FaithStanding Firm IN the Faith of Jesus

By Merryl DeMott

I love the conference theme: Well done, good and faithful servant!

These words are among the most beautiful words a follower of Jesus could ever hope to hear. And to be a good and faithful servant, I believe, begins with having a firm foundation in Jesus and the faith of Jesus. I’ve entitled this talk, Standing Firm in the Faith of Jesus.

But first, I’d like to give you a little bit of my religious background, where I came from before coming to this truth of one God and one human Jesus Messiah faith.

I was raised in a Roman Catholic family. We went to church every Sunday, but we never read the Bible. What I learned was what I heard on Sunday morning or in catechism class. When we said the Our Father prayer, I thought about the meaning of “God’s Will” to be done on earth as it is in Heaven. And though I recited the Catholic Creed, I never believed that God was a trinity or “God in three persons”, whatever that meant. I had always believed that God is the Father of Jesus, and Jesus is the Son of God. And the Son is not the Father.

I remember always praying to God as a child alone in my room, and I was always talking to God and wanting to know him and his Son. To know God’s will.

Later, as an adult, I left the Catholic Church and went to college, where I received my first Bible as a gift and read it cover to cover. But I really didn’t have an understanding of everything I was reading.

After college, I got married, and soon afterward, my husband and I started studying with Jehovah’s Witnesses. It was the first time I had heard about God’s Kingdom on earth (they called it paradise). Also, I could see the bible talked about the sleep of the dead and that God has a name. They also did not believe that God is a trinity, and that was very appealing to me.

My husband later stopped studying, as he did not like the Watchtower discouraging parents from sending their children to college or pursuing higher education. But he allowed me to raise our four children in that belief system.

However, I did not understand that Jesus was a real human being made like his brothers in every respect, as Hebrews 2:17 says. Even when scripture calls Jesus God’s only begotten son, I was still thinking of Jesus as pre-existing in heaven, as the witnesses taught as doctrine. Though the Witnesses had some teachings that were in line with Scripture, there were a lot more doctrines that did not line up.

I left the Watchtower after many years of studying with them, getting baptized, and being indoctrinated into believing their literature and their propaganda. Thankfully, none of my children became Jehovah’s Witnesses. After I decided to leave, I couldn’t pick up a Bible to read it or go on the Internet in those early years, but I still prayed to Jehovah God. It took 20 years for me to search

out like-minded believers on the Internet, because of the mental anguish and guilt that was instilled in me by them and myself.

This talk is not about my journey or testimony, yet what I will be discussing is what I have come to believe is truth, and yes, it took me a long time to get here. Perhaps some of you may have come from other Christian denominations, or religions that had you questioning your beliefs, your understanding of God and his truth, his purpose, and your faith, as I did.

I've entitled this talk *"Standing Firm in the Faith of Jesus"*

Standing firm describes a stability that doesn't waver when pressure comes. Standing firm emphasizes holding your ground – refusing to be pushed off the foundation, even when outside pressures are working against it.

A tree stands firm because its roots run deep. A soldier stands firm because he refuses to retreat.

Another way to describe this is to imagine a lighthouse standing tall on a rocky cliff overlooking the ocean. Day after day, year after year, violent storms crash into it. Winds howl. Waves slam into its foundation. Lightning flashes. The sky turns black. Everything around it is shaking – but the lighthouse does not move.

Why? Because its foundation goes deep into the rock beneath. It was built to withstand storms, not avoid them.

> As Christians, we cannot afford to build our faith on anything shaky or temporary. The world is full of conflicting faiths and beliefs, but only one can hold the weight of the real life. We want our faith to be strong, unwavering, and not to be shaken in times of trouble, hardship, or persecution. A faith built on a foundation of truth, God's truth in Scripture. That faith starts with knowing God's appointed agent, Messiah Jesus.

We are going to look at what it means to have faith In Jesus and the Faith Of Jesus.

And that raises some questions: What is the difference? And what does it mean to stand firm in the faith OF Jesus?

Because the faith OF Jesus is not just about what we believe about him…It's believing what he believed. His mindset, His purpose, his teachings, his obedience, and His faith in God.

Faith in Jesus

Now, faith in Jesus is important, and I think it's where most people begin.

Many of us are familiar with the idea of having faith in Jesus. Or believe in Jesus. We hear it all the time. Talk to any professing Christian on the street, and they will tell you that they believe in Jesus or have faith in Jesus.

And yes, the bible does say to believe in Jesus.

John 3:16 – “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

Acts 16:31 – “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

Many people in various Christian denominations can quote bible verses; say they believe in Jesus, say they have faith, go to church every Sunday, are genuinely good people, but still do not know what he believed or taught. It’s possible to say: “I have faith, but that faith never transforms how we think…how we act… or how we obey.

And each of these denominations holds its own views and beliefs, not only about who Jesus is, but about the gospel and who God is.

The apostle Paul warned the Corinthians not to be led astray by false teachings, saying, “I am afraid that just as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds might be corrupted from the sincere and pure commitment to the Messiah. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus, different from the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different Gospel from the one you believed, you are putting up with it beautifully!

(2 Corinthians 11:3-4)

By believing in another Jesus, another gospel, or another spirit, as Paul warns, it is just like the serpent who deceived Eve. It would be believing in a falsehood, a deception, a fake, a lie, AND you would be thinking or believing it as the truth.

So, how can we know what is true?

Well, the Apostle John tells us how we can be sure. 1 John 1:1-4 says, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirit to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the spirit of God: every spirit which confesses Jesus Messiah as having come as a fully human being is from God, while every spirit which does not confess that Jesus, the one so identified, is not from God. It is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming, and now that spirit is in the world already.”

So how can we follow someone if we don’t know anything about them? Who they are, what they believed, or what they taught? And the bigger question: Why follow them?

We should and must know who we are following.

Both Paul and John warn that many false beliefs, messages, ideas, and prophets are in the world, and that we must know how to discern falsehood from truth. It starts with knowing and believing Jesus’s identity. We will explore this question of “Who is Jesus?” – And then what Jesus believed and preached, and why we must listen to him, obeying everything he commanded.

Isn’t that why we call ourselves Christians?

It is vital that we know the real Jesus.

1. Who is Jesus?

Jesus wanted to know what his disciples believed about him and what the people were saying about who he was.

Matthew 16:13 – 20 – Jesus asked them, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

Then Jesus asks, "But what about you?" Who do you say I am? Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And how does Jesus respond to Peter? He said, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by My Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it…" Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah."

Did you catch what Jesus said to Peter? On THIS rock I will build my church. The rock is Peter's confession of faith – "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus affirms Peter's confession that Jesus, the Son of Man, is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, and that God revealed this to him.

This rock foundation of knowing and believing that Jesus, the Son of Man, is the anointed One, the Messiah, is the Son of God! This is essential, since Jesus is building his church with it. Those who believe like this will be part of his church. The church will be built on that truth, and not even death itself will prevail against it. In other words, that truth will conquer even death itself.

By asking two profound questions, Jesus challenged his apostles to move beyond the opinions of the crowd and come to a personal conviction about his true identity – a REVELATION FROM GOD - leading Peter to confess that Jesus, the Son of Man, is the promised Messiah (Christ), Son of the Living God.

Let's look at these three titles that identify who Jesus is:

- Son of Man
- Christ (Messiah)
- Son of God

Son of Man

Jesus calls himself, "the son of Man." This title 'Son of Man' is predominantly used by Jesus in referring to himself, and appears over 80 times in the 4 gospel accounts. When Jesus uses this title, the disciples know he is talking about himself, the one standing before them.

Jesus says of himself, Mark 2:10 – "The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins."

Mark 10:45 – Jesus said, "The son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Luke 6:5 – Then Jesus declared, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

This title allowed Jesus to gradually reveal his identity rather than using the more politically charged title “Messiah”, and it emphasized his humanity, his lineage and to fulfill prophecy as the appointed King of God’s Kingdom.

The disciples would have been familiar with the title ‘Son of Man’ because it was found in the Scriptures, especially Daniel 7:13-14. This title connects him to the prophetic figure, the human Messiah, when God will exalt and give authority, glory, and an everlasting Kingdom.

Daniel writes, “I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a son of man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, Honor, and a Kingdom, so that all the people, nations, and population of all languages might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away, and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:13-14)

The disciples would have also been familiar with Psalm 8:4-6, which was quoted by the writer of Hebrews: “What is man that you think of Him? Or a Son of Man, that you are concerned about Him? You have made him a little lower than the angels, you have crowned him with glory and honor, You have put everything in subjection under his feet.” (Psalm 8:4-6) (Hebrews 2:6-8)

In the Hebrew mind, “son of man” (ben adam- son of adam), literally means human being. Jesus was a human being made like his brothers in every way.

Earlier I mentioned Hebrews 2:17, a Scripture that clarifies that Jesus HAD to be made like his brothers in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. And verse 18 says, For since He himself was tempted in that which he has suffered, he is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.”

“Tempted in every way, just as we are - yet without sin.” Hebrews 4:15-16 says, ”For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who had been tempted in all things just as we are, yet without sin.”

Jesus is able to sympathize with our weaknesses, our struggles, our temptations, because he is just like us, proving that his humanity was not symbolic, not because he took on “human nature”, but fully lived and experienced. Yet he did not sin. He got hungry, thirsty, tired, sad, and was tempted. (Matthew 4:2, John 19:28, John 4:6, Matthew 26:38, Matthew 4:1-11)

Jesus’s humanity is also clearly explained in Hebrews 5:1, which says, ”For every high priest taken from among men is appointed to represent them in matters pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.” Jesus is our High Priest, a man, who represents us before God as our Mediator, as 1 Timothy 2:5 says, “For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.” Through his sacrifice, resurrection, and exaltation in heaven, Jesus continues forever as his priesthood is permanent, since he always lives to make ongoing intercession for us. He intercedes for us and grants us access to God through His perfect sacrifice. (Hebrews 7:24 -25)

At Jesus’s trial, he said in Mark 14:62, “You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.” And no doubt, the Jewish high priest recognized this from Daniel 7. Jesus was identifying himself as the one who receives God’s authority and the Kingdom.

“Son of Man” shows that Jesus was not a preexisting spirit in heaven, but a man begotten into the world, as we will see.

Jesus' statement also draws on Psalm 110:1, where David wrote: “The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’” Earlier, Jesus had used this very passage when speaking with the Pharisees, asking how the Messiah could be merely David’s son if David called him “Lord” (Mark 12:35-37). By combining Psalm 110:1 with Daniel 7, Jesus identified himself as the Son of Man and the Messiah whom God exalted to His right hand and entrusted with divine authority and kingship.

Christ /Messiah

This title, “Christ or Messiah,” in Scripture never refers to a third person in an eternal Godhead. Messiah, or Mashiach in Hebrew, literally means “anointed one”. In Greek, it is translated as Christos, or Christ. It is a title set apart for God’s specially appointed human servants. Prophets, priests, and above all, the king, were anointed with oil as a sign that they had been chosen or appointed by God for a special role. The prophets and later the disciples understood this to coincide with the anointed King and leader expected to establish God’s Kingdom, bringing redemption, restoration, and salvation to God’s chosen people.

Moses foretold the coming of a prophet like himself: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers. You must listen to him” (Deuteronomy 18:15), a clear messianic expectation.

David received God's prophetic word from Nathan in 2 Samuel 7:12-13, “And when your days are fulfilled, and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his Kingdom. He will build a house for My Name, and I will establish the throne of his Kingdom forever.”

Psalm 2:7,8 speaks of this Messiah – “The rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against His Messiah whom He has installed as King in Jerusalem and of whom He says: “You are My Son: today I have fathered you. Ask of Me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance.”

Even the Samaritans were eagerly expecting the Messiah, despite their religious differences with the Jews. They accepted only the books of Moses and worshiped on Mount Gerizim rather than in Jerusalem. Yet their hope for God's promised Deliverer was very real. When Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman at the well, she said, "I know that the Messiah is coming." Jesus plainly revealed Himself to her, declaring, "I who speak to you am He". (John 4:25-26) Through this remarkable conversation, Jesus made it clear that He was the long-awaited Messiah, and many Samaritans came to believe in Him.

Son of God

Luke writes a detailed account of Jesus’ birth, showing further proof of Jesus’ identity. The angel Gabriel visits Mary and says, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus.” Then he tells her that this child will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and God will give him the throne of his father David, and reign over the house of Jacob, and His kingdom will have no end.

Mary asks an important question, “How will this be, since I am a virgin? The angel said to her, “Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; for that reason precisely the Holy Child will be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:28-35) (One God Translation - AB)

This miraculous conception is the origin of Jesus, his beginning. And the reason he is called the Son of God is because God created him in the womb of Mary. And he is 100% human, a mortal person.

Then, at Jesus' baptism, God publicly revealed and affirmed Jesus as HIS Son, the Anointed One. As Jesus came up out of the water, “the heavens opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and settling on Him, and a voice from the heavens said, This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”(Matthew 3:16-17)

Just as kings, priests, and prophets in the Old Testament were set apart by anointing oil, Jesus was set apart by the Father's own testimony and the visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit. His baptism marked the beginning of His public ministry and demonstrated that He is God's Son and chosen Messiah, empowered to proclaim the Kingdom of God, bring salvation, and fulfill the Father's redemptive plan for the world.

This anointing was prophesied in Isaiah 11:2, “The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of Knowledge and the fear of the LORD.”

Jesus’ baptism fulfilled the prophetic expectation that the Messiah would be anointed not merely with oil, but with the Spirit of God resting upon Him.

Early in his ministry, Jesus stood in the synagogue in Nazareth and read from the book of Isaiah. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD.” (Luke 4:18) (Isaiah 61:1)

After reading the passage, Jesus declared, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”. (Luke 4:21)
By making this statement, Jesus revealed that He is the promised Messiah, the Anointed One commissioned by God to bring the good news of salvation, healing, freedom, and hope. Jesus' reading of Isaiah was not merely reciting prophecy, but a declaration that He Himself is the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan foretold centuries earlier.

Faith OF Jesus

So, what does it mean to have the faith OF Jesus? It’s believing what he believed. It’s knowing what he taught, what he preached, and what he has done. And then we must follow his example, do what he says, obeying all his commandments.

What did Jesus believe?

Well, Jesus knew and believed he was the human Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the Living God (as Peter confessed) and as identified by the prophets.

But the clearest way to answer the question of what Jesus believed is to look at his own words in the New Testament writings.

1. Jesus's belief, or faith, was his complete devotion to the One True God – The Father, as expressed in the Shema, which he affirmed as the greatest commandment:

Mark 12:29-31 – when Jesus was asked by a Jewish scribe what the greatest commandment is, Jesus replied, "Hear, Oh Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is One. And you shall love the LORD with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy 6:4-6.

(Sh'ma, Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad) The Hebrew word Shema means hear, listen or pay attention. It is a call to acknowledge the One True God and to respond with our whole being. Believing fully that God is ONE and He alone is worthy of our complete trust, devotion, worship, obedience, and love.

It is not enough to simply believe that God is ONE, for even the demons possess that knowledge and tremble, as James 2:19 says. It is responding to that truth with a willing heart that seeks Him, loves Him, worships Him, and obeys Him with everything we have.

In my early years in the catholic church, and in the Watchtower, I never heard of the Shema; it was never recited, taught, or mentioned. This Jewish creed affirms Jesus' belief that the LORD God is ONE LORD, and that we must love HIM wholeheartedly, as well as love our neighbors as ourselves. It is Jesus' creed, and it must be our creed, as well.

Jesus believed that the Scriptures are God's authoritative revelation. He frequently quoted the Hebrew Scriptures; referred to people and events as real history and truth; quoting from Genesis, "Have you not read that HE who created them from the beginning made them male and female… (Matthew 19:4, Genesis 1:27). He mentions "the blood of Abel," "the days of Noah", Lot and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the sign of Jonah, Nineveh, Moses and the burning bush, the Queen of Sheba, David eating the consecrated bread; quoting Isaiah, just to name a few. (Matthew 23:35, 24:37-39, 10:15, 16:4, Luke 11:32, Mark 12:26-27, Matthew 12:42, Luke 6:3-4)

And Jesus answered each temptation by Satan with, "It is written," showing Scripture to be God's divinely inspired truth and affirming that true worship belongs to God alone and that His word is to be obeyed above all else. (Matthew 4:2,7,10)

Jesus believed he was sent or commissioned by God, and that all authority came from the Father. This is the principle of agency. This principle means that a person can be authorized or commissioned to act on behalf of another, just as a king sends an ambassador OR agent to represent him. In Hebrew, this principle is "Shaliach". And it means messenger, ambassador, agent or "one who is sent". The Shaliach, or agent, speaks and acts with the sender's authority, so responding to the agent is equivalent to responding to the sender, and honoring the agent is honoring the one who sent him.

John 12:44-50 – Then Jesus cried out, “Whoever believes in me does not believe in me alone, but in the one who sent me. And whoever sees me sees the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should remain in darkness.

As for anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I have not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not receive my words: The word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.
I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has commissioned me what to say and how to say it, and I know that his command leads to eternal life. So I speak exactly what the Father has told me to say.”

Jesus believed in the Gospel of the Kingdom, and this gospel, or good news, is what he preached. From the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus proclaimed God’s Gospel good news – to call humanity back to God through repentance and faith. Jesus said in Mark 1:15, “The time is fulfilled, he said. “The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe in that Gospel”.

He directly taught about the Kingdom of God, sometimes referred to as the Kingdom of Heaven, in his Sermon on the Mount.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:3

“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:10

Jesus tells us to pray for God’s Kingdom to come, for God’s “will” to be done on earth as it is in heaven”. (Matthew 6:10)

Praying for that future Kingdom to come to be established on earth shows that God’s Kingdom is a real, tangible government, not a state of mind, feeling in your heart or to go to heaven when we die. Jesus then expands this thought that we should not miss; he said,– “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided to you.” (Matthew 6:33) He urges us, his followers, to prioritize our lives with the future promises of God for mankind’s salvation.

For three full years of his earthly ministry, Jesus announced this gospel good news of the Kingdom of God. Belief in that good news of the Kingdom of God was so important to Jesus that He said, ‘I must preach the Gospel about the Kingdom of God to the other towns also, because I was commissioned for this purpose.’ (Luke 4:43) Jesus heralded this gospel message throughout the towns and villages. Preaching it in the synagogues, where the Torah was read and studied; in private homes, when traveling on the road, in fields, on boats, by the sea, and in Jerusalem.

One of Jesus' most significant teachings about the Kingdom of God was the parable of the Sower. In Matthew 13:3-23, Jesus describes a farmer sowing seed, with some falling on the path, some on rocky ground, some on shallow soil, some fell among thorns, and some on good soil. The seed represents the word of the Kingdom of God, while the different soils represent the different conditions of people’s hearts. Jesus explains how people respond when they hear the kingdom of God gospel message. Some hear the word, but Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that was sown

in them; some receive with joy but have no root and only remain for a season; others fall away when difficulties come; and others allow the worries and riches of the world to choke it out. But the good soil represents those who hear the word, understand it, and bear fruit. Jesus emphasizes the importance of this parable because it reveals that merely hearing his words is not enough – the condition of our heart determines whether His word takes root and produces a changed life. In Mark 4:13, Jesus said to his disciples, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand any of the parables?” This shows that the Kingdom of God is essential, as Jesus said he was commissioned to preach this good news.

And wherever he went, he healed those who came to him in faith, believing he is the Messiah, the Son of God. From the words Jesus spoke to the countless miracles he did, all came from his heavenly Father. From those who witnessed the blind receiving sight, the lame walking, the sick healed, the dead rising, to the very ones who received these miraculous healings, all brought glory and praise to God.

And as we’ve read in Scripture, Jesus’s works were accomplished through the power and authority given to him by God. He declared, saying, “The Son can do nothing by himself, unless he sees the Father doing it.” ”For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom He wishes.” (John 5:19,21). Through his works, Jesus revealed the power and compassion of God, leading people to recognize, worship, and glorify the Father who was working through him.

Jesus also sent out His disciples on two occasions to preach the Kingdom of God and heal the sick. First, He sent out the Twelve Apostles, giving them authority over demons and diseases. (Luke 9:2). Later, Jesus appointed and sent out seventy-two disciples to every town and place He was about to visit, instructing them, "Heal the sick who are there and tell them, The kingdom of God is near to you" (Luke 10:9). These two missions demonstrate that the message Jesus entrusted to His followers was the announcement of God's Kingdom, accompanied by acts of healing and mercy that confirmed the nearness of God's reign.

It was only later in His ministry, after Peter's confession of faith, that Jesus began to openly reveal to His disciples that He must suffer, be killed, and be raised on the third day. (Matthew 16:21) (Mark 8:31) He also foretold the manner of his death, saying that he would be “lifted up” (John 3:14; 12:32-33), an expression John explains referring to the kind of death he would die, namely crucifixion. He further told his disciples that he would be handed over to the Gentiles, who would mock him, flog him, and crucify him. (Matthew 20:18-19)

Jesus believed in the resurrection of the dead, and that salvation comes from the Father through Jesus.
John 5:24-29 – Jesus said, “Truly, I tell you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not come under judgement. Indeed, he has crossed over from death to life. Truly, I tell you, the hour is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so also has He granted the Son to have life in Himself. And He has given Him authority to execute Judgement, because He is the Son of Man.

Do not be amazed at this, for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out - those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgement."

Salvation – Jesus also made it clear that He is the only way to the Father, saying, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

On another occasion, Jesus says to Martha, the sister of Lazarus, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die." He then asks her, "Do you believe this? She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have come to believe that You are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was destined to be born into the world." (John 11:25-27) Here, Martha clearly showed her confession of faith in the One God and His human son, Jesus Messiah, and in the hope of the resurrection.

Prayer was central to Jesus' life and ministry. He regularly withdrew from the crowds to pray in a solitary place (Luke 5:16, Mark 1:35), spending entire nights in prayer to God (Luke 6:12). He turned to God in prayer before raising Lazarus from the tomb (John 11:41-43), as well as other miracles; and he gave thanks to God before the loaves and fish were multiplied. (Matthew 14:19; John 6:11) Jesus relied on his heavenly Father and showed his desire to give God the glory for the mighty works that were performed through him.

After the Passover meal, and just before leaving with his 11 apostles for the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus offered his longest recorded prayer. He asks the Father, saying, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your son, so that the Son may glorify You, just as You gave Him authority over all mankind, so that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. And this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:1-3). He prays for his apostles that they may remain faithful after his departure, be unified, and prays for future believers. (John 17:20-26)

Then, in the garden, Jesus withdrew from the apostles about a stone's throw away, knelt down praying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will, but Yours be done." (Luke 22:42) Verse 44 says, "And being in agony, He was praying fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood…"
This account shows Jesus is in an extreme state of emotional and spiritual distress as he faces the suffering and death that awaits him. Although he longs for another way if possible, Jesus chooses obedience to the Father's will. Trusting God's plan above his own. Jesus submits completely – "Not my will but Yours be done." Jesus' prayer demonstrates his complete reliance on God.

Jesus – The Human Son of God - When I first understood that Jesus was truly human, not a pre-existent being or angel, not God or Jesus incarnated, but truly a created human, it was like the scales fell off my eyes. I cried and cried –for what Jesus willingly endured: the brutal torture, cruel and merciless punishment, through scourging with whips, punches, flesh tearing, bruising, abusive mocking, a crown of thorns, and being nailed to a cross by Roman crucifixion, and dying for me. My heart swelled with deep gratitude and appreciation for what Jesus suffered on my behalf, bearing my sins. As Isaiah prophesied: "He was pierced for our transgression, he was crushed for our

iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5)

And I prayed, thanking God for HIS loving kindness and gift of salvation through HIS only begotten human son, Jesus - for forgiving my sins. Jesus gave his perfect human life, who was sinless, and willingly suffered the pain of horrific beating and torture and died for me and mankind's sins.

I can now grasp the meaning of 'only-begotten Son. Jesus was uniquely begotten by God, conceived in Mary, a miracle! He stands alone as the one human Son born through God's Holy Spirit brought into existence. And though Jesus did not sin, he was still human, and he really did die. And God raised him from the dead three days later. He didn't raise himself. He trusted his heavenly Father to resurrect him. That was true faith and trust in God.

And, after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and instructed her, "Go tell My brothers, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God." (John 20:17) Not only did he call his disciples, his brothers, but he also affirmed that His God and Father is their God and Father, as well. This statement affirms that he cannot be the same being as God Himself. Jesus has a God.

The resurrected Jesus spent forty days speaking to the apostles "of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3) and appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once. (1 Corinthians 15:6) Jesus opened his disciples' minds, in order that they "might comprehend the Scriptures," saying, " Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms." The prophecies about his suffering, death, resurrection, repentance, forgiveness of sins, and the preaching of His Kingdom to all nations. (Luke 24:44-47)

Jesus commissioned his disciples, saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you, and surely I am with you, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

Ascension - Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples asked, "Lord, will You at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel? And Jesus replied, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:6-8) And as they stood there looking up, two men stood beside them, and said that this same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven. (Acts 1:11) Jesus will return to earth then to set up the Kingdom of God.

What is The Gospel?

The disciples now included Jesus's death and resurrection as part of the Gospel "good news", as well as the Kingdom of God. Jesus's sacrificial death as the Lamb of God makes it possible for sin to be forgiven. John the Baptist declared this about Jesus soon after his baptism, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29)

The gospel, however, cannot be reduced to only the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as many proclaim, because doing so omits a major part of the message that Jesus Himself preached and commanded His disciples to preach. And this would be preaching another gospel – a half truth or an incomplete gospel message. And those who accepted the full gospel would have been taught Jesus's identity as the Messiah, the Christ, his beliefs, his teachings, and the importance of what it means to follow him.

We see this in Phillip, the evangelist, Peter, and Paul, and many others in the New Testament, who preached "the Kingdom of God" and "the name of Jesus Christ," and they baptized those who believed, as commanded by Christ Jesus.

"But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news about the Kingdom of God AND the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." (Acts 8:12)
Thus, the gospel encompasses not only the proclamation of God's Kingdom but also the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, through which entrance into that Kingdom is made possible. These Christian converts now would believe in Jesus' identity, beliefs, teachings and the Kingdom of God as Jesus preached, as well as his death and resurrection for forgiveness of sin.

After his vision, Peter visits Cornelius, in Caesarea, a gentile centurion, and many others who came to meet him. Peter said, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him." (Acts 10:38) Those hearing about the preaching done by the disciples and believing in Jesus received Holy Spirit and were baptized.

The apostle Paul, too, under house arrest, "welcomed all who came to him, preaching the Kingdom of God and teaching things about the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered." (Acts 28:31) Paul clearly preached the saving Kingdom gospel that Jesus taught and everything about Christ Jesus.

Now that we've looked at Jesus's identity, His beliefs, what He preached, and what He has done, we are left with the most important question of all: What will we do with what we have heard? Christianity is not simply about gaining head knowledge or accumulating facts about Jesus. It's not the ability to memorize, or quote scriptures, or even hearing Jesus's words that help us stand firm. True belief moves us to action.

Jesus himself emphasized the importance of paying close attention to what he taught and allowing his words to shape our thinking, decisions, and conduct.

Jesus concludes his sermon on the mount with the parable of the wise and foolish builders. He said, "Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain fell, the torrents raged, and the winds blew and beat against that house, yet it did not fall, because its foundation was on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the torrents raged, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell – and great was its collapse!" (Matthew 7:24-27)

The lesson here is clear: Both builders heard the same words, but the difference was obedience. One acted; the other didn't. And when the storm came, it revealed the foundation. When we believe Jesus' words,

follow and obey him, we have built our faith on the unshakable rock foundation. Our faith must be built on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ, not based on feelings, circumstances, or the opinions of others.

The apostle Paul also points to Jesus as that foundation: “For no one can lay a foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 3:11)

Faith and obedience protect us when difficulties arise. Trials, pressures, and opposition will certainly come, just as storms struck both houses. Yet those whose lives are built upon Christ’s teachings will not be swept away.

So let us leave today with a renewed commitment to stand firm in the faith of Jesus. Let us follow His example, remain in the truth of God's Kingdom Gospel Word, trust His promises, obey His commands, and persevere faithfully until Jesus comes to set up this Kingdom of God on earth. Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:27) May our lives reflect the strength, courage, and faithfulness that come from a firm foundation in Christ alone.

Let us heed Paul’s counsel, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

(1 Corinthians 15:58)

Thank you