, ran him down.

I’ve had the privilege over the last few years to be friends with Brian and to get to talk to him and spend time with him behind closed doors. Can I just say this? He’s the real deal. He really does love Jesus.

And every time that I see that, I look at his story, and I just shake my head. I’m just like, “I don’t get it. How is it that God chased him down and rescued him, and brought him from darkness into light?” There’s just this mystery to it.

And it's a beautiful thing. In fact, he texted me just a couple of nights ago, I didn't see this until later, he texted me at 1:13 in the morning, go figure. He simply said this, "Hey, bless your resurrection weekend, brother. He is risen. And so are we." And I just teared up reading that.

I'm reminded, once again, that this gospel message is for anyone and everyone. There is no one who is too far gone. There is no one who is too dark. There is no one who is too addicted. There is no one who can out-sin the grace of God.

Now Nicodemus is going to ask a question that maybe some of you are asking right now:

"How are these things possible?'... Jesus replied," now Jesus is going to get a little condescending toward him. I love Jesus so much. "You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don't understand these things? I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won't believe our testimony."

Wow. Jesus just said what I just said. He just did it a way tighter way. He said, "I can totally say all of this stuff and try to convince you, but you wouldn't believe." He goes:

"But if you don't believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things?"

"No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man," that's Jesus, "has come down from heaven. And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life." John 3:9-15 (NLT)

And with those last couple of sentences you may be like, "What in the world is Jesus talking about?" He's actually referencing a pretty obscure passage in the Old Testament, Numbers 21, you can go back and read it later today, in which the Israelites are grumbling against their leader, Moses. And so God sends fiery serpents, venomous serpents to bite them and now they are dying.

What a great story. Those of you, your kids are acting up during the day, just read that to them at bedtime and say, "This is what happens to bad little boys and girls. God sends snakes to bite them."

So, the Israelites are really, really sorry. A snake bite will do that. They are like, "Moses, what do we do?" So Moses, in his compassion goes to God and he goes, "God, they are really, really sorry."

And here's what God says. God says this to Moses, "Create a replica of a snake out of bronze, put it on a pole, lift it up," I love this, "lift it up and everyone who just looks at it will be healed." I love that. How easy is that?

He didn't say, "Hey, everyone who takes a test and passes, everyone who shows Me that they are really, really sorry, everybody who paid the penance or paid the price...." No. He just told them to look at it. And you know what? Not everybody did.

Here's the thing. All you have to do is look at it. And Jesus is saying, "This is a reference, this is a foreshadowing of when He would be lifted up on a cross." Here's what He is saying, "All you've got to do is look at Me. All you've got to do is look to Me and you'll be healed."

We oftentimes make this far too difficult, more difficult than it needs to be. Jesus is explaining to a man who appears to have it all together what it means to experience new life.

We have lots of examples in the gospels of Jesus finding what we might call the down-and-outs, tax collectors and prostitutes, people with really, really messed up lives.

We have a tendency to judge sin by exterior, Jesus judges sin on the interior. On the exterior we might see different levels of sin, on the interior, Jesus just sees sin. There are no levels. There might be differences in consequence, but there are no really bad sinners and then good sinners, there are just sinners.

And Jesus comes to Nicodemus, this is a pastor, this is somebody who is religiously elite, this is somebody who is morally upright—if there was anybody who could earn salvation on their own, it would have been him, and Jesus says, "You've got to be born again."

It shows me that no amount of knowledge, moral performance, or good behavior puts anything right between me and God.

See, all of your religious behavior and righteous activity is not enough. All of your achieving, accomplishments, and accolades won't give you the peace that you are looking for. What you need is a miracle. And it is something that you cannot do for yourself. You need to be born again.

We are not mistakers in need of a life coach. We are sinners in need of a Savior. And this isn't a little spiritual redecorating, but a complete demo and renovation of the heart.

Maybe there was one time in your life when you got religious, you were sprinkled, confirmed, dedicated, rededicated, sponsored and nominated.

Maybe you attended a service, raised a hand, walked an aisle, went to an event, read a book, prayed a prayer, got an emotional buzz, but you never received Jesus for who He really is, the Hope of New Life.

All you did was you just snapped on external beliefs and behaviors and they never took fruit. Some of you were raised in church, you were never raised in Christ, and you walked away from both. So, you've got to get to the root.

My great-grandparents had a grape vineyard when they were alive and we used to pick grapes and we'd take them into her kitchen, she put them in a big batch and boil them. She'd make fresh, homemade grape juice. Man, there is nothing like it.

And my grandparents, if they had decided to get rid of the grapes and they wanted to have an apple orchard instead, how would they have gone about doing it? Well, they wouldn't have gone and picked all of the grapes off of the vines and then tried to fasten apples to the edges of the vines and hopefully the next year there would be apples. That's crazy. No. You would actually dig up the vines and you would replant apples seeds to eventually get an apple orchard.

And what many of us do when we just snap on external beliefs and behaviors, a little bit of sin modification, behavioral modification, image management, "I'm going to read my Bible and pray, go to church—all we're doing is we're attaching apples to the vines and we're not really getting to the root.

And it is a radical transformation of the heart. And we don't like that word radical, especially in church, it makes us nervous because it sounds like irrationalism.

But that is not what that word means. It's really unfortunate that the word radical has sort of been hijacked. It comes from the Latin word radix, and it just means: root. You just get to the very root of this issue. The very heart of the matter.

And here's the gospel message. Ephesians lays it out like this:

Once you were dead—pop quiz, can dead people respond? Last time I checked: no, because of your disobedience and your many sins.

You were spiritually dead.

"But God," oh, man, He "is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life," we didn't have to earn it, He gave it to us, "when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!)" Ephesians 2:4-5 (NLT)

Man, may you never, ever, ever forget that because oftentimes we respond to the gospel message and the longer we walk with Jesus, the more we think that it's grace and. It's grace and my knowledge. It's grace and my behavior.

You know what that produces? It produces modern day Pharisees who look down on other people. And we fail to remember that we are all in need—but by the grace of God.

There isn't a single one of us who stands a chance and may we never forget that. Many of us, our heads are so full of doctrine, and our hearts are so far from Jesus because we're not getting that. All we're simply saying is look to Him. Look to Him.

So I want you to know this:

The gospel is not about making good people better, but bringing dead people to life.

And that is a miracle. Some of you may feel like, "Well, do I have any responsibility in the matter?" Yeah, you do. There is something that you have to do. You have to get real. Jesus already knows what is in your heart so stop trying to hide it. You just come clean.

And I never want to ask you to do anything that I'm not willing to do. I just simply want you to know, I never, ever want to stand on this stage or pretend to be something that I'm not. I want to be the same guy on this stage that I am off of it. And I never want to pretend that I've got it all together. I never want you to assume that I'm beyond any sort of sin. I'm a beggar who continues to be in need of God's grace.

And if we were to be honest right now, many of you have really been struggling to listen to this message because you just can't get past the fact that I'm wearing a suit jacket right now. You're so confused.

And honestly, I make the joke that if you see me in a suit jacket it means somebody is getting married or buried. And ain't no wedding cake here today. So you fill in the blanks.

This suit jacket is actually not a very accurate representation of who I am. I feel really uncomfortable wearing it [removes the jacket]. My shirt is actually a better representation of me [torn sleeves, frayed tie, words drawn on it depicting pride and various other sins].

This is not a gimmick or an illustration this is a mirror. This is real. I just want you to know that there is not anybody listening to this, I genuinely mean this, there isn't anybody listening to this who is a worse sinner than me. I'm in just as much need of God's grace and mercy as anyone else. And only by the grace of God can I even stand here.

So, how do you experience that new birth? Well, you take off the jacket and you stop pretending, stop hiding.

I want to be careful here how I say this because I understand church hurt and church baggage is a real thing. Many of you walked away from God because of church hurt. And I understand.

So, you'll say, "Well, I don't want to go to church now. Those people are just hypocrites." Well of course they are, all of us are like this. Churches are messy because people are messy and we're all in need of God's grace, running after and being transformed more and more into His image.

So I want to be a church where we remove the jacket, and we stand in the grace of God recognizing that we can't do anything to earn it. And it is a miracle when somebody crosses over from death to life.

How does the Bible say it? Well the Bible says you just simply believe that Jesus is the Son of God, you confess your sins, take off your jacket, you repent, which means you turn around and you begin to move away from the way that you were traveling before, and move more and more into the image and likeness of Jesus. It's called sanctification.

And the fourth thing that the Bible asks us to do is to be baptized. And it's that last one that is weird. Baptism is so weird. I don't understand it. There is a mystery to it.

It's the water that Jesus is referencing in this passage, and it is the number one thing that people resist. There are a lot more people who have believed, confessed, and repented—very few who have followed through on the fourth part.

We'll do anything but that. And we really resist it. But what I want you to know about baptism is that it is a death. You are being buried in a watery grave, identifying with Christ. Romans 6 says, and you are being resurrected as a new creation in Christ.

There is something very mysterious about that. It seems silly. Adults dunking other adults in a bathtub, very silly. But there is something very powerful about it. There is a mystery to it.

I think the reason why God instituted is to get us to face our pride and to get us to die to our sins.

The word baptism comes from the Greek word baptizo. It means to dip, to plunge, or to immerse. The problem is that when we translated it from Greek to English we didn't translate it, we transliterated it.

If we would have translated it, we would not even have the word baptism. We would just say dunk. But we transliterated it, we took a Greek word and made up an English word. So we took baptizo and said baptism.

Some of you are like, "Well, what about my sprinkling? I was sprinkled as an infant." Nothing wrong with that. The Bible doesn't prohibit it. It also doesn't instruct it. And many of you have been sprinkled! I think that's great. I think that's for your parents and your grandparents because they are the only ones who have memory of it.

But now you need to be immersed and you're not forsaking their guidance in your life, you're building on the foundation that they laid for you.

Baptism is an amazing thing. It's a very violent thing, actually because somebody is dying, and you're being resurrected.

A few years ago I baptized a couple of teen-aged girls in that baptistry and one of them was deathly afraid of water. And she didn't tell me that. And I wish she would have.

So I took her confession and as I was taking her down it was as if I was trying to dunk a cat under the water. She fought me and she had freakish strength.

I tried to get her down and brought her up and everything was wet except a little patch of hair on her forehead. So I was like, "I've got to take her down again."

So I went again, and she was fighting, and I was like, "Booyah," trying to knock her down. And I brought her up again and the same patch of hair was dry. And I was like, "Well, you don't need bangs in heaven."

It's something that is violent that happens. Your old self is being crucified. Your old self is dying. And honestly there is a lot of junk in our lives that we can try to clean up and manage and we just actually need to leave it in the tank. We need to be washed clean.

You are saved by faith through grace and the finished work of Jesus on a cross. Baptism symbolizes that. But it's a cleansing. It really is.

Every time we make a decision and do something tangible, there is something powerful about that. Baptism is a tangible expression of what is happening on the inside.

Some of you, there is a lot of junk in your life right now. And you've been scrubbing and scrubbing and scrubbing and scrubbing and trying to manage it and you need to just leave in the tank.

The reason why we do spontaneous baptism, by the way, is because that what was modeled for us in the New Testament. In the book of Acts, Peter preaches a sermon. It says people were cut to heart, meaning they were convicted, and they said, "What do we do?" And Peter didn't say, "Well, raise a hand and pray a prayer." He said, "Repent and be baptized." And thousands were right there in that moment.

The Ethiopian eunuch was reading the prophet Isaiah. Didn't understand it and a friend comes along and says, "Hey, can I explain it to you?" And he does. And whatever he says, the eunuch says, "Look, there's water, I should be baptized right now."

There is something very powerful about that. That's why we do it in the moment. The first Sunday we ever did this years ago, I just preached on this, made an invitation and 280 people were baptized that morning. It was incredible. I've never been a part of anything like it.

And I was in the tank 'til 1:30 in the afternoon. And by about baptism 150, my lats were cramping up and the tank was disgusting. I needed a hazmat suit to take people's confession, you know?

I had hair wrapped around my fingers and there were things floating in the water. There was this nice little film on the surface. And the reason why I'm telling you all of that is because if you're going to get baptized today, you need to get in the front of the line, alright? Just a little pro tip for you. Just be in front of the line, you won't have to worry about any of that.

I love the fact that the baptistry was disgusting because it was symbolic of what we leave in the tank. And some of you need to leave some stuff in the tank.

On the cross, it took Jesus' death (and His breath away) because death took your sins away. His resurrection takes your excuses away.

So today, at all of our campuses, if you would bow your heads and close your eyes. I just want to lead you in a prayer, and I want you to make this your own.

God, I am a sinner and I plead guilty. I have done things my own way and I'm wrong. I want to take off the jacket. I just want to stand in front of yYou as I am.

God I want to do things Your way—I want to surrender the controls of my life over to You. I believe that Your Son is Jesus Christ, and He came into this world not to condemn the world but to save it.

Father I want to accept Your free gift of salvation. I want the Holy Spirit to come into my life. I want to follow Jesus for the rest of my days as Lord and Savior. In the name of Jesus I pray, Amen.