

Introduction

If you have your Bible I want to invite you to go ahead and open it up with me. We're going to be starting a new sermon series today in the Book of First John, so not the Gospel of John (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John), but this is the letter of First John, toward the end of the New Testament. It's actually just a few Books in front of the Book of Revelation. So, if you have your Bible with you, I want to invite you to open that up as we take a look at that. If you don't have a Bible with you today, that's okay. You can use your Smart Phone, iPad, or whatever, but you're also welcomed to just follow along here on the screen in just a few moments as we jump into the Scripture. We're starting a series today entitled "Overcome." We are examining how the words of Scripture and how the Gospel of Jesus Christ makes it possible for you and for me to overcome the travails, the difficulties, that we encounter in this life. So, I believe that the Resurrection is a relevant message for you and for me today. I want to take a few moments to explain that to you and give you an opportunity today to do something with that and to respond. So, this is what we're going to do. We're going to read 1 John chapter 1, verses 1 through 10 together, and then we're going to look and figure out what this means. How does this apply to you? How does this apply to me? And then we will see how the Lord has for us to respond even today. So, 1 John chapter 1:

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life — the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us — that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

"This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and his Word is not in us."

Easter. The Resurrection. Jesus Christ back to life. Who cares? I mean, why does that really make a difference... if someone who died 2000 years ago came back to life? Does it really even affect your life or mine? A lot of people would say, "No way." And maybe you're one of those people. Maybe you're someone who thinks, "Maybe it matters but I'm not exactly certain how it matters." I think I'd like to try and explain that today by using, well at least starting to use, two pictures. I don't know if you're familiar with the graffiti artist... his name is Banksy. Banksy primarily operates in London, but sometimes he also operates in other global cities around. His art does not hang in museums... at least not initially. It is graffiti art, so he puts his art on the side of buildings and that sort of thing. People discover it and then sometimes it is taken down and hung in museums and that sort of thing. If you don't know anything about Banksy, you can take a look at the film "Exit through the Gift Shop." You might learn to appreciate it or even understand it a little bit more. But I wanted to show that this week one of Banksy's paintings was found in London. The title of it is "Mobile Lovers." Let's take a look at that painting here real quick. (Laughter) You know. We laugh at that because we've lived it. Right? I mean, it's kind of funny. You've got these two people that initially, at least, you think, "Oh, they're in love." Their face is sort of aglow with this love that's pure and good inside of them, and then you realize, "Oh no; they're just checking their email" or whatever it is that's happening right there. They're looking out at the phone and it's distracting them. Now Banksy has hit upon something

that I believe is pretty important and pretty essential. It's the idea and the temptation of something that we'll call "disembodiment." "Disembodiment"— What is that?

Disembodiment is the temptation that you and I face every single day... to really believe that the most important thing in the world isn't what's happening in the physical present world right here around us but something that is happening out there. We tend to believe that the stuff happening in our mind is most important. We tend to believe that the stuff happening in our heart is the most important. This is why we can be really good at collecting Facebook friends but terrible at face-to-face communication. This is why we can collect decorating ideas on Pinterest all day long but never actually do anything with them. This is the reason why we can be very witty on Twitter at 140 characters or less, but we can never actually get around to being witty whenever we're with someone else: Because we discover that we're very good at being disembodied creatures who think of ideas and have feelings and this sort of thing all the time and those become reality to us but not the actual events, the actual things that are taking place around us. What's funny is that when it comes to the spiritual realm, when it comes to what it is that God is doing in our lives, we sometimes tend to fall toward disembodiment. We start to think that religion, God, Jesus... that whole thing... really, all that's about is something you believe in your head or something you believe in your heart. It doesn't really have any implications. It doesn't really affect the skin in my life. It's not really a flesh-and-blood type of thing. Easter is actually an argument against that line of thinking. Easter is an argument to say, "Disembodiment is not what is best." Easter instead argues for a very strict, embodied faith.

Let me see if I can explain what I mean by contrasting Banksy's "Mobile Lovers" with another painting. It's a painting done a few hundred years ago by an Italian artist named Caravaggio. This painting actually hangs on the wall in my office. It's called "The Incredulity of Saint Thomas." So let's take a look at this painting. This records the episode whenever Thomas ("Doubting Thomas"), right after the resurrection, was told by the women, "Jesus has come back to life" and he says, "I will never believe it unless I see Him for myself and put my finger in His pierced side." Jesus appears to Thomas and says, "Alright, buddy. Go for it." Caravaggio records it. Isn't it kind of an interesting contrast? In Banksy's painting, we've got these people touching one another, but there is zero intimacy there. Even though they are physically present with one another, there's actually no emotional or spiritual presence. But here you can see all three men are looking intently, not just at Jesus but very particularly at the wound in His side. So, as Thomas puts the finger in there, it's almost like you can hear... they're so quiet... "Is there going to be that 'gook' noise..." are they going to hear that? That is what is taking place in this moment.

This is why Easter matters desperately to Christians, and this is what I want you to hear, right here and right now. I want you to hear this. Easter matters because Christians believe that the literal embodied fleshly resurrected body of Jesus Christ is indeed a central key component to the Gospel. Let me put it to you differently. We believe that you cannot separate the body of Jesus Christ from the body of the message. The body of Jesus is the message. If Jesus Christ is not resurrected, then this message is flawed, faulty, and should be thrown away. However... if the body of Jesus Christ is indeed resurrected, then things matter.

Let me explain to you why I believe that these things matter immensely. If you look at 1 John chapter 1, verse 1... Look at some of the words that show up. John says, "*That which was from the beginning...*" Listen to the words he uses. He's talking about "*That which was from the beginning...*" Jesus who is eternal... "*We have heard...*" so we've heard Him... "*We've seen Him with our own eyes. We've looked upon Him, the things that He did. We touched Him with our own hands.*" John says, "There's a very tactile relationship that I had with the resurrected Jesus. I am an eyewitness to the fact that Jesus was not only

crucified but also that He came back to life. I touched Him. I heard Him. I know that this is true." "Jesus is alive," John declares, "And you can know this because I have seen it, I am an eyewitness, I have felt Him." Now, John is not the only one that feels this way. The Scripture all around, after Jesus is resurrected... we have all of these different accounts from different writers that say the same thing. For example... not just John but Matthew says this: "The women come across Jesus..." (Matthew 28:9) *"And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshipped Him."* They grabbed His feet; a physical, fleshly body. Luke, a physician, in Luke 24:30: *"He took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened."* Luke says there was a meal that Jesus participated in and ate. In Luke 24:39: *"See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Touch me and see."* Jesus, in Luke's account, invites them. "Look, if you don't believe it's really Me, come and touch Me. You can find out for sure that it is truly is Me." We've just looked at John chapter 20, the episode where Thomas puts his finger right into the side. There's another one in the next chapter in the Gospel of John, John 21... It says, in John 21:12-13, that the disciples were out fishing and they come back, and they discover Jesus waiting on the seashore cooking breakfast for them. He's like, "Here, have some fish; have some bread." Dead men tell no tales, and dead men do not cook breakfast for their friends. So this is an important thing. Why is John so insistent that the resurrection is real, and why is it that an educated person in the west, in the 21st century, would actually believe it? Why would I publicly stand up and declare, in front of a whole lot of people that I don't know, that someone who was dead is now alive? You would think me to be crazy, unless I truly actually believed it. Why does it matter? Why didn't the disciples just say something like, "Well, it was a ghost. It was an apparition. It was a hallucination." People would have believed that. But they said, "We now are inspired to live in that way." Right? But that wasn't what they said. They declared it to be a physical, living, actual flesh-and-blood body. Why don't people like me today in the 21st century just stand up and say things like this... Why don't I just say, "Hey, you know what? Jesus is alive in our hearts, and that's the really the true meaning of the Resurrection. Let's go out there and love each other." Why don't we do that? ...Because that's not what the eyewitnesses said. They said that Jesus Christ's physical body came back to life. This is what we have to decide today, friends. Are you ready? We have to decide: "Are the eyewitnesses of the Scripture reliable eyewitnesses OR are they like the guys on the episodes of 'Finding Bigfoot'?" That's what we have to decide. Nobody watches "Finding Bigfoot"? I'm sorry about that. (Laughter) Those guys are kind of sketchy. You know, they always find the weirdest person... "Yeah... I saw him with my own eyes." Sure you did. Okay, right. But this is the thing. We have to decide, "Are these eyewitnesses reliable?" Why do we have to decide? Because, if these eyewitnesses are indeed reliable, we will find that the resurrected body gives us two key truths that I want to run by very quickly.

It means that the message is validated.

Let me say this real quick. 1 Corinthians 15:14 says this: *"And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain."* We have a lot riding on this resurrected body, and Paul puts it very plainly. Are you ready? If Jesus Christ didn't come back from the dead, then everything written in the New Testament is a complete sham and a waste of time. If Jesus didn't come back from the dead, then the Christian faith is defunct, dead, we shouldn't care about it... move on. But if Jesus Christ did come back from the dead, then it is God's stamp of approval, His seal, that the resurrection is a bona fide historical event. And if indeed it did happen, that gives a ground to the theology that we have. Now, you may not know this, but this is what Christians believe: "If God has the power to raise the dead, then God has the power to give us life after we die." You see, that's the power of the Resurrection. If God has enough power to raise Jesus from the dead, then, as Colossians says, "Jesus Christ is the firstborn among the dead," meaning those who are in Christ one day will be raised in the very same way that Jesus Christ was raised.

So, if that is indeed truthful... if indeed that did take place and shall take place, then there will come a moment when the God who had the power to raise Jesus from the dead will also have the power to raise anyone else who is in Christ back from the dead as well. That is actually what Christians believe... that there will come a day when anyone who is in Christ, their molecules... cells... will be pulled back together, reconstituted... and they will be raised with Christ and they will worship Christ and will rule with Christ. Now you say, "That's crazy!" Maybe it is. Or... maybe it's the truth. ... Because, you see, if Jesus truly did come back from the dead, then maybe I'm not crazy at all. Maybe I'm the only sane one around. So, this is the thing: It means that, if Jesus did come back from the dead, the message is indeed validated.

It Means The Message Is Indeed Ultimate.

But then there's a second thing that it means for us. It means that the message is indeed ultimate. What do I mean by "Ultimate"? I mean this: There is nothing else in this world that matters as much as the message that Jesus Christ proclaimed. So, if His coming back is sort of the stamp of approval that says, "Yep... this is a truthful Gospel. You can put your trust in it. It's a very true and accurate record of the events that took place." Then, at the same time, you can also declare that His message is ultimate; there is nothing more important. If Jesus Christ came back from the dead, you have to do something right now. You have to decide, "What He said, is that true or not?" Well, if He came back from the dead, it has to be true... well then, guess what? If it's true, that means it's important. Wouldn't you think if God cared enough about someone to bring them back from the dead, the stuff that He said might matter a little bit? Right? So, if Jesus went around spouting recipes, we'd all be making them. But that's not what He spouted. He spouted the way to the Kingdom of God. So consequently we believe that this message is indeed ultimate. In fact, it's so important that it's been eloquently placed like this. Let me say it myself. "If Jesus Christ came back from the dead, then nothing else matters. But if Jesus Christ did not come back from the dead, then we should throw it all away because none of it matters." You see, I should quit my job and go do something else which is actually edifying and matters in life, if God did not raise Jesus Christ from the dead... But if He did raise Him from the dead, there is nothing that you will do today, this week, this year, or for the rest of your life that matters more than to understand, walk in, and then go and proclaim and share the same Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the very cornerstone of humanity, if indeed Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. So, if the message is truly true, if Jesus did come back from the dead and it's true... and if the words that He spoke are indeed ultimate... that's there's nothing that matters more than these words... If those two things are the case, we probably ought to know what it was that He said. So, guess what? John tells us. He says, "Look. I'm a reliable eyewitness. I touched Jesus, I heard Jesus, I saw Him, I looked upon the things that He did after He was resurrected. Let me tell you what He says.

THE MESSAGE

1. God is Light. (v. 5)

So what does He say? He says, "First of all..." Let's look at verse 5: *"This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you..."* So he's going to tell us. *"...that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all."* So John openly declares that the nature of God is the nature of light. Now he doesn't mean literally that God is just light. But what he means is that God is pure, holy, righteous, true... He's without blemish. He's perfect. He's the most loving... He's the most Holy Being that ever has or ever will exist. He is ultimate. He is light. John isn't the only author that says this. A few other verses I wrote down: Exodus 13:21: Whenever the Israelites were being led out of slavery we read this: *"The Lord was going before them in a pillar of fire by night in order to give them light."* The presence of God was signified in the Book

of Exodus by a fiery light. In Exodus chapter 34, Moses goes up on Mount Sinai to hear from the Lord. When he comes down, the Bible says that his face shone because he had been in the presence of God. That light reflected off of Moses. In Matthew 17:2, Jesus transfigures before His disciples and we read this: *"His face shone like the sun."* In Psalm 36:9, the psalmist says, *"For with you is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light."* In other words, "We are able to see the good things in the world because of the light that You give, Oh God." In John chapter 1 (the Gospel of John), John gives a description of another man named John, John the Baptist, and he tells them, *"There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light that all might believe through Him. He was not the light himself but came to bear witness about the light. The true light which gives light to everyone was coming into the world."* And who is this light? Jesus himself declared it later in John's Gospel. He said, *"I am the light of the world."* Paul later says, *"Those who are followers of Christ are children of the light."* Light is essential because the light of God means this: That God is the standard by which we know truth, we know love, we know purity. There is nothing as holy or as loving as God.

Now, why does that matter? You see, some of us in this room, we don't agree with that. Some of us in this room are walking through very painful circumstances right now. We have cancer. We've lost our job. Our family is falling apart at the seams, and we think there is no way that God would let us walk through these difficult circumstances if there is truly a loving, holy, good, beneficent God, then there would not be starving children in Africa. We have these sorts of reasons, and we parade them out and we believe that this is a good enough reason to say that there can be no such thing as a loving God which is truly light. Of course we don't actually walk out all of the possibilities if we think through that because what if the eyewitness is accurate and that God truly is light? Well if that is the case, why don't we just think about it for a second. Let's just tease it out and see what happens. You may have objections to it and I can certainly understand those, but why don't we just walk with the possibility that there is indeed a God and indeed His nature is love and is light. Why would He reveal Himself as the standard... perfection, righteousness, holiness... why light?

In our house, probably the brightest light bulbs in our house are our bathroom lights. Why do we do that to ourselves? Do you ever wonder that? You go into the bathroom, you're groggy-eyed... you didn't get enough sleep, you're still tired and you hit that switch. We don't have a dimmer in our bathroom. You would think we would be smart enough to do that, but... floodlight all the way. Ba-Bam! It kind of wakes you up. The other problem with those lights, when you get up close to the mirror and you turn those lights on... "Why are those lights so bright, because I can see every problem that is happening right here." That is not so good. You say, "Wow, I don't ever remember that mark being there last week. Oh man, there's another one of those wrinkles." You know what we like to do? We like to (walking backward)... "I look great now, you know. If I get a little further away from that light and that mirror and suddenly I look good."

This is the thing about light. Light has a very interesting property. Light brings illumination to that which it shines upon. If the nature of God is light, perhaps this is John's point: When the light of God shines upon people, we can truly and accurately diagnose who we are." You see, this is the thing. I think that many of us like to stay far away from God, and we like to blame Him for the pain in our life because we certainly don't want to ask, "What would it look like if I took a moment to compare myself with the God that is revealed in Scripture and the standard that He has set, because if I do, I'm afraid I might begin to see a few things I don't really want to see."

2. We are sinful. (vv. 6, 8, 10)

Here's the thing. In 1 John chapter 1, in fact, we read that God is not only light but we also read this: That people are not in the light. Left to their own devices, we discover that people unfortunately are in the dark, that we are sinful and we are broken. Three verses jump out right here: Verse 6, verse 8, and verse 10: Let's take a look at these three. Verse 6, first, John says this: *"If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth."* John kind of says, "Look; there's basically three groups of people out there in the world, most of the time. There's probably others but these three are the ones he really draws attention to, and he says, "If you really let the light of God, His holiness, His righteousness shine upon you, then guess what? You're going to see three things: The first one he says, "There are these people who say they walk in the light, but really they're no different than the rest of the world out there." We have a word for those kinds of people. They've been using that word for literally 2000 years, we know, at least. That word is this: "hypocrite." They're the people who say they've got it all figured out. But really, if you watch them, they don't look different than anyone else. And John says, "There are some people out there who, if the light of God truly shone upon them, do you know what they would find? They say that they are walking in the light of God, but really they look just like everybody else. They are walking in sin." They're just hypocrites.

Verse 8: He then says, *"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."* So John says, "Look... there's not just hypocrites out there; there's a second group of people. These are the self-deceivers, the self-deceptive." Let me tell you about this kind of people. These are the people who say, "There's nothing wrong with me. I'm not that bad. In fact, I'm pretty good. Look at that guy over there. Now he is jacked up, okay? That guy... That lady... Whoaaee! Have you seen her? She's a piece of work." We like to compare ourselves, those of us who are self-deceivers, with other people around us, and if we compare ourselves with those other people, then do you know what we'll soon discover? Well, we're pretty good, compared to them, and since we're better than them, then we're probably just fine."

Do you ever notice how whenever we compare ourselves to other people, we're very selective in the ones that we compare ourselves to? We're very careful to choose ones that we know that we are better than. Right? In fact, if you actually thought about it in the analogy of the bathroom mirror, those of us who are self-deceivers... do you know what we are doing whenever we're looking at ourselves, saying there's nothing wrong with us? We're not just taking a couple of steps away from the mirror... we're actually... (backing up and calling from afar)... "I look great!" That's what we're doing right there.

But this is the thing. There's not just hypocrites, and there's not just those who are self-deceptive. Take a look at the third group in verse 10: *"If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and his Word is not in us."* There are not just hypocrites that say they're holy but they're not. There are not just the self-deceptive people out there that are tricking themselves. There's also a third group of people. Do you know what this group of people is? This is a group of people that say, "I've got it all figured out, and I'm doing just great walking around with God." Do you know what you are? You're called the "self-righteous." Yeah. You think that God is blessed by your presence in His church. You think that you've earned that grace. You think that you've earned your ability to be in His presence. Now, I hate to break it to you. The Bible is very clear about this. Your righteousness is like filthy rags to Him because under the pure and holy light, whenever you get close up to that God, you've got all kinds of problems, all kinds of pock marks on you. Unfortunately, sometimes those of us that struggle with self-righteousness, the closer we get to the light of God, the more we close our eyes and we just close and we sing, "Oh, look how holy I am." This is the problem. Three groups of people that John points out: hypocrites, the self-deceptive, and the self-righteous.

Here's the funny thing. In my lifetime, I've been all three. There has been a time in my life whenever I would say, "Oh, I'm just fine. I'm walking with the Lord. I'm great." Now if you would have followed me around and looked at my life, you would have seen that I was no different than anyone else. I would declare that I was a Christian, but really my actions did not live up to that because I was walking in a sinful way of life. There was another time in my life when I would declare, "There's nothing wrong with me," and the reason was I was standing so far away from the light of God that I couldn't actually see the true issues going on with me. There has been another time in my life when I felt like I was so holy and so good because I was showing up at church every Sunday and I was singing the songs and I knew all the words and I knew the Bible verses and that sort of thing, and do you know what? God showed me, "Look, buddy. You aren't anything apart from Me."

So this is the truth. It doesn't matter today if you're a hypocrite. It doesn't matter today if you are a legalist, self-righteous Pharisee. It doesn't matter today if you're someone who is completely self-deceived because right now in this moment, this is why we find out that the truth of Easter matters for us, and this is why we're all here right now. I want you to hear this. It's not just that God is the light and we are the dark. But now this is the great truth that John proclaims in verse 7 and verse 9. Verse 7: *"If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."* The blood of Jesus. That's kind of gross, right? You get washed by blood? I mean, what's that about?

This week some of you probably went to the grocery store, and when you were there you walked down the meat aisle and you saw the meat there. Maybe your meat aisle looked something like this... (Picture of various meat products appears on the screen). So, in your meat aisle there... you've got the cellophane, you've got the Styrofoam, you've got your steaks, you've got your pork chops... that sort of thing. You took your meat and you went home to prepare it. You cut through the cellophane wrapping there, the shrink-wrap, and you pulled the meat out, and there was a little bit of blood on the bottom of that Styrofoam and you went, "Ewww!" You picked up the edge of the Styrofoam and you didn't want to touch it, and you threw it in the trash can. Then immediately you went and used your antibacterial hand soap because you're a bunch of germaphobes. You wash it off right there. Right? Why? ...Because we are people that are disembodied not only in our spirituality but also in our daily life. We are so disconnected from where our food comes from. I hate to break this to you but you killed a cow. Did you know that? Pigs died for you so that you could have bacon. They don't make that in a factory without the pigs. It comes straight from the pig. Animals died. Blood was spilled for you. I know that we kind of know that cerebrally, but we are so removed from that process, we can't begin to understand it. We're kind of like, "Eeeww, gross; there's blood and that sort of thing."

Listen to me. The point that John is trying to make is one that would not have been lost on his ancient readers, but sometimes those of us who live in a modern world live in such a sanitized version that we don't ever have to deal with the true bloodiness of life. Maybe you're a medical worker and you deal with blood. If you deal with blood and you're not a medical worker... I don't know what you're doing. Please don't tell me about that; I'm kind of scared of you right now. There are some of you that are out there that deal with blood on a daily basis but most of us do not. This is the thing that John would not have lost on his ancient readers, and this is what I want you to hear. There were religions all over the world that taught one thing: That an angry god was appeased by a blood sacrifice... typically a sacrifice of a child. You've seen that kind of stuff in movies. You know, they're throwing kids in the volcanos and that kind of stuff. You read about this in comic books. Look... that kind of stuff really happened, and so it wouldn't have been surprising to the ancient readers of this text to hear, "Oh yes; this God is angry and He is appeased by the death of a Son." But do you know what would have shocked them? It was to understand this. That that little

bit of blood was actually a whole lot of blood. You would have been completely freaked out and grossed out if you would have seen what God did for you at the cross of Calvary because it is not just a little bit of blood on the bottom of a Styrofoam package. It is indeed human sacrifice on your behalf and on mine. He was whipped and He was flayed and He was crucified, and He was beaten and He was pierced for your transgressions and for mine. The Scripture says that in that moment between the light the God and the darkness of our sin, Jesus with His arms spread wide on the cross of Calvary... in that moment, He became sin who knew no sin that we might become His righteousness. What does that mean? That means that His blood was spilled, and it should have been mine. Now, this is the thing about that. Ancient hearers would have heard that and said, "Oh, well sure. Okay; gods are always demanding sacrifices because they are angry gods." Do you know what they would not have expected? They wouldn't have expected what verse 7 says. Look at verse 7. Verse 7 says this: *"If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us..."* What? God did not demand that you bring your firstborn and kill it. God instead said, in verse 3. Look at verse 3: He says, *"...we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us..."* God desired fellowship with His created people so badly... He wanted fellowship with his people so badly that He did not demand that they give a sacrifice. Instead, He gave His very own Son. It goes all the way back to Genesis chapter 20 whenever Abraham took his son up to the top of the mountain, and the angel of the Lord stayed Abraham's hand from execution. He said, "No. I don't demand sacrifice of your son because Yahweh is not like other gods," and it completes itself at the cross of Christ. In this moment he says, "Yahweh is not like other gods because you don't give me your son, I give you Mine. That's how much I want to be with you. I will take your sin on Me because I love you and I desire fellowship with you." Now that would have been shocking to ancient hearers. You would go, "Wait a minute. This God has wrath and justice and He needs a sacrifice to be satisfied, but instead of demanding that I give my son, He gives His? That's crazy talk." You think that's crazy... guess what? It gets even nuttier now.

3. Jesus Is The Bridge. (v. 9)

Verse 9 then says this: *"If we confess our sins..."* What does it mean to confess? It means this: You see the light of God, you get up close enough to the mirror and you let the light of God shine so directly on you that you see all of the messed up brokenness that you have in your life. When you get that close and you allow God to shine His light on you and you measure your life honestly, you have a moment of clarity... Look. Some of us need to have a moment of clarity. You know what? A lot of us, what we do is we spend so much of our time justifying our evilness to ourselves, but you know deep down... you know you're messed up. That's alright. You can admit it. You know that you are. You have those moments, don't you? You think to yourself, "I'm a pretty fun person to be around." And then you catch yourself being a complete jerk to somebody and you go, "Whoa!" Maybe I'm not..." Or you say to yourself, "You know, I'm a pretty generous and kind individual," and then someone is in that moment of need and you find yourself holding tightly onto your money... then you go, "Maybe I'm not as generous as I thought I was." Or you begin to think to yourself, "Yeah... I'm doing pretty good, right? I'm losing weight, I'm in great shape," and suddenly your pants won't button. Then you go, "Wait a minute. What's going on here?" There comes those moments when suddenly the truth slaps you across the face, and in that moment when it happens... when that does happen... you have to change and you have to act on it. Well, guess what? That happens when you have the truth hit you. This is what John says: "Let the truth of God hit you." This is how it hits you. You compare your wretched darkness with who God is and you just confess it. "Confess it" means you just speak it. You say, "Lord, I am messed up. I am broken. I am sinful." And guess what happens? It says, *"If we confess..."* (verse 9) *"...He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all*

unrighteousness. " You see if God is light and God is perfect, that means that messed up people like you, messed up people like me, we can never get into the presence of God. We'll never be invited to come into the kingdom of God... We'll never be invited to come into heaven with God. We'll never been invited to be those things, except and unless we are washed clean. How are we washed clean? ...Because God gives Himself to satisfy His own wrath, He makes a bridge between His light and our darkness, and then He cleanses us. Now you think that's crazy; then comes the really nutty part.

You see, it's not just enough to have this great, happy, forgiven-of-our-sins sort of life. You see, this is the problem of our theology. Most of us have a disembodied theology, not only of a lot of stuff that we believe here but also about heaven. When I tell you to picture heaven, I can almost bet a hundred dollars I know exactly what comes into your mind. You picture floating on clouds, playing a harp, even though you've never picked up a harp in your life. You have these tiny little wings and you have a halo and you believe that every time that a bell rings an angel gets his wings. Listen. That is not what the Bible describes as heaven, and if it is what the Bible describes as heaven, who wants to go there? I'd rather go to Schlitterbahn. Right? (Laughter) I mean, here's the thing. I don't want to float around on a cloud all day and play a harp. That is not heaven but thank God that's not what's in the Bible. Let me tell you what is in the Bible. The Bible declares this: That our God not only gave up His Son Jesus Christ as a sacrifice but then three days later, as a demonstration of His power and to prove that the Gospel of forgiveness of sins was true, He brought Him back to life to say, "Look... I'm powerful enough to bring Him back from the dead." Then after that, after He did that... He then said, "Now, I make this available to each and every one of you, if you will place your faith, your trust in Jesus Christ, you too can be forgiven of your sins. The same God that raised Him from the dead will one day, even after you die, raise you from the dead, bring your mortal bodies back together and... then this is the really nutty part. Are you ready for this? Heaven isn't even somewhere way up there. It is right now but what Revelation 20 and 21 says is this: "There will come a day when the new heaven and the new earth... they come together. Jerusalem descends..." Are you ready for this? This is nuts... "And then God..." according to Corinthians and according to Revelation that declare this: "Behold. I am making all things new." Now listen. I know you didn't get it, so I'm going to say it again. "He is making all things new." What does that mean? He is taking all the physical stuff out there and He is fixing it. Guys... Your belly will disappear, alright? (Laughter) Ladies... Makeup is unnecessary in heaven. Listen to me. God takes our broken mortal bodies and perfects them and glorifies them. He takes disease and vanquishes it. He removes all death and all dying. He takes the deserts and He converts them into gardens, and He declares that all of Creation will be perfect. Those people that you have missed, if they are in Christ, they will be there... we'll be there. Jesus will be there perfected. This world, which right now is broken and filled with cancer and disease and problems and bankruptcy and issues and broken families, will one day be made perfect. All of those who are apart from Christ, they will be pushed out, but those who are in Christ will be there, and the world will be revealed, resurrected, redeemed, and perfected. Now, when that happens, the truth will declare and will take place. All things are indeed being made new. That is the Gospel. Now... (Clapping) You can clap for that.

Now here's the thing. Right now, you say, "Why am I walking through the junk that I'm walking through in my life?" A couple of reasons:

- 1) God lets you walk through some of that sometimes for this reason... so you'll say "Yes" to Him because if He doesn't break you, you're too stubborn to say "Yes." You think you've got it all under control. He goes, "Oh, okay... let Me break you."

- 2) Some of us right now we've already said "Yes" to Him. We say, "Well then why do I have to walk through it? I've already been broken." Do you know why? ...Because the Book of Hebrews declares it openly and Paul says it over and over and so does John, and Jesus says it as well. You know what? The purpose of those things is to chasten you and to perfect you to make you more into the likeness of Jesus Christ so you don't think that your money and your house and your health and your family are more important to you than God. You say, "If I've got Jesus Christ, I've got everything" and He makes you into His likeness. That's why He lets you walk through those things. Others of us we just live in a broken, fallen, sinful world and sometimes stuff happens, but it never happens unless it passes through the hand of the Father and He has a reason for it.

Typically it's this: Either to draw you to Him right now or to form you into the likeness of His Son. It's almost always one of those two reasons. So ask yourself right now, "Is God breaking me so that I'll say 'Yes' to Him, or is God molding me into the likeness of Him?" ...Because there will come a day when all of this pain that we walk through will be perfected, changed, and resurrected through the redeeming power of the cross, and it will be done so that then we'll say, "All of that pain I understand. It was all there so that I would understand that the Gospel is the most important thing, not my stuff, and so therefore I humbly bow myself, I take off my crown, and I cast it at the feet of Jesus Christ and I declare, 'He alone is King of Kings, and He alone is Lord of Lords.'" Now...(Clapping) Now, if that is the truth, who in the world would ever want to float around on a cloud and play a harp? Not me! So this is the thing: Do you right now want to be made new in Christ, or do you say, "No, I'm okay; I've got it"? You see, that's the moment that we come to. John is very clear that God has a purpose, and it is verse 3. Verse 3 declares this: "God, the Father, has fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ, and He wants fellowship with you." But guess what? He's not going to twist your arm into it. You get to decide. Do you want fellowship with Him or not? Here's the other thing. He will draw you up to a point, but eventually you will have to decide, "Will I place my faith in Jesus Christ? Will I trust Jesus Christ? Will I give Him my life?" Now some of you go, "Man, I don't know if I want to do that. It's going to change me. It means I have to be a different person." Yeah! You're exactly right because whenever that happens, do you know what? Whenever that happens your heart is so changed. A lot of people out there, they think this: "If I do good things, then God will love me." False. This is the way it works: God loves you, you understand that grace, and then you go, "Oh, I now need to do some good things because God has saved me and changed me." Whenever we do good things, do you know what we're doing? We're actually living out the way that life will be one day in heaven. We're living out our perfected, resurrected lives in advance. Whenever we do that, people around us go, "They're living out a perfected, resurrected life. Why are they doing that?" They ask you about it and you say, "I'm doing this to bear testimony and witness to who God is in Jesus Christ."

So this is the moment, my friends. Today, we get to ask this: "Do I believe that a Creation that is restored does not end with me floating on a cloud, but instead it is a Creation that is restored because death is not the final word and I too will be resurrected in and with Christ." If Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, this Gospel is true. If Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, this message is ultimate, and if Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, He died for your sins, came back from death to kill death and to bring life to each and every person who says "Yes" to Him. If that is all true, then guess what? It is way more important than what's for lunch. So what are you going to do about it right now? The answer is up to you. So let's pray and let's ask this question:

"Lord, how do You want me to respond to this Gospel today, right here and right now? Father, we thank you for Your goodness. God, we pray that You would show us how You want us to respond to your Gospel. Lord, Your Son Jesus has died for us. We're not good enough to earn it. We have never done enough

good stuff to make You love us. We never could do enough good stuff to make You love us. Lord, You just gave us Jesus Christ anyway. Father, we will never ever be the sort of people who would ever deserve it, but God You give Your goodness anyway. Father, we will never be the sort of people who will ever be able to earn our way or work our way into Your presence, but God You give it anyway. So Lord, right now, we pray and we ask this: Show us... show us, Lord, the way to Your Kingdom. Lord show us the way forward. Lord, give us the courage to say 'Yes.' Give us the courage to grab hold. God, we pray this in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen."