

Well, if you have a Bible, why don't you grab it and turn to 1 Corinthians 15. That's where we are going to spend a little bit of time together tonight. So Matt is obviously still in Australia and will get back tomorrow. I heard it through the grapevine that he actually saw a covenant member while he was in Australia. So we're going to chat tonight, and I'm really excited to have the opportunity. It really is a privilege every time I get to talk with you, which is about ten times a year. And we get to talk about whatever really, whatever the Holy Spirit lays on my heart. And so it's a lot less just reading a textbook and figuring out what I need to talk about. It's more kind of an art of just discerning and really trying to lend my ear to the Spirit of God and say, "Okay, where is our family at right now? Where is our campus at right now? What would You have me to say to them?" And so I've done that and really feel compelled to talk about the gospel of Jesus Christ with you tonight.

The Summer transition into the Fall is always a bittersweet time for me as a pastor here at our campus. Our city obviously is so transient. There are people coming in and out all the time. And our campus here reflects this transience, where there are people coming in and out of our campus all the time. The Summer into the Fall is bitter in the sense that every single Fall and Summer there are dozens and dozens and dozens of men and women who pack up and their season here in Denton is over. They are leaving this station of life and are on to the next. And therefore, they are leaving our campus after being here for six months, a year, or two years. And that's just a bitter thing for me. I'm always grateful and obviously excited about what the Holy Spirit is doing in their life, but in my selfishness, it's bitter for me. I met with a guy this week who's been here for two years, and we got to spend lots of time together. And really it's been an amazing thing for me to watch the Holy Spirit conform this guy into the image of Jesus more and more since he's been here. From when he showed up in Denton to who he was when I had coffee with him this week is not the same guy. It was so encouraging to hear how the Lord is moving in him. He's moving off to Dallas to go to grad school. We left coffee this week, and it was just a bitter moment for me of going, "Man, I don't know when I'm going to see this guy again. I guess I've just taken it for granted." And there are dozens and dozens of men and women for whom that is the case every Summer moving into the Fall.

And then it's sweet on the other side, because in the same way there are dozens and dozens and dozens, really hundreds, who come into our campus every single Fall and transition into here for the first time. I know many of you were part of that group. I met a couple of you before service tonight. I'm glad that you're here and glad that you're even thinking of worshiping with our family and getting rooted here in our family. I'm just excited, and it really is sweet to see so many new faces and think about the next year, two years, three years, four years or however long the Lord has this new crop in here that we get to spend time with them. And so that's been fun for me.

But also, there's this weight, as I think about this, that comes, because the reality is magnified that for many people here at our campus, we have a small window of time to spend with them. So for many people, we have a year, two years or three years. But for a lot, we have this small window of time. And so as a pastor, a shepherd, an elder, I feel this weight where Acts 20 talks about how the role of the pastor is to take care of the flock and to teach them the counsel of God. And so here we have these people who are here for this short amount of time. So as I'm going into the Fall and seeing people transitioning in and out, it's really magnified for me that we've got these people here that are just going to be here for a little while. And so what do we teach them? What does it look like to really shepherd them well? And so if I get an opportunity to speak, what do I talk about? And so as I've thought about and prayed about this, if there is one thing

that I want us to get as a campus, as a family, for those of you who are transitioning into our family who are going to be here for this small window of time, it's the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's crucial. If nothing else, if you come and you don't walk away with anything else from your time in our family, I want you to walk away feeling as if, not only that you know the gospel of Jesus Christ but that it dwells in you so richly that it's always on the tip of your tongue, it's always in your mind and you're always meditating on it. I want you to dwell so richly in the gospel that you're always preaching it to yourself daily and in conversation, it always kind of comes out because that's what you're thinking about, because that's the news that you're thinking about. So that's my hope.

I gave a sermon this Summer. It was kind of my biannual sermon, and many of you who've been here a while know that my sermon is about how we're here to love our city. Like God has put our church, our family in the middle of Denton to love our city, and we're going to love them by sharing the gospel with them through our deeds and through our words. And we talked about what that looks like. And as we talked about sharing the gospel with our words, I kind of made a side comment of, "If you don't know how to share the gospel with your mouth, if you don't know how to open your mouth and share the gospel, well then that's a problem, and we need to talk about it. If you're a Christian, if you're a follower of Jesus Christ and you don't feel comfortable and confident to open your mouth and share the gospel of Jesus Christ, then we really just need to dig in and talk about that." After I said that, I had many people come up to me and say, "I feel like that's where I am. I feel like I would know the gospel if I heard it. I know Matt says it every week. It's in the mission statement of The Village Church to see 'God get glory from lives being changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.' We are talking about the gospel all the time, and if I heard it I would probably know it, but if somebody asked me to share it, I can't say with any amount of confidence that I would be able to open my mouth and articulate the gospel."

And so the more I've heard that leading up to this weekend, the more I've just thought what I want to talk about tonight is the gospel. I want to clarify the gospel in the hopes that if you're in here tonight and you're a believer in Jesus Christ, if you walk out of this room, you will feel comfortable and confident, not only to open your mouth and articulate the gospel if someone asked you, but you could also point to a Scripture and say here's what I am talking about. I know that that might sound elementary to some of you, but I feel like a lot of us are just sitting right there. Like there's one church I know in Washington D.C. that part of their membership process is an interview to get affirmed as members. The church wants to make sure they are believers in Jesus Christ. So one of the questions they are asked is "Okay, share the gospel with me in sixty seconds or less." I think it's a great question, not to see who is eloquent or how you can make it through and go, "Oh yeah, I'm a stud. I've got wise and persuasive words here that I can use." But no, if you know the gospel, it's obvious, even if you stumble through it. If you're thinking about it, if you're dwelling on it, if you're studying it, if you're talking about it in conversations with people, it's obvious that you'll know it in such a way that it just comes out. It dwells in you richly. And so that's my hope for you if you're a believer in here. I hope that as we talk about it tonight, you would walk out of here with confidence that you know the gospel and you're little bit more clear about the gospel now than when you walked in, And I don't mean that you can leave here and regurgitate some facts without it ever impacting your heart. That's not what I'm talking about, but my hope is that you would be able to share it in the same way. As you understand it a little better and are a little bit more clear about it, you should be able to live in light of it better as well. If you can't articulate it, how in the world are you living in light of it in every sphere of your life? Well you can't be. Because you don't know what it is. And so it's just that crucial. And if you're here and you're not a believer, what I'm hoping as we talk tonight is that you'll look at the church and ask questions. I know it's difficult to look at the Church of Jesus Christ, especially down here in South in the Bible Belt and say "Okay, what is it about these people that they actually believe and how they live that actually makes them Christian? What makes them Christian?" I know it's hard to kind of cut through everything you see. It's not our t-shirts. It's not our political stances. But what is it that makes us Christian? What is it that we believe and that we live out that makes us believers in Jesus Christ? And if you're not a believer in Jesus Christ, I'm hoping that as we talk tonight a little bit more, you'll figure that out.

So let me read this. It's a quote that maybe will get us thinking together a little bit more along the lines of where I want to take you. But I think that most of us would know it if we heard it, but it's another thing of really being skillful in understanding the gospel and being able to share it in light of everything we talk about here on Sundays, being able to pull out from a conversation and say, "That right there, what that person said, that's the gospel of Jesus Christ." So let me read this quote from Graham Goldsworthy. He is an Anglican in Australia, but this is from his book called *According to Plan*. He writes, "The main message of the Bible about Jesus Christ can easily become mixed with all sorts of things that are related to it. We see this in the way that people define or preach the gospel, but it is important to keep the gospel itself clearly distinct from our response to it or from the results of it in our lives and in the world." So our response to the gospel and the results of the gospel are not themselves the gospel. He's going to start clarifying by saying, "If our proper response to the gospel message is faith, then we should not make faith part of the gospel itself. It would be absurd to call people to have faith in faith. While the new birth bears a close relationship to faith in Christ, it is a mistake to speak of the new birth as if it were itself the gospel. Faith in the new birth as such will not save us. It is therefore important to understand both what the gospel is, so that we include what must be believed, and what the gospel is not, so that we don't require people to believe more than is necessary for salvation." And this I think gets us really to the heart of what I want to talk about.

So what is the gospel? Obviously, repenting and believing it are implications and should be our response to hearing it, but if that's not the gospel itself, what is the gospel? So let's just start with the word "gospel." In non-Biblical sources before the New Testament period, "euangelion" (the Greek word that means gospel) is actually the word we get "evangelical" from. The word customarily referred to the reward given to a messenger who brought good news, good news of military victory perhaps or of escape from danger. But by an obvious transfer as the word became more and more common it eventually came to refer to the good news itself. So it started off as a word that meant the reward that was given to a messenger that brought good news, but then the word transitioned into actually meaning the good news itself, great news of victory.

And so an example I always think of is when I went to Greece. I went to Athens a few years ago. When I was in Athens, I went to a city called Marathon, which is where we get the word "marathon" believe it or not. Marathon is Greek city down on the sea, and there was a big battle there. The Greeks were supposed to lose, but they didn't lose and miraculously, they won the battle. And the story goes that they sent a messenger back to Athens to share the news of military victory. And so this messenger ran twenty-six miles from Marathon to Athens non-stop. And it's not like West Texas where it is just flat, this was mountainous terrain. So he runs into the city center and he exclaims, "Nike! (which means "victory")." And then he falls dead as the story goes. But that in and of itself is a picture of gospel. He ran twenty-six miles, and he shared the gospel, the gospel of military victory with the people of Athens. And so the word gospel literally means "good news, victorious news." So when we talk about the gospel of Jesus Christ what we are actually saying whether we know it or not is "the great news about Jesus Christ."

So what in the world is the great news about Jesus Christ? And to understand the great news about Jesus Christ you actually have to understand the storyline of the Bible. If you don't understand the storyline of the Bible, it's going to be really difficult to understand why the news of Jesus Christ, the good news, is such good news. Now I'll put it to you this way. If I told you my little niece went home with her parents from the hospital this week, you might go "Wow, that's really cool." Now some of you who have kids probably remember when it happened to you, "Yeah, I remember that. That's just great. Thanks for sharing. Neat." But if I told you a little bit more of the storyline, and if I told you that my niece was in the hospital in NICU for two weeks, unresponsive, and she woke up this week and got to go home with her parents, that changes the news that I just shared with you. Knowing the storyline matters. And so it's the same way with the gospel of Jesus Christ. You really cannot talk about the gospel of Jesus Christ in a comprehensible way without talking about the storyline of the Bible. So here's what that means. It's not just enough for us to know these facts about Jesus, we have to

know what the Bible talks about all the way through and how it leads us to the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so I just briefly want to talk with you about that.

So what's the storyline of the Bible? Let me read this quote from D. A. Carson to you. He's one of the foremost Conservative scholars in America today, and he talks about the basic storyline of the Bible that leads us say, "Tell me the good news." That's what the storyline of the Bible does. It leads to this moment. This is what Carson said. "The Triune God is the sovereign, transcendent and personal God who has made the universe, including us His image bearers. Our misery lies in our rebellion. Our alienation from God, which inspired His forbearance, attracts His implacable wrath." And so the basic plotline as he has said it thus far is this. God, out of an overflow of His being and His glory, creates. He speaks and things come into existence, and He creates the universe, the planets, and at the apex of His creation, He creates man in His image. And He breathes His spirit into dust, and man is created. And then he creates woman. He takes a rib out of man. Genesis 1 is already pointing to the gospel of Jesus Christ, for just as Adam's bride would come from his wounded side, the Bride of Jesus Christ the Church would come from His wounded side as well. So he takes this rib of Adam and patches him up and wakes Adam up and Adam sings this song. "Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh. Finally, there is someone here for me to spend time with and interact with." Because before then it was just birds and beasts, and God said, "It's not right for us to leave this man like this. We need to create a woman." And so He did it. And that's the story in the Scriptures and in Genesis 2, "And man was naked and unashamed."

And then the next verse leads us into the story of the fall of mankind. God created this perfect, harmonious, beautiful creation, and man decided that he could do things better than God, that he was smarter than God, that he could be a better sovereign than God could. So he rebels against the word of God. God told him how to live, what life was supposed to be like, told him what to do and what not to do. In love He said, "Go this way, not this way." And man said, "You know what? I really appreciate You giving me some heads up, but I really think I know better than You, God. So I'm going to do this." And man sins and rebels against God and separates himself from God. And death enters the world, and it infects and shatters everything. And all of us now, in Adam's fall, we sinned all. All of us became sinners by our nature and by action, we join in this fall. And we do it every single day. And so here we are, creation and fall, and the rest of the Bible really is answering this question, "How in the world is God going to deal with this problem of having sinful creatures that rebel against Him?" How is He going to be just and at the same time finish what He set out to do, which is namely to have a planet full of creatures who image and glorify Him. How is He going to do this?

And D. A. Carson continues the storyline by saying this, "Despite His forbearance, our misery and our rebellion attracts God's wrath, but God, precisely because love is of the very essence of His character, takes the initiative and prepared for the coming of His son." And so again, after the fall, the rest of the Bible is preparing for Jesus Christ to step on the scene. It's preparing for this great news to be trumpeted. "He prepares for the coming of His Son by raising up a people who by covenantal stipulations, temple worship, systems of sacrifice and a priesthood, by kings and by prophets are taught something of what God is planning and what He expects." So this is the Old Testament leading right up to Malachi, and then in the fullness of time, His Son comes. Jesus of Nazareth, born of the Virgin Mary, in Bethlehem. He comes and takes on human nature. Jesus was fully man and fully God, and that's where the good news starts. And Carson says, "The good news of Jesus Christ makes sense in this context and this storyline and no other."

And so that's the storyline: creation, the fall and God dealing with the problem of human beings that sin against Him and attract His wrath, and all of us are there. And onto the stage after years and years and centuries and centuries and centuries of shadow, comes the form, Jesus Christ, the One whom everything was pointing to, everything has been leading to, all the shadows have been preaching about for centuries. And this is what Paul says is the great news. And only within this context do we understand the great news. Now I would remind you that Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, "I would remind you brothers and sisters of the Gospel that I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and

by which you are being saved." The gospel is not Christianity 101. I know there is a tendency to think that, "Oh yeah I got that. Somebody told me that, and that's how I got saved. Now I need to move onto better things like Calvinism and Arminianism. Now I need to move onto better things. What I'd really like to learn is some Eschatology. That would make me a mature Christian." And we kind of just view the gospel as some entry-level step, what baby believers do. We go to the Sunday school class, we learn about it. And Paul is saying here, "Actually the gospel here that I preached to you, you receive it, you stand in it, and by it you are saved. If you hold fast to the Word that I preached to you, unless you believed in vain."

Here's the great news. Onto the stage of history in response to man's sin and his rebellion, our problem that we are separated from God because we are sinners, because his wrath is deserved by us, and there is nothing we can do about. There is no amount of good works that we can do. Nothing. We can't fix it. We can't sacrifice it. We can't do enough. And onto the scene Jesus Christ steps. And Paul says this, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

And so the Apostle Paul says, "This is what is of first importance. Here is the great victorious news of Jesus Christ." The news is this, "I delivered to you of first importance what I also received, and it starts with Christ." And I know that this may be stating the obvious, but it's important you understand that the gospel of Jesus Christ is unashamedly, utterly Christ-centered. The gospel of Jesus Christ is about Jesus Christ. It's about the historical person of Jesus Christ, the Jesus that the Scriptures talk about is the Christ, the long-awaited promised Messiah that the Old Testament Scriptures had pointed to, the Jesus of Nazareth that was born of a virgin and was fully God and fully man at the same time, His entire life. He never sinned. This is Jesus Christ. This is what the gospel is about. We could even say that the gospel of Jesus Christ is about Jesus in a way that it's not about God the Father and not about God the Spirit. Now, obviously, I'm not trying to separate the Trinity here. I'm not trying to tally out and make Jesus more important within the Godhead at all. But what I am saying is that I think it's fair to say that the gospel is more about Jesus, even though God was directing it and it was His plan that Jesus would carry out. When we are talking about this news, it really is centered on Jesus in a way that it is not on the Father and the Spirit. Even though it's the Spirit that has to awaken cold, dead, sinful hearts to believe it. But the gospel is Christ-centered. It's about Jesus Christ. And it's not just about His Person, it's also about His work. Because the next word in the sentence is that Christ "died." Christ died. He actually died. There are many people who don't believe that Jesus Christ died. This is a stumbling block for them to believe that He died. It's outside of their belief system and worldview. "Yeah, I can believe that Jesus was a historical person. . .but that he died?" Many Muslims don't believe that Jesus Christ died. My wife and I had a couple of our friends over from Saudi Arabia a couple of months ago. We were having dinner and talking with them, and had coffee with them afterward. They had a lot of questions about Jesus Christ, and so we were talking about the gospel and trying to clarify it. They don't believe that Jesus Christ died. They believe that God the Father took Him off the cross. They believe that He was a great prophet and so God rescued Him from the misery of dying and just took Him up to heaven. They believe that he's going to come back, but He never really died. But Paul is saying that a big part of the great news is that He did die, Jesus Christ did die. He was really murdered on a cross. And historical evidence outside of the Bible points to this, but it's key that you understand this. I tried to explain this to my Muslim friends, that if He didn't die, then all of these things that we've sung about tonight, are not true. We've not been redeemed by His blood and the wrath of God has not been absorbed because there was no sacrifice. If He never died, there was no sacrifice and He was just rescued up, and that's not good news if He didn't die. And it's a stumbling block for many, but for us it's crucial to what we believe about Jesus, not just because history says so, but also because if He didn't die, we're still in our sins.

And so he says, "Christ died for our sins." Christ having really died and hung on a tree is a stumbling block for many, but a worse stumbling block is that He died for our sins. There are many people who can even admit, "I know the history. Jesus really did die. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate. But I don't believe that he died for our sins." In fact let me read you a quote from Gandhi, who was a Hindu. This is what he says about Jesus' death. "I could accept Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice, and a divine teacher. His death on the cross was a great example to the world, but that there was anything like a mysterious or miraculous virtue in it, my heart could not accept." You hear what he's saying? "Yeah, I believe He was murdered, crucified, and tortured as a martyr, but I don't believe there was anything special about His death. There's nothing more special than anyone else who has died for their religious faith. He's a great example, but that's it. Yeah, He died, but He didn't die for anything supernatural." In fact, Tim Keller, who is a famous pastor in New York city and author, interestingly enough says that he gets asked the question more "Why did Jesus have to die?" than "Does God really exist?" It's more of a stumbling block to the people that he talks to, to really have the question answered. They want to have the question answered, "Why did Jesus have to die?" more than "Does God exist?" I guess that's easier for them to believe that the fact that Jesus Christ really had to die. Because what does it imply? He died for our sins. This implies that you and I are sinners, and we needed a sacrifice to cover our sins, and that's not very popular. It's not very popular to tell someone that they need a sacrifice to cover their sins because God's wrath is going to be poured out on them if they don't have one. Especially in New York but even here, you get it. You go on campuses and go around the school and talk to people, and people are just so opposed. They will go, "Really have we not evolved in our thought process more than that? This God of the Bible requires a blood sacrifice for sins? I mean come on. It's 2009. We're intelligent human beings; we really don't believe things like that." Well actually we do. The thing is that God doesn't just require blood; He gave His own blood for the remission of sins. So Jesus Christ went on the cross and died, and herein really lies the heart of the gospel. Christ died for our sins. It's important that you understand there is substitution. Gandhi is wrong. There is substitution that happened at the cross, supernatural substitution where God took on our sins. God the Son took on our sins and died for them and gave us His righteousness. He got what we deserved, and He gave us what we don't deserve in dying for our sins.

James Montgomery Boyce who is a pastor in Philadelphia at a Presbyterian church there. He says this about the gospel and particularly about Jesus dying, "The true nature of the great news also emerges in this understanding of the death of Jesus. The gospel is not just a new possibility for achieving joy and fullness in life as some seem to suggest." In other words, he's saying that the gospel is not about God fixing your finances. It's not about God giving you a hot, Christian wife or giving you this thing that you want. It's not about fixing or reconciling your marriage, or making your roommate smarter. That's not what the gospel is about at its core. That's not what it was for. God does those things by His grace, praise the Lord. He fixes, He heals and He redeems as we've sung about tonight. But what he's saying is that this is not what the death of Jesus Christ primarily is about. "It's not just a solution to what were previously troublesome and frustrating problems. It is rather something much deeper that has been done. Something relating to God on the basis of which and only on the basis of which these other blessings of salvation follow."

J.I. Packer says, "The gospel does bring us solution to these problems, but it does so by first solving the deepest of all human problems, the problem of man's relation with his Maker. And unless we make it plain that the solution of these formal problems depends on the settling of this latter one, we are misrepresenting the message and becoming false witnesses of God." Jesus Christ was faithful where you and I were unfaithful. He was dependent on His father where you and I have tried to be independent. He was obedient where we have rebelled. He loved His Father more than life itself, where you and I have loved our own lives more than the Father. And because of His perfection, God the Father received Jesus' death as a perfect sacrifice and atonement for our sins, and in the death of Christ, all of the wrath that we deserve for our rebellion was poured out onto Jesus. Gandhi was wrong. Jesus Christ died for our sins.

And that's not where Paul stops. "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures. . . ." And I'm not sure which Scriptures he had in mind, but basically he is saying the things in the gospel are biblical. They've been talked about in the Bible. And so maybe he had in mind the story of Jesus walking on the road to Amais with his disciples when they didn't recognize who Jesus was. They were lamenting the fact that Jesus was dead and said, "Have you not heard this man Jesus of Nazareth was killed?" And what did Jesus say? "Have you not read your Bible? Have you not read that this had to happen for the Scriptures to be fulfilled?" And He opened their hearts and their minds, and then in Luke 24 it says that He starting from the beginning, and He took them all the way through the Hebrew Bible and explained to them how the Christ had to suffer and then be raised. It's unbelievable.

And so Paul says, "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, . . ." You don't bury people who aren't dead. ". . .and that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures." And I want to camp out here for a moment, because I think that many of us, when talking about the great news of Jesus Christ, talk about Jesus as if He were still dead. We got that part down, and we need to have that part down because to get to the empty tomb you have to go through the Cross. The Cross and the resurrection in Paul's mind, they go together. You can't separate them, but I think we try really hard. We like to talk about Jesus dying for our sins a lot, and we don't talk about very much at all the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Most of us just leave that out when we talk about the gospel. We're talking about this great news, and we just leave out the resurrection. That's really bad news. It's bad news because a dead Messiah is not a Messiah at all. If Jesus didn't raise from the dead then nothing that He said about Himself even mattered. It wasn't true. He's dead. He's just a man, He's just a martyr and Gandhi was right. But we know that it's true because He raised from the dead. Because He raised from the dead, it validates and vindicates everything that He said about Himself. And so we can put our trust in Him because He has conquered death. And that means that He's conquered sin, because the root of death is sin. Man sinned, and God cursed them and said, "You're going to die when you sin, if you rebel." And they sinned, and so death entered into the world. And so the fact that Jesus Christ has conquered death by raising from the grave means that He really did die for our sins. Thus our faith in the fact that He died for our sins is really rooted in the fact that He rose from the grave and validated who He was and who He said He was going to be. In my conversations with non-believers, this is where I go. There are a lot of things that I talk about. I try to listen and discern where they are at, what they believe, what they don't believe. But more often than not, I run to the resurrection. I want to talk about the resurrection with people who don't believe in Jesus Christ. Because they have to answer that question about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If He really did raise from the dead, if that really happened, you need to do what He says because Who He said He was is true. And if He didn't raise from the dead, if you could somehow prove to me that He did not raise from the dead, then what are we going to talk about?

In fact, I was having a conversation with one of our neighbors this week. She called me up, and she has not had a good experience with Christianity in general, most of that due to Christians she has met. And she has all these questions about suffering, intolerance and if a loving God would really send people to hell. These are all great questions, and I listened to her and tried to empathize with her. She just kept going on and on, and then she asked, "Where do you start with this whole thing." And so I asked her, "Friend, let me just ask you this. Those questions are great questions, and we can get to those later. But those things are peripheral questions. Let's just start central. Let's talk about Jesus Christ, who He is, and what He's done. In fact, let's talk about His resurrection. Do you believe Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, physically and literally raised from the dead? Because if you do, well then we need to believe and submit to what He says. But if you don't, is it really going to matter if I answer these questions about suffering or not? I'll will answer these questions for you, and I'll try to be helpful and try to point you to Christ in that. But let's just start here. Let's start with the resurrection."

Honestly, most people don't want to do that. They don't want to talk about that, and they don't want to talk about Jesus. A lot of people would cut the argument off right at the beginning and say, "Well, miracles can't exist and so that couldn't

have happened." Well if didn't happen, if that miracle didn't happen, then you're going to have to explain a few things to me in history. One is how the church of Jesus Christ got started. How in the world did the church of Jesus Christ take over the Roman Empire? How do you explain that without the resurrection, without the people who were leading this movement actually believing that they saw Jesus Christ walking through walls and eating fish in a glorified body? They saw Him die, and they saw Him raise from the dead. How do you explain that? And also, how do you explain that most of the leaders of this movement were martyred horrifically? I think it was Blaise Pascal who said this, "I believe the witnesses who get their throat slit." You talk about numerous people that have lost their lives, especially in the early church. You have to explain to me why these people would be willing to get fed to lions if they didn't actually believe that they had seen Jesus Christ raised from the dead. But again, sadly enough, we leave this part out of the great news. I think it was years ago, an archbishop in Australia was asked this question on TV. "If it could be proved that Jesus Christ didn't really raise from the dead, if we found His bones and we could show them to you, what would that do to your faith?" And this bishop wrongly said, "It wouldn't do anything to my faith. Because Jesus Christ has risen in my heart." That's wrong. Our faith is grounded in the truthfulness of its object. We believe that it is historically true and accurate that he rose from the dead.

Let's finish. ". . .and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." The history of this news about Jesus Christ is rooted and grounded in every other account of history is rooted in, eyewitnesses. Paul is going, "This guy saw Him. . .this other guy saw Him. . .these 500 people saw Him, and most of them are still alive. If you need to, go ask them. They were there. Some of them have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James and all of the apostles. This is history. This happened.

And so I want to leave you with this as we talk about the gospel. Your faith in the gospel, in this good news, it had better not be rooted in your warm feelings about Jesus Christ. It doesn't have to be. We believe the gospel, not because it makes us feel good but because it is truth. We believe these things we've talked about, the storyline of the Bible, creation and the fall are true. God reconciling mankind to Himself through the person and work of Jesus Christ is true. Christ dying is true. Christ dying for our sins is true. Christ dying for our sins and raising from the dead is true. This is why we sing. This is why we gather. If you understood this, it would undercut so much of the consumer Christianity that we have going on right now. We come in here tonight, and we do what we do because of this, not because of how we feel. Now there are feelings that accompany believing this, or least there had better be. This is not a mere cognitive thing, this faith of ours. It affects us. It affects our emotions unlike anything in the world does. But you just need to know that our faith is rooted not in how we feel.

I was on the phone a couple of months ago with a young woman. She's been over to the house some with Kimberly and me. She's really wanting to believe the gospel. She really wants to believe. She has come to service a few times. She comes here, and she watches you interact. She watches us sing. She watches us celebrate the Lord's Supper. This night she was really wrestling through it all, and she said, "Do you really think that everyone can feel that way about God?" What she was saying was, "I want to be a part of the Church." In her mind, that was rooted in feeling a certain way about God. I had to step back and say, "Friend, I don't know about that question, but let me just tell you this. Our faith is not rooted in our feelings about God. Our faith is rooted in the person of Jesus Christ." I got to open up 1 Corinthians 15 with her and talk about it. It was unbelievable. It was like somebody had shared the greatest thing she'd ever heard before. She had never heard that. "Oh you mean coming and worshiping and being part of the Christian church is rooted in something that actually happened in history, not how I feel? Well that changes everything." My response was, "Yes my friend it actually does."

And so here's the summary again. My hope in sharing this is that you can walk out of here and go, "Here's the gospel. Here's a Scripture I can point to. This is what we talk about. This is what we mean when we sing about it. This is what is on the mission statements. The gospel is the great news of Jesus Christ and what He has done to restore us to a right relationship with God." If we had time I'd take you to Romans 10, that has another way to say it in a nutshell. It says that the gospel is, "Jesus Christ is Lord and He's been raised from the dead and has come with Saving and transforming power." That has a thousand different implications, but this great news is that God has decided not to leave this world and us in the mess that we got ourselves into. Through His Son, He's decided to make all things new, and He's invited us into that if we would trust Jesus Christ and submit our lives to Him as Lord and Savior.

Let me give you a couple of exhortations. Those of you that are believers, think about this news, meditate on this news and talk about this news at the dinner table. Most of our conversations are about news anyway. "Oh did you hear about Kennedy? Did you hear about this person that had their baby? Did you watch this? Did you hear about this? Did you see this highlight?" We talk about it all the time. We're always talking about news. Talk about the gospel. Think about the gospel. Open your mouth with your family and friends and share it. Dwell on it enough so that if someone were to ask you, you would be skilled enough in understanding it that you could have a conversation. Please do that. Let it be on the tip of your tongue. Think about it, and then not just know it in a way that you can regurgitate it, but rather ask yourself, "What does it mean to live in light of this historical truth that we espouse in every single area of your life?" What does it mean to live out the gospel? At your House? With your kids? On your Facebook? Let's just get real practical. I see some of these pictures. I get emails often about Covenant Members and what is on their Facebook page. It's really disheartening. It's just proof that we don't understand and believe the gospel enough to work it all the way down to these parts of our lives where it comes out and changes who we are and what we do. Think about it, talk about it, dwell on it, treasure it and ask the Holy Spirit to help you grow in it. Become gospel people. Let's become gospel people together, people who treasure Jesus Christ and the news about Him.

And if you're here and you're not a believer, this isn't good news to you yet. This news about Jesus Christ dying for our sins to absorb God's wrath for us that we might be reconciled to the Father is not good news to you yet. It's not good news to you unless you believe it. And so I would invite you if you're here and you're not a Christian, join our family, repent of your sins, submit your heart and your life to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Believe with us. Believe this news with us.