



March 26, 2017  
1 Kings 18:16-39; Mark 2:1-12  
Dr. Craig Hazen, Biola University  
**So That You Will KNOW**

Hi Everyone. My name is Larry Adams and I want to take a moment to thank you for reading this message. At Golden Hills we are committed to exalting Jesus and preaching the Word. Your downloading of this message is a great encouragement to us, as we know that our ministry is going out to spread God's Word all over the world.

We want you to know, too, that in no way do we intend these messages to be a replacement for your involvement in a good local church, where, sitting under the authority of pastors and other teachers, you can learn to worship, grow and serve and be engaged with a body of believers where you can grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We realize also, that some of you may be in areas of the world where there is no local church. Therefore, we hope these messages you are using, to gather with your family or other believers, or people from the community that it will be a great encouragement to you, as you hear God speak into your life, helping you to become disciples who are true, reproducing followers of Jesus Christ.

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Dr. Craig Hazen, Founder & Director of Christian Apologetics Program, Biola University

I've been hiding in the back, but I wanted to sit front and center now, so I can enjoy the music. I find it strange, though, how you favor the drummer. I mean, how many churches actually provide bullet-proof glass (actually a Plexiglas sound shield) for the drummer? (laughter) The rest of the band is out, open to sniper fire, but the drummer is protected. Clearly he is favored and loved.

I hope you'll come to the *Engaged – Reasonable Faith in an Uncertain World* conference (next weekend). This is something you don't get in your neighborhood very often. We're going to bring some of the finest communicators and thinkers on really important topics, like dealing with Islam and Mormonism and the Jehovah's Witnesses, and dealing with the scientific skeptics. Offering how to talk about God with people and give a solid case for the resurrection of Jesus. Some of the big apologetics topics.

Some of you are thinking – *apologetics? What is that?* I run a conference almost every weekend across the country somewhere, and we have sometimes, huge halls filled with people who are coming to an Apologetics Conference, and it's not that unusual to have half of the people going, "I'm not really sure what apologetics is." God bless those people for showing up anyway! That's good! But let me take the mystery away. Unfortunately, it's an old, archaic term. It's a solid, biblical term, but it's old. It's morphed over time, so that people think - *what? I'm going to learn how to apologize for being a follower of Jesus? I don't get it. What's that about?*

No – apologetics simply means **offering reasons for faith**. The great apologetics verse would be 1 Peter 3:15 – "Be prepared always to give an answer, a reason for the hope that you have, but do so with gentleness and respect." That's what apologetics is about. It's not about being smarter than the other guy, or winning arguments or anything like that.

It's a very pastoral enterprise answering people's questions. Some people really hope that Christianity is true, but they can't commit to it. I was like that as a young man. I remember going, "Naa, it sounds interesting, but you know, it couldn't possibly be true." It turns out Christianity IS true, and all of the evidence backs it up. All the facts of the universe, both seen and unseen, back up Christianity. Because it turns out it's true. There really is a God who created all of this, so that we might have a love relationship. Then we shook our fist at God and went our own way, and God provided a way back through His Son, Jesus Christ. His death on a cross AND His coming back from the dead. This is a true story. It's a true story of all that ever was, is or will be. We're in possession of it.

So we need to be able to articulate that, and answer some basic questions about it. You would be surprised how much power your personal Christian witness is, with being able to answer some questions in a confident, accurate manner. It really is amazing what takes place. The Spirit moves.

The Holy Spirit really loves sharp tools in the old tool box. We want you to be sharper tools. So that's what the conference is all about. Don't miss it. We're bringing in some of the finest thinkers and communicators. These guys are top-flight in terms of their ability to communicate in an interesting and fun way.

One of the speakers is Tim Muehlhoff, for example. Tim Muehlhoff is a professor of Communications at Biola University. He is a very thoughtful Christian apologist also. He is the guy – when he speaks in chapel for the undergraduate students at Biola, there is a line around the campus, waiting to get into the gym to get a really good seat. He is that good. You're going to love hearing guys like Tim Muehlhoff and Melissa Travis and Alan Schlemmon and Don Hester and Phil Ward and others. It's going to be a great time dealing with key issues, so be sure to check it out.

Just to get your appetite whetted, I did bring some resources. These (a few books) are recommended for you. Lee Strobel, *The Case for Grace*, probably his best book yet. He turns his journalistic skills toward telling the stories of some dramatic transformations in people's lives. It's a compelling book, hard to put down. And a book I wrote called *Five Sacred Crossings*, a novel, a fast-paced mystery story that I think you'll enjoy. I'm an academic person and I've written academic books, but nobody reads those. So I wrote a novel and it's still going strong. It includes how Christianity is set apart from all the other world religions. Let this be a little bit of encouragement to those of you who have some creative juices. You love to write and you'd like to write something, or a musician or visual artist – we need you. We need you to carry these important messages to the general public in intriguing modes of communication. Those of us in the scholarly realm, we provide a lot of raw material, but people aren't going to read our books. They will read the books you write and watch the movies you make that include some of these great ideas. So be encouraged if you have creative juices.

Another book called *World Religions and Cults, 101* does go along with the theme of the conference. We'll be talking about Islam, and the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. This also covers Hinduism and Buddhism as well. You know, those religions you've heard of, but wonder what they are really about. This is a wonderful first step into those religions, to help you understand something about them and be better informed when they knock on your door.

And also a DVD of a debate of the existence of God that took place at Biola University. We got our best debater, William Lane Craig, who is one of our faculty members, a brilliant Christian philosopher and probably one of the best debaters we have on our team. We set him up to debate Christopher Hitchens. Hitchens, in his day, was the top atheist debater. So smart and clever and funny and interesting. Everyone was a little bit afraid to debate him. So we finally set this up. William Lane Craig against Christopher Hitchens. Packed gymnasium. HD cameras rolling. Streaming on-line. How did it turn out? Well, you only have to read the atheist blogs to find out how it turned out. The atheist blogs were saying things like, "Oh my gosh! What happened? Christopher Hitchens was spanked like an errant school

child.” Therefore, I carry a box of these around in my trunk, to have handy to hand out to every atheist or agnostic I bump into at the little league game, at the post office, and so on. They get excited because we actually put Hitchens’ name first. So they see that and assume it’s going to be really good.

These resources will be available today and at the conference. But enough commercial.

It’s good to be with you. By the way, this church really has something wonderful going on. I go to a lot of churches, so I can tell when I walk into a place – there is a spirit here that is remarkable. Keep up the great work. In fact, set your vision much bigger. You guys can handle it. You have something going here. You are going to make a big ruckus worldwide. (applause). I totally expect that.

So we’re having an apologetics conference and I run an apologetics program, so I bet you won’t be surprised if I have an apologetics core to my message. It really is this: How in the Bible does God demonstrate (an important apologetic tool) demonstrate His identity and the truth of His word? How does He do that? How often does it happen? Is it a biblical theme?

I’m here to say, yes it is a biblical theme. In fact, I had a little exercise one time: reading from Genesis through Revelation (in my comfortable reading chair at home) and looking with special attention focused on how God demonstrates His identity and the truth of His word constantly. It is a major biblical theme. He loves to show us that it’s true. He wants us to know that these things are true. That’s basically what apologetics does. It offers reasons for faith, so that people can have their questions answered and move closer to the cross with good faith and good thinking. God loves to demonstrate His identity and the truth of His word.

Now, it’s very difficult to pick out an example to demonstrate this, because there are so many wonderful examples in the Old Testament alone. It’s really hard, so let me do some hard editing and we’ll bring it down to one solid Old Testament example that I love the most. This is just such a wonderful example. I couldn’t pass this one up, even though there are so many. This has to do with 1 Kings 18. Elijah squaring off against the prophets of Baal. You probably know this story well. This is quite dramatic. I love Elijah, by the way. He is a great prophet. He’s not a writing prophet like Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Isaiah. He is a doing prophet. You know, people wrote down stuff about him because he is such a bizarre character. I always picture him having hair going out like this, maybe one eye bulging out, and you know, wearing ragged clothes. He has a sword on, for goodness sake! He is marching around the desert, eating bugs and things. Could you imagine when he wandered into town? The junior high kids would hide behind the bushes and throw rocks at him, and he would snarl at them. He was a great figure. A bit on the crazy side, I’m sure.

So get this – he decides to give Ahab, who had gone a very bad direction, a very bad time. In fact, let me set this up, starting in 1 Kings 16:29-33 and following. This is the set-up.

<sup>29</sup> In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria over Israel twenty-two years. <sup>30</sup> Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him. <sup>31</sup> He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. <sup>32</sup> He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. <sup>33</sup> Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him.

Oh, my goodness! He did more to arouse the anger of the Lord than did all the kings of Israel before him!

So this is a huge offense to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There were so many people falling away and following foreign gods, exactly the thing they were not supposed to do. It was on the top of the list of things they were not supposed to do. It was a huge offense to the God of Israel. This is obviously going to bother a prophet of God like Eljah.

So in chapter, 18, the story continues. (18:16-

<sup>16</sup> So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. <sup>17</sup> When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?"

<sup>18</sup> "I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the LORD's commands and have followed the Baals. <sup>19</sup> Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

So it's going to be 850 against Elijah. I love the odds of that.

<sup>20</sup> So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel.

<sup>21</sup> Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him."

I love that stark contrast. No more middle ground, people. Quit wandering around in some spiritual fog. If Yahweh is God, you have to serve Him and pay attention to Him. If Baal is God, go follow him. I love that. We don't see that kind of stark contrast very often.

So you know what happen next. Elijah lays down the rules of this little contest. They all march up Mt. Carmel. The prophets of Baal and Asherah, all 850 of them, they're going to go first. So they have a nice crowd. They build a lovely altar there, and put a nice slab of meat on top. Very attractive, I might add. I think Baal will really go for this. So. They go first. It's early in the morning, the cool of the day. They begin calling out to Baal to send fire from heaven to consume the offering, proving that he is the one and only true deity. So they start chanting and dancing. Calling out to Baal. (he is dancing). They're working it. Feeling good. The sun is getting higher in the sky. Now, there are 850 of them so they can send in substitutes occasionally. They're dancing and chanting. Nothing is happening. It has been a few hours now. They're working up a sweat. It's hot. Flies are now gathering on the meat. That's the only thing happening. They're working hard.

Elijah is over here, watching all this. I always picture him, sitting in like one of those recliner lawn chairs. He has his feet up. Drinking a glass of iced tea with a little umbrella in it. He occasionally moves the glass to yell to them, "Hey! Shout louder! Your god is probably asleep! Or louder, he's probably on the toilet! Heh Heh." I kid you not – that's the kind of raucous language we find in the text.

So they are looking at Elijah, dancing harder. Working it. Working up a sweat. Nothing is happening. Time is running out. The text says, they got a little desperate. They pulled out swords and spears and start cutting themselves. Maybe showing Baal a little blood will get things going. So you can imagine, they're bleeding, dancing, chanting. Pretty soon, they start collapsing. A pile of prophets here. Finally, BUZZ! Time's up. It's over. They had their shot.

So it's Elijah's turn. He builds a lovely altar. Puts a nice slab of meat on it. He has some people dig a trench around the altar! People came in and poured buckets of water over the meat and it ran down and filled up the trench.

(I was teaching this story to some fourth graders one time and I asked, "Why do you think the prophet Elijah had somebody bring in buckets of water to pour over the meat?" One kid immediately raised his hand and I called on him. He said, "Uh, to make gravy?" That was a keeper.)

So the water runs down, filling up the trench. Elijah says a prayer. Here is the prayer he said (18:36-37)

"Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. 37 Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."

I always picture him after the prayer. He kinda winks at God. WHOOSH! Down comes fire from heaven. It licks up the offering, laps up the water in the trench. Probably takes out a couple of the prophets of Baal for good measure! It's a definitive demonstration! Yahweh is God and Baal is not. There is no confusion here.

Now, could you imagine that after this – all of Israel is watching this, you know, (not every single person, but representatives of every tribe were there), and could you imagine them walking away from this little exercise going, "Huh! Religion is a tricky thing. Who could really know about that stuff? It's all about what goes on inside you. You either believe that stuff, or you don't. You know, that's what religion is really all about." NO! That's not what they were doing at all! They were running to caves to hide! Because they knew that Yahweh was real and He was a little bit mad at the situation.

So, definitive demonstration. God loves to demonstrate His identity and the truth of His word. There are so many wonderful Old Testament illustrations of this. He wants people to know in a definitive manner.

When you roll into the New Testament, it's a whole new ball game. You think it's good in the Old Testament, by the time you get to the New, it's almost over the top. I remember as a young man, reading the New Testament going, "Wow! These guys are really obsessed with the idea that this really happened." Yeah.

Here are some examples:

- 2 Peter 1:16 – Peter writes: "For we did not follow cleverly devised stories [the Greek word is actually "myths"] when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty."
- John takes it a bit further (1 John 1:1) "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life."

It's as if these apostles want to grab the people they're writing to and shake them! No! Don't you make a mistake even for a second that this was some weird feeling or mystical dream or some ecstatic experience! No! We saw Him! We heard Him! We touched Him. This is what we're talking about. It's real! They are obsessed with it.

By the way, you don't find anything like this in religious texts from the other great world religions. You just don't find this kind of language. In fact, let me demonstrate this for you by reading the writing of another apostle who was kind of obsessed with this idea. In fact I consider this passage to be the strangest passage in all of religious literature. My doctoral work is in religious studies, for goodness sake, so I have to tell you, I study all the great world religions. So this one stands out as something so

odd, I say it's the strangest passage ever in major religious literature. It's in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul writes this:

<sup>12</sup> But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup> If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. <sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is **useless and so is your faith**. <sup>15</sup> More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is **futile; you are still in your sins**. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. <sup>19</sup> If only for this life we have hope in Christ, **we are of all people most to be pitied**.

Wow. The apostle Paul basically set Christianity up for a huge test: if Jesus did not come back from the dead, if there is no good reason to believe Jesus came back from the dead, if it's only about our feelings – then guess what! The apostle Paul is encouraging us all to go do something else, for goodness sake! Because we're wasting our time here.

Wow! You don't find things like that in other great religious literature. These people not only thought this really happened – they knew it happened. They knew it. They wanted to make sure they communicated that very, very clearly. That Christianity is about knowledge. It's not about blind leaping.

Most people think – if they find out you're a religious person, they think (I guarantee – this is in the cultural water we drink) if they find out you're a religious person, they basically think, *Oh, well, then you have simply, blindly believed something. What you've done is, you've gone out to the edge of the religious abyss, you've closed your eyes, and you've leapt blindly into it. EH! Good for you. That meets your needs.* You know? Maybe sometime you've been at work and you left a Bible out on your desk. (Heaven forbid!) And some skeptical coworker comes by, sees the Bible sitting there, and he says, (condescendingly) "A Bible! Oh! I didn't know you were a religious person! Heh, heh! You know what – good for you, good for you." (You know what they mean by "good for you." They're like – you need that kind of thing. You need that blind leaping aspect of life. Now, me, I'm more of a science guy. But you, you must need your fairies, your leprechauns, your unicorns. Whatever. You need them to get by. I totally get it. Good for you.) ARGHH! It drives me nuts.

Here is another example. Here is a definition of faith that is just mind-cringing. Check this out. It comes from an engineering professor at the University of Southern California. He wrote an editorial piece for the Los Angeles Times. I printed it out. I carry it around. He felt obligated to help us, who are religious people, to understand what faith is all about. Here's an atheist skeptic from the engineering department at USC, helping us to understand faith. Here is what he thinks faith is. Ready for this? "Faith is unwarranted belief. Faith is belief without evidence or despite evidence to the contrary. Faith occurs when a person believes something is true, even though he suspects it is false. It takes large doses of such faith to support the very existence of casinos, psychic hotlines, astrology columns, mall Santas, and most organized religions."

Is that what we signed up for?! For goodness sake! This is tragic. What he is really saying here is, faith equals blind leaping. Right? Faith equals blind leaping. Another way to put it is: faith has no knowledge. No knowledge. Knowledge and faith are opposites.

Is that how it works? I have to tell you, that is not the biblical picture of faith. Do you know what faith is, in the scriptures? It's trust. That's what it is. *I trust Jesus for my salvation. I think He is the only way, so*

*I put my trust in Him.* Now, that has nothing to do with the knowledge base for that trust. I trust Him, but my trust sits on a firm foundation of knowledge. I have excellent reason to believe that He actually existed. That He was killed on a Roman cross and that He came back on the third day. I think that it is historically, a slam-dunk. Listen to this. It's historically a slam-dunk that Jesus was alive at Point A, dead at Point B, and alive again at Point C. I think we can know that. The evidence is clear and it is compelling.

During the conference, I'll give an hour presentation on the evidence for the resurrection. It will blow your mind, because I know you've never heard it before. (You might say, wait a minute, I've read *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* – but no, you haven't heard this!) We've come a long way from that point, and we can even make our case in the most dire situations on secular university campuses.

So the resurrection of Jesus is the best-attested fact of the ancient world. It really happened. That's why I like to use the word "knowledge" about it. Not just some spiritual knowledge. I'm talking about objective, investigative knowledge. To know that Jesus came back from the dead. That's the kind of faith we're talking about. It's trusting a God, and I have excellent reasons to believe He exists, and that Jesus is His unique Son and the Savior of humankind.

So this has nothing to do with blind leaping. Christianity invites people to walk into it with their eyes wide open, asking hard questions all the way.

Jesus was a big fan of demonstration. Right? He was a big fan. In fact, along the resurrection line, He said to some skeptics one time (He was being cornered by the Jewish teachers of the Law. He'd walk through town and they'd go, "Hey, Jesus! Show us a sign!" What they meant by "a sign" was, show us some demonstration so that we will know that You are the Messiah. Now, how did Jesus respond? I'll paraphrase. He said, "I'm not going to show a sign to a bunch of rascals like you. Except for one sign. Tear down this temple and I will raise it up again in three days." John tells us He was talking about the temple of His body. The resurrection of Jesus was going to be the great sign for that generation and for ours. We have the evidence to demonstrate this. Make sure to come to the conference and hear it. It's vital! If Jesus actually conquered death for us, and we're all going to die, it seems to me, we should all have a really strong argument for the resurrection of Jesus.

The scriptures are brilliant, but they come under so much assault. We need to be able to support them in vital ways. And we have that! We have that. In some ways, we're like Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz*. We have this knowledge base. She had the ruby slippers but she just needed to know how to knock them together three times. We have a knowledge base that we can make work for us too.

Jesus was a big fan of demonstration. My favorite example of Jesus demonstrating the truth of His identity and the truth of His word, is in Mark 2:1-12. I know this section very well. Jesus is coming to Capernaum. This is a big deal, because nothing happens in Capernaum. There are not concert halls or sport stadiums or video games or multi-screen movie theaters. There is nothing! So when a guy like Jesus is coming to town, known to be a spell-binding, itinerant preacher, and the guy who can cast out demons, heal people, and multiply loaves and fishes – this is a big deal. I guarantee it. You get there early to get a good seat.

So that's the set up in Mark 2. Jesus is coming to Capernaum. It says Jesus is teaching in a home, jammed full. There are people standing out in the street, craning their necks, hoping to hear what's going on inside. So it sets the scene up, then it shifts focus a little bit, doesn't it. It takes us to look at four guys. I love these guys. There are probably guys like this all over this room. I love these guys. They are going to go hear Jesus, but they go – wait a minute! Let's get our friend, the paralytic. Rumor

has it, Jesus is going to heal people. So I love the compassion they have. So they go get this guy. They put him onto a mat. He is paralyzed, so they have to carry him. They carry him to where Jesus is, but they go – oh! They can't get near the place. But here's what I love about these guys. They are undaunted. They find a way to get the guy up onto the roof! Now, the text doesn't say how they did that, but I'm imagining two throwers and two catchers! (laughter) Or maybe some sort of rope and pulley system. You know? Anyway, they get this fellow up onto the roof. Then they start to dig through the tiles on the roof. That's how they're going to get him inside! They are pulling up tiles. They're digging through. Imagining the scene inside, as the ceiling is shaking. Dust falling. Maybe some leaves. Suddenly, a beam of light breaks through. It hits all the dust in the air. The people are thinking, wow! I'm so glad I got here early! The hole gets bigger. Finally, a head pops through the ceiling. The hole gets even bigger. Dust is starting to choke the place. Light pouring in, blinding some of the people. As if this was not crazy enough, moments later, this hole in the ceiling begins to give birth! This poor man, probably wrapped in a mat with ropes around him, they're stuffing him through that hole! He might be spinning around. He lands, a cloud of dust flies up. People are amazed. It's mayhem! It takes a moment. The dust begins to settle and as it does, you can see the four guys peeking through at the top. As it settles, everyone is leaning forward wondering what Jesus will say. What does He say? When the dust clears, Jesus points to the man in front of Him and says, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

I think you all have the same kind of look on your faces as the people there probably did. Kind of like (amazement, bewilderment). They're thinking, *Can He do that?*

Now, it says that there were some Jewish teachers of the Law in the back of the room. They were thinking *wait a minute! Who can forgive sins but God alone!?* But everyone is bewildered. They are not leaping to their feet, happy that this man's sins are forgiven. Isn't God good? – Why were they not doing that? Because, if sins were actually being forgiven, that is an invisible, spiritual act. Right? There is no LED light on your forehead that blinks when your sins are forgiven. You can't see it. There's nothing like that. You can't go to the doctor and have the state of your sins assessed physically. Like there is some probe that reads the state of your sins. There is nothing like that! You have to simply trust the person who is saying that your sins are forgiven. So Jesus says, "Son, your sins are forgiven." But the people are not leaping to their feet all happy about this.

Another example. Say the door opens in the back of the auditorium here, and in walks a tall man with a white robe on. He has a long beard. A hat. A staff. Sandals. He comes in (He looks like Gandolf, from the *Lord of the Rings*.) Maybe he has some disciples following him. He walks down front here. (By the way, this is completely plausible in Los Angeles. If I tell this story in Los Angeles, everyone would go, yeah, I saw that last week.) But the guy comes down and walks up here and pushes me aside with a very important message. He says, "Lo!" (that's what religious guys say). Or maybe, "Behold!" Or maybe even, "Lo and behold!" He says to us, "My children, your sins are forgiven." Now. Why aren't you inclined to leap to your feet and go *YAY! Gandolf has forgiven our sins! What a happy day!* Why aren't you inclined to do that? Well, although there are a lot of theatrics surrounding it, and it's great fun and all and you're glad you got there early to see it – you don't know if Gandolf can forgive your sins.

Well, Jesus was in that room. He saw the looks on their faces when He said, "Son your sins are forgiven." Just a neutral look on their face. It led Jesus to take the next step. Here is it. The crescendo of this particular gospel narrative. Here's the crescendo: Jesus says, "This so that you will know, that you will KNOW that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." Maybe, for the first time in his life, the guy gets to his feet. He grabs his mat and starts to walk out. People clear out, making way for this guy. The text in Greek in this chapter of Mark says, in the strongest words in that language, "They were astonished!" They had never seen anything like this ever! Everyone in that room had excellent reason to believe that Jesus could actually forgive sins, even though it was an invisible,

spiritual act. Because He linked it tightly with a demonstrative miracle – right before their eyes. He wants us to KNOW.

He wants us to know through miraculous events, right before our eyes. He wants us to know on the basis of transformed lives. Many of which sit in this room today. There are tremendous testimonies of the power of God, His identity and the power of His word – based on your experience. He gives us reasons to offer to people, through apologetics. Offering reasons to show that Jesus was a real historical figure, killed on a Roman cross. That He did indeed come back from the grave on the third day, exactly as the text says. The New Testament text is reliable. God really exists. We have a solution to the problem of evil. And so on. All of these things, there are wonderful demonstrations of the truth, of Christianity, pointing to the truth of His word.

That's why we're having an apologetics conference! We want to equip you to be able to offer up reasons for faith. To demonstrate the identity of God and the truth of His word. So please join us next week.

Let me close with a word of prayer.

*Heavenly Father, our great King. What a joy it is to serve you. What a joy it is to know that You didn't leave us stranded in our own time, without a witness. You left us a tremendous trail of evidence back through history, testifying to what You did on our behalf. I pray that we will take that very seriously. That You would fill us with Your Spirit. Give us great vision to spread your word. To live big for You. I pray for this wonderful congregation here in Brentwood, Lord, that You would grow them. That You would give them a tremendous vision for worldwide impact, that this church would play a role in one of the greatest revivals in human history that will emanate out of this place and join with other important Christian bodies. Father, bless this church. You said in John 15 – if we abide in You and Your word abides in us, we can ask for anything. That's what I ask for this church, Father, that You pour out Your Spirit and give them a vision for big things in the Kingdom, and that they would play a role in the greatest revival we've ever seen in human history. In Jesus' name, Amen.*