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Welcome to the New Life Podcast, a ministry of New Life Presbyterian Church in Ithaca, New York. Today we have this week's preached by Tim LaCroix, our senior pastor. Join us for worship each week at 10 o'clock at 950 Danby Road, Ithaca, New York. You can also visit us on our website, [www.newlifeithaca.org](http://www.newlifeithaca.org). Now here's this week's sermon.

00:43

Reading from Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians chapter 15 verses 1 through 11.

00:51

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preach to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preach to you, unless you believed in vain.

01:07

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

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Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I.

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but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach, and so you believed." This is the word of the Lord.

02:21

Most of the people who don't actively follow Jesus

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come to that place in their life because they simply don't see the need for it. There's been some studies recently done on religious belief in the United States. The last one was released by Pew this February, February 2025. And one of the things that the study found was that 75 % of Americans either are absolutely or fairly certain that God exists. That's a pretty high number.

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But if we dig a little deeper into the numbers, we find that only 33 % of Americans attend church in person at least once a month. The difference between those two numbers, 75 and 33, is 42%. 42 % of people in our country who believe in God but are not actively following Jesus. In other words,

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75 % of our country would be totally fine with the sermon I preached last week. I talked last week and argued from about the existence of God, about how belief in the existence of God is not only reasonable, it is a more likely solution to how we got here. And almost everybody would agree to that, but they would not necessarily agree with what I'm about to say today.

03:52

What accounts for the difference there? What accounts for the 42 % of people who would have no problem in general with what I preached last week and who still aren't actively following Jesus by being a part of his church on a semi-regular basis? Well, that study by Pew didn't go into these details, but there have been other studies. There's recently been some studies that were digging deeper into the notion of the de-churched. And there was a...

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a book that was released last August called The Great De-Churching and they actually funded a sociological study to find out why people were basically spiritual but not religious. And what they found by and large was not exactly what they expected because what we would expect, what I would expect is that by and large the people that aren't attending church are doing so either because they lost faith in God altogether or because they've been hurt by the church. And there are obviously are people like that and I'm not discounting that as those of you

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who have been around know that we talk about that a lot. what the study found was that most of the people in that 42 % aren't actively following Jesus simply because they don't find the need. They don't see the need for it. A lot of people didn't actively make a decision to stop going to church. They just simply, for one reason or another, because of sporting events on Sunday morning and a large part of it was COVID, people had to stop going to church. They just...

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When they stopped going to church, they just realized that they didn't miss it very much. You know, they didn't really miss it and they felt like it didn't add enough to their life to be making the sacrifice like all of you have done to wake up on Sunday morning, especially with small kids, and make it to church. And so how do we address then that issue? People that say they believe that God, there is a God who created the heavens and the earth, they're fine with that, but they are not actively following Jesus.

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Is the answer then to prove to them that they need God? Because that might seem to be one solution. And maybe we need to show them, actually, you're lonelier than ever. This generation is lonelier than ever, and you need community. The lack of participation in civic organizations has shown to be a detriment to society. We could show them that participating in civic organizations like the churches is better for your health. You have better health outcomes. You live longer.

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We could show them scientific evidence that says that worshipping together in a body, especially singing, is good for you, both your psychological health and your mental health and your physical health. We could talk about all those things, but if we were to approach the lack of felt need for being a part of the church with trying to demonstrate that they actually do get things out of this, aren't we just giving in to the idols of this age?

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by showing people who don't think they need God, actually you do need Him. What happens then if they show up and maybe they feel some of these things but it doesn't really hit home for them? What happens though if we tell them that they actually need God but God doesn't meet their needs because it's not guaranteed that God will meet all your needs in the mystery of His providence? And indeed if we think about it, if we approach this issue, people don't feel the need for God.

07:05

With actual cosmic quid pro quo, aren't we really promoting illegalism that believing in Christ is this proposition? There have been some people who have converted to Christianity from atheism and I've talked about it recently, some famous examples of this. And when they describe their conversion, what struck me about it, and we talked about this before, is they'll by and large talk about the benefits of Christianity.

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how Christianity is philosophically superior, how it's a better way to form a society, it's a better way to raise a family. But what I found absent in a lot of those accounts was a

description of faith, of conversion, of trust in God, of life change. So what is the answer to that 42 % of people who have no problem with what I preached last week but who are not actively following Jesus? I think the answer is found in this text today.

08:03

And the answer is that the solution for bringing people who may have belief in God but not actively following Jesus, the solution is to preach that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again on the third day.

08:20

As I approach this text, and we're looking at 1 Corinthians 15 here. As I approach this text this week, more difficult part was to figure out how to present this because, you know, one of the things that we're taught in our preaching classes is that we need to present a need, a reason for folks to listen to a text. We need to present not just a lecture, but a sermon. And the difference between a lecture and a sermon is actually getting at

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people's hearts, getting at what their desires are, what their needs are, what their sins are, etc. As I thought about what this text actually said, Paul, in the original context, is addressing a problem in Corinth, and that problem is that people were denying the resurrection. They were denying the resurrection, either resurrection of Christ, or the resurrection of the last times, or both. And so, this is a very specific problem that he's addressing.

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the denial of the resurrection. And he's also addressing it in terms of, if you don't believe this, you'll be lost in your sins. And as I thought about this, I thought, how is, how does this fit as an entrée into our cultural situation? And part of when we apply the text to our lives, we have to think about the ancient culture and bring it forward to our culture. And the thing I thought about was this.

09:45

Yes, Paul is addressing a lack of belief here, and we'll talk about that, but the essence of the message is that this message is what changes people. And as I thought about the issue of bringing people along to faith in Christ, ultimately, we cannot do it by arguing people into the kingdom. Now, part of the reason why I'm taking this approach is because I had a lot of great discussions and comments after last week's sermon.

10:13

And one of the things that I touched on very briefly, but I was able to expand upon in our midweek podcast, which I don't do every week, but sometimes there's a lot of feedback on sermons and I feel like there were some things that I didn't really go in depth because you don't want me preaching hour-long sermons. And so I put that off and did a podcast on it and I filled my desire to say everything I wanted to say about it. So you can go listen to that if you want to. But one of the things I touched on briefly but didn't really expand upon is this

10:42

And it was in the text last week because I talked about, you know, that Jesus is showing us evidence for the existence of God. But what I didn't expand upon, I want to expand upon more, is the notion that yes, he called on Thomas to look, he asked him to touch his side and touch his wounds, but he also called Thomas to faith. And the call of Jesus is the essential part in this whole equation.

11:12

The call of Jesus, we believe in our tradition that the call of Jesus is powerful. We believe that the call of Jesus to faith is efficacious. In other words, it takes, it works. In the text, Jesus says to Thomas, stop disbelieving and believe. That's not just a request, that is a call. And so part of the story is the call of Jesus to believe and the Spirit's operation to bring Thomas to faith.

11:42

Jesus himself says something like this in Luke chapter 10 verse 22. He talks about how we can know God the Father. He says, things have been handed over to me by my Father. And

no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son. So how can we know God? If Jesus says the only person who knows the Son is the Father, and the only person who the Father is the Son, how can we know?

12:09

Either one, the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Jesus says, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. It is the call of Christ. It is the operation of the Spirit with the call of Christ to bring people to faith. And so there's a spiritual element to this that we cannot argue people into the kingdom. We can't convince them. I've often said, and I've relayed this before, but when I have opportunity to share the good news with people and get into discussions about

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various objections to the faith. I'm happy to talk about people's objections to Christianity, but ultimately you get to a point where you have to say, look, we can talk about your objections, we can try to answer them as best we can, but you're going to keep coming up with them. At some point, you've got to decide what you're going to do with Jesus. At some point, you've got to decide that. And so how do we move the needle on our de-church friends

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neighbors, family members, co-workers, the people on our kids sports teams that we talk to, and maybe even some of us. And this is not a judgment. I'm not saying any of this judgmentally. I'm genuinely seeking to find the best way for us to engage in folks who are struggling, doubting, don't see the need for Christ. The answer, I believe, is here. We preach Christ having died for our sins and rose again on the third day.

13:36

We're going to cover three things in this text briefly. The first is the fundamental tenet. The fundamental tenet. Not tenet. We're not talking about renting a house. The fundamental tenet. The fundamental tenet, Paul says, boils down to that. Going to verse 1, chapter 15,

he says, now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preach to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved.

14:05

He's reminded them of what he preached originally. Paul does this often in his letters. He does it famously in Galatians. He says, if anyone comes to you preaching a different gospel other than the one I gave you, let them be accursed. But here he says it the same. If I want to remind you, brothers, of what I preached to you when I came to you. Paul directly came to Corinth. He established the church in Corinth. He planted the church in Corinth. And now he's writing back to say, remember what I taught you when I was there. Remember what I taught you when you received, when you

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believed in the gospel and that truth in which you stand and that by which you are being saved. Remember this. And what is that? Well, he goes on a little aside. He gives them a little bit of a promise and a warning. He says, if you hold fast to this, if you hold, you are being saved if you hold fast to this, otherwise you believed in vain. The unless there, I think is a little unclear and confusing. The grammar is if,

15:05

you hold fast, if not, you believed in vain. In other words, if you don't hold fast to this truth that I'm about to tell you, your faith is not faith. It is in vain. It is not a faith that brings life. And what is the truth that he wants to deliver? What is the truth he wants to remind them of? He says in verse 3, for I delivered to you of first importance what I also received, this, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures,

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that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas into the twelve. What we have here is the snippets most scholars agree of an ancient creed. We don't have this creed written out, but it reads like a creed. In fact, there are parts of this that are quoted directly or at least paraphrased in the



creed we're going to see in a few moments. The Nicene Creed, which we are familiar with, it says that

16:05

On the third day he rose again according to the scriptures. That's almost a direct quotation from here. And then it also says that he under Pontius Pilate, he was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. In other words, he was crucified for us. So, evidently there were ancient creedal statements that haven't been haven't made it into writing that kind of come through in biblical texts like here and there's a couple of other places.

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that come through in the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed. But these creedal statements, Paul is pulling back to. And what is he saying? He's saying there's basically two fundamental tenets that we have to hold on to. And those tenets are held as one, basically. That he died for our sins and he rose again on the third day. Now, he does mention four things here. He says he died, he was buried, he rose, and he appeared. Four things.

17:03

But the buried part accentuates the evidence that he died. The burial is mentioned in the Credo statements to show that he really did die. It wasn't just passing out because of the pain. And the appearing part accentuates evidence for the resurrection. Essentially, we have two things here. Two things that he says are of utmost importance. He says in verse 3, I deliver to you as of first importance.

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This is the most important thing that you can believe. This is the most important thing you can teach. This is the fundamental tenet of the gospel that Christ died for our sins and he rose again on the third day. And this is what I believe, this I believe is what we should be teaching, preaching, and sharing in order to help people come to faith in Christ. Because we cannot issue the call of Christ. None of us can issue effectual calling. Only Jesus can do that.

18:02

Only the Holy Spirit can bring that. So how is it that we see in the Gospel, in the Book of Acts, and in the letters of Paul, that the Apostles go about engaging with people who do not see the need for Jesus. They say, Jesus Christ died for our sins, and on the third day rose again.

18:20

We see that being preached to religious people like Jews. We see it being preached to pagans, cultured pagans and rustic pagans. We see Paul going to the Areopagus and saying this basic message, although contextualized, to the very sophisticated Athenians. And if we're wondering whether the scriptures themselves are asking us to fully contextualize the message of the gospel so that

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we make it completely palatable and completely understandable and reasonable in every aspect so that people are convinced intellectually to come in. That's not what we see. We see Paul going to the Areopagus and telling the philosophers, this man rose from the dead and they think that is crazy. But that's what he does. That's what has power. This is interesting.

19:17

Paul says this over and over. He says,

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There's a verse here that I... Okay. This is 1 Corinthians 1.21. I'm going to come back to this in a little bit. He says, since in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom. Right, wisdom didn't bring them to a knowledge of God. It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. The folly of what we preach to save those who believe. And what is this folly? That we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews, and folly...

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to the Gentiles, for the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." The fundamental tenet of our faith that we are to preach and share with others is that Christ died for our sins and rose again. You know, every religion, almost every religion, is trying to deal with two problems. One problem is the problem of evil and suffering. How do we explain, how do we reconcile the problem of evil and suffering in the world? That's one. And the other is, how can we have

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some kind of knowledge of God, transcendence, awe, whatever it is. Those are the two basic problems that every religion is trying to solve. And here, in this message, we have the two problems addressed and solved. The problem of evil is solved. The problem of evil and suffering is solved that Jesus Christ died for our sins. He took evil on himself. He took the pain and suffering of the world on himself. He took the shame of the world on himself, and he absorbed it into his own body. And so the problem of evil is dealt with with the incarnation and the

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sacrificial death of Christ on the cross and then the problem of knowing God and experiencing the transcendent is answered to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. How can we know the God that created the universe? We can know through Jesus Christ who proved to be God incarnate by being raised from the dead and this is something that if true changes everything. That's why I like the Michael Green quote that is printed in your bulletin on page 3. It is the death and resurrection of Jesus, the empty cross.

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which lies at the heart of apostolic Christianity and is God's good news for the world.

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This is the message that we are to share. This is the message we are to preach. And this is the message that we are to hold fast to, that Christ died for our sins and on the third day rose again. The second thing we find is a foundational tradition. A foundational tradition.

So we have a fundamental tenet. Second, a foundational tradition. Paul talks a lot about tradition in a positive light.

21:59

We're not maybe familiar with this as Protestant believers, but tradition is something that Paul comes back to over and over. In fact, in the Bible, there are 15 occurrences of tradition used positively, and 13 of them are in Paul's writings. Six of the 13 are in the letters to the Corinthians. Paul is really...

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Preaching tradition to the Corinthians and it's interesting that he's doing this we could we could speculate as to why part of the reason why is because Paul's apostolic authorities being questioned we saw that in verses 9 10 and 11 that Jim read So his apostolic authorities being questioned so he is emphasizing the fact that he received this from others and handed it to them But also I think that that that Corinth is not much different from our modern culture

22:51

Corinth was a very sophisticated place. It was a very urbane place, a cosmopolitan place, where people were wealthy and people were knowledgeable and they were educated. And I think he's appealing to tradition in order to really connect them to what came before and to give them an anchor. And so Paul mentions tradition. He mentions it beginning in chapter 11.

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In chapter 11, where he's talking about the Lord's Supper, he says, The words receive and deliver are evocative of tradition. The word tradition comes from the Latin trado, which means to hand down. Tradition are things handed down. And so he handed down to us what he received from the Lord, which is the liturgy of the Lord's Supper. Then here in 15.1, he says,

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And then in verse 3, for I deliver to you as of first importance what I received. The delivering and receiving is evocative of tradition. We see this very clearly in 2 Thessalonians. So Paul talks about tradition in a very positive light. He says in verse 15, says, so then brothers, 2 Thessalonians 2.15, so then brothers stand firm and hold to the traditions

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that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. Now that's important because Paul mentions two ways tradition can come. It can come through the Scriptures, through what is handed down to us through the Scriptures, and the Scriptures are handed down. No one received their Bible directly from an angel or from God, I think. It was handed to you. It was handed down. This is a form of tradition, is the God's word, but also spoken.

24:42

Traditions are handed down and spoken. And what we find here in 1 Corinthians 15 is an example of a tradition handed down. This creedal statement. This creedal statement is a tradition handed down that Paul alludes to. And what we find contained in that creedal statement is our facts that are handed down that are evidences for what Paul is asserting. What is he asserting? He's asserting that Christ died for our sins.

25:11

What is the evidence for that? What is the tradition that backs that up? The first thing he says, according to the Scriptures. The Scriptures that are handed down to us predicted the fact that Christ would die for our sins. We don't have exactly, he doesn't list a verse here, he doesn't quote a verse, but we're pretty certain that he's alluding to passages like Isaiah 53 and 54, the suffering servant, where it says he was pierced for our transgressions, he was wounded.

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for our iniquities, Psalm 22 which talks about Him suffering for us, for our sins. The Old Testament points to the fact that the Messiah will die for our sins. He will die for our sins. So, the tradition of Scripture is part of that. But then He also points to the fact of the grave.

And I've talked about before that almost no one denies skeptical atheist anyone. That Christ died, He was crucified by the Romans, and He was buried.

26:10

So, Paul's presenting two things to us. He's presenting to us the spoken tradition, the fact of his burial. He's presenting us with the scripture tradition, the prediction in the Old Testament that he would die for our sins. Then we move to the resurrection, which of course is the most important part, because without that everything else falls, and Paul says that later in this chapter. What does he present as reasons to believe the resurrection? Well, he says,

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in accordance with the scriptures. So we go back to the testimony of scripture. Where in the Old Testament does it say that Christ will be raised on the third day? That isn't very clear. There are scriptures that seem to allude to it, and Isaiah 54, the suffering servant, is raised to life again. That seems to be what's going on. We have the story of Jonah being in the belly of the well for three days, but explicitly, the only place that we have that predicts the death and the resurrection of Christ three days later

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is Christ Himself. He predicted His own death and resurrection in very specific terms, multiple times as recorded in the Gospels. Now, 1 Corinthians was written in AD 55. Is it possible that Matthew and Mark were already written? I think so. So possibly what Paul is referring to is the Gospels themselves in which Jesus predicted His own death and His own resurrection before it happened.

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And a huge part of the vindication of Christ in his word and his authority is that he very specifically predicted his death and it happened according to his prediction. So we have his being raised from the third day according to the scriptures and according to tradition as he appeared. So it says he appeared to Cephas. Now we know that all the gospels that

record the resurrection record him appearing to Peter. And then it says he appeared to the twelve.

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which is collective of the 12 disciples, although Judas was not with them. It's a sort of a group, just like Peter stands in for the individual believer. The women were the first to see Jesus rise from the dead. Paul does not deny that. He's given a representative of these groups. Peter represents the individual. The 12 represent the church. And then we find that he appeared to 500. Now, this is the part that is tradition.

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And nowhere else in the Bible are we told that Jesus appeared to 500 people. This is the only place it is told. Apparently, Paul is handing down an oral tradition that he received. Now, it's not oral tradition anymore. It's actually scripture because Paul wrote it. But he received it as tradition. And he related to them, hey, you guys know that there are 500 people who saw Jesus and some of them are still alive. So he's appealing to the Corinthians.

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You can take a little road trip and go down to Antioch, can go down to Jerusalem, you can talk to some of these people if you don't believe me. But again, he's appealing to tradition, he's appealing to eyewitness tradition. And then he talks about James, and then he talks about himself. I think St. John Chrysostom summarizes what Paul is doing here very nicely. This is the third quote on page three of your bulletin. Chrysostom is one of the greatest preachers we've ever had in the church.

29:29

He says, if you disbelieve one witness, Peter, you have 12 witnesses. If you disbelieve the 12, then listen to 500. I like that turn of phrase. He says, if you disbelieve them, listen to James, the Lord's brother, who did not believe during the Lord's life, but after his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. But now you may say that his brother was biased.

29:58

So then Paul says, listen to me. Listen to me, for he appeared to me as well. And who am I? I am Paul, his enemy. I was formerly a persecutor. But now he preaches the good news of the resurrection. Paul is laying out reasons to hold this truth as real. Peter saw him, the 12 saw him, 500 people saw him. James' brother didn't believe until he saw him.

30:27

Then he appeared to the apostles at his ascension, and last, as one who is stillborn, he appeared to me, an enemy of his, a persecutor of the church, a murderer. So if you don't believe any of those people, believe me, because there's no reason for me to believe in this unless it's true. Unless I actually saw him and received what I'm passing down to you. And so, we do have a foundational tradition in the church.

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We have things that are passed down to us, that show us that we have eyewitnesses through the ages and the Bible that's been passed down to us so that we can see that and believe. And so we do have attached to all the gospel narratives that Jesus does give evidence with his call to faith. But as I said in the first point, it has to end with the call to faith. And what's the third point here? So we have

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The fundamental tenet, we have the foundational tradition, and thirdly, we have the foolishness of faith. And ultimately, I can't make any of this make sense for you. How is it that we can preach these two things, that Christ died for our sins, and he rose again from the third day, on the third day, and this is the answer to why people will feel the need for Jesus, is because it is foolishness. And Paul knows it.

31:56

There are only, let's see.

32:03



There are 200 plus times that the word foolishness or folly is used in the Bible. All of them are negative except for 17 times in Paul. Most of them are in Corinthians. Paul says, I know this is foolishness. I know that what I'm asking you to do doesn't make much sense. But he says, the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

32:30

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? You want to debate? You want to bring philosophy and logic into it? Sure, we can do that. But has God not made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, they didn't find God that way. It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. But we preach Christ crucified.

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stumbling block to Jews and folly foolishness to the Greeks. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." So Paul is actually saying, I know that this doesn't make sense according to the wisdom of this world. If you're going to convince someone of their need for something, you've got to convince them of it. You've got to show them. But Paul says, no. The way you do it is you preach Christ. You preach him that he died for our sins, and on the third day he rose again.

33:28

And ultimately Paul says, I know this makes us fools. He says in 1 Corinthians 4 10, we are fools though for Christ's sake. We are fools for Christ's sake. And so we are called to engage in something that doesn't make sense to the wisdom of this world because the wisdom of God makes the wisdom of this world foolishness. And so we are fools for Christ. We are to

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Befriend our friends and neighbors and family members. Of course, hopefully we're friends with our family members, but that's not always the case. We are to go about this in a winsome way, in a way that gets to know people, engages with their lives and their

concerns. We are to attempt to answer questions and engage in debates, but ultimately, the only thing that's going to move the hearts and souls of people is the call of Christ as we preach that Christ died for our sins. Not your sins, our sins.

34:22

in the first person plural, our sins, not bringing it in condemnation, but including ourselves in those who need his salvation. Christ died for our sins, and on the third day he rose again. This may be folly to the world, but it is the wisdom and power of God. And so it should be the content of what we preach and share, and what we laid hold to in our own hearts and lives. Oftentimes people will say to me as I

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as I engage in proofs to believe in God, kind of get to that place where, yes, it's more logical to believe in God as a creator, and someone will say, but yeah, how do get from there to Christianity?

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Here's how you get there. You preach that Christ died for our sins and on the third day he rose again. Yes, we can talk about the reliability of God's word, the transmission of the manuscripts through the ages, and I've talked about that. I'm happy to talk about it for hours. But, you're not going to argue someone into the kingdom. It must be the message of Christ having died for our sins and on the third day rose again. If we don't see our need for that, we're not going to see our need for singing or community or

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food or whatever else, if we don't see our need for a savior, we're not going to see our need for God. And ultimately what makes the 33 % different from the 42 is they have a sense that they need a savior. They need a savior. And that's why we're here. We know that we need a savior. We know we need someone to take our sin, to take our shame, and we need a connection with the God who became one of us, took on our pain.

36:02

on the cross and he rose again. And so I will remind all of us, lay hold to that truth that Christ died for your sins and on the third day he rose again. Let's pray.