

Aaron Brockett:

Hey, Traders Point family. I hope you've had a fantastic week. Over the course of the summer, I want to invite you to join our team as we pray for all that God is going to do in the fall season. We're just anticipating that God is going to bring more and more people back, physically, to all of our campuses, and we want them to have a great experience. And I want you to be a part of it. So for all the ways that you can be a difference-maker, go to tpcc.org/serve. But today I'm really excited to introduce our next guest in our Summer Message series. Josh Howerton is the Senior Pastor of Lakepointe Church, a multi-site and multi-lingual church with six campuses in the Dallas Rockwall, Texas area. He was also the pastor of The Bridge Church in Nashville, Tennessee, for 10 years. Josh is married to Jana, and together they have three children: Eliana, Felicity and Hudson.

Josh and I met about six years ago, when he was in Nashville, and he called me and drove up to Indy, and we had lunch together, and just had an incredible conversation and quickly became fast friends. On a regular basis, it feels like I'm texting or calling Josh just to run a situation or an issue past him like, what would you do? And Josh always gives me a listening ear and always gives me incredible counsel and encouragement. He's one of my closest friends. You're going to love him. He's a great communicator, he's a man of God, he's the real deal. So at all of our campuses, would you join me in giving a warm Traders Point welcome to Josh Howerton.

Josh Howerton:

Awesome. Well, hey, Traders Point family. It is so good to be with you guys today. Man. I'll be honest, this is a big deal for me, and I'll explain why here in a second. Had some nerves, like man, I'm getting ready to preach to Traders Point Church for the first time. I had a buddy that texted me, and he was trying to encourage me on the way up, and his text message said, "Hey, man, don't try to be witty, funny or intelligent. Just be you." And I thought, "Okay. All right. Thanks, bud. Thanks, man." So, let me explain this. By day, I'm the senior pastor of a church called Lakepointe, our campuses are in the Dallas Texas area. By night, I am a massive fan of Aaron Brockett Traders Point Church, like massive, massive fan. I tell people I've got a church crush on Traders Point, and here's where this comes from. Sometimes people, I think, wonder, man, is their pastor the same person, in person, as he is on stage preaching? I just want to let you guys know, you're in very good hands.

Six, seven years ago, I was a pastor in a church of, back then, just a couple 100 people in Nashville, and I heard about this move of God that was happening in Indy at Traders Point Church. So I drove up on a week I was off and sat in this room in that chair right over there in

this auditorium, and man, God, just used that moment to give me vision and inspiration for the future, ended up connecting with Pastor Aaron, and he really took me under his wing when, honestly, he had no reason to do that. I could give him absolutely nothing in return, and mentored me as a young pastor coming up in ministry and God's use in my life.

Last year, I had a... long story, I had a panic attack on stage while I was preaching. That's fun. I went through the season where that started happening to me, anytime I would start to preach, wondered if I'd ever be able to preach again. Pastor Aaron, when I was in that season, he called, and he said, "Hey, Josh, I want to spend some time with you." He flew me out to spend some time with him, spent an entire week praying for me, encouraging me, like... let me know like, hey, man, it God's not done with you, and put me back on my feet. Anyway. All that to say, I want you to know, his soul is as big as his biceps. Come on somebody, and he's a good man. He's a good, good man, and you're in good hands.

Well, hey, I'm really excited about this message I'm preaching today. If you got your Bibles, head of Revelation chapter 12. Revelation 12, and in a lot of ways, this is really, in some ways, become like a life message for me. I feel like it's the best message that I can give you. Let me lean into it like this. As a pastor, every now and then you'll have these mundane interactions that can turn awkward. I had one of those last year, where my kids... We were getting ready to spend the day at some soccer fields with my daughters. So I ran over to Kroger to get the juice packs before the games. While we were there, I pull into Kroger, it was really full, Saturday morning, and I see a guy that's walking into his car in a really good parking spot. So I'm like, "Awesome, man. Here we go. I got a good spot."

So I just followed this guy to his car. And then he gets in his car, and he knows that I'm there, waiting for the spot. So I just wait, and he gets in, and he puts it in reverse, and I see the little reverse lights come on, and I'm just waiting. I keep waiting, and waiting, and waiting. I'm many things, but I'm not always a patient man. So as I'm waiting, and waiting, waiting, my frustration is rising, and rising, and rising. So I did the thing that you tend to do. Eventually, I just put the blinker on as if to say, hey, bro, it's time. As soon as I put the blinker on, he shifts out of reverse, so I see his reverse lights go off. So I'm waiting, and eventually I roll my window down just to like, catch his eye, that kind of thing, I'm adjusting the mirror, he's adjusting his mirror.

Well, eventually, I realize what's happening, and I am furious about it. So I decided, man, I'm going to get out of my car and walk up to this guy and tell him I know what he's doing. You are intentionally just sitting there because you know that I'm waiting for this spot. So I get out of my car, and as I walk up to the front door of his car, he rolls down the window, and he says, "Pastor Josh!" I said, "Yeah, I just came here to say that Jesus loves you. God bless you." Now, listen, that story is funny now. But, I was about three seconds away from doing something that I would never have been able to get past, and as a pastor, doing something to hurt somebody that they might never be able to get past.

Here's what who want to preach to today. I want to preach to the person who you've got something in your life, in your history, that you'd say, "Man, I got past the pain. What I haven't been able to get past is my past. I can't get over this thing." For some of you... Let me just get really transparent. For some of you, it's your sexual past. There was a time, maybe when you were in college, or in a relationship, where in the moment, you did this thing that like... it felt

fun, it seemed right, you just went with a moment, and now, years later, you're carrying around the baggage of something that you did 10 years ago. You got past the pain, you haven't been able to get past your past.

For some of you, almost every Christian I've ever met, there's a recurring sin in your life. It's like, it's that thing that you've told God over and over and over, like, "I'll never do this again." Not only did you do it 100 more times, you've done it like 100 times, 100 more times, and now, everywhere you go, you're carrying around the weight of your most recent failure. You got past the pain, you haven't been able to get past your past. For some of you, you said something in a heated moment to somebody you love, maybe it was a child, maybe as a parent, maybe it was a friend, and you would give anything to be able to unsay those words, but that toothpaste didn't go back in the tube. And now, in that relationship, you've gotten past the pain, you can't get over what you said and how it affected that person.

Let me do one that's really wrong. Some of you, you strayed in your marriage, years ago. Here's the story. Your spouse forgave you, your children forgave you, God has forgiven you, you can't forgive you. You got past the pain, but you've never been able to get past your past. Now, listen, if, in the last two minutes, nothing I said resonated with you at all, I know something about you, you are very young. That's what I know. You are really, really young. Because, here's what I know. At some point in your life, I promise, you are going to do something that you deeply regret, and that sticks with you for years, that you have trouble getting over. You might hear that you may go, "Man, pastor, can't you be more positive?" Yeah, I can. I'm positive that at some point in your life, you are going to do something that you regret and that you can't get past.

So here's what I want to do. What I want to do is answer these two questions in this message. Why does that happen? And how can you overcome it? Why does that happen? And how can you overcome it? If you got your Bibles, head over to Revelation chapter 12, pick up with me in verse seven. Here we go.

It says, "Now, war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against a dragon." If you're freaking out right now, just track with me, and I'll explain it in a second. "And the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven." Let me pause here really quick.

For some of you, if you're like me, and you became a Christian in high school, and you started opening up your Bible and you read the Gospels, and you were like, Okay, cool. That's cool. That's cool. You get into the epistles, and you're like, okay, makes sense. That's powerful. Cool, cool, cool. Then you got to Revelation, and you're reading about Jesus looking like metal, and dragons eating babies, and you're like, "I didn't know they dropped acid in ancient Rome."

Now, let me just explain what's happening here. Most people think read the book of Revelation is all revelation about the future. And it does do that. But most of the book of Revelation isn't revelation about the future, it's revelation about what's going on behind the scenes in the spiritual realm in the world right now. So now, listen, the Bible isn't an old book, it's a timeless book. So it doesn't just tell us what happened, it tells... If you're going to clap, you got to commit. If you're going to clap, you got to commit. The Bible isn't an old book, it's a timeless

book. So it doesn't just tell us what happened, it tells us what always happens. So what this is doing, this passage is telling you what's happening in your life as a Christian right now.

Here's what it says. Pick up with me in the middle of the passage. It says, *"And the great dragon was thrown down."*

These are metaphors being used to describe what's happening in the spiritual realm. *"That ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world, he was thrown down to earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, 'Now, the salvation and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ have come for the accuser.'"*

If you're taking notes, circle the word accuser. *"For the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And, they have conquered him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony."* Amen. Amen, amen, amen. Okay.

All right. Let me get into this, and let me explain. Okay. So here's a lie a lot of people believe. If you're new to Christianity, let me just unmask this lie. A lot of people think that when you become a Christian, that's the ticket to a low maintenance, hassle-free life. That is simply not true. In fact, the Bible gives you a promise, it says that anybody who desires to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. So I heard somebody say this one time, that, man, the birthmark of a believer is a bull's eye. That before you were a Christian, like the devil, demons, Satan, all those things... By the way, those are real. That before you were a Christian, he had no reason to attack you, you were exactly where he wanted you to be. But when you became a Christian, you didn't just gain salvation, you gained an enemy. The birthmark of a believer is a bullseye.

Now, here's why I say this. Most Christians understand the fact that we have an enemy. What I've come to understand is that most Christians misunderstand how that enemy attacks us. We see this in Revelation 12. Now, here's what I mean. I'm getting ready to ask you a rhetorical question. What that means is, don't answer out loud. Don't answer out loud. Rhetorical question, if I were to do a pop quiz right now, and I were to ask you to describe, in one word, what you think the devil does, what would you say? Don't answer out loud. If I were to ask you, in one word, what you think the devil does. I think most people would say, "Oh, Josh, that's easy. The devil does temptation. That's what the devil does." By the way, that's true. Yes, the devil does do temptation. The devil tempted Adam and Eve in the garden, he tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he tempts us day and night, all those things.

He does do temptation, but in Revelation 12, we get a glimpse into what's really going on behind the scenes in the spiritual realm, and it uses a word that's not found anywhere else in the entire Bible to describe what the devil is doing. It calls him "the accuser". The accuser, it says, who "accuses the brothers and sisters day and night." Let me give you the big idea, and let me explain it. My big idea is, Satan's main strategy isn't temptation. His main strategy in your life is accusation.

Now, let me explain what that means real quick, because that might not register. I went to a high school where there was a lot of fights. I saw a lot of those fights, I didn't see a lot of those fights, I was in some of those fights, I was not in some of those fights, some went well for me, some went really, really bad for me. If you're ever in a fight, there's two moments that define a

fight. Number one is when somebody lands the first punch. Just a heads up, if you're taking notes, whoever lands the first punch usually wins. You just need to know that. That's one. But number two, there's a moment in a fight where it can move from dangerous to scary, and here's when that happens. Sometimes after somebody lands a punch, it moves from dangerous to scary when, if they can get on top of the person and turn it into like a ground and pound.

Now, what the devil does, according to the Bible, is he does that one-two punch. His first punch is temptation, and what gets scary is if he can turn it into the ground and pound of accusation. In other words, what he wants to do in your life is tempt you to do something wrong, temptation. But here is what he really wants to do in your life. He wants to turn that temptation into the ground and pound of accusation. Here's what that looks like. He wants to convince you, watch this, that what you did is who you are. That's accusation. He wants to convince you that what you did is who you are. Let me say it another way. He wants to convince you that your issue is your identity.

The reason he wants to convince you that your issue is your identity, because if you believe that, then you will think that God feels about you and relates to you like he feels about it relates to your issue, instead of relating to you as a son or a daughter of a living God. See, that's why he wants to take temptation and turn it into that ground and pound of accusation. He can't steal your salvation, so he wants to steal your enjoyment of it. You see, that's what he wants to do. Now, if this doesn't make sense, what you did, who you are issue, identity, let me give you an example from my personal life. Before I tell this story, I should have said this in the earlier service.

I run a team that helps me, and they were like, "Are these true story?" And I was like, "Man, should I tell this story?" And the first time I ran it past them, they were like, "Man, bro, that makes you sound really bad." I'm just going to be really transparent with you, here's my mentality, is, if me being honest about a struggle can help you overcome yours, that's worth it to me. You didn't know that. Let me just get right in. So, first, you just need to know... what you need to know is preaching is hard. If you're ever going to send Pastor Aaron an email or an encouraging email... If you want to send an encouraging email or text message, like, Sunday afternoon is the time to do a preaching, preaching is...

In fact, this is a true story, I literally... I never think a message is going to be good before I preach it, and I always think it was terrible after I preach it. I literally have a recurring nightmare that I... In my dream, I wake up, drive to church on Sunday, in Dallas. I get there to the auditorium, service starts, I walk out to preach, and zero people are there, because they all realized how terrible a preacher I was and they all stayed home. There's only one person in the entire auditorium, is my wife, Jana, she's on the front row on her phone listening to an Aaron Brocket sermon. That's, for real, a dream I've had. That's a real thing. Preaching is hard.

So, when I was a pastor in Nashville, there was this season where I was preaching five services live every Sunday. 8 AM, 9:30, 11:00, 4:30, 6:00. By the time I was done, I was catatonic. Jana's little joke was, Josh when you come home, we do life around you. So I came home one day, and usually, Jana would have dinner waiting on me when I got home, because what I want to

do when I'm done preaching is I just want to eat my feelings. What I want is carbs. Like, extra gluten, give me carbs. That's what I want. In fact, let me...

Can I just get this out of the way here? Can we please stop with this, bread-is-bad-for-you foolishness? Can I preach for a second? Let me just preach for a second. Let me just preach [inaudible 00:18:08]. Jesus did not say he was the broccoli of life. He did not pray, give us this day our daily kale. He said he was the bread of life, bread is awesome. Amen. That's it. I needed to get that out there. Okay. So what I want to do is I always want to come home and just eat my feelings, all the carbs.

Well, I got home one day, and Jana didn't have dinner ready as she usually did, and so I just walked in. I don't know, I was in a bad emotional spot, five messages, and I walked in and I just said, "Where's dinner?" You guys can see how this is going to go. I said, "Where's dinner?" And she just kicked into defense mode and she was like, "Hey, Josh, man, it's been a really hard day. Eliana's sick, Felicity is hungry. I had a tough day. I brought my discipleship girls over earlier. I was really busy," that kind of thing. Hard day.

I was just in rough spot that day, and so I just fired back, I said, "Well, how do you think my day was?" Now, what you got understand is Jana is a four 11-and-a-half redhead, and the thing about redheads is the stories are true. The stories are true. In fact, the only difference... You guys know the difference between a redhead and a terrorist is you can negotiate with a terrorist. Let me do.

So, as soon as I said like, "How do you think my day was?" Jana kicked into high gear, and it just escalated. So she was like, "Josh, listen, I just told you, I had my discipleship girls over, I was taking care of... Eliana is sick, Felicity is struggling." And then it just sort of like... She starts raising her voice, I start raising my voice, Eliana is asking Where's dinner, Felicity freaking out and crying because she didn't feel good, and things escalate, escalate, and escalate, and I just... It has never happened before and it has never happened since. I don't know what happened that day. Something just snapped in me, and some unpassed oral words came out of my mouth, and I finally just yelled, in my kitchen with my little kids... I just screamed, "Why can't everybody just shut up?" And then I had a metal butter knife in my hand, and I took it and I threw it into the sink across the room.

As soon as I did that, my little girls, they just started crying. And Jana just grabbed them under her arm, she's just went, "Hey, guys, let's go, let's go. It's going to be okay. It's going to be okay. It's going to be okay. Daddy is going to be okay." I was just there alone in the kitchen, and I can hear my little girls crying. Until after about 30 seconds, I heard my two-year-old Felicity say from the balcony, "Is daddy done yelling yet?" As soon as she said that, this voice kicked in. You guys know the voice. It was that voice that was like, that's who you are. You're the guy that screams at his wife. Now, who do you think you are? Some man of God. Your children, they're going to grow up hating God and hating the church, because they saw their dad preach at 10 AM and scream at 7 PM, and you've lost them, you've ruined everything. And it's that voice. You see, is the voice in your life that wants to take what you did and convince you that's who you are. Your issue, he wants to make your identity.

Now, we did me. Let me do you. Okay. So for instance, the mom that gives her kids everything she's got, she pours everything out, she has all the time, all the energy, all the emotion, but she

works outside the home, his is the voice that immediately comes into your life and goes, "That's who you are. You're the mom who's choosing to neglect her kids. That's who you are." Or, the man that grew up with an explosive dad, and when you grew up, you promised yourself, you swore you'd never be anything like your dad. And then you raise your voice one time in the house, it's that voice that immediately comes and goes, "That's who you are. You're just like your dad. You'll always be... You're nothing but a... That's who you are." His is that voice.

Or maybe you're working your tail off for the first time in your life to do something meaningful with your life, to make a difference for the kingdom of God that lasts in eternity. And then you fail one time, his is that voice that pops right in and goes, "That's who you are. You didn't just fail, you're a failure." He is the accuser of the brothers, who accuses them day and night. He wants to take what you did and convince you that that's who you are. Your issue, your identity.

Now, let me explain why this is really important. Just track with me, I'm going to do something weird. I'm new here, so y'all maybe just track with me. You guys remember in Luke 17, there's this story about a leper that comes to Jesus for healing. It says in that story that the leper "stood far off" and called out for healing. Now, let me explain this really quick. Just track with me. Okay. CrossFit. Here we go. Okay. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, LeBron. 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30. 30, here it is. I'm vaccinated.

Okay. All right. Okay. All right. By the way, you can send all your angry vaccination emails to Aaron.brocket@... That's a joke. Okay. Now, this is the distance. That's the distance right there. I'm going to preach this to you. This is the distance right here, 30 paces. That's the distance that somebody with leprosy chose to stay away from a healthy person. Have you guys ever noticed that the Bible doesn't tell you his name, it just calls him a leper? Do you know why that is? Because for that guy, his issue was his identity. And because he believed that, he spent his entire life stand 30 paces away from anybody who could love him, anybody who could accept him. You see, that's what happens.

In fact, I think this guy had an advantage over us because he has spots on his skin. But you have spots on your soul. What the devil wants to do is he wants to convince you that your issue is your identity. Because if you believe that, then you think that God feels about you like he feels about your issue, and you will spend your entire life staying 30 paces from grace, your entire life 30 paces from joy, 30 paces from purpose, 30 paces from coming home to the living God, 30 paces from the people of God, 30 paces from worship. Your entire life, you'll do that.

Listen to me. Something doesn't have to be true to destroy your life, it just has to be believed. I've been married to Jana for 15 years. I have been 100% faithful to Jana for 15 years. That's true. Wait, hang on. Okay. That's weird applause moment. I guess it makes sense. Just track. That is a good thing. Here we go. Okay, let me start over. Something doesn't have to be true to destroy your life, it just has to be believed. I've been married to Jana 15 years, 100% faithful. But if she doesn't believe that, it will destroy our relationship. Now, watch this. There is, therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. That's true, but if you don't believe it, that will destroy your relationship with God. You see, you'll spend your entire life staying 30 paces from his grace, his acceptance, his love.

In fact, this will even taint how you view and think about God. You guys know there's that amazing passage in... I think it's Isaiah 68, where God says, "All day long..." He says, "All day long, I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people." Now watch this. If you believe that, that your issue is your identity, if you believe that what you did is who you are, what you'll do is you'll view that verse, and here's how you'll think about it. You'll think God is in heaven going, "Now, all day long, all day long, I have held out my hands to this disobedient and obstinate people." Because God is not against you, God is for you. He loves you. That verse isn't God doing this, it's God doing this. He's going, "Man, all day long, all day long, I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people. I don't care where you went, I just want you to come home." See, that's God's heart towards you. If you don't believe that, if you believe that your issue is your identity, then you will never accept the fact that God doesn't love you based on what you do, but on who you are. You are a son or a daughter of a living God. That's what's got to happen.

I mentioned earlier I've got three children: Eliana, Felicity, Hudson; 10, six and two. Hudson, our two-year-old, is... Listen, let me just tell you all this, boys are different than girls. We call him the master of disaster. That's what we call Hudson, master of disaster. Because everywhere he goes, that kid, he's just a disaster. Let me get back up here, so I can preach. Hudson, kid's a disaster. He's a screamer, he won't sleep at night, he destroys everything. This is a true story. Earlier this year, we found him... he got into our pantry to steal some candy, which he knows is against the rules, he knows that. So we come into the kitchen, he's up on top of a chair rummaging through all the stuff. And he just looks over his little shoulder, looks right at us, and he's just grinning.

We were like, "Hudson, hey, you can't do that, you can't steal." He says, "Why?" We went, "Well, hey, son, man, when we come to know God, we want to obey his commands, and God commands us not to steal." This is literally what he said. He smiled real big, and he said, "I don't know God yet." That's why he said. Kid is a disaster. So let me just say that kid is a disaster. But watch this. But I'd give my life for that kid. I just want to be around him all the time. He's got me wrapped around his finger. Why? Because I don't love him based on what he does, I love him based on who he is. I adopted that son into my family when he was six weeks old, he is sealed, that is legally my kid, and I will love him till the day I die. It won't matter what he does, it matters who he is; he is a son of Josh Howerton. That's the basis of my love for him.

Now, listen. What the devil wants to do in his accusation is to sever those things. Again, he wants you to base your position before God on your practice. You need to understand, God... This is all free. I didn't get this in the earlier service, I'm just having fun. God does not love you to the degree that you are like Christ Jesus. He loves you to the degree that you are in Christ Jesus, and that's 100%, 100%. Now, the question is okay, that's objectively true, but how do we subjectively experience it, so that we overcome this accusation? Well, look at what this passage says. Look what it says, it just says, "Here's how they overcame," I love this language, "by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony." I love it so much. Blood of the lamb and the word of the testimony.

Now, have you ever noticed this? Have you ever noticed how much legal language is in like the book of Revelation and the New Testament? Legal language. So think about this, it says, word

of their testimony. That's a legal term. Testimony is information given in court as evidence. I'll give another one. You'd never see this unless you study it in the original language. So the Greek word that gets translated, accuser, in Revelation 12, that's the same Greek word that's used for a prosecuting attorney in court. It's saying that's what the devil does.

Now, here's what I love so much. If you go over to First John 2:1, here's what it says. Just track with me. It says,

"My little children, I am writing this to you, so that you may not sin. But, if anybody does sin, he has an advocate before the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous one. He is the propitiation for our sense."

Now, do you guys know... I mentioned this earlier. So testimony, legal term, accuser, legal term. Do you know what the word advocate means? It's the Greek word that means defense attorney. All right. Now track, track. I love this so much. Just track with me. I love the Bible. So track with me.

So it's as if every second of your life, there's a courtroom in heaven. God the Father is a good judge, Satan is there as a prosecuting attorney, Jesus Christ is there in the courtroom with you. And it's as if every single time you sin, Satan, the prosecuting attorney, he stands up and he says, "Your Honor, I have a charge to levy against Josh Howerton. He sinned again. In fact, I've got it written in your word that what Josh just did for the 1,000th time is against your law. And," airtight case, "and, your word says that the wages of sin is death. I accuse Josh of this sin. I have proved his guilt by your own word, and I demand that the wages of that sin, death, be levied upon Josh Howerton."

And then, when the Bible says that if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous one, I want you to imagine, it is as if every single time he does that and he levies his accusation in the courtroom, it's as if there's a long, quiet, and then you hear someone stand in the back of the courtroom, and he cries out, "Objection, your honor. Objection." And Jesus Christ Himself strides forward to the front of the courtroom to stand next to you.

Here's what I always used to think. I always used to think that Jesus was before God, asking for God to give me mercy and grace, like, "Oh, man. Josh screwed up again, man. One more forgiveness, please? Will you please just let him loose just one more time? Mercy and grace, please God?" but think about this, guys. A defense attorney does not ask a judge for mercy. A defense attorney pleads a case. In fact, have you ever noticed this, in First John One, it says, think about this language, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just." It doesn't say He's faithful and gracious to forgive us our sins. It says he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

Well, how in the world could it be just for God to forgive our sins? Let me go back. So every time Satan accuses us in the courtroom, it's as if Jesus Christ stands. He says, "Objection, your honor." He comes forward and he stands next to you and he says, "Your honor, Father, I've got a case to plead. Yes, Josh did just break your law again. That's true. And yes, your word says that the wages of sin is death." And then it's as if he holds out his bloody, nail-scarred hands, and he says, "But I have evidence to present, your honor. I went to the cross for that sin, I was punished for that sin, I already paid the penalty for that sin, and it would be unjust for you to punish the same sin twice. And so your honor, I do not ask for mercy, I demand justice for

my death. You must forgive Josh again." That's your applause moment right there. That was it. That's the one. That was it.

Every second of your life, you get acquittal, after acquittal, after acquittal, after acquittal because Jesus Christ, the righteous one, has an airtight case; he was crucified for the sins of the world. Now, listen. That's awesome as an objective reality, but it says that they overcame by the blood of the lamb "and the word of their testimony." What does that mean? A biography is your story with you at the center. A testimony is your story with Jesus at the center. You see, in your biography, what you did is who you are. In your biography, your issue does become your identity. But in your testimony, your testimony is your story with Jesus at the center, and what that means, in your testimony, you are not what anybody else says about you, you are what Jesus says about you. He is the only one who gets to define you. That's it.

In fact, let me say it like this. The world is lorded over by the father of lies, and the number one lie the devil wants you to believe is that you are your activity. But guys, only Jesus gets to tell you who you are. So listen to me, you are not your addiction. I don't care how many times you stood up in an AA meeting and said, "Hi, my name is John, and I'm alcoholic." Now listen, you may struggle with alcoholism, but your deepest identity is not that you are an alcoholic, you are a child of the living God. Listen, you are not your past. It doesn't matter how bad what you did was or how deep the transgression, you are not your past. You are not your sin. It doesn't matter how deep or dark it was, you are not your sin. You are not your orientation.

I know you got 1,000 people in your life telling you what you shouldn't shouldn't do with that part of your life, but you are not your orientation. You are not your affair, you are not your abortion, you are not your divorce. You may hear that and go, "Yeah, Josh, but that's the biggest thing that ever happened in my life." No, it isn't. Jesus dying on the cross for you is the biggest thing that ever happened in your life. That is what defines you, and nothing else. Only Jesus gets to tell you who you are. You are not your obesity, you are not your assault, you are not your bankruptcy. But guys, listen to me. You are also not your success.

Amen.

You are not your 401(k).

Come one.

You are not your position on the corporate ladder, you are not your dadgum Instagram likes. Only Jesus gets to tell you who you are. So here's what I did, here's how I'm in this message. I got this list of... You have spent your entire life having hundreds of thousands of lies spoken over your soul about who you are, thousands upon thousands, but only Jesus gets to tell you who you are. Here's what I got. I got this list together of every single thing the Bible says about who you are, and it's long. Now, I'm going to declare these things over you to finish this message, and here's two things I want. One, I'm going to give you like five seconds to clear the mechanism. And as I read these things, I want you to stop hearing the voice of Josh Howerton, and I want you to hear it as if Jesus Christ is declaring these things over you.

Number two, this list is long. About the time you think I'm done, I'm halfway finished. So buckle up and enjoy it all, because I had fun putting it together, and I'm going to read the whole thing. Here we go. Five seconds, I want you to stop hearing my voice, and I just want you to hear the

voice of Jesus. This is who you are, this is who you are. If you're a Christian, this is who you are. You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world, you are a child of God, you are Jesus Christ's friend, you are chosen and appointed by Christ to bear his fruit, you are a slave of righteousness, you are a temple, and that's got nothing to do with what you look like in a bathing suit. You are a temple of the living God. You are a new creation. You have been reconciled to God, and you are a minister of reconciliation. You're a saint.

Ephesians One says you're a saint. You hear that, Catholics? You're a saint. So that means you can take off that necklace with that old dead guy on it, and you get a necklace with your own name on it and tell your grandma from now on, "Hey, it's St. Eric. The Bible says I'm a saint." You're a saint. You are Holy and dearly loved. You are a member of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. You are an alien and a stranger to this world in which you temporarily live. You are an enemy of the devil. You are born of God, and the devil cannot touch you. You are not the grade I am, but by the grace of God, you are what you are. You are justified. You know what that word justified means? It means when God looks at you, it is just as if you'd never sinned. But it's actually even way better than that. It means that when God looks at you, it is just as if you'd always obeyed. You are justified, completely forgiven, and made righteous.

You are free forever from condemnation. You have received the Spirit of God into your life, that you might know the things freely given to you by God. You are valuable, and you should be treated as valuable. You are sealed by God in Christ, given the Holy Spirit is a pledge, guaranteeing your inheritance to come. You have been crucified with Christ. It's no longer you who lives, it's Christ who lives in you. You are blessed with every spiritual blessing. You have direct access to God through the Holy Spirit that you may approach God with boldness. Why? Because he's your dad, and dad's love it when their kids come running to them. You have been rescued from the domain of Satan's rule, and you have been transferred to the kingdom of Christ. You are fearfully and wonderfully made, you should know that full well.

You died with Christ, you have been raised with Christ, your life is now hidden with Christ and God. You have been given a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline. You have been saved and set apart according to God's good doing, and because you have been sanctified, you are one with your sanctifier. He is not ashamed to call you brother or sister. You have the right to come boldly before the throne of God and find mercy and grace in time of need. You have been given exceedingly great and precious promises by God, by which you are a partaker in his divine nature, and you are loved by God. Amen and Amen. That is who you are. Only Jesus, only Jesus, only Jesus gets to tell you who you are.

What I want to pray is that right now that would become a felt reality in your life. Right now, at all of our campuses and online, would you just bow your heads with me? I want to pray that the spirit would apply this to your soul, and so, come Holy Spirit. Would you please, like your word says, pour out the love of God into our hearts, so that we might be able to comprehend the width and depth and breadth of God's love for us in Christ Jesus? Father, would you please clear away, right now, you just clear it away, push it away, push it to the side, clear it away, all of the accusation that is pent up within our souls, so that we would know that if we are in Christ, we are freely forgiven and accepted by you.

Father, I pray for people who need to come to know you. Because for people who do not know you, these things are not true about them yet. And yet, here you stand today, with wide-open, nail-scarred hands, ready to receive them, eagerly beckoning them home to make them your children. I pray that today, like your Word says, that today would be the day of salvation, that they would call upon the Lord, "while he may be found", and that today they would be adopted into the kingdom of God. Father, we love you. We pray those things in the wonderful, glorious, crucified, risen name of Jesus Christ, friend of sinners, Amen and Amen.