Welcome back to week number three of our Real Jesus Series. If you wanna grab a Bible and go ahead and turn with me John Chapter 8. We’re gonna jump in where we left off last week. While we’re turning there, let me just give you a quick little reminder. We’re looking at a section in John, where Jesus is having some conversations with a group of people who really struggled to believe what he had to say about himself.

And last week, we looked at four ingredients that go into spiritual blindness that I think were partly responsible for why they couldn’t understand what he was saying. And as we continue that conversation, what we’re gonna see today is actually there’s something else that needs to be corrected before they can go any further.

Verse 21 in chapter 8 says, “Once more Jesus said to them, I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come.” This is once again meaning he’s trying again, he’s making another attempt, and in this other attempt, he says kind of an interesting thing. He says something here that he actually says several times throughout the Gospel of John. We find the same kind of statement several different times in the Gospel of John, and it always has three components.

He says, “I’m going away,” he says, “You’re gonna look for me,” and then he says, “Where I go you cannot come.” Now, sometimes there’s some additional elements but it always has at least those three elements. And I think it’s important that we understand how this functions as his attempt to get them to wake up to the reality of what he says.

The first thing he says is “I’m going away.” Now, there’s a lot of different things that it could mean, and people over the years wondered what he might have had in mind. But I think probably the simplest answer is the best answer and that is that he was planning on leaving the planet. I don’t mean the crucifixion. I mean what happened after his resurrection, which is something we call the ascension.

And if you read about it in the first chapter of the book of Acts, there was a moment after the resurrection where Jesus like literally left. I love the description you find in Acts. He was hanging out with some of his disciples and he said, “Hey, I’m going away,” and then he literally went up into the air and went away, which is crazy if you stop and think about it.

And it caused years ago, that some Russian cosmonauts to declare that there’s no possible way that the Bible could be true because we’ve been to outer space and we didn’t see Jesus floating around up there. I kid you not, that claim was made, “We’ve been the space and we didn’t see God up there.”

And the thing is, what you need to understand is if you read the chapter in Acts, he went up and then a cloud obscured him. It means he transitioned out of the world, he wasn’t in the physical world anymore. And that’s probably what Jesus is referring to here when he says, “I’m going away.”

But maybe the most interesting thing about this is the way that he says it. He doesn’t say, “I will go away.” He says, “I am going away.” It’s a present tense verb. What he literally says is, “I’m departing.” In other words, it’s already happening right now. It’s not something I’m gonna do in the future, it’s something that’s already beginning.

It’s a little bit like if you’re standing on the platform in a train station and the train is still. If it’s not moving you might say, “Hey, the train will go away eventually,” right? We know what is gonna happen, it will go away. But when it’s already pulling away, you’d go, “Hey, the train is going away,” and what that does is it creates a little bit of a sense of urgency, and I believe Jesus intends that.

What Jesus is saying is, “Listen, I’m already in the process of doing it, I’m already in the process of pulling off of the platform. The boat is leaving the dock. It’s already moving.” In other words, “Listen, you don’t have endless time to figure out what you think about me.” What he’s saying is that there’s a clock running on our time to figure out what we believe about Jesus. And that was true for those people in that day and it’s every bit as true for us today.
There was a moment...scripture is pretty clear that “It is appointed to man to die once and after that to face judgment.” that death is the end of the clock. The time's running out, we have to figure out what we believe about Jesus before we get to that moment. And so when Jesus says, “I'm going away,” it's already starting. He's saying, “Listen, there's a clock running. You've got to figure this thing out.”

The second thing he says is “You'll look for me,” he says “You'll look for me.” And it's interesting that he says this kinda thing a couple different times, and sometimes he says it to believers and sometimes he says it to unbelievers. And when he says it to unbelievers, what he typically says is something along the lines of, “You will look for me but you will not find me.” Now when he's talking to believers, he doesn't say that last part, but he says, “You will look for me,” but he doesn't say you won't find me.

Now here he's talking to nonbelievers and he says, “You will look for me,” and he says really kind of a harsh version of “you won't find me.” He says, “You will die in your sins.” What he's saying is, “Listen, you're gonna look for me after I ascend to Heaven, but you're never gonna find me because if you don't believe in me, your sins are gonna prevent you from going to the place that I'm going. You'll never find me.”

And what we need to understand is that he's not saying, “Where I go you cannot go.” Now, that's an interesting statement. it's the kind of thing you would expect him to say just to the nonbelievers. “You're not gonna be able to get where I'm going,” right? But interestingly enough, every time he says this kind of thing, he says that line even when he's speaking to believers, even to his closest followers, he says “Where I am going, you cannot go.”

And he's speaking to religious people. He's going, “I know that you're doing the best that you can at following the rules, I know that you're working really hard at checking off the boxes of what you think God is looking for, but the reality is where I am going into the presence of Father into Heaven, you cannot go. It's not possible.” So it all depends on what you think about Jesus.

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And the third thing he says is “Where I go you cannot go.” Now, that's an interesting statement. it's the kind of thing you would expect him to say just to the nonbelievers. “You're not gonna be able to get where I'm going,” right? But interestingly enough, every time he says this kind of thing, he says that line even when he's speaking to believers, even to his closest followers, he says “Where I am going, you cannot go.”

And what we need to understand is that he's not saying, “Where I go you will not go,” he's saying “Where I am going, you are not able to go.” Literally, the word is “You don't have the power, you can't pull it off, you can't do it.” What he's really saying is nobody has the ability to get to Heaven on their own, that's what he's saying. He's saying, “Guys, it all comes back to me again. I can get you there, you can't get there.”

And so they're kinda like, “Well, if he killed himself, we were definitely not gonna be going where he would be going.” But it is odd, but it's a hard right turn. It's a strange thing that they say. And if you were here last week, you might remember me saying that one of the ingredients of spiritual blindness is a tendency to focus on the irrelevance and ignore the important. This is a great example of this.

I'm not exactly sure what it was that made them kinda go off in this direction, but Jesus ultimately identifies the real issue, the real reason why they're having such a hard time tracking with him, when he says in verse 23, “But he continued, "You are from below, I'm from above. You are of this world, I am not of this world." And what Jesus is doing there is he's identifying the core issue, he's identifying the fundamental underlying issue that has led to spiritual blindness, that's led to their confusion, it's led to their inability to track with what he was saying.

And I would say the principle this way, he's saying, “Listen, our perspective determines our perception.” Our perspective determines our perception. In other words, where we stand and where we're looking and how we're looking at something, determines what we're gonna be able to see of it.

We see this in everyday life. Imagine that you came up behind me and you could just see the back of my head, and I was doing this. Like there's two major options right, I could be sobbing uncontrollably or I could be what? I could be laughing and you don't know why because of your perspective. Because that perspective doesn't give you the ability to perceive everything you need, and so you'd need to go to a different position.

And what Jesus is doing here is basically saying, “Hey, this works in the spiritual realm as well, our perspective determines our perception.” And the problem he says to this group of people that can't seem to get a handle on what he's saying is, “You're looking at it from the wrong perspective.” And he identifies two major perspectives, from below and from above, from an earthly perspective from a heavenly perspective, from God's perspective from a human perspective.

And what he says is, “You're looking at it from the wrong perspective. You've gotta change your perspective if you're gonna understand everything that I'm saying.”
So he goes on he says, "I told you that you would die in your sins. If you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins." What Jesus is doing is he's trying to return them to the core issue. He's like, "I don't know how you guys got on the suicide, but that's not the important thing." The important thing I said is it's about you, if you die in your sins. I know where I'm going, I know what comes next, but if you die in your sins what comes next is not good. That's the issue that you need to be focused on, that's what you need to be paying attention to.

And so he's trying to return their attention to the core issue, but unfortunately, one of the characteristics of those who are seeing things from below, from an earthly perspective, is that those who see from below tend to steer away from uncomfortable conversations.

I don't know if you've ever had this experience where you're trying to deal with something really serious, but somebody is looking at it from this non-spiritual earthly perspective. And they just seem to keep finding tangents, irrelevant things to go off on, irrelevant roads to walk down. And you keep going, "No, we need to come back to this," but they keep going off. It's because the conversation you're trying to have is uncomfortable.

The conversation that you're trying to have it's touching on some sore spots, some insecurities, it's touching on uncomfortable places, and those who see things from below tend to steer away from uncomfortable conversations. That's what's happening here. Now, in his attempt to steer them back to the real conversation, he makes an astounding claim and it's really easy for us to overlook. They didn't overlook it as we'll see in a second, but it's easy for us.

He says, "Unless you believe that I am he," and that's how most of the English translations render it because in the Greek it doesn't feel like it makes a whole lot of sense. They actually add the word "he" in because in the Greek what it actually says is, "Unless you believe that I am." And as English speakers were like, "Unless I believe that you are what? You can't just leave it hanging out there, Jesus. You gotta tell us what you're talking about."

But some of you may be already ahead of us on this one, and that is that when Jesus said, "Unless you believe that I am," what he said sounds remarkably similar to something that God said back in the Book of Exodus in the third chapter. Where Moses had an encounter with God through the burning bush, and God told him, "I want you to go down to Egypt. I want you to tell Pharaoh let my people go." He's like, "That's not gonna go well."

And honestly, God even if Pharaoh says yes, the Israelites are gonna have some questions too. They're gonna be like, "Who told you to do this? I need a name God." And God said, "Okay, here's the name. The name that I want you to give the Israelites is tell them I am sent you."

And I guarantee you Moses is like, "That is not helpful." But that's the name that God gave him. So that's what Yahweh means in Hebrew, it means I am. It's this incredibly deep...it means beginning and end I am. It means all the in-between points I am, forever and ever I am. All the power I mean, it's just this incredibly profound statement.

And Jesus says, what looks suspiciously similar to it here, he says, "Unless you believe that I am." And while we might easily miss that, his original audience didn't, which is why they responded verse 25, "Who are you?" they asked. "Who are you?" Which again, it's a very perfectly accurate translation, but it doesn't quite capture I think the gist of what they're saying.

In the Greek, there's a little bit of an odd word order happening. They move the word "you" to the beginning of the sentence, so it's not really where it belongs, but that's how you emphasize something in Greek. So what they really say is you who are. And what that means is...the heart-beat of their statement is, who do you think you are, what kind of a nerve do you have to be making this kind of a claim. They understood exactly what Jesus was saying. They're not asking for clarification. They're expressing outrage. Who are you to make that kind of a claim about yourself?

Jesus says nothing new guys, "Just what I have been telling you from the beginning," Jesus replied. It's what I've been saying all along, "I have so much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is trustworthy, and what I have heard from him I tell the world. Now they did not understand that he was telling them about his Father.

And so Jesus said, when you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own but I speak just as the Father has taught me. The One who sent me is with me, and He has not left me alone for I always do what pleases Him."

He says, "Guys, you just don't get it, but you are." He says, "You are gonna get it. Here's when it's gonna happen. It's gonna happen when you have lifted me up." And he's almost certainly referring there to the crucifixion itself. And how is it that crucifying Jesus in the moment when he was lifted up on the cross, how would that make things clearer to his opponents here? And I think the answer is because when he was raised on the cross, that set off a string of events that they were gonna have to pay attention to.

I mean the sky darkened, as I mentioned last week. We actually have Roman reports of that happening. Reports to governors going, "This weird thing happened in Judea. How do we explain it?" In the Temple, there was a place called the Holy of Holies. It was where the Shechinah glory, the manifest glory of God would appear. And it was behind a huge veil, and people could only approach to the outside of that veil, and so this veil kept the Holy of Holies separate.
But when Jesus died, that veil tore from the top to the bottom signifying that we all have access right into the presence of God. That happened after the crucifixion. Of course, there was the resurrection itself. His point was when, "I'm lifted up, you're gonna see a string of things that will convince you that I am who I say I am, that I am I am." Sounds a little bit like a Dr. Seuss thing doesn't it?

But the problem is that at that point, it would be too late for them. For this group, that moment would be too late, but that's part of the problem. See, those who see things from below tend to ignore truth until it's too late. They tend to ignore truth until it's too late.

Now, fortunately, this group that he's speaking to is mixed. It's not just from people who see from the below. There's also some people there who see from above. And so verse 30 says, "That even as he spoke, many believed in him," that their perspective allowed them to perceive truth. "To the Jews who had believed in him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching you are really my disciples. And then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Anybody heard those words before? Yeah, one of the most probably familiar teachings of Jesus also probably one of the most abused teachings of Jesus, because we see it in all kinds of chronicles. I guarantee you right now, you can head to Hobby Lobby after the service and I promise you will find at least five knick knacks with a portion of that "the truth will set you free," right?

We quote this in all kinds of chronicles. I remember talking to a non-believer once who was telling me that he was afraid that his wife might be having an affair, and he told me that he was afraid to actually go through the process of finding out. He said, "I think it would almost be better if I just didn't know. I'd almost rather the uncertain." And then he said, "But you know what they say, the truth shall set you free." And I was like, "Okay, that might be true here, but that is not what Jesus meant."

What Jesus means here is an experience really, it's a stair step of experiences that work together. Really what he's saying is this, he's saying that trusting in Jesus will give you the perspective to see and to experience true freedom. It's what Jesus is getting at, he's saying that, "If you trust in me, that will give you the right perspective so that you can perceive and to experience true freedom." And it's a stair step of things, right. Let's work through each of them in turn.

The first thing is that he says that if you what? "If you believe in me, if you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples." He says, "If you hold to my teaching, you're my disciples." Okay, what teaching is he talking about? And it's important to notice that he doesn't say teachings, he says teaching. It's one, it's singular. The Greek word actually is word. He says, "If you hold to my Word, then you are my disciples." And it's interesting, it's the same Greek word that's used in the very beginning of this Gospel to say "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Here he says, "If you hold to my Word," Jesus isn't talking about his teachings, he's not talking about things that he said to do, okay? What he's saying is, "If you hold to my one claim about myself, if you hold to what I'm telling you about who I am, that I am the I am, that I am God himself, the unique Son of God come into the world to rescue you. If you hold to that, then you're my disciples."

And I think it's important that we recognize that what Jesus is saying is that trusting Jesus's claims about himself is all it takes to become a Christian. Please get a hold of this because it's amazing how often it gets turned into something else in the church. That somehow with the best of intentions, we get to this place where we're kind of communicating to people, "Listen, you can follow Jesus but before you do, you've gotta get a bunch of stuff right. You've gotta start following the rules, you gotta clean yourself up, you gotta do these things," and that's not what we see throughout the Gospels.

I mean, Jesus was willing to look at people who just came to him for a healing and who expressed their trust that he was able to heal them. And he would say things like, "I'm gonna to call you daughter from now on," and he would say, "Your faith has saved." No examples at all, no evidence at all that they were following any of his teachings just faith in him.

The thief on the cross, the thief that was crucified next to him on the cross, what did Jesus say to him? He said "Today, you'll be with me in paradise. You're going where I'm going because you've trusted in me." But it's clearly not because he was following any of the teachings or the rules or the regulations or those kinds... I mean Jesus has teachings about how to live, but what he's saying is, "Those are not what make you my follower. What makes you my follower is you trust in who I say I am, that's it."

And that leads to something very, very important. He goes on and he says, "If you hold to my Word who I say I am, then you will know the truth." And I want you to notice that he says something that's future tense. "If you hold to one belief in who I am, if you're willing to trust who I am, then you will know the truth." It will come later, "you will know the truth."

Okay, wait what truth? In context, I think the truth he's talking about is the truth of who he is. See, this kind of interesting statement, "If you believe who I say I am, then you will know who I say I am." Well, wait a minute. What's going on here? This feels kind of circular, doesn't it? Yeah, because what he's talking about is this idea to really know. I mean, not just intellectual knowledge, but the knowledge that is deep and it's profound and it carries us through hard things.
To really know and to be confident that Jesus is who he says he is, we have to trust him first. And it's only in our trust in Jesus that we really come to this full knowledge, which is really saying is that it's only by choosing to trust Christ that you can fully experience the truth of who he is. I mean, think about it like this. I use the lake that's frozen over a lot, so let me use a different analogy.

Let's imagine that somebody asks you to climb up a ladder and you look at the ladder and you're like, “I don't know about that ladder.” And you kind of examine it and you come to the place where you believe intellectually, “You know, I think the ladder is probably okay. I believe the ladder can hold me,” but you don't know the ladder can hold you until you do what? Until you start climbing the ladder, and it's only in that moment as you begin to ascend like, “Aha, this ladder actually is capable of holding me up, it's capable of getting me from where I was to where I'm looking to be.”

And that's what Jesus is talking about, that it's only in trusting him that you really begin to fully know and experience the truth of who he is. And then he says, “And from that, and only from that as a place that you come to experience freedom.” Freedom from what? Well, from sin obviously, from darkness certainly. But beyond that, from everything that keeps us from the life that God intended because you understand that the world does not offer us the life that God built us for. It's not even close, it's not even a distant second.

And so what Jesus says is that knowing Christ will set you free from everything that keeps you from the life that God intended. That's this progression, that's what Jesus is saying here. He says, “Trust me, take a step of faith with me, and then and only then will you come to know that I am who I say I am. And only in that way, will you come to experience the freedom that allows you to experience all of the life that God intended for you.”

I mean, think about it like this. I don't know, I was driving into Denver the other day and I saw that brown haze, you know, the nasty brown haze I'm talking about? And started thinking I can... imagine that you're walking around and it's so bad that you can't see it. I mean, every few feet it's right there and you're like, “I gotta get out of this. This is awful. It's affecting my lung. I hate this thing.” And you come across a ladder, and on the ladder it says “climb to clean air.” And you look at the ladder you're like, “I'm not so sure about this,” but you decide to give it a shot. And so you take your belief and you translate it into faith, which is trust.

And you put your foot on the rung and it doesn't fall, so you put your foot on the next rung and you start climbing. And what happens is you find yourself climbing out of that smog into clean Rocky Mountain air. You're experiencing freedom, and that's what Jesus is talking about here. Do you understand?

Belief is one thing, but belief means nothing if you're not willing to trust. And so he says, “If you'll hold to the truth of who I am, who I claim to be, if you put your trust in me, then you'll know that I can be trusted, and in that and only in that will you find yourself experiencing freedom.”

So “They answered him, “We are Abraham's descendants. We've never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?” It's like another tangent, right? And it's a weird tangent because actually, from basically where we're reading, if you just back up a few pages, this part of the Bible right here is a constant story of their enslavement. It's a constant repeated cycle of disobeying God, losing His blessing, going into slavery to another nation, repenting, God and His grace and mercy bringing them back, and then they forget that.

It's a long cycle of enslavement, and here they're going, “We've never been slaves of anyone.” And Jesus is like. But you gotta understand is that those who see from below tend to dismiss even obvious reality. And maybe all they mean is you know, “Yeah, I mean technically, there might have been foreign governments and stuff like that, but in our hearts, we were still free.” Maybe that's what they mean, I don't know. But it's a strange statement that they refuse to acknowledge reality, even when it's staring them in the face.

So Jesus replied verse 34, “Very truly I tell you, you're wrong. Everyone who sins is a slave to sin.” That's what I'm talking about guys. “Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you're looking for a way to kill me because you have no room for my word.” Interesting enough, same word logos, word.

In other words, “You have no room for my claim about who I am.” “I'm telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you're doing what you have heard from your father.” That was dangerous talk. He just called into question their father. “Abraham is our father,” they answered. “If you were Abrahams children, said Jesus, then you would do what Abraham did. As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You're doing the works of your own father.”

You hear a disquieting hint there, right? You can imagine the crowd getting a little restless at this point. “Wait a minute, who are you saying we're kids of then? We're not illegitimate children, they protested. The only Father we have is God himself. And Jesus said to them, if God were your Father you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? It's because you are unable to hear what I say.

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies he speaks his native language for he is a liar and the father of lies, and yet because I tell you the truth you do not believe me. Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I'm telling the truth, why don't you believe me? Whoever belongs to God,
hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.”

You understand, again, he’s coming back to this fundamental underlying truth that is the cause for all the confusion, the cause for all the opposition. What he’s saying is your perspective it determines your perception. You’re looking from below and it means you’re unable to see what God is doing. And of course, in the process of making that point, he says something pretty inflammatory, right? And maybe some of you felt what I feel every time I read it, which is just a little bit of discomfort when Jesus basically says, “Yeah, you belong to the devil.”

And what you need to understand is that that’s not an accusation, that’s not an attack. Jesus is not hurling insults at them. I guarantee you, Jesus says this with tremendous sorrow. But what he’s saying is that those who see from below they are held captive by the devil. This is an expression not of anger or frustration. This is an expression of pity. He’s recognizing that they are blinded to the truth. Because the unfortunate reality is this, and I think we miss this sometimes, but there’s only two sides to the spiritual realm, there’s only two sides to ultimate real life. There’s God’s side and there’s the devil’s side.

And I don’t mean by that to suggest that the devil is like a bad god or that he’s equal in any way, but there’s only two options. There’s go with God, side with God, obey God, trust in God or do it on your own and the devil is the first one to walk that path. And so he’s defined that other side of spirituality, but there’s no neutral ground is what he’s saying. There’s no spiritual Switzerland, okay? Switzerland, they are famous for not choosing sides.

What Jesus is saying is that that’s not an option, it doesn’t work that way. I’m not saying that you’re intentionally choosing the devil’s side. You’re probably doing inadvertently, but you’re doing it nonetheless. Those who think can see from below, they’re held captive by the devil. And so this is an expression of tremendous pity.

I remember years ago, I was traveling back from England. I’d been over there doing some studying and I ended up in a seat next to a geneticist. She was studying recombinant gene therapy. This was a very smart person. Like you don’t get a Ph.D. in Genetics by collecting the tops off of cereal boxes, right? She’s a really, really bright woman, and as we began to have a conversation, I began to feel what I would classify as just frustration because she kept saying things that I thought were interesting.

She was very anti-Christian, very anti-God. She had actually broken into the conversation. I’ve been having a conversation with a Muslim guy, and I was loving the conversation. Like we were just having a blast. We’d gotten to the point where we were really comfortable with each other, and he would say stuff and I’d be like, “Dude, that’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard.” And then he’d be like, “No, no, that’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard.” And we were just having a blast and she broke in. She’s like, “You’re both full up beep.” That’s how the conversation started.

And so, we were having this conversation with her and at one point in the conversation, I said, “Okay, so you’re saying there’s no God. There’s no God. And you’re saying that there’s no right and wrong?” She goes, “Actually, that’s not true. There is one thing that is wrong.” “Okay, what’s that one thing?” She said, “The only thing that is wrong is if you try to impose your beliefs on somebody else.” “Okay, wait a minute, where are you going?” She said, “Well, I’m going to Canada because I’ve got some appointment and some people. We’re trying to change some of their laws in Canada because they’re very, very restrictive on research, on genetic therapy research.”

And I said, “So you think that their laws are wrong? “Yeah” “So you’re gonna go and try to change their laws?” “Yeah.” “So you’re gonna go and try to impose your belief about right and wrong on their beliefs, right?” “Yeah.” Many of you were ahead of us in the conversation.

And I was like, “How can you not see this? The inconsistency, the hypocrisy of it.” And finally, in frustration, I leaned over because I could see the guy next to us he was on the other side of her, had been kind of listening in. And I said, “Hey, I don’t know anything about what you believe, but who makes more sense here?” He goes, “She’s full of beep,” completely true conversation.

And I remember at the time feeling vindicated. I was like, “Yes,” but then the Holy Spirit began to work on me and I began to realize, “You know what, I don’t have any right to feel vindicated because I shouldn’t be victorious. What I should be is compassionate.” So there was a moment when it was really tempting to begin to look at this person, her inability to see the inconsistency and go, “I feel contempt for your intellect and your stubbornness,” and it was really tempting to feel that contempt. But what I began to realize was I shouldn’t be feeling contempt. What if it should be feeling is compassion because this is a woman who is enslaved. She’s enslaved by spirituality that is keeping her from seeing the truth.

And as I began at that moment to push into the conversation, what I realized was she grew up in a religious home and it was kind of an abusive home and that had an impact. And then she chose a particular lifestyle and her church cast condemnation and guilt upon her, and so she got to this place where she just wanted nothing to do with religion. And from there, she wanted nothing to do with religious people, and from there she wanted nothing to do with God. And from there she got to the place she was like, “Well, maybe there is no God because that would be a whole lot easier way to deal with this.” But there was a hurt, there was a pain, and there was an enslavement there that led her to the place that she was in.
And as I read the words of Jesus here when he says, “You’re doing the works of your father, the devil,” it’s not an attack, it’s not an accusation. This is a statement of tremendous compassion and pity. And as Christians, we have to pay attention to this temptation that we have to look at those who don’t believe what we believe about Jesus and feel contempt rather than compassion. Because we need to understand that our perspective determines our perception, determines our ability to see truth.

All right, so what do you do with this? Well, it depends entirely on where you are and the question of who Jesus is. And if you’re here today and you’re thinking, “I don’t know what I believe about Jesus, or I don’t believe what this guy up here’s talking believes about Jesus,” then here’s what I encourage you to do. Ask yourself this question, what step could I take to change my perspective?

I mean, you can’t just believe something that you don’t believe. You can’t just suddenly go, “I do believe in Jesus because that guy told me I should.” Maybe what you need to do is change your perspective. What’s one step you could take to potentially change your perspective? If you feel some tug to look into this, that maybe you join our Starting Point class where people are talking through this stuff. Or you start reading the Bible or going to the church on a regular basis. Or come to the church, call the church and set up an appointment. I’d love to talk to you. But what’s one step you can take to begin maybe changing your perspective?

Second question is just, do I have enough belief to start trusting Jesus? And maybe you’re here today and you’re like, “You know, I’m close. I’m almost ready to put my faith in Jesus. It’s just that I’ve got one more question, I’ve got one more thing.” Listen, there’s always gonna be one more question, there’s always gonna be one more thing. My question is, do you have enough belief to put your foot on that bottom rung? To go, “I’m gonna trust him as much as I’m able to right now. I’ll have an opportunity to do that in just a moment.”

If you’re here tonight and you believe in Jesus, you believe in his word, who he says he is, then my question to you is this, first off, am I trusting Jesus in a way that’s deepening my knowledge of him? Remember when Jesus says “you’ll know the truth,” he’s not just talking about intellectual stuff. He’s talking about knowing with a confidence. In other words, are you trusting Jesus in a way that’s leading you to deepen your confidence in him?

Because listen, if you just show up at church and you hear the stories, and you hear the words, and you listen to the questions, and you go back out and you don’t do anything with it, then you are not deepening your knowledge of Jesus. Which means you’re not gonna be ready when the storm comes. What do you need to do to trust him?

Second question is just this, because this is just deeply important to me and I hope it becomes important to you, and that question is this. Do I look at nonbelievers with contempt or compassion? Do you look at those who don’t believe the Gospel, who don’t believe the truth about Jesus, and you just get angry, and frustrated, and contemptuous, or do you feel compassion because they are blinded?

And one last question. How can I seek to change a non-believer’s perspective rather than his or her mind? We spent so much time going, “Well, if I just said this, if I had this argument, if I just made him read this book.” Maybe what they need to do is see a better picture of Jesus through you, and maybe in that, they would change their perspective on who Jesus is.

Would you pray with me? Jesus, we all wanna know the truth about you, whether we believe that you are you say you are or we don’t believe that right now in this place. We want to know the truth because we understand the truth is important here. And we recognize that there are many things that we all need to be freed from, and so we wanna know you in a way that sets us free to experience the whole life that you’ve given and you’ve designed us for.

And would you give us a perspective that allows us to see from above, that allows us to see truth in stark clarity, that allows us to perceive what is in fact, true, and then to live accordingly, in Jesus’ name. Amen.