

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

SEEING IS BELIEVING | EASTER WITH TRADERS POINT

AARON BROCKETT | MARCH 30, 2024

Alright. Happy Easter Traders Point family. How are we doing today? Good to be with you guys. This is the last of a cajillion services, so I hope you guys are showing up. I've been preaching for the last 18 hours, and I'm going to empty the tank this hour.

What you need to know is that you just walked in to a celebration, I don't know, roughly 20,000 of us across all of our locations. But over two billion Christians around the globe all declaring the same thing. Jesus is alive! The tomb is empty! Because He walked out of the grave you can walk away from anything that you may be facing as well.

So, that means that chains can be broken, addictions can be set free, relationships can be restored, anxiety can be lifted, anger can be cooled, hope can be found all in the power of Jesus' risen name. Come on somebody. Celebrate that, man.

If you're sick of hearing applause, I'm really sorry because the next hour I've got a lot of Good News that I want to share with you. But before I do that, I know that you've already been greeted by your campus pastors at all of our locations, but I want to do that too.

So, I just want to welcome everybody who may be a guest with us today. Man, we are so incredibly honored that you would be here. In fact, I'd really rather not call you guests. I'd rather call you future family because that's how we want to view you.

Here's how this works at our house. We'll have guests over to our house. We'll invite you in. And we'll entertain you. And we'll feed you. And then at a certain hour, we'll show you the door because it's time to go, man.

But that's not our mindset around here. We want to see you back and eventually call you family.

In fact, I want to invite you back next weekend. We're kicking off a new five-week series of messages on a subject that touches all of us either directly or indirectly called Weeds in My Garden.

We're going to be talking about the subject of mental health. We hear a lot about that subject now a days, but we want to look at what God's Word has to say about it. So, I want to encourage you to come back. Maybe you're not normally a church attender. But, maybe you might say, "You know what? For the next five weeks I'll come, I'll watch, I'll



tune in.” And if you do that, God will show up. I believe that He’s got a word specifically for you.

Now, it’s Easter and we don’t have many traditions around here but we do have one, and that’s an Easter survey. So, right now, if you would across all of our locations and those of you online, pull out your phone and take a picture of this QR code behind me. Even if it’s your first time to be with us today, I still want to hear from you.

And there’s a reason why we do a survey every Easter, really practical. Number one, this is the one weekend out of the year that you all decide to show up at the same time. So, I’m going to take advantage of that and get some good information from you.

The second is the information off this really simple survey—in fact, it’s just three questions, it won’t take you long to fill it out at all—but the information that you give us on this helps us set direction for the next year. You are helping us to kind of lead and shepherd and pastor this church.

Really quickly, you can do it right now, 30 seconds. Just answer these three questions:

Number one: How would you describe your relationship with Jesus? The more honest you are, the better. Totally okay for you to be honest about that.

Number two: What areas in your life present the greatest challenges right now? This helps us with pastoral care and this helps set the course of the teaching series for the upcoming year.

Number three: What would help you take your next step in knowing and following Jesus?

So, thank you for taking just a few seconds to fill that out. If you need more time that link will be live for the next week or so and we’d love to hear from you.

Now, if you have a Bible, go ahead and meet me in John, chapter 20. John 20 is the passage that we are going to be walking through together today. In chapter 19, Jesus is sentenced to death. He’s crucified. He died. And then He is buried in a borrowed tomb by a couple of men: Joseph of Arimathea and a guy named Nicodemus. They go to Pilot. They ask for permission for Jesus’ body and then they bury Him in Joseph’s tomb.

Now here’s why that is significant. Most people who were crucified on a Roman cross did not get a proper burial. The body was just taken off of the cross, eventually, and just thrown into the garbage heap to decay or to be eaten by birds.



But Jesus' body is buried in a borrowed tomb fulfilling the prophet Isaiah's prophecy about it—that Jesus would die a criminal death, but that He would be buried like a rich man. And Joseph of Arimathea was a rich man. So he goes to Pilot. He asks for Jesus' body. He and Nicodemus are in a rush because it's beginning to be the Sabbath. So they get Jesus' body in there, kind of hastily, and then they leave it.

Three days later, the first to visit the tomb are women. Now, why is that? Well, the ladies in the room know why. If my wife has been out of town for a few days and I go and I pick her up at the airport, and she's coming home, she's wondering if she's coming home to a clean house, I'm like, "Hey, babe. Don't worry about it. I cleaned it up." She's like, "Mm-hmm. Now, I've got to clean up the cleanup." Ladies, can I hear you? You know what I'm talking about.

So, the reason why the ladies were the first to the tomb is because they've got to clean up the cleanup. They are like, "We know that Jesus needs a proper burial. So Mary Magdalene shows up and the stone has been rolled away, the tomb is empty. Jesus meets her there. And then she goes to the disciples.

We're picking it up in verse 18 of chapter 20:

"Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, 'I have,'" what the Lord? "'seen the Lord!'"

That's encounter talk. In fact, I want you to pay attention to how many times the word seen and saw are mentioned in this passage, because those are encounter words. Mary didn't say, "I've heard about it." "There's a conspiracy theory." "I read about it online." She's like, "No. I saw Him." She says this to the disciples. She gives them this message.

Now, what do you think their response might be to this message of resurrection power? You might think that the disciples might high-five each other. That they would throw a party. That they would hold a press conference: Hope can be found. Fear is gone. A new beginning is at hand. Nope.

Look at where they are in verse 19:

"That Sunday evening," this is the first Easter, by the way, "That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders." John 20:19a (NLT)

Why were they meeting behind locked doors? Well, because they were afraid. Afraid of what? Well, they were afraid that if they could do that to Jesus, then the disciples were

very likely next. If they could crucify Jesus, put Him to death, then it was just a matter of time before they were coming after them as well.

But Mary shows up and she says, “Guys, I’ve seen the Lord.” And that did not phase them. The message of resurrection power was missed. They couldn’t hear it. Why? Because of their fear.

Now, here’s the question I just want to present in front of you today. Is there anything—it’s totally okay to be honest about this—is there anything right now that is deafening the message of resurrection power in your life?

It may be the very same thing as what the disciples were facing. It’s just good, old fashioned fear. And there is a lot to be fearful of in the world right now. Is it just me or can the rest of you feel this? It feels as if the entire collective world is holding its breath waiting for the next bad thing to happen.

You look at the news. You look at social media. And you see all of this fear that is going on. And fear can keep you and me (it certainly kept the disciples) from hearing and receiving the message of resurrection power.

It could just be good things that distract us from the message of resurrection power.

Man, don’t get me wrong. I love Easter. It’s one of my favorite holidays. But, we can so easily get caught up in the event of Easter that we miss the message of Easter.

Here’s what I mean. I’m looking around the room right now. You all look good. You look good. You’re dressed in your Easter best. There are all kinds of pastels. You look like a bunch of ice cream cones right now. It just looks amazing.

And right now, you’ve got your list. You’ve got family in town. And you’re going to take a picture in front of the green thing. It’s Easter. You’ve already posted and you know what you are going to say about it.

And already you’ve picked your path out of here to navigate the Traders Point parking lot. Hunger Games afterward. So that way you can get to lunch on time.

It’s just like all of the events of Easter. You’re going to have an Easter egg hunt later. It’s amazing. It’s great. And I hope you enjoy all of it.

Man, don’t miss Jesus. Don’t miss the message of resurrection power in the events of the Easter holiday.



So, here you have the disciples. They are behind locked doors. Mary tells them she's seen the Lord. They are not buying it. Look at verse 19:

"Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them!" John 20:19b (NLT)

I love that so much. Just get this picture in your mind. The disciples are on the couch eating wings, watching the NCAA final four. And all of a sudden James kind of turns and he's like, "Hey, Jesus. Could you pass the sweet baby...? J C? When did you show up? Right? Jesus just like Harry Potters right into the room—suddenly.

Now, here's the thing. Jesus spent three years with these guys. These are some of His closest friends. And He told them what was going to happen and they were kind of slow to the take. And then it happened.

I was thinking about this last week. If I'm Jesus and I resurrected from the dead and I'm showing up to my closest friends, what do you think the first words out of my mouth would be? I thought about that. Now, definitely I'm doing the Harry Potter thing. Definitely, poof, coming into the room. But then the first word out of my mouth, I think would be, "Tada." You know? Or, "I'm back." Something like that.

But here's Jesus' first words. Look at verse 19:

"Peace be with you," he said. As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side." John 20:19-20 (NLT)

Why would he do that? Why would He show them His wounds? Because they saw Him die. They saw Him crucified on a tree. And He knows that they are going to need this evidence to believe. And it says:

"They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! Again he said, 'Peace be with you.'"

By the time we're finished with this passage, Jesus will have said that three times. I think there is a reason. And He said:

"As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." That's mission talk. "Then he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" John 20:20-22 (NLT)

So, here's what I want you to see. At the presence of Jesus their fear turns to joy, their joy and belief was activated when they saw Him and now He is sending them as the Father has sent Him. And He's giving them the Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit, by the way, that He is giving you and me. The same Holy Spirit that is in this room right now. The same Holy Spirit that will give you an encounter with the living God.



Now, verse 24... I like this hour. You guys are responsive. Last hour they were quiet, man. I like this hour.

Verse 24 indicates a break in time. Now, look at verse 24. It says:

“One of the twelve disciples, Thomas... was not with the others when Jesus came.” John 20:24 (NLT)

That’s such a bummer for him. The most significant event in human history and where is Thomas? Oh, he went to Meijers to get more potato chips. And by the time he comes back, Jesus has already caught an Uber. He’s gone.

Now, the disciples give him the same message of resurrection power that Mary had given them. And they are going to tell us that Thomas walked in with a bag of potato chips, and they are like, “Bro, you’re not going to believe this. We saw Jesus!” Not, “We heard about it.” “We read about it.” “We think this is true.” “We saw Him. We talked to Him. We touched Him. You’re not going to believe it man.”

And Thomas is standing there going, “You’re right. I don’t.”

“...he replied, ‘I won’t believe it unless,’” what? “I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side.” John 20:25b (NLT)

Man, I love the fact... This is one of my favorite Easter passages. I don’t know about you, but I can relate to Thomas so much. I think I would have been a lot like him. I think I would have been, “Man, you know what? I kind of believe you and all, but I’ve got to see it to believe it. I need to seal the deal by actually touching the wounds in Jesus’ hands and in His side.”

Now, here’s what I want to point out. Right after Thomas says this, the very next verse, we’ll get to it in a minute, verse 26, it says, “Eight days later.” What I want you to see is that there seems to be no immediate resolution to this conversation. A week goes by. Think about that for a minute. A week more of fear. A week more behind locked doors. A week more of, “I wonder what’s going to happen.” A week more of the disciples being like, “He didn’t believe. I mean, we saw Him, but I don’t know how we’re going to prove this to him.”

This tells me that God is not insecure. Because an insecure God... Jesus, He knows that whole conversation just went down, because actually we’re going to see Jesus replay the whole thing in a minute. Jesus heard Thomas say that. And an insecure God would have been, “Hello, it’s just us.”



But a secure, sovereign God is like, "Okay, I'll let you sit in that for a minute." 1 Peter tells us that God is not slow in keeping His promises. He's patient. And some of you, right now are like, "God is kind of slow. God is freaking me out. Time to show up. I've asked You to make Yourself real to me." God doesn't seem to be doing anything.

Well, He's on His own timetable, not yours. And God is not slow. He's patient. And He's patiently pursuing you. And He's sovereign. And He knows the exact date and hour when you're going to be in relationship with Him. And it very well could be sooner than you think.

See, every Easter... I respect Thomas so much. He's like my favorite person in this whole narrative because there is a skeptic in me. And there is likely a skeptic in you. What I've found is that some of the most faithful, spiritual giants, not only of our day and age, but throughout church history were natural skeptics.

And it seems like every Easter what I'm trying to do in the message is really two primary things. Number one: I'm trying to convince about half of you that you are not crazy for believing in a literal, bodily resurrection. The second thing I'm trying to do is I'm trying to convince the other half of you that you're crazy for not believing in a literal, bodily resurrection. And the third thing I'm trying to do is I'm trying to assure all of you that it's okay to have some doubts. Thomas did. And it's okay.

Jesus doesn't pounce on him. He doesn't chastise him. He doesn't shame him for it. Listen, man. If you're tired of life, you're ready for Jesus. If you're fearful of life, you are ready for Jesus. If you've got some doubts, because there is a skeptic in you or because you've been hurt, you've been misled in your past, then you are more ready for Jesus than what you might imagine.

Have you ever just wondered this on Easter? Why was the stone rolled away? I remember growing up in church going to Sunday school and hearing the Easter messages and either what I thought I heard them say or what they said (I don't remember which one is which) is that the stone was rolled away so that Jesus could get out.

The stone was rolled away not so that He could get out, but so that we could see in!

But already, in the passage, we see that Jesus sort of like appears into a room. He didn't seem to be held back by any sort of wall or barrier. So the stone didn't need to be rolled away so that He could get out, it was so that we could see in.

And if there is anybody right now who thinks, “Man, I just can’t come to Jesus because I’ve got some really legitimate questions and doubts. I don’t want to be fooled. There are a lot of religions out there; there are a lot of paths you can take. I don’t want to waste my life. I don’t want to be fooled.” I can totally resonate with all of that.

So what you are doing is you are just holding back, you’re kind of sitting back a little bit and you’re like, “If I could have some answers to some questions then I would cross the line of faith.”

And I just simply want to say to you, you are waiting for something that can never happen. It doesn’t matter what religion you end up ascribing to. It doesn’t matter if you are an agnostic or an atheist. Every single path requires faith because there is nobody who has 100 percent of his questions answered.

What happens is, you, by faith, step into something, you enter into something and as you do so your questions get answered gradually rather than all at once. It’s not that the questions are bad and it’s not that there aren’t good answers to the questions. It’s that we’re sitting back waiting for God to give us an answer key or email us the answers to our questions. And God is like, “The only way to do this is through an encounter. The only way to do this is through relationship.”

One of my favorite definitions of faith is this:

Faith: When the unexplainable meets the undeniable

You can’t explain it. But you can’t deny it. You had an encounter with the living God. And Jesus doesn’t ignore or diminish Thomas’s doubts, what He does is He addresses them with an undeniable encounter. Check it out. Verse 26. Eight days later the disciples are going to run it back. They are together again. I guess the tournament is not over. Some of you got that.

And this time Thomas was with them. Thomas is like, “I’m not going anywhere. We will Door Dash the potato chips. I’m staying right here. Alright?” So the doors were locked but:

“but suddenly, as before,”

I think Jesus loves doing this. He’s standing there among them, “Hey guys, what’s going on?”

“Peace be with you,”



And then He turns to Thomas. Now, in the way that you read the Bible tone is everything. I don't think Jesus turned to Thomas with His arms crossed. I don't think He's wagging His finger. I don't think He's shaming Him. I think Jesus turned to Thomas with a smile on His face and moisture in His eyes. And He looks at Thomas and He says:

"Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!'" John 20:26-27 (NLT)

Man, I think Thomas gets a bad rap. For those of you who have been in church for a while and you know the Bible stories, you likely know that Thomas has a nickname. What is it? Of course—Doubting Thomas. You know what I think? I think Thomas is in heaven going, "Come on guys. Really? One time I had questions and I get branded with the nickname for life—Doubting Thomas.

Here's what we need to know about Thomas that is oftentimes overlooked. Did you know that he was one of the bravest disciples? He was the one who said, "Guys, let's go to Jerusalem and die with Jesus." He was a passionate follower.

He was all in or all out. He's like, "I'm ready to go." Right? He is not a Doubting Thomas; he's just simply a realist. He had legitimate questions. Why? Because saw Jesus die. And typically, dead people don't come back to life. So, Jesus showed him undeniable proof.

Check out Thomas's response. Verse 28:

"My Lord and my God," Thomas exclaimed.

I love that. Thomas didn't go, "Hmm. That's really interesting." Thomas didn't do what many of you do. I know that when I'm preaching sometimes some of you, it sounds like a holy herd. "Hmmmmm." I'm like, "Wow, these people are getting fired up, man."

Thomas didn't do that. Thomas wasn't like, "Hey, you gave me something to ponder, Jesus. And I shall go away and ponder on it." He didn't do any of that. Immediately he's like, "My Lord and My God." There was an audible response, a tangible reaction. He didn't just kind of stand there stoically, he was passionate about it.

And then what I really love about this passage is that as Jesus is talking to Thomas, He has you and me in mind. Easter 2024. Because He mentions you and me in this passage. Did you know that? We're here. In verse 29:

"Then Jesus told him, 'You believe because you have seen me.'" Now here we are, "Blessed..."



That means Jesus is saying there is a blessing for those, and those is a reference to you and me,

“...who believe without seeing me.” John 20:29 (NLT)

I love that. Jesus basically says... He is acknowledging the challenge of belief. If you are like, “Man, I’m just really struggling to believe this whole thing.” He’s like, “Man, I feel you. I understand. And I’m telling you there is a blessing for those of you who choose to put your trust, your full devotion in Me, just like Thomas and the disciples did when they had something you don’t have, they got to touch my wounds and put their hands into my side and you don’t. You know what? By choosing to put your trust in Me and believe in Me, there is a blessing for you.”

Now, listen. This isn’t blind faith, dumb faith, cross my fingers, pie in the sky, I hope it’s true. Sometimes society says, “Well, that’s what faith is.” Listen, man. There is good reason to believe that this has happened. Christianity is not based on a story a feeling or a philosophy or a set of beliefs. Christianity rises and falls on an event. The resurrection of Jesus. It either happened or it didn’t. And if it happened it means that Jesus changes everything. And the resurrection of Jesus was witnessed by over 500 people.

Here's what I want you to see. The disciples, in this passage, are afraid of the Jews, they are afraid of being put to death, they are behind locked doors. But you fast forward to the rest of their lives every single one of them courageously died proclaiming that Jesus had walked out of a grave.

Peter was crucified upside down for it. Matthew was burned at the stake for it. James was run through with a sword for it. And the reason why I point that out is that people don’t die for something that they know is a lie.

Some of you are like, “Objection. People die for stuff that’s not true all of the time. That’s why I have to take my shoes off at the airport.” That’s not what I said. People will die for something that’s not true if they think it is true. No one will die for something that they know is undeniably false.

Here’s what I mean by that. Matthew and the other disciples, if they made it up then you’ve got to ask yourself: Why would they make it up? And others would say, “They just made it up to get power for themselves.” And I’m like, “What kind of power did they get? They all died proclaiming that Jesus has resurrected.”

Don’t you think that one of them would have cracked over the next 40 years? Matthew is being burned at the stake and they start to light up his feet and the flames are coming



up his legs and he considers saying to himself, “You know what? I think I’m taking this a little bit too far. I know that this is a lie. I know that this is a legend. I’m going to cry uncle and go ahead and come clean with it because I know that this is a legend.”

There is no way that Matthew would be like, “Well, I know that this is a lie but I’m not going to quit because quitters never prosper.” Come on, man. They were all put to death because they literally saw Jesus alive.

One of them was Jesus own brother. Think about the miracle of that for a minute. How many of you have a brother? What would it take if your brother today, at Easter lunch, said, “Hey, I have some news for you. I am the Son of God?”

“Get out of here, man. You’re the one who gave me swirlies as a kid. There is no way I’m singing worship songs to you.”

But James, the brother of Jesus is like, “Jesus is the risen Son of God.”

Listen, man. Jesus’ resurrection means that He conquered death itself. He put death to death. So when Jesus says in John 14:6, “I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life. Nobody comes to the Father except through Me.” Jesus is not saying, “I am the superior way among all other ways.” Although we could argue that He is.

But that’s not what He is saying. He’s not saying, “I’ve got a better philosophy on life.” Or, “I’ve got a better set of morals. And if you just follow My way then life is going to work out better for you.” We could argue that He does.

But that’s not what Jesus is saying. Jesus is saying, “I am the only One who paid the debt that you owe—in full. I’m the only One who put death to death. That’s why I am the way. That’s why I am the truth. That’s why I’m the only way to God.”

You read John 14:6 and you might say, “Well, Jesus. You’re not being very politically correct.” He’s not. But He is being biblically correct.

And here’s what I mean. And I want to say this gently but I do want to say it directly. If you’ve ever heard or you’ve ever been told or believe that, “You know what? It doesn’t matter what I believe just as long as I sincerely believe it and I don’t hurt anybody. And, you know, all religions eventually lead to the same place anyway.

“So, let me take a little bit of truth from this philosophy of life and a little bit of truth from that religion, and just kind of mix it all up in a spirituality cocktail. I’m just going to do me and follow my heart.”



That sounds good. That sounds true. But I'm telling you that is a lie straight from the lips of Satan himself. And I'm telling you it sounds good but most effective lies do.

See, Satan knows that well over 90 percent of the human population, not only today but throughout history, believes in some sort of God. They believe.

So, Satan knows the odds of getting you to not believe anything are pretty slim. So, what he'd like to do is just water it down, "You don't need to reject it. Just take a little bit of it and mix it with all of the other stuff that you want to do." And you end up neutralizing everything.

So, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." The difference in Christianity and every other religion, worldview, and philosophy in the world is that the founders of every other faith are buried and in the ground.

Let me just give you a couple of examples. This is the Temple of the Tooth in Sri Lanka. Every year tens of thousands of Buddhists travel to this spot where one of the teeth of Buddha is buried underneath the temple. They pray and meditate and remember the things that their dead, buried founder left them.

This is the tomb of Confucius in China. Every year tens of thousands of people who practice Confucianism travel to the burial place of their religious founder to remember what he taught.

This is the mosque of the prophet Medina. Every year millions of Muslims travel to the final resting place of the founder of their religion.

I have traveled to several non-religious famous people's graves. You likely have too. I've been to George Washington's grave. The casket is on the other side of the bar. I've been to John F. Kennedy's gravesite, the Eternal Flame.

In the mid-90s I was actually in Russia and I got to go to Red Square and visit Stalin's tomb. It's kind of creepy because you get to walk through there and his body is there under glass under lights. Very creepy. But he's still there.

Last year I went to Israel and I visited the two locations where they think Jesus may have been buried. They are not entirely sure. It's one of these two. It's either the Garden Tomb or the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. I've been to both. Both were empty. Both you could walk inside. Both there was no body. Both there were lines of people trying to get in. This is the only tomb in the world that is famous for what is not in it.

Some of you say, “No, Aaron. Wait a second. Are you saying that all other religions are wrong?” No, that’s not what I’m saying. Jesus is saying that. Jesus said, “I am the way and I’m the truth and I’m the life.” And when they are all in the ground and He’s not, I’m going with Him.

Now, for those of you who didn’t clap just now, let me just say that the Bible is intellectually honest about resurrection talk. Here’s what I mean. If it was a legend, if it was a lie, if it was made up then after this there is no way the authors of Scripture are bringing up the subject of resurrection because they don’t want people prodding at it too much. If it’s a legend and a lie, it’s going to fall apart.

But Paul goes right at it in 1 Corinthians, chapter 15. He addresses it on the head. Check out what he says. He says:

“For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave.” 1 Corinthians 15:13-15 (NLT)

And then in verse 19 he says:

“If our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.” (NLT)

What is Paul saying? Paul is saying that Christianity is based on an event. The resurrection. And it either happened or it didn’t.

And if it didn’t happen, let me just kind of drive this home a little bit closer. Alright? If the resurrection of Jesus did not happen, here’s what that means for you. This means that you no longer need to be one foot in and one foot out, you can just be both feet out. What this means, if the resurrection didn’t happen, this is the last Easter you ever have to get dressed up and attend church and not feel bad about it.

And some of you just got really nervous right now because you’re like, “Aaron, this is the first week I’ve gotten my spouse to attend with me. And that’s the best you’ve got?” “I got my co-workers here. My boss came.” “My neighbors came.” “Aaron, do your job.” I am. I am.

Listen, the opposite is true as well. If Jesus did walk out of a grave, then that means it has to be both feet in. If Jesus did walk out of a grave then that means not only should you be here every Christmas and Easter, you should be here as often as possible. Not

because God judges your church attendance, but because you're passionately pursuing Christ as Thomas did.

You are like, "You know what? He deserves everything. This radically changes everything." If Jesus walked out of a grave then that means that I can change to. Come on, man. Think about it. There is no doubt that Jesus changed the world.

I always know that people are grasping at straws when they finally get around to, "Well, I don't even know that Jesus ever existed at all." And I'm like, "Come on, man. There are so many non-religious historical figures who record the life of Jesus. We know that He existed. And He existed long before television and cameras and video cameras and all of that kind of stuff.

In the words of C.S. Lewis... The claims that Jesus made... Jesus didn't say things like He was a moral teacher like a Mister Rogers up in heaven. He said He is Lord. So, C.S. Lewis said He's only one of three things: He is a liar, a lunatic, or He is Lord. And if He's a liar or a lunatic that means that you need to disregard everything He ever taught. Even all of the stuff that kind of makes sense to you. All of the moral stories. Just throw it all out of the window because He's a lunatic or He's a liar.

But if He is Lord, and He is, then that requires full devotion. There is no doubt that Jesus changed the world. He still makes the cover of Newsweek every year. One out of three people in the world are devoted to Him—2,000 years have gone by and we're still talking about Him. But that's not really what I'm concerned about. No doubt Jesus has changed the world. Jesus' life split the calendar into two: B.C. and A.D.

Here's the question that I want to ask. Can He change you? That's really the kind of question that He is asking. Now, some of you are like, "Well, what does He need to change about me? Because you know what? I feel like I'm doing pretty good. I know I'm not in church a lot. I haven't talked to God in a while. But I'm not living a bad life. I've got a pretty good marriage. My kids are on the rails. And we're making enough money. Here's the deal. What do I need new life for?"

Well, let me give you two truths. The first one, I know 100 percent of you are going to totally agree with. The second one, not so much. So here's the first truth.

We live in a world that is certifiably jacked up in every possible way. Don't you agree with that? Yeah, I think you would probably agree with that.

If there are any of you who are like, "I don't know, Aaron. I think things are pretty well buttoned up." What world are you living in? I'm like, "You're crazy. Alright?"



Just turn on the news, look at social media. It's a dumpster fire. There are all kinds of problems: economically, politically, relationally—you name it, man. There are so many problems. If you look at all of the problems, you're like, "How in the world are we even going to begin to address and fix this thing?"

Well we won't on this side of eternity. Jesus said He would come to put to right what has been wrong. So there is a big problem in the world. We all agree with that. Now here's the second truth and you're probably not going to like it so much but it's still true.

You and I are to blame.

It's easy to look at this and to say, "Well, those people over there are to blame. Those people across the political aisle. Those people in another country. Those people of another race or ethnicity. Those people are to blame.

No, no, no man. Look at your own heart. See, you and I are highly incentivized to view ourselves as victims in our culture. And we don't really like to talk about sin or sinning or being sinners anymore. You know, we know we are not perfect. We would rather call ourselves mistakers rather than sinners, "Well, nobody's perfect. And if I do mess up it's probably somebody else's fault. You know, I eat processed food out of a can."

Yeah. That is the first service that that has come out of my mouth. I told you I was going to empty the tank, man.

Listen. Jesus said this. Jesus said that He must be crucified. He didn't say, "I need to be or I probably should. It would be a good idea." He said, "I must be crucified." Those are heavy words. He's saying, "This is the only option." What He is saying is that you and I are not victims who have been sinned against. We are villains who have done the sinning.

You want to say, "Aaron, that's offensive." Well, yeah. It would be if I was saying it at you. But I'm not saying it at you. I'm saying it with you. Man, we're all in the same boat. I'm telling you, man, there is nobody who is in more need of God's grace than the person you are looking at on the platform right now.

I've got a heart problem, man. I've got a sin problem from the inside out.

And the problem is not out there in the world. It's in here [the heart]. You need a heart transplant. And that is not something that you can do yourself. You have a sin problem in your heart. We are sinners in need of a Savior, not mistakers in need of a life-coach.

So, here's the reality of the gospel. Here's the reality of the gospel:



God is holy, so a payment for sin had to be made

It had to be made. But:

God is loving, so He made that payment Himself

You know, on Good Friday when Jesus had been beaten and scourged and mocked and spit upon. He put the beam on His shoulders and He's walking down the Via Dolorosa to Golgotha and He's so weak that He falters and He falls down. You may know the story. A guy named Simon comes over and he bends down and we say that Simon carried Jesus' cross to Golgotha. But that's not technically true because Jesus was already Simon's cross.

And when Jesus was beaten and when He was mocked and He was punched and when He was nailed to the tree, listen man, Jesus was not just being crucified for you, He was being crucified instead of you. And sin against an eternal and perfect God either requires an eternal and perfect payment or the payment of an eternal and perfect sacrifice.

So the crucifixion erased your sinful past and the resurrection provides you with a hopeful future. The Bible says it like this, "God made Him who knew no sin, to be sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."

I want you to picture it this way. If you're sitting down at a table across from God and you're beginning some negotiations about your eternal destiny and God says, "Listen. I'll make you a deal. This is the debt that you owe. And it is so much that you couldn't even begin to repay it in a thousand lifetimes."

But God says, "I've got a deal for you. If you would just push across the table all of your sin and all of your shame, and all of your secrets, don't make any excuses for them, just slide them across the table through confession and repentance, I'll take them and in exchange I'll slide across the table My Son's holiness and righteousness and sinlessness. And I'll apply that to your account."

Guys, can I just ask you this? Why would you ever pass up that deal? Because that's what the gospel is. The gospel isn't, "Well, I try really hard. I'll try to learn better. And, I'll try to be a good, moral person." That's not what it is. It's you taking the righteousness of Jesus because He nailed your sin to a tree. And the Bible says the same power that raised Christ Jesus from the dead can be at work in you right now.



So, I didn't finish the passage in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul kind of sets this up. He's like, "Hey, man. If Jesus didn't walk out of a grave we're to be more pitied. All Christianity completely collapses. And then he says this in verse 20:

"But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died." Corinthians 15:20 (NLT)

And that sentence is a little peculiar. The first of a great harvest? What in the world does that mean? What he's talking about here is, if you're a farmer and you plant a crop in a field then, at the first sign of harvest, the farmer knows that there is more to come.

So, what he's saying here is that resurrection power didn't just happen to Jesus only, it happened to Jesus first. And that means that you and I don't just celebrate Easter, you can experience it today. That same power can come into your life.

Some of you may be sitting there thinking to yourself, "Man, Aaron. This sounds so good. And I honestly want it. I want to believe that this is true. But there are some things that are holding me back. It's not the questions that I have, it's just knowing who I am. I don't feel worthy. I know you said a minute ago that you could call me future family, but honestly, if you knew who I really was, you wouldn't call me future family; you'd kick me right out of here.

"I'm not even talking about some distant thing in the past. I'm talking about what I looked at on the Internet last night." "I'm talking about the divorce that I just recently had and it was nobody's fault but my own." "I'm talking about the darkness that is in my own soul. The things that I've done and said to betray the people who I love the most.

"Man, Aaron. Last year I came here on Easter and I had this big commitment that I was going to come back and I was going to turn over a new leaf and I was going to make a commitment to Jesus and this is the first time I've been back since then. I just can't get it together.

"In fact, today we just wanted to have a nice Easter with our family and we got the kids all dressed up and as we drove coming over here the kids started cussing in the minivan on the way to church. This is the kind of family we are. We are a mess. And I'm looking around the room and everybody just looks like they have their act together. I don't think would fit in."

Man, you would fit in here more than you might think. And here's what I want to ask you to do. I want you to look around at those people who you think have it all together. Don't look directly at them, that would be kind of weird. Just out of your peripheral. You know?



You've already seen everybody and you're like, "Oh yeah. She looks like she's got it all together. I want her life." Or, "I want his life."

Listen. They don't have it all together. They are not decent people who just figured it out and they're just living their nice little holy lives. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. We are all a mess. We don't bring anything to the table. We come totally dependent upon the sacrifice that Jesus made.

Listen, man. Jesus has done everything necessary for you to be accepted. He has done everything necessary for you to be changed. He has done everything necessary for your past to be forgiven and for your future to be empowered.

But listen to me. Look right at me. You have to receive it. You've got to receive it. You've got to hold your hands out and you've got to...

Here's what confession and repentance is. It's letting go of the stuff you're holding on to so that you can receive what God wants to give you in and through Jesus.

So, you've got to receive it by faith—by faith. And it's not a blind faith, it's a reasonable faith.

There is a phrase over and over again in the passage that says this: He appeared to them. He appeared to them. New information will not change anything. You need a divine encounter. You need God to appear to you.

So, right now would you just be willing to say, "Jesus, here's where I'm at. I'm a mess and I've got doubts and I've got questions. I've got some hurts that haven't been healed. But I need an encounter with You. Would You make Yourself known to me? Would You show up?"

Now, here's the thing. It would be awesome if, after the service as you are walking through the lobby and you stop there to take a picture in front of the Easter thing, that would be amazing. But I don't think we can pull that off. We can do one better. The Holy Spirit is in this room right now. He is with you and He is beckoning you and He is chasing you down. He wants to have an encounter with you. Today, right now.

There will be a day of reckoning at some point. And:

Only a fool goes through life unprepared for what's inevitable

Right now you can put all of that doubt as to where you will, not only spend your eternal future, but even what's going to happen in the world tomorrow.



Listen, man, whatever happens, and I'm pretty sure that there is more tragedy to come, unfortunately. I'm pretty sure there's more bad news to come, unfortunately. But God is sovereign. And Jesus has already won the battle. He walked out of a grave. So, that kind of resurrection power that will steady your feet in an unstable is ready for you right now. Man, you've got to receive it. You've got to receive it.

So, here's what I want to ask you to do. We're going to give you an opportunity, just like Thomas, to have an audible response to the message of the gospel.

Listen, man. Don't just go. "Hmm. Interesting. I'll ponder that until next year." I don't want you to pull away from here today going, "Oh, man. The worship was so amazing and the coffee was so good and that preacher was really funny." No, no, no. I want you to walk away from here today going, "Who was that preacher, who were those people, what was that church? I don't care. I met Jesus there. I had an encounter with the living God."

I want you to experience that right now. So, here's what I want to ask you to do. Across all of our locations your campus pastor is going to give you instructions on how you can be baptized. What I want to do is I want to lead you in a prayer and right now. If you've just got the smallest, wobbly faith but your ready to respond, then just let me lead you through this prayer.

Dear God, I come to you right now and just like Thomas I've got some doubts and I'm afraid. And honestly, I'm angry and I'm anxious. But, I come to you right now and, through a weak faith, I declare that you are the risen Son of God. I believe. And I want that kind of resurrection power in my life.

So, I'm going to slide across the table all of my secret sin and shame and I trust that what God has said is true. That He will, in return, give me the holiness, the righteousness, the purity that Jesus died for me to have.

I declare that there is a God and I am not Him. And that Jesus is the Son of God who made a full payment on my behalf. He declared it is finished on the cross. That is a word for a receipt that means paid in full. And so I receive it today.

So, Father, would You enter into my life through the power of the Holy Spirit? Would you give me the strength to face this uncertain world with certainty? Would you give me a peace that passes all understanding because I trust You and I believe in You? I will follow You, imperfectly, but I will follow you all the rest of my days with full devotion and passion. And I ask this in Jesus' name: Amen.



Now, if you prayed that prayer, man, we're just going to celebrate that with you right now. Way to go. Way to go, man.

What I want to ask you to do right now is I want to ask you to have an audible, tangible, physical response to that decision through baptism. The Bible teaches that baptism is the first step of obedience that you make. It is an external expression of an inward transformation. And it literally is you being buried, lowered into a watery grave, so you can be resurrected as a new creation. And you need to experience that today if you've never done it or if you don't remember doing it or if you previously did for poor reasons.

So, right now I want to ask everybody to stand to your feet. If you need to be baptized, you've been feeling that conviction of the Spirit, you can walk right out of these double doors to my right, your left.

If your feeling fearful and you need somebody to go with you, just grab the hand of the person sitting next to you and ask them to go with you. If you don't know them, I'm sure they will probably go with you. It will be okay. It will be fine. And let's celebrate right now as we watch these people come to life.

