



Following Jesus

Part 1 – Changes How I Listen to Sermons

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Let's just see the hands of all the students. You're in school right now; junior high, high school, college, masters, PhD. There was a guy in the first service that was yawning; why is it when students raise their hand, they yawn. Can you explain that to me? Are you tired? Has it already been an exhausting couple of days of school. How many of you remember that one student that would always raise their hand and ask the teacher or the professor, "Is this going to be on the test?" Raise your hand if you know what I'm talking about. What were they actually asking? "Do I need to listen?" That's right. You're going on and on up there from the front and they're want to know "Can we just cut all this out and find out what we need?" That's the problem with these standardized tests. We want to just prepare kids for tests rather than learning. So, everything that is said in school is important. And all the students said... Thank you for that overwhelming...

So we are starting a brand new series today called *Following Jesus* and then fill in the blank. What does it mean to you? We are going to spend the next nine weeks looking at what it means to follow Jesus. Today, it's kind of different. We're talking about how to listen to a sermon. This has been brewing in me for a couple of months. I usually go out to the lobby and hang out and there's going to be a question that pops up here in a little bit that I get asked quite often. When you see it on the screen and I kind of go into a correction with it, some of you are going to be like "He ran in there and put that in after I asked him." No, understand you are one of many who ask this question and we just want to bring unity to our church today.

We're going to address a couple of things that maybe you didn't expect to hear on Labor Day, but we are glad you're here. We're asking, through this series, that the Holy Spirit call many by name. If you are a guest here today, we are glad you're here. Hopefully, this will be a start for you on where you go with your faith and what you hold true and what you let go and what you allow to trump... I didn't drop that name in there to get you excited. ...traditionalism or reason, but how do we value the scripture here at Woodland Hills.

If you have your Bible, turn to Matthew 4. We're going to go through Matthew 4. We're going to look at Chapter 5 and 7. If you don't have your Bible, that's not a problem. All the scripture we share today will be on the screen. We're going to look at the very beginning of the ministry of Jesus Christ and the sermon that he preached that we often refer to as the Sermon on the Mount. We aren't going to cover it all obviously for the sake of time, but we are going to look at the beginning of his ministry and we are going to look at how people responded to him and then how you and I need to respond.

Today, we're going to look at four different types of listeners and, hopefully, it will challenge each and every one of us in the way we listen to the word of God declared.

Let's jump right into Matthew 4: 18-20. ***18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people.'*** Now look at what following Jesus means. This may be the first take away for us in this series. ***20 At once they left their nets and followed him.*** Immediately, they followed Jesus.

What we are hoping in this series is that some of you will maybe hear something for the very first time and you will immediately take it into your heart, into your life, and you will apply it. Maybe for some you, you've been running for a while and you know the truth of God's word and you haven't chosen the "at once" or "immediately" response. Following for you means "I'm going to follow Jesus in the areas of comfort and convenience, but I don't know if I want to give up living with my boyfriend or living with my girlfriend, dabbling in porn, drunk on the weekends. I don't know if I want to give all of that up, but I'll take the step that is the easy stuff to follow. I'll take the stuff that doesn't require too much or cost too much." We're hoping in this series that immediately sticks with many of you. That once you hear the word of God proclaimed, you'll go, "I've got to do something about that."

Then here's kind of an overview of the ministry of Jesus Christ in Matthew 4. ***23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom... We're going to see that in the Sermon on the Mount. ...and healing every disease and sickness among the people.***

Flip over to Chapter 5. ***1 Now when Jesus saw the crowds...*** We see this often throughout the gospel that when Jesus saw the crowds, he was moved with compassion, he wanted to make the most of the opportunities that were right there. ***...he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him...*** Now, the word *disciple* means student and we have to understand this is a little bit different in that day as we understand it today. A student today is someone who goes in and learns a subject. So, we have teachers for this subject and teacher for that subject, but in that day, a student was someone who connected themselves, linked themselves to the heart and mind of a person and they were a disciple of them. They wanted to take on their beliefs, behaviors, thoughts, words, and actions.

2 ...and he began to teach them. This is where we go into the Sermon on the Mount. It begins with a blessing and an invitation. So, for all our visiting Baptist... That's why you love the Sermon on the Mount. It's a blessing and then an invitation. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." "Blessed are those who mourn." And at the end, he gives an invitation. In the middle... If you've ever wondered if the Sermon on the Mount was an expository sermon... Does Jesus just stand up and read the Tora and explain it or is it a topical sermon. When you see everything he covers in this, I would definitely consider it a topical sermon. Look at what he covers throughout the Sermon on the Mount.

These are the broad categories. He talks about the Law of Moses. He talks about anger. There are some of you who are patting yourself on the back because you've never murdered anyone, but you harbor anger, bitterness, resentment in your soul. He talks about reconciliation, how to come together when a relationship falls apart. He talks about lust. Some of you are patting yourself on the back

because you've never committed the physical act of adultery, but you have to remember that lust – looking upon a woman as to have her in your heart... Jesus talks about that, he talks about adultery. He talks about divorce. He talks about oaths – how to be a person of your word. He talks about love. He talks about giving. He talks about prayer and fasting. I hope you never complain about a sermon length at this church again. Are we clear on that one? Jesus covers a lot of stuff in the Sermon on the Mount. He talks about judging others.

After he teaches the ways of the kingdom, this is what he declares. He goes okay you've heard this, you've heard it said, but I say to you. Watch the invitation of this sermon in Matthew 7: 13-14.

13 “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.” Many are going to listen to this message and do nothing with it. Many are going to listen to it and choose another path. They are going to choose what seems right in their eyes and what seems right in their eyes leads to destruction. **14 “But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”**

We read in Matthew 7 **28 When Jesus had finished saying these things...** When he had finished preaching this sermon, **29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.**

If you are brand new to Woodland Hills Family Church, we want you to know that we take the word of God very seriously around here. We stand on the authority of the scripture and all of the scripture. We don't pick the parts we like and leave out the parts we don't like. We preach the whole Bible. We, as followers of Jesus, stand on the authority of Jesus and his word. What that means, to make this very practical for you, is we believe everything Jesus taught. We believe that Jesus is the only way to the Father. No one comes to the Father except through Him. We believe there is only one true God. We believe that marriage is between a man and a woman. We believe that life begins at conception. We believe that life is as valuable, as we talked about last week in the value of children. We believe children have value in the womb and outside of the womb. We believe that God hates divorce.

As I declare all of that from the authority of scripture, can I tell you what some just heard? This is why we are talking about hearing the sermon today. Some of you just heard that at Woodland Hills Family Church, they hate Muslims. Some of you just heard that at Woodland Hills Family Church, they hate gay people. Some of you just heard they hate divorced people. Some of you just heard they hate anyone who has had an abortion.

I want to tell you something; that's not at all what I just said. You see why we are starting with this idea of listening to a message, just as they listened to the message and saw a man who spoke with authority. We want you to know something. We don't hate people who have had a divorce. God hates divorce; he hates the destruction that it causes, but we have a whole ministry called DivorceCare because we care for you, we love you. We don't hate gay people. We wouldn't be what you would label homophobic as a church; not at all. We believe your lifestyle is destructive and contrary to the Word of God and we want to lead you on another path. Not on the path that you think is right. We stand on the authority of scripture. We believe that Jesus is the only way and we don't believe there are a lot of ways to the Father. Jesus didn't declare “I am A way.” He said, “I am THE way.”

I want you to know we can stand on the authority of Jesus and his word and we can speak the truth in love, but, boy, we live in a culture right now that says “No, you can’t do that. If you stand on the authority of that book, you are a bigot. If you stand on the authority of that book, you are a racist. If you stand on the authority of that book, you are a hate monger.” When did being passionate about your beliefs mean that you have to be angry and ugly and nasty? May we be a church that is passionate about what we believe. May we not back down on the scripture.

I do other things besides pastoring and one of the things is I’ve kind of moved into the area of comedy. I enjoy doing comedy. It’s refreshing to my soul. I’ve had friends who have called me after listening to messages, and they’re like, “I think you have to be careful what you say.” I ask them what they mean and they say “As a pastor you’ve got to be careful what you say because it could hurt your brand.”

I’m like, “Bro, I pastor in Branson; I don’t have a brand.” I have to tell folks.

They’ll say “It’s going to ruin you before you even get...”

I go, “But let me tell you that I’m a pastor first. I’m called to proclaim the whole counsel of God’s word.”

“But if you say that, you’ll be uninvited.”

I’m like, “Exactly! That’s what I’m trying to do. There are places I don’t want to go and if they don’t want me then that’s fine!”

“You’re going to offend the Baptist.”

“I’m great with that. I’ve been doing it for years and it doesn’t hurt the “brand” whatever that means.” The more you make fun of them, the more they invite you. I haven’t figured that one out.

I think that’s the problem. Churches today are worried too much about their brand. “Well, we want good reviews on Facebook.” Jesus says, “If they hate you, just remember they hated me first.” We’re trying too hard to go after five stars on Facebook. I’m thinking maybe we should have lower stars on Facebook if we are actually doing our job. “It’s bad on brand. Let’s just stay away from that topic.” Then I wouldn’t call you a pastor and I wouldn’t call you a church.

Here’s what we do think about following Jesus. **Following Jesus means I hear what I need to hear, not what I want to hear.** As a pastor, I would love to stand up here week after week and just tell you jokes. That would be fun, but I stand doubly accountable for what I say and I don’t get to just say what you want to hear. I have to say what you need to hear and sometimes that makes you mad. Some of you walk in here on Sundays and you’re like, “I hope I get... I want to hear this right here.” But I’m asking that during this series, the next two months, September and October, your heart and your mind is open to hearing things you don’t want to hear. But not just hearing things you don’t want to hear, but doing something with it.

I pick on Baptists a lot in this church. If you are brand new, just know that I grew up independent, fundamental, pre-millennial, King James Version only Baptist, so it's how... I have to stick with my roots. You're going to love this next term. This next term is a Baptist term.

Following Jesus means being okay with having my toes stepped on. Raise your hand if you love that term and you know what I'm talking about. At the church I grew up, people would leave and the pastor always stood at the back and shook every single person's hand as they walked out. People would actually say to him, "Got my toes stepped on today; thanks for that!" They are looking for it. Raise your hand if you've looked for having your toes stepped on. Look at all the old people in the room. It's all the old people going, "I love having my toes stepped on; it's one of my favorite things to have happen."

We have to be okay with this and here's why. This is what the Apostle Paul told young Pastor Timothy in 2 Timothy 3. **16 All Scripture...** We stand on the authority of this. **...is God-breathed...** In other words, it's inspired and it's useful. I love this four-part outline. You could do a whole series on these four. The first one of these four has to do with knowledge. The last three have to do with behavior. It says it's useful knowing the scripture, hearing the scripture proclaimed, a sermon.

...and is useful for teaching... In your quiet time in the morning when you open the Bible, don't just go to the good parts and skip of the painful parts. All scripture is God-breathed. Go to the scripture with the mind that says, "What will you teach me today?" It's useful for teaching. Your translation may say *doctrine*. We teach here what we believe about God the Father, God the Son, God, the Holy Spirit, about the scripture, about end times, about the church, about salvation, about man. That's teaching what we believe and walking through it.

The next one says **rebuking...** This has to do with conviction that you would say, "Okay, I just heard something that doesn't line up with the way I'm living and what was just declared doesn't line up with the way I'm living. I'm convicted by that, so something is going to change. And there are sins of omission and sins of commission, meaning there are things you are doing that you shouldn't be doing that you need to stop. And there are things you are not doing that you should be doing that you need to start. The scripture says that's conviction. We need to hear the word of God proclaimed and go, "Okay I'm going to do something today, I'm going to make a change, I'm going to repent of that sin and go in another direction."

There is **correcting...** This is the idea of setting the record straight, meaning you've heard a lot this week about this subject or that subject and it seems to be all over the map what we believe and what we hear and tolerance and intolerance. Let me declare the word of God today so that we can set the record straight on what the Lord believes about this issue right here, about this big topic. Let's just go ahead and set the record straight. That's correction.

...and training in righteousness... This is the idea of training a child in the way they should go. In other words, when you hear the Word of God proclaimed, you should have a desire, you should be moving forward in your walk with Jesus, moving from immaturity to maturity. When the word of God is proclaimed, you should be taught what it means, you should be convicted of sin, the record should be set straight on what we believe, and then you should say, "This is an area in my life that I need to grow

up.” I’m going to hear the Word of God, talk about relationships and about loving people who hate me. It’s time for me, at 42 years old, to stop harboring bitterness towards a family member who hurt me 20 years ago. That’s immaturity. Training says, “It’s time for me to grow up. It’s time for me to let that go. It’s time for me to go after them and try to make amends and be reconciled with that brother, that sister, that cousin, that mom, that dad.”

Some of you prefer the jokes. You don’t want teaching. You don’t want rebuking. You don’t want correcting. You don’t want training. The problem is we need that, **17 so that the servant of God** (you and me) **may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.** We don’t do good works to bring ourselves into a relationship with God. We do our good works as an overflow of our relationship with Jesus. We need to be training. We need to be rebuked. We need to be corrected.

Don’t you love this as a parent? If you go home today and you start to instruct your kids... You have to teach them something they didn’t know before or you have to correct them, rebuke them because of the way they were treating somebody. What if you sit down to share with them and your five-year-old daughter says, “Please tell me, blessed mother.” What if you went to correct your kid and they sat down in front of you, looked at you intently, and they were just so focused on you? This is the heart I want when I come to the scripture. This is what the follower of Jesus should desire.

Again, I want to encourage you. Be okay with having your toes stepped on this morning. Some of you are like, “He couldn’t have picked a worse start to Labor Day weekend. Where are the beach balls and the popsicles? That was Memorial Day. It was a lot more fun on Memorial Day. Labor Day is a little downer.” Not if you want to experience life at its fullest. Let’s look at four different types of listeners today.

The Critiquing Listener

This is the person who shows up week after week and their desire is to critique what’s going on rather than being taught, rebuked, corrected, or trained.

About nine years ago, in this church, we went through a very painful split over critiquing. A large group rose up and said, “We like this teacher.” Another group rose up and said, “We like this teacher.” One group said, “We prefer when this guy speaks.” Another group said, “We prefer when this guy speaks.” It started to divide our church and we didn’t handle it well. So, today... I probably should have said this months and months ago, but today, as we launch into fall, you’re probably going to see that this is where this sermon idea to start this series came from.

Paul warned the Corinthian church of this. He said this in 1 Corinthians 1: **11 My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you.** They’re not getting along, they are divisive. Christ doesn’t bring division; he brings unity. We unify around him. **12 What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul...”** Again, going back to the idea of disciple or student is “I adhere to this guy and his ways. I like the way he does it and I’m sticking with him.”

But then another says, "It's not really Paul that tells me what I want to hear, it's not his method or personality. ...**another, "I follow Apollos..."** "I like Apollos. I really like the way he does it." ...**another, "I follow Cephas..."** They are talking about these leaders. ...**still another, "I follow Christ."**

Can I ask a favor? I asked it in the first service and I'm going to ask it in this service. This comes from your pastor, asking you. If your heart is one of critiquing, can I ask that you get behind and support 100% the teaching team of Woodland Hills Family Church? No matter who is up here proclaiming the Word of God. No matter who is getting there start. We have newer speakers up there that are just getting started in preaching and teaching, and we have seasoned veterans that are coming in. I just want to encourage you to support the teaching team because it's an issue of unity. Nothing concerns me more than us starting to pick Paul, Apollos, Cephas... Starting to pick the leaders we like and prefer and attending church on those days. This is why we don't answer the question when you call in the office and ask who is speaking this week. That's because it's a bigger issue at stake and the issue is unity. Some of you are ticked right now that I'm bringing this up, but I'm asking that you open your heart and mind to conviction and rebuke.

Some of you walked in here this morning and this was your primary question: "I wonder who is speaking this morning." I don't think that's a helpful question. Honestly, I think that's a disunifying question. This is why I had to walk out of the lobby before the first service. Five people asked me this question. I'm not frustrated with you; I'm just asking that you be a part of God doing something bigger and greater at this church than just a speaker. Some of you are saying, "I wonder who it is?" But I think a better question, as you walk in next week, would be "What will God teach me this morning?"

Some of you have been in church for 120 years. You've read the Bible more than I have. You know the Bible more than I do. You've studied more than any seminarian I know. You know the Bible in and out. So, you learning something new? I don't know if that's going to happen. Maybe or maybe not. Every now and then, 80-year-old Pat Kershaw will come up to me or email me afterwards and go "I never thought of it that way before."

For some of you, you come in... Again, some of you have been in church 120 years and you walk in and you want to be rebuked. And when your attitudes are pointed out that need to change, you're like, "Bring it! I know what it produces in my life and I want it. I'd love somebody to call it out besides her." I see friends right now looking at their spouse.

My friend Bob sits over here, usually in the first service, and it's almost become a joke between us. But when I usually walk down... On Sunday morning, I come down this side. He stops me and I love when he asks me this question. He goes "How's the material today?" He used to tell me, "I need to know how the material is to decide whether or not I stay after worship. I just want to know if I should get to IHOP or if I should actually stay and listen to what's going on." I'm going to leave it at that and trust the Lord to work in your heart and life on this one.

What will God show me this morning? And Reverend George Whitefield... Whenever you really want to make a point, you find someone who has been gone for a long time. He's been gone for hundreds of years. He was a great Methodist minister, part of a great awakening in God moving in the hearts and

lives of his people. he said this: *"Preferring one teacher over another has often been of ill consequence to the church of God."* I'm going to leave it at that and just ask that the Lord work in your heart and life on that one.

The Distracted Listener

I'm a distracted listener. How many of you really struggle watching a movie with someone who is distracting you because their mom never taught them how to eat snacks? You know what I'm talking about. It's that person in the movie theater who doesn't know how to eat popcorn. It's the one that thinks the best popcorn is on the bottom. Does anybody know what I'm talking about? You're trying to watch the movie and they are digging around in the popcorn bag. How many of you know what I'm talking about? That's all of us. Okay, so good. And the twelve of you in here that we need to really take down on this one... Honestly, I'm almost about to bring you before the elders I'm so worn out with this. I sit there in my chair and I get so frustrated and stressed out. Then when they are done, to keep it sealed and fresh for the next day, they can't just set it down and take care of it after the movie. They have to crinkle it up and roll in down. Then about ten minutes later, they decide they want more. That's when I get up and Amy asks where I'm going. I tell her, "I have to hit this person right back here behind me because I am about to lose it!"

And then they get done with the popcorn and they've never opened a bag of candy in their lives. I'm like, "Let's go; we're leaving. I'm not even going to watch the rest of the movie." There have been movies where I've moved four or five times to try to be able to listen to the movie. Then you've had that person who plays the fiddle with their cup through the whole movie, right? It's just that squeaky little squeaky noise. Then they have a child that finishes their bottle of water and they sit there crinkling the empty bottle. Raise your hand if you're just livid right now.

You're like "He's hitting every single person." And it's fun and you enjoy when I hit someone else. You didn't like the critiquing part, but you're really liking the distracter. Many of you come in here today already completely and totally distracted from your week, completely and totally distracted from something that is weighing on you. It's why we spend so much time as a church thinking it through during the week. Katie back there is the one who runs what we call our experience. My wife does environments and Katie does experience. Amy is always thinking through environments that keep people from becoming distracted. That's why when you walk into our church, we don't have a lot of billboards with everybody selling their grandma's furniture and advertising babysitting and all the different ministries that you can support and parachurch ministries you can give to and "here's a bucket to put some change in for the college fund..." We keep all those distractions away. We want to stay focused.

Katie is thinking how we can remove distractions from folks in the service. I can keep it in the movie theater, but I'm going to go ahead and bring it into the church for just a second because some of you have wanted me to speak on this for years and I've just refused. That is babies in the service. Your like, "Here we go. He's going everywhere the angels dare to trod. Even the angels won't proclaim this stuff that he's talking about this morning."

Some of you are way over here on the issue and some of you are way over there. We have primary issues in this church and secondary issues. Primary issues are what we believe about God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, Jesus, the Bible... Then we have secondary issues. Children in the service is like a fourth or fifth type that's not anything to break fellowship over. I just want you to know something we believe around here. We talked about it last week. We value children. You can have your children in the service. A child making noise doesn't bother me at all. You've heard me speak. I can get louder and speak right over them. I sat down after a child was going on and on and on and I said, "That actually got a little fun for me, competing with that kid." And I can't explain it; I think it's the heart of a man, but I looked at her and I said, "I definitely won."

Here's what we've taught for years around here about your home. We believe children are a welcomed addition to the home, but not the center of it. And all God's people said... Amen. Eradicate the kid-centered home and eradicate the kid-centered service. We believe children are a welcome addition to this service, but not the center of it. When it becomes like everyone in the room is thinking about the child, that's a whole different issue. We just need to be tolerant and loving and caring and understanding. We actually have the word *family* in the name of our church: Woodland Hills *Family* Church.

Jesus said consider carefully how you listen. So, honestly, for some... I haven't even talked about mobile devices. Some of you are looking at your Bible online, but for you playing the video games right now, maybe it's distracting the person next to you. Help us remove distractions. Help us keep it where people can hear.

The Debating Listener

There are many that come in here with the idea that they've got to come up with a counterpoint. "When he speaks, I'm going to decide what I believe and what I agree with and what I don't and I'm going to spend most of the message just coming up with a counterpoint." That doesn't work in your marriage and it doesn't work in the church. You're not going to have a great marriage if when your spouse is speaking, you're coming up with a counterpoint. You're not even a listener at that point. You're just ready to fire off your next response.

In Proverbs 18, the scripture says, ***2 Fools find no pleasure in understanding...*** And you can't understand someone unless you're listening. You listen, in marriage and any relationship, with mouth closed, eyes open, ears open, body connected, distraction free. It's at that point that you can gain understanding.

It's one of the reasons that social media is such a poor communication method. You don't ever see the body language or hear the tone. With social media, someone can share... I've shared stuff, making a joke out of something, and people get all upset. I guess you weren't here when I was laughing as I typed it and you took me as being angry when I typed it. You know that 93% of communication is non-verbal. It's our tone, the way we fold our hands, the proximity to the person. You can say the exact same thing and people will hear it a different way.

...but delight in airing their own opinions. We don't deal with this a ton around here because I think most people that come here realize there is a much greater work going on that we all want to be a part of and it's not about having debates with each other and fighting each other.

The Attentive Listener

Wouldn't we all desire to be in relationship with this last type of listener and wouldn't we all desire to be this type of listener.

Proverbs 22 says, ***17 Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply your heart to my knowledge, 18 for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, if all of them are ready on your lips. 19 That your trust may be in the Lord, I have made them known to you today, even to you.***

So, where are you at? Let's start here on the rebuke and correction and training side, knowing that the teaching part is the doctrine, but then what is coming to mind right now? Are you the critiquing listener? Are you the debating listener? Are you the distracted listener? What prayer do you need to have as you walk in each week to Woodland Hills? What prayer do you need each morning before you open your Bible? Are you going to be distracted, are you going to be critiquing, are you going to be listening for someone else rather than yourself? Let me tell you who is in here today. There are many in here today that are not Christians. There are many in here today that have chosen the wide path. They have chosen the way that leads to destruction.

I met more people in the first service that were here against their will. There were probably five of them. I could tell as I was introduced to them. It's Labor Day weekend, they're here with family. Everybody was coming and they're here whether they wanted to be or not. So, you're here and you've never placed faith in Jesus. What we talk about to you is foolishness. It's ridiculous and you're going to argue and debate it. You're going to think we've picked our political party and now we're going down that road. We don't rest on the authority of a political party at this church. We rest on the authority of scripture. You think it's tainted with tradition. Listen, we believe that the scripture trumps tradition. Sorry to throw that name in again. That was not meant to... Honestly, that just came out; that has nothing to do with it.

You're like, "If I stay here long enough, you'll probably give me a Trump bumper sticker or a Make America Great Again hat." No, no, please don't be distracted by all that right now. What I would like to do to end this message is just declare for you a message that Peter preached out of Acts and then share with you briefly what Paul preached a few chapters later in Acts. I'm not going to add commentary to it; I'm going to let the message stand on its own. It's about the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ and where salvation is found. If you are brand new and you have chosen the path of destruction... If you were to die today, you would spend eternity separated from God, you would spend eternity in hell. I want you to listen. That's all I'm asking.

Here is what was preached in Acts 4. ***"It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. 11 Jesus is***

***'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.'* 12 *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.*"**

When Paul walked through Athens, he ended up standing before Areopagus and he said, "I looked around your city full of idols. You're going the wrong way. You're on the path that leads to destruction. I've looked around and you're very confused. You're a worshipful people; you're just worshiping the wrong thing." He stands up and declares "In him we live and move and have our being." He proclaims the resurrected Jesus Christ.

When he's done giving the gospel before the Areopagus, this is what we learned and this is what we know still happens today. There are still three responses to the gospel message. There will always be many responses to the same messages, but what we have to be careful to understand is that when God breathed this book, when scripture was inspired by Almighty God over 1,400 years and over 40 authors, he only meant one thing by what he said. But we take the one thing he said and we can apply it hundreds of ways. I think that's where we get confused today. We think God said this, but it can mean a bunch of different things. No, it only meant one thing when he said it and it only means one thing today. Our culture doesn't get to define what God meant when he spoke it. It was spoken, but we can apply it many ways.

After Paul preaches the resurrected Jesus, here are the responses in Acts 17. **32 *When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered...*** I just want to say, church, we have to be okay that every time we gather and Jesus is proclaimed, people will mock what we say. May we not become the followers of Jesus that when someone mocks what we believe, we go at their throat. May that not be you and may that not be me. We understand that some of you sneer.

...but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." In other words, "We have more questions. What you just proclaimed, we would like to know more about that." And they are in here today as well. I want to encourage you. If you sneered, mocked through today's message, I want you to hear this. I'm going to speak on behalf of this church, on behalf of our teaching team, on behalf of our elders, on behalf of the congregation gathered. We want you to come back next week. We're okay. We're not threatened by your mocking what we believe. We will have a welcoming environment for you next week. We want you to come and drink our coffee. We want you to come and gather here. We will think about you this week as we create environments and experiences for you to gather again with us next week.

Some of you have more questions. We say come back next week and we'll talk more and share more and explain more and maybe some of your questions will be answered. We also aren't afraid to place you in a home group to where your questions can be answered. We're okay with you coming to our men's study on Saturday morning. They meet once a month. But, maybe you come and say "I need someone to talk to." You can meet with our prayer team and ask questions. We're great with this.

But here's what we know too. Some of you heard, for the very first time maybe, or you've heard it before, but today, is the first time you decided to listen. After you heard of the resurrected Jesus, as

Paul had happen here as well... Some of the people became followers that day. ***33 At that, Paul left the Council. 34 Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed.*** And that will be many in this place today.

I'm going to ask you to bow your heads across the whole congregation. We will pray to close out. I'm going to invite you to stay, invite you to worship before we leave. Maybe you've been the one who has mocked, maybe you've been the one who has asked questions, but today, for you, you're like "I believe. Ted, I am on the path to destruction. I destroy my relationships. I then seek coping through drugs and alcohol. I'm destroying my life and I get that. Today, I want to confess that. I want to confess my sins before my Father in heaven and place faith in Jesus Christ, the resurrected Jesus."

As I pray, I'm going to ask that you just follow along with me in this prayer and you pray in your own words to the Father. Father, it is through the authority in the name of Jesus and the power of the blood of Jesus that I confess my sins before you. I've spent my whole life on the path to destruction. I've spent my whole life thinking I would just do what was right in my own eyes. But, today, I know clearly that is leading me down this road that is destroying my life and, ultimately, sends me to hell for eternity. Today, I confess that before you. I believe in my heart and I confess with my mouth that Jesus has been raised from the dead and the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that will save my lifeless soul. Be my Savior. I choose the narrow way. And today, I believe.

If you prayed that prayer in your words today, stop by and see our prayer team, tell someone at the Welcome Center on your way out. Let us know. We want to know of the decision you've made to become a follower of Jesus Christ.

Father, it is in the name of Jesus that we thank you for the opportunity we've had to gather today to worship. I pray for those who may mock what has been spoken. I pray that the Holy Spirit continues to convict them. For those who are still asking questions, I pray that they find answers to the questions that they have. For those who have believed, I pray that today they know clearly and understand and feel welcomed into this church family.

We're grateful for what you are doing here. We thank you that we get to celebrate baptism next week as a church family for those who have made decisions to follow your Son Jesus Christ.

It is in the name of Jesus that everyone agreed and said... Amen.