

# How Did They Miss Jesus?

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This morning we have spoken that phrase, that the Lamb has overcome. You know, sometimes church, you've just got to be transparent. My wife's entire family lives in Rockport, Texas. If you watched the news this weekend, the eye of that hurricane went right over their house. I've got family right now who are in a vehicle trying to make their way back to see if there's anything left. And the reason I share that with you, yes, I solicit your prayers, but not to feel free to feel sorry for me but do you know what? We've all that stuff. We've all got things that are on our mind. We all have things that are heavy on our heart and isn't it good to know that the Lamb has overcome. The Lamb has overcome our worries. He has overcome our fears. He has overcome our doubts. He has overcome our struggles. He has overcome the grave. So not even a hurricane has the capacity to take away what he has established with an empty tomb. So no matter what you're dealing with, no matter what those you care about are dealing with, we have come today to celebrate that nothing that we are dealing with is above an empty tomb. He has overcome not just for today but forever.

Let's pray.

*Lord, as we come to this time of opening your word, Lord, you know what's going on in our lives, you know the struggles, you know the doubts, the fears, the concerns so, God, help us right now as we prepare to open your word, help us to take all those things and just put them down at the foot of the cross, realizing that you've overcome not just the grave, but you have overcome every issue and every struggle and every concern. And Lord, for the next few moments supernaturally make it possible that all those issues would just go by the wayside and the only thing we would care about is what you want to teach us, what you want to show us from your word, so that we couldn't just declare that you have overcome but that we would be as your word said, we would be overcomers with you. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

This morning I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the Gospel of John 8. I also want to encourage you just a few pages to the right, the book of Romans 2 and 4. We're going to spend a little bit of our time in the book of Romans but the majority of our time today is going to be spent in the book of John 8 as we continue a journey, as we continue walking through the Gospel of John. For those of you that our guests or visitors with us, we've been doing this for some time now and we have a purpose, we have a direction. The goal is to get to chapter 15. When we get to chapter 15, Jesus makes a very strategic

statement, he says, "I am the vine and you are the branches, he who abides in me and I in him shall bear much fruit for apart from me you can do nothing." That's the intended goal and so we are walking through the Gospel of John. What does it really mean for Jesus to be the vine? What does it really mean for us to be the branches? What does it really mean for us to see fruit born in our lives? And today in John 8, beginning in verse 33, we find ourselves in the midst of a discussion, in fact, some of you may say this is a heated debate. There are these individuals who are the religious authorities of Jesus' day, there are these individuals who are the political powerbrokers of the day who are actually going to argue with him, they are going to debate with him on who should have the upper hand, who has the higher authority, this "rogue rabbi from Nazareth" or these professional religious folks from Jerusalem?

So today in John 8:33, we pick up the story where there is this discussion or debate and here's the question I want to ask you, it's rhetorical, I know: how did these guys miss Jesus? I mean, they had seen the miracles, they had heard the sermons. They are in a personal dialogue with him, how did they miss Jesus? And we're going to see the way they missed Jesus is oftentimes the way we miss Jesus as well. Beginning in verse 33, it says,

33 They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how do you say then, You shall be made free? 34 Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever commits sin is the servant of sin. 35 And the servant abides not in the house for ever: but the Son abides forever. 36 If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed. 37 I know that you are Abraham's seed; but you seek to kill me, because my word has no place in you. 38 I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and you do that which you have seen with your father. 39 They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus said unto them, If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. 40 But now you seek to kill me, a man that has told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. 41 You do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. 42 Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, you would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. 43 Why do you not understand my speech? even because you cannot hear my word. 44 You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. 45 And because I tell you the truth, you believe me not. 46 Which of you convinces me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do you not believe me? 47 He that is of God hears God's words: you therefore hear them not, because you are not of God.

Wow, what a heated conversation. I mean, these individuals, it's getting personal now because they are starting to call out "who is each other's father, who is your daddy, so to

speaking." So what we see here is a very heated discussion between Jesus and these individuals who claim that he is not qualified to say what he is saying and do what he claims he can do. But what we see is they completely missed it, right in front of their face, and so we have to ask ourselves: how did these guys miss it? How did they miss it? Well, I think there are two reasons. I think they missed it because of their perspective of the past as well as their perspective of the present; in other words, how they looked at their history and how they looked at their today. What I want to do today is look at what was their perspective of the past and then see what the Bible says in response or proof thereof, and then I want to look at how did they look at their present and what's the Bible answer as well there.

So let's begin with their past. How did they miss Jesus by looking at their past? One of the things that you see in this very beginning is they claimed an allegiance to Abraham and so we see it was about their descent and what I mean by that is they claimed that their authority, they claimed that their ability, they claimed that their superiority was based on – listen to this – the name on the back of the jersey. They descended from Abraham. In other words, we have had situations whether it be in sports, we have had situations whether it be in life, situations in business, situations in school, where we all know somebody who got something they had no right to have just because of their family's reputation, just because of their name, just because of their descent from somebody else.

We've all seen this in our life but I think it really came to fruition, at least in my life as a young teenager. I was part of a baseball team that was about to participate in a very large tournament situation. It was one of those tournaments where we knew they were going to be a lot of scouts there. We knew there were going to be a lot of radar guns for the pitchers. It was a big deal. There were going to be schools coming from all over the state. It was going to be packed with participants and packed with observers. The only problem was, just like this last week in the state of Texas, there was a lot of rain that had come and the field was soaked. Now we did everything that we knew to do. It was our home field and we put all the chemicals you were supposed to put on it, all the things you were supposed to do to try to dry the field out, the only problem was we couldn't get it dry. I mean, it was still puddled with water. So about two days before the tournament we said, "Coach, there's no way we're going to pull this tournament off." He said, "Don't you worry. I'll take care of it. When school is over today, come back by the field and I'll show you how we're going to pull this off." All right, I guess you've got something I've never seen before and there was something I had never seen before. When we got out of school and went to that baseball field that day, hovering over the pitcher's mound was a helicopter. They brought a helicopter in to dry the field. Now, those are some folks that want to play some baseball. You bring a helicopter in and somebody wants to play some ball. It was mesmerizing. I'm sitting there in the dugout, you know, 100 mile an hour winds blowing at me, watching a helicopter hover over a baseball field. And it stayed there for a while and it did its job and eventually, yes, it dried the field out.

That was a mesmerizing experience, it's what happened next that brings this point today to absolute clarity. If you ever wondered why in some situations and everybody has those situations whether it's a business partner, whether it's a teammate, you say, "Why do they

get all the favoritism? Why do they receive all the accolades? Why is it that they always seem to get the benefit of the doubt?" You know, every team has one and every group has one, and you kind of wonder why. Oh, my questions were answered because we had one of those players on our team. He was a decent player but it just seemed like he got the accolades he didn't deserve and was put in a position that he didn't deserve. I got my answer when that helicopter landed and his dad stepped out of it. I said, "Ah-ha! I've seen the light." It doesn't always matter what your batting average is, sometimes it's the name on the back of the jersey.

We've seen that in life and that's what these guys were claiming. They were saying, "Well, because we are descendants of Abraham and we don't believe you are, you should listen to us. You should be at our feet." But I want you to hear what the Bible says about their claim of descent. Turn a few pages over to the book of Romans 2, and I know these are not the words that were spoken directly by Jesus during his earthly ministry but Romans 2 and in particular Romans 4, addresses the situation of human descent as authority when it comes to the things of God or a relationship with God. Romans 2:28. Now remember, they are claiming descent from Abraham. They are claiming that the father of the Jewish people, they have the same name and the same descent thereof. "For he," listen in verse 28, "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."

Now turn a few pages to the right to chapter 4 and it's going to get specific here. In other words, it's saying that you can't claim a descent or a heritage just because of the name on the back of the jersey, more importantly it's the condition of the heart. Romans 4, beginning in verse 1, "What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he has whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt."

So when you take those passages in the book of Romans and you apply it to John 8, what the Scripture is teaching us is that our relationship with God, our condition before him, is not based on a physical, earthly, human descent, it's about the condition of our heart and even Abraham, who they were claiming as their forefather, even the Scripture says he was not justified, he was not declared righteous before God because of the works of the flesh, but the condition of his heart back in the book of Genesis when it was attributed to him for righteousness because he believed in God's plan.

So as they looked back to their past, this allegiance to the name of and the descendancy of Abraham, they were making a claim that the name on the back of the jersey was actually more important than the claim of the heart. But there is another issue these guys dealt with in their past. Back to John 8, what we have here in verse 33, "They answered him, We be Abraham's seed," I want you to notice this next statement, that we have "never been in bondage to any man." These are the leaders of the Jewish people claiming

that they being of Abraham's seed, that their people have never been in bondage. There is no greater distortion of truth you will hear today than this, is for someone of Abraham's descent to say they had never been in bondage. What you see happening here in John 8 is what we call in our culture revisionist history. Revisionist history is where you go back and you rewrite the story so as to fit what you would like the story to say and the intent and the motive that you would like to propagate. They're claiming that they are innocent. They're claiming Jesus is guilty. They're claiming they have the answers and Jesus is wrong. So they are trying to rewrite, they are distorting history by saying, "We have never been in bondage."

Now, this is a very simplistic statement I'm about to make: had they not heard of Egypt? I mean, it's the whole story of Exodus, right? I mean, the main story in the Old Testament as far as the first five books of the Bible are concerned is this experience where when the Israelites were in Egypt, there arose a Pharaoh that knew not Joseph and for the next 400 years the Jewish people were enslaved, they were bond servants for 10 generations. But we know the story well. A man by the name of Moses, who is on the back side of nowhere, one day the Lord comes to him and says, "I want you to go back and say, 'Let my people go.'" Moses and Aaron his brother, they go back and we know about the famous 10 plagues. We know about the water into blood. We know about the frogs and the lice. But do you know that the last plague was called the Passover. It was that time in which the firstborn in the families who did not believe, the firstborn in the families that rebelled against God, the firstborn would lose his life, but those who had the blood of the Lamb across the threshold of their doors, the firstborn would be passed over.

Why is this significant to John 8? They said, "We have never been in bondage," and yet every year since they gather together as a family, they gather together as a community of faith, and they celebrate the Passover meal where they recall out loud, "We used to be in bondage in Egypt but now we are free." Do you see the distortion here? When they look at Jesus and say, "But when you look at our past, it's not as bad as you think it is, in fact it's actually pretty good." Had they not heard of Egypt?

Or let's move on through the chronology of history. How about Assyria? The top 10 tribes as far as when I say 10 geographically speaking, in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Assyrians, the world power at that time, they came and the Lord had told them for 200 years it was going to happen and they didn't listen. The Assyrians came in and they took them captive. The southern tribes, of which most likely these guys talking to Jesus would have been a part of, they were in the south, they were in Jerusalem, they were in Judea, they not only saw the Assyrians take the northern kingdom, they had prophets come and tell them, "Hey, what happened to them, it's going to happen to you." And in 586 BC, a man by the name of Nebuchadnezzar, a Babylonian, comes into Jerusalem, he takes the city, he takes the temple and he takes them, yes, into captivity for 70 years. This is where Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego come in. This is where the prophet Ezekiel is known in Scripture. In fact, it was 70 years after where Ezra and Nehemiah and Esther come to play in biblical history. In fact, the rebuilding of the very temple that they were so excited about in the midst of Jerusalem was done so when they came back out of bondage in Babylon.

So how they have distorted their past in light of Egypt and Assyria and Babylon actually makes its way to their present with what we know as Rome. They were in bondage to Rome because they had to pay taxes to Rome. Do you not remember the story of Christmas when Mary and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem, the city of David, to pay a tax that Caesar Augustus had put on the entire world, including the Jewish people? What a distortion of their past. What an opportunity to try to revise history.

A couple of weeks ago, my wife and I found ourselves in one of the most aweing experiences of our lives. We found ourselves on the grounds of the property of a Jewish concentration camp from World War II. And I won't go into detail of just the humility and the humbleness and the experience that it was, but when you walk in the front gates, they are right outside of Munich, Germany, and you walk into this facility where tens of thousands of people lost their lives, there is this huge edifice, huge, when multiple languages that make this statement, "So we do not forget." In other words, don't change history because if you do, then it will change you. And what's happening here is they decide and say, "Well, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Rome, we've never really been in bondage." You see, when they look at their past, not only was this issue of descent from Abraham, not only was there this distortion of history, they were in absolute denial of the condition not just of themselves but humanity as a whole.

Notice what Jesus says, verse 34, "Verily, verily," or truly, truly, "I say unto you, Whosoever commits sin is the servant of sin." And what Jesus is talking about here is at the root of the issue is sin and that is the root of all humanity's problem. We as the human race, as individuals and corporately, our issue, we like to put all kind of titles on it but our issue is a sin problem. That's what our issue is and he was saying it doesn't matter what you say about the past, it doesn't matter what you say about your ancestry, at the end of the day each and every one of you have a sin problem.

What's the biblical proof for this? Well, all you've got to do is go back to the very Torah that they claim to profess in. The book of Genesis 3. We know the story well. Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden. Everything is going well until they eat of the forbidden fruit. When sin enters the human race as 1 Corinthians 15 says, that sin entered through Adam but yet Christ, the second Adam, came to abolish or to take care of sin. From that point forward whether it was Cain or Abel or Seth or you or me, there is a sin problem amongst the human race, so much so that three chapters later, Genesis 6, the Lord says, "Except for eight of you folks, there is going to be a big storm that is going to wipe everybody out." You get to chapter 11 of the book of Genesis, what we know as the Tower of Babel where humanity comes together and says, "God, we know better than you do and we're going to prove it and we're going to show it." The Bible says that God comes down and he disperses the people, he confuses the languages.

You say, "Jeff, why are you going into all that detail in the book of Genesis?" Because it is in chapter 12 of the book of Genesis where God comes to Abram in Ur of the Chaldees and says, "Hey, I've got this plan. I'm going to redeem all people to me. I'm going to redeem the nations unto me and if you and your wife and your snotty nephew," and he is

snotty if you read the story, "if y'all will go down to a land you know not of, I will work through you and I will give you a seed of promise, a child who through his descendants, the Messiah will come." You say, "Why is that critical to the story?" Because they were denying they had a sin problem yet it was because of sin that Abram was even called out in the first place. It was humanity's sin problem that God responded with the call of Abram. It was because of humanity's sin problem that he went to a land that he knew not of.

What we see is not just this denial but we see the fact that they would not admit that sin was their problem. You know, in the New Testament when we go to the book of Romans 3:23, I'm sure many of you are familiar with it. It says, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." The last time I checked, all means all. It means all of us struggle with this and then in chapter 6, verse 23, it says, "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of life is through Jesus Christ our Lord." And what we see in these individuals who present themselves before Jesus is because of the name on the back of the jersey, because of their willingness to distort or to rewrite their own history, and because they deny the fact that they had a sin problem, they absolutely missed Jesus right in front of their face.

But it wasn't just their perspective of their past, it was also their perspective of the present because beginning when they begin to respond back to Jesus, they begin to talk about Abram, they begin to talk about that they are descendants of Abraham and Jesus argues back, "Well, if you were of Abraham, you'd do the right things but you are of your father the devil," and such. And what they did in their present as they began to attribute their lives in a self-justification position, let me tell you what these guys did. Now, this is a phrase that may be new to some of you but I come from the state of Texas and we have weird ways of saying things, okay? They were "perfuming the pig." Now, some of you say, "They did what to what?" You perfume the pig, let me tell you what that phrase means. When you perfume the pig, you take a pig, what does a pig do? A pig loves the slop. A pig loves the mud. A pig loves to wallow in all that junk, right? Can we just be honest: they make for good bacon but hey are nasty creatures. Is that okay? So those pigs, there they are, you can take a pig, you can give it a bath, I mean you can give it a shower, you can clean it up, you can spray some perfume on it, even put a little lipstick and a bow if it's a girl pig and scent it, and what will that pig do? It goes right back to the slop. In other words, what they were doing is they were denying the nature of who they really were, they were making it look good on the outside even though it was corrupt on the inside.

Interesting that they again come back and what do they say? "Oh, but Abram, Abraham is our father. We do the works of Abraham." Now we just read in Romans 4 where it says that Abram was not justified by the works of his flesh but by basically the condition of his heart. What were they saying? "Ah, because of what Abraham did, we should be declared righteous."

Let's talk about Abram for just a moment. The Lord does come to him in chapter 12 and chapter 15 of the book of Genesis. He says, "Look at the stars," and even though they

were past the birthing age, "do you believe the Lord is speaking, do you believe that I can bring a descendant from you? Do you believe that I can bring the Messiah from you even though the age that you are?" He said, "We believe. We believe. Let's go forth." Then there is chapter 16, you see, in chapter 16 of the book of Genesis, Sarah is not getting any younger, Abraham is not getting any younger and there has yet to be a child born as the Lord promised. So what do they do? They get this brilliant – please notice sarcasm – they get this brilliant idea that Hagar, Sarah's handmaiden, should be the vessel by which Abram should utilize to have a child. So we know about the birth of one known as Ishmael. If you have read through the Old Testament, you know all these people the Israelites are fighting and it doesn't matter if it's Samson, if it's David, if it's Saul, Solomon, all the battles the Israelites have, guess who they are battling? The descendants typically of Ishmael. In other words, it was Abraham's disobedience, it was Abraham's rebellion, it was the works of his flesh for the sake of the flesh that got them in the very mess they were in. And yet even today, we find ourselves in a world, all you have to do is read the news, watch the news, particularly over in the Middle East, typically all of the fighting is between the descendants of Ishmael, the descendants of Isaac and they are clashing with each other. They are perfuming the pig, folks. They are looking at Abraham and they are looking at Genesis 16 and they are saying, "Oh, but we're really not corrupt." Okay, you're not corrupt.

How about Jeremiah 22 that says the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob and ultimately David, were so corrupt that a man by the name of Jeconiah showed up, it was so bad that the Lord said, "No longer will there be a king descend from this throne to sit upon David's." So corrupt that when you get to Matthew 1, you see a genealogy, you see a lineage of Jesus that is so contrary to the Old Testament. You see, in the Old Testament we have 10 genealogies, all these men, they are born, they have babies, they die. You say, "Well, how do they get born, have babies and die?" Well, the women aren't listed, girls, I apologize for that but it says "So-and-so begat So-and-so," we know it was actually his wife but nonetheless they had children and they died. When you get to Matthew 1, all of a sudden the genealogy of Jesus, you've got Hagar, oh yeah, the woman of ill repute. You've got Bathsheba who was with David on the top of the roof. And guess who shows up? Jeconiah, that same guy found in Jeremiah 22. What I find intriguing is that they're before Jesus face to face, they are advocating that the works of their forefathers, the works of Abraham and their own works should be justifiable in front of God, and yet the very people who they claim as their forefathers have a track record of less than righteousness when it comes in the flesh.

But they didn't just try to "perfume the pig," they also pontificated. I know that's a big fancy word but it basically means this: when you pontificate, you claim that your words, your opinion, your position, is of greater value than anybody else. Now, when we get later on in this passage, particularly beginning in verse 41, can we just be honest with ourselves? It gets a little nasty. I mean, they are basically calling out each other's daddy, so to speak. I mean, it's getting rough here because Jesus is talking about Abraham and the lack thereof or if they were of Abraham they would do the things that Abraham did that were good. They come back and they say, "Well, at least we're not born of fornication."

Let me tell you what they were alluding to. What we know as the Christmas story, the Lord comes to Mary, a young lady and says, "You're going to conceive of the Holy Ghost." She is with child with no human man being involved. She goes and visits her cousin Elizabeth and she comes back. Joseph sees the condition she's in and being a righteous man, he wants to put her away privately because he cares for her. He doesn't want the Levitical law to be enacted where death comes in and so he begins that process and then the angel of the Lord shows up and says, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, this is of God. The Messiah is in her womb. Hang in there, Joseph. We've got this." And then he is born. All throughout his earthly years up until this point, Joseph never claimed to be his father. Never claimed, always declared that it was of God. Mary never claimed that there was any human involved so guess what these guys conjecture? They say, "Ah-ha! If no one is going to claim to be the father, then you must have been born of fornication." Do you see the dirty little angle they are taking here? I mean, it's getting dirty.

So what does Jesus do? Jesus writes the next number one bestseller on the pop Christian book market. You know, everybody talks about we want to have the best of this, the best of that, be blessed here, be blessed there, can you imagine if there was a book written entitled this, "You are of your father the devil." That's what Jesus said. Jesus looked at these guys and he said, "You have a father. Oh, you can claim it's Abraham but your father is the devil himself. He was a liar from the beginning. He was a murderer from the beginning. He was a thief from the beginning." If that's not words to win friends and influence people, I don't know what is.

So what happens? What Jesus is doing not only describing the works of the devil, he's describing their very behavior – listen to this – in just the last 24 hours. You see, at the very beginning of chapter 8, these same men bring a woman caught in adultery in the very act, they throw her at the feet of Jesus and what do we discover? That these men had lied as well. These men brought the woman but they didn't bring the man, did they? They were lying about the true nature of the situation. They were murderers. They basically wanted Jesus to end her life by the throwing of a stone at her head. They were killers. They were destroyers just like the Bible describes the devil himself. Why is this significant? Because they were pontificating. They were declaring their righteousness. They were saying, "Look at us and how wonderful we are." And what does Jesus say? "You're so wonderful, look at what you just did 24 hours ago."

So it wasn't just about their past, it wasn't just about them changing history, they were taking their lives, making it look good on the outside though it was rotten on the inside, and then what they were doing is they were imitating their father the devil himself by their very actions being of lying and thievery and murder. Ah, but there's one last thing that I think is so critical to know about what they did as far as their perspective in the present. They had a comparative theology. What they really were doing was doing performance based theology. They were saying, "Look at us. Look at what we've done. Look at the good things that we've done." And here is the problem: they tried to compare themselves to God himself. And we're good at doing this. We love comparative theology. My father-in-law shared this with me years and years ago. He said you're always going to

find somebody better, you're always going to find somebody worse. Those of you that are students, you're always going to find somebody smarter and you're always going to find somebody not as smart as you. Those of you that are athletes, there is always somebody stronger, always somebody not as strong, faster, not as fast. In business, there is always someone who is a little more successful and someone who is not quite as successful. The problem with comparative theology is that we justify our position always based on the one who is less, do we not?

In fact, it reminds me of an old story, a story of a young pastor, brand new to town, in fact he had just been there for a few months. He comes rolling into town and this town possessed two men, they were twin brothers. They were the wealthiest most rotten men in the whole community and everybody knew it. They stole from everybody. They lied to everybody. They were greedy. They were guilty of everything you can imagine. Well, after being in town for just a few months, one of the twin brothers died. When he died, none of the churches in town would host his funeral. None of the pastors in town were willing to perform it. So out of desperation, the other twin comes to this young pastor brand-new in the community and he says, "I don't know what you've heard about my brother, but I would like for you to do his funeral service." He said, "I will consider that." Then the twin brother says, "And I'll make you a deal, I will give you \$10,000 if you will declare at my brother's funeral that he was a saint." He said, "I'll do it." So the funeral came and everybody in town showed up and he began to talk about the life of this brother, the one that was deceased. He gave the stories of his infidelity, he gave the stories of robbery, he gave the stories of extortion, and then he closed the message by saying, "But compared to his brother, he was a saint." You see, when we get into comparative theology, how easy it is to always find somebody that we look a little better than and that's what they were doing but Jesus comes and he says, "Well, you can't compare because the ultimate standard is God himself."

So how does this all apply to today? You see, it's easy to look at these guys and say, "Man, I'm glad I wasn't in that group." It's easy to see this historical account and say, "Wow, that's an amazing story of 2,000 years ago." It's easy to say, "Well, I'm not in that position and if I were, hopefully I wouldn't do what they did." But what we discover today is really their issues, their struggles, their problems are actually our problems as well. How many times do we get caught up in basing our future based on our past? I cannot tell you how many people I have had a conversation with and I'll ask them a very important question. I say, "One day, one day when you stand before God himself, I mean you're looking at the pearly gates, this life is over, eternity is about to begin, what are you going to say to God at the pearly gates?" And do you know what people say to me? They say, "I'm going to tell him I was a Baptist." What does that matter? I've had people say, "Well, my grandfather was a preacher." So? Do you know how many times we look at our past, we look at somebody else and say, well, based on who they were or what they did or a title over the door, that's exactly what these guys were doing. They were saying, "Look at Abraham and look at our past. That's what you should look at." What Jesus then says, he says, "No, no, I'm not interested in back then, I'm interested in you. Where do you stand?"

How many times when asked that question somebody will say, "I don't know what I would say." I've got great news for you today, every one of us barring the Lord's return, we are going to breathe our last breath. Now, some of you are thinking, "I thought you said you had good news?" I've got great news, the great news is that's not the end. The great news is Jesus rose from the dead. The great news is the tomb is empty. And he said, "Whoever believes on me shall have life," listen, "everlasting." In fact, he told his disciples, he said, "I'm going to go away and I'm going to prepare a place for you and one day I'm going to come back and I'm going to call you again unto myself." But it's not just about then and there, it's also about here and now because in John 10:10 he did say the devil was a thief, a liar and a murderer, but then he said that he came to give us life that we may have it more abundantly.

So what we discover is that sometimes it's easy to pick on those who miss Jesus in John 8 when some of us have missed Jesus too. We are basing our relationship with him on what we've done or somebody else and what they've done versus what he alone has done on our behalf. Don't get caught up like these guys did thinking, "I've got to do something or I've got to change something." You see, the only righteousness that's true righteousness is that of Jesus Christ himself. No amount of the past and no amount of the present can ever do that in your life.

Let's pray together with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. You know, maybe you're that person this morning whether you find yourself in an environment like this for the very first time or whether this has just been kind of a part of your life for years, but maybe today you realize that you have been basing your entire relationship with God, maybe you've been determining your entire eternity on how you compare to somebody else or what you did do versus what you didn't do or what you haven't done versus what you did do. Today the word of God made it very clear that there is nothing you are ever going to do or not do that will justify you before God. That's why Jesus is so important. And maybe you are here today and maybe the proverbial lightbulb has turned on and you realize it's not about your works of righteousness, it's not about a name above the door, it's not about somebody who has gone on years before you, but maybe today you realize that the blood of Jesus Christ, that the empty tomb was for you personally.

If you find yourself in that position today, I've got incredible news. You don't have to sign up for a class. You don't have to jump through a bunch of hoops. You don't have to check off a bunch of boxes. All you need to do is have a very sincere serious conversation with God. You don't have to have this conversation out loud. You don't even have to say the same words that I might say but maybe the conversation would go a little something like this, "God, I just want to confess today I've been trying to do it on my own. Somehow, somehow, God, I bought the lie that I could be good enough. I bought the lie that I could stop doing enough stuff and somehow, in some way would take care of my sin problem. But I understand today that Jesus is the only answer to my sin problem so I believe today, I believe that Jesus loved me so much that he was willing to be born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus loved me so much he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus loved me so much he was willing to pay the price of my sin on the cross of Calvary and three days later he rose from the grave so I

could be forgiven and I could be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to all the world's problems but I do know that Jesus is the answer to my sin problem, so in the best way I know how I'm asking you to forgive me. I'm asking you to save me and I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe that's a conversation you had with God today or maybe you're dealing with God on some other issues or other items, we'd love the opportunity to talk with you. We'd love the opportunity. This isn't about condemnation, this is about celebration. We want to know what God is doing in your life and we would just love the opportunity to discuss it with you.

*Lord, as we come to this time, how grateful we are that you are a God of second chances, you are a God of third chances, in fact for some of us, we have lost count of how many chances you have given us. But more than that, God, that we don't have to earn your favor and we don't have to work toward grace but you have bestowed it through the life and the blood and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. So God, I pray, help us. Help us not to trust in ourselves. Help us just to simply trust in you. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

In just a few moments, you're going to have the opportunity to respond. We're going to stand. Our team is going to lead us and I'll be here at the front whatever decision that needs to be made. If you would, stand with me as we come to our time of invitation. I'll be here.

"The moon and stars they wept  
The morning sun was dead  
The Saviour of the world was fallen  
His body on the cross  
His blood poured out for us  
The weight of every curse upon Him

"One final breath He gave  
As heaven looked away  
The son of God was laid in darkness  
A battle in the grave  
The war on death was waged  
The power of hell forever broken

"The ground began to shake  
The stone was rolled away  
His perfect love could not be overcome  
Now death where is your sting?  
Our resurrected King  
Has rendered you defeated

"Forever He is glorified  
Forever He is lifted high  
Forever He is risen  
He is alive, He is alive!"

I know there are many of you here today, here for the very first time and you say, "Well, is the invitation, is the opportunity to respond already over?" No, actually if you'll allow me to use sports terms, this is kind of half-time. In fact, in just a moment, a friend of mine is going to come and we're going to pray and we're going to have the opportunity to respond by giving, the giving of our tithes and our offerings, and by doing so, you can do the traditional way that many of you have grown up doing, whether that be writing a check, whatever it may be, but you also have the opportunity to give by texting, to give electronically. Whatever means is best for your way of doing things in life. The Lord was willing to give everything and we just are asked to give a portion. In doing so in a moment after we praise, we're going to be seated but I'm still going to be here at the front and maybe you're that person that needed to make a decision, maybe you're like this one who has come and said, "Hey, we want to be a part of the church." Whatever that is, I want to invite you to come to celebrate what God is doing in your life. I'm going to ask my friend to come and pray for us and then we'll give.