

One of the most compelling things for me, in my own journey towards Jesus, was that I had this thing in my mind, because not really being raised in the church, of what a Christian looked like and what it was. And for me, it was always an upper middle class white republican, you know what I'm saying? And that's kind of what a Christian was. And then, one of the most compelling things for me is when I started trying to seek out who this God was and who Jesus was. There was no rhyme or reason to it. And what I mean by that is, there were people who had gone through these really horrific lives of struggle and disease and hurt and pain and rejection, and they came to know Christ. But then, there were these people that I met, who never struggled at all; they kind of just fluttered through life unscathed and yet they came to know Jesus. Then I knew these people who I wouldn't consider very smart, but they loved Jesus very much. And then, I met people who had Ph D's in fields that I can't pronounce, and yet they had this strong love for Jesus. And then, there were wealthy people; and then, there were poor people. There were people who grew up in the church and didn't stray away; and then, there were people who stepped into church and had their lives changed for ever. And then, there were people, and you heard it here, and I want you to hear the message, there were people who grew up in church their whole life but never met Jesus and then one day did. There seems to be no rhyme or reason to it. He just calls. He just saves.

And I'm sad that you didn't get to hear all the stories; there were such beautiful stories told. I'm sad that you didn't get to hear all of them, because there was this one little girl who said, "Man, I grew up in an abusive home, and I've spent my entire adult life feeling dirty and like I was impossible to love, but Jesus..." Right? I mean, that "but Jesus..." line keeps being the line. So, we're going to celebrate tonight. We're going to celebrate, not anything that we've done, because the irony of all these stories is that we didn't do any of it, we're not here to pat ourselves on the back. That would be a joke. We're here to say, "Look what God has done and is doing among us. Who are we that we get to witness such beautiful things? Who are we that we get to live out such beautiful things?" On the line of people who have grown up in church but have needed to be saved from it, I want you to see one more story before we sing "Holy, Holy, Holy." The story of a husband and wife with five boys who have been attending the Village for a year or two now. And their story is another similar one, one of growing up in church and trying to get all the Scripture thing down. If they could just live this way, they would be blessed. But somewhere over the past year, God's been molding them, saying, "No, no, no. I'm the treasure. Not stuff, Me. The treasure you get is not just external blessings; the treasure you get is Me." It's a beautiful story. Here it is....

We'll be done in just a few moments. If you read last week, if you're a guest with us tonight, we've been preaching through the Book of Hebrews. Over the last nine weeks, we got to about the middle of chapter 5 last week. But last week we read these words, and I think you've seen a picture of it tonight, so I want to read them for you again. Starting in Hebrews 4:14, it says this, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

I think everyone living has this moment, whether it be late at night or in your car or after some monumental mess up where we come face to face with who we really are. I never met anyone who came face to face with who they really are and liked what they saw, ever. I've only met liars, alright? So, I've never met anyone who came face to face with what really is in the core of who they really are who liked that. In that moment, two things happen, whether it be in your car or

late at night or when you come face to face with the reality of what's really going on inside of you. When people come face to face with that, a lot of them have a tendency to believe this way: "Well, if this is who I am and there is a God, then we must be opposed to one another, because I'm such a mess up and He's God. So, there's no way I could come to God, because God probably wants to destroy me. He wants to destroy me because of the things I've been." And their reaction to seeing who they really are is not one of "Oh, I need a God," but it's, "Oh, if there is a God, I had better run from Him, because the things I have done surely have upset Him. And it's only a certain amount of time before He destroys for the things that I've done." And I can list a whole slew of guys that I currently hang out with and drink coffee and non-alcoholic beer with that are there, that are in that place where they're going, "Not me. If there is a God, I...man, I don't think you get where I've been."

And then, you get this other way that you've gotten to watch tonight, these people who wake up and they're going, "You know what? I'm a good church kid, but that's all I am." Or you get these people who wake up and go, "Something's wrong with me." You get these people who wake up in the middle of their sins, in the middle of a thousand different stories...and these videos that we're showing, I think we're going to show one a week for the next twenty weeks or so. You're going to see everything from a poor girl whose soul was just devastated after several abortions, a guy who God's delivering out of the gay lifestyle. You're going to see all these stories of people who have been rescued. There are people who have woken up in the middle of their sins and instead of running from, they ran to. In that moment, where everything felt wrong in the soul, instead of going, "God and I must be diametrically opposed. God must be against me," they said, "No, I'll run towards Him, for He is my only hope." And that's what we're celebrating in here tonight. And maybe you want to know what we're singing about. And listen, it wasn't thirteen years ago that I sat in a chair just like you and watched something very similar to this and then left and mocked it, alright? So, feel free to mock it when you leave. In fact, if you got something good, e-mail it to me. I'll use that stuff. I mean, I poke fun of us all the time. But I'm telling you that what you got to see tonight is people who didn't run from Him, they ran towards Him.

How? Because there's a question of justice that has to be answered here. If God is just, if He is good, if He is right, how can He just forgive sins? I mean, we would never put up with that from anybody else. I mean, if there was some judge in Austin who had a definite guilty man in front of him, and he just said, "Oh, you're sorry? Okay, cool. You're clean," we'd be in an uproar. You could get killed for that kind of stuff in Texas. That might work up east, but it ain't happening here. So, how's it possible? Well, it goes back to the Hebrews text, the high priest.

Now, when I first started trying to figure out what was real and what wasn't, started trying to pursue Jesus, it was the early '90's. It's hard to believe that was sixteen years ago, isn't it? Well, during that time, I started really paying attention to church, and all these old hymns were great to sing tonight, but it was just lines in the song. I mean, in the first three songs, we said something about the blood of the Lamb or redeemed by the blood of the Lamb or the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world like four or five times. And at that time in '87, there was a movie that came out with Dan Aykroyd and Tom Hanks called "Dragnet." And it was a spoof on a TV show, and they infiltrated this cult by dressing up like goats. There was only like seven of us that saw the movie. Okay, they put on chaps and goat horns, and they infiltrated this cult. And so, I remember being in church early on and there were all these things I didn't understand. One was the "front of the room" concept and the other one was this "blood of the Lamb" deal, because every time I heard it, I just immediately, in my head, go toward "Dragnet." I'm just waiting for a bonfire and chanting and men to come out dressed as animals and me wanting to burst out of the room. But what's being referenced when they say, "blood of the Lamb" and what's being referenced here in Jesus being the high priest, it answers this question of "How is this possible that God could love you, right now, where you are?"

The high priest was a man who was appointed by God and once a year, went into the Holy of Holies in the Jewish temple. Only once a year, he would go in, and he would carry this thing of blood into this pitch black room, and he would find

the ark of the covenant...and if you don't know what that is, your best bet tonight is to go rent "Raiders of the Lost Ark," alright...and walked into this dark joint and found the ark of the Covenant and then took this blood of this lamb and poured over what was called the "bema seat," the mercy seat. It was the top of the ark. And the blood would cover the ark, and He would walk out of the room. And what this was, it was a picture of that God was painting so that we could understand what Jesus did for us on the cross. It was the idea of propitiation. It was the idea that there could be blood that covered our mistakes, that although we're guilty, although we're deserving of death and destruction, there could be this innocent blood that serves as a covering for our sin. And it was this picture, this really weird picture that was painted so that you and I could understand what's happening in the cross of Jesus, that Jesus, our great high priest, sympathetic to our weaknesses says, "I know, but come and I'll heal you."

And every story you've heard tonight is a picture of someone saying, "Yeah, I'm busted, but I'll run to Him not away from Him." And we can't forget this, we can't forget all that's happened tonight and all that we've seen and all that we'll see here is due to the cross of Jesus. We can't forget that, because if we do, then what ends up happening is we become our worst enemy, and that's the Evangelical who would say, "You guys are running, you need to be like me," who holds up really stupid signs at rallies. No, instead we need to say, "We're all broken, and there's still room. Yeah, I remember, but listen, there's still healing. There's room."

So, how do we remember to put this at the forefront of our mind, that we can run to Jesus because of what He did on the cross no matter how dark the past or how dark the reality? Well, the Scriptures say that the night before He was crucified, He picked up this loaf of bread, and it was just bread, it was not magic bread, and He broke the bread and prayed. He said, "This is my body, it's about to be broken for you." And what He was saying, in essence, was, "What's about to happen, the breaking of my body, it's going to create a people. It's going to create this harmony of mankind where black, white, Hispanic, Asian, rich, poor, smart, dumb, pretty, ugly can all come together in one house, My house. This broken body, broken for you, is a symbol of the new covenant." And then He took this cup of non-alcoholic wine, and He blessed it. And He passed it around the room. He takes this cup and blesses it, not magic wine, just wine. And He says, "I need you to drink this in remembrance of Me, because if you forget this is about My shed blood and broken body, you're going to become a proud, ineffective, arrogant wart on humanity. So, don't forget."

And I know it's weird, but it's really not. Like, I always try to explain it with my wedding ring. Like, I think this ring, it's gold and platinum. I don't know, Lauren bought it. This ring, if I just chucked it out there or if I, before I got out here, threw it out there and you found it. The truth is it's just a ring to you. That's all it is. It's just a ring. You would look at it and maybe you'd like it, and depending on your ethical makeup, you'd keep it, turn it in, sell it on eBay, whatever. Depending on where you are, you'd do something with it. But at the end of the day, this is just a ring to you, it means nothing to you, it's just a ring. I was eleven years old the first time I had the thought that the junk that was in my family would go to the grave with me. I was eleven years old when God began to stir in my heart that I would do things differently. I was eleven years old when I decided that if God would move, stir and be merciful that I would love my wife like Jesus loved the church and impart not rules and regulations to my daughter and son but the wonder and awe of a creator God. And every time this ring clicks against this other one, every time I have to get the soap out from underneath it, every time I have to take it off when I work out I'm reminded of this covenant I entered into with God almighty. No matter how difficult or how much time or energy it takes, I will do all He will enable me to do to impart the awe of who He is in my family. And so, it's a ring, but it's much more than a ring.

And tonight here, in a minute, you're going to get a piece of bread. That's all it is. It's just bread. We bought it at the store. It's just bread, but hopefully it's so much more than bread for you. And then, in a little while, we're going to get these little plastic cups. We're going old school tonight. We're going to get these little plastic cups with wine in it, and it's just wine. It's not magical wine. We bought it at the store, not a Christian store, just a store. We just bought the stuff at

a store. It's not magical. It's wine, it's grape juice, but I hope it's more than that. Because all the hope I have for you and all the hope I have for me and all the hope I have for my son and my daughter and my wife and life is wrapped up in the broken body and shed blood of Jesus. And my hope tonight is that you wouldn't run from but you'd run to. Because the blood says, "There is no sin with more power than the cross." The broken body says, "No, you do belong."

While the communion servers are preparing, I want to address one thing, because it's come to my attention over the last couple of months as we've done communion. My wife has this really good friend who gets terrified every time she does communion, like she won't do it. Because apparently, at one point, somebody preached 1 Corinthians 11, and 1 Corinthians 11 says that those who took the supper in an unworthy manner fell asleep, which is this great New Testament way of saying they died. And so, at one point, somebody stood up on a stage and said, "If you take this wrong, you'll die." And so, then you've got all these people that are absolutely freaked out and panicked over the the Lord's supper. And what they do, what she does in particular, and what I found that several other people do is they get to this place where they're going, "I'm not worthy. I've had such a tough week. I've failed in this area this week. I've screwed up in this place this week. I haven't done this, and I know I should..." And the crazy thing about that is communion's for you who have had a tough week. You know who I'm worried about? I'm never worried about the guy that goes, "I'm such a mess and need so much more of God than I have right now." I never worry about that guy touching the bread and the wine. I just worry about the guy who this is just some empty ritual that you'll do tonight because you've always done it. That's who I get nervous for. Because it's not a good snack, you know. I don't know why you would do it if it has no meaning for you. So, here's my hope: my hope is that in this very old tradition, the fact that you belong and that you've been forgiven and that you can run towards and not away with no fear of destruction would overwhelm you. Because, bottom line, you're guilty just like me, just guilty. All of have failed to acknowledge God. All of us think our way is better. All of us are prone to wander. All of us are in need of a savior. It's not us vs. you outside of us; it's all of us. This is the reality for all of us. And so my prayer tonight is that this would be weighty for you.

If you're here tonight, and you're not a believer in Jesus, you got invited by somebody who's being baptized or by a friend, we're so glad that you're here. Communion though is a real family deal. It's just for those who believe in Jesus. And so, we're not trying to exclude you. In fact, when the service is over, you can go over to Bleecker's house and have dinner. Just find him. We want to include you.

You are welcome in this place. We love you being here. You are always welcome here, but this is a family deal. Thank you for being here, but as the basket comes, you can just hand that to the person next to you and I promise you, no one's going to judge you or think weird of you or anything like that.

Let me pray, "Father, I thank You for these men and women, I thank You for what we'll celebrate tonight. It is deeper and larger that I think we'll be able to fathom tonight, but I pray that You would do something here, that You would stir something in us, that you would remind us of what we've been saved from and what we've been saved to and that all the trivial answers and churchy trash that comes with Bible belt evangelicalism will melt away under the honesty of our need for you. I thank You for the rawness that we've seen here tonight. I thank You for the stories of salvation that we got to see and hear. I pray that You would remind us of how You saved us, stirred us. Be rich in these next few moments. It's for you beautiful name. Amen."