

Harris Creek Baptist Church
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Series: Unseen Battle
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The Cure for Dead Religion

John 3:1-18

1 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.” 3 Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.† 4 “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!” 5 Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit^b gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You^c must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” 9 “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked. 10 “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? 11 Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.” 16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

He is risen! (Crowd: He is risen indeed.) Yes, absolutely. Happy Easter! Happy Easter! Thank you for spending your morning with us. That wasn't very “Eastery” music in that video just now. I know that's because, if you've been with us, we're going through a series on spiritual warfare. Really, this morning, we're going to celebrate. We're going to look into the empty tomb; we're going to talk about what it means. But before we can talk about new life, we have to talk about death. We have to understand why this day actually matters for us - the implications of that. So, we're going to celebrate but before we celebrate, we have to understand what it means to us.

My wife, Monica and I, throughout our marriage, we've had different people living with us. And so just different people in our homes for different reasons throughout the 17 years that we've been married. So, once upon a time, there was a young man; a single adult living with us. He was a part of a life group and someone in his life group was getting married. So, he was invited to the bachelor party, and we were talking about that. But this was not just any ordinary bachelor part

because the guy that was getting married, his dad was the CEO of an oil company. And his dad's business partner was one of the wealthiest human beings on the planet Earth. So, the bachelor party was going to be on his private island. And I gotta tell you, I know, I was like, "wow".

I've gotta tell you about the private island, because on this island he employed 100 people. He had 100 people just living there, taking care of his island. He had retired Navy SEALs guarding his island. On his island were zip lines and all kinds of animals - pythons and monkeys and exotic birds. And a house made of jade, I don't even know what that means, but it's just like major flex, right? You've got an island and your house is made of jade.

And so, he's showing me these pictures, right. He's like, "this is where I'm going to go." And I'm like, "This is crazy. I can't wait to hear about this." So, the day comes, and they're all believers, they're going over there to celebrate their friend who is about to get married. And so, he goes and when he's coming back, I want to talk to him. I want to hear about it. And when he walks in our house, there's something's wrong. You can just tell, there is a heaviness to him. He's sad. Something happened. I was like, "what's going on, buddy?" I run up to him, like "Hey, what's up? What's going on?" And he says, "I got bit by a monkey." (Audience Laughs) That's how I responded, "that's funny! You lived to tell the story. You have a story now for Two Truths and a Lie. 'I got bit by monkey once kind of thing.'" And he said, "They think it had rabies." And I'm still like, "OK? Do you get a shot? Do you take some pills? You gonna be OK? What does that mean?"

Well, it turns out, that if you show symptoms of rabies, it is not compatible with life. The mortality rate of someone who displays symptoms of rabies from the World Health Organization and the CDC would tell you the mortality rate is 99.9%. It means almost certain death. I know we've learned everything we need to know about rabies from The Office, but it turns out this is not... I mean, this is why they had to put down Old Yeller. OK? So, this is not a good thing.

There's a heaviness to this. So, we pray with him and for him. And we're waiting as he's going to the doctors, trying to figure out his fate, that any day he may show symptoms and after he shows symptoms at any day, he could just drop dead. And you can imagine. You can imagine the celebration that occurred in our home when he got the news - you don't have it. You're not infected. There were high fives. There were fist pumps. There were hugs, tears of joy. It was a celebration! You don't have that disease that is not compatible with life. You are going it live! This is great news.

I know, that most likely just because of where you're at right now, you have at some point in the duration of your childhood, or your life, celebrated Easter. Maybe it's a white cross in the yard, that says He is Risen. And maybe it was an egg hunt. You put on your pastel colors and got a nice Easter outfit. Maybe you chose Easter dresses. Maybe you made the nest out of flowers. You went and picked wildflowers, you know, or whatever it is that you did in your tradition to celebrate Easter. I would argue that my friend, when he found out he didn't have rabies, was way more excited than we are this morning.

Because before we talk about life and new life, we have to understand what it means for us. That you and I were born into a disease that's not compatible with life. We're going to die. And that

this disease is not good. Our condition, there's only one cure for it. We are going to talk about that today. And at the empty tomb, this reality that He is risen means that you and I can live. That we don't have to live for this world, that we can live for another world that we're going to be in! But the confusing thing for us - it's a couple things. One, we're surrounded by death. People die all the time. There is sickness, death, disease, sadness, heartbreak all around us. So, if you look at this back wall, you see both of these realities represented in our Earth. (The back wall has a picture of the tomb. Half with just rock surrounding it and half with flowers and lots of new plant life growth.)

You have springtime and flowers and new birth. But you also have war; destruction; death and disease. Both of those are swirled up in this melting pot called Earth and the human experience. And we experience both of those things. So then when we come in here, and we are like, He is risen! He is risen indeed!" But it's like, but what does it mean? Because people still die and there's still really difficult situations in this life. So, what does this mean for us is what we have to talk about today.

We're in this series Unseen Battle, if Harris Creek is your church home, where we're talking about spiritual warfare. Week one we talked about how Satan is a fallen angel. He's here on this Earth and he's speaking the lies about God. Week two we talked about that he has a lot of authority here to cause trouble for us. He can do a lot of things to us and that we're to stand firm. Stand firm in temptation but stand firm in his attacks. And then last week we looked at the ministry of Jesus and we saw that the enemy is no match for Him. That Jesus can effortlessly defeat Satan at will. That He can beat him. And today, today you're going to see that in the greatest display that has ever happened in the history of the world. That's what we celebrate on this day!

This is the message, The Cure for the Disease of Death and Dead Religion. That's what we're talking about. The cure for the disease of death and dead religion. And it's perfect that we're celebrating Easter right in the middle of the series. Let me show you from the scripture. I'm just going to read to you Colossians 2. This just kind of sets up this morning.

13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; He has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

And the stone was rolled away. Death has lost its sting. But why is it that on this day we can get more focused on what we're going to have for lunch; and all the things that need to be done; and where we're going to take the pictures? The family photos and who is gonna hide the eggs? How are we gonna make to have all these things that we have to do? Rather than looking into the tomb and say, "Oh, man. That means I don't have to die. That means I'm going to live forever. That means I can live my life here on this earth different". It's big news for us!

I told you last week that I think the strongholds in our city are religiosity and churchianity. That we go through the motions. That we've been here before. That we could put on our best and kind

of go, “Hey, how are you? And you know our family, we've got it all together and we don't really... Yeah, we, sinned at some point in our time, but really, we've cleaned that up ourselves.” And we're going through these motions and make it look like we know what to say, and what to do, and who to hang out with, and how to dress to look like and appear as a follower of Jesus. That we would manage perception. It's rampant in our culture and it's not compatible with Christianity! It's different than why Christ died, but it's what we've learned so it's what we do. It's what we've seen, so it's what we walk in. It's not Christianity!

I came here. I moved my family here to stand on this stage, and on my toes - and if your guests with us today, I apologize for the passion - but I'm sorry that I'm not sorry that it's not Christianity. It's not. That is something different. It's not God's desire. It's not His best. I don't care if it's all you know of church, it's not His church. It is something different and catch up with me. Look at church history and you'll see that the church has always been an army of people living authentically. Meaning, sharing things; confessing sins to one another; and pushing back darkness.

So, I'm going to be in John chapter 3 if you want to turn there. In John chapter 3, we're going to look at our condition of dead religion. We're going to look at the cure for our condition. And we're going to talk about what the resurrection means; because just like you, I'm tempted to take it for granted. I'm tempted to let my mind run to what I have to do after the service and what family is coming into town and where we're going to go and who's making what. Rather than just taking time to pause to remember what Jesus has done for me and what it means.

In John 3 is the most famous verse of all time. Do you know what it is? Anybody? Most famous verse of all time. **16 For God so loved the world that He gives only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.** John. 3:16. Anybody know the context of John 3:16? What that is spoken into? What's happening around that very famous verse? (Audience speaks) Anybody? Somebody. Nicodemus, there it is. There's a man in the scripture named Nicodemus. Nicodemus comes to Jesus, at night, and he has a conversation with Him. We're going to pull up and watch that conversation this morning. This is the context of this very famous verse: **16 For God so loved the world that He gives only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.** That comes immediately following a conversation between Jesus Christ, the son of the living God, and this man named Nicodemus, who is a very religious man. A God follower. He's placed his life where his mouth is, and this is what happens here in verse one.

I'll just say if you're here this morning and you're curious about Jesus, that's what's going on here. Nicodemus is kind of like, “Man who is this guy and what is the reality of what He's done? Can I believe it?” And so, if that's you, welcome home. You are in a great spot. Also, if you've been in church your whole life and you've gone to Sunday school, you've done all the things - that's also this guy. So, he's kind of both of those people in one person. He's studying Jesus and says this. Verse one – **1 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling Council.** The Jewish ruling Council is the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin is made up of 70 people. These are the Jews of all Jews. This is the A Team. The VIPs these guys. OK? It's quite the lineup. You might have heard of Gamaliel. Gamaliel disciplined the man named Saul

of Tarsus, who later became Paul, who wrote 65-70% of the New Testament. Joseph of Arimathea, also one of the 70. This is the A Team of the Jews and Nicodemus is one of them.

2 He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.” So, the ruler of the Pharisees, well respected by those who keep the law, comes to Jesus at night, most likely in hiding. In the shadows of the buildings there so that no one would see him to say, “Who are you really Rabbi? What's really going on here? It seems like God is with you, but I don't know.” He doesn't want his friends to know. He doesn't want them to think that he's compromising his faith by following this rebel. **3 Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless they are born again.”** Nicodemus responds, **4 “How can someone be born when they are old? Surely, they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!”** We laugh, “Oh this guy, you know, was he that...” But you have to keep in mind that you've heard the term “born again” before. The only reason you know the term born again is because it was spoken right here. This is the first time that term has ever been said by someone in reference to Christianity. So, Nicodemus is the intellect of intellectuals. This is a well-studied person. Very smart, one of the most intelligent people in that area, and he's like, “What do you mean born for a second time?” It's a logical answer. It means he's tracking with what Jesus is saying, or at least he hears His words. **5 Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the spirit.”** This is not a reference to baptism; this is a reference to natural birth and salvation.

Natural birth – hey your water broke; and salvation - the spirit of God giving you new life. **6 Flesh gives birth to flesh**, as evident of what I just said, **but the spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, “You must be born again. 8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear it sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”** He's saying you don't understand how the spirit works, Nicodemus. He saves who He wants to save in ways that you can't see or anticipate. He does what He pleases, but Jesus' point, it's not up to you. It's not up to you, it is a work of the spirit. Which is why Nicodemus says, **9 “How can this be? Nicodemus asked.**

This is a guy who manages perception. He dresses in a certain way; speaks in a certain way; hangs out with a certain group of people; does certain things and eat certain things so that everyone would look at him and think he's pious. This guy is holy. They are great church goers. This man! He's talking to Jesus, Nicodemus is the ruler of religious people. Jesus is like, “Man, I don't think you get it. You have got to be born again.” Born again. Born again. He repeats it over and over in this passage. You got to be born again Nicodemus. Born again. Born again. He is like, “I'm confused.” Here is my first point.

1. If Satan cannot kill you in rebellion, he will try to keep you in dead religion.

If Satan cannot kill you in rebellion, he will try to keep you in dead religion. When I say religion don't let that word be offensive to you. I know that there's a redemptive aspect to religion. I know that we're to care for the widows and the orphans as God tells us through his servant James. That this is the true religion that He wants. I'm talking about dead religion - self-righteousness,

legalism. Managing perception. This is a respected man. A political man. A religious man. Everything in his life would tell you, 'That guy...He's the teacher of all Sunday school teachers. This guy has it going on when it comes to church things.' And when you think of sin... See sin is our condition. Sin is why, apart from Jesus, we have no hope. Sin is what we've committed against God, which deserves death because God is holy. Sin is our effort not to worship God, but to be like God - as Lucifer did. As Satan did, right?

Sin is our condition. The symptoms of our condition, there's two. Like a cough or fever or a runny nose or a sore throat, those are symptoms of something. The symptoms of our condition, our sin, is one rebellion. We do what we want to do when we want to do it. "I don't care. I'm going to go where I want to go. Hang out with who I want to hang out with - say, watch, buy. Our rebellion is a symptom of our condition. There's another symptom. So, if that's the runny nose, let me give you the cough. Dead religion. Perception management. "Well, I can't actually become a Christian. I can't be born again. Let me figure out what it looks like to look like a Christian. What I need to wear. Where I need to go. Who I need to hang out with. What I need to say. What I need to watch or not watch. Where I need to go or not go." This is what's happening in our community.

This is a thing here and Jesus, to correct that, He says, "No, you have to be born again." See Jesus has very little patience with these people. Even here, there's like an edge to his voice. Like you can manage the outside. You can manage your talk. You can do good things. You can go to church, and you can sing songs. But you're still going to go to hell, Nicodemus. Unless you understand what I'm telling you. You gotta be born again.

Why would he use that illustration? Born again? Why would he say that? That's a weird thing to say. He's Jesus, Son of God. He could have went anywhere. He said, "You gotta be born again." It's a weird thing. We say it like it's normal, but it's like that's weird to be born again. And Nicodemus is right, "What? I'm supposed to like, get inside my mother's womb? That is weird." You love how honest the Bible is.

Monica and I have three children. She gave birth to all three of them and I was there. I know father of the year. I mean, I had some things, but I moved them to prioritize that. Make sure I would be present. And I remember, especially the first time. It is kind of true for all of them, but especially the first time. You have no idea what's going to happen. There is just a little bit of angst, you know? We would go to the hospital. They would put us in a room. They would put her in a gown and hook her up to some IVs and heart monitors and things. And we're there and we're waiting and we're praying. She's anxious, I'm anxious, like, "Man, what's about to happen?" They come in and they put her on a gurney thing and move us to another room. And there's people in there, there's just a little bit of tenseness in there. It's intense, at least for her and I. For them, it's a Wednesday. For us, it's intense, you know.

And I just remember sitting there, not knowing what's going to happen. There is the beep, beep, beep of the heart monitor thing and the IV drip and whatnot. And all of a sudden in this little room, with about four medical professionals, Monica and I, in a moment (JP snaps) there's someone else there. We can see them. We can hold them. Reality was different 5 minutes ago,

but now we're meeting a new person. They are going to be in our family. A new life. This is why he's telling Nicodemus, "You have to be born again." It's not like you are your old self with church clothes. It's not what he's talking about. Sometimes in 21st Century America, I think we think that is like, "Oh, I'm who I was, but now I go to church on Sunday." No! You're altogether different. You have different preferences and a different appetite. You have different affections of your heart, and you go to different places. You hang out with different people, but you love different things. And when you're all by yourself, when no one else is looking, not for the approval of anyone, you spend time with your Maker. It affects all the things that you do - how you think and how you speak, even when others can't hear you. You are new.

I will tell you something else about this new life... They're not really clean. You know, it's kind of messy. There is blood and pain and effort. I told my kids that after the Good Friday service. We were at dinner, and we were talking about their births, which is a weird discussion at dinner. They were like, "What was it like?" And I told them that there was blood, there was pain, and there was effort. One of them goes, "It wasn't mine." You got it. You got it. You understand why he said you have to be born again. Because all of you were birthed by blood, pain, and effort that was not yours. It was not yours, Nicodemus. What needs to happen in your life is not of your effort, your cleaning up, your doing. You were brought forth new by the blood, the pain, and the effort of the one you are speaking to.

Verse 10: **10 "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus "and do you not understand these things?"** He says, "You're the best they have. You are the Pharisee of Pharisees. You graduated from Truett with an MDiv and a THM. You went to Bible college. You have stacks on stacks of resumes. I've been to your office, Nicodemus. You've got like 6 resumes on the wall. Trophies and plaques and things for how smart you are, and you don't get it?" **11 "Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven - the Son of Man.** The one you are speaking to. Then he says "Hey Moses and the prophets, those who've gone before me, they told you these things and you still don't get it. And I'm still talking in the earthly realm. If I go spiritual realm on you, Nicodemus, how are you going to get it?"

Listen to this, first 14: **14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in Him.**" Jesus is spelling it out for this thick-headed man. He is saying, "It's me. The solution to your condition is in front of you. The cure for your condition is the one that you're speaking to." It's my second point.

2. The cure for our condition is Christ.

The cure for our condition is Christ. And if you're following closely with me, you are like, how did you get that point from there? And I want to explain it because there's something really obscure, but very beautiful happening in this text right here. So lean in.

I'm walking out of McLane Stadium the other day and as I round the corner there parked on the side of the sidewalk, really on the curb, is an ambulance. And as I passed the ambulance, there's a symbol on the side of an ambulance that's actually on all ambulances. I was like, "That's a strange symbol on a vehicle of life." This is it; this is the symbol. You've seen it, right? It's a pole with a snake on it. That is a weird thing. It is on every ambulance. Right? And then maybe you have like a medical band or some sort of pendant that looks like this. (Slide with a charm with a snake on a pole.) This is a sign of medicine, which is a weird sign of medicine that there would be a snake as a sign of healing on every ambulance you've ever seen. That's weird. Why would that be?

If you are a guest with us today, this is when we bring in the snakes and handle them. No, I'm kidding. We're not going to do that. We don't handle snakes here. You took a wrong turn. But we have been talking a lot about snakes in our series on spiritual warfare. Jesus says to Nicodemus, "You're going to see the Son of Man lifted up just as Moses lifted up the bronze serpent in the wilderness." This comes from an obscure text in Numbers 21. It is two tiny paragraphs - just a few verses. I'm going to read them to you.

If you don't know who the Israelites are, the Israelites are God's chosen people. They have this pattern where you know God blesses them. They rebel. They wander. They repent. God blesses them. They rebel. They wander. They repent. They are hardheaded, just like us. And here God has just given them food out of nowhere, but they're like, "We're hungry and we're tired of eating that." So, they're complaining again, and this is what happens. **6 Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. 7 The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people. 8 The Lord said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." 9 So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.**

So now, you start to see why a sign of life on the side of every ambulance you've ever driven by there's a pole with a snake wrapped around it. And just in case you're a Greek mythology expert, you might say, "Well, that's the rod of Asclepius." Here's what you need to know about the "little g – god", the fake god Asclepius. He came 600 years after Moses in the desert. Greek mythology often borrows stories from the Bible and reinvents them, as is the case right here. So, the rod of Asclepius is really what happened in the wilderness 1500 years BC.

But I gotta show you something else. I tried to find images of this scene. And so, you know, you're left to ancient art. And so, I'm looking at some of the oldest art that we have and it's unbelievable that just these few verses, these tiny two paragraphs, how much art there is. How many times this story has been captured through art. And Moses in the wilderness... (Slide of images of a snake on a pole begin to show on screen.) So, if you look here, there is the brazen serpent on a pole. And the shape of it should be familiar to you, but I wouldn't show you just one picture. There's also that one; old painting that we have. There's another one. This is actually even on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel you will catch this theme. There is something happening, bigger than what is – there is another one – in this text. There is something bigger

happening in just these few verses that I think we need to lean in. Why Jesus would say, “Nicodemus, I want you to understand something here. That in the same way these people had this condition that's not compatible with life and the only way that they could live is if they looked at this image. You're going to see the Son of Man lifted up in a similar way.”

Now I can talk to any medical professional in this room, and they would all tell you there's not a disease that you're healed from by looking at something. So, it's a supernatural healing that comes through an act of faith. ‘Hey, build this and look here so that you might live, right?’ You gotta understand, right? Nicodemus says, **14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes may have eternal life in Him.**” I don't think Nicodemus gets it. He hears these words, probably just like you right now, kind of in one ear and out the other. What are we having for lunch? Right? But then something happened, y'all! Then just a little while later, he's there and this rabbi that he's talking to at night, they take him. He drags His piece of wood across town. They stripped Him of His clothes, scorched the skin from His body. They beat Him and put a crown of thorns on Him. And Nicodemus is there, and Nick's looking as they take this thing, and they lift it up. And he's like, “Wait a minute! Wait a minute! That guy told me this was going to happen, and He was going to be lifted up. Just like the brazen snake in the wilderness. Just like Moses and the Israelites. He's going to be... Hold on there! I think there's something more to this guy.” And I believe Nicodemus gave his life to Jesus.

And you say, “Well why would you jump to that conclusion?” Do you know when he shows back up? This man who snuck to talk to Jesus at night, afraid of what his friends are going to think of him. All of a sudden, he says, “Hey, Pilate. Give His body to me.” This is the guy that put Him in the tomb. We always talk about those that see when the tomb is empty, but this is the guy that put him there. That added a great cost to him, thousands of dollars. He wrapped him in myrrh and aloes, and embalming fluids, and linen. He cared for him with Joseph of Arimathea, and they put him inside the tomb. All of the sudden, he risked his reputation, his time, his money, and his life here. They don't like Jesus very much and they didn't like anybody that liked Jesus very much. That's why the disciples are hiding right now. But Nicodemus is like, “No, no, no. That's my guy. I got Him. Hey, I know usually you throw out the bodies with the trash. I know usually you just dump them and light them on fire at Gahanna, not this one. We're going to bury him in a tomb. We're going to put him where only the wealthy and kings sleep for eternity.”

John 19, Joseph of Arimathea is there, and **39 He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 75 pounds.** That's a lot. **40 Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with the Jewish burial customs. 41 At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid.**

I grew up in the church, a church school. The whole deal. After college, I began to really wrestle with my faith because I thought, what are the odds that I'd be born to the right country? If I was born in China, I'd be Buddhist. If I was born in Iran, I'd be Muslim. If I was born in India, I'd be Hindu. If I was born in Israel, I might be Jewish. So, I was like, what are the odds that I'd be born

in the right country in the right faith? I began to wrestle with this. So, I started studying world religions. I was really blown away by the evidence that supported the historicity of Jesus. The archaeological findings that we showed that this man actually lived and died, and the scripture says over 500 people saw Him when he came back to life. Then on His birth, the calendar reset, and all of these things acknowledge this man born in Bethlehem. A carpenter who lived in Nazareth. How?

Something else struck me. As I was looking at my options of other faiths, all their leaders were dead. Their leaders were dead. I'm going to die, I thought, I don't know that I want to follow somebody else who can't defeat death. Mohammed, the founder of Islam, he's buried in the Mosque of the Prophet in the city of Medina near Saudi Arabia. You can go there, and you can see it. It's sealed and his body is inside. Buddha, where we get the world religion of Buddhism, he was cremated, but not before they took parts of his bones, and his teeth and they spread him out in temples like the Temple of the Tooth in Sri Lanka. You can go there. His teeth are there. The Bahai faith - Baha'u'llah, Right, he's buried right outside of Israel in Bonaci. You can go there. His tomb is there, it's sealed, and his body is inside. Joseph Smith, the founder of the Latter-Day Saints movement, or Mormonism, you can go there in Illinois. You can look at his tomb. His body's inside. But this garden they're talking about in John 19, I've walked in that garden. I walked up on this tomb (picture on screen) right there. There it is. It's open. So, let's take a look inside. (Picture of empty tomb.) He's not there. See Nicodemus wrapped him up, put him in, and three days later, he walked out. On this day, he walked out.

The Angel said to Mary Magdalene, not a religious person now, but a demon possessed prostitute turned Christian. **Mark 16: 6 “Don't be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him?** My third and final point.

3. The resurrection means death is defeated.

The resurrection means death is defeated. Today means that you don't have to die, that you can live forever, and that Jesus beat death. See the cross means that your sins were paid for. That you don't have to go to hell to pay for your sins, the only thing you can do in hell, because they were paid for on the cross! And anybody who sins were paid for on the cross, they get to go and be with God forever and ever and ever and ever, because your sins were paid for past, present, and future. The empty tomb - meaning it took, it means it cleared, the check cleared, the payment, was processed - and he defeated death. Which means the worst thing that the enemy could do to you, won't be done, right.

The worst thing that the enemy can do for anybody is to drag them to hell. Once he can't drag them to hell, then the worst thing that he can do is kill you. But it's got to be infuriating that every time he kills some Christian, they just end up in heaven with God. Like how frustrating is that? If you have trusted in Christ, this is your hell. This is the worst that it will ever be. But if you haven't trusted in Christ, this is as good as you will ever experience. This is your heaven. Have an amazing Easter because it will be the best food you ever taste. It will be the hardest you ever laugh.

I will tell you why I'm so passionate about this, like, certainly if you're here... If this is your church home, you know this guy he yells a lot and get all passionate about religiosity and churchianity. Because every week here. Listen, listen to me. Listen to me. Every week, multiple times a week, I am talking to your friends and your neighbors and your coworkers. Every week...listen, I don't have a lot of tricks. I got one trick. I have one move if you will. OK? Between 1 & 10 - 10 being certain and 1 being not so sure... This is the way I share my faith. You share your faith however you want to share your faith. This is how I share my faith. Let me ask you two questions. First question, if your guest with us, I'd encourage you to answer them. Between 1 & 10 - 10 being certain and 1 being not so sure, if you die today how certain are you that you would go to heaven? OK? Answer that with a number. 10 being certain, 1 being not so sure.

I asked a young man this just recently in the last couple of weeks. He grew up in the church. His dad's a pastor. He has been in church his whole life and wanted a good Christian education, so he went to Baylor. And he's here, and he's like, "Man, I love the way that you guys are making disciples here. And I'm here and I'm getting equipped. And I'm learning, you know, the Word here. And it's so good. I'm in a life group here." I am like, "Hey that is awesome. Hey, I ask everybody the same two questions. Between 1 & 10, 10 being certain and 1 not so sure if you died to today – son of a pastor, in church your whole life, going to Baylor for a good Christian education - how certain are you that you would go to heaven?" He said 7. "I said if you stood before God - second question. If you stood before God and He said, 'Why should I let you in?' What would you say?" And he essentially says, "How am I going to get from here to there? Don't you understand, JP? I've been in church my whole life. I was born into a Christian family. I'm good man. I don't want to sin, I fight it. How am I going to get from here to there? Every year I celebrate Easter!"

What on earth do you celebrate at Easter? You're still counting on your works, Nicodemus. You're still focused on what you do. What do you celebrate at Easter? **Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not of yourself, it is the gift of God. Not by works, so that no man can boast.** What do I have to do to be saved? Call out to the only one who can save you. Call on the name of the only one who can save. **Romans 10:9 For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, then you will be saved.** Then you will be saved because of what Jesus did. If you could be saved by any other means, God wasted the death of His son. He would have told you just to be good. "Just follow the rules. My Son doesn't have to die." But He did. You have to be born again.

In summary, if Satan can't kill you in rebellion, he will try to keep you in dead religion. The only cure for our condition is Christ. The resurrection means death is defeated.

My friend, who thought that he had rabies, had he begun to show symptoms, he would have paid any price. He would have done anything, gone anywhere and talked to anyone to live – to be okay. To get rid of his disease. Like that's the weight we have to feel. Like what do I have to do? That's what Nicodemus is asking. What do I gotta do? Jesus is like, "Man, you have to be born

again. The only way that you're going to get from here to there is this (the cross).” This is it. It is all we’ve got. It’s the only bridge there is.

If you want to go from death to life, you’ve gotta be born again. Your works won't take you there. Your religion won't take you there. Church won't take you there. Your dress won't take you there. **16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God didn't send His son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.** The stone is rolled away. New life bursts forth. For **18 whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe, stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.**

I'm begging you. I'm begging you to believe. Like Nicodemus to say, “Hey, Jesus. Take my time, my reputation, my life, my resources. You can have it all. Use my life here on this earth.” If you're here and you're believer, and you are like, “Yeah, I've heard that. The cross came down as a bridge. Oh yeah.” Would you tell somebody? Would you spend your life telling people? Don't just go to church, use the gifts that God has given you to live a life on purpose. You're going to die soon. I don't want you to have any regrets in that moment, as if that's even possible. I want you to live a life that means something. In that moment, that there be crowns that you put there that you can lay at the feet of Jesus. It is because of what He did, and not what you do.

Let me pray for us.

Lord, Father, help us this Easter. Help us believe God. Stir in us a faith. Help us to know. And if we do, stir in us courage, zeal, energy, focus your Holy Spirit, to push us into being on mission for you.

If you're here and you realize you haven't trusted in Jesus, like all that has to happen right now, I you're like, “I want to go to heaven. I want to be born again. How do I do it?” You say to God right now, this is a tradition in the church, you start by just confessing that you're a sinner. Lord, I have sinned against you. I've gone my own way. I've done what I wanted to do, not what you've wanted me to do. Maybe that was rebellion. Maybe that was dead religion. Maybe it was both. God, I know, just as Moses looked on and the Israelites looked on the brazen serpent. Lord, I look up on the cross and acknowledge that as a payment for my sins. You just say that to Him. You say in in your heart, in your mind, or you say it loud. I don't care!

You died for my sins. Your Son paid the price for my sins. And your spirit raised Him from the dead. And I believe that. With that same spirit, would you entrust to me that same spirit so that I can navigate this broken world of sin and death and disease, depression and despair? That I can navigate that by the power of your Holy Spirit. God stir in me a joy and a courage. Not a spirit of timidity, but one of power, love, and self-discipline. Thank you, God. Would you do that work here, God? We need you. In Jesus name. Amen