

## Easter 2025

(Coming out of song: He Who Is to Come)

Church family, can you feel it? The air's electric today, isn't it? Like the buzz of kids hunting Easter eggs or the sugar rush from sneaking one too many chocolate bunnies!

But seriously, something bigger is stirring. The King has come—Jesus, the One who carried a cross, shattered the grave, and still reigns today. This isn't just a story we dust off once a year. This is a revolution of love, mercy, and power that's changing lives right here, right now.

Welcome to Easter at City Hope! Whether you're a regular, a first-timer, or someone who got dragged here by your grandma promising brunch after—we're thrilled you're here. This is a place where we don't just remember a moment in history; we celebrate a living Savior—Jesus Christ, the One who was, who is, and who is to come.

Easter is about an empty tomb. Can I get an amen for that? Our God, our Father, our Savior, King Jesus—He did exactly what He said He'd do. He walked out of that grave like it was just another Sunday morning.

And did you know there's more evidence for Jesus' life, death, burial, and resurrection than for some of the Founding Fathers who signed the Declaration of Independence. Hundreds of eyewitnesses saw Him—ate with Him, touched Him, followed Him. This isn't a fairy tale; it's the most verified event in ancient history.

For so many of us in this room, Jesus isn't just a historical figure—He's the One who flipped our lives upside down in the best way. He's given us hope when we were hopeless, purpose when we were lost, and love that we didn't deserve.

But before we dive in, let's rewind and look at the whole story of Easter, because it's too good to rush through. Picture this: Jesus, the King of glory, shows up in a barn, not a palace. His first bed? A feeding trough. His mission? To step into our mess—not to point fingers, but to pull us out. He lived with a heart so big, He touched lepers, ate with sinners, calmed storms, and even brought dead folks back to life. Fully God, fully man—loving us with every step.

Then came the cross. Betrayed by a friend, mocked by a crowd, nailed to a tree He didn't deserve. They buried Him in a borrowed tomb, sealed it with a stone, and thought they'd snuffed out the Light of the world.

But on the third day— (anybody know where I'm going?) --- the stone rolled away, the grave was empty, and Jesus walked out, proving once and for all that grace always wins. That's our Jesus. That's why we're here.

So, City Hope, whether you're rock-solid in your faith or just curious about this Jesus guy, lean in today. You're loved, you're welcomed, and you're part of this story.

For the last few weeks there has been these words of Jesus stuck in my head. I'll be honest with you; I have been wrestling. I still don't know that I fully understand the gravity.

Luke 23 is where these words are found...let me catch you up to this point.

- One of Jesus best friends named Judas betrayed Jesus and turned Him over to the Jews.
- Jesus was led away to be beaten with a whip and mocked.
- They took Him to court and declared Him guilty.
- They released a murderer and condemned Jesus to death.
- They twisted together a crown of thorns, placed it on his head and made fun of him.
- They hit him. Spit on him. Paraded him through town to be seen by all.
- Then, they drove nails into his hands and feet....and crucified Him.

I want to invite you to stand with me briefly as we honor the reading of God's Word.

**Luke 23.32-34 | <sup>32</sup>Two others—criminals—were also led away to be executed with him. <sup>33</sup>When they arrived at the place called The Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals, one on the right and one on the left. <sup>34</sup>Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing."**

Pray

These last 12 words have truly blown my mind. I've honestly read them dozens and dozens of times...but this time was different.

I think this whole Bible is just a way for us to know Jesus better. I think that's why you're here today. For some of you maybe this is the day where you personally begin a relationship with Jesus.

For others, today is a day for you to fall more in love with Him. These 12 words teach us so much about who He is. Let's jump in. The first thing we see today...

### **1. Jesus is the model**

In the middle of His darkest day what does He display? "Father, forgive them" ...what???

There are some words that we throw around a lot like, love and compassion – humility and servanthood – Obedience – grace and truth – mercy and forgiveness.

This is the bar we should be striving for. Yes, He was perfect, and we will never reach that on this side of heaven, but Jesus is the standard.

**He's the blueprint for a full life.** If you want to know what real love, strength, peace, and purpose look like in a person—Jesus is it.

He didn't just teach those things; He lived them perfectly. He didn't just tell us how to live—He showed us.

He loved enemies, forgave those who hurt Him, served the broken, and stood up to evil. He wasn't just a good guy—He was the example of what's possible when God leads a life.

If this life is a road, Jesus is the map and the destination. He shows us the way forward, and He is the point of it all. **Jesus didn't just die for us on that cross—He showed us how to live.**

When He said Father, forgive them...He showed us that **forgiveness isn't about fairness—it's about freedom.**

That prayer wasn't just about them. It was about all of us. And it's the kind of life He invites us to have too. He is the model.

Secondly, there is this part of the prayer that is tough for me

**Luke 23.34 | ...Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing.**

How can you say they didn't know? It sure seems like they knew what they were doing when they used the hammer to pound the nails into your hands/feet.

It sure does sound like they knew what they were doing when they created a crown of thorns and crushed it down upon his skull. That's my perspective. How can you say they didn't know?

This is what Jesus reminded me of this week...**He sees deeper than behavior.** The Bible reminds us that man looks on the outside but not God...God sees the heart. This part of those 12 words reveals that...

## **2. Jesus is full of mercy** (He is merciful in the middle of injustice)

What is Mercy? **Mercy is when I don't get what I do deserve.**

They deserve death. They deserve beatings. Buts that's what they got. They got prayed for. The King of Kings went to His Father on their behalf...what????

Jesus recognizes that their actions come from spiritual blindness and brokenness.

He's not excusing them, but He's acknowledging the gap between what they're doing and what they understand.

While Jesus says, "they know not what they do," they were aware they were executing a man.

But, they were ignorant of the full spiritual implications—that they were crucifying the Son of God.

**My sin always has spiritual implications.** (Sin is anything that goes against God's Word.)

We don't like to talk about it because we want to excuse ourselves. But I love you enough today to tell you the truth.

Sin is the most serious thing man will ever deal with. Sin is a spiritual virus that invades our whole being. It makes us morally and spiritually weak. It's a deadly disease that infects every part of us: our body, our mind, our emotions, our relationships, our motives—absolutely everything.

Because Jesus was full of mercy, those who crucified Jesus were prayed for.

Because Jesus is full of mercy we are invited, not indicted.

**John 3.17 | For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.**

**When justice said 'punish,' Jesus said 'pardon.'** – That's who Jesus is. He's our model, He's full of mercy, and finally the final trait of Jesus we see in these 12 words...

### **3. Jesus is on a mission**

You see when we get to know a little more about Jesus, we find that some 700 years before this moment of prayer on that cross, there was a prophet who talked about this.

**Isaiah 53.12 | ...he willingly submitted to death and was counted among the rebels; yet he bore the sin of many and interceded for the rebels.**

Jesus didn't just die for sinners—He prayed for them.

How is this so? How can you forgive people who did such terrible things to you? Not just forgive them...He's praying to God on their behalf.

Jesus had a mission. He had a purpose.

His mission didn't stop when times got hard. His mission was His mission, and He would not stop. We read of His mission over and over in Scripture...here are a few.

**(Please place all 3 on 1 slide)**

**Luke 19.10 | The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.**

**Mark 10.45 | ...to give His life as a ransom for many.**

**John 3.17 | God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.**

He never stopped. **His mission wasn't just to take our place, but to plead our case.**

We read this as taking place 1000's of years ago, but He's still on a mission today.

Lean in as we close...**His mission is you.**

He wants a personal relationship with you. He wants you to experience this kind of love. A love that will never stop pursuing you. A love that is unending. Love that is unexplainable.

The fact that He is praying for them shows us the true character of Jesus.

That's who Jesus is...He's our model, full of mercy and on a mission.

Conclusion/Response:

There is one other part of this story that kind of blows my mind but also brings me so much joy and hope.

I came across this powerful illustration the other day and I want to end with that story.

Jesus was crucified between two criminals...and something eternal happens.

On that first Easter, Jesus hung on a cross between two thieves—one mocking, one believing. The believing thief had no resume to boast about. No church attendance record, no Bible study certificates, not even a single good deed to his name. He was a criminal, a nobody, with nothing to offer.

But in his final moments, he turned to Jesus and said, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus, with nails in His hands and love in His heart, looked at him and said, "Today, you will be with me in paradise."

Imagine that thief showing up at the gates of heaven, still catching his breath from the cross. An angel stops him and says, "Hold on, buddy. What are you doing here? Got any

credentials? Know the doctrine of justification by faith?” The thief just shakes his head. “I don’t know any of that.”

The angel, flustered, grabs his supervisor. “This guy’s got no qualifications! On what basis are you here?” And the thief, with a grin, says, “The Man on the middle cross said I can come.” And that’s enough.

Church, that’s the gospel. That’s Easter. Jesus, the Man on the middle cross, who prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,” says to you, to me, to every broken, undeserving one of us, “You can come.”

You don’t need to clean yourself up first. You don’t need to earn it. You just need to trust Him. And when you do, the tomb is empty, the slate is clean, and heaven is yours.

So, City Hope, don’t leave this place just dreaming about Easter brunch—though I know those biscuits are calling! Take this grace and run with it.

I’ve had moments where I felt like that thief—unworthy, but welcomed by Jesus

The Bible teaches that heaven—eternal life with God—is a gift received through faith in Jesus Christ, not earned through good works.

The Bible gives us a path to receiving heaven like the criminal...

### **Recognize Your Need for God’s Grace**

- The Bible says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3.23). Sin separates us from God, and “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6.23a), meaning eternal separation from Him.
- Like the thief on the cross, we must acknowledge we’re unworthy and can’t earn heaven on our own. The thief had no good deeds to offer—just a humble plea for mercy.

### **Believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord**

- God offers salvation through His Son: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3.16).
- Believing means trusting that Jesus’ death on the cross paid for your sins and His resurrection defeated death. The thief believed Jesus was the King and trusted Him, saying, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom”

### **Confess and Receive**

- The thief didn't perform rituals or good deeds; he simply trusted Jesus' promise, and Jesus said, "Today, you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23.43).
- Romans 10.9 states, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Confession is declaring your faith in Jesus.
- The thief's plea showed a heart turning to Jesus, away from his old ways.
- This doesn't mean perfection but a sincere desire to live for God.

I want to close our time giving you an opportunity to respond. This is a 1-time decision. You don't have to do this over and over every time you sin.

You plant a flag and say I'm following Jesus...I believe in Him and want Him to come in and take over my life.

Just like the thief on the cross and so many of us in here today...you can know Jesus.

I want to lead you in a prayer...nothing magical about the prayer...is about what you believe in your heart. If something is stirring inside you...and you have never made Jesus Lord over your life...i invite you to say it with me.

Here is your prayer...say it with me

*Father, Forgive my sins. Be the Lord of my life. Thank you for sending Jesus into this world, so that I can have peace. Thank you for being a voice I can trust. Today I turn to you. Come into my heart. My life is not my own, I give it all to You. In Jesus' name I pray.*

If you prayed that prayer with me just now...here is what I want to ask you to do

