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**Hello Summer**  
**Part 5 – The Cross**  
Pastor Alex Himaya

Today, I want to dive right in. I told some people earlier this morning that I've not experienced warfare in my own heart and my own spirit like I did last night in a long, long time. I slept very few minutes last night, just in this battle. I just believe that God wants to do something fresh. In the last service, we saw four or five or ten people in here come to know Christ and four over there in the Chapel come to know Christ and we're just praying that today, if you're here and you don't have that settled – this relationship with the life-giving God and his Son Jesus Christ – today that could get settled for you.

Let's just pray together for anointing on this time. Father, today, in this place, we ask for supernatural anointing. We ask, Father, for favor and for unction from heaven. I pray, Father, that you would fall on this place and you would just minister to us. Holy Spirit, we tell you today we believe in you, we believe in your ministry, we're completely dependent upon it, and what we need is a touch from you in this place today. In Jesus name we pray, and together we all say... Amen.

I want to take you to this passage... Let me do this before I do that. Several people asked me in the first service about Israel. I mentioned Israel to you before. I've been twelve times, and I take people. We are going to do a trip in 2020. Several asked me after the last service about that and I gave them this email address to prevent me from having to do that after the second service. Would you just write this down if you have any interest in it? This is Tammy Adams, who is my assistant. [tadams@thechurch.at](mailto:tadams@thechurch.at) If you have any interest in that trip, she can get you all the information because I don't have any information other than it is in January 2020. I would love for you to go.

Quite honestly, this message has come out of... It began when I was 17. As a junior in high school, I had been a believer for two years when the Governor of Louisiana at that time, Edwin Edwards, stood up and preached this derogatory statement against Christ on a microphone for a radio address. Here's what he said. "We don't believe that Jesus died. We just believe that he swooned [meaning that he went unconscious], was laid in a grave, came back to consciousness, and walked out of the grave."

Now, I didn't understand it at the time. I don't know if it was righteous indignation in this two-year-old believer, or if it was this Middle Eastern temper, but something happened in me and I was ticked. I found myself, for about 15 hours a week, for months, in medical school libraries in Shreveport, Louisiana, studying. This is before the internet and before you could just pull it all up. And I was in books, trying to figure out what happens to the human body in a Roman crucifixion. And what is it that happened to Jesus? And what was going on before, during, and after the crucifixion?

There's a song we've been singing across the country that says the cross has the final word. There are always some arrogant theologians who are like, "No, the cross doesn't have the final word; the resurrection has the final word." And we're like, "Shut up." It's a song, right? We're not building our life off of a song, but when people say the cross, they don't mean just that wooden structure, they mean what happened before, during, and after the cross. So, the resurrection is inclusive in this banner called the cross. So, what we're talking about is when somebody wears a necklace or tattoos of a cross on their body, they are not celebrating this torture symbol. They are celebrating what happen because of the cross, that Jesus rose again and we have a relationship with him.

I'm titling this talk today *The Cross*. I want to read you a passage in 1 Corinthians 15. If you have your Bible, turn there. I'm going read the first few verses of that chapter. The interesting thing about this chapter is this is where the Apostle Paul, who wrote half of the New Testament and started half of the New Testament churches, says, "This is the most important thing I ever said." That's heavy when you think through that for a minute. He said a lot of stuff. I mean he wrote Romans. He is the theologian of theologians and he says this the most important thing he's ever said, so let's pay attention and ask God to show us.

**1 Now, brothers and sisters...** This is to the church. This is to those of us who already know Christ. Again, if you don't, we're glad you're here. ***...I want to remind you...*** We need to be reminded from time to time, don't we? Vision leaks and our memory is not amazing all the time. The older I get, I'm like *what happened? I had a thought right on the top of my head.* I used to go to bed and pull that thought back out the next morning. That's not possible any longer. I have to write it down or it's gone forever.

How many of you are parents? How many of you have ever had to remind your children of something? I have four: an 18-year-old daughter, whose graduating and actually going to Pastor Ted's alma mater, Liberty, which is 16 ½ hours away from Tulsa, Oklahoma, but we're very, very proud of her. Then I have a 16-year-old son and a 14-year-old son and 12-year-old daughter.

There is something happening with my sons right now, the middle two. I'm pretty well convinced the two halves of the brain are just not attached. It's like nothing is communicating between the two halves of the brain. Sometimes, I just say to Meredith, "Give them grace; they're brain dead. They'll get through puberty and the brain will attach itself."

I'll say, "Son, did you do what I asked you?" and he'll say, "No, I forgot." I'm like, "It was like five minutes ago that I asked you; what do you mean you forgot? How do you forget five minutes ago?"

So, I find myself saying to these boys on a regular basis, "I need you to do better." They're like, "What do you mean, Dad?" I'm like, "I need you just to do better at this thing called life and responsibility because here's what I need you to remember. You're leaving here in a couple of years. You're not staying. And when you go, you're not on my bill anymore. So, I need you to do really, really well so that you can take care of yourself. I need you to be a fully functioning adult who can take care of himself because I'm cutting you off. I just need to feel better about cutting you off that you can make it on your own."

Sometimes we have to remind people of things, right? As the children of God, we're no different; we have to be reminded of this message. So, look what he says, ***I want to remind you of the gospel...*** say gospel. You know gospel just means good news, right? It is good news. It was good news, it is good news, and it will forever be good news. And we need to be reminded that it's good news.

Sometimes the way we are reminded of how good the news it is, is by being reminded of the depravity that we used to live in. Sometimes it is a good exercise for you and me to crawl back down into the cesspool of what we used to be and where we used to live and what we used to experience and not just see but taste it and experience it to realize how good this news is. It is really, really, really good news.

Sometimes I meet Baptist people who will say, "I've never seen a miracle."

I'm like, "What do you mean you've never seen a miracle? Do you know Christ?"

They say, "Yes, I know Christ."

I'm like, "You're a miracle because you were dead and now you are alive. This is not a prayer you prayed and a card you filled out, this is a life-change event that happened in your life and you now will live forever and ever and ever in the presence of Jesus Christ, which is impossible because you are a sinner and he is holy, but he made a way. That's the gospel, the good news.

***...I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved...*** You ought to write that line down. By this gospel you are saved. There's no other way. There is absolutely no other way. There are a bunch of times in the Gospel of John that Jesus says, "I am." He says, "I am the bread of life. I am the living water. I am the good shepherd. I am the gate. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the way, the truth, and the life." And ends up saying, "And no one comes to the Father except through me." He's the only way and only gate into a relationship with Jesus Christ. By the gospel you are saved. ***...if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.***

***3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance...*** In other words, this is the most important thing. ***...that Christ died...*** say died. ***...for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried...*** say buried. ***...that he was raised...*** say raised. ***...on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared...*** say appeared. ***...to Cephas [or Peter], and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.***

That's Paul saying, "Last of all, he appeared to me. I'm one of the bunch, but I wasn't one of the bunch. I came along later." Remember, he was on his way to Damascus to persecute the church and Jesus showed up and made himself known to him and now he's a follower of Jesus Christ.

I just want to use those four verbs and paint the picture for you of what happened before, during and after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

**Christ died.** Now I don't know what kind of violence you've seen. Obviously, Branson is not known for it's violence. But, some of you are from other places and maybe you've seen some violence. Here's what I want to assure you of. You've never seen the violence that happened before and during a Roman crucifixion. I assure you of that. By the way, the crucifixion for Jesus began the night before what they called The Last Supper. By the way, it's called that because for them it was supper. It wasn't a little wafer and a little bit of juice; it was supper and they did that together. By the way, the only menu item on the table at their supper was bread.

We don't view bread in the way that they viewed bread in the first century, right? For us, bread is a side item, a freebie. It comes before the meal. You can go right up the road here to Lambert's and they will throw it at you. If it hits the floor... no big deal. I read the story of that. Do you know the history of that place? Mr. Lambert was the chef, the waiter, the hostess in his first café and some regular customer said, "Hey, Mr. Lambert, I know you're busy back there cooking; just throw me a roll." He said, "No, I'll get it to you in a minute." The customer said, "No, just throw it," and he threw it. That became the tradition at this place and it's now the home of the throwed roll. The food itself is not all that good, but the rolls are amazing.

In that day, bread was what you lived on; it was the meal. So, it's not the freebie that you get at Outback before the steak comes or at Texas Roadhouse. It is the meal and Jesus is saying, "I want to be the meal. I want to be the menu item. I want to be the center of your life. I want to be what saves you and what sustains you and what secures you and what satisfies you. I want to be the bread of life in your life." Jesus died, and it began for him the night before at The Last Supper.

When they finished that last supper, he made his way through or outside the city gates. We don't know for sure, but he made his way out of that upper room and he came around this side of Jerusalem. He came through a valley called the Gehenna Valley. You've heard of Gehenna before, right? It's the trash dump. He makes his way through the Kidron Valley. The Kidron Valley is really deep and pierced down in to the land. He's coming through that valley and the depth of it is exasperated because at the top of the hill is the Temple Mount, which goes up and up and up. So, the fact that this goes up and up and up and this goes down, down, down, it was a magnificent sight I'm sure as they made their way around that valley onto the Mount of Olives.

The Mount of Olives is a mountain with olives on it. That's why it's called the Mouth of Olives. Sometimes we make the Bible really difficult. It's not all that difficult. They went on the Mount of Olives, which is a mountain with olives on it. In the middle of the Mount of Olive is a garden and the garden is called the Garden of Gethsemane. Gethsemane means the press. Some scholars think it was a wine press. I don't think so because it was on the Mount of Olives. So, I think it was an olive press. Maybe there was a vineyard there too; we don't know, but I think it was an olive press.

By the way, the pressing of olives is this ancient, ancient practice and it hasn't changed much in all of these thousands of years. They will take these buckets of olives off the tree and pour them in this rock trough that's about seven or eight feet in diameter. I don't know how many feet in circumference. But the trough is about two feet wide and two feet deep. They'll just pour these buckets of olives in it and then they will take what is called a millstone...

Remember Jesus said, "You'd be better to have a millstone tied to your foot and thrown in the ocean than to lead one of these little ones astray." Jesus was probably standing next to an olive press when he said that. The millstone is this concrete wheel that has a hole in the middle of it that sets in the trough on top of the olives.

There is a stick that goes into the hub of the wheel and either a servant of an animal would be attached to that stick and they would push the wheel around, crushing the olives. In the first pass when you crush the olives... The olive oil that comes out on the very first pass is called extra virgin olive oil. It's the most expensive olive oil and it's the best because it is the oil that has been kissed by the sun on the skin of the olive. In that day, that oil was used in one place, the Holy of Holies. It was the most valuable. It's so interesting that this press where Jesus is putting his life in this garden... Remember he goes to the disciples and says, "Hey, you all pray with me," and he goes a little further and he gets on his knees and he's praying. He comes back and finds them asleep. He says, "Could you just wake up and pray for a few minutes?" Then he goes and prays by himself and he comes back a third time and finds them asleep and says, "Could you just pray with me?" Three times; it's so interesting.

The second pass of that millstone produces olive oil which, in that day, was used for lighting oil lamps. And Jesus is the light of the world. In fact, for you to think through that for a moment... In fact, I've been studying this for about two years now and I haven't preached it yet because I think it will just rock everybody's world. I just need you to know Jesus was probably not born in December, but he was likely conceived during the festival of lights called Hanukah because he is the light of the world.

By the way, a moment ago, I said that he said, "I am the bread of life." Do you know where the bread of life was born? It's not a trick question. Bethlehem, Bayt Lahm in Hebrew. Bayt means house, Lahm means of bread. In other words, the Bread of Life was born in a bakery, which is humor only God gets, right? It makes perfect sense. By the way, Jesus didn't miss a single festival. It's important for you to know the Jewish culture.

So, he is in this press where the life is being pressed out of him. Three times, he asked his followers to pray with him and three times they fell asleep. The third time they press that millstone over the olives, it crushes the pits of the olives and it produces a substance that you and I would call lye, which is what you make soap from. How interesting is it that the only one who is the King of Kings and the Priest of all Priest and the Holy of Holies where the first pass created, and the second pass creates light and he's the light of the world and he's also the one who washes your sins away and mine.

Jesus Christ is in that place and the life of God is there. It is being pressed out of him. In that place where he was praying, the Bible says he began to sweat drops like blood. It's a condition that physicians call hematridrosis. Hematridrosis is when you are in such agony and such focus that your arteries and vessels actually release blood into your sweat glands and you sweat blood. Jesus was that focused, and he sweat blood.

On our first trip in the year 2000, eighteen years ago, we were there at the Garden of Gethsemane and there was a lady with us who was a botanist. She was from the University of Arkansas and she had a PHD in botany. She studied plants for a living, which sounds crazy boring to me. We were in the garden

and we couldn't figure it out because there were so many tourist, which is fascinating by the way. When you go to this place, it's so fascinating that the whole world comes there. I know you think the whole world comes to Branson, but they don't. The whole world goes to Israel, right? People from every tribe and every tongue and every nationality come to this place because something changed the world in this place.

In that crowded scenario in the Garden of Gethsemane, it felt like Baptist day at Six Flags or Silver Dollar City. It was a miserable experience. There were people everywhere, bumping into me. I looked across the road and I saw this priest over there guarding the gate into this private garden. It was about an acre that had olive trees on it. I walked over to him and said, "Hey, can we go in there?" and he said, "No." I said, "How much?" Cause that's how I roll. I said, "How much," and I bribed a Catholic priest so that my tour group could worship.

We went into this private garden and it was about an acre with olive trees. By the way, some of those trees are carbon dated at 2,000 years old, which means Jesus could have been praying beside or kneeling against one of trees. I just told our people to spread out and just take in where they were. People were laid prostrate on the dirt underneath these olive trees for about 20 to 30 minutes, praying. We came together and we sang a song. Remember that song – "Shall we Gather in the Garden?"

When this lady, this botanist, was getting up off the ground, she grabbed a clump of clover out of the ground, which looked like the green clover that grows all over Branson, Missouri, except for this clover had red dots all over it. She said to our Jewish guide, Ovey, who is in his 60s... He was the chief guide at the time over all of Israel.

She said, "Ovey, tell me about this clover. I've never seen it and I've studied plants my whole life."

Ovey said, "You're not the first botanist to ask about this clover. We've done some research and we've made some inquiries and to our knowledge, this clover only grows in about three or four places on the planet and all of them are in Jerusalem. One place is this place called the Garden of Gethsemane. Another place is over on the back side of the former High Priest Caiaphas' house (we'll get there in a minute). The third place that we know for sure that it grows is at a place called Golgotha. He said, "We believe..." A Jewish man who doesn't even believe he needs a savior looked at us and said, "We believe Yahshua sweat his blood on this clover and stained it forever." I can't tell you anymore than that; that's just what he told me.

We were in that place and we were in that garden and Jesus' life is being pressed out of him and then he was arrested. You know that story. In all the plays, they screw it all up. I don't know if there are plays of this in Branson, but if there are, make sure they read the Bible. They always send Roman guards after Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. They weren't Roman guards that came after Jesus; they were Jewish people. They were the temple guards that came after Jesus and they arrested Jesus and they took him and put him on trial for his life.

There were two phases of the trial: the Jewish phase and the Roman phase. We know all about the Roman phase and Pontius Pilate, but the Jewish phase happened first, and they took him to Caiaphas' house who was the former high priest.

Caiaphas' house is still standing today, by the way, which is incredible construction. Thousands of years later, this rock house is still standing. There is a cistern under the house and a well. You have to have wells in the Middle East because it rains like three times a year, so you have to collect every drop of rain so that you can live off the water. Next to the cistern is a prison. No doubt about it; it's a prison. You can see where the chains are fastened through the wall, etc. The first time I saw that, I thought *what kind of pastor was he that he needed a prison in his house?* He was probably a youth pastor, right? But the high priests heard all the cases; they were like the judges of the day, so there was very much a need for the prison at the high priest's house. By the way, most scholars believe Jesus spent his last night alive in that well or in that cistern.

In that day, you were lowered with a rope. Today there are stairs around the perimeter of it. About five or eight years ago, we had an atheist, agnostic... He couldn't actually make up his mind which he was. He ran the press company at the University of Arkansas. He was a professor. He went on the trip with us. When I found out he was atheist/agnostic, I called the airlines and moved his seat next to mine. We sat next to each other for 18 hours on the way over there, which was fun. We had a lot of conversations. After several days into the trip of amazing sights and amazing tourism, teaching at every place, it was in that cistern when he looked over at me with tears running down his cheeks and said, "I believe." And he gave his life to Christ in that well and his life was changed. That's where death was arrested, and his life began.

When Jesus left Caiaphas' house, he went to Anis' house, who was the existing high priest, then he went back to Caiaphas. They asked him, "Are you teaching that you are the Christ? Are you teaching insurrection? Are you teaching that you are the Son of God?"

Jesus said, "Hey, wait a minute. What I taught, I taught openly. I taught it in the Synagogue. I taught it in the Temple and the courts. I'm not hiding this. What I've taught, I taught everywhere." And the man sitting behind him hit him in the face and said, "You ought to show more respect to the High Priest," not knowing he had just hit the true High Priest in the face.

They then took him into the Roman phase of the trial. In the Roman phase of the trial, he appeared before Pontius Pilate. Pontius Pilate was the leader of the Jews, representing this Roman province called Judea. His home was in Caesarea by the Sea on up the coast, but he was now in Jerusalem and he was hearing these cases as the leader of the Jews. So, Pontius Pilate hears these cases and I'll just paraphrase this whole story because it's a very interesting dialogue. By the way, if you're trying to follow along, you have to look at all four Gospels because I'm tying them all together. That's what ADD people do.

Pontius Pilate is trying to get to Jesus. He is asking him searching questions about truth and trying to figure it out. It's crazy interesting dialogue. He basically says, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give him a fierce beating." And they took that prisoner, in this case Jesus Christ, into that torture chamber where

that Roman soldier called a lictor took that weapon called a flagellum or a cat of nine tails, which is a handle with nine strips of leather coming off the end of it. At the end of each of the strips of leather was a conglomeration about the size of our fist made of metal, rock, and bone, designed to be grappling hooks.

They would take that prisoner and tie him over a stump or a bolder so that every muscle in his back was pulled tight, stretched, and exposed. Then that soldier would stand on one side of Jesus and slap and just at the time those hooks would grab flesh, he would rip it back, tearing the flesh off of the side and the back of Jesus. History says when he had done all the damage he could do from one side – slap and rip and slap and rip – he would come and stand behind him and he would throw it over him. He didn't care if it came over his face, onto his face, ripping the flesh off of his skull, or onto his chest, ripping the skin off of his chest. When he had done all the damage from those two angles, he would stand on the other side and he would throw it – slap and rip and slap and rip. When he had done all he could do from these three angles, history says that he would come and face him and throw it over his face onto the back of his head, ripping the scalp off of his skull. Now, they knew from experience that if you hit a man 40 times with that weapon, you would kill him, so it was an act of mercy they hit Jesus 39 times.

The Bibles says that Jesus was unrecognizable. I just want to paint the context of that Bible word. That does not mean that Mary walked by and thought *Is that Jesus?* It means that as people walked by, they thought *Is that a human or an animal, that skeleton I'm looking at?*

Then they put that cross, that horizontal piece on his shoulders, tied his hands to it, put a rope around his waist, and led him through that narrow Jerusalem streets. There's a point in which the Bible narrative says he falls. Maybe the soldier jerked the rope. Can you imagine what happens to you when a timber is behind your head and your hands are immobilized. His face was planted in the pavement. The Bible says they mocked him and ridiculed him and ripped the beard out of his face.

He made his way to a place called Golgotha, which looks like a skull. It's called the place of the skull. The cliff, the rock, the geographical formation looks exactly like a skull. Again, we try to make this hard. It was a place of death where they killed people on a busy street at a busy intersection at road level. It was not on a hill. Every painting and hymn we sing is as if Jesus died on a grassy knoll in London with sheep. That doesn't exist in Israel in the Middle East. It's on a busy road where people are passing. It's crime prevention to say "If you commit a crime here, this is what happens to you."

They put Jesus on that cross between two criminals. One of them wasn't repentant and said, "Hey, Jesus, if you're really the son of God, get us down from here." The criminal on the other side was obviously repentant. He said, "Hey, why don't you shut up. Can't you see this man has done nothing to deserve death?" Maybe he had killed people before, but he had never seen someone die with such dignity. He said, "Jesus, when you come again in your Parousia..." It's a Greek word which means kingdom. In other words, he was acknowledging him as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lord. "When you come again in your Parousia, would you remember me." To which Jesus said, "You're not going to have to wait that long. Today, you are going to be with me in paradise."

The application is it's never too late with Jesus. He comes through at the ninth hour on a regular basis. In other words, you and I can't put guns to him and say, "God, if you don't work a miracle right now, I'm not going to believe you work miracles." God's like, "What do you mean? I've already worked the greatest miracle of all time. I beat death, hell, and the grave. I am the miracle worker."

They put Jesus on that cross at 9:00 in the morning. At high noon, when that sun should have been at it's hottest and brightest in the Middle East, the Bible said the earth began to shake and the thunder began to roll, and the sky grew pitch black, which means even nature could not believe what happened to the one by whom and through whom it had been spoken into existence. Nature was shocked at what was playing out with Jesus Christ. The veil was ripped from top to bottom in the Holy of Holies to indicate that God ripped it. Man didn't rip it, but God ripped it from top to bottom to make a way in.

Today, all I can paint for you is a little bit of the physical because I cannot, for any moment, begin to imagine the spiritual. Jesus died for your sin and mine. For every bad attitude we've every had, for every willful act of disobedience we've ever committed, for every sin we have ever committed, Jesus Christ died. There are lots of statement that Jesus said from the cross, which is a fascinating sermon series to just study the last words of Jesus from the cross. One of the phrases that he made is the one that I just can't get over. Thirty years of reading this text and I just cannot fathom that Jesus said, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing." In the Greek, it's in the imperfect tense, which means he said it and he kept on saying it. He said it over and over again. With the nail in one hand, he said, "Father..." and the nail in the other hand, "Father. And the nail in his feet, "Father, forgive them." Every joint dislocated, "Father, forgive them..."

By the way, the Word of God... Jesus is the Word. John 1 says, "The Word was God and the Word was with God and the Word became flesh and it dwelt among us." Jesus is the very Word of God. He is the Word and he is the one by whom and through whom everything that was spoke into existence was spoken into creation. And when God said, "Let there be light," it wasn't a statement that happened and it was over; he said, "Let there be light, light, light..." It's still happening. The Word is still going out. There is still life on this planet because God said, however many years ago, depending on your philosophy of the earth, let there be light and there is still light because the Word of God doesn't return void. It goes out and accomplishes exactly what it was set out to accomplish. And in that moment, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them." and he's still saying it. Forgive them, forgive them, forgive them, they don't know, know, know, what they are doing, doing, doing." Jesus died.

**Christ was buried.** The way that you would bury a body in that day is that you would rip strips of linen and then wrap the body up like a mummy. Then you would put this gummy substance called myrrh and then spices and flowers to push back the smell of death. Then you would do the whole process again. You would do it as long as you had time or as long as you had spices. In this case, they had to hurry because the Sabbath was coming. So, they took Jesus into a new tomb and they put him in this new tomb, which means it was borrowed.

I had a few people ask me over the years why would the Son of God, the King of Kings, borrow a tomb. Certainly, you know the answer, right? He was only going to use it for three days.

Then they would lay the body in this tomb that had been cut out of the rock. Then they would roll this rock, which was six feet tall by six feet wide, in front of this tomb. Then they would take these cords and they would tie a knot in these cords and put hot wax on it. Then somebody with the signet ring of Cesar would push that signet into that hot wax to say, "The one who breaks this seal, the punishment for him is going to be death." Little did they know the one who was going to break that seal, they tried death on him and it wasn't going to work. And then they took an Elite Roman guard... An Elite Roman Guard means there were sixteen Roman soldiers to guard a six-foot hole. And Jesus was buried. We're getting ready to walk on holy ground because the Bible says that Jesus rose again.

**Christ rose again.** He didn't stay there, right. Three days later, the women went to finish the burial. They couldn't finish it because they were in a hurry because of the Passover and the Sabbath was coming. So, they were on their way back to the tomb... I just envision this in my own heart, in my own mind that the women were on their way back, just working themselves up into a worried frenzy. The Bible doesn't say that, but they were worried. I know female. Sometimes you worry, females. I tell my wife all the time, "What are you worried about? Don't worry, be happy. There's a song about it. Just be happy." Quit worrying, right? There's no point of worrying; it never fleshes out anyway. Ninety-nine percent of what we worry about never even comes to fruition. It's a waste of energy and a waste of time. All the way to the tomb. "Who's going to move the stone?" Just working themselves up.

And they got there. I think it's interesting, by the way, that he let the women be the first ones there. You think I'm making fun of you; I'm not making fun of you. I think Jesus let the women go to be the witnesses of the resurrection because he knew they wouldn't get sidetracked on the way to go tell everybody else about it, right? They wouldn't stop and sweep the garage on the way out and forget where they were going.

The women turned the corner and it says the stone was moved. It's interesting in the Greek. Matthew uses the word *kahluo* (sp), which means the stone was moved. Mark puts the prefix *ona* *kahluo* (sp), which means the stone was moved a distance. Luke uses a different prefix of *appa* *kahluo* (sp), which means the stone was moved a great distance.

Who was the first man to the tomb? His name was John. Do you remember the story? When the women came and told them, they took off running. John was running, but John outran Peter. John stopped and looked in and took it all in. Do you remember this in the story? He's analytical, like some of you. He's a very heavy-duty thinker and he stopped and just looked at it and was taking it all in. Peter finally catches up and runs right into the middle of the tomb. It says he stood there and looked at the grave clothes folded. By the way, John uses the word *aero* which is where we get our English word airplane or aerodynamic, which means that stone flat flew off that grave. Peter is standing in the middle of that tomb. It says he stood there looking at the folded grave clothes.

That's bothered me for decades. I hate folding clothes. It's a bad exercise for ADD people. When I was in college, I took a mesh bag, threw all my dirty clothes in it, and then throw the whole bag in the washer, and then throw the whole bag in the dryer, and then I would live out of it. The worst part of folding clothes for an ADD kid is matching socks. When my babies were little, I would get so mad over this because the dryer eats them, and we can't find the matches. We would have baskets of unmatched

socks and I would tell Meredith, "Just throw them all away and start over. Go buy 20 sacks and let's just have new socks and let's forget about this nonsense."

Who took time on resurrection morning to fold the clothes? About ten years ago, I asked a Jewish Rabbi about that.

He said, "It's very simple."

I said, "Not to me."

We sat down at a picnic table. He said, "Every Jewish boy understands that."

I said, "I'm not Jewish; help me."

He said, "When a Rabbi, which Jesus was by the way, would entertain people in his home, the servants were to see, but not be seen. So, they were ready, but they weren't seen. So, they would hide behind pillars and hide behind posts, looking for the beckoning of the master, looking for the beckoning of the Rabbi. When the Rabbi would give the signal, they would come and wait on his guests. At any point in the dinner if the Rabbi wanted to stand up with his guest, walk over to the balcony, and admire the view, there was a signal that the Rabbi would give to the servants. If he took his napkin and threw it on the table, it meant 'We're done here, you can clean it.' But, if he took his napkin and he folded it and laid it on the table, it meant 'We're not done here; I'm coming back.'"

The Rabbi Jesus is in that tomb. He took the time to fold the clothes to say, "We're not done; I'm coming back." And we know that he did, by the way. In fact, Jesus did not move that stone to let himself out; he moved that stone to let us in to become a witness to the resurrection of the Son of God. By the way, there's another verb.

**Christ appeared.** For the skeptic in the room, let me just say to you. More than 500 followers at the very same time saw him. He did not do this in a corner and in some upper room only. He made himself known in a resurrected state. To all of the apostles, in multiple point of geography all over the nation of Israel. Do you remember who he saw first in the list in 1 Corinthians 5? It said Cephas or Peter. For about 15 years that bothered me because I was like why Peter? Why does he get to be first? Peter denied Jesus; why is he the one that Jesus goes to see first?

A few years after I started asking that question, I was in a state of rebellion with the Lord. I was fighting God over some things that I felt like he wanted to do. And I asked the question again. "Peter denied you," to which the Lord said, "Exactly. That's the whole point. Peter needed to see me really, really bad." Do you remember that narrative in The Last Supper?

Jesus is in that upper room and he says, "One of you is going to deny me," and Peter says, "Not me, Jesus." Jesus says, "Shhh Peter." I related to Peter. When I read the New Testament, he's the one I related to.

My dad, knowing my personality growing up, this is the repeated instruction he gave me. "Alex, never pass up an opportunity to shut up." There's a lot of wisdom in that. You learn more when you're listening.

Peter said, "No, no, Jesus, I'm telling you I would never ever deny you."

Jesus said, "Shhh, not talking to you Peter."

"No, Jesus, I would die for you before I would deny you."

"Peter, before the rooster crows in the morning, you're going to deny me three times."

Have you ever had a rooster? Sometimes they think it's morning and it's not morning. I've shot some of our roosters.

That rooster crowed, and I wish I could tell you it was a Roman knife to his throat that forced him to deny Jesus, but it wasn't. It was a little girl on her way to run an errand. You remember when Jesus was arrested, John followed after. The one whom Jesus loved, that's John, that's the way he referred to himself. I always thought, *How arrogant is that?*

In the last couple of years, several Rabbis have told me that most scholars believe that John was somewhere between seven and nine years old. They were all boys. Peter was the only one that was 21 or older. Ask me about it afterwards if you want to know how I know that. Of course he was the one Jesus loved; he was the baby. Everybody loves the baby. The baby is the one that could get away with laying his head on the master's chest and just lying there and being held by him. He referred to himself as "the one who Jesus loves."

Now you let that sit in your heart for a minute. Is it worth it to do Campout? Is it worth it to go after the next generation? Is it worth it to spend money on the next group of people coming along? You better believe it. And John knew the girl who was guarding Caiaphas' house and he got in and maybe John was like me and he bribed her to get Peter in too, but we know Peter got in. Peter was standing there warming his hands by the fire while Jesus was on trial for his life and this little girl walking by said, "Hey, you're one of the twelve," and he said, "No, I'm not."

Somebody standing there said, "You cut my cousin Mallkus' ear off." Remember that story? Peter grabbed a knife in the Garden and went to cut the guy's head off. You say, "He didn't cut his head off, he cut his ear off." I know, but I relate to Peter, he was not aiming for the ear. He's a bad shot or Jesus moved it kind of like the force. And just let him cut the ear off and Jesus picked up the ear and put it back on. How cool would that have been to watch? Could you imagine if Peter had succeeded and cut the guy's head off and it rolled across the dirt and Jesus went over there and grabbed it by the hair and just put it back on. They all would have fainted. Jesus would have had to volunteer himself to the cross; there would have been nobody left to take him. By the way, he said several times, "Nobody takes my life from me. I laid it down and I take it back up again." He's the King of Kings and he's the Lord of Lords.

And he died, and he was buried, and he rose again. By the way, do you know the Bible says that Peter was warming his hands by the fire? And there's a word in the Bible that only appears two times in the whole Bible and this is one of them.

In fact, let me ask you this question. Do you know which of your seven senses is the most closely associated with memory? It's smell. We all know that, right? If you can smell, you know that. I can smell Polo Cologne and instantly I'm back in the seventh-grade basketball locker room. Mixed with sweat, right? Because junior high boys don't have to wash; they just cover it up. It was a horrible experiment with those two things together. I can smell the perfume Beautiful and instantly I'm back with my junior high girlfriend. It's immediate. The nerves go right into the part of memory in your brain apparently.

Now, this word is only mentioned twice in the Bible. One of them is right here when Peter was warming his hands by a fire. The Bible doesn't just say by a fire, it says a *charcoal* fire. It's a very distinct smell, which was necessary in that culture by the way. For every meal, you had to have a charcoal fire. For every cold evening, you had to have a charcoal fire. For every piece of bread, you had to have a charcoal fire, which meant that Peter was going to smell that smell for a long, long time every day of his life. And Jesus was saying, "Hey, when you smell that for the rest of your life, I don't want what you remember to be you denying me."

When Jesus shows up, he walks along the seashore of the Sea of Galilee. He calls out to Peter in the boat and says, "Throw the net on the other side." The boat is as wide as this aisle. What do you mean throw the net on the other side? And they did it. By the way, the Bible says they caught 153 fish. For years, I asked why the Bible is so specific; who cares how many fish whether it's 15 or 153? What is the significance of mentioning that in the Word of God?

Again, I asked a Rabbi about it just a few years ago. He said, "One, five, three, when you lay the Hebrew alphabet with one, five, three, that means 'I am he.'" Every Jewish boy would know that. When they counted those fish and they realized it was 153, they knew that was Jesus over there and they went. Peter pulls his thing up and runs in the water to get to the shore and Jesus... You know the dialoged "Do you love me, do you love me, do you love me" to match the three denials. But the Bible says Jesus cooked them breakfast on a charcoal fire. That's the only other time that word is mentioned. It was as if Jesus said, "Hey, when you smell that, which you will every day for the rest of your life, I want you to remember me reinstating you. And I want you to remember what I said I was going to do with you."

What Jesus wants you to remember is what he said about you and what he has placed on you and what he has called on you. He does not want you living your life in every failure you've ever committed in your life. He wants you to live your life with the proclamation that the Word of God has pronounced over you, "You are mine. You are my child. You are a co-heir with Jesus. You are holy. You are justified. You are pure. And that's what I've done in you and I want you to live out what I've declared over you."

Every time Peter would smell charcoal from that point forward, he would remember.

By the way, you turn the Bible two pages from John 21 into Acts 2, you see Peter stands up to preach and the New Testament church is birthed, and thousands come to Christ.

We're praying today for you. Would you bow your heads and close your eyes and open your hearts? Can I just ask you across this room and across the Chapel this morning with nobody looking except for me? The last thing we want to do is embarrass somebody in this place. But if you're here today and you say, "Pastor Alex, when you talk about a life-saving relationship with Jesus Christ, I got that settled. I know that he is my Lord and my Savior. He walks with me, he talks with me, he is my Lord, I have a personal relationship with him." You say you've prayed the prayer, but that's not what I'm asking. You've walked the aisle. That's not what I'm asking. You've filled out the card. That's not what I'm asking. What I'm asking is do you have a living, breathing relationship with a living, breathing God? That's what I'm asking. If you've got that settled and you say, "Yes that's me," in this room and in the Chapel, would you just raise your hand? Lots and lots of hands. Every time I ask that question, I rejoice. Something in my heart leaps when I see hands go up like that. It means that a man that died 2,000 years ago is still changing lives in 2018.

Some of you didn't raise your hand and I just want to thank you for being honest. I just want to ask you how many of you, in this room and the chapel and those of you watching online, would say, "Pastor Alex, I don't know that Jesus is my Lord and Savior. He doesn't walk with me. He doesn't talk with me. If I died today, I don't know for sure that I'm going to heaven. If Jesus comes back next week, I'm not sure he's coming for me, but I would like to know. Would you just pray for me?" With nobody looking, if that's you, would you just slip your hand up and say. "That's me, Pastor, just pray for me."

I'm not going to drag it out, but I do want to pray for you. If you say, "If you're going to pray, please include me in that prayer. I would like to know that I know that I know that Jesus is my Lord." Just slip your hand up.

Can I just say to you by the way? Sometimes people will, in an intimate conversation after a moment like this, walk up to me and say, "Hey, I don't know. I've got real questions about my salvation." I just want to lovingly say to you, "That's ludicrous. For the Son of God who spoke this whole thing into existence with a word to live in little ole you and you not know, that's ludicrous." When he comes in, he comes in with life-changing power. He comes in to change everything about you. He comes in to love on you and to speak to you. Listen, if you don't know, you need to settle it. By the way, if doubt enters your heart in a moment like this, what do you think that is. The holy spirit is not trying to give you doubt to nudge you into the Kingdom. I mean the devil is not going to nudge; that's the Holy Spirit nudging you.

Father, I pray right now. Believers, you're praying with me. You're as much a part of this equation as I am. I pray right now that salvation would win. That lives would be changed. That men and women, some new to the church, some that have been here a long, long time and everywhere in between, would settle this thing called salvation, would settle this personal, intimate relationship with you today. Holy Spirit, would you win the victory in every heart and every mind? Would you remove every distraction and every hindrance that today may be the day for men and women and boys and girls to come know you personally?

I just want to lead you in a prayer. If you just lifted your hand and said, "Include me in that prayer," I want to lead you in a prayer, helping you cross that faith line and trusting Jesus as your Lord and your Savior. You say, "I don't know how to pray." I'm going to pray it and lead you in it, one phrase at a time. I don't want you to just repeat it; I want you to pray it, I want you to say it to your heavenly Father. Your spirit is not going to float out of your body into the corner of the room and watch your body do this. That's not how this works. It's not magic. This is a decision of your will to place your faith in Jesus. So, I'll pray it one phrase at a time. I want you to repeat it after me out loud. The Bible says if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved.

By the way, I'm going to ask hundreds of people around you, who've already done this, to support you every step of the way in every word of the prayer. They are going to pray it out loud simply as an encouragement to you, those of you who are praying this to settle it today.

Dear God, I know I'm a sinner. Today I ask you to forgive me for all my sin. Jesus, come into my life to be my Lord. You call the shots. Come in as my Savior and my forgiver. In the best way that I know how, I trust you alone to save me. Thank you for saving me. Thank you that you were not embarrassed or ashamed of me, but you died, naked on that cross in a public place on my behalf. Help me in this moment to not be ashamed of you.

Before we say amen, you just prayed that prayer and you meant it with all of your heart, you just trusted Christ and gave your life to Jesus, you're not embarrassed of him, you just prayed that prayer and you meant it with all of your heart, would you just slip your hand up high across the room today?

If you just trusted Christ and just settled your salvation, here's what I want you to do. If your hand is up, I just want you to stand to your feet. The rest of you keep your head bowed and eyes closed. I feel so strongly that you need to pray with somebody today that I want to get you with a prayer warrior. So, if your hand just went up to say, "I just trusted Christ," would you just stand to your feet? I'm going to call the prayer warriors right now. Just stand up. The prayer warriors are coming.

You don't need to look right now because this is still a tender moment, but there are men and women and boys and girls standing in the auditorium today and the Bible says the angels in heaven are throwing a party. So, you don't need to look, but you can celebrate right now with what God is doing in this place. So, if you're standing, would you just say excuse me and make your way to the aisle and come down here and just pray for just one minute with one of these prayer warriors right here. You just say, "I just prayed the prayer." They can take it from there.

In fact, while they're making their way in this direction, just say excuse me and come on down. If you came with somebody and you want them to come with you, just grab their hand and say, "Would you go with me?" In the Chapel, would you just come forward.

While these are making their way forward, could we all just stand and let's worship today? Can I just say to you that he verb of he died, was buried and rose again, certainly that applies to the life of everyone

who just came to Christ. But, "he was seen" applies to everyone of us who have been saved for a long, long time that we need to see him afresh and we need to see him again. Let's lift our voices to him in this place today and let's worship him.