

Part 1: Getting the Gospel

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[0 : 00] All right. Thank you, Elliot. Good morning, family. How are you guys? Good to see everybody. Yeah. I'm feeling a lot better this week. It's good to be here. Yeah. And again, if you're new, man, so glad you're with us. New year. We're kicking off a new series, so great time if it's your first time to be with us. And we hope that you stick around for a while. And this series that we're getting into, we're calling it Following Jesus. And really what we're thinking about is, okay, what does it look like? What are the basics of Christianity? When you simplify it, Dan, when you get down to the nitty-gritty, as Nacho Libre says, what does it mean? What does it mean to follow Jesus? And that means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. For some, it's like, oh, you got to vote for a certain political party. That's what it means to follow Jesus. For others, it means behaving a certain specific way, trying to be a better person, right? We think of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus, and he kind of read off his resume.

Look at all the things I did. I kept all these commandments. I get to be a disciple, right? That means I'm a Jesus follower. But it doesn't quite work out that way, right? For some of us, we think of it this way. Man, don't drink, don't chew, or run with girls who do. That's what it looks like to be a Christian, a Jesus follower. And then there's kind of the South. There's that nominal Christianity.

It's like baked into the cake, right? Of course, I'm a Christian. I was born here, right? I'm country. And my parents were Christians, and so therefore, I'm a Christian. That can make you religious, but that doesn't mean you're following Jesus. So following Jesus doesn't start with what you and I do. It doesn't have any, it doesn't start there, right? It starts with hearing and believing in what Jesus did for you. And so we're going to be in 1 Corinthians 15, chapter 15, sorry, verses 1 to 4.

We're going to work out of that. And it says this, now I, the apostle Paul, he's writing to a church here. Now I, Paul, would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I deliver to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures. Feels like really simple Sunday school stuff for many of us that have been in Christianity a long time, right? But that's the thing.

That's what the main thing is. That's what we have to grasp about what it means to follow Jesus. It's the gospel. The gospel is the good news of who Jesus is and what he did for us. Paul is talking to a church here and reminding them and us what is most important, right? This is most important, guys.

[2 : 57] And what is, he doesn't, he doesn't give them 12 rules for life. He doesn't say, do these six things for your best life now. He says, remember what's of first importance. This is the thing you have to hold on to. This is the thing you can't forget. This is the thing you have to prioritize. The gospel.

Well, what is the gospel, right? Is it a genre of music? No, that's not what he's talking about. He's talking about that word gospel that simply means good news. That's what gospel means. And it's a word that back in the ancient times when they would talk about gospel that referred to this time and messengers would bring news back from to their home city of wars being fought, right? And so they would come back with the news of the battle and the people in the cities would be waiting with bated breath thinking, okay, what's going on? What's going on? Is it victory? Is the message going to be victory or is it going to be defeat? And back then that was a big deal because if your side lost, you were in big trouble. Usually the army was going to march to you and you're either going to become their slaves or you would be slaughtered. And so imagine a messenger coming back, being in a city, waiting with bated breath, like what? What is it? What is it going to be? Is it going to be death or is it going to be life? And he brings the good news. Ah, we won victory. That's the kind of good news that the gospel is. It's life-changing. So what makes it so good? Verse 3, 1 Corinthians 15,

Christ died for our sins. Christ died for our sins, was buried and raised on the third day. That's the kind of news that doesn't just change your life for now. It changes your eternity. It changes how you are going to live forever and ever and ever. See, Paul is reminding the Corinthian church here that their victory has been won. Their victory is won. Just like that messenger running back and saying, guys, the victory is won. You have nothing to worry about. The gospel, the good news comes to us and says, guess what? Jesus has won the victory. He's won the battle. He came, he lived a sinless life, and then he died on the cross, taking our sin on himself and the punishment for our sin on himself on the cross. That's what happened. Now, sin, we have to realize as people, we're told, is one of those enemies of ours that we can't defeat on our own. It's not like we go out to battle and we're like, sweet, I think I can get sin this time. No, no, no. That is not how it works. We can't defeat sin. You can't defeat it. I can't defeat it. Nobody can defeat it. Check out what Jesus says about it in John 8, verse 34. Jesus answered them. He said, truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. Guess what, guys? That's all of us. We all practice sin. Everyone who practices sin, it's not a friend of sin. It's not in control of sin. They're a slave to sin. And the slave does not remain in the house forever. The son remains forever. So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed. Jesus is saying, guys, to be human. To be human is to be enslaved to sin. That's how we're born. We're born into it. It's baked into the cake. We're born with these sinful desires from the get-go. We don't honor God. We reject God, and we run from him. Our heart's default setting is disobedience and idolatry, which means we will put anything and everything first before God if we can. And that is what we do, and that's what sin is. That's what sin looks like in our lives.

[6 : 36] And guess what, guys? It doesn't come without consequence. Because of sin, you and I deserve God's divine justice. And that divine justice is ongoing eternal death.

Now, we like to think of God as this, like, easygoing, hippie-in-the-sky kind of guy with a long hair and a robe, right? It's kind of a popular version of God. He's really cool. He's everybody's friend, wants everybody to just be, you know, with him. But he's a holy, just, and all-powerful God. We can't forget that.

We can't forget that. We can't reduce God to just being, to being this idea of this, like, nice guy in the sky. He only wants good things for us. He is holy, just, and all-powerful. Think about what he's, how he's revealed himself and what he's done, right? Our creation, everything that we see, this amazing universe, this amazing earth that we live in and all that we enjoy, we look at it and we stand on it.

And sometimes God created all that with his voice. He spoke it, and it came into being. Out of nothing, he created everything. It says that if he pulled his breath back to himself, everything would stop existing. He continues to uphold all of creation, everything that we know, all of our life, he continues to uphold it by the power of his word. And then it also says this, he is a consuming fire. He is a fire that cannot be quenched. Now, it's hard for us to grasp this, this idea of who God is. We don't get holiness. We were talking today, me and some guys are looking at the holiness of God in a study we were doing, and the author of this book we were reading, he says, man, it is impossible for us to get to the concept of this holiness of God because you and I are born into this world that is so far from being holy. We try our best to like figure out what that means, but we're hopeless. We can't do it. And so God has to come, and he has to give us glimpses and examples and reveal a bit of his holiness to us.

And he does that through his word. And here is a great picture of this. When God delivers Israel out of Egypt, he takes them to Mount Sinai, right? And it was here at Mount Sinai that he is drawing nearest to his people, right? Until that time, he was with them, but he hadn't really exposed them to much of his glory and his holiness yet. And so it's at Mount Sinai, he's drawing near to them, and he's going to expose them to his glory and holiness as much as they can handle.

[9 : 14] So in chapter 19, verse 16 of Exodus, it says this, on the morning of the third day, there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire, okay? Imagine this big, huge mountain.

The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled. The mountain was shaking underneath the weight of the glory and the holiness of this God.

And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. Like, you know what's cool about being here in the South? Like, I grew up in Southern California, and you probably had a thunderstorm once every 10 years, you know? But man, here you get it like, man, all the time in the summertime. And then you get some boomers coming through, you know? And just like, where that thunder cracks right over your head, and you're just like, oh my gosh, your house is shaking and everything's shaking. That's what's happening here, you know? It's not this nice little crackling sound off in the distance, like, oh, rolling thunder, how nice. No, man. God's voice is like booming and shaking this place with this thunderous voice that he has. That's what they're describing here.

And it says this in verse 20, the Lord came down on Mount Sinai to the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. And the Lord said to Moses, go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the Lord to look, just to look, and many of them perish. Also let the priests who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves, make themselves holy, clean themselves with water and blood. They had to do that. Lest the Lord break out against them. And Moses said to the Lord, the people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for you, yourself warned us, saying, set limits around the mountain and consecrate it. And the Lord said to him, go down and come up, bringing Aaron with you, but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest he break out against them. Guys, this has been the storyline of the Bible. Man, God created us. We got to be in relationship with him, Adam and Eve, in the garden, enjoying it. And then we fell. We sinned. And he said, sorry, you can't be in this place where I am, where my presence is. And they got kicked out, and he put cherubins, he put these angels with swords barring the way back in. There's a little, there's a book we love to read to our kids. It's called the garden, the curtain, and the cross. Is that what it's called? Something like that. And basically, the little refrain is, he's like, because of sin, you can't come in. Because of sin, we can't draw near to God. We just don't get to run to him as we want. In fact, God has to protect us from himself, and from his holiness, and from his goodness, and from his righteousness, and from his justice.

And this little account in Sinai is one evidence of why he does that, and how he does that. He says, you can come this close, but no further. Now, you may think, man, man, this God guy, he is grumpy. [12:49] I like the Jesus guy in the New Testament. Why can't we get to him? We have this concept that Jesus is this meek and mild dude. Let's refresh our memory in a couple of instances. Remember when the officers of the temple were coming to arrest Jesus, and they said, where's Jesus? And he steps forward, and he says, here I am. What happened next? All those officers fell on the ground backward.

It was like, hey, Jesus, we're coming to arrest you, and then like they're looking around each other. How in the world did we end up on our back all of a sudden? There's another thing. The apostle John knew Jesus, did three years with him, right? Intense ministry, has revelation, sees a vision of the ascended risen king, Jesus. What happens? It says he fell down as if he were dead in front of him, all right? Man, this Jesus, we have to realize this Jesus, this God that we know, he's an awesome, holy God, right? He is a God that deserves our reverence and our respect and our honor. Now, if we don't realize, and we don't have this concept of how holy God is, we won't really realize what our sin means, and we can't appreciate that truth, Christ died for our sins. We'll read it and go, oh, yeah, got it. Understand it. That's cool. Thank you. But man, sin is a much bigger problem than the stuff we want fixed in our lives, right? We think of sin, man, I just got to get the sin issues fixed so my life can be better. Man, I got a bad marriage. I need my bad marriage fixed. I'm facing some addictions that I just need to, like, get over, man. God, can you fix those things? Broken relationships with our kids or with our parents. Maybe there's racism you're experiencing. Man, all those things are important. Those are things we all want to see fixed and eradicated, but that isn't the biggest problem when it comes to you and your relationship with God and your sin toward God.

And all those things just have that one thing in common. They're all fruits of sin. And at some point, you and I have to realize that we can't fix that ourselves. We can't solve our sin problem. And so maybe you're here. That's why you started coming to church. That's why you're reaching out to God. You want God to fix it. And there's nothing wrong with that. But think about this. If you were to stand before God today, those problems would be the last thing you're thinking about. Honestly. If you were to stand in the presence of God, if you were there at Sinai and that thing's shaking and that voice is thundering, the last thing you would be thinking about is some of your problems in your

life. You would be crying out like Isaiah did when he saw the Lord seated on the throne, high and lifted up. He cries out, this prophet of God cries out, woe is me. I'm accursed. Standing before this holy God, seeing him, I am accursed. I am a man of unclean lips. See, our biggest need isn't for Jesus to fix our problems. Our biggest need is that we need to be able to stand in the presence of God. And the Bible is consistent that you and I can't do anything to make that happen.

[16:05] God has always made that way. He always made that way. And that is why Christ, Jesus, God the Son, had to come and die for your sins and for my sins. It's what Jesus did for you and for me. Jesus died for all the sins you and I committed and all the sins you and I are ever going to commit.

He died for every single one of those. Can you believe that? Do you believe that? Many of us might think that Jesus only died for the sins we committed before we believed and then we got to do a lot of other good works every time we sin to make up for it. I used to think that when I was a kid, I want to speak to you young guys and gals in the room. Man, that is so just like, take that theology and put it in the wood chipper. Jesus died for the sins you have committed. He died for the sins that you will commit. Or some of us believe that there's just certain sins that are too evil, too heinous, too wrong, that Jesus surely, his blood couldn't cover that. He couldn't have died for that.

I know people now that follow Jesus, love Jesus, saved, have a vibrant relationship with them. Part of their testimony is that they had an abortion. It's not my story for them to tell. They can tell you if they want to, but guess what? Jesus died for that sin, too. He did. If you're here today and that's a part of your story, you know what? You're not beyond God's forgiveness. Jesus died for that sin. Jesus died for that choice that you made. It's all forgiven in him. Some of you think, okay, Jesus forgave my sins, but man, I just don't feel forgiven. I don't feel worthy to approach God. I don't feel God's love. And that's just another level of the gospel that we need to get. Jesus died not only to take away our sin, but also to take away sin's guilt and shame. The gospel is the good news of what Jesus is doing in us. Now, I grew up in church. I'm a PK, so I spent a lot of time in church, right? Professional Christian, unfortunately. I understood Jesus died for my sins, knew the stories, knew all that stuff, could recite them to you, no big deal. And I would repent, especially when I was a teenager. I repented a lot. But while I knew Jesus died for those sins, and I knew he forgave me, I always had a problem feeling forgiven. And sin works that way. Sin works that way. It says, oh, come, sin, you're going to love it. You're going to enjoy it. No big deal. And then when you do sin, everything turns around on you and says, you're unworthy. God will never forgive you. He's never going to love you again. Look at what you did. It comes with loads of guilt and shame.

But Jesus doesn't forgive our sins with this caveat, man, I hope you really feel bad about what you did. I hope you don't forget what you did. Shame on you. Or there's a lie that I used to fall for all the time. Jesus, man, please forgive me. And if you do, I will never, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever do that again. Then two minutes later, you know.

[19:32] Or we promise him big things. Man, if you just get me out of this jam, if you just forgive me of this, if you just keep my parents from ever knowing that I ever did dot, dot, dot, dot, dot, man, you know what? I'm going to give my life to you. I'm going to go serve you in the jungles of India somewhere, some such thing. It's this sense of like, man, we can't trust that we can just come to God and ask for our sins to be forgiven if it's forgiven. We got to make him these big promises. We got to somehow add to what Jesus did and try to earn his forgiveness.

Do you struggle with that? Do you struggle with understanding your relationship with God that way and living that way? Do you find it hard to confess sin or talk about past sin like it's really been forgiven? Maybe you struggle with that and that's because I want to be as nice as possible. You're carrying around guilt and shame. And here is how you and I are taught to deal with guilt and shame. We hide it away. We suppress it. Good way to hide something bad. Good way to hide something bad is to cover it up with something good.

Right? When me and Hales were married, I was single and I had this really ugly couch. Right? She inherited it. It was our first couch. It was faux leather. Twelve years old. Cracked. Ripped. But it reclined. It had cups that, you know, cup holders you could fold down. If you plugged it in, I think it massaged your back or something like that.

[21:09] It was, I thought it was the coolest couch. It was the ugliest thing you had ever seen. I wasn't thinking about when I bought it, man, this really ties the room together, you know. But Hales had to live with this. Right?

And so what she did to cope with this ugly, hideous couch is she hid it under some like, you could buy these like couch covers from Pottery Barn, you know, and you could turn an ugly couch and you can cover all the ugly stuff and kind of make it look halfway decent.

That's what we do as Christians, man. We like to hide. We like to cover up the ugly stuff. The legalist hides his guilt and shame under rules. Oh, man, I don't want people to really know these things about me.

Okay, so I'm just going to like, oh, where's a rule I could follow? Look how good I'm doing. Look at this rule I'm following. I just want to be able to point to something. The moralist hides their guilt and shame by a veneer of good behavior.

Ooh, look who I am. Look what I believe. Look at the things I can recite and quote. Look what I do. The religious person hides their guilt and shame through multiplying religious practices.

[22 : 24] I'm just not going to serve on Sunday. I'm going to sign up for everything I can sign up for because, you know what? That'll show people. I could walk around and put my foot forward and be like, yeah, look at all these things that I'm doing, right?

Feel really good about ourselves. People stand back. Unfortunately, us in the church, we stand back and applaud. Wow, look at those great, wonderful people that they are.

And that fools us. It fools people. And you know what? The sad thing is we fool ourselves. But God isn't fooled. He sees right into our hearts. He sees the guilt and the shame you and I are limping along with that we just can't get ourselves to face, that we're afraid of facing.

You know what, guys? He wants to heal us of that. 1 John 4, 16 says this, So we have come to know and to believe the love of God that God has for us.

A lot of us are good at believing that God has love for us. A lot of us need to grow in knowing that love. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God.

[23 : 32] And God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us. Abiding, remaining in him.

By this is love perfected with us. Why is that so important? So that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is, so also are we in this world.

Check this out. There is no fear in love. But perfect love casts out fear.

And then look what it goes on to say. Fear has to do with punishment. And whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

We hide. Why do you and I hide? Why does guilt and shame make us hide? Because it sows fear. Guilt and shame feeds fear.

[24 : 31] Fear. When we choose to live with guilt and shame, we choose to walk in fear. We choose to walk afraid of what God thinks about us and what people think about us.

Fear. We cover up. We hide those things over instead of coming and exposing them to God so that he could deal with it and heal us.

Fear has to do with sin and punishment. If we are afraid. If we can't be open and honest and vulnerable and transparent with God and with others, with other Christians. There's a fear issue there.

And it has to do with our belief that, you know what? I still deserve punishment because of the sin that I did. That's not forgiveness and love.

Did you know it's possible to be saved and healed by Jesus and steal hide from him? We were reading in Luke 8 in our community Bible reading and this story of Jesus just stood out to me.

[25 : 29] And I was like, oh my goodness, I've never seen this before. As Jesus went, the people pressed around him. And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for 12 years.

And though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment and immediately her discharge of blood ceased.

Awesome, right? And Jesus said, who was it that touched me? And when all denied it, Peter said, master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you.

But Jesus said, someone touched me. For I perceive that power has gone out from me. And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, think about that.

She came trembling and falling down before him, declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him. And how she had been immediately healed.

[26 : 26] And he said to her daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. What? A strange reaction. This woman healed by Jesus. This woman desperate her whole life to get this issue of

blood eradicated and resolved.

She touches Jesus and she's immediately healed. You think she would jump up and praise God and say, look what you've done for me. But she stays hidden.

She doesn't want to confess that. Why is that? Well, there's two things happening here. One, she committed a huge cultural taboo. As a woman in that day, you didn't reach out and touch another man.

That wasn't your husband. That was a huge no-no. Okay? So one, she had to confess that. Broke some rules there. But more than that, more than that, she would have had to expose her true self to Jesus and others.

See, we look at her and we say, we have pity on her and we think, oh man, that stinks that she had this issue of blood. So glad she got it resolved. She not only had this issue of blood, she would have been considered unclean.

[27 : 42] She would have been ostracized for it. She wouldn't have been able to go to the temple to worship or offer sacrifices because she was considered unclean. She would have been considered a second-class citizen.

And they would have looked at her with scorn all her life thinking like, God only does this to punish sin. You must have sin in your life that God's dealing with you on. So she's hiding away.

Even after she's healed, because what does she have to do? She has to come and she has to explain, this is what happened. This is who I am.

I was this woman with this issue of blood. I was unclean. I was the outsider. I was a nobody. I was what everyone looked down upon. I was what everyone despised. I was what everyone thought little of.

You think, Jesus, why did you make her do that? Because Jesus isn't satisfied with us hiding anything away from him. He wants us to know how deep his healing is.

[28 : 42] Present yourself to me. The fullness of who you are to me. All your guilt and all your shame, you can bring it to me. You confess it to me. You can come as who you truly are, your most authentic, true self.

You can trust me with that. What does he say to her? He doesn't say, shouldn't have done that. He says, daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace.

He sends her away with a blessing. He sends her away calling her a daughter. Acceptance. Love. All that good stuff. It's an amazing story. Guys, we're not too much different.

We can know Jesus. We can know he died for our sins and forgives us. Right? By his stripes we're healed. We love quoting that. But we can still live hiding who we really are from him. Guilt and shame rob us of confidence in Jesus' love and forgiveness.

He never withholds his love and his forgiveness from us. But we are really good at withholding it from ourselves.

[29 : 45] So how do we overcome that? How do we do that? How do we overcome that? How do we live in the fullness and freedom of Jesus' love and forgiveness? Now, it's interesting that we were reading before in what we were reading before in John 4 about being perfected in God's love.

It says, right? Abide in him. Abide in God's love. Remain in God's love. Now, there isn't a special place to drive to.

You can't Google map that. You can't say, take me to God's love so I can abide in it. And it's like, make a left here and a right there and boom. You'll find it. There isn't a special temple you can go to. There isn't a special suit you got to wear, a special underwear you got to wear, a magical mantra you got to recite.

No. How do we do that then? How do we remain? How do we abide in God's love so that we can be perfected by it? That is what Paul is saying about the gospel.

That is why he's saying it is of the most importance. It's of the highest importance, the first importance. You have to get the gospel. You have to remain in it and dwell in it.

[30 : 47] The gospel doesn't just bring us into God's love. It keeps us there. Right? Verse 1, I remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you in which you received, in which you stand.

We take our stand in it. We remain there. By which you're being saved, hold fast. We hold fast to it. We don't let it go. And that is what is so powerful and unique about the gospel and about Christianity.

Be of all other religions, the gospel is good news. It's a truth that we hold on to. And it's unchanging. But it's also a person to dwell in.

The gospel is the good news that God is with us. If you're a Christian, God never keeps himself from you. Ever. Ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever.

How do we know this? 1 John 4, 13. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us. Because he has given us of his spirit.

[31 : 53] God doesn't save us and keep his distance. Right? That's not love. I didn't want to marry Haley so we could live in separate homes or separate states or anything like that.

No. I wanted to marry Haley so we could have a life together and be together and enjoy one another and spend time and laugh and love and other good marital stuff. We can measure our love for others by how much we enjoy being with them and how far we will go to be with them.

We can measure our love for others by how much we enjoy being with them and how far we will go to be with them. Friends, God loves us so much that he did whatever it took.

He loves us so much he did whatever it took. He sent Jesus, he sent his only son to die so that you and I could live with him.

So that you and I could abide in his love. Unceasingly. Without end. He wants to abide in us and us in him.

[33 : 08] This language he uses throughout the Bible, especially in 1 John, it's this language of loving union. And how does he make that happen?

He makes that happen. He confirms it. He gives us confidence in this by giving us his spirit. That's part of God's salvation package. He forgives us our sins and then gives us his spirit that dwells with us.

If you ever doubt, if you ever doubt that God loves you or that your sins are really forgiven, God gave you the Holy Spirit. Confirming that the gospel is true. Romans 8.16 says, So now we have these two witnesses.

We got the gospel and we got the spirit. This is how we live confident and free in Christ. On your worst day. When your feelings tell you that you don't deserve Jesus' love, go to the gospel.

Trust the Holy Spirit. God did whatever it took to bring you home. Nothing. Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing can separate you from God's love.

[34 : 11] We don't live by our feelings. Don't live by your feelings. Live by the truth of the gospel. Listen to the spirit that tells your heart that the gospel is true. And if you're struggling with both of those things, hearing the spirit, trusting in the gospel, you know what?

Guess what? God's given us a third witness, each other. Right? The gospel is the good news is that we don't walk alone. We say here lone rangers are dead rangers and lone rangers are dangerous rangers.

And here's the thing, guys. The more we get the gospel and are confident in God's love, the more we realize that we need each other. Hebrews 9, 23 to 25 says it this way. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is through his flesh.

And since we have a great priest over the house of God, since we have all these things, let us, community, you and me, together, draw near.

With a true heart and full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from evil. Verse 23, let us, you and I, together.

[35 : 17] What do we do? We hold fast the confession of our hope. We hold fast the gospel without wavering for he who promised is faithful. And let us, together, you and me, consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.

And all the more as you see the day drawing near. You and I never mature out of our need for community. Actually, the more mature you are in Christ, the more you realize you need it.

The more you realize, man, it's one of God's main gifts of grace to you and me. We draw near together. We hold fast our confession together. We consider how to stir one another up to love and good works. And it's not because we lack confidence and we're insecure people.

It says, since we have confidence, since we have all these things in Christ, community will boost your confidence in God's love. That's what it does.

That's why we care about community groups. And if you're not in one, man, get into one. Find out. Write it on that connection card. Put it in the bucket. We'll make sure you get into one. It's the best decision you will make.

[36 : 25] That's where discipleship happens. That's where we grow together. I'm going to have the band come up as we close. If you're here, man, it's a new year.

Maybe you're here because you've been thinking, you know what? I want a change in my life. I need to do something differently. And you're here at church, trying church out. We are so happy that you are with us. And we hope that you come back next week as well and again and again and again.

But we want you to know this, that God loves you and he wants to be with you. And I want to ask you this question. Are you ready to stand before this holy God today?

Are you ready for that? Jesus died for your sins. Stop running from him. Stop trying to fix your problems on your own.

He's offering you salvation today. It says, who the son sets free is free indeed. You don't have to be enslaved to sin anymore. And it doesn't cost you anything.

[37 : 27] It costs you faith and surrender. Faith that Jesus is the son of God who died for your sins. He was buried and rose again. He's living and seated on the throne.

And he loves you. And surrender. He's Lord and King. If you are here and you're a Christian, man, let's not play religious games.

Let's not do that. Let's not live our lives hiding, covering up behind legalism or moralism or a ton of religious activities.

Let's not live with cheap guilt and shame. Man, God sets us free from that. Jesus sets us free from that. His love is unconditional. He loves you knowing all who you are.

He already knows that. And come to him. And guess what, guys? We're going to come take communion. If you're a Christian, you believe in Jesus, this is for you. If you haven't surrendered your life to Jesus yet, I would say, man, that's your first step.

[38 : 32] Don't come and take communion. Surrender your life to Jesus. And then we invite you. Yeah, come and participate in this. Oftentimes, we think of communion as this little thing. We come and we get some bread and we get a cup and we drink it and we go on our way.

But this is an opportunity. God's presence is in this room. Jesus isn't like, he's not going to show up physically at the table.

But his presence is at that table. And I want you, if you're creative enough and imaginative enough, I want you to realize as you come, it's your Savior inviting you to this table.

And just like he did on that night when he was betrayed, he gave it to his disciples. He said, this is my body broken for you. Take and eat. This is my blood shed for you.

Drink. And I want you to realize, even though you're coming up and getting it, it's Jesus himself offering it to you. The presence of Jesus is there at that table.

[39 : 29] The presence of Jesus is there in this room. And when you take it with faith, he's here with us as we're doing that. And we're enjoying him and we're reminding ourselves that we're communing with him.

And we get to present ourselves at that table. Lord, this is me. Warts and all. Ugly, tattered, old sofa. This is what we get to do.

And let's rejoice in this gospel. Let's rejoice in his grace. Let's rejoice that Christ died for our sins. Let's pray. I want to pray something very simple, Jesus.

May your power to set us free be here today. For my friends in the room that deal with guilt and shame.

For my friends in the room that run and hide from community because they just can't give themselves to share who they once were, even though you've healed them. That you would heal, that you would bring a new kind of healing, Lord.

[40 : 40] That you would call them out from hiding. Man, may your gospel so penetrate our hearts.

May we be so convinced of it, Lord God, that we would live in freedom. Freedom in you, Jesus Christ, who the Son sets free is free indeed. Amen.

Amen.