

Behold the Lamb

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Now turn our attention to God's Word, and I would just like to state and make plain for our understanding and for the clarity of mind that when we study the Word of God, when we hear the Word of God proclaimed, we have not moved out of worship into the proclamation of God's Word. We are continuing the worship service as the Word of God is preached. That should always be our understanding and our approach as a church, as individual Christians, that the opening of God's Word is a time of worship ever as much and even driving the music that we sing. Some people will think about the music time as the worship time. The music leader as the worship leader. That's not the case. The Word of God is central to worship. The pastor who brings the Word of God is responsible to be the worship leader, and we need to have such a respect and a high view of the Word of God that we understand that whenever it is opened it is a time of worship. And so, we are continuing worship and not shifting out of worship as we open God's Word this morning.

The act of preaching is meaningless if Christ is not proclaimed. And let me add from your perspective, the act of hearing is meaningless if Christ is not received and obeyed. It is your responsibility, as we come to the scriptures this morning, to hear it and to apply it to your lives, to think deeply about your soul, particularly with the kind of message that we have before us here this morning. We are going to the Gospel of John, and we are completing a brief four week series where we have kind of taken an overview look of the life of Christ. If you thought about the life of Christ as a beautiful extended movie, we've just looked at three snapshots. We've just looked at little snapshots as we've done single messages from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And now, we are taking one more snapshot look at the Gospel of John. But, oh beloved, the message that we are going to see from John today could not be more urgent for you to hear and to appropriate and to examine yourself.

It would probably be widely agreed by anyone who's familiar with the Bible to realize that the most frightening passage of scripture is found at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 7 where Jesus said, looking forward to the day of judgment, that there will be many on that day who will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not do all of this stuff, prophecies, and miracles, and all of this stuff in your name?" Jesus will say, he said, "I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me you who practice lawlessness." In 2 Corinthians chapter 13 verse 5, it says, "test yourselves to see you if you are in the faith. Examine yourself. For do you not recognize that Jesus Christ is in

you unless indeed you have failed the test." And so, as I am fond of saying from this pulpit, for an hour, suspended as it were between time and eternity and the preaching of God's Word, as we have one more opportunity to examine our souls in light of what God's Word says. This morning I invite you, I call you, under the authority of God's word, I command you to examine yourself in light of what you are about to hear this morning, because it is too urgent to treat it any other way. Because the Gospel of John is written as a gift from God to humanity. It is written as a gift of God from His holy mind to humanity to understand, to awaken us to the only possible means of salvation from sin. Each one of us are under the weight of the recognition that we fall short of the glory of God as He has revealed it in His perfect Law. We fall short of the moral character of God with our loves, and our affections, and with what we say, do, and think. We all fall short of the glory of God. And when you read scripture you realize that God does not trifle with such violators of His holiness. This is a matter of immense consequence. Who could stand up and speak and tell stories about himself and tell jokes and get people to laugh while they're rushing down the river toward the waterfalls of eternity? Who would do that? We can't do that here this morning as we come to this providential time in God's Word from the Gospel of John. I just want to ask you to take this seriously. I ask you, I invite you, to open your heart to God's Word this morning because the gospel of John is, in one sense, uniquely written to lead us to saving faith in Jesus Christ. To give us the knowledge of Christ that is necessary to flee from our sin and to embrace the only one who can save us. And that's what we have in the gospel of John.

Look at John chapter 1 verse 29. I want to give you bookends to the Gospel to kind of help set the stage for what we are about to see. John chapter 1 verse 29. John the Baptist, who was the forerunner of Christ, saw Jesus coming to him, and he said at the time to his audience words that still ring true today, that are the trumpet call to every soul that would come under the sound of God's Word. Look at John chapter 1 verse 29. The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" There's our one single hope. "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." The writer John, and John the Baptist, as it is, presents to us, holds forth to us, right at the start, puts on center stage with the spotlight on Christ and says, "Behold this man! Behold this one who alone can take away the sins of the world. The one who alone can take away your sins." And make no mistake about it, without apology, the Apostle John is writing with an evangelistic purpose. He is not writing as an abstract, disinterested historian here who is just chronicling facts for us that we can take or leave as if we were reading a book about World War I. No, no, this word of God in the Gospel of John is written to impact us, to confront us, to save us.

Look at the end of the gospel, John chapter 20. We're just broadly setting the context for what we have to say here today. And beloved, I just plead with you to receive what is said from God's Word this morning. Look at John chapter 20 verse 30 and line yourselves up with the purposes of God in the proclamation of the Gospel of John this morning. Scripture says that "therefore many others signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book, but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." That's why the Gospel of John was written, was to lead us, and he states it

so clearly. Don't you love the clarity of God's Word? Don't you love how it just lays it all out on the table and puts the banquet out before us, and says, "Here, come, take, and eat. Come and eat the spiritual food that will give you eternal life. Come and receive the banquet. Come and receive the food which can nourish your soul. Which can save your soul. Come and believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that believing you may have life in His name." It is a promise of the full and free forgiveness of sin to repentant sinners who will receive Christ. Nothing else matters. Nothing else matters. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul? And so nothing else matters except that we would understand and be assured that we are lined up with the purposes of God in salvation.

Now, here is a question this morning. What does it mean to believe in Christ? You might think that that was an easy question to answer, that there was a superficial answer to that question. Many writers from certain seminaries will try to reduce it to such a bare mental assent to certain facts about Christ that never confront a life with sin, that never transform it with true saving grace. That's not what we stand for here at Truth Community Fellowship. We understand that there are many who think that they are saved who are not. We are concerned enough about the realities of eternity, the reality of souls, that we're not content to let people go about in that self-deception. One of the things that I love about the testimonies that you're going to hear tonight, without exception, there is going to be in the baptism waters an affirmation of everything that you hear preached today. These dear people are going to come and give testimony to the fact that "I thought I was a Christian when I wasn't. I was walking in self-deception and then the Lord actually saved me."

Well, beloved, this word from the gospel of John is written, and, in part, when you read it with any level of seriousness at all, helps you understand that the question, do you believe in Christ, is not a superficial question. It is not a moment in time bowing the knee at the altar and then moving on with life and nothing changes. Do you believe in Christ cannot be answered by, "I bowed the knee at the altar when I was eight." That is just not true. That is not what scripture leads us to contemplate. In fact, scripture teaches us that many, many, men and women will react favorably to Christ at a certain level, but they fall short of true salvation. It's frightening. It's in Matthew 7:21-23 where Jesus said, "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not?' But I will say, 'I never knew you, depart from me.'" And they're going to go off into perdition shocked. Shocked at the outcome! Shocked! "But Lord, Lord!" He says, "I never knew you. What else can I do? You don't belong in heaven because I don't know you; you don't know me!" And I would be a foolish irresponsible pastor if I thought that there weren't some in exactly that condition who were sitting in front of me today as I open this Word. It would be pastoral malpractice for me to just assume that all of you were born again truly in Christ, that the devil's self-deception has not settled on your own soul. I can't preach that way, and I'm not going to preach that way, and Truth Community will not preach that way. We want to protect people from that fate. And we love you enough, and we care about your soul enough to confront you with the possibility that maybe you're deceived, that maybe you're not in Christ.

And so, with humble dependence on the work of the Holy Spirit, we come to the Gospel of John this morning. Go back to the very first verse of the Gospel if you would. What does it mean to believe in Christ? Well, it starts with a recognition of who He is, and John, again, puts Christ on center display right from the beginning. In John chapter 1 he says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This Jesus Christ who is proclaimed in the Gospel of John is God himself in human flesh. Look at verse 14 of chapter 1. "And the Word became flesh." What Word? This Word who was with God and was God. The Word who was God became flesh. And then the rest of the gospel of John is an exposition of selected portions of His ministry. John takes the Word who was God in human flesh and displays Him so that we might believe in Him, and believe in Him unto eternal life. Believe in Him unto the forgiveness of our sins. Believe in Him unto the deliverance of our souls from that desperate judgment in which we are in danger. But all of that so far still begs the question doesn't it. What does it mean to believe in Christ?

Well, John in the middle of those framing verses that I just read, says this, John chapter 1 verse 12, John chapter 1 verse 12, he says, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God. Even to those who believe on His name. As many as received Him, as many believed in His name. They were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Somehow, God gives birth to true Christians. Somehow, believing in Christ means to receive Him. And that idea of receiving Him that we want to focus on this morning. As you read the Gospel of John, you see that John sets forth various signs, miracles, mighty works that Jesus did that authenticate the reality of His claim to be the Son of God. Jesus turned water into wine. He healed the sick. He healed the lame. He fed five thousand people with just a little bit of bread and fish. Five thousand men. There were more in the audience beyond that. Who is this Jesus? He walked on water. He raised the dead. Everything that scripture says about him was verified, authenticated, by what he did during his earthly life. There is no disputing it. This is what we read. This man of whom we read in the Gospel of John is the very Son of God. God in human flesh. This is the one to whom we are called. This is the one who alone can save us. And yet, you could believe everything I just said and fall short of eternal life. You could affirm every factual statement that I just made and still be outside the kingdom of God. You could believe everything! You could receive, and affirm, and amen the preacher. But you could affirm all of that and still fall short of what it means to really believe in Christ.

What is saving faith? What is saving belief in Christ? What does it mean to receive Him? What we're going to see as we walk quickly through the Gospel of John, is what you're going to see is that receiving Christ, saving faith in Christ, means receiving Him in three distinct ways. There are three distinct aspects of receiving Christ might be the better way to say it. I'll just give you the outline here at the start, and then you will know where we're going. You can trace the path before we go there. Receiving Christ, believing in Christ, means receiving new life, a new law, and a new Lord. New life, new law, new Lord. Scripture makes this abundantly clear, and that is the road map that we're going to follow here today.

Let's look at point number one. New life. New life. Beloved, saving faith in Christ is more than bestowing your intellectual approval on Jesus. Let's not trivialize the majesty of God by thinking that He needs our approval, that He wants our approval, that He is somehow a subject to whom we bestow our blessing. That is a reversal of divine order. Look at John chapter 3. You'll see why I say this. In John chapter 3 verse 1 there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher for no one can do these signs unless God is with him." Look at that statement. Nicodemus recognizes the signs. He comes to Christ with a certain attitude of at least feigned deference, pretending at least, to give Him praise and acknowledgment. He affirms Him as a teacher from God. He affirms Him as a worker of wonders. And you might think on a first read through the gospels that Christ would be so encouraged to get something like those words from a ruler of the Jews. Look, I say without fear of contradiction that many churches have baptized many people on a lesser confession of Christ than what Nicodemus made in verse 2. You just say something about Jesus and under you go. Well, read the passage and realize that Jesus had nothing to do with it. Is affirming Jesus on your human level true faith? Not according to Jesus.

The confrontation that Jesus makes on Nicodemus' soul in the face of what Nicodemus intended to be praise is shocking. But in verse 3, Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus comes, "Jesus you're a teacher from God! I see the signs! No one could do this unless God is with him!" And then Jesus says, "Don't fool yourself. Unless you're born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God." He is rejecting that human approval and saying this is not real faith. Nicodemus is stunned. Look at verse 4. "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" And Jesus reinforces the point. He says in verse 5, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." What Jesus is saying there is, "You must have a spiritual cleansing from the Holy Spirit if you are going to enter into the kingdom of God. Nicodemus you need to be washed. Not externally. You need to be washed spiritually. You need new life." And that is in perfect keeping with what we have already read in chapter 1 where we said that those who received Christ, or those who were born of God, born from God, born from above. He needed new life. And without it he would not enter the kingdom of heaven. That's for a ruler of the Jews, the teacher of Israel, the one who affirmed Christ as being sent from God having God with him. And Jesus says, "You're missing the whole point. You need new life, Nicodemus." You here in Legacy Hall on May 4, 2014, and whoever else hears this message, you must have new life. To receive Christ is to receive new life.

Jesus said the same thing in John chapter 4 verse 13 when he spoke to the Samaritan woman. Turn to John 4 verse 13. And this new life is a gift. It is not something that you can do on your own power. It's not something that you can invoke in your own strength. That's why you must be born from God. Look at John chapter 4 verse 10 actually. You know the story of the Samaritan woman, so I won't bother setting the whole context, but just look at verse 10. Jesus said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that says to you, give me a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you

living water." She asks a couple of questions in the next two verses. Verse 13. Jesus answered and said to her, verse 13, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but," now watch this in verse 14, "whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst, but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life." The Gospel of John presupposes that we are spiritually dead apart from Christ. That you come to Christ not as one who is approving what Jesus did, and as if you were blessing Him. The lesser does not bless the greater. We come to Christ not as those who have merit, not as those who deserve it, not as those who can demand anything from Him. You must come to Christ as one who recognizes that you are dead and you are in need of spiritual life to be given to you. If there is any sense of human pride, human deserving, when you came to Christ, in your attitude toward Christ, let me tell you, if you think you deserved it, you're not born again, it doesn't matter what else you say about Jesus. We come to Christ as those who say, "Lord, I need a gift. I need You to give this life to me which You have promised, because I happen to be in front of You as one who is dead in sin and unable to save myself."

Now, why would I make a big point about that? Because, the tendency of your sinful wicked heart is going to be to have reserved in the corner of your mind a little place where you say, "I'm not really all that bad. I'm not really completely dead. Yeah, I might need a spiritual boost here, but between Jesus and me, with God as my co-pilot we're going to be o.k." Uh, no. No. And see, it's the truth of the new birth that gives the lie to the human condition. It's the truth of regeneration that God must impart spiritual life for you to be born again. That exposes the reality of it. Here's the question beloved, as you examine yourself in the light of God's word. And you young people, you old people, for that matter, let's be clear, and straight, and honest with one another. Have you come to Christ? Has your self-confession in the presence of Jesus Christ who is to judge the living and the dead, is your self-confession one that "I come to you as one who is utterly dead in sin. I have no merit of my own, I have no life of my own. If I'm to be saved, it must be that You are going to give life to me, and I receive You on those terms. That I need life. I don't have anything to offer to you."

I used to work in a pharmacy and they had a pestle and mortar thing where they grind up the medicine, and you put it in, and you grind it until it's a fine dust. Look, that's a picture of what should be your understanding of your human pride, and your merit, and your deserving of salvation. It is the recognition that you must be born again grinds all of that into the dust of humility until there is nothing left for you to boast about. Paul said in Galatians, "I will not presume to boast about anything except Jesus Christ. Except in the cross of Christ I'll boast. Not in anything else." He said in 2 Corinthians, "We preach Christ, not ourselves. Your view toward your own souls should be "it's got to be about Christ, it's not about me." And so I ask you as one appointed by the providence of God to be the one speaking here today, you here appointed to hear this today: have you come to Christ like that? Have you come to Him in utter spiritual brokenness and bankrupt of any spiritual claim of your own? Have you come to Christ as one dead in sin, and said, "I must have new life from You. I must receive new life from You." Or, are you just a nice girl with a lot of religion at a Bible teaching church? Don't miss the difference. Don't miss the distinction, because eternal destiny hangs in the balance of how you respond to

this teaching of God's Word from the Gospel. To receive Christ means that you receive new life. To receive new life realizes that you are willing to openly and without reservation confess yourself to be one who is dead in sin. And there are a whole lot more people who want to say good things about Jesus. Out of the subset of those, there's a smaller, a much smaller group that says, "I'll say good things about Jesus, and I won't say anything good about myself," because human pride of your heart wants to reserve some kind of credit for yourself. It can't happen. You can have your pride. You can have Christ. You can't have it both ways. So what's it going to be? Where are you at before this one who says you must be born again? Christ doesn't need proud men to flatter Him. In fact, He rejects them. And I can't look into your heart. All I can do is open the word of God to you and plead with you to listen and to heed it. Have you believed in Christ as one who needs new life?

Secondly, new law. New law. I'll explain what I mean by that. New law. What rules your thinking? What is it by which you determine truth? What is it that helps you decide what's true and what's false? What is the defining standard of authority in the way that you define your worldview and your view of yourself? True faith, true saving faith receives Christ, receives His Word as the final authority in all things. And someone who is not willing to submit himself completely to that authority has no reason to believe that he's a true Christian. This is extraordinarily searching, and, yet, I can tell you beloved, and those of you who are true Christians in the audience, I can assure you that if you wrestle through these things as a believer, the spiritual clarity that it brings to your mind, and the sense of deep profound assurance that it gives to you as you wrestle through these areas is worth every ounce of spiritual effort that it takes to do so. There is clarity, there is courage, there is confidence to be found in one who has seriously interacted with God's word on these points. And the difference, beloved, and we talked about subsets, right? Think about the world of those who would follow Christ, those who are in a church today, like ours, maybe not like ours, gathered around a big entertainment show all supposedly in the name of Jesus. There's a bunch of them there. Look. Look. Understand that as a first point of discernment that not all of them are saved. That with the sheep are goats. That with the wheat are tares. And that mere external affiliation with a church, even a church like ours, is no guarantee, is no statement of where a man is truly at with Christ, whether he is a true Christian or not. Mere external affiliation with Christ means nothing if that's all the further it goes.

Look at John chapter 6 verse 10, and you'll see exactly what I mean. This is consistent with everything else that Christ has said before. John chapter 6. This is the chapter where Jesus fed the five thousand. I alluded to it briefly earlier, and I just want to give you a little bit of context. We're going to skip over John 6, and we'll save that for some time down the road when we teach through the Gospel of John, Lord willing. I just want you to see one simple thing. The crowds were attracted to Jesus because he could feed them. They liked the fact that He could fill their belly. In an age where food was not as readily accessible as it is to us today, to have somebody who could make food happen was cool. And that alleviated a lot of problems that otherwise they were going to face. So, I just want you to see the numbers. John chapter 6 verse 10. Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place, and so the men sat down in number about

five thousand. So Jesus takes these five barley loaves and these two fish. You know the story. I don't need to rehearse it for you. He starts breaking the bread; the disciples start distributing it; five thousand people eat with a whole lot left over. That was a sign. That was a display of utter deity. To make food out of nothing. To take a little loaf of bread and just multiply it is utterly outside the ability of human power. Ok, so there you are. You've got this huge massive audience that has been hearing his teaching, this huge massive audience that has been on the receiving end of one of his miracles, one of his signs, and Jesus goes on and continues to teach them. And so, again, if a twenty first century church guru showed up there, he'd say, "Jesus is doing everything right, man! The people are showing up. They're calling themselves disciples of Christ. What a remarkable revival we're seeing in our midst, people! Praise be to God!" Is that what was happening? No. That's not what was happening at all. Which is what you see as you continue to read on in the gospel.

Look at John 6 verse 53. Here's the point. We'd said new law. Receiving the word of Christ as utter authority being the mark of a true disciple. Watch what happens. Note how this separates the wheat from the chaff. Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you that unless you eat the flesh of the Son of the man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves." See it? Life, his word, his authority, I'm not making this up. That's the key thing for you to understand. That's the key thing for you to understand. I am not making this up in anything that I say today. You can see it with your own eyes from the pages of scripture. You don't have to take my word for it. I'm not a three year old kid that went to heaven and came back and telling you fancy tales. We have the word of God in front of us. That's our authority.

Verse 54. "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. He who internalizes me, in other words, I will raise him up at the last day. My flesh is true food. My blood is true drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in Me and I in him." Verse 58. "This is the bread which came down out of heaven. Not as the fathers ate and died. He who eats this bread will live forever. These things He said in the synagogue as he taught in Capernaum." Verse 60. "Therefore," watch this now, out of this massive momentum of this supposedly great external crowd, it was a great external crowd, but out of that momentum, verse 60, "many of his disciples," which is simply a word for those who were learning from him. It is not a statement, especially in this context, that they are necessarily converted. In fact, it will be shown that they are not converted. "Many of his disciples when they heard this said, 'This is a difficult statement, who can listen to it?'" They are objecting to the word of Christ. Can you imagine having Jesus Christ right in front you and saying, "No, I don't think I accept that." "Jesus," verse 61, "conscious that they'd grumbled, said, 'Does this cause you to stumble?'" Look at that. "What if you see the son of man ascending to where he was before? It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." Notice how He's putting the emphasis on the authority of His words. Verse 64, He says, "But there are some of you who do not believe." Wow! Wow! There they are learning from him, having seen the miracles, a disciple at one level, and, yet, Jesus pierces to the spiritual reality and says, "Some of you don't believe." Verse 64, "Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that did not believe and who it was that would betray him." And He was

saying, verse 65, "For this reason I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father." What was the result of that? Verse 66, as a result of this, "many of his disciples withdrew and were not walking with him anymore."

Now beloved, here's the point. From external association, it looked for all the world like these people were true disciples of Jesus Christ, genuine followers of Him. The reality of it was much different, because, follow me here, when Christ taught them things that they did not like, they walked away. They wanted nothing to do with what He taught really. They accepted it, think about it this way, oh, this is so very very important, oh, you must examine yourself in light of what I am about to say! They followed Christ only as long He said what they agreed with. When Christ spoke and said things they didn't like, they said, "I'm out of here. I'm parting ways. That's not what I signed up for." They did not believe despite their love for signs and wonders. They just up and walked away when the teaching no longer suited them. Wow. What an exposure of the wickedness of the human heart. What a parallel to the modern signs and wonders movement. "Lord, I'll take all of the signs and wonders," not that they're real today, but that's another point. "Lord, I'll take what you can give me. But I reserve," not that anyone necessarily thinks this consciously about it, but circumstances and teaching expose it in time, "but I'll reserve final judgment about what I will accept and what I won't accept." And when the pressure of truth is put on the soul, they turn and walk away. You know what that's a mark of? Someone who was never saved to begin with. Their external association with Christ was simply a goat being amongst the sheep. It wasn't real. They were not truly converted. And the reality of the false condition of their soul will be exposed on the final judgment day. And then they will cry out, "but Lord!" He'll say, "Why are you calling me Lord? You walked away when My truth was explained to you. In what sense was I Lord? Why do you call me Lord, Lord? And not, 'do what I say' Jesus said? Why this sham? Why this insult of My holy authority? Why?"

You see beloved, true faith can be recognized by the fact that it receives the Word of God, the inscripturated Word of God in the 66 books of the Bible. It can be recognized by the fact that it receives the Word of Christ and brings itself under its authority, mark this, without condition. What rules you're thinking? Don't answer that superficially. But the only thing that could possibly be true about a true Christian is the recognition that my thinking, my understanding of right and wrong, my understanding of truth, my understanding about sin and holiness, and the character of God is ruled exclusively by the holy Word of God. And that which contradicts the Word of God, I reject out of hand. If I have a different opinion, I will conform my opinion to the clear Word of God and not stand in opposition to it.

Look at what Peter said in John chapter 6. "Jesus said to the twelve," chapter 6 verse 67, I want you to see the clarity and the purpose of the Word of God, the Word of Christ, receiving it as law, receiving it as final authority to your soul. "Jesus said to the twelve, 'You don't want to go away also do you?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the holy One of God.'" There they were standing, and having gone from a crowd that would fit into an arena to a crowd that would fit on this platform. And Peter

shows the mark of a true disciple when he says, "Lord, there is nowhere else to go. I'm all in on Your word. Where else would I go?" It is a recognition of the authority of Christ and an utter submission to it.

Now, let me just say a word of pastoral encouragement to you too at this point. As you're walking through trials that are testing you to the limit, there is something going on besides the trial in that time when you're tempted to wonder what God is doing. You're tempted to question it. Some of you, as I have done in times gone by, one time in particular, "Am I even going to continue to follow if this is the trial and sorrow that following Christ is going to bring me?" Do you ever feel that way? I have. Let me help you understand what's going on at that point. The trial is not about the trial. The trial is exposing for you to see whether you are truly willing to subject yourself completely to the Word of Christ and close the back door and lock it so that you can't walk out. Have you received the Word of Christ with that level of final unconditional submission? Or do you have these mental places where you'll give yourself an out? You see, when we call people to Christ, we're calling them not simply to Him as the Savior who can save them from sin. We're calling them to come under the authority of the Word of God as their final disposition of what is true. And unless we tell people that that is what is at stake, we are leaving the door open for them to be deceived. You don't have that door open to you anymore, not after this morning. The question is, do you unconditionally receive the Word of God, the Word of Christ, as your defining spiritual authority? And if you're in that trial that I alluded to, listen: let that trial be to you the defining point in life where you say, "Yes Lord, I will follow you no matter what." You say it through sorrow. You say it through tears, but you say, "Lord, no matter what else happens, I'm not leaving. Where else could I go? You have words of eternal life." That is what that profound trial in your life is intended to bring you to, to clarify your attitude of trust and submission in Christ. And if that result is produced by that trial, then that trial has become an avenue of God's blessing to you. You can say, and rejoice through the tears, "My faith is real." God has done a real work in my life, because otherwise, I would have left a long time ago. You see, true disciples continue in the Word.

Now, let's go through these next passages quickly. John chapter 8 verse 31. The priority of the Word in true faith, the submission to the Word in true faith. John 8:31. Jesus was saying to those Jews that had believed in him, "If you continue in My Word, then you are truly disciples of Mine, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." He says, "You have to continue," having just seen people walk away because they rejected certain aspects of his teaching. Hah, ironically when He said, "You can't come to me unless the Father calls you, unless the Father draws you," they took off. Jesus said, "If you continue then you are truly disciples of Mine. This is the mark of a true disciple. They continue in my Word." Those who have taken an exit ramp off someplace, they weren't disciples, they weren't disciples, they were never disciples to begin with. They were never true Christians. In one of the Apostle John's other writings, 1 John 2:19, He said, "They went out from us, but they weren't really of us, for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us, but they went out so that it would be shown that they are not all of us." Departure is the sign not only of defection, but of someone who was never saved to begin with. When we see people who have been associated with the

church for a time, associated in their family, they grow up and they depart, the sad reality that we have to acknowledge is, you know what, for whatever the other appearances were, they were never saved to begin with. Otherwise, they would have stayed. Genuine love for Christ, true faith in Christ, receives his Word as law, as final authority.

Look at John 14 verse 15. John 14 verse 15. "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Verse 21, "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me." Verse 23, "Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word.'" Verse 24, "He who does not love Me does not keep My word." How many times does He have to say it? Once. How many times did He say it? Multiple. How important is this? Infinitely important. I think about things like what I'm about to say: people, it's sad, it's a sign of spiritual blindness and deadness. It's horribly sad to realize how casually people can have the Word of God presented to them and then just turn and walk away from it. The spiritual implications of that are enormous. You share the gospel with somebody, you present the gospel with them, and they brush it off with a wave of their hand. Ah! It is speaking spiritual volumes. Somebody comes under the hearing of the Word of God for a period of time and then walks away. "Eh, that's not my cup of tea." They might as well put on a shirt that says, "I'm going to hell. Want to come with me?" Because that's what's happening. A casual dismissal of the Word of God is the mark of somebody who was never saved, and it doesn't matter how many times they tell you, "Oh, but I accepted Christ as my Savior." "Oh, the pastor baptized me when I was eight." Out! Out with this insult to the seriousness of the eternal consequences of the gospel! Out with that! Out! Out! Out! We will not trivialize what Christ said, "If you continue in My words then you are truly disciples of mine." It's not that you are earning salvation or merit by continuing in God's Word. It's a sign that you've truly been born again. That the Spirit has done a work in your heart that has made you receptive to the Word of God. He's removed your heart of stone and given you a heart of soft tender flesh that says, "Yes, I want this Word to reign over me. Yes, I want this Christ to reign over me."

Is that where your spiritual life is at? That's the question. I can't answer it for you. I can't assume anything. All I can do is say, "Here is the Word of God" and ask the Spirit of God to work in your heart and make you to see and make you tender and responsive to it. Do you receive God's word, or do you leave room for the Word but. "I believe in Jesus, but other religions will go to heaven too. I'm a Christian, but hey, I can't judge homosexual marriage. That wouldn't be right of me. I love the Bible, but science has taught us that evolution is true." True faith, write this down: true faith submits all the mind to all the Word and stays there.

New life, new law, finally, new Lord. New Lord. Saving faith does more than hear about Christ and walk away unchanged. True saving faith does more than raise a hand in a meeting or walk down stadium stairs to go up to where, you know, other people have been trained to prime the pump by getting out of their seats and walk and follow in a reaction of mass hysteria, an emotional manipulation. Saving faith, true faith, true repentance could never walk away unchanged. Stated differently: true faith submits to Jesus Christ as Lord. True faith stated differently: true faith submits to Christ as a ruling person in your life. It's not merely a receptivity to certain theological constructs, or

memorizing two or three Bible verses. There is a celestial confrontation that takes place when a man is converted where Christ takes ownership, takes rulership over a human soul. And saving faith is the glad, knowing, understanding submission to His authority. Without reservation, without qualification, true saving faith recognizes Christ for the person that He is, God in human flesh and says, "You, henceforth, will be my Lord. Take my life. Do with it what You want. Just take me. Please take me and have mercy on my sin filled soul."

Look at John chapter 14 verse 6. John 14 verse 6, Jesus said to him, "I," the personal, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me." Personal submission to Him. Eternal life is to know the Father in Jesus Christ whom He sent. Look at John chapter 17, John chapter 17 verse 1. Jesus is praying on the verge of His crucifixion, and says, "Father, the hour has come, glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You. Even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, and to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life." Christ gives eternal life as the gift. We receive it, as a gift and not as a wage. And then He says in verse 3, "This is eternal life, that they may know You the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

As you go to the end of the Gospel, you see the climatic illustration of true faith. In the writing of the Gospel of John, this book that was written so that you would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name. Everything that has been written, the teachings of Christ, the signs of Christ, all of it has been designed to be this divine force, this divine influence on your thinking, on your heart, on your will to bring you to this point that's illustrated for you so that you can see it. So that you can also embrace it. And say, "Yes, this is what I want my heart to be."

John 20 verse 26. Actually, go to verse 24. You remember Thomas, one of the twelve called Didymus, which means twin, was not with them when Jesus came. And so the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord! We've seen the resurrected Christ." But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." In the original language, that's an emphatic statement. He said, "Unless I see this, I will by no means believe." He's pounding his fist on the table, as it were. "I will not believe this unless I see." Verse 26, "After eight days, his disciples were again inside and Thomas with them, and Jesus came, and the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst, and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas," I love the way the Lord addresses us as individual men when He saves us. Paul said, "He loved me and gave Himself up for me." Here He comes as an individual, not to a mass of humanity who can take or leave it. He comes to a man and presents himself. And he says, "Thomas," verse 27, "reach here with your finger and see My hands. Reach here your hand and put it in My side. Stop being unbelieving, but believing." What does saving faith look like? What's the climax of this book that is designed to lead us to eternal life? Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord, and my God. My Supreme One. My Master. My king. To You I bow my allegiance. To You, I irrevocably devote my affection. There will be no other besides You, my Lord, my God." And it is right after that confession that John says, "These things were written so that you would believe."

And through the wonder of the inspiration of scripture, this great Gospel has brought us face to face with Christ ourselves and says, "What will you do with this One?" Thomas received Him as Lord and God. Christ will save you from your sin if you receive Him on those same terms. Lord and God. Christ offers you the free full unconditional forgiveness of all your sin. He offers you the gift of eternal life, but he doesn't leave it to you to determine and state the terms of engagement. "He's my teacher. Oh, I'll follow him as long as it suits my fancy, as long as I get what I want, and don't trouble me with too much doctrine in the process." The man, the woman, the child who tries to have Christ and yet hold Him at a distance, says, "You can't go there. You can't have that part of my life," has reason to question whether they're saved at all. In fact, there is no reason for you to think you are saved if that's you. If you are consciously rejecting the Lordship of Christ over an area of your life, you are not a Christian! Because true saving faith receives Him as Lord and God. Those are the terms of engagement.

New life, new law, new lord. Jesus Christ confronts us, confronts you, with a total confrontation of everything that you are and says, "I will be gracious to you, but you must bend the knee. You must receive me as Lord and God." What's your verdict? Christian, you should be rejoicing if you can identify these affections and motions in your heart. If you can see that spiritual reality animating your spiritual life. "I am born again. I do love God's Word, I do submit my life to Christ. Oh, I wish I was perfect. I'm not. I fall short. I get that, but the great desire of my life would be nothing more than to be found pleasing to my Master." If that's you, rejoice. All of today's message has simply described a work that God has done in your heart. And He's been gracious to you. Give thanks. You should have, of all people, the most deep assurance. Join with me in rejoicing in the Gospel. A merciful Christ has given you life that's worth more than ten thousand trials in this life.

But if that's not you, what will you say? What do you say? Preserving your lusts, preserving your sin, preserving your autonomy, even if it produced ten thousand blessings for you from now until the day of your death, it's going to seem like an awfully cheap exchange when Christ turns you away. There's no option here. There's no alternative here. Lord and God, receive Him for eternal life. He's offered to you in the gospel now. Don't walk away. Don't walk away! Bend the knee and receive the blessing.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we commend these things to you. New life, new law, new Lord. Those of us who are saved, or those who were dead in sin, and, yet, You made us alive in Christ. We had our own thoughts about the world, but now we submit them to Your word and ask that You would claim every thought captive in obedience to Christ. And Lord Jesus, we're not simply after a theological construct here. This isn't about simply memorizing Bible verses and getting a prize at the end of the season. No. No. No. Lord Jesus, You are a real living person. And we bring our will, and our allegiance, and our affections, and we submit them to Your marvelous majesty and Your marvelous authority. We gladly give ourselves over to You. You would have us after all that we have done in sin against You?

You would still have us and receive us? What kind of mercy, O Christ, is this! Thank you. Praise be to Your name. And I pray Lord, that those who have had their hearts exposed as false disciples, no matter how long they've been in the church, that You would help them humble themselves before Your sovereign majesty and receive new life, confess the fact that they have withheld their final allegiance from You, but no more. But no more Lord. Take Your word. Apply it to their heart, and capture their soul for Yourself, even as You did mine and many others in this room. All is vain unless Your Spirit gives us help. And so we humbly commit all of these things to You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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