**Welcome to Mission Hills. So glad you are here. As you have probably figured out already, Easter is coming. Anybody shocked?**

Okay. We are really excited about Easter here at Mission Hills because it gives us a chance to do two things that are very important to us as a church. The first is we get to look up, and the second, we get to reach out. We are going to look up in worship because the reality is without this resurrection the whole Christianity thing means nothing, right? And I know we are not that kind of church, but can I get an amen on that one? Amen.

Without the resurrection, Jesus is just a good teacher. He had some interesting things to say, but he's not Lord. He's not savior. He's not the Son of God. With the resurrection, however, we have certainty to our faith, so we are going to celebrate that on Easter. The other thing we are going to do is we are going to reach out because the purpose of the church is to hold up the light of the gospel to the world, so I want to encourage you on your way out today if you haven't grabbed one, grab one of these invitation cards and use it to invite somebody. I'm going to give you three reasons why you should be inviting somebody to come to Easter at Mission Hills. We'll do a little countdown, okay? Number three, invite somebody to come because people are more likely to say yes on Easter than any other weekend. Tom Ranier, the guy that does studies on these kinds of things did a study a few years ago and found out that 96% of people who don't normally go to church would say yes to attending a church if somebody actually invited them, and that, that actually goes up a little bit on Easter, which means, chances are you are not going to get rejected, so if that's what's holding you back, understand that most people that don't go to church actually would say yes, and especially so on Easter, so you have a great chance of success on that.

Number two reason is because you should invite someone because -- we are going to explain the gospel in a clear and engaging way. Our theme this year is baggage check. Picking up on the idea that because of our sin and the things that we do and the things that are done to us, we all have baggage. You have heard that phrase before, right? Everybody has baggage. What if there was a baggage check for that stuff? What if there was somebody you could give your baggage to and understand that it could be truly taken care of and you could be set free of it. That's what our theme is for Easter. Why don't we look at the Easter trailer for this year?

No one gets through life without picking up some baggage along the way. From heartaches to hurts to guilt for what we have done or failed to do. It gets pretty heavy. In fact, the baggage we accumulate can be down right unbearable. This Easter, we'll explore the only way to check that baggage, to hand it off to someone who can take care of it in a way we cannot. This is the hope God offers us. The resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us the chance to start living life free from the burden of all of our baggage.

The cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ means that we can be free of the baggage that sin accumulates in our lives, and we can live and experience the life God made us for. That's going to be super clear and relevant, so it's a great opportunity for them to hear that message in a way that will really connect. And the number one reason you should use one of these invitations to invite someone to Easter this year at Mission Hills is because you care about them. That's the number one reason, because you care about these people. We are not looking to bump our numbers up. We are seeing in Easter an opportunity to reach out to the world with the hope that we have in the gospel of Jesus Christ. I really encourage you to grab these on the way out. Please don't just stick them in people's doors late at night, like you sneak up on their porch, okay? That's not what we are looking for. We are looking for you to give this to somebody and say, hey, I would love to go to church with you this Easter, and then make plans to come with them, and maybe afterwards go to brunch or something like that and ask them how it is that God might be speaking into their hearts.

Why don't we pray for our Easter services right now. God, we thank you for the resurrection of Jesus Christ because it's the heart of our faith and we are grateful for it. Lord, would you allow this Easter at Mission Hills to be a tremendous opportunity to both look up and to worship you for all that you have done, and also to reach out to those that do not yet have the hope we have in the resurrection of Jesus? In Jesus name, amen.
Today we are going to look at one of the more spectacular events in Jesus’ life, a tremendous miracle that a lot of people, even if they don’t go to church know a little bit about, but the miracle itself that we are going to look at is only a small part of the story. What’s interesting as we begin to unpack that, as you are going to see, the miracle is really just, it’s kind of like, it wraps everything up at the end. It’s all of the stuff that happens around it that we really need to be paying attention to because I think all of the stuff that surrounds this miracle provides what I think is the most Biblical answer to the hardest question we face as believer, the hardest question that comes to me, and it goes like this. Why do bad things happen to -- to good people. Anyone ever ask you that question? Anybody ask that question themselves, maybe not out loud but you wonder it in your heart? Why does God allow bad things happen to good people?

The story we are going to see today, I believe, gives us the clearest Biblical answer to that question. But John, like any good storyteller, doesn’t just tell us the answer. He makes us work for it a little bit. We have to pay attention to the story he tells. This is what he says: A man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This is Mary whose brother Lazarus now lays sick is the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. And so the sister sent word to Jesus. Lord, the one that you love is sick. Now when he heard this, Jesus said, the sickness will not end in death, no. It is for God’s glory so God’s son might be glorified through this. Now, Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, so, when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. Which is a weird thing to say, right? Do you feel it? When you came in today, you should have gotten a little extra card. If you didn’t get one, stick your hand up and the usher will bring one. We have a few extras. I want you to have one of these in your hand today. At the top it has that verse, Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus so when he heard that Lazarus was sick he stayed where he was for two more days. That’s a weird thing to say. What we expect to hear is but, right?

He loved them, but he stayed. Then we have to go, there must have been extenuating circumstances. There must have been a reason he didn’t hurry to heal Lazarus, but that’s not what John said. He loved them so he stayed where he was two for two more days. He didn’t hurry to heal Lazarus. He didn’t get up and go, I need to head off this bad thing in your life because he loved them. That’s another way you can translate the Greek word there. You can say because of this or for this reason. He loved them and for this reason, because of his love for them, he stayed where he was for two more days, and as we are going to see, that meant a really bad thing happened. Why on Earth -- why on Earth would John say it that way? Because ultimately, what John is doing is setting up the answer to the question, why does God allow bad things happen to good people?

And what he’s saying in effect, it begins to hint at the answer. What he says in effect is that Jesus loved them too much to allow them to bypass this difficult circumstance. I don’t like that. Anybody else here like super thrilled with that? I don’t like it. You may feel the same way. I don’t like it, but I can’t deny that’s what the word of God says. Jesus loved them too much to allow them to by pass this difficult circumstance. Why? He’s going to answer that question. Before we get to that answer, I want to encourage you to do something. On this card that you got, on the bottom is a blank space. Before we begin to look at the answer John gives us, what I would like you to do, to, I would like you to think about a hard thing that’s come into your life, a bad thing, a difficult circumstance. I would like you to write it down. It says my difficult circumstance is, and I would like you to jot that down. Maybe it’s something done and gone in the past, but you remember it well. Maybe it’s something you are in right now, but I want you to zero in on this bad thing, because as we begin to unpack what John has to say about why Jesus would allow this bad thing into their lives as a result of his love for them, I want us to begin realizing that this is not just an academic intellectual exercise in Biblical interpretation, it’s deeply important that as the people of God, we understand the answer to this question, and we want to be able to apply it to ourselves in simple and practical ways.

I want you to jot down that thing, and as we go through the story -- I’m going to do it differently than I normally do. Rather than going and stopping regularly and explaining things, I’m basically going to read the story. As I do that, I want you to look. I want you to listen for good things that happen because of this bad thing that he allowed. That’s what I want you to be looking for. So Jesus waited for two days. It was apparently a fairly long journey which means it’s even days after that when he finally gets there. Then he says to his disciples, let us go back to Judea. But Rabbi, they said, a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and you are going back? Jesus answered, are there not 12 hours of daylight? Anyone that walks in the daytime will not stumble for they see by the world’s light. It’s when a person walks at night that they stumble for they have no light.

Really, all he’s saying here is guys, I’m still in charge. I still got this. You are worried that if I go back they are going to arrest me. I’m still in control. You can walk with me because my time is not up yet. There is still time in my day. I’m not ready for the cross yet. Whenever you walk with me, you walk with light because I’m the light of the world, so guys, don’t worry about it. Just trust. After he said this he went on to tell them, our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I’m going there to wake him up. The disciples are like, lord, if he sleeps, he will get better because napping is good for sick people. Jesus had been speaking about his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep, so he had to tell them plainly, and I guarantee there was at least one head smack. Lazarus is dead. Lazarus is dead and for your sake, I’m glad that I was not there so that you may believe, so let’s go to him. And then Thomas known as Didymus said to the rest of the disciples, let us also go so that we may die with him.

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews, and when he uses the word Jews here, he refers to the religious Elite that he had been in conflict with that had been trying to stone him. They have
come out from Jerusalem. They have traveled the two miles to visit Mary and Martha in their grief. That tells us something significant and Mary, Martha and Lazarus, it tells us they are from a prominent family because the religious leaders have come out to pay their respects. So many Jews had come to Mary and Martha to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed home.

Lord, Martha said to Jesus, if you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask, and Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again, and Martha answered, I know. I know he will rise again at the resurrection of the last day, and Jesus said to her I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though they die, and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Martha, do you believe this? Yes, Lord, she replied. I believe you are the messiah, the Son of God who has come into the world. After she said this she went back, and she called her sister Mary aside. The teacher is here, she said, and he's asking for you. Now when Mary heard this, she got up quickly, and she went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village but was still at the place that Martha had met him.

When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house comforting her noticed how quickly she had got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. Now when Mary reached the place where Jesus was, she fell at his feet and said, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. Where have you laid him he asked? Welcome and see, Lord, they replied. And Jesus wept. The Jews said, see how he loved him? But some of them said could not the man who opened the eyes of the blind man kept this man from dying? Jesus once more deeply moved came to the tomb.

It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. Take away the stone, he said. But Lord, said Martha, the sister of the dead man, by this time there is a bad odor for he has been there for four days. Jesus said, did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God? So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up, and he said, father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always heard me but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here that they may believe that you sent me. When he had said this, Jesus called out in a loud voice, Lazarus, come out, and the dead man came out. His hands and his feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them take off the grave cloth and let him go.

Do you see what I mean? The miracle itself, spectacular as it is, it’s almost glossed over, isn’t it? I mean there’s not much detail given. Jesus shows up, stone is rolled away, dead man come out, and he did. You know, like and he did? That’s all you are going to say about it? Which tells us something I think is important is that there is a lot more going on in the story than just that miracle. The miracle becomes a platform for something more significant. If we really begin to push beneath the surface, one of the things that I think becomes evident is that this is a confusing story, because on the one hand we have undeniable, unmistakable incredibly clear presence of the power of God, right? I mean Jesus can tell dead men to come out of the grave, so we know he’s all powerful, and we know he loves people, right?

He’s weeping over them. He’s moved in his spirit. We know that he’s all powerful. We know that he cares about these people and yet, he let this happen. He could have stopped it. He chose not to. When he first got the message that Lazarus was sick, he could have gotten up. He could have hurried, and he could have headed off this difficult thing in their lives, but he chose not to because as John tells us, he loved them so much. I don’t know about you, but that’s a little hard to fit together, isn’t it? He’s all powerful. He cares. He allowed a bad thing to happen. Why does got allow bad things to happen to good people?

I asked you as I was reading it to keep your eyes open, to look for good things that happened as a result of the bad thing God allowed to happen. Did you catch any of them? There are a lot of them. Let me point out seven of them. There are probably more than that. There are seven that jump off the page. Seven good things that happen and that couldn’t have happened without this bad thing. The first one is just that we wouldn’t have an unmistakable display of God’s glory. I mean, that’s what Jesus said. Verse 4, when he heard this, he said this sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s son may be glorified through it.

We wouldn’t have an unmistakable display of God’s glory without this bad thing that happened because here’s the thing, there is a profound difference between healing a sick person and a dead person, isn’t there? I mean that’s not just like a scale. That’s two totally different things. Like sick people, the problem is, when Jesus heals a sick person you always have the option of going, yeah, but he was probably turning the corner anyway. It’s probably a coincidence. Jesus said that and then -- because sick people get better, right? It happens. Yeah. Not the dead people. Dead people don’t get better unless you have a Princess Bride situation happening here, he’s just mostly dead. No, no, no. He’s dead four days in the grave. There’s no question about it, this guy’s dead, dead, dead, dead and yet Jesus says come out, and he does. This is an unmistakable, undeniable display of God’s glory. Nobody can write it off. Nobody can push it aside.

See, difficult circumstances allow God to demonstrate his glory in unique and unmistakable ways. How many of you have had a difficult thing in your life where God did something and because of the difficult thing and because of what God did, there was no way to miss that God had showed up. How many have had that experience? There are a bunch of hands that go up because that’s often the case. Difficult circumstances allow God to demonstrate his glory in unique and unmistakable ways, and that is good.

Second thing, Thomas wouldn’t have gotten to demonstrate his faith in a tangible way. Thomas, I always feel bad for Thomas. I mentioned this before. He has an unfortunate nickname, right? What’s his nickname? Doubting Thomas, because he’s human, honestly. See, he wasn’t with
the rest of the disciples when Jesus first rose from the dead. He didn't get to meet Jesus after his resurrection. The rest of them came to Thomas and said, you are not going to believe it, he's back. He's like, you are right. I don't believe it. Because that doesn't happen. What are you talking about? What are you guys smoking? You're crazy. Because of that, he's called doubting Thomas. But did catch a different glimpse of Thomas here?

The disciples are very concerned. Jesus, Bethany is really close to Jerusalem. This is a prominent family, and all of those religious leaders who were just trying to kill you, they are going to be there, and you want to go back? Jesus says, yeah, we are going back. Trust me, verse 16, and then Thomas said to the rest of the disciples, let us also go that we may die with him. Wow. I would rather go and die with Jesus than live in safety apart from him. Does this sound like a man who is full of doubt? This is an incredibly powerful display of his faith. It’s faith expressed in a tangible way. It’s one thing to say I believe in Jesus when everything is going good. It’s another thing to say I believe in Jesus, and I’m going to prove it by living this way when things are going hard.

You see, difficult circumstances allow God’s people to demonstrate their faith in tangible ways. How many of you have had a bad experience in your life that has allowed you to concretely express your faith? How many of you have had that experience? There are a bunch of hands going up. There’s power to that, isn’t there? There is tremendous power to that. Difficult circumstances allow God’s people to demonstrate their faith in tangible ways, to make it real, and that is good. Third thing is that Martha wouldn’t have gotten to verbalize her faith in Jesus. Martha is another one of those characters that I feel bad about. Everyone has a one-sided view of her. Everyone remembers the story from Luke 10. Martha had a home and Jesus was in her home. She had obligations to cook a meal for them.

Mary was there. Mary was sitting at Jesus feet. Martha got frustrated that Mary wasn’t helping her. Martha was like, Jesus, rebuke her. Jesus was like, not going to happen. Everybody’s like, yeah, Martha. She’s too busy to be with Jesus. Mary, you know, she understands intimacy, she’s doing the thing Martha should have been doing. I’m going to tell you right now, that’s a fundamental misunderstanding of that story. That’s for a different day, but did you catch – did you catch Martha’s faith here? Jesus hears that Jesus is coming, and very gets up and she runs to meet him and what does she say? Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died, but I know -- not I think. Not I suspect. Not I wonder if maybe – I know, that even now God will give you whatever you ask. This is a woman of treads faith. In this difficult circumstance she’s in has given her the opportunity to verbalize it.

You see difficult circumstances allow God’s people to verbalize their faith. How many of you have been in a bad situation and it has allowed you to say to yourself and others, I trust God in the midst of this. No matter how this turns out, I trust God. How many of you have had that experience in a difficult place? Yeah. Because difficult circumstances allow God’s people to verbalize their faith, and that is good. It does something not only for us, but it does something for others watching. A fourth thing that this bad thing has allowed to happen is that without it, Jesus wouldn’t have had the platform to say, I am the resurrection and the life. It’s this bad thing that gave him the opportunity to do that. I guess he could have said that at another time, but it wouldn’t have been as meaningful apart from these circumstances, right? Apart from Lazarus actually being in the tomb, you would not have seen the power of this and yet, Martha says, Lord, I know God will give you anything you ask for even now.

Jesus says, do you understand that your brother will rise again? He’s testing her knowledge. She says, I know. I’m clinging to that. I know that he will rise again in the resurrection of the last day. I’m holding on to that hope that I will see him again. Jesus says, no, Martha. That’s not quite what I was asking. Your brother will rise again because I am the resurrection. I am the resurrection you are waiting for. I’m the life you are hoping for. I’m right here. I’m right in front of you. I’m right now. Anyone who believes in me will live even if they die. Whoever lives by believing in me will never die. I am the resurrection of life. Oh my goodness, the power of that proclamation at that moment. You see, difficult circumstances allow God to reveal more of himself to his people. It’s in the moment when life is shattered, and it’s through the cracks of our shattered lives and our hopes and everything that we begin to see the reality of God’s glory streaming through. We see the reality of who he is in a way we never would have seen otherwise. Can I get an amen? Do you mean it? Some of you do.

How many of you have had an experience of something really bad happening and in the midst of that difficult thing, you saw God more clearly, you understood God more profoundly than you ever have in your life? How many of you have had that experience? Yeah. Because difficult circumstances allow God to reveal more of himself to his people and that is good. Fifth thing is that Martha wouldn’t have gotten to take her place -- God honors Martha. Again, we had this negative view of Martha, and I think it’s unfair because the reality is that Martha is honored here in a way that we can easily overlook. Jesus pronounces he’s the resurrection and the life and then he says, Martha, do you believe this? He sets her up. She responds, verse 27, yes, Lord. I believe that you are the messiah, the Son of God who is to come into the world.

One of the things that’s true about literature from the ancient literacy, books written in this time period is that they very often followed the same format, and that is that in the middle of the book you had some kind of climactic event, some sort of pivotal thing that happened that really catapulted the book into the next half, and you always found it right in the center, some huge event, and interestingly enough, Matthew, Mark and Luke all have the exact same event dead center, this pivot moment. You know what it is? It was a man named Peter. You might know that name. He’s one of the apostles. In dead center of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, there is a story where Jesus asks the question, well what about you guys? What do you think about who I am, and Peter says, I got it. You are the Christ, and Jesus says, you’re right. It’s a pivotal moment.

And for people who are used to this kind of literature, they look for that moment. Matthew, Mark and Luke give them exactly what they want.
It's Peter's recognition of who Jesus is. It's awesome. Peter gets that place of honor there. Interestingly enough, John doesn't report that story. However, if you find the beginning of John and the end of John and the middle, guess where you will find yourself? You will find yourself here in chapter 11. Here in dead center of the Gospel at that pivot point that they would have expected, instead of Peter's proclamation, we have Martha. I know who you are. You are the Christ, and not just the Christ. She goes on and she says, you are the Son of God. Up to this point in the Gospel of John, nobody has articulated that clearly who Jesus is. She gets a place of honor, which is made possible only by this difficult circumstance.

She is lifted up, and she is honored. Difficult circumstances allow God to honor those who trust in him. Some of you have experienced that. How many of you have been in a bad situation, you have clung to Jesus, and in the midst of that, God honored you. God blessed you in a way you never would have expected. How many of you have experienced God honoring you in the midst of a difficult situation and you clung to him? Lots of hands because difficult circumstances allow God to honor those who trust in him, and that is good. Another thing we see is that apart from this bad circumstance, apart from Lazarus' sickness and death, we wouldn't have seen God's willingness to endure our bitterness. This is a bad situation. It's very natural for people in a bad situation like this to feel bitter, to struggle with, honestly, anger with God. God, why didn't you? Why haven't you? Why won't you? Those are natural questions.

As believers, the struggle that comes in, we naturally feel that bitterness toward God. At the same time, we feel guilty because we are like I know I shouldn't, but I can't help it, and then there is a fear that creeps in. What if God stops blessing me. What if God withdraws from me because of this bitterness I can't seem to control? What if God says, are you going to question me? You are going to be bitter toward me? Fine. Good luck on your own. In our heads we realize that's probably not true, but we struggle with the fear that maybe it is, and yet we can't quite let go of the bitterness, and what we see in the story is the proof that God is more than willing to endure our bitterness and push through it.

There is someone in the story that's struggling with bitterness. Did you see it? It's Mary. I know Mary's the good girl, right? If you are familiar with these stories, like Martha actually showed up in a book a few years ago called the bad girls of the Bible. I'm like, that's so not fair. We write books. One of my favorites is “having a Mary heart in a Martha world.” Martha's bad. Mary's good, but you know what? Mary's real, and Mary's struggling with bitterness here. You see it in a couple of ways. The first one is this very obvious and disquieting note that Jesus is on his way and Martha hears, and Martha jumps up and she runs to Jesus, and what does John tell us about Mary? Mary stayed home. That's weird. That's your first sign that there is some bitterness that she's struggling with. The second sign is she doesn't come to Jesus until Jesus explicitly tells Martha, go get her. Martha has to go and pull her aside and say, Jesus is asking for you. Okay. She gets up and she goes, and she falls at her feet.

Remember Martha said, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that even now God will give you anything you ask for. Then Mary gets there, and she falls at Jesus' feet, and she says, Lord, if you had not have been here, by brother would not have died. Period. End sentence. She's struggling with some bitterness, and I don’t blame her. Do you? It's entirely natural. It's entirely understandable. The one that she loved so much, that she thought was so good allowed this really bad thing to happen, and he could have prevented it. She's struggling with it. It's entirely understandable. But notice how Jesus responds to the bitterness. Did he say, what's your deal? Really? You're going to question me? You are going to get mad at me? Fine. You are on your own. That's not what he does. He pushes right past it. I think that's a really important lesson to learn because when we are struggling with bitterness, we also at the same time as it follows here, we also struggle with fear that somehow the bitterness is going to cause God to abandon us, and what we see here is it's not.

So difficult circumstances allow us to experience God's willingness to endure our bitterness. God's willingness to push past in spite of how much we might try to push him away. That's a hard one to be transparent about, but can we be honest? How many of us have experienced a bad situation and we struggle with bitterness toward God? How many of us? Yeah. And how many of you have experienced that bitterness and yet experienced that God kept pursuing you in spite of your bitterness? How many of you have had that experience? Yeah. Difficult circumstances allow us to experience God's willingness to endure our bitterness, and that is -- that is good. One last piece. Without this bad thing, we wouldn't have had the chance to see the depths of Jesus emotional involvement and his investment in his people.

If you were here a few weeks ago you remember me saying we can trust Jesus to care for us because he's emotionally invested in us, because it's not a job for him. He's not the hired hand. He's the shepherd of the sheep. They are his, and he loves them deeply, and this bad experience allows us to see that. Verse 33, when Jesus saw her weeping, and she saw the Jews that came along with her also, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. And the interesting thing is, I get why they have translated it that way, because in the context, it makes the most sense, but the verb that's being used there actually doesn't say deeply troubled in spirit. The verb John uses there normally means angry. It means “ticked off.” What John seems to literally say is that when he saw them weeping, he was infuriated.

As believers, the struggle that comes in, we naturally feel that bitterness toward God. At the same time, we feel guilty because we are like I know I shouldn't, but I can't help it, and then there is a fear that creeps in. What if God stops blessing me. What if God withdraws from me because of this bitterness I can't seem to control? What if God says, are you going to question me? You are going to be bitter toward me? Fine. Good luck on your own. In our heads we realize that's probably not true, but we struggle with the fear that maybe it is, and yet we can't quite let go of the bitterness, and what we see in the story is the proof that God is more than willing to endure our bitterness and push through it.

There is someone in the story that's struggling with bitterness. Did you see it? It's Mary. I know Mary's the good girl, right? If you are familiar with these stories, like Martha actually showed up in a book a few years ago called the bad girls of the Bible. I'm like, that's so not fair. We write books. One of my favorites is “having a Mary heart in a Martha world.” Martha's bad. Mary's good, but you know what? Mary's real, and Mary's struggling with bitterness here. You see it in a couple of ways. The first one is this very obvious and disquieting note that Jesus is on his way and Martha hears, and Martha jumps up and she runs to Jesus, and what does John tell us about Mary? Mary stayed home. That's weird. That's your first sign that there is some bitterness that she's struggling with. The second sign is she doesn't come to Jesus until Jesus explicitly tells Martha, go get her. Martha has to go and pull her aside and say, Jesus is asking for you. Okay. She gets up and she goes, and she falls at her feet.

Remember Martha said, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that even now God will give you anything you ask for. Then Mary gets there, and she falls at Jesus' feet, and she says, Lord, if you had not have been here, by brother would not have died. Period. End sentence. She's struggling with some bitterness, and I don’t blame her. Do you? It's entirely natural. It's entirely understandable. The one that she loved so much, that she thought was so good allowed this really bad thing to happen, and he could have prevented it. She's struggling with it. It's entirely understandable. But notice how Jesus responds to the bitterness. Did he say, what's your deal? Really? You're going to question me? You are going to get mad at me? Fine. You are on your own. That's not what he does. He pushes right past it. I think that's a really important lesson to learn because when we are struggling with bitterness, we also at the same time as it follows here, we also struggle with fear that somehow the bitterness is going to cause God to abandon us, and what we see here is it's not.

So difficult circumstances allow us to experience God's willingness to endure our bitterness. God's willingness to push past in spite of how much we might try to push him away. That's a hard one to be transparent about, but can we be honest? How many of us have experienced a bad situation and we struggle with bitterness toward God? How many of us? Yeah. And how many of you have experienced that bitterness and yet experienced that God kept pursuing you in spite of your bitterness? How many of you have had that experience? Yeah. Difficult circumstances allow us to experience God's willingness to endure our bitterness, and that is -- that is good. One last piece. Without this bad thing, we wouldn't have had the chance to see the depths of Jesus emotional involvement and his investment in his people.

If you were here a few weeks ago you remember me saying we can trust Jesus to care for us because he's emotionally invested in us, because it's not a job for him. He's not the hired hand. He's the shepherd of the sheep. They are his, and he loves them deeply, and this bad experience allows us to see that. Verse 33, when Jesus saw her weeping, and she saw the Jews that came along with her also, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. And the interesting thing is, I get why they have translated it that way, because in the context, it makes the most sense, but the verb that's being used there actually doesn't say deeply troubled in spirit. The verb John uses there normally means angry. It means “ticked off.” What John seems to literally say is that when he saw them weeping, he was infuriated.

We are like, that doesn't make sense. Surely he's not mad at the fact that they are grieving? No, he's not mad about the fact that they are grieving, so what is he upset about? He's upset about this whole mess. He's upset that the children that he created to be in a relationship with him, to love him and to be loved by him, to live in eternity plugged into him and experiencing life as he intended it to, they are suffering. They are dying. They are experiencing the horrible consequences of being unplugged from God, or being separated from God by sin. He hates the fact that his children experience this. He is not just moved, he's angry. He's moved by his anger to action, and ultimately, not just the action we see when he calls the dead man out of the tomb, but the action that leads him to the cross so he can call all of us out of the tomb.

He said where have you laid him? They said come and see, Lord, and then -- shortest verse in the Bible in case you are ever in a trivia contest -- say it with me -- Jesus wept. Wept doesn't mean a tear rolled down his cheek, like in a solitary track. He sobbed. He was weeping. He was so
upset. He was so moved that he wept. See, difficult circumstances allow us to experience the depth of God's love for us. In fact, honestly, for so many people, it's only in the midst of a difficult circumstance, it's only when life feels like it's falling apart that we suddenly realize that when the bottom drops out, the love of God is right there to catch us, and we experience it in a way that we have never experienced. How many of you have experienced the love of God more profoundly in brokenness than when things are going well. That's worth an amen.

It's a good thing. I have highlighted seven. There may be more, but the point that John seems to be bringing us to is that this bad thing happens, but that bad thing is actually the proof of God's love for us. It's that God loves us too much to bypass the good that comes from these difficult circumstances. I realize that, that sounds paradoxical, but it seems to be what the word of God is driving us to. He's saying that God allows bad things to happen to us so that we can believe he is truly good. God allows bad things to happen to us so that we can believe that he is truly good. That's what he said, right? Verse 13, Lazarus is dead, and for your sake, I'm glad I was not here so that you may believe. He allowed a bad thing to happen so that they could believe. Toward the end, as he prays, before he calls Lazarus from the grave, Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the Benefit of the people standing here that they may believe that you sent me.

Why does God allow bad things to happen? So that we can believe. Believe what? As paradoxical as it sounds, to believe that God is truly good. I realize that, that is a truth from God's word that we have to cling to by faith. That's not necessarily the easiest thing to cling to especially when things are bad. It's interesting, on the other side of bad things, most of us can look back and say, I don't know that I would have traded that if it meant that I would have lost out on this good that I received because of it. But of course in the middle of it, we lose sight of all of that, right? I want you to grab this card. At the beginning I asked you to write down something bad, some difficult circumstance that you faced, or you are in the middle of right now. On the other side of the card, we find a description of the seven things we just talked about. I want to ask you to think about this question in response to that bad thing or in light of that thing. This is the question -- which of these seven results, which of these results have I experienced because of the difficult thing that I faced?

Circle it. You might find that it's actually, it's more than one. For me, and some of you have heard this. For me, a couple of years ago I was in a bad place. I was part of a church that had kind of just spiraled into decay, and everything was falling apart. I was the associate pastor. I wanted to solve things, but I wasn't in a position to be able to do that. I was desperate to find some way to try to salvage stuff. It just wasn't working. We had this one big congregational meeting. Some ideas were floated. Honestly, it was an awful congregational meeting. It just all fell apart. It was just nasty. It was a mess. I had to leave and go speak that week. It was a dark week. I'll be honest, I was struggling with bitterness. I was going, God, why have you let us get to this place? Why have you allowed me to experience this? It was a dark week. It was in that week I was by the lake. I was at Maranatha Bible camp, and I was praying through this, and God spoke to me. I don't say that lightly because that's not the way God usually leads me. It's not that bushes catch fire and voices speak. God spoke to me in that moment. He told me, I want you to go and ask the senior pastor a question. I was like, that -- that's not going to go well. That question that I'm going to ask him, I can't see anyway forward that I get to stay with this church that I love so much.

I don't see how that's possible, but I had my Marching orders. I said to God, okay, I'll ask that question. In that moment I experienced something I had never experienced before, and that is, in spite of all of the uncertainty, not having any idea how I was going to move forward from this place, not even beginning to understand, how is that going to impact my ability to pay my mortgage and what I do, I don't know any of that, and yet in that moment, I experienced what I believe Paul called the peace that passeth understanding. It swept over me and I thought, it's okay. God's got this. It wasn't a head thing. It was a heart thing. I was like, huh. I remember sitting there going, so that's what you meant by that? That's the peace -- I like this. This is good. I would never have experienced that apart from that bad thing that God allowed me to go through. So it as paradoxical as it sounds, I understood in that moment, and I continue to cling by faith to that realization, that God allows bad things to happen to us so that we can believe that he is truly good, so for me, when I was working through this, this week, that experience is what I wrote down here, that bad place, but what I circled was number four, that difficult circumstances allow God to reveal more of himself to his people.

I saw truth about God then that I would not have ever seen otherwise. I want you to do the same thing. It's important that we do this because when the bad things happen, and we have to cling by faith to this reality, it's all that much harder if we can't look back and remember, this is where I have seen the goodness of God push through, not just in spite of the bad, but because of it. We have to be able to cling to those. I want to encourage you to circle those, stick this someplace that you can remember it. Then I want to ask you to do one other thing for me, and that is this -- ask the question, how will I celebrate the evidence of God's goodness that this difficult circumstance has provided me? Because in celebration of God's goodness, we find the strength to cling by faith to this answer. As paradoxical as it may sound, God allows bad things to happen so that we may believe that he is good. Would you pray with me?

Jesus, it is a difficult truth. It seems pretty clear. It's hard to get past that simple statement from John inspired by the holy spirit that you loved them and so, you stayed where you were, and you didn't head off this bad thing in their lives. You did it because you loved them. You did it because you are good. It's a clear truth, but it is a difficult truth. Lord, for those experiencing hard things right now, I pray that you would give them a measure of faith that would allow them to cling to that knowledge, and to look with wide eyes for your goodness. For those who have come through those hard things, Lord, would you allow us to cling to the reality of your goodness that we have experienced because of the bad that you allowed, so that when we come to those opportunities we have to encourage others, or to deal with it again, we can cling to the reality. That your goodness is not in question when things are bad, but in fact, your goodness is -- it's on display with a clarity we could not have seen otherwise. It's a hard truth to hold to. Give us the faith to cling to it, and to cling to you and your goodness. In Jesus name, amen.