

“Consider the Cross: Eternity’s Dividing Line” // Luke 23:1–26 // Easter 2025¹

(VAMP) Luke 24:1 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb. 3 They went in but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men (angels, of course) stood by them in dazzling clothes. 5 So the women were terrified and bowed down to the ground. “Why are you looking for the living among the dead?” asked the men. 6 “He is not here, but he has risen! Remember how he spoke to you when he was still in Galilee, 7 saying, ‘It is necessary that the Son of Man be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and rise on the third day?’” 8 And they (were like, “Oh yeah...”) (and they) remembered his words.

1 sentence, uttered by an angel, that changed the course of history: He is not here but he is risen, just like he said.

There is a tradition dating all the way back to the early church... On Easter Sunday the pastor would say, ‘**Christ is risen**’ and the congregation would repeat: ‘**He is risen indeed.**’ It’s pretty awesome to think about doing something that has almost 2000 years of history behind it, right? So, can we do that right now, joining w/ 2000 years of believers from nations all over the world?

Christ is Risen!

¹ Works consulted: “Pilate, the Crowds, and Barabbas,” John Mark Comer; “With a Politician,” sermon by Tim Keller; Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Luke*. And others as noted throughout.

He is Risen Indeed!

(x2)

If you believe that, Summit Church, put your hands together right now!

*****END VAMP*****

And let me say, if **you’re one of those people who hasn’t been here since last Easter... Well, first, welcome back. It’s good to see you again. Listen, I know** it can take a lot of courage to walk into a church, and I just want to say, “I’m glad you’re here.”

Second, I can **understand, if this is the only week you come, why you may not feel compelled** to come back on other weeks, because you’re like, “Every time I go he preaches on the exact same thing. It’s always this Resurrection deal.”

Yeah, I get it. Listen, we **actually talk about a lot more throughout the year**--you should come check it out--but do understand that the **core of our faith is what we celebrate today**: that Christ **actually came**, just like all the prophecies said he would. **He actually lived, died, and resurrected** from the dead and was seen **alive** by hundreds of witnesses who went swearing by their lives they had seen him risen.

And so, for 2000 years, the **center of Christianity** has not been a new perspective on life or a new moral code to live by, or a new political program; the center of Christianity is an empty tomb. If the tomb wasn’t really empty, then Christianity is one religious perspective among many. But if it is, then everything has changed: sins can be

forgiven, addictions can be broken, captives can be set free, death is not the end, and life can be made new. So, that's why this day is such a big deal.

I did hear about one young pastor (true story) who decided that if this was the only weekend a lot of people would come to church, he was just going to tell them everything they needed to know about Christianity in one queen-mother-of-all sermons. He preached for 90 minutes. True story! The next year, Easter was the **lowest attended** Sunday of the year.

So, I'm not going to do that; I'm going to try to get right to the point: **LUKE 23, if you have your Bibles.** Luke 23 is the dividing line of history. If you've ever driven along the **Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina**, you might have seen a little sign that says, "**Eastern Continental Divide**." It marks the ridge that divides the Eastward and Westward slopes of our continent. Every raindrop that falls on the Eastern side of the divide flows down into the Atlantic Ocean; everything on the Western side toward the Gulf of Mexico, or America, or whatever it's called now.

That means two **little raindrop friends**, conceived together in the same cloud, casually falling together from the sky, just chatting it up on the way down, can land a fraction of an inch apart, on either side of that divide, and end up on literally opposite sides of the planet.

Luke 23 marks that dividing line of humanity. In Luke 23 we meet 5 people (or groups of people), whose different responses to the cross literally divide them for eternity--some going on to everlasting life, and others to everlasting death. I'm going to call these **5 people (or groups of people) our "PERSONS of INTEREST."** You see, Luke records their stories for us **not just because they are part of the historical record**, but because *their* stories are emblematic of how all people in all places and at all times respond to Jesus.

You should be able to see your own response to Jesus in these stories, and where you see yourself in relation to them can **answer an important question** that perhaps you've had, the question of, "*How can you know for sure what will happen to you when you die?*" Maybe you've wondered that.

In fact, let me ask you a question I've asked lots of people—in airplanes and Uber rides and in crowds of people like this. Here's the question: on a scale of 0-10, with "0" meaning you're sure you're not, and "10" meaning you're sure you are, how sure are you that if you died, right now, that you'd go to heaven?... (BOW HEADS; burst into flames)

I want to tell you how you can be a "10" by the end of this message (or a "0")--simply by making sure you are on the right side of Jesus.

Luke 23, vs 1 Then their whole assembly rose up and brought him before Pilate. 2 They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation, opposing payment of taxes to Caesar, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king." 3 So Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

[13] Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, [14] and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him... Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. [16] I will therefore punish (which means 'whip' him) and release him."

POI #1: is Pilate: (and we'll call Pilate) 'The Preoccupied'

"Pontius Pilate" was the Roman governor over Judea, and in order to execute Jesus, the Jewish leaders had to go through him. What we see here in Pilate is a certain ambivalence toward Jesus--Pilate doesn't want to really make a decision about him. **THREE TIMES** in

this chapter Pilate says that he thinks Jesus is innocent, but he can't bring himself to let him go, because that would be too unpopular. So, in **vs. 16 he says**, *"I'll punish him anyway by having him beaten and then let him go,"* which doesn't make any sense, of course: If he's innocent, he should go free; if he's guilty, he should be punished.

What we see in these verses is that Pilate is **not actually concerned** with whether or not Jesus is the promised Jewish Messiah--that's not what he's solving for, he's mainly concerned with keeping the peace. You see, **historians tell us that at this point** in his career, Pilate was on pretty thin ice with Caesar. Several riots had broken out in Jerusalem under Pilate's watch, and Emperor Tiberius had told him, 'Pilate, one more blow up, and you're finished.' In fact, we know that shortly after these events, Pilate mishandled another disturbance in the region and as punishment Caesar banished him to Gaul where he eventually committed suicide.

The point is that Pilate was so PREOCCUPIED with earthly pressures that he didn't have time to consider a question like who Jesus actually was.

That's not rejection of Jesus; it's indifference to Jesus, and, honestly, it's probably worse than outright rejection. You see, at least with rejection you're thinking seriously about the question. With indifference you're saying the question doesn't really even deserve your attention.

Listen, friend: **DISTRACTION sends far more people to hell than disbelief ever did.**

Pilate represents the husband too distracted by his career, too engulfed in the cares of this life to give serious thought to Jesus—he's focused on paying bills and parenting and getting his kids into the right schools preparing for his retirement. Pilate is the young lady so

focused on getting ahead in school that church is just not a priority right now, or she is so focused on getting married she doesn't have time to think about these things; he's the high school student so focused on sports and what his friends think that he never stops to ask, **"What have I decided about Jesus?"**

But, when you think about it, it's crazy not to think seriously about this question because one thing is for sure--I don't know the future for any of you, but one thing we all have in common: we are all going to die someday, and on that day the most important question will be what we decided about Jesus.

A recent study from **UNC School of Medicine**, just released, shows that the death rate in America holds steady at 100%. It was totally unaffected by the tariffs being imposed and then withdrawn. Which means it's crazy not to think about this.

The French philosopher Blaise Pascal famously said the most insane thing the human race does is to live as if death is not a sure and certain reality. It would be like being on the Titanic after it hit the iceberg. You know, they say it was about an hour before people really knew they were in trouble. They just kept partying and having a good time while the ship was sinking. Imagine if you had been one of the few people who knew the ship was in dire trouble, certain to sink, you knew that everybody that was not on a lifeboat was going to die, but you said, "Ah, who's got time to think about that? This party is too much fun, this food is too good, this view is too beautiful and this setting too serene to disturb myself with those kinds of morbid thoughts." That's crazy because in about an hour the only thing that's going to matter is if you're ready for what comes next after the ship goes down.

***Pilate the Preoccupied.* Let's keep reading, because we're about to meet PERSON OF INTEREST #2 in Vs 5:** After Pilate declares his belief

that Jesus is innocent, “They (the chief priests) kept insisting, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he started even to here.” 6 When Pilate heard this, he asked if the man was a Galilean. 7 Finding that he was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem during those days.

Pilate, who again, just wants to resolve this issue and move on, finds a loophole that gets him off the hook. He’s like, “Oh, Jesus is a Galilean? This is my lucky day. That puts him in Herod’s jurisdiction. I’ll make Herod deal with him!”

So, he sends Jesus over to Herod, who happened to be across town at the time, and vs 8: Herod was very glad to see Jesus; for a long time he had wanted to see him because he had heard about him and was hoping to see some miracle performed by him. 9 So he kept asking him questions, but Jesus did not answer him.

POI #2: Herod: and we’ll call him--**The Superficial**

This was the Herod who had had John the Baptist beheaded after John had confronted him about having an affair with his sister-in-law. He’s curious about Jesus. He’s heard people talking about Jesus and he wants to see him do some miracle. Of course Herod is not really interested in pressing in too much with Jesus’ teaching, because that would require reckoning with his messed-up life (his parties and his affairs and his unchecked ambition)--so he wants to learn about Jesus, but at arm’s length. That’s why I call Herod ‘the superficial.’

Herod represents the person today who enjoys coming to church--he’s into the Bible and spiritual things; he believes in prayer and even loves a lot of worship music, and he asks great questions in Bible study--but he never really gets serious about Jesus because that would require too radical a life change. He’s interested in Jesus, but only up to a point. He wants religion to be a part of his life, but he never wants to go on to full commitment. He’s what we call a “fan” of Jesus but not a “follower.”

But here’s the thing: coming to Jesus, discerning the truth about Jesus, requires a willingness for him to completely change your life and a willingness to follow him wherever he leads. Notice Luke says, **vs 9**, that **Jesus never even answers Herod**. To the superficial and the merely curious, Jesus... doesn’t... respond.

Jesus only reveals himself to those ready to follow him. And when I say follow, I mean ready to surrender their will and their pride and their trust to him.

Unfortunately, the word “follow” in our parlance has taken on different implications. For example, I’ve told you this, on social media, I follow **Andrew Huberman**. If you don’t know, Huberman is a brilliant American Neuroscientist from Stanford who makes all these out-of-the-box health suggestions.

My wife and I enjoy following these people and we implement many of their suggestions: I put collagen protein powder in my coffee in the morning and take berberine (which is supposedly ground up tree bark) supplements at night. But Huberman also recommends a number of things I *DON’T* do: like he says we should 100mg of lion’s mane mushrooms every day, and delay drinking any coffee until you’ve been up for at least 2 hours. He also says that you should light the interior of your home exclusively with red party lights after 7pm, and that you sit outside in a bucket of ice water for at least 11 minutes a week.

I have no problem saying I ‘follow Andrew Huberman’ and ignoring some of those recommendations. (And maybe I shouldn’t. Please don’t send me any articles. I’ve read enough.) But some of his stuff I just don’t want to do! I’m pretty sure he recommends “lion’s mane mushrooms” just because the name sounds cool. And I **want my coffee** ready when I open my eyes in the morning and I don’t want

my home to look like a Miami nightclub after 7pm each night. ***But, bottom line: I feel perfectly fine saying “I follow Andrew Huberman”*** and yet choosing not to follow some of his prescriptive. My guess is that there are people in your life like that, too--people whom you say you follow and yet you feel perfect freedom picking and choosing what you do and don't want to follow from them.

But see, it was different with Jesus. To follow him meant total submission of your will to his. Luke 6:46. The Bible compares it to marriage: When I got married, I didn't say, “Veronica, I hereby surrender 95% of my romantic life to you.” If I had, she wouldn't have said, “Well, that's a clear majority. It qualifies as an “A” in most colleges.” If I didn't give 100% of that part of my heart to her, she wouldn't have wanted any of it. It's the same with Jesus: If you're not willing for him to be Lord OF ALL in your life, then he doesn't want to be Lord AT ALL.

So how are you approaching Jesus? As a fan or a follower? **Let's be honest: many of us follow Jesus like I do Andrew Huberman.** You're like, “Hey, yeah, he's a really smart guy with a lot of great suggestions. And I'll do these and these... ooh, I feel better already.” But what he says over here about relationships, or money, I'm not ready for those yet.

Jesus has no answer for the Superficial. He reveals himself only to those who seek him with all their hearts.

So, we've got Pilate the Preoccupied; and Herod the Superficial. The 3rd PERSONS OF INTEREST we meet in vs. 10: “The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him.”

POI #3: The Chief Priests, and we'll call them: The Proud

The chief priests had spent a lifetime distinguishing themselves from the masses--they'd got the degrees, climbed to the top of the ladder;

proving they were the *creme de la creme*; living in ways they thought deserved God's blessing--and Jesus repeatedly insulted that pride. **Jesus had said, you see, that these religious leaders, despite their lofty status,** were no better in God's eyes than any other sinner, and they needed to be forgiven just like the tax collectors and prostitutes did.

And they hated Jesus for saying that. And not just a little, either--they **“vehemently” (vs. 10)** accused him. Their opposition to Jesus is the strongest of any group in this chapter--because, see, when you've spent a whole lifetime trying to set yourself apart--to show you're better, and that you deserve good things, you HATE anyone who challenges that.

Listen: One of the things that you'll find as you read the Gospels (and it's counter-intuitive for newcomers): **The greatest resistance to Jesus often comes from the religious community,** and from those who really seem to have their lives together, and that's because coming to Jesus requires **an abject humility and a total surrender** that most people, particularly proud, religious people, are unwilling to show.

You see, to come to Jesus, you've got to admit that there's nothing about you that makes you more worthy of God's grace than anybody else. The prophet Isaiah said that even on our best day, our righteousness to God is like a filthy, diseased rag--and the word Isaiah used indicated the kind of rag you'd have used to wrap a leper's open sores that became filled with blood and pus and decay and all kinds of infectious bacteria. Imagine showing up to enter heaven dressed in filthy, bloody, pus-filled rags.

Our only hope is to cast ourselves completely and totally on God's grace and say, “I have no hope but your mercy.” And most people don't want to do that, because it would require (first) divesting

yourself of any pride you have in things you've done that set you apart from others and make you better and worthy of honor, and (second) surrendering your whole life to Jesus without reservation or conditions.

Most people don't want to do that; instead, they'd rather play church--to focus on being good people who are respectable and obey the rules, and they feel fairly confident they'll get into heaven--as long as God grades on the curve, and surely he must, they think. Sure, they're not perfect, but surely they're in the upper 35%.

Listen, churches today are full of "chief priests." They are hard to spot, because they show up faithfully each week; they know every word to every song; sometimes they are on the worship team; sometimes they serve in leadership, but in their hearts they've never really reckoned with how sinful they are in God's eyes and surrendered themselves without condition or reservation to the mercy of Jesus.

Billy Graham famously said, *"It's not most people's sins that will send them to hell; it's their good works" (their false sense of righteousness.)*

So, we have the Preoccupied, the Superficial, and the Proud. In Vs. 18, we see our 4th person of interest: **Barabbas**. Here's the setup to the Barabbas story. In vs 18, Pilate's still trying to find a way to get out of his Jesus dilemma. Pilate knows Jesus is innocent, and he just wants to get things back to the status quo so he can move on with the kingdom. So, he has Jesus whipped and then says to the crowd, "Is that enough?" thinking surely they'll be mollified when they see the broken, bloody body of Jesus. But the crowd, now being manipulated by the chief priests, starts to shout back, 'No, crucify Jesus! Crucify Jesus!' And they begin to chant that louder and louder, and Pilate doesn't know what to do... but then--then, he has an idea. He REMEMBERS an old custom where on the Passover the governor of

Jerusalem releases one prisoner as a show of goodwill, and he thinks, "This is my way out!" So he goes into his dungeon and drags out this the worst prisoner he can find--this scoundrel Barabbas, a thief, a murderer, and he stands him up beside Jesus. Scholars say he would have been a domestic terrorist, a real menace to society; he'd harmed lots of people, including his fellow Jews. And so Pilate says to the crowd, *"Which one shall I release to you?"* thinking for sure they'll choose Jesus over this rascalion Barabbas. But, vs. 18 They all cried out together, "Take this man away [Jesus]! Release Barabbas to us!"

POI #4 (is) Barabbas, who is: The Guilty

And here's where the story becomes really personal for me and you. You see, of all the people in the story, the one we're supposed to most identify with is Barabbas. You say, "But wait, J.D., I'm not a murderer or a... rascalion, or whatever word you said a moment ago."

And that's probably true... but the point is that Barabbas was rightfully condemned in his sin, as are we. *For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; there is none righteous; no, not one.*

Barabbas is **the first in a long line of people** who is going to be set free because Jesus dies in his place. BTW, something interesting you should note about Barabbas' name: It's Aramaic, and in Aramaic, **Barabbas is literally "son of a dad."** ("Bar = son of;" "Abba = a dad.") **Son of a dad.** Could you come up with a more generic name? Like naming your son, "Dude," or "Bro." This guy is just "the son of a dad" because he represents all of us.

Barabbas' story is my story. I'm the child of a human dad, and so are you. All of human history comes to a head in this one moment in this one man; we're seeing the entire fate of the human race epitomized in the story of one man.

Think about it: One of the most interesting things about this trial is that at several points, Jesus remains silent as accusations are hurled against him.² But why would Jesus do that, stay silent, especially when it's so obvious that this trial is a sham. Clearly the charges against him are made up: Jesus wasn't a blasphemer or lawbreaker or terrorist like they were saying and he hadn't encouraged people to stop paying taxes to Caesar. So, why doesn't Jesus speak up to defend himself?

Well, ask yourself this: **When you stand in a courtroom silent** while others make **accusations against you, and when the judge asks what you have to say for yourself you say nothing in your defense, what are you conceding?**

Guilt.

Jesus stood silently in the face of accusation because he was conceding guilt. But why, you say? He wasn't guilty of these charges. It was because at that very moment, as the chief priests pointed their fingers at Jesus and accused him of these false charges, Jesus perceived (behind their fingers) the righteous finger of God the Father pointing at him, accusing him of my sin. And Jesus stood silent before that accusation because he was pleading guilty... to J.D. Greear's sin.

This whole trial is about me. I was preoccupied, like Pilate--thinking more about daily trivialities than eternal realities. I was superficial, like Herod, more interested in what Jesus could do for me than what I owed to him. I was proud, like the chief priests, refusing to admit my utter and complete need of grace. All the profiles in this chapter are about me, and they come to a head in Barabbas--I am the guilty one.

² Check out Luke 23:5, 9. This is made even more explicit in other Gospels. This was a fulfillment of the prophecy made in Isa 53:7, that when he was accused he would "open not his mouth."

The **old Negro spiritual asks**, *Were you there when they crucified my Lord?* The answer is YES, I was there--I was there in Pilate, I was there in Herod, I was there in the chief priests and most of all, I was there in Barabbas. *Guilty, vile and helpless we, spotless lamb of God was he, full atonement, can it be? Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

There's **ONE MORE individual, one more person** of interest I want to show you really quickly before we close: **verse 26:** As they led him away, they seized Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country, and laid the cross on him to carry behind Jesus.

POI #5: Simon the Cyrenian: *(We'll call him)* **The Disciple**

Quick question: Why do you think Luke tells us this man's name AND where he is from? I mean, I get it if Luke wants to tell us about the moment when the cross got so heavy that Jesus staggered under the weight of it--that helps us understand Jesus' suffering--**but why give us this man's name—and not just HIS name, but also where he was from? Btw, in the Gospel writer Mark's account of this, Mark also mentions the names of Simon's 2 sons—Rufus and Alexander.** Why include all these personal **details about Simon?**

Scholars say **it's because Simon of Cyrene was known in the early church.** The first readers of Luke's book would have said, *'Oh, Simon of CYRENE, the dad of Rufus and Alexander? I know him! I didn't realize he was there for all this!'*

In fact, Paul ends his letter to the Romans by saying: "...greet Rufus, who is chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me also."³ Scholars say it is almost certain that this is the same Rufus

³ Romans 16:13

mentioned in Mark as the son of **Simon of Cyrene**.⁴ **That means Simon went on to become a follower of Jesus**, and not only that, he led his wife and **2 sons to faith in Christ**.

BTW, of the 26 people Paul greeted by name in Romans 16, Rufus is the only one Paul describes as “chosen in the Lord.” That doesn’t mean the others *aren’t* chosen--Paul is just making a point: **On the road to Calvary, even as Jesus’ body staggered under the weight of the cross**, Jesus was still sovereignly choosing a man to become his disciple. While his body was split with pain, he was still loving and calling sinners to come home.

VAMP

In 2008, tragedy struck the home of Steven Curtis Chapman, one of my generation’s most famous Christian musicians. Steven’s 17 year old son was pulling their SUV back into their driveway and didn’t notice when his 5 year old sister suddenly darted out in front of it to greet him and he ran over her. The place, as you can imagine, descended into chaos. Steven was in the backyard when he suddenly heard his wife start wailing and he ran up to find his wife crumpled over the crushed body of their little girl. Steven said when he picked up his little daughter--there was so much blood and her body was so mangled that he knew she wasn’t going to make it. When the ambulance finally got there, and the EMT’s took over, they put her in the back to rush her to the hospital, and Steven got into a police car to follow them, but as they pulled out, he noticed his 17 year old son off to the side. In the chaos, everyone had forgotten about him, and he was lying there in a heap on the edge of the driveway, overwhelmed by grief and guilt, his older brother was literally laying over him, covering him. And Steven told the policeman: “Stop. Stop

the car.” He opened the door, stood up on the door jamb, pointed at his son and said, “Will Franklin, your father loves you,” and then they rushed on to the hospital where his little girl died in his arms. What always gets me is that here, in a father’s worst moment of pain, he is thinking about the needs of his son: he’s not blaming him, he’s loving him, restoring him.

Here, on the road to Calvary, in Jesus’ worst moment of pain, he extends love to a man he came to save. He never stopped loving us. From the cross, he prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” **This is not a weak, stumbling victim needing our help; it was a strong, Sovereign Savior extending salvation to those he’s chosen.**

And that leads to my **last bit of good news. Simon of Cyrene’s story is an invitation to you.** You and I may indeed be guilty, but on the road to Calvary he stopped the car, so to speak, called your name and said, “Hey--your Father loves you.” That’s *his* voice that’s been stirring in your soul as I’ve been up here talking. He’s calling you--not just to pray a ritual prayer, or to take Easter Communion and go on your way, and see you again at Christmas, but to follow him--to become his *disciple*, to carry his cross into the world and lead your family and friends to Jesus just like Simon did.

Have you picked up that cross? That’s the invitation to you today: **consider the cross, and follow Jesus.**

The events of this trial mark the dividing line of eternity. Two people who grow up together in the same community, the same church, in the same Bible study, in the same family, react differently to Jesus and end up *eternities* apart--one in everlasting paradise; the other in

⁴ Why else would Luke and Mark record their names? They didn’t mention the names of other random people on the road—“The guard’s name was Fred, and the one who hit Jesus was named Bob”—Luke and Mark record their names because they were well-known in the early church. Cf. William L. Lane, “The naming of Alexander and Rufus suggests that they were known to the readers

of the Gospel. It is possible that they were Christians and active members of the church for whom Mark wrote.” (NICNT: The Gospel of Mark, p. 565); R.T. France, “*The mention of Alexander and Rufus... suggests that they were known to the audience, and probably members of the Christian community*” (NIGTC: The Gospel of Mark, p. 642).

everlasting torment. The most important question you'll ever consider is this: ***Which side of Jesus are you on?***

Which brings me back to the assurance question I presented at the beginning... How sure are you on a scale of 0–10 that if you died you go to heaven? You can know that you are a 10 if you are on the right side of Jesus. You say, well what does that mean exactly to be on the right side of Jesus?

Well, **Romans 10:9–10** says it involves 2 things: **Repentance and Faith**

Repentance = repentance means acknowledging that Jesus is Lord. That he is the unquestioned authority in your life. Listen, surrender is one of those things that has to be total for it to mean anything. **If you're going to follow Jesus, he has to be** Lord of everything--where you go, what you do, who you date, what you believe--for surrender to mean everything. As we say, if he's not Lord of all, he's not Lord *at all*.

The other side of the coin is **Faith** = Faith means believing that Jesus died in your place, that he bore the FULL punishment for your sin.

These two things, repentance and faith, are what it means to be on the right side of Jesus.

A few weeks ago I compared it to sitting down in a **CHAIR**: You either are or you aren't. (SIT) You're either surrendered to him, or (STAND) still in control of your life. You're either trusting in him as your sin-bearer, or you're trusting that you can be good enough to earn heaven.

If you're seated in him, then the answer to the question of how sure you are that if you died to go to heaven can be "10." If not, you can be sure it's a "0."

You see, right now, if you asked me on a scale of 0–10, how sure I am that if I died I would go to heaven, I'd say "10." And that's not because I think I've lived such a good life that I deserve it--quite the opposite. It's because I recognize, like Barabbas, that Jesus died in my place, and I've put my trust in him. And when I get to heaven, if an angel stops me at the gate (if that's how it works) and he asks, "Hey, why should we let you in here? We know lots of things you did that would make you unfit for here," I'll point down on earth to that cross, and say, "But down there Jesus paid the full measure of my penalty; he died in my place, and because he did, there's no penalty left for me! Nothing left to punish me for." And if the angel says to one of his associates, "I don't know--someone go and get the book that contains all J.D.'s sins, we better review it, to see what he missed," and he sends an angel down to the heavenly record room to get the book of my sins, that angel will come back from that records room and say, "There is no more book. It was the same situation with Barabbas years ago. God the Father threw that book at Jesus" so there's not one page with one sin left for J.D. to account for." I won't show up to the banquet of heaven dressed in the filthy leper's rags of my own righteousness--boasting about this church or what a good father I tried to be--those are filthy leper rags; no, I'll be dressed in a spotless robe washed white by the blood of the Lamb.

And see, that's because when I was 16 years old, with a lot of questions and a lot of inconsistencies, I "sat down" in the chair of Jesus. What about you? You see, you can **(SIT)** "sit down" in him today, too, if you never have. In fact, I want to give you a chance to do that right now.

Every head bowed, every eye closed... “Jesus, I believe you are Lord and I surrender to you. Jesus, I believe you died for my sin, and I receive you as my Savior. Thank you for saving me.” If you prayed that prayer with me, **raise your hand?** **Text READY to 33933**. That acknowledges you’re serious about this and ready to take the next steps.

Summit, put your hands together for people all over the Triangle who are right now putting their faith in Jesus? Listen, maybe you couldn’t quite utter that prayer just yet...but you have questions and you’d like to talk to someone about them...maybe you’re a ‘0’ and you want to know more about moving toward a ‘10’...you can also text that number and there’s an option to simply speak with someone who will follow-up with you this week. That feeling you have right now, **DON’T LEAVE HERE** without allowing us to walk with you in this.

OK, I want everyone to stand. We’re going to end our service singing a song together, at all campuses, that was written by our Summit worship team called “Consider the Cross.” But let me tell you one quick story that I heard this week, before we do:

The first time we sang that song together was 2 years ago at Easter. In the congregation that day, unbeknownst to me, at our Garner Campus was a first time guest named Elliot. He’d just been in a pretty severe motorcycle accident; the doctors were shocked he’d survived. He’d been in the hospital for more than a week, and when he got out **someone invited him to come to Summit Church** on Easter Sunday, 2023. He told us later that while he’d been in the hospital, he’d had a dream in which God told him that he needed to turn his life around. Of course, the member who invited him didn’t know that, they were

just being obedient to the prompting of the Spirit, but when Elliott came that Easter Sunday, he heard the gospel and responded. Here’s what he said in a letter he wrote, “I’ll never forget when we sang together, ‘Consider the Cross.’ This song,” he said, “led me to tears for the first time in over 15 years.” What the motorcycle wreck couldn’t do, God did through this song. He realized that this gospel was an invitation to him and that Easter Sunday 2 years ago he gave his life to Jesus. He was still so messed up from the motorcycle accident that he couldn’t even walk down the aisle when the invitation was given! Fast forward 2 years, he now is in our Summit Worship residency, exploring a call to ministry, and he led this song on stage at the Knightdale Campus 2 weeks ago.

He says, *“This was not only the song that brought me to Christ, it has stirred me up to become the man God made me to be. It revealed Jesus to me, and stirred up the gifts of the Spirit in me.”*

So, I want us all to stand together, and sing this song together, can we? The cross is the dividing line of history! Those who embrace it, Jesus takes onward into eternal life--life with him. Consider the Cross!

Grace, you lead us all together as a church. Let’s worship our Risen Savior!