



EASTER

Stories of Hope, John 20

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do, or maybe somebody around you does you can look on with—I invite you to open with me to John 20. It’s good to be together on Easter. I have a concern that for many people, Easter Sunday is kind of a religious routine. We go to church, hear some songs, listen to a sermon on the resurrection of Jesus and maybe spend some time with friends or family. Then we go back to life as normal on Monday. I’m zealous for today to be different than that. I have prayed that the next few minutes would not be a normal Easter.

I want you to picture two scenarios with me. Scenario #1. Imagine sitting in your living room, watching the news on TV or flipping through the news on your phone, and you see a report that pancreatic cancer is the most deadly cancer in the world. You hear the facts that it is tough to diagnose. It often doesn’t appear until it’s too late. It kills 95% of the people who have it, usually within six months. Some people die within days of being diagnosed. Imagine hearing that and thinking, “What a horrible disease.” Then you swipe over to a different app, or switch the channel to something else.

Then imagine scenario #2: In this scenario, you’re sitting, not in your living room, but in a doctor’s office after a physical, waiting for your results from a routine scan. The doctor comes in, sits down, looks across the desk at you, and says, “I don’t know how to tell you this, but you have pancreatic cancer.” That news now hits you a lot differently than it does in the first scenario, right?

Here’s the deal. The news in the first scenario was true. The facts were there. You believed them. But in the second scenario, that news isn’t just true—it’s personal. It shakes you to the core of your being. That news changes everything about your outlook on life and death. That’s what I’m praying will happen in the next few minutes. I don’t want anybody to hear about the resurrection of Jesus and think, “I guess that’s true. The facts are there. I believe them”—then flip the channel on the rest of your life. I have prayed that in the next few minutes you might be shaken at the core of your being, that you might hear this news about the resurrection of Jesus and you might realize that this changes everything about your life—and death.

Just to let you know where all of this is headed, a few minutes from now I’m going to invite people all across this room to trust Jesus to change your life. I know there are various friends or family

members who are here today. Maybe you say you're not a Christian. Maybe this is your first time in the church. Maybe you've come to church many times—maybe even this church many times. Regardless, today I'm going to invite you to put all your hope and all your trust in Jesus.

This is not just for those of you who would say you're not a Christian. There are others of you who would say that you are a Christian. You have called yourself a Christian, but the reality is you don't personally know Christ. You've attended a church—maybe this church for many years. At various points in your life, you have gone through some motion of Christianity, but if the truth were told today, Jesus is not your life.

So today at the end of our time, I'm going to invite you to leave behind nominal Christianity—Christianity in name only—and trust in Jesus as your life. In fact, let me pause right now and pray for you.

God, I pray that through Your Word—not through my words, but through Your Word—I pray that in the next few minutes You would bring life to people all across this city where we're gathered right now. I pray that by Your Spirit, in unexpected ways, You would shake us at the core of our beings, that You would show us the hope that is found in Jesus and that You would bring many people to eternal life in Him. God, only You can do this, by Your Spirit. I pray that You would do this, in Jesus' name. Amen.

In John 20, you have the story of Jesus' resurrection told from the perspectives of three different people whose lives were shaken and totally changed by the resurrection of Jesus. I want you to hear their stories—but also stories of people today, right here in Washington, who 2,000 years later have had their lives changed by Jesus in the same way.

1. I was hurting and Jesus gave me hope.

The first person we hear from in John 20 is a woman named Mary Magdalene. She is not to be confused with Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary Magdalene was a woman whom Jesus had healed long before this (Luke 8:2), who had followed Him ever since. She was present at Jesus' trial. She was there when Jesus was crucified on a cross. Now, a couple days later, early in the morning while it was still dark, Mary came to Jesus' tomb. When she got there, she was shocked, because the stone in front of the tomb had been rolled away. She immediately assumed that Jesus' body had been stolen, which apparently was not an uncommon thing in that day. Listen to her story, starting in John 20:11:

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." ¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

We can imagine that, in her tears, she wasn't able to recognize Jesus. We know that she was not expecting in any way that He would be alive. Resurrection was not even in the people's worldview at that point. This was the farthest thing from her mind. Verse 15: *"Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.'"* If only she knew how responsible this guy was for that body not being in the tomb! *"Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned and said to him in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means Teacher)."*

Feel the weight and wonder of this scene. Here's Mary Magdalene, this woman whom Jesus had healed, a woman who had gone from being unclean in the culture around her to being clean, to having new life—only to see the One she had followed be murdered in the most violent form of death imaginable in that day. Think of the horror she had witnessed, the grief she was experiencing. All of her hopes had been dashed. All of her joy had been ripped away. Now she had come to honor Jesus in His death and she thinks somebody has stolen His body.

Do you ever feel like when it rains, it pours? Have you ever been at a point in this world where it feels like your hopes have been dashed? Your joy has been taken away? Have you ever gotten to a point where you look around and think, "This is not what I would have planned." Have you ever experienced grief so deep that it's impossible even to put it into words? Have you ever felt alone in the middle of it all? I've got a feeling that most of us can identify at some level—maybe many levels—with the hurt we can only imagine in Mary.

Here she is, completely alone, standing at this tomb, weeping, unable to be consoled by even angels, much less some gardener, until the supposed gardener says one word. I love this. All Jesus says is her name, "Mary." His voice was just as recognizable as a husband's voice is to his wife or a mother's voice is to her child. The voice of Jesus echoes in her heart and she turns. With shock and surprise, she says literally, "My dear Teacher!" In an instant she goes from grief to gladness. In an instant she goes from sorrow to joy.

So Mary's story at the resurrection of Jesus is this: "I was hurting and Jesus gave me hope." This is the point of Jesus' resurrection. This world we live in is full of sorrow and hurt, sin and sadness, unmet desires and shattered dreams, unexpected disease, inevitable death. But Jesus came to conquer it all. The reason Jesus went to the cross in the first place is because of sin, sorrow and death in the world that separates us from the goodness of God. Because of our sin, we experience these things. We've all been separated from God. It looks different in each of our lives, but sin is what separates us from God.

Jesus came to change that. Jesus came to die on the cross for our sin, to pay the price of sin for us. He took upon Himself the full force of sin and death, and then on the third day He rose from the dead in victory over sin and death so that we might have hope. No matter what this world brings you, no matter

how this world hurts you, you can know that through Jesus, sin, sorrow and death will not have the last word. Jesus has come to us, right where we are, in the midst of our struggles, hurts and pain. Just like He did with Mary, He meets us here and in the middle of our hurting He gives us hope.

That's Mary story—and she's not alone. I invite you to hear Shalon's story of how hurt was transformed into hope one Easter Sunday a couple years ago.

[Video testimony @ 12:43] Growing up, my home was very dysfunctional. Both my parents were always fighting and they really couldn't take care of me. I was sent to her family members in Peru, where I never really had any protection, so I was left very open to any type of sexual abuse. It was almost like I was a magnet for it.

When I came back here to the United States, my home was a mess. By the time I was 17, I had decided to move out, drop out of school and get my GED—because I didn't want to be at home. I don't know why my mind thought it was all I was good for, but I decided to go into dancing. It took a really big emotional toll on me. I was very broken and lost.

I had all these experiences with drugs and drank from a very young age. I ended up pregnant and had to go back into my parents' home—which I did not want to do. I wanted to be independent. But I needed their help. I got clean and had my son, but then went back into dancing again.

One day I was on my knees, crying, “God, help me. I don't know what to do anymore.” I thought, “I have to clean up my life. Before I can do this right, I have to get off drugs and find another job. Until I figure this out, I can't go to church, because God's not going to take me.” I was wrong. That's not the truth. But I didn't know that.

I went into a detox center and when I came out, I met a guy. There was something different about him. I now realize that he had Christ. I said, “Hey, can I go with you to church?” I started coming and every single time I heard a sermon, it was like God was revealing Himself. Everything that was being said, I had never heard before.

On Easter 2014, I prayed to accept Christ into my life. Now Christ is the center of my life. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). He's the ultimate Lover and He will love you like nobody can ever love you. He will heal you. He will restore the years the locust has eaten (Joel 2:25-27). He has radically changed everything.

2. I was doubting and Jesus showed me truth.

Some of you may think, “Okay, that sounds great. But that's pretty subjective. Just because somebody has an experience doesn't make it true. After all, there are millions of people in the world who have had other experiences in other religions. So maybe Jesus works for Mary Magdalene or Shalon, but

that doesn't mean Jesus works for everybody. Islam, Buddhism, atheism, agnosticism—it's all just a matter of subjective preference.”

But is it? I mean, that sounds good at first, and it certainly appeals to a world that views religion in terms of preference and opinion, but when you pause for a moment and actually think, you realize the resurrection of Jesus is not a matter of subjective preference at all. It's a matter of objective truth. Either Jesus did rise from the dead, or Jesus did not rise from the dead. That's not a question of preference or opinion. That's a question of truth—and it's a really important question.

The reality is, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then we are wasting our time on Easter Sunday. This whole thing is a sham. It's a lie and Christians are fools. The Bible itself says that followers of Jesus are to be pitied among all people if Jesus did not rise from the dead, because they've based their lives on a lie (1 Corinthians 15:17-19). In other words, if you're not a Christian today, and Jesus did not rise from the dead, then feel sorry for Christians.

But if Jesus did rise from the dead, then that has huge ramifications for every single one of our lives. This is the One Who taught that He was God in the flesh, that the only way to come to God is through Him. Then He rose from the grave to prove it. He did what no one else in all of history has ever done or would ever claim to do: dead for three days, now alive, never to die again. Don't miss this because everything hinges on this. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then we don't have to worry about a thing He said. But if Jesus did rise from the dead, then we must listen to everything He said.

This is not a question of preference or opinion, but of truth. Did Jesus rise from the grave? Most people think that the burden of truth in that question is on Christians, that followers of Christ need to give evidence that Jesus rose from the grave. But I don't think that's completely the case. Sure, of course, there's a burden of proof on those who believe in Christ to know why they believe Jesus rose from the dead, but there's also a burden of proof on those who don't.

That's because there's no question, even among the most secular of scholars, that around 2,000 years ago an entirely new religious community and movement was formed virtually overnight, and immediately hundreds of people started claiming that Jesus had risen from the dead—even when it meant they would die for claiming that. It was a fast-growing movement that now makes up what some estimate is about a third of the world. So how do you explain that? If you don't believe in the resurrection of Jesus, then there's a burden of proof on you to provide some other plausible account for how this movement called the church started practically overnight.

There are various explanations out there. Some people believe Jesus didn't even die on a cross, much less rise from the grave. Many Muslims, for example, believe it was merely a man who looked like Jesus who was crucified that day. This is a theory invented by Mohammed six centuries after the crucifixion occurred.

Others believe that it was Jesus on the cross, but He didn't actually die there. Instead He was just hurt really, really, really, really badly. He fainted and went unconscious, so people just thought He was dead. This is an explanation that assumes Jesus went through six trials, no sleep, a brutal scourging, thorns thrust into His head, nails thrust into His hands and feet, a spear thrust into His side, after several hours on a cross. Then He fainted, was wrapped in grave clothes, put in a tomb with a stone rolled over the entrance that was guarded by Romans soldiers. So He subsequently regained consciousness, nudged the stone away from the darkness of the tomb, hopped past the guards who were standing by, and coolly went on His way. That is probably not the most plausible explanation.

Others maintain that the tomb was not empty. The disciples and Mary just went to the wrong tomb, so ever since that day everybody's been going to the wrong tomb. "If only someone would check next door..."

Others allege that the disciples were just delusional, hallucinatory at best, when they claimed they had seen Jesus alive after He died. But as we mentioned earlier, even the thought of resurrection from the grave was virtually inconceivable in both Greco-Roman and Jewish thought in the first century. Yet hundreds of people suddenly claimed to have seen Jesus—some of whom ate, drank and talked with him. Hallucinations don't normally eat and drink.

In addition to all of that, it wasn't in the best interest for these people to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus, knowing that if they did they could and would lose their lives for it. Pascal said, "I believe the witnesses that get their throats cut." This is why N.T. Wright concludes, "The early Christians did not invent the empty tomb and the meetings or sightings of the risen Jesus. Nobody was expecting this kind of thing. No kind of conversion experience would have invented it. To suggest otherwise is to stop doing history and enter into a fantasy world of our own."

All of this leaves us with one other possible explanation: Jesus died on the cross and actually rose from the grave. You say, "Well, all of that doesn't prove that a real physical resurrection of Christ caused this radical shift in history." What did, then? There's a burden of proof on each one of us here; a step of faith for each one of us. And the reality is we're not the first people to want proof of the resurrection of Jesus.

Listen to the second story in John 20 about a man named Thomas:

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

Thomas gets kind of a bad rap here because of his doubts and questions. But personally, I'm pretty thankful God put somebody like Thomas in the story to do a reality check for all of us. I don't want

to base my life on a lie. The last thing I want to do is encourage anybody else to base their lives on a lie. So listen to what happens to Thomas:

²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”
²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Do you hear Thomas’ story? Mary’s story is, “I was hurting, and Jesus gave me hope.” Thomas’ story is, “I was doubting, and Jesus showed me truth.” This is so encouraging. It is not bad to doubt and ask questions. Jesus doesn’t say to Thomas, “Stop doubting and just believe.” Instead, Jesus says, “Stop doubting and believe,” as He shows Him the evidence of His love for him in nail-scarred hands and a spear-pierced side. Jesus doesn’t call us to a blind faith to step out into nowhere. Jesus calls us to reasonable faith, to faith based on truth—and He does it with grace.

It’s just like He did in the life of another man in Mark 9:24 who was filled with doubts. He cried out to Jesus, “Lord, help my unbelief.” It’s just like He has done with numerous people who have dared to ask, “Is the resurrection of Jesus actually true?” Thomas is not alone.

Let me introduce you to Ali Ganji, a physician here in Washington, whose story moves from doubt to truth.

[Video testimony @ 25:17] My name is Ali Ganji. I’m a physician and my specialty is rehabilitation after catastrophic illnesses and injuries. I was born in Iran and my parents were secular Muslims. But I was influenced by an uncle who was a fundamentalist Muslim clergy. I was always interested in sciences, so when I was 16, I immigrated to the United States. By the time I went to college at Georgetown University, I started doubting my faith. I started doubting the existence of God and doubted even the possibility of an afterlife.

As a Muslim, I was always unsure of where I was going to go and whether the good I did was good enough to make it to heaven. Then God’s divine radar detected me and I met a couple of students who were born again Christians. At first I was not interested at all in their message, because I thought I’d heard the message before. I didn’t realize that Christianity is not a religion—it’s a two-way relationship with the God of the universe, and these people had that two-way relationship with the God of the universe, which is the way God originally designed us before the fall.

So I started investigating this very, very thoroughly, hoping that I could prove them wrong. But there is a preponderance of historical evidence that proves that Christ indeed rose from the dead after three days. Then I saw all the evidence in the Old Testament and New Testament of the prophecies that

have come true. Ultimately I saw the transformation of human lives supernaturally by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The other thing I didn't understand was that there is passive sin as well as active sin. The Bible says, "Whatever you didn't do for the least of these people, you didn't do it for Me." So all of us build up a sorry record of passive sin that we cannot pay for. We need a Savior to pay for our sins. I ultimately could not fight this anymore. I fell on my face at the foot of the cross and gave my life to Jesus.

That truly transformed my life, which is why I know that this is not just my wishful thinking. This is an objective transformation that is done by none other than the God of the universe, when one is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The transformation that I have undergone is so real that I know it's not just a placebo or my own wishful thinking. It is God's truth.

3. I was dead and Jesus gave me life.

These stories lead to the last part of John 20, where the author of this Bible book, John, writes these words:

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

What's most interesting about this last verse in particular is the emphasis that John puts on that word "believe." We see it twice: "*So you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*" In this Bible book named after John, he uses this word over and over and over again. This is so important, because this is where the message of Christianity really is radically different from every other religion in the world.

We don't have a list of things to do, boxes to check off, rituals to follow. No, here we simply have truth to be believed. This is the question we're confronted with on this day: do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead? If you don't, if you would not say "yes" to that question, then there is a burden of proof that is on you. This is too important simply to put off. What then is the better explanation? This is not a matter of religious preference. This is a matter of truth and eternity is dependent on a right answer to this question.

But even if you say, "Okay, yes, I believe Jesus rose from the dead," we need to understand what the Bible means by belief. I want to urge you to listen real closely here, because so many people in our culture who go to church would say they believe in the resurrection of Jesus. On this Easter Sunday, many people are gathering in churches to celebrate their supposed belief in the resurrection. But there are multitudes of people here and in churches like this one, right now, who believe in the resurrection of Jesus, but who are not followers of Jesus and do not have eternal life with Jesus. You say, "Is that

possible?” Absolutely, it’s possible. The reason I say that with full confidence is because even the devil himself believes in the resurrection of Jesus—and he’s not a follower of Jesus. He does not have eternal life with Jesus.

If the devil himself were here today and I were to ask him, “Do you believe the Bible is the Word of God?” he would say, “Yes.” If I were to ask him, “Do you believe Jesus is the Son of God?” he would say, “Yes.” If I were to ask him, “Do you believe Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead?” he would say, “Yes.” If I were to ask him, “Do you believe Jesus is the only way to be saved from sin?” he would say, “Yes.” If I were to ask him, “Will you commit to live a good, decent, moral life, go to church, even get involved in leadership, even be on staff in the church?” he would say, “Yes.” Because you can believe and do every single one of those things yet not be a follower of Jesus and not have eternal life with Him.

Do you know what the key question is that would change everything in a conversation like that with the devil? Or the key question that changes everything in every one of our lives? The key question is: Is Jesus your life? In the words of Thomas earlier, “Is Jesus your Lord and your God? Do you repent and turn aside from your own rule in your life and do you believe—do you trust—in Jesus as your Lord and your life?” The devil, when asked that question, would say, “Absolutely not.”

Scores of people—even scores of people who identify themselves as Christians in the church—would look at their lives, and if honest, would say, “Yes, I believe in Jesus with my mind, but I am not following Jesus with my life as my Lord and my God.” Yet this is John’s story, and it’s the story of any and every true follower of Jesus. “I was dead, then Jesus gave me life.” *“These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*

I want you to hear one more story—Nobel’s story. Nobel spent years in the church and almost all of that time, he would have told you he was a Christian. Without question, culturally he was. Did he believe in the resurrection of Jesus? Sure, ever since he was a kid. Was he involved in the church? Yes. But had he turned from himself to trust in Jesus as his Lord and his life? Listen to Nobel’s story.

[Video testimony @ 34:15] My name is Nobel. I’ve been a member of McLean Bible Church for about ten years now. I was raised in a Christian home and went to church every Sunday. I heard the altar call every Sunday and heard the gospel presented clearly each week. At about seven I finally believed that Jesus was the Son of God. He was the only way to get to heaven. But for the next 23 years, I lived my life basically apart from God. I didn’t invest in my spiritual life. I called myself a Christian, because of that sinner’s prayer I’d prayed as a boy.

I was successful. I was married. I had a business and a degree. I was doing well. I could finally afford to buy all the things I ever wanted and was flirting with all the pleasures of this life. I secretly had

sins that chained me down—stubborn habits I’d had since I was a boy. But all in all I thought I was a pretty good guy.

Then at 30 years of age, my business, which was successful until then, and my marriage, which was successful also, both came to a halt. I was bewildered, wondering what was happening. God had blessed me for so many years. Why was He stopping now? But in all reality, I was honest with myself at that point and realized there were things I was doing that were displeasing to God. My lustful eye, my overindulging in food and drink, my pride, my love of money and other things—these were really my masters, not Jesus.

At the perfect time, my wife lovingly suggested it was time I read the Bible all the way through in its entirety. So for the first time in my life, I was willing to do that. I bought a one-year chronological Bible and started my journey through the Bible. As I read the Bible, I quickly discovered in the Old Testament that God is to be feared, honored and respected. He’s not to be toyed with. He’s a holy God. Then as I got to the New Testament, I recognized that Jesus was merciful and forgiving and loving, however, He was still just as demanding of our obedience. He said, “The one that has My commandments and obeys them is the one who loves Me.” He said, “If you love Me, you will obey My commands.”

At that point I realized that believing in Jesus and obeying Jesus are one and the same. They’re two sides of the same coin. You can’t separate them. To separate obedience from belief is damnation. It’s either a works-based salvation, or it’s a cheap grace, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer called it. So through reading the Bible, God convicted me of the things I was doing that were sinful, and He gave me the courage to finally fully and completely surrender my life to Jesus.

I got on my knees and asked for forgiveness. I repented and turned from my sins, then Jesus broke the chains of addiction and the stubborn habits in my life. He gave me true freedom. I’ve been following Him now for 15 years. So, when did I become a Christian? Was it when I was seven? Only God knows that. But what I do know is I didn’t start to follow Jesus until I was 30 and now I’m a true follower of Jesus. That’s how I define myself.

So my question is: what is your story? Not just the person beside you, behind you, in front of you, not just these people in John 20 or these people in these videos. Right where you’re sitting, what is your story? When you boil it down, there are really only two potential stories here, two potential responses—and both involve a step of faith.

One potential story is for you to turn away from Jesus. You may choose to say, “I don’t believe that Jesus rose from the dead. I’m going to bank my life forever on Jesus not having risen from the dead.”

Or maybe you'll say, "I'm going to believe it, but I'm just going to believe it culturally. However, I'm going to keep Jesus at arm's distance. I'm not going to follow Him as my Lord and my life." Either way, you're saying the same thing: "I turn away from Jesus in my life." So that's one potential story.

The other potential story is to say, "I trust in Jesus as my life." It's to say with Mary and Shalon and scores of other men and women, "I was hurting, then I trusted in the One Who conquered sin and death to bring me hope." I urge you, amidst the inevitable hurts in this world, trust in Jesus as your ultimate hope in life and forever. I promise, the resurrected Christ will prove Himself faithful.

Along these lines, you could say with Thomas and Dr. Ganji, "I was doubting and He showed me truth. God loved me enough to come to this world, flesh and blood, to demonstrate His love. The evidence is there in what He did on the cross for my sins and in the resurrection from the grave." What more proof do we need of God's great love for you? Trust in Jesus today. Don't just trust in Him as a cultural crutch, so you become a nominal Christian—a Christian in name only—which is no follower of Christ at all.

Along with John and Nobel and countless others over the course of the last 2,000 years, trust in Jesus to bring you from death to life, now and forever. Is this your story? Are you trusting in Jesus as your life right now? I want to ask every person who can hear my voice, are you trusting in Jesus as your life, such that you know if you were to die today—knowing none of us is guaranteed tomorrow—that you would have eternal life with God?

There is no more important question in the world for you to answer than this. Today, if you have any question about this—if your heart does not resound when you hear that question, saying, "Yes, Jesus is my life!"—then today, I want to invite you to find life in Him. He loves you. He wants you to know His hope, His truth, His life, free from the penalty and payment of sin and death forever.

So in just a moment we're going to sing, "Trust in Jesus." When we start to sing, I want to invite people—from the first note that is played, from the first word that is sung—to step out from where you are, to make your way to the front of this room or wherever you are. And as you're standing there, as we're singing together, I want you to be saying with Mary and Thomas, John and Shalon, Dr. Ganji and Nobel, "Right here, right now, I trust in Jesus as my life."

Guests, friends and family members, nominal Christians, even church members who've called yourself a Christian when you came in today—thinking others needed Christ, but now realizing you need Christ—whoever you are, please don't let pressure of any kind keep you from coming to Christ as your life. Don't be thinking, "What will my friends or family think if I come down? What will the other members of the church think that have been here all these years?" We've said this before—if they're Christians, they will praise God that you are coming to Christ. Don't let pressure or pride keep you from

coming down here. Don't let anything keep you from coming and confessing the resurrected Jesus as your Lord and your life today. There is nothing more important than this.

I did a funeral on Friday for a couple, a husband and wife, who died tragically in a car accident. One minute everything was great. The next minute she was instantly gone. He died moments later. None of us is guaranteed another moment. Trust in the resurrected Christ to give you life now.

Let me pray. Will you bow your heads with me?

God, I pray that right now You would give courage to people of all ages and stages of life to find hope in You amidst the hurts of this world, to find truth in You amidst the lies of this world and to find life in You that overcomes death forever. God, please change stories and lives right now I pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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