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Empty Tomb or Empty Faith

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1 Corinthians 15:1-9

BIG IDEA – EITHER THE TOMB IS EMPTY OR CHRISTIANITY IS

Happy Easter, Two Cities Church. How is everybody doing? This is the Christian Super Bowl. Don't you just love that video? If you haven't gotten the message of that video, I want to make it super clear: everybody needs Jesus, and nobody is too far gone. In fact, the message of Easter, if you're new, is God comes to us because we couldn't go to him. God meets us where we are.

Let me ask you this evening... Where are you spiritually? What's interesting about the story of Mark is Mark was in, what we would call, rebellion. The video opens up, and you're like, "Is that a Megadeth poster?" Mark was living a life of rebellion, and that relates to some of you. I had a guy come up to me on Thursday night. We had a service Thursday night. He came up to me afterward, crying, and said, "I am that guy in the video."

God meets you where you are in your rebellion. God meets you where you are in your religion, in your pretending and in your performing. God meets you where you are, but he never keeps you where you are. The message of Easter is that God became a man to reach man. See, religion is our attempt to try to reach God, and Christianity is God's pursuit of man.

By the way, my Easter gift to you is a slightly shorter sermon this evening, because we have all of these incredible videos and baptisms and other things. I just want to tell you really simply what the main message is. Here we want to make the main things the plain things and the plain things the main things.

There are a couple of you here today, or maybe many of you here today, who I only get for Christmas and Easter. That's it. You're CEOs (Christmas and Easter only). We are so glad you're here. Every time you come, you're like, "I don't want to keep going."

All he talks about is the virgin birth and the resurrection." Well, we're open all year, so come back another time, guys. We'd love to have you here.

Here's the main message of Easter. The main message of Easter (actually, it's the main message of Christianity; that's why this is so important) is *either the tomb is empty or Christianity is*. If you don't remember anything else I say this evening, I hope you'll think about that. Either the tomb is empty...that means Jesus is risen and reigning and alive and everything we sung about there...or Christianity is.

Now, you might find this interesting. If you don't know the Bible very well, that's totally fine. The Bible critiques itself. In this kind of strange place in the Bible, the apostle Paul... He's this guy who becomes a Christian, and he's the first great Christian, church planter, and all this kind of stuff.

He basically says, "Guys, think about this logically with me. If Jesus isn't raised from the dead, we're the most of all men to be pitied." He says, basically, "Why am I suffering like I'm suffering if Jesus didn't rise from the dead?" Then he kind of takes it logically. He goes, "Guys, here's the bad news. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, I'm a false teacher."

Here's the whole thing. If the empty tomb is true, we should be all in. If the tomb isn't empty, we should move on. Like, if tomorrow in the *New York Times*, or maybe a paper that you trust, whatever news source you would trust... If on the front page it said, "We found, 100 percent for sure, the bones of Jesus Christ in the Middle East," what effect would that have on your life?

It depends on how all in you are right now. It depends on how much you're staking your entire life on the truth of the empty tomb. Now look. I know we're not all there. Some of you, a friend invited you and you came. There are all types of people. Every time the church gathers, there are all types of people, but especially on Easter there are all types of people.

Do you know the story about the guy who didn't want to go to church? He said to his wife, "I don't want to go to church. Everyone is mean to me at church. Actually, they're very suspicious of me at church." She says, "Honey, come on. They're not mean, and they're not suspicious of you, and also, you're the pastor." A conversation we had earlier this evening. No, I'm just kidding.

I know that every time the church gathers there are genuine saints. That's the biblical word for believers. You're excited. You hope we sing a certain song. You see your friends...all that kind of stuff. There are those who are seekers. It's interesting. The Bible says if you seek God with all your heart, you'll find him.

What I've found in my 20 years of ministry is God is working on different people's hearts at different times in their lives. Someone becomes a seeker. They're spiritually curious. They're spiritually questioning. They're spiritually confused. Maybe they found the religions of the world...materialism ("The more I have in my hand, the happier I'll be in my heart"), consumerism, and individualism...they found them wanting and bankrupt.

If you're here today as a seeker, I am so excited for you. It was 23 years ago this week that I came to Christ, and I know what it's like to be a seeker. I know what it's like to say, "I don't know if Christianity is true, but I want it to be true." I hope to help you tonight.

Others of you are here, and you're skeptical. That's okay. I just want to say... You don't really want to be here, and thank you. Thank you for being here. This is your Easter gift to your dad or your mom or your friend. You offered to guard the Easter baskets, but that didn't work, so you're here. We are so glad you're here.

Guys, we have two desires. This is the kind of church we are. We put all of the cards on the table, just say, "This is what we're trying to do." So, what are we trying to do? If you're new or have been coming around for a while, we have two desires. First, we want you to believe and become a Christian.

There was this one time the apostle Paul, this guy, the same guy who wrote a lot of the Bible... He's before this governor, and the governor goes, "What do you want me to do, Paul?" and he says, "I'd like you to become a Christian. I'd like you to become just like me except for these chains." We care about your soul. We don't view you as a project. We don't have an agenda. We're going to love you no matter what, but we believe everyone spends somewhere forever.

The second desire... And this is for some of you. We want you to be a part of a local church. There are too many of you... I love you, so hear me say this. In the most Spirit-filled, winsome, Christ-centered, humble way, hear me say this. Some of you are spiritually homeless. You're a believer, but you don't... Now, a human without a home we call *homeless*, and we feel bad for them.

I've seen this in Winston-Salem. People do what I would call *spiritual Airbnb* or *spiritual Vrbo*. "Let's rent *this* church for the weekend and see how it is. Let's rent *this* church for the weekend and see how it is." I want to encourage you to buy. I want to encourage you to put down some roots, because so many of you are in the exact same place you've always been because you haven't meaningfully connected yourself to community.

With that said, I want to take us back to the earliest account of Christianity and of the story of Easter of the resurrection. Turn to 1 Corinthians 15. This was written in AD 54. That's 21 years after Jesus died and rose from the dead. What I'm going to read to you today, the confession that's in here, they think was just written a few months after Jesus rose from the dead. Let me read this to you. This is 1 Corinthians 15:1-2.

"Now I would remind you..." Why? Because people forget things. **"Now I would remind you, brothers..."** The gospel makes you a family. **"...of the gospel I preached to you..."** That's what I'm doing right now. Look at all of the things you're supposed to do with the gospel. Are you doing this? **"...which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain."** Or believed for no purpose.

I want to talk to you today about the gospel. There was this great monk turned Reformer. His name is Martin Luther. It's not that important that you know a lot about him, but he said something really interesting. He goes, "I love the Bible." He says, "Do you know why I love the Bible? I love the Bible because the Bible holds the gospel, and it's the gospel that holds Christ."

So, we have to talk about the gospel. If I went around downtown or I went over to Wake Forest University or Winston-Salem State and interviewed a bunch of young men and women there, and I asked, "Guys, what's the gospel?" do you know what they're going to tell me? "A genre of music." It's not a word we use today.

When you become a Christian, you need to get a new vocabulary. Right? You know this. If you're in any special industry... You're an engineer? New vocabulary. Lawyer? New vocabulary. Doctor? New vocabulary. Business guy? Finance guy? You have a new vocabulary. There are certain words you'd better learn. Whether you're seeker, skeptic, or believer, you have to know what the word *gospel* means.

Gospel is the good news about what Jesus Christ did for us. That's what it is. In fact, the gospel created the church. Let me tell you a really cynical view of the church. Here's a cynical view of the church that you'll find. "Oh, the church. It's a bunch of old guys. It's male, pale, and frail...you know, all of these old guys. And they wrote a book. So, really what happened was the church created the Bible."

Nope. Wrong. You got it reversed. The Bible created the church, because the Bible holds the gospel. Think about this for a minute. I mean, look around for a second. How did we get here? By *here* I mean how is it that a billion people worship Jesus when it started out with 12 guys who were uneducated, not from the right families, and from a strange, small part of the Middle East? How did we get here?

Listen. You cannot describe the birth, the survival, and the massive explosion of the church of Jesus Christ apart from the gospel message. In the gospel is Christ, and the central thing Christ did was die and rise on our behalf. Here's what people think of when they think of church: "The most boring hour of my week."

When most people think of church, they think of fighting with their husband or fighting with their wife. They think of a building. Guys, there is no organization on earth that has had the influence of the church. Do you think it's an accident that our hospital is called *Wake Forest Baptist*? Hospitals, schools, nonprofits... It all comes from the gospel.

Now, what is the gospel? The gospel is good news. Some of you tonight, probably most of us, need some good news. Especially ever since COVID, we have lived in a world of bad news. I can't remember what day it was, but some day this week... The same thing happened to you.

You woke up, and however you get your news, you heard about that horrible story of what happened in Baltimore. Most of us, I'm sure, saw the video. You just go, "This is some bad news. It's a sad, tragic story." I don't think our souls were created to handle as much bad news as we have. Well, today I'm here to tell you some good news, not about what you need to do but what Jesus did.

This is helpful clarification. The gospel is good news; it's not good advice. We all want good advice. That's why you listen to the podcasts that you listen to. That's why the self-help section of the bookstore is always in the front and growing the biggest. Good advice is fine...three steps to *that*, four hacks for your marriage, seven ways to be a better parent, and three ways to get in better shape.

The gospel is something different. It's good news (we'll get into this) about what somebody did 2,000 years ago and how it can change your past, your present, and your future. Notice what it says has to happen with the gospel. Look here really quickly. This is a little awkward for me to talk about because it's what I'm doing right here, but let's look at it.

"Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved..." Those are all of the things *you're* supposed to do with the gospel. We'll talk about that in a second. ***"...if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain."***

Again, it's a little awkward for me to talk about because I'm doing it right now, but preaching is essential. Look around this room for a second. We designed this room

so you can kind of look around. Look around this room right now with me. Guys, this is an incredible room. I want to talk about it for a second, and I'll tell you why.

This room took a lot of time and a lot of money to build. This was a three-year process from finding it to our church funding it with millions of dollars to very carefully designing, particularly, how this room would feel, to the long and delayed process until, finally... We've only been here for three months. Why am I telling you all this? I want you to know this.

We designed this room for the gospel to be preached. That is literally the purpose of this room. It's interesting. As soon as we built this room, people started emailing us. "Can we do *this* event here? Can we do *that* event here? Can we do *this* event here?" This is not an event center; this is a church that is designed for the gospel to be preached, whether it's in the videos you saw, the baptisms you see, the songs we sing, or me right now.

Now, what's *your* job? My job (and I'm with you to do the other job too) is to preach the gospel; your job is to do everything else in this verse. How are you doing with that, guys? Are you standing in the gospel? A lot of us stop at receiving the gospel. Standing in the gospel speaks to what Paul David Tripp, an author, calls the "nowism" of the gospel.

He said here's the problem with most Christians. I'll talk to the Christians. I know there are a lot of us here tonight. He said the problem with Christians is Christians go, "The gospel? Yeah, that was that awesome thing Jesus did 2,000 years ago. When I die a long time from now, I'm going to be really thankful for the gospel, because I'll go to heaven and be like, 'Thank you.'"

He said that's funny, because the only thing that's missing is your life. When you stand in the gospel, it changes you. It changes your identity. It changes your priorities. It changes your community. It changes the mission and purpose you have for your entire life.

My question for you this Easter is... Let's be honest. Give me the real answer, not the right answer. Are you standing in the gospel? He says when you stand in the gospel, you're being saved. What does that mean? It means I'm becoming more like Jesus. I'm overcoming the power and pollution of sin in my life.

01 CHRISTIANITY WAS NOT DEVELOPED BY MAN BUT DELIVERED FROM GOD

Well, he wants to unpack this gospel more for us. Look at verse 3. He wants to tell us about this gospel. ***"For I delivered to you as of first importance..."*** See? This is why I'm talking about it: it's the most important thing. ***"...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."***

Paul wants to tell us where Christianity came from. What's interesting is we live in a time where everybody is obsessed with where their food came from. I know how you guys are. You shop at "Whole Paycheck," Whole Foods...whatever you want to call it. I know how you guys are. Grab the package. Flip it over. "I'm sorry. It's non-GMO, but it's not grass-fed. It's cage-free, but it's not free range." I don't even know what these words mean. You don't either. It's okay.

We are obsessed with where our food comes from. We are obsessed with our genetics. Supposedly, this whole Ancestry.com thing, and everything else, is hundreds of millions of dollars. "Swab your mouth, send it in, and we'll tell you all this history." Fair enough. It's so interesting. We're so interested in where we come from and what our background is.

Well, Paul, just for a second, wants to say, "Let me tell you where the gospel came from." He said it wasn't designed or delivered or developed by any human. We would have never thought about this. Listen to why. Every other religion (I'm not trying to be disrespectful; I just want to be very clear) outside of Christianity is the exact same. It's "I do something for God, and he rewards me. I be a good person. I do more good things than bad things, and God owes me."

Christianity says, "No. Jesus Christ does something good for you and freely gives it to you, and in response, you believe, repent, and are transformed." So, what he's saying here is that we have the Word of God that holds the gospel, and in the gospel... It's amazing. Think about this. We love the Bible here. That's why, if you come back next week and the week after and the week after that... All we do here, by the way, is just walk through books of the Bible.

It's because what God did... This is so cool. We would have never known God if he didn't let us get to know him. That's a deep thought to think about. Have you ever tried to get to know somebody who didn't want you to get to know them? Every guy in here is like, "Yeah, that one girl in high school. I tried." Right? Have you ever had that couple over? You're like, "I don't get it. Jim and Sally come over, and we've been around them for years. We ask them a ton of questions. I feel like I don't know them."

Here's why. When you're getting to know somebody, it's always more dependent on the person being known whether or not you're going to get to know them. So, God had to decide, "I'm going to let you know me." The Bible is not a book about man's thoughts about God; the Bible is God's thoughts given to man.

02 EASTER IS ABOUT THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSON IN HISTORY

Okay. Now back to Easter and the empty tomb, because this is what he's getting at. How would I define the empty tomb? The empty tomb is the most important event in the world done by the most important person in the world. So, when you think about Easter, what is it about? It's about the most important person in the world and the most important event that he did.

Now, maybe this is self-evident, but I just want to say this. I want to talk a little bit about Jesus being the most important person in the world, but I have to say this first. I hope this is not going to be a surprise to any of you, but I'm afraid it's going to be a surprise to a couple of you. You are not the most important person in the world. Some wives just hit their husband. Some husbands just hit their wife.

The way we act, we think we are the most important person in the world. In part, this is the selfie generation. I was reading this article years ago about the selfie. This is very interesting to think about, I think. They said here's what has happened with the selfie. When you take the selfie, you are the center of the world, and everything else is in the background.

This is really interesting. I'm going to give you some info that'll support this in a second. We are the most self-obsessed generation and the most miserable generation, and that's not an accident; they're connected. Non-Christian psychologists show a direct connection between how much you think about yourself and how unhappy you are. It's basically the same exact thing.

I want to show you a book. This is called *Generation Me*. This is not written by a Christian. This lady is a psychologist at San Diego State. Look at the subtitle of the book: *Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—and More Miserable Than Ever Before*. That's right.

You can't handle being the most important person in your life, and by extension... Some of you may have low self-esteem. You struggle with peer pressure. You struggle with people-pleasing. You struggle with codependence. Nobody else in your

life outside of Jesus Christ can be the most important person. They cannot handle it. I love my wife. I love my kids. They're a great spouse and great kids but crummy gods.

I'll tell you how you can make your kids anxious. Some of you are already doing this. Just make them the most important person in your life. Go ahead and put that kind of pressure on them. Do you want to make sure your spouse is always failing? I'll tell you how to do it. Make her or him the most important person in your life. They can't handle it.

But here's the problem. Let me explain this problem to us. You and I were designed (we have to) to have somebody who is better than us be more important than us. Let me explain this to you. I'll prove it to you right now, even if you're not a Christian. This is why you love to watch sports.

Could you imagine if you said, "All right, guys. NC State is in the bracket. This is so exciting...Elite Eight and all that. Let's turn it on," and you turned on March Madness, and everybody who played basketball was as good at basketball as you? You'd be like, "I hate this sport. This is terrible. The score is 4-2, and it's the second half."

Could you imagine if every time you turned on Netflix all of the actors and actresses were as good-looking as you and me? You'd cancel your Netflix subscription. I tell you that to say we can't help it, guys. We were designed to look at and celebrate someone who's better than us. We just have to get his name right. His name is Jesus.

I want to talk to you about Jesus, because it's interesting. When you think about Jesus, it's fair to ask the cynical question sometimes. It's fair to be a little bit of a cynic sometimes and to go, "Why Jesus?" He's a Galilean peasant, ostensibly. We know by the size of the well in Nazareth that he grew up with fewer than 100 people in his hometown.

They estimate that his house was maybe the size of two parking spots. So, whenever you walk out, look at two parking spots next to each other and say, "Okay. That was Jesus' house." He never ran for political office. He didn't come from a prestigious family. He didn't travel much, yet it's weird. No one has had more books written about them, more songs sung to them, and more paintings drawn of them than the Lord Jesus Christ.

Why is this? Well, three reasons. First is the claims he made. I don't have time to get into it. I'd encourage you to read the Gospels...Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They start the New Testament. In there, Jesus has these direct claims where he says, "I forgive sins" and "I came down from heaven" and "I and the Father are one." Those are the direct claims. It's like, "Okay."

Then there were the indirect claims. The indirect claims are all of the things Jesus did that show he was God, when he's not just saying, "I can forgive sins," but when he forgives someone's sin or when he accepts worship. So, people look at Jesus' life, and they see the claims he has made.

The second is his character. It's interesting. If you look at Jesus' friends and his enemies, they both had nothing negative to say about his character. Now, you know this. The deeper a friendship with someone, the more you love them. Right? But the more you know their failures and their faults and their flaws. We're so aware of them.

So, it's interesting that Jesus' friends, when they write the New Testament, say he was sinless and perfect in every way, but then even his enemies, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the scribes, all of the religious leaders of the day... That's a whole other sermon: how the people who were in religious leadership were his greatest enemies.

Anyway, their main accusation against him was that he blasphemed because he said he was equal with God, but if he really is who he says he is, then he didn't even do that, and that accusation doesn't stand.

03 EASTER IS ABOUT THE MOST IMPORTANT EVENTS IN HISTORY

What we really need to look at, what has changed people's lives in regard to Jesus and caused a response of worship is the events around Jesus' life. So, I want to talk about these events. I already read them to you. We all know events are important. Right? Some of you are hoping for an event in the future of your life. It'd be an event that your career would take off. It'd be an event that you'd meet him or her or you'd get married. It'd be an event that you'd have a kid.

A lot of us can look back on our lives... The longer you live, the more you can look back on your life, and you realize there are sometimes 5 or 10 key events in your life, and those defined your life. It was who you married or how many kids you had or the career path you took. You look at an event in the past...

Google *this* when you get home. Google "Greatest events in world history." I can't name them all, obviously, but you'll see things like the Industrial Revolution or the invention of the printing press or World War I, World War II, the American Revolution, the French Revolution...whatever.

Here's my whole point. I want you to think about this. This is really neat. Events that happened in the past before you were born affect you now. I think about this with 9/11. I think I was a sophomore in high school when 9/11 happened. I remember what it was like to fly before 9/11, and I remember what it was like to fly after 9/11. Every person who ever goes to an airport after 9/11 is affected by that event.

I want to tell you about an event... Hopefully it has been clear already, but we're going to talk about it. We've sung about it. I want to talk to you really quickly about the four events that are mentioned in the life of Christ that happened in the past but affect you today, but you have to believe and receive and stand in them. Let me show you them. Let's read it one more time. I'm going to start in verse 3.

"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ [the most important person in the world] 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."

Let's talk about them quickly...four events. For some of you, this is just going to be a reminder. Part of my job is to try to take the familiar and make it fresh, so I hope this Easter you'll stand in this anew, if you're a believer already; you'll receive this. The first thing it says Jesus did was he died on the cross for our sins.

Now, if he had just died on the cross... Respectfully, that in and of itself, being crucified, is not that big of a deal. What I mean by that is there have been tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of people who have been crucified. Being crucified, as horrible as it was, was unbelievably common.

The Romans perfected execution. This was the thought process of crucifixion. "How do we kill somebody in a way that will definitely kill them, but also do it in the most painful way possible, but also do it in the slowest way possible?" They came up with crucifixion.

Tens of thousands of people have been crucified, and we don't sing songs to them. We don't build churches around them. We don't say they're God. The thing is it says *why* Jesus died. You need to think about this for a while, because it's possible to be in church and not be in Christ.

I grew up as a Catholic boy. I was Catholic the first 15 or 16 years of my life. If you've never been to a Catholic church, it's very different than the way this is set up. One of the things you'll see when you go in there is not a cross but a crucifix. By the way, the difference between a cross and a crucifix is with a crucifix Jesus is still on the cross.

I remember seeing it. It was a strange thing to see as a 6-year-old. It was a strange thing to see as a 14-year-old. I'll be honest. Maybe I'm more dense than you are. I just didn't get it. I didn't get it that Jesus died for me. See, the reason Jesus went to the cross was to deal with your biggest problem.

Your biggest problem is not financial. Your biggest problem is not your boss or your spouse or your kids. Your biggest problem is not your lack of education. Your biggest problem is not a health concern. The Bible says your biggest problem is God's problem with you and your natural sinful state. Jesus went to the cross to solve our biggest problem.

I don't know if you noticed this tonight. It's kind of hard to see their shirts, but everybody we baptized and everybody who baptizes wears the same shirt. It's a very simple shirt. It only has four words, because we try to make the main things the plain things and the plain things the main things.

We were like, "What's the simplest way to explain Christianity? Could we do it in four words?" We think we did: "Jesus in my place." Jesus died for us. Jesus died instead of us. Jesus died in our place. See, here's what the Bible says. You need a substitute, not a second chance. A lot of people think they need a second chance. "Just let me try again. Let me try again." You don't need a second chance; you need a substitute.

If you know your Bible at all, the classic example of somebody who got a second chance was Noah. Do you remember this? It was like, "All right, Noah. We're starting over. Everybody is gone, and it's just you and your seven family members." Do you remember the first thing Noah does when he gets off the ark? He gets drunk. God is like, "Oh, no." You don't need a second chance; you need a substitute.

I have a 7-year-old son. He's pretty good at basic math. If I try to have him take an algebra test, it doesn't matter how many chances I give him; he'll never pass that test. He needs somebody else to take it for him. God desires two things of your life: that your life be perfect and your sins be punished.

Why didn't Jesus just come down on the weekend and die? I don't mean that disrespectfully. Why not come down on the weekend, die, and go back to heaven? Because he needed to live your life as an infant, as a baby, as a toddler, as a young adult, as a fully grown man, and he needed to obey in all of the places you have failed.

Guys, here's what sin does to us. Remember, it says he died for our sins. Sin does three things. Sin enslaves us. Some of you are there. The biblical word for addiction is *slavery*. The number of people over my 20 years of ministry who I've met who

cannot believe what they've gotten themselves into... They feel like there's no way to get out. What's the old saying? "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay."

The second thing sin does to you is it makes you dirty. I've talked to guys before who, after they do something they know they shouldn't do, look at something they know they shouldn't look at... Sometimes they'll say, "I feel like I need to take a shower." Why would that be? It's because their soul is telling their body they're dirty.

Sin enslaves. Sin corrupts us. It corrupts our character. It hardens our hearts. That's how we get into all of the things we get into. You don't get in there overnight; you get in there over time. Sin makes us guilty. See, guilt is to the soul what pain is to the body. It tells you something is wrong. The problem with the world today is they don't know what to do or where to go with their guilt. We can take it to Christ.

It says he was buried. That means he was really dead. Guys, if you didn't get it, the video we showed you at the beginning... When it's going the one direction, that's what the disciples felt on Friday and Saturday while he was buried in the tomb, clothed like a mummy. When it goes reverse is what they felt like when they realized the tomb was empty.

Jesus was buried, but then it says Jesus was raised. This is what we celebrate at Easter. It means we serve a living Christ. I heard a story last week about a priest (this is a true story). He was at something with about 25 nuns. He was mentoring them or discipling them or teaching them something. This is a real story.

He said, "I want to ask you a question. Who's the greatest living person? I want you to write it down. I want you to hand it in." He said of 25 nuns, only three wrote down Jesus' name. He said, "Did you forget he's alive?" How different would your life be, really, if you believed Jesus was alive?

How about your quiet time or your devotional tomorrow? How about the way you prayed? How about the way you interacted with your family? How different would it be if you really believed that? By the way, whenever I'm preparing, I always think this one question to myself: "What would it be like if we really believed this?"

Then he spends the most time talking about how he appeared. Did you notice that? Let me just read it to you. I haven't even gotten there yet, but I want to read it to you. Verse 5: ***"...and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], 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..."*** Most people think that's his half-brother James.

"...then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me." Paul is like, "I got to see him." *"For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."* After Jesus rose from the dead, the Bible tells us, he appeared physically and repeatedly to both individuals and groups, men and women, for over 40 days.

I've told you this before if you've been coming around. Christians don't believe today what the first Christians believed; we believe what the first Christians witnessed with eyewitness accounts and, therefore, believed. When we read this, this should shock us, and we should say, "I'm all in if this happened." Because if you went to someone's funeral on a Friday, and then you saw them at Trader Joe's on Sunday... "What's going on? I was at your funeral."

04 THE EASTER EVENTS REQUIRE A RESPONSE!

Here's the thing, guys. The resurrection requires a response. I want you to go back. He says he appears to Cephas. He appears to 500. He appears to James. He appears to all of the apostles. Then look at verse 8. *"Last of all, as to one untimely born..."*

In the Greek, that's the idea of a premature baby. He's like, "I shouldn't even have been born. I almost didn't make it." That's what he's saying. Paul, by the way, never got over the gospel. He says, *"...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."*

It's Easter. We try to do a version of this every time the church gathers, but I want to give you a chance to think about this Easter message no matter where you are here. Listen. If you've been a believer for years, I want to challenge you on Saturday night, the night before Easter, as we celebrate as a church family. What would it look like if you really believed this, if you really realized, "The tomb is empty; therefore, my life doesn't need to be. I have access to the living God"?

I want to talk to a whole other group of you, because here's the thing about Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is not a signpost; he is a fork in the road. I've told some of you this before. I did college ministry at Duke University to a bunch of fraternities. I had a Bible study at one point (believe this or not) in eight different fraternities. I'd get them to invite me into the fraternity meetings one time.

They'd give me, like, three minutes, and they would do this horrible introduction. "Here's a religious guy. He wants to talk." I'm like, "Oh, gosh." I'd finally get up there,

and I'd try to... "Hey, guys, hold on." I basically would say, "Hey, guys, listen. Jesus Christ is worshiped by a billion people on earth. His life splits human history in half. Would you guys be willing to do a four-week Bible study just to look at his life?"

Some of you are seeking, and I just want to say... What would it look like for you to take your next step, whatever it is? We're going to take it with you if you want to. What would it take for you to do your next step, to ask, "Man, what if this was really true?"

We had some people on Thursday night receive Christ personally in our service. I want to ask you this. Have you ever received Christ personally? I'm not asking if you grew up religious and churchgoing. I'm not asking if you're a good person. I'm not asking if you have been baptized. I'm asking if you have ever personally embraced and received Christ.

Some people have never received Christ. Do you know why? Because no one ever told them how. It's like, "How would I do that?" The Bible says right there, "Receive him. Stand in it." "How do I do that?" I just want to tell you. It's not that hard. People have been doing it for 2,000 years. It's the *ABCs*.

You *admit that you're a sinner*. It's so freeing. Do you know what you do when you admit you're a sinner? The Bible says you agree with God. It's like, "God, I've been trying to act like I'm something different than you say I am. I agree I'm a sinner and what I need is a Savior. I'm not a mistaker who needs a life coach. I don't just make mistakes and have accidents and little indiscretions. No, I am a sinner."

This is amazing. The second thing you can do is you can just *believe*. *Believe* is you transfer trust from yourself to Jesus. Another thing I used to say to college students when I would do college ministry... We'd be meeting, and I'd share the gospel with them, and I'd be wanting them to respond.

They'd say, "Well, I need to think about it," and I'd say, "Well, let me tell you something. You can believe before you get to your dorm." Just make it real. You could believe right now where you are. You don't have to understand it. I don't understand everything. You can say, "I don't understand everything." In fact, you believe so you *can* understand.

Then the third is you *confess*. You just go public with it. That's what we saw 11 people do tonight. Christianity is unbelievably personal, but it's not private. So, if you'll bow your heads, if you'll close your eyes, I want to give us a moment to do this. If that's you... Look. I think about myself all the time. I think about 16-year-old Kyle

walking into this room as a nominal Roman Catholic and not knowing what's going on. Maybe that's some of you today.

You say, "I've never heard any of this. I've never understood that Easter is about the most important person and the most important event. No one has ever asked me to personally receive Christ." Well, I'm doing that tonight. I want to ask you to personally receive Christ. I want to ask you to bank your life on the empty tomb. I want you to say, "I'm all in."

If that's you, I want you to say this with me. I want you, in your heart, to admit you're a sinner. You know what you've done. The great thing is there's nothing you can do that will keep you from the grace of God. Just tell God right now, "God, I am a sinner. I agree with you. I know I've crossed a line. I know I've done things you don't want me to do."

The second is you could just believe. Just reach out. Welcome Christ into your life. Just say, "You will be the most important person in my life. You will be the sun and the solar system of my life. I will do what those people in the baptismal did. I'll say, 'I'll go anywhere, and I'll do anything, and I'm fully trusting in what you've done.'"

I want to give you a chance tonight, with every head bowed and every eye closed. If that's you, if you would say for the first time ever you have personally received Christ, would you put your hand in the air? Would you let me agree with you and just see it? Just say, "Yes, Lord. I trusted Christ tonight." Thank you. Let's pray.

Lord, we pray for all of us. That's the amazing thing about the empty tomb, about the message of Easter, about the gospel. It's so simple we could explain it to a 5-year-old, and they could receive Christ, and it's so bottomless and deep we could spend our lives studying it, meditating on it, and thinking about it. We thank you for all this. In Jesus' name, amen.