



Jesus Is
Part 3 – Jesus is Hope
Joe White

Before the message:

Ted Cunningham: Good morning, Woodland Hills online, livestreaming. I know many are joining us from around the country. Friends, we're grateful that you're part of this today with us. What a crazy and trying time it is in our nation. I've asked Travis Brawner, one of elders, to join me today just for a few moments before the message because we want to address a lot of what's going on, but also just to talk about steps that we can take as a church.

It just seems like, by the hour, we're getting new information and changes. Travis is a medical doctor tied to this closely in the community and he's been a steady voice in my life through the last few days. He's not fearful of anything. He refers to me sometimes as emotional and whimsical in my approach to things. First of all, I just want to say thank you; you have truly been a steady voice in this for me as a leader and in making decisions. This is a decision today to this from our entire elder board. It was one of the messiest decisions I think we've ever made as far as we were not all on the same page.

Travis Brawner: Most complicated for sure.

Ted Cunningham: Yeah, but we love each other. I love the fact that none of us... I don't feel any elder brought an agenda to the decision. We leaned into wise voices and good counsel and made the decision we thought was best for our church family, for our community. I want you to start by just calming us down a little bit before I get into the notes. You've had some great words to say.

Travis Brawner: I think we're dealing with two epidemics really. One is of fear and the other is a virus. The thing as a church and as Christians we need to understand is that we should not and will not participate in a fear epidemic. And you'll talk about that in a moment about what fear is and that God did not give us that spirit.

The fact is, there is an actual epidemic of a virus. For that, we should be concerned, not fearful but concerned and participate. Woodland Hills is one of the single largest gatherings of people in Southwest Missouri week after week. We look to the authorities of our country and our state and our region. We lean on them and them giving us some wisdom from research and experience of how we, as a group, can participate in helping this viral epidemic that is real and is taking place. But we will not participate in the fear epidemic.

Ted Cunningham: You kept bringing us back to how we are going to make this decision and I appreciated that because we're not making it based on fear, we're not making it based on hype, we're not making it based on money or social media. I had to just turn off the news several times this week and that brought a great sense of peace. It's not that I want to be uninformed, but there is so much hype going into this.

We just want to share four quick things with you before the message begins. First of all, we talked about it a lot this week. **Faith not Fear.** 2 Timothy 1 – ***For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power and love and self-discipline.*** I've been posting that like crazy this week that the decision we're making is based on faith, based on wisdom, based on self-discipline. We want to be clear.

The second thing we want to say is we're going with **Hope not Hype.** Romans 15: 13 says, ***May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*** Travis, speak to that hype epidemic that you talk about.

Travis Brawner: I think that concern, that lack of hope sometimes is what drives the fear. And the uncertainty, that's a big thing that we're all dealing with right now. The uncertainty of the future, even tomorrow, the next week, the next months. As we're not to participate in the fear epidemic, we're to be involved in concern that drives us then, as Christians, as a church family, to take action and not be apathetic.

So, the action, the decision that we came to this week to not meet here on campus as a group was that first action we felt like we could take to contribute to that. There will likely be many actions carrying forward in the next days, week, months, who knows. We don't know what that looks like, so, for now, we say today that we're not meeting as a group. We're online. What does next week look like? We're just playing it by ear. But the concern should drive us to action just like we're concerned about poverty, about homelessness, about abortion. As Christians, these are things that we are concerned about and that drive us to action. It's the same thing with what we are dealing with right now. We should take action.

Ted Cunningham: So, Faith not Fear, Hope not Hype, and **Action not Apathy.** You added that about 20 minutes ago, which I like. Again, we're changing messages as the hour progresses. Then the last one that we've been talking a lot about this week: **Prayer not Paranoia.** Any time you are gripped with fear, any time you start buying excessive rolls of toilet paper, please stop.

Travis Brawner: How many rolls does your family have?

Ted Cunningham: Well, I'm going to be really honest with you. Amy told me this morning that Amazon cancelled our toilet paper order this morning because we were buying too many rolls. I don't think we were excessive; we bought an extra 80 rolls just to have on hand, but they canceled that order so I'm glad I'm at the church. I'm going to...

Travis Brawner: That's why we kept everyone else away.

Ted Cunningham: The worship team has taken it all out of the bathrooms. I look forward to seeing them put rolls this big on their little home holders. I know many people aren't in the humor mode on this yet, but it's one of my ways to work through it.

Travis Brawner: But that's the paranoia. That illustrates kind of the fear and the uncertainty. We resort to things that just sometimes don't make a lot of sense.

Ted Cunningham: As a doctor, you can say this virus is not going to make us go to the bathroom that much?

Travis Brawner: No.

Ted Cunningham: Okay, thank you. So, we cleared that one up and hopefully the nation will heed your wisdom. Why is prayer so important? I think right now, and if I could just encourage all of us, prayer is far more needed than your opinions or my opinions. I can tell you I am not an infectious disease expert. Prayer is what we need right now. We need to be praying for our national leaders and local leaders.

We're a community, so we're speaking primarily to the Woodland Hills family today and this is the one that I think gets me emotional. I was telling Travis back there. Matthew 9 - ***36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless...*** Another translation says they were *confused and helpless*. Every time, when I see people panicking and full of fear, it's one thing to see that in a community, but it's another thing to see that in your church. There are times... We pour into our teaching and all of that here and to see followers of Jesus gripped with this, confused, harassed, and helpless through all of this... So, I really want us to be praying for our theater owners, our attraction owners, restaurants, stores, employees. This is going to hurt people financially and that has to be part of our prayer through this whole time.

Just so you know, this decision was not based on money for us as to whether or not we should meet. I'm not saying that other churches are making that decision because of money. We're not going there today. But we want you to know today that you can give online. We encourage you to give online. We need you to give online. Or we need you to hold your offerings until we do meet here on campus again and then bring that with you. That's because the next thing we want to share is if a member of our church family is in need and this is going to be a difficult couple of weeks for you and you're starting to stress, you've had gigs cancel, you've had work cancel and you're a day to day or week to week worker, counting on those resources, this is one of the reasons why being part of church family is so important. We want you to contact us. We have the resources right now.

Travis Brawner: Yeah, our benevolence is in place just like it always is. There may be more need, there will likely be more need that comes up now because of the circumstances and we just encourage our church family to come forward with their need.

Ted Cunningham: So, give, and ask if you have need. We're not saying that flippantly; we truly want you to reach out to your church family here. I was thinking this week about the people who often say

things like, "I don't need the church." This is the time where we all need the church. We all need each other. We all need the family.

I count about 12 people in here right now and they are very enthusiastic. Penny is talking back to us like crazy down here. She is making up for about a hundred people today. Clay over here is as silent as can be. It's time for you to add some energy. Joe is going to need it here in a second.

Travis Brawner: So, week to week, we're going to be making decisions as we move forward, and we want people to stay connected. We are thankful and grateful, and we praise the Lord that we do have an online presence that we can stream. This was just a flip the switch and we're streaming online so we could continue. We know a lot of churches out there don't have that ability, so we are grateful for online. In an information age, we are thankful we can stay connected with social media and other ways, particularly with our parents that are wanting to stay plugged in with the children's ministry and I understand there are going to be ways to do that.

Ted Cunningham: Yeah, this is a very important time. If you are not on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter with our church. Please connect, please go online and follow those. In talking with Stephanie Watson today, they're going to be putting on whfckids... Just connect to all of it right now because we're going to be putting resources out there for ways that you continue to disciple your kids. We know you're not here today to take resources home with you, but all sorts of online resources are going to be made available for you. Emails are going out to our church family right now.

It's interesting that we're not meeting physically today, but this is a time where we need to be talking about connecting more than ever. So, please get connected. Again, if you're watching this at a family members house because you don't have internet, you don't have a device to stream, many of our church family don't even do email and all that. So, feel free to call the church office. We're here to help.

I think that covers it. We're going to pray. We're going to spend a few moments in prayer and I hope you gather your family around right now and let us take all of these needs for our church, for our community, and Branson, being a tourism town, knowing that the next couple of weeks are going to have an impact for the next several months. Would you join me in prayer?

Father, we want to be people of self-discipline, we want to be people of wisdom, power, love, faith, hope. May all of this drive us during these times. We lean into you. We will not, we refuse to give in to fear and paranoia and panic. We trust in you. This is even a time when our finances are put to the test. This is a time for us to really figure out if we've placed hope in wealth because your word is clear on that. We should not place our hope in wealth. Our hope is in you. We trust in you. We believe in you. We know that you are 100% sovereign.

Of all the numbers we're seeing come out, all the statistics and the numbers changing each day, the number that has not changed is 100% and that is that you are 100% sovereign over all of this: 100% sovereign over our lives, 100% sovereign over our families, over our community. When we hear the stories of 300 hotel rooms canceling for this hotel and that hotel and theaters looking at making very

difficult decisions this week, we don't think of theaters and attractions, we think of people and the people that are going to be affected by that. But I trust you for all of that. I pray for our national and local leaders right now. There are a lot of governors and mayors and officials who need to speak to this issue, and they are not infection disease experts either. They have to trust and lean on the expertise of those in the medical community and those at the CDC and those in the health facilities all around the country. They have to lean in and trust in that, so I just pray for wisdom for them. They are guiding us nationally and locally. And, again, not making decisions based on fear or hype, but we want to be wise.

So, as we take this week to week as a church family, I pray that we are connected now more than ever. I pray that we are praying for one another. I pray for attraction owners to be praying for theater owners and theater owners to be praying for attraction owners and restaurants praying for hotels and families to be praying for families and believers to be praying for the lost that we would not give into this. I pray that the lost and dying world around us would look at how the church is handling this and go, "Wow, there's something different about them. They are not handling this in the way I am, so let me find out what their hope is." That they would clearly know our hope is Jesus and we have declared that time and time again.

So, thank you, Jesus, for life, for being the creator of it, the sustainer of it, the one who brings new life. We thank you for the time we get today. I pray for each family who's watching right now, each individual, each single who is watching right now that they will be at peace, peace in you ultimately.

We pray this in the good name of Jesus, through the authority of that name, through the name that is above every name. And everyone agreed and said... Amen

Well, Travis, you've known him a lot longer than I have. I've known him for about 18 years. A month or two ago, we asked Joe White to join this series. He said, "What's the series?"

I said, "It's Jesus Is. We're just going to spend eight weeks leading up to and through Easter on this."

You know Joe is athletic. He's a coach. He's the only one in my life that calls me Coach. No one else refers to me as Coach. He says, "Put me in, Coach. What do you want me to talk about?"

I said, "Well, I can't think of a better person to talk about hope." I've been with him all weekend. We had an event in Lynchburg and he preached to several thousand guys. He didn't touch any of them. Joe, we love you at this church and there's nobody more fit today and we just said let's continue. I told yesterday, "I'm not going to make you preach to an empty room, Joe, if you want to do it." I think he got more excited to preach to an empty room. But we provided 12 enthusiastic people.

Help me welcome Joe White and *Jesus is Hope*.

Joe White: Thank you. So, as I come out on my four-wheel drive cart here... We've been through snow in the mountains this winter. We've been bow hunting in South Texas. This thing is able, and I am disable, but God is able in my disability.

I don't know what Teddy was seeing out there. Man, I'm seeing a full church today. This is a party! Goodnight! I see Ron and Bonnie over there and Jim and Suzette. How are y'all doing over there. Stephanie, great to see you. Tonya, how are you doing back there. Wow, this is exciting, ladies and gentlemen. Where are you? Can you imagine packing all three services into one service? This is awesome.

I was thinking backstage. This is really funny. When you speak to a crowd, you're really animated and then we speak to the camera, we're just still. We were thinking backstage... We were up in Columbia in the Mizzou football stadium. We had 30 to 40 thousand guys out there. There was a giant black cloud over the stadium. I was just about to go out on the platform to speak to these men and be very animated. The cloud just opens up and rain just drowns the stadium. So, somebody gets on the PA behind me and they're like, "Rush to your cars, there's lightning. Rush to your cars and turn on 94.6 and we'll broadcast this thing." So, everybody has left the stadium. I was sitting there drenched on the stage. They pull us and the next two or three speakers back. We go up into some little booth up there. We stand out in front of a Mizzou Football Stadium and no one was in there. We are animated and emoting and the stadium is empty. I felt like a total idiot. At least we have four or five people today.

In the years of Kanakuk growth over the years, it's been interesting backstage. We've had 94 summers in a row, which just blows my mind. Debbie Jo and I are always fighting our way out of debt over the years. One time, we were facing what we thought was a financial crisis and I was worried. I was carrying the weight of the employees on my shoulders. I just care so much about everybody; they're like our family. There are probably like a hundred and something of us.

I was worried, so I went down to talk to Debbie Jo about it and she looked at me and she said, "I don't care." What she was saying was, *I grew up poor and if we live in a tent, I don't care.* My wife is that kind of a Christian woman. She is so secure in her relationship with Jesus that happened to her when that little girl was 15 years old, growing up in a very tough situation with her daddy being killed as a US Navy test pilot. She just settled it down for our life forever. We plan on, like everybody else does, a great summer for 95 years now and we plan on the theaters being open and people coming to the City of Branson, but nobody knows. But my wife has got the word for the day, "My hope is in Jesus." That's the way that our marriage lives.

Then I come over here with... I call him little Olaf. Isn't he cute? He's my little snowman. I was in surgery again the other day in a hospital in Oklahoma and they called it a revision. They go in and they just go after this thing. It gets interesting. They always say, "How's your pain?" I'll usually go, "Two." And then they'll do all these things and they'll go, "How's your pain?" I'll go, "Two." I'm always a two because when you're a two, they don't care, they don't ask anymore questions. So, I was a two like a twelve.

I looked at that thing and I go, Woah, that looks like Olaf. I started drawing Olaf on this thing. Oh my gosh the doctor was like, "What have I got here?" But if I get serious, it's really hard. You know I've had 23 surgeries and I'm not proud of that, I'm not ashamed of that, but they've cut pretty much everything from head to toe that I have as my body has failed over and over again.

And I've got another thing going on with my back. I've had five back surgeries and I've got a lot of pain going on there. And my heart beats really weird. Sometimes it's fast and sometimes it's slow; it's crazy.

But behind the scenes, when they take the makeup off, you beautiful ladies' faces and you men take the smile off your public face, and you get in your closet all by yourself and you're looking in the mirror and your looking at the person only God knows who you are, your personal self, hope's on trial. And, honestly, hope has been on trial in my life for about 20 years since cancer started entering my body in various places. Honestly, it's been brutal. I know for everybody in this church, sitting here and watching online, hope's on trial in everybody's life. When our parents die. When our marriages are severely tested. When our kids get hurt. When physical failure happens in our bodies, in our wife's body, in our children's bodies, hope is on trial.

You know the adversary, you know who he is. You know what the enemy says. I'll tell you what he says to me in this year and something long with difficulty with pain and failure. "Where's your God?" he says. "Why doesn't he heal you? You've got people praying all over America for you and nothing gets better. The wound does not heal." People are like, "Are you going to get a prosthetic soon? Are you going to be walking soon?" Honest folks, do you know what I say? In the middle of this battle with the voice, the enemy that threatens financially and physically and emotionally, I'm ain't living for a prosthetic and I'm not proud of this or anything. My hope is in Jesus. You know we say he is our rock and he's who we stand on. Well, now we get to find out, church, if we really mean it. Now we find out if we really mean it. I've gotten a chance for a few years to find out and I stare down the enemy in the name of Jesus Christ who conquered him 2,000 years ago on that hill, and he's still conquering to this day. And he's conquering him in my life.

I'll tell you, through all the trials... I said this to somebody the other day and I started weeping. Hope still stands. I don't now when I'll have another leg and you know what? We've got the greatest doctors in the world in Branson, Missouri, but my hope is not in medicine. My hope is not in walking around on two legs like all you other boring two-legged people do every day. My hope is in Jesus. And I know you feel it and I know you understand it and I know I'm not the only one in this church that is in crisis today, but I cling, church, I cling to Romans 5: 5. I've thought about this verse for years. It says, **...and we exult in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; 5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.**

Then Paul echoes that in 2 Corinthians 5, Verse 1 and then he sums it up in Verse 5. Paul says this, **1 For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down...** He's talking about this earthly thing that we live in for a few short years. **...we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.** Then he goes on, **5 Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God...** This is why we were made, and this is why we were recreated in Christ. Because Paul says... and church, echo this throughout the rest of your life **...who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.** We talk about down payments and we talk about earnest money contracts and we talk about putting something on layaway by giving a hundred bucks to hold for that thousand-dollar dress that we all wear in Branson, Missouri. The earnest money – it even sounds crass to even think about it this way – is the Holy Spirit. Goodness

gracious, church, and we worry about the style of car that we drive? My oh my, the Spirit of God is in our hearts and he's coming back to take us home. Whether we die before the rapture or we're in the rapture, it's all the same. We have the Spirit of God in our heart.

I read this week about Everett Alvarez Jr. He was the first pilot in Vietnam to be shot down. On August 5, 1964, this dear brother in Christ was flying the first mission in that horrible war of the 60s that many of us were a part of in various ways. His plane was shot down and they took that man to the Hanoi Hilton that became famous for 190 fighters that were taken into that place and tortured unmercifully and starved unmercifully for eight years and seven months. But when he walked into the horrible prison, he said, "I gave the Lord's Prayer as I walked through the door. Our Father who art in heaven..." He lived alone in dark, solitary confinement in horrible, torturous position where they would hang and be stuffed with robes and bars, stretching their members to the point of dismemberment. They gave him opportunities to leave early to show the world that they were having mercy on the prisoners. He said, "I will not leave this prison until all 190 of us walk out together." Hope still stands.

I have a buddy named Brandon Cook. Brandon was a camper at Kanakuk. He was from Magnolia, Texas. He was from a salt of the earth family, and Branson loved Jesus as high school kid. We used to train together. At Kanakuk football, we became buddies. Brandon went to college down in South Texas. There in college he roomed with an atheistic roommate. Brandon lost his childhood faith. Brandon was brilliant. He went down to Rice University to finish his degree and he put all of his hope in science, math, and medicine. There was no God, but science was God and math was God and medicine was God. He was into the depths of all of those great studies.

Brandon had a girlfriend, a Kanakuk girl named Britney. That girl loved Jesus. Her hope was not in science, math, and medicine, or in marriage even though she loved him. Her hope was not in marriage. She would pray on a regular basis, "I'd rather spend eternity in heaven with him with Jesus, than life on earth with him without Jesus." That's what she would pray. Sure enough, there in his latter years of college, Brandon got some horrible form of cancer and cancer began to ravage his body. There in the hospital, as Brandon literally died in front of Britney's eyes, she would pray, "Lord, I'd rather spend eternity in heaven with him with him, than life on earth without you with him." Brandon's condition grew worse and worse and science and math and medicine began to die.

Finally, just before Brandon's death, he had tubes in his nose and throat with all the breathing apparatus in full place to keep that young man alive. He had a little white board and a marker and Brandon would communicate by writing on the board because he couldn't talk with all the apparatus breathing for him. The doctors came in very honestly and very humbly and they said, "Brandon, we don't have anything else we can do; it has all failed. There is one last experiment we could try, but it will be a ten-day medical coma and you probably will not survive. No one we know of has survived this particular procedure. So, Brandon, we need you to give your final words to your mom."

Brandon took that pen... He was a wonderful kid. And he took the board and he wrote, "Mom, will you take Britney as your daughter? Dad, will you take Britney as your own daughter? Britney, will you marry me?" And they flipped the switch.

All four of his family members were there when they told me the story. They were at his bedside throughout the entire ten-day experience. They said that somehow, mysteriously, on day seven, his hand began to go across the bed searching for the little white board. His daddy realized something was happening and that he wanted to talk. His daddy slid the white board under his hand. Then Brandon began to reach for the marker, so his dad slid the marker under his hand.

That boy, who had given himself to atheism in favor of science, math, and medicine, drew three crosses on the board and he showed it and then he put it down and he was back out again into this fully induced medical coma. When he woke up, his dad said, "Brandon, were those three crosses you drew on that board?" Brandon answered yes.

Britney said, "Brandon, what were you doing?"

He said, "I was talking to Jesus." And he said, "Britney, will you marry me? I love you, Britney." He had never told her he loved her.

She said the next three weeks of his life were incredible. He said I love you to everybody: the nurses, the folks that were helping him with changing the sheets. He was like Mr. I Love You. She said he was completely different. He lived with Jesus for three more weeks and now he's living with Jesus for eternity and Britney's pray is answered. They'll be together with Jesus forever and ever. What a love story.

I was called the other day by a dear buddy of mine named Dan. Dan had two graduate degrees: a degree in law and a degree in theology. He was making money, had an incredible wife and lovely parents. His daddy, Trevor, was my hero. Then somehow there was a very untimely death. His daddy passed away. He was with Dr. Dobson on a retreat and was in a plane with three other incredible godly men. The plane went into the side of a mountain as it lost power and Trevor was gone.

Dan began to collapse. His mother, Lucy, this awesome, godly woman, the first female professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, she was something else. Then Lucy mysteriously passed away, probably lovesick for Trevor. And Dan fell apart and he turned to the bottle. This is not a private story. Dan shares it humbly and honestly. He turned to the bottle and he began to... his hope collapsed. That's because his hope was in his marriage and in his family. These are all good things but there's only one hope that survives at the end, right? And he promises he'll be there at the end. The Spirit is a pledge.

Dan drank and drank and then he drank so much he went code blue three times. He was at the edge of death. The third time he went code blue, somehow the young man woke up and somehow, through a miraculous prayer, Dan placed his hope in Jesus alone, no mom, no dad, no wife, no daughter. And now with a failing liver. He said, "Joe, I saw the map of my life and I was in the center of the map. But at that moment, I put Jesus in the center of the map, and I placed my hope in Jesus." Today, he survives with joy. He's friends with his wife and incredibly close with to his daughter. He's one of the finest caregiving people that I know on Planet Earth.

I close today by asking this dear, precious, wonderful church that I love like a family, where's your hope today? Could we all become like my little Debbie Jo and just say, "I don't care. My hope is in Jesus; I am secure."? I also ask you today, church, at the center of the map, who is in the middle? Is it you, is it something that you want? Or is it Jesus, and truly loving God and loving others? I thank God that even though this crisis is difficult, we get a chance to find out who is in the center of the map.

As we close this wonderful service... And thank you for watching online. In prayer, I ask you to look at the map and I ask you to look at your hope. Who is in the center and where do you place your hope? In a moment, just like Dan did, you can transfer your hope, in a moment in prayer you can transfer your hope to the only who can save us, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Love you, church; we're in this together.