

Believe!
Week 6: John 5:16-47
March 16, 2014

Welcome/Introduction—thank Adam Gilbert and the visiting worship team for coming today!

One other thing that I want to note before we move on is that we've recently restocked our Book Table with all kinds of new great titles.

We've added a section for devotional books—these are for sale for \$5 and they're great places for you to go to engage with the Lord

We've also added a couple of copies of "The Good and Beautiful God" which was our book for this past fall that a number of you really resonated with
and we ADDED the follow-up book in that series "The Good and Beautiful Life" which is really, really good as well.

We've also got not one but TWO books on forgiveness because I had a number of conversations this summer and fall where people were wrestling with how to forgive someone who had really hurt them and done them wrong.

"Free of Charge" and "The Art of Forgiving"

Free of Charge: a little more philosophical and theological—if you just can't quite wrap your brain around how forgiveness is supposed to happen, how this whole forgiveness thing is really supposed to work, this book is rich there but still very personal and practical

"The Art of Forgiving" taking a little risk here, haven't read it but know of the author and he's got a good reputation and as I skimmed over it, it looked good and really practical

so y'all will have to give me your reviews

But the book on the table that I want to highlight the most is a book called "Boundaries"—in the past ten years, I've probably recommended this book to more over-achievers and over-worked, stressed out people than any other book.

It is one of the best books for those of you who always find yourselves over-worked, over-stressed, or over-run by other people

I think at some point in the near future we'll make build a book-club discussion around it, but this is a book full of wisdom for helping you to make wiser decisions

This book has helped me probably more than any other to understand where my responsibility ends and to be okay with that.

To be able to honor God with what I can control and need to be faithful in and to be okay with putting a boundary in place and simply saying

“That’s not mine to deal with or take on and I’m okay with letting that go.”

Now, we’ve had a policy of charging \$10 for everything on the book table and it was just kind of working for us financially.

But we’ve realized as we’re adding smaller books that it seems unfair to charge \$10 for those

AND we’re finding that only charging \$10 is limiting the books we can get here and have available to you.

So we’re having to shift our policy there a bit—we’ve now got 3 price points: \$5, \$10, and \$15 all based on the price of the books

We’re still losing money on some of them and making up money on others, but we feel like this will give us more options to get more and better books available to you.

HOWEVER, we don’t want money to be an obstacle to you getting the book that you need.

So while we’re making new price points, we’re also shifting our payment policy: you just pay whatever you can afford.

The prices are all simply suggestions. If you need a book but you can’t pay the \$10 or \$15 or even the \$5, we just ask that you pay whatever you can afford to pay for that book.

We so want you to have good resources in your hands, we so want you to get what you need to grow in your spiritual life, that we’re going to get good books here and invite you to dig into them, paying whatever you can afford for them.

So stop by our newly re-stocked book table with new books—we’ve sold 177 books since we started this book table this summer and I’ve been so encouraged with how the Lord has used this as a ministry

And I want to say a big thank-you to Linda Rowe who helps to organize and staff it and keep the books on everything—thanks to Linda and all those who work the book and resource table.

If you’re just joining us, in the Tour de France they have multiple stages and legs in their journey

here at Chatham Community Church we are doing a multiple-stage journey through the New Testament book of John

If you're new to the Bible, there are four biographies we have of Jesus' life and John is one of those, he was one of Jesus' original twelve followers and wrote one of the most detailed accounts of Jesus' life

We're going through the book of John in 6-8 week chunks at a time meaning we should be done at some point in the next 3 to 14 years!

And this section of John that we're currently touring through has this key big word that comes up over and over again and that is BELIEVE

And what we've said is that there's a couple things about this whole believing thing:

1. Essential to Christianity: There's no real Christianity without it.
2. An obstacle to Christianity: Belief is hard at some point for almost all of us

But what we're finding as we read these stories of Jesus is that the people he came in contact with had the same obstacles we have when it comes to believing:

too cynical to believe, too much pain to believe, too apathetic to really believe

And what we're finding is that Jesus delights to meet people in the midst of whatever their belief-hang-up, whatever their obstacle is

And the good news for us this morning, is that Jesus isn't afraid of our obstacles, our doubts, our questions

We BRING THE QUESTIONS WITH US

Because what we find is that Jesus is the MASTER and taking and leveraging honest questions and using those as an opportunity to pour out more grace and more truth that then develops into real faith

Today we're going to wrestle with and answer the most important question that we could possibly answer.

I've told you before that when we look at the Bible, there's four key questions that the Bible is interested in answering in this order:

1. Who is God?

This is the number one question that the Bible is interested in answering; unfortunately, it's not always the number one question we're asking when we open the Bible

2. What is God doing?
3. Who are we?
4. What do we do?

And we've talked before that one of our problems when it comes to reading the Bible is that the Bible is obsessed with God, and we're obsessed with ourselves.

It's no wonder that we miss so much of what's going on!

We have to re-calibrate our reading to match the pitch of what the Bible thinks is important

And this is actually a gift to us because when it comes to the quality of our lives and having our lives work the way they're supposed to
the answer to that first question is far and away the most important

The problem is, of course, is that our culture currently is telling us that we each can answer that first question in any way we want to

That it doesn't really matter how you answer that question as long as it works for you or you think it works for you or feels good for you right now.

And some of that is an attempt by our culture to stop so many of the wars and so much of the violence that has erupted over disputes over how we answer this first and most important question

And that's a worthy goal and an important issue that we have to deal with in a society and a world with so many different religions

But I want to suggest to you that who and what we worship as God has enormous consequences and outcomes

Any of you ever worked alongside someone who made power and prestige and recognition as their god?

Then you know first-hand that it matters who your god is, don't you?

If you've gotten married to someone who's god is alcohol, it mattered, didn't it?

If you've gotten married to someone who's god is MONEY or STUFF, material things, always buying more and more stuff, that's mattered, hasn't it?

If you've had a mother or father or mother-in-law or father-in-law whose god was control

you know that how a person answers the question who or what is God matters, doesn't it?

See, who or what we think is God matters—there are hundreds of gods out there, and contrary to popular opinion, they are not all created equal.

And which one we connect our lives to matters

because we were all made to worship something

And how we answer the question who or what is god in our lives will decide what we worship

That is, who or what you think God is will dictate what we build our lives around, how we organize our energies and passions and set the direction of our lives.

If we're honest with ourselves, every single one of us at some point in our lives has built our lives around the wrong god and it's had painful consequences, hasn't it?

So here's our issue that we're going to tackle this morning: Who or what is God and how do we know is the single biggest and most important question in the universe

Not just in some big, hypothetical world, but in our everyday lives

because who or what we think God is becomes the thing that we worship, the organizing principle that shapes and re-shapes our lives EITHER for good or for bad

But it's hard to know how to answer that question because there are so many gods available to choose from aren't there?

Some are non-religious like power or money or sex; and then there are thousands of religious options as well.

Today, Jesus is going to give us HIS answer to this question of who is God.

His answer is utterly unique and it's one of his most direct, most audacious, most bold, most clear and compelling statements as he takes on this number one question

In one of the most complicated and longest addresses by Jesus that we're going to read in just a minute, he's going to tell us that he's come to show us who our real Father is

And to bring us back home to him.

This is a little dense of a passage, so if I lose you, just stick with me and I'll try to help you make your way back

Last week we looked at the story of a man who'd been an invalid for 38 years who Jesus heals

But he heals him on the Sabbath day, which draws the ire of the religious authorities because the religious law forbids any work on the Sabbath

And that's where we're picking up today in John 5, starting in verse 16

¹⁶ So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. ¹⁷ In his defense Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” ¹⁸ For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

So when you take something that’s valuable and try to copy it and pass it off as the original or real thing: it’s called a forgery or a counterfeit

And if you get caught trying to pass off something that’s counterfeit as the real thing, you get in trouble

But the amount of trouble depends on the value of the thing and what it is that you’re trying to copy.

If I drew up my own Monopoly money, that’s not the real thing but it’s no big deal.

But if I printed up my own \$100 dollar bills, that’s a more significant forgery.

The religious leaders had a category for prophets and priests who would tell others ABOUT God

But Jesus here is saying that I’m not just a prophet or priest; I’m THE SON of God, God is my FATHER

If you look throughout the entire Old Testament, what you find is that this whole idea of being children of God or sons or daughters of God was only very, very rarely used

And when it is used it’s used in only in very general ways

This idea is primarily a New Testament idea introduced by Jesus and his followers as a result of the very identity of Jesus

So these religious leaders hear Jesus saying this and they interpret him correctly—he’s saying that he’s the Son of God, not just in a general sense but in a very particular and specific sense:

THE Son of God!!!

This claim makes him related to God in a way that puts him EQUAL with the God of the universe.

And because this is the most valuable thing in the universe, the religious leaders have only two choices:

they can either believe him and fall down and worship him or decide he’s a liar and attempt to kill him.

They choose door number two here and this sets the course for Jesus' relationship with the authorities for the rest of the book.

¹⁹ Jesus gave them this answer: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. ²¹ For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. ²² Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

A number of years ago I knew a student who dropped out of college and entered into an extensive apprenticeship program to do a very specialized form of welding.

I don't remember what it was exactly he was doing or why it was so specialized but I remember him telling me that he was going to be going through this graduated apprenticeship process for a couple of years before he'd be some sort of master welder

And to start with, his job was to stick with his mentor and follow him around and start to learn simply by doing whatever his mentor told him to do

Just hours and hours and days upon days as a shadow, watching, mimicking and copying in the best ways exactly what he was doing

Jesus experienced this as a kid with his father—his dad was a carpenter, and it he probably learned carpentry from him as all sons learned a trade from their fathers in that time

But he says that now, in his ministry as a 30-ish year old man, he's got a different kind of apprenticeship happening and a different kind of trade going on

He says this about his working on the Sabbath and about his whole ministry, every single moment: [CIRCLE] I'm only doing whatever I see my Father doing

Every second of every day, he sees God the Father at work, healing people, teaching people, bringing life to people

And Jesus says, "I'm just following my Father around, doing whatever I see him doing, whenever I see him doing it, including on this Sabbath day which is his day to give life and healing to whomever he wants!"

In fact, the Father is going to do even greater things than these and I'm going to follow him into doing those greater works right along with him so that you'll be amazed and see who I am and how great the Father is

Jesus is saying, “Here’s who I am: I am THE Son of the Father, I am equal to and with the Father

I’m the one sent by the Father, entrusted to show you the very character and nature of who God is and what he is like and what he does.”

When it comes to the question “who is God” and “what is God like” there are all kinds of opinions and suggestions from all kinds of different people

I’ve known people who talk about God in fearful ways

their understanding of God is a cosmic parent who is never happy with them, never satisfied, perpetually frowning on them in judgment and disdain

In their understanding, God is an un-ending source of should’s and oughts that are never satisfied, never completed, there’s always more and more to do to keep God happy with you

And I’ve talked with people for whom God was just a nice old grandfather in the sky who didn’t really care much about what you did as long as you were happy and were nice to everyone around you

And of course there are dozens of variations off these and hundreds more options besides all of that.

But here, Jesus makes a bold and audacious statement:

“I am the one who is showing you what the Father is like. I was sent here for this very reason: to show you the nature and character of God himself.”

Later on Jesus will say “If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father.” He’s saying the same thing here: I’m just doing whatever I see my Father doing.

See, previously, God had sent prophets with God’s messages all throughout the Old Testament.

But in Jesus, we don’t get another prophet. We get God himself come in the flesh to make himself known to his people, his creation.

I’ve been keeping a prayer journal since my freshmen year of college, that’s 21 years or so from now.

In fact, my very first line in my first entry was “I’m going to attempt to do perhaps the most futile thing in the history of mankind—I’m going to try to keep a journal.”

Over the years it’s morphed into a prayer journal where I write out my prayers almost day in and day out for 21 years.

If you wanted to get to know me really well, I could send you to people who know me pretty well—friends and extended family would give you some insight into who I am

My wife and kids would give you even more insight into who I am.

But if you wanted to know more than you ever wanted to know about me, all the depths of my dysfunction and dreams and shame and pain and good and bad

I would give you my journals. And then you'd really know more than you ever really wanted to know about me.

Previously in the Old Testament the prophets had delivered *biographies* about God—explaining who he was and what he was like.

And that was a great gift and they were wise and bold and faithful in what they did

But in Jesus, we get God's walking, talking, breathing AUTO biography, Jesus is God's talking journal—he is God himself coming to show us who God is and what God is really like.

Jesus says if you want to know what God is like, LOOK AT ME!

That's 100% audacity!

And with the religious leaders in this passage, we have a choice to make:

Door number one: we can either fall down and worship him or

Door number two: we can call him a liar and attempt to shut him up

But even to the point of his death, Jesus will not relent in making these same bold claims:

He is the Messiah, he is the Son of God, he is the embodiment and enfleshment of God himself

In Jesus, God does not send someone else to do his dirty work for him.

In Jesus, God himself gets dirty and sweaty; in Jesus God himself comes and touches lepers, walks among the weak and wounded and sick and dying and grieving.

In Jesus, God himself shares in this world's pain and joys and sorrows, and then embraces the bitterest cup of all

the cross and all the pain and suffering and death drunk the very dregs.

And in all of this, the Father and the Son are of the same mind, they agree 100% about what needs to happen.

Sometimes in Christian circles we'll talk about Christianity in this way:

“Well, God the Father was really angry with all of us and wanted to kill us all, but Jesus the Son wanted to keep us and save us.

So Jesus saves us from the big mean awful Father who really just wants to smite us and destroy us if only Jesus would let him.”

That’s perhaps an exaggerated version of it, but that’s essentially the way that in some circles we talk about the relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

God the Father is the mean one—I mean, just read the Old Testament and you see how mean he is all the time

And Jesus who is his Son is the nice one who likes humans and saves us from big mean dad

What does that do to our understanding of God? It completely warps and twists it, doesn’t it?

It puts this weird conflict between the Father and the Son and it puts us in a weird position

It feels like you’ve been adopted into a family but Dad didn’t really WANT to adopt you, and in fact doesn’t really like you at all and you’d better keep away from him

And if you’ve got Dad issues of any kind from growing up, that just makes it all the worse, right?

But what does Jesus say here about the character and the nature of the Father?

Oh my friends the good news is that he says that in all that he does, he’s only doing it as he sees his Father doing it.

Jesus and Father are on the same page about you. Jesus is for you and the Father is for you and later Jesus will say the Spirit is also for you.

In every way, right now, in every moment, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are 100% FOR you.

My friends, every one of us at some point in our lives are tempted to believe that God doesn’t really care about us

But here we get the good news. God DOES care, HE DOES love us, he has come to get us when we were far from God, he came and rescued us.

God HIMSELF goes to a great deal of trouble to get us OUT OF our great deal of trouble.

Jesus and his Father are working together to bring healing and forgiveness and redemption and grace to this world and to each of our lives

And Jesus talks about the jobs that they share together: [CIRCLE]
the Son gives life just like the Father
and the Father has entrusted all judgment to the Son
life and judgment are going to be repeated themes in this next section as
Jesus plays out the implications of this mutual co-inherence

There are these overlapping spheres of power and authority and mutual
relationship where the Son and the Father simply delight to share in the work
together and point to one another

And all of this ends up with the question of worship and honor—who gets honored,
who is exalted and lifted up and seen as supreme and Lord over all things?

The Father honors the Son and the Son honors the Father
and the goal is that you and I might first off truly know the character and
nature of God

And as we engage in relationship with him, we might get caught up in this mutual
love-fest

This honoring and loving and bringing honor to God as we share in the love
between the Father and the Son

This co-laboring in judging and giving life is what Jesus really plays out as he
continues in this next section to talk about his relationship with the Father, watch
how these same themes get repeated here:

²⁴ “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes [square here: this is our word for this section! Watch what happens when we believe] him who sent me has eternal life [blue circle: life] and will not be judged [red circle: judge/judged] but has crossed over from death to life [blue circle].

²⁵ Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live [blue circle]. ²⁶ For as the Father has life [blue circle] in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life [blue circle] in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to judge [red circle] because he is the Son of Man.

²⁸ “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live [blue circle], and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned [red circle]. ³⁰ By myself I can do nothing; I judge [red circle] only as I hear, and my judgment [red circle] is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.

This is all kind of complicated but bottom line: the Father and the Son delight to work together in mutual affirmation, mutual self-giving, mutually lifting the other one up

And together they give life and together they judge and evaluate and assess our hearts and our lives

Now Jesus is going to transition to talking about his ministry and the religious leader's response to his ministry

First what he's going to do is call some witnesses to testify about his ministry, he's going to call four witnesses that point to his legitimacy and the validity of what he has done, watch as Jesus calls these 4 witnesses to the stand:

³¹ “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. ³² There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is true.

Okay, so Jesus acknowledges that a claim this large can't be believed simply on his own testimony about himself, so here comes his witnesses:

³³ “You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. [#1/circle or something]
There's star witness number 1! The religious leaders were intrigued by John, interested in what he had to say

³⁴ Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. ³⁵ John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light.

³⁶ “I have testimony weightier than that of John. [Bigger star coming than John!] For the works that the Father has given me to finish—the very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent me. [#2/circle or something]

Jesus says if you don't believe what John said about me, the very miracles I'm doing which you're upset about because I did it on the Sabbath

But if you could see past the rules to get to the miracle, you would see that these works, this miracle, that man who was an invalid for 38 years who's now walking—that testifies concerning me

³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. [#3/circle/something] You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, ³⁸ nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent.

Jesus says that the Father is testifying concerning him. Some people think here Jesus is talking about at his baptism when a voice came from heaven and said “This is my Son, listen to him!”

It could be that or it could just be that as Jesus is doing every moment of every day exactly what he sees the Father is doing he speaks his still, small quiet ‘YES and WELL DONE’ over all of it!

Either way, the Father himself is the third witness, but the people don't hear it, can't receive it because believing here is the pre-condition for hearing the voice of God

This echoes with something we talked about a couple of weeks ago: that even just small steps of opening ourselves up to believing opens us up to more and more believing

And attempting to engage with God through the lens of cynicism or doubt just won't work.

It's just like trying to see and be convinced that germs exist by looking through the lens of a telescope—you can't see germs that way but that doesn't prove anything

Trying to look for God through the lens of cynicism is like trying to look for germs through the lens of a telescope, it doesn't work and you don't prove anything by it.

Jesus here is saying that for those who do believe, they hear the Father giving witness to confirm his identity

But there's one more star witness Jesus has left to call:

³⁹ You study^{cl} the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, [4/circle/star/something] ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

Four witnesses to validate Jesus' claim to be equal as the Son of God.

And after Jesus is done calling his witnesses, he totally lowers the boom on these guys and on us this morning:

⁴¹ "I do not accept glory from human beings, ⁴² but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. ⁴³ I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. ⁴⁴ How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"

One thing that's true about Americans is that we love our celebrities. We've always been fascinated by people who leverage sometimes mediocre gifts into meteoric stardom.

But with the combined rise of social networking and reality t.v. over the past decade,

what's shifted is that we have a whole category of celebrities who are celebrities for no other reason other than THEY ARE CELEBRITIES

Previously, people were celebrities for having accomplished or done something, even if it was not particularly impressive

But celebrity culture has removed the pre-requisite of having done anything at all

There's a whole group of people who have somehow turned being a celebrity into a full-time job!

And the question is, how do I get in on that job! Right? Pays great, and people flock all around you fawning over you for no reason whatsoever!

Well, the answer is right at all our fingertips: Facebook.

Facebook for much of our culture trades on the desire many of us have to tap into celebrity culture, to leverage attention for ourselves and get people to respond to us, to pay attention to us.

Many of us, not all of us, use Facebook to get as much attention and approval as possible: How many "likes" can I get? How many comments can I get?

And our Facebook status update becomes the primary lens through which we start to view all of life—could that be a Facebook status update? Would this be a cute picture to post on Facebook? Would people "LIKE" this if I said it a certain way?

This doesn't happen to everyone, but for some of you, when our primary lens for looking at our life becomes through the grid or filter of what would make a good Facebook status update, we have let seeking the glory that comes from people become our god.

Jesus invites us into a grid or paradigm of being present to people. Love is his grid. Asking what is God doing here in this moment is a grid.

The Father is always working and I too am working, that's his grid—and he invites it to be ours as well.

What if you asked the question "What is God already doing here in this moment" as your primary question rather than "How might this be a good Facebook status update?"

Now I'm not hating on Facebook or on witty and hilarious status updates. I am glad to contribute my own voice occasionally to the Newsfeed and I enjoy checking every so often to see what everyone else is up to

Facebook is a great tool and when it's in its right place, it is delightful. One great old dead theologian dude said that "All sin is disordered love."

In other words, it's not sin to love sex, money, power, control, work; it's just when it's disordered, OUT OF ORDER, not in its proper place

And in our celebrity-loving culture, Facebook can easily become this kind of thing where we constantly seek the glory that Jesus is objecting to here—the glory that comes from other people

Especially if you're a people-pleaser like me.

We get sucked into this all the time. I want people's approval, I pop out a cute Facebook status, I GET people's approval—my idol gets worshipped and nobody gets hurt, right?

Except that worshipping the wrong god always has consequences for us.

And for some of us, if we would let it, seeking the approval and the applause of people whether via Facebook or some other way that we seek it out

would become the thing that we live for, our functional god receiving all our best energies and dominating our thoughts and receiving all our worship.

And let me ask you: is it ever enough? Do you ever get enough likes? Do you ever get enough compliments?

How long does it last? A couple hours? Then what? Gotta' find the next way to get that same scratch itched over and over and over again!

The god of people pleasing is never really satisfied. It's like drinking salt-water, it just leaves you wanting and craving more and more

When we partner with God in loving and serving people as an outgrowth of our primary center in God, people are a blessing to us

When we attempt to make a god out of people's approval and put people at the center rather than God, we lose both God and a right relationship with people that is life-giving to us and to them

And Jesus here is saying that if we live for the approval and glory given to us by other PEOPLE we miss the gift that God wants to give us of HIS approval, the glory HE wants to give to you.

Don't miss this: God WANTS to speak his delight over you.

God is eager to pronounce to the entire cosmos that YOU are his daughter, YOU are his son, and in the end over your life he WANTS to shout "Well DONE!!"

Your good Father in Heaven is so eager to whisper and shout his delight in and over you that he gave up his own Son to make to do it!

But Jesus here is saying you and I have a choice: we can either live for the glory and applause and affirmation of people or we can live for the glory that only God can give.

We cannot have both at the top of the food chain. One of those will dominate the other one

Either we live for people's approval and we relegate God's approval to a distant second OR we live for God's approval and we relegate people's approval to a distant second

One of those is the path to an endless and tiresome cycle that never delivers the life that it promises;

the other is the path to eternal life and a "Well Done" that will last and satisfy you for an eternity.

This morning, some of us have to decide which of those two lives we want to live and start to organize or re-organize our lives accordingly.

Jesus closes with this to the religious leaders:

⁴⁵ "But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. ⁴⁶ If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. ⁴⁷ But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"

See, these religious leaders were super-familiar with Moses and the 10 Commandments and they think that they're really living out all that he taught

But Jesus was perpetually calling them out for living by and knowing the LETTER of the law and the commandments but neglecting the SPIRIT of the law and the commandments

Jesus called them whitewashed tombs—he said that the outside of the cup looked shiny but the inside was filthy

Now I want to take a moment to talk with my good, Southern, church-going friends. Some of you aren't good, nor Southern, and you haven't been church-goers your whole life, you can just sit back and listen in on this one

But to those of us who have grown up and most of our lives been good, church-going folks we need to hear this: we have the same danger as these Pharisees did.

We can play religion on the outside, look good on the outside, go through the religious motions on the outside

And we can feel good and even a little bit snotty about our good religious performance,

We might even look down on others for not being as good, we can get a little bit self-righteous, a little bit prideful about all that we've done in the church and how good our kids turned out because we did everything right

Jesus says listen, you can get so caught up in doing the right religious stuff that you miss the important thing: the important thing is not you and your performance, it's Jesus

Jesus says, if your religious in the ways that you're supposed to be religious, then you'd know that your hopes don't hang in your religious performance

True and right religious practice points NOT toward yourself but toward JESUS.

If the Pharisees really knew Moses, then they would know Jesus, worship HIM, and completely re-orient their lives around Jesus

But they only know the letter of the law and not the spirit of the law and so they miss out on the point of the law.

If you've grown up religious, and you really KNOW what religion was supposed to be all about you, you'd worship Jesus, completely re-orient your life around Jesus, because religion exists to point people toward HIM

But if we only know the outward performances of religion

if we're caught up in the letter of religious practices and miss the point or the intent of what religious practice is all about, then we've missed the whole point of religion

It's not about us, it's all about Jesus. If we don't get that, then it's time to deconstruct everything you've ever thought you've known about religion and faith and go back to the drawing board

Otherwise, what will happen is we will fall in love with the sign and miss the one who was signified

we will prefer the packaging to the actual gift itself, we will find that we prefer the form of religion to the substance and actual beauty of it.

This morning my friends, Jesus tells us the good news that answers the single most important question in the universe:

Who is God? How do we know what he's like? How do we know what he wants from us or expects from us?

Jesus says all you have to do is look at me—I am God’s living, breathing, speaking autobiography. I’ve come to show you who God is and to make you a way to be connected with him

Because one of the first things that you need to know about God is that his nature, his essence, is LOVE.

And he demonstrates this reality by doing this: when we were lost and without hope and without God in the world, he came to rescue us

To rescue us from all our false gods and deliver us to the One True God, our Good Father, so that our lives and our all worship might be centered on him

And when our lives and all our worship are centered around the one true God through Jesus, we are delivered over from death into life

And life is what characterizes us at the deepest parts of our soul and all that we do or touch or participate in is blessed by the love of Jesus.