Craig Groeschel: It's amazing that this weekend with literally millions and millions of other Jesus followers and hundreds of thousands of churches all over the globe, we gather together to celebrate the greatest event in the history of the world that three days after the death of Jesus, the stone was rolled away, the tomb was empty, Christ was not there, He has risen from the dead. Because of that, we gather together to celebrate the goodness of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I want to welcome everybody.

> Also, it's a very special day for our church because as of today, we are launching the 25th LifeChurch. We are collection of community churches in seven different states. As of today, on a snowy weekend, in the greatest Kansas City area in Overland Park, would you join me in welcoming the newest LifeChurch location in Overland Park, Kansas. We welcome all of you. We are so thankful to have you joining us in the greater Kansas City area.

Next week, we're launching a brand new message series. It's called Love like Jesus. I tell you we're starting a new series because that's the best way to bring someone so they can get in on the ground floor. What I want to do today is I want to talk about one of the big questions in life. In fact, at the end of our life, there is no question bigger than this, what does it take to be made right with God? What does it take to be made right with God?

If you ask that question today, you're going to get all sorts of different answers. You have to admit no matter what you believe, whatever your spiritual background is, maybe you don't even have much of a spiritual background, but we live today in what I would call a very spirituality pluralistic society. In other words, tolerance is a really high value and it's very common today for many people to believe things like this. All roads really lead to God. It doesn't really matter what you believe as long as you're sincere. All world religions are essentially the same anyway.

In fact, when I was going to seminary, I commuted with two different people and it was interesting, the different beliefs as we're going to seminary to start to become ministers in our own different fields. I actually studied with this one lady and she believed that she was reincarnated. I didn't. We'd have this really heated and fun discussions. We liked each other and respected each other but disagreed. She would say, "Whatever you love in this life is evidence of what you once were in a previous life." I'd say, "What do you love" She said, "I love trees and I love France." She was convinced that she was reincarnated and she was once a tree in France.

The other guy in the car, he was going to joke with her just to have a little fun. He said, "Now, let me understand this right. Whatever I love, that's what I once was?" She said, "Yes." He said, "Whatever I love, that's what I once was." He said, "I was a bunch of women in a previous life because I love women." That's what he said. She was trying to get me to talk about what I was, and I said, "I wasn't reincarnated and such." She said, "What if you were?" I said, "I wasn't." She said, "What if you were?" I said, "I wasn't." She said, "What if you were?" I said, "I wasn't." I said, "User a tree in a France. I was a dog in France. I lived close to your tree." Anyway, we were friends but we disagreed.

All different beliefs about God. The interesting thing to me is as soon as someone dies, a lot of people don't think about God or eternal life, as soon as someone dies, everyone starts to think about it. We tend to think that we're indestructible. Then, one day, we recognize we're not. As soon as someone dies, no matter what, almost everyone starts to have what I call a feel-good theology. It doesn't matter how they were raised, it doesn't matter what they believe, they start to say something like, "Thankfully, she's not suffering anymore. He's gone on to a better place. Now, he's an angel in heaven," or something like that.

Then, they say something that feels good. "Now, grandma is in a better place looking down on us. Grandma is in a better place looking down on us. Grandma is in a better place looking down on us." I don't know about you, but just to be honest, there's at least three times a day I don't' want grandma looking down on me from anywhere, just saying.

How is it that we're made right with God? It's probably no secret, I am a follower of Jesus. What's really interesting to me is that in the world today, you can talk about spiritual things all day long and it's really not controversial. How many of you would agree with that? You can say you have a higher power, higher being, God, spirituality, and it's not controversial. When does it get controversial in our world today? You bring up the name of Jesus and all of a sudden, it gets really controversial which is interesting because hardly anybody debates the existence of Jesus. Did you know that? There's almost nobody, no rational-thinking person is going to say, "There was no historical figure named Jesus." People accept generally that yes, someone named Jesus lived.

What's also interesting to me is that people don't really dislike His teaching. It's hard if you're any of the moral normal person to dislike when Jesus taught help the poor, love those that others overlook, forgive people. They don't debate the teaching of Jesus. They don't debate the existence of Jesus. Why is it that everybody gets wigged down about Jesus? I think it's probably because of the exclusive claim of Jesus. We live in a very inclusive world, all belief should be treated equally, nobody should be left out, all roads should lead God, all world religions are basically the same, and Jesus diametrically opposes that mindset when He says that He is the only way. It's the exclusive claim of Jesus.

In fact, in John 14:6, this is exactly what Jesus says. Thomas says, "Where are you going? I don't know where we're going." Jesus answered him, and He said, "I am the ..." What? Let's say it aloud. He said, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life." Then, Jesus says, "No one comes to the Father except ..." what? "Except through Me." In this very inclusive world of religious pluralism, Jesus makes an exclusive claim that He is the only way. A lot of people still want to say, "All roads lead to God. All religions are the same."

What I want to do today is let's just think for a moment together and recognize, there may be some good things in a lot of different world religions but we have to

acknowledge, they're not anywhere close to being the same. In fact, I give you just a real quick overview of some of the major world religions, two minutes or less, and then we'll talk a little bit more about Jesus. Let's look briefly and recognize all world religions are not the same.

We'll start with Buddhism. Buddhists will believe there is no god, no type of final existence. A Buddhist is going to believe in countless rebirths and eventually, you hope to end the cycle. You contrast that with Hinduism and a Hindu is going to believe in a god, an impersonal god that is approached through deities, or statues, or idols. You take these first two, Buddhism and Hinduism, they offer no forgiveness of sins, no supernatural help, only karma. In other words, if you cut someone of the road, someone else is going to cut you off because baby, you deserve it. That's what this would believe.

You contrast that with a Muslim who is going to worship a personal God named Allah. A Muslim has no secondary gods. There's a total ban on idles. Your standing with God is based on your religious good works and effort. You contrast that with new age. There is no type of God. Your goal is to be one with the cosmos or one with the universe. Contrast that with someone who's a Jesus follower who believes in a personal God who love His people so much that He became like them in the person of Jesus, lived without sin, died for the sins of the world on a cross, rose again, and people are made right with God not by going through deities, or idols, or religious performers but by faith in God's Son, Jesus, alone.

Can we not acknowledge that although there may be good and positive things in many different religions, they're absolutely and completely not the same? Fair enough? Here is what I want you to do today, it's really simple, I am going to ask you to simply consider Jesus with me. No matter what your background is, consider Jesus. Let me be real clear, I am not asking you to consider our church. I am not asking you to consider a denomination.

I am not asking you to consider Christians because can we agree, some of them can be pretty screwy? Don't point at them right now. Don't say Easter. Don't make them feel about, "All I'm saying," whatever. One of them is real normal and like, "I'd like to hang out with that other," and the other one is narrow-minded, bigger than hateful, judgmental, and has bad hair. Where did you come from? I am not asking you to consider even Christians. I am not even asking you to consider me because tragically, I'd let you down. I'd love to be the perfect example for you but I am simply not the perfect example.

All I'm going to ask you to do is consider Jesus, what He claims, what other people said that He did, what He actually did, and just look at Him, and see what happens. Consider Jesus, three aspects of His life. The first one, if you want to jot down in your notes is this, consider the ministry of Jesus. Just consider who He came for and how He treated them, the ministry of Jesus.

In fact, I want to look just for a moment at Mark's Gospel, Mark 2:16-17 which

essentially tells us why Jesus came. I love this. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw Jesus eating with the sinners and tax collectors, Jesus was hanging out with those religion rejected, with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked His disciples, "Why does He eat with tax collectors and sinners?" In other words, someone who is religious shouldn't eat with that type of a person. On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It's not the healthy who need a doctor," but who needs a doctor? He said, "The sick." Jesus said this, he said, "I have not come to call the righteous," but who did Jesus come to call? He came to call the sinners.

I love this with all of my heart. Jesus did not come for those who have it all together. Jesus came for people like me who needed help, and needed grace, and needed mercy. Jesus actually came for those that religion rejected. When everyone else said, "We're too good for them. They're not good enough for us. They're not clean enough, not righteous enough, not holy enough," that's exactly who Jesus came for. Jesus loved those that everyone else despise. He welcomed those that people turned away. Jesus didn't come for those who are perfect. If you're absolutely perfect, you just keep on shining your halos, sitting there like you got it altogether, and recognize Jesus came for people like me.

Not only did he come for sinners but when you look at the ministry of Jesus, you will be blown away by the miracles of Jesus. What did this guy do? By the power of God, Jesus opened blind eyes. He healed deaf ears. He calls the mute to speak. Jesus multiplied a few loaves and fishes to feed thousands and thousands of people. Jesus would cast demons out of people. Jesus even rose the dead. His very first miracle, Jesus turned water into wine. A miracle which is a real problem to many of my Southern Baptists friends today. Wine, nonalcoholic wine. I know it is in the original language. It's got to be. It's got to be.

What's so funny to me about the miracles Jesus is that His detractors did not debate the validity of His miracles. They just wanted Him to stop. By what power is He doing this? No one said he didn't really raise the dead. They saw it. Consider the ministry of Jesus. What's crazy is many of you, you are a direct result, you, there are literally thousands of you at churches across our country and beyond, you are a direct result. You are a miracle because of the ministry of Jesus.

In fact, if we had time, there are literally thousands upon thousands upon thousands of you who could say, "This is who I was and who I am now. This is the way I was and I'm not that way anymore. I was a mess and I've been transformed. I was addicted and now, I'm free. I was full of hatred and now, my heart is full of love and grace." You are different because of the perfect work of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Consider the ministry of Jesus.

In fact, I want to share with you just three of the thousands upon thousands of stories from our church. Just three stories and show you some pictures of these great people. Now, the first one is from our South Oklahoma City LifeChurch. This is Teddy and Tanya. Unfortunately, and Teddy gives this full permission to tell this story. He tells it himself, was unfaithful multiple times to his wife. If you've endured

that there's not much else that would shake a marriage more than that, and their marriage was hanging by a thread.

Thankfully, they decided to turn towards Jesus and the church, and reached out to some people and said, "We need some help." Instead of being turned away as often is the case, they're accepted, loved, and embraced, and their lives slowly started to be changed by the grace of Jesus. Now, their marriage is so solid, so strong. This couple serves every weekend. Live Kids, they serve on the hosting. They lead a small group. This couple's marriage was barely making it. Now, mentors other couples and helps them get through hard times. If you want to give up a little glory for God and clap on that one, you are welcome to because that is a direct result of Jesus changing lives. Consider the ministry to Jesus.

I want to tell you about Dylan. Dylan is this amazingly cute kid that you want to reach out and hug in the backseat. He is from Owasso, Oklahoma LifeChurch. Dylan was diagnosed with a confirmed rare disease. They put him on an ambulance and got him as quickly as they could down to Forth Worth. If you'll notice, the female paramedic on the right, I want to come back and tell you something about her. This kid's life is in grave danger. Everyone is afraid. Medical reports confirmed. The doctors in Fort Worth see them. They're confirmed. "Get him here and get him here now."

The pastor at the LifeChurch in Oklahoma called the pastor of LifeChurch in Fort Worth and said, "They're coming. Can you receive them? Can you help them? Can you get them a place to stay? Can you do everything for them? Can you pray?" There were two churches praying for this little boy. Two churches, thousands of people praying for Dylan, confirmed dangerous disease, going down to see his specialist.

Something happened in the ambulance ride between Owasso, Oklahoma and Fort Worth, Texas because when they got to the specialist in Fort Worth, Texas, they looked at the original report and they looked at the new report, and the new report showed no sign of the disease whatsoever. On a three-and-a-half-hour ride, that which was there miraculously disappeared.

I told you about the female paramedic. She was so moved by this family and by their faith that she ended up going to their church. On the first weekend that she walked in happened to be the weekend that the pastor told the story about the ride, and she didn't even know that the boy had been healed, and she heard it at her first time there that little Dylan had been healed. She gave her life to Christ. Her son gave his life to Christ. They've been completely baptized, transformed, and Dylan, the little boy, said, "You know what? I thought I was going to die but it was absolutely worth it. I would go through it all over again to see that family come to know Jesus." That is a miracle by the ministry of Jesus Christ. Consider the ministry of Jesus.

Let me tell you about Holston. Holston was a self-proclaimed atheist. Holston did

Holston just dove in and he liked where the church is making a difference. He started serving, helping the community, but he helped build projects for four weeks at the church because he's good with his hands. Then, on week number four, last summer in a series that happened to be called Christian Atheist, the pastor said, "If you would like to follow Jesus, would you raise your hand?" Holston couldn't just raise his hand, you see he stood up publicly and declared before everybody, "I am surrendering my life to Christ." Weeks later, he was baptized. There he is right in the middle picture transformed by Jesus. Consider the ministry of Jesus.

If I can be real transparent with you, I am a miracle by the ministry of Jesus. I am a different person. Before, I was a follower of Jesus. Listen to me. I lied, and lied, and lied, and lied, and lied. I lied so much, I forgot what the truth was. I stole. I was arrested for shoplifting the time I got caught. I parted my brains out until I didn't know which way was up. One night, I beer bonged the six pack of beer. Beer bonged six of them. Then, drank a little bottle of Seagram Seven. Then, went out partying. See, that's how we did it back in the day.

I got so out of control that my fraternity brothers brought me back and dumped me in the room and said, "Your night is over." I remember thinking, "No, no, my night is not over. I am going to the girls' dorm," because that's what you do when your fraternity brothers tell you night is over, and you're still drink, and you don't believe. I was running to the girls' dorm. The last thing I remember is really crazy. I remember running over there thinking to myself, "Wow, I can't even feel my legs hitting the ground. This is so cool."

Next thing I remember waking up about 11am the next day, had overslept practice somehow in my room, and I found out that I passed out with my head hanging over the edge, the curb of a very major street. Thankfully, some guys from another fraternity were kind enough to pick me up and dump me in my room after that. I woke up and realized I have a real problem. I tried to stop the partying. I couldn't stop. I started praying and didn't really even know how to pray.

One night, after spending some time with some people, I went out to this little softball field all alone, hurting and scared to death. I melt down in that softball field one person, and I called out to Jesus. When I stood up, I was absolutely and completely a different person. I was not like a little bit better version of me, I was a new person. The old guy was done. I was a new creation in Christ Jesus.

That very same week, my big brother in the fraternity who was wilder than I was, he was out partying in California, and someone gave him this piece of paper that explained the Gospel. It's called the Track. I don't know but it's a Track. He's so moved, and he was hurting, and he was afraid. He read about Jesus. Then, he prayed this prayer. I didn't know that happened the very same week I did this.

He was at a party, and I was at a party. He came back, and I'm like, "Bro, I got something to tell you." He goes, "I got something to tell you." I said, "What I'm going to tell you is bigger." He said, "No, I don't think so." I said, "I'm going first. I got just to tell you. I don't know how to say this but I think I got to give my life to God." He went, "No bleeping way." I am not going to tell you what the bleep was but I bleeped it for a reason. He said, "Me too. I did this. No way." We hugged each other. He said, "Let's go get drunk to celebrate." That's exactly what we did. We went and got blasted, bliss, to celebrate our decision to follow Jesus.

Now, just for the record, if you decide to follow Jesus today, I am not advocating you go and get wasted high, drunk, or stoned. It's not what I'm saying. We didn't know any better but that's where we were. That's what we did. We had no idea. I stand before you today not as a person who's decided to follow God as a bit different. I am a person today who is a new creation in Christ Jesus. The old is gone. The new has come. I have been transformed by the power and the presence of God. I am not who I was. Consider it. Consider the ministry of Jesus.

The second thing if you're taking notes is this, consider the resurrection of Jesus. Why does the resurrection matter? You see, Jesus was miraculously conceived. He was born of a virgin. He did not inherit the sin nature of an earthly father. He was completely without sin. Jesus lived the perfect life for us. On the cross, he became sinned for us. He suffered horribly. While the creation was mocking the Creator, as they spit on Him, and hurled insults at Him, and beat Him beyond recognition, on the cross, Jesus looked up to heaven and cried out, "Father, please forgive them for they don't even know what they're doing." What kind of grace is that? What kind is love is that from the cross?

Then, Jesus cries out the victorious cry, "It is finished. Into your hands, I commit my spirit," and He breathes His last and gave His life. The moment He did, the earth went dark. The ground trembled. The Roman centurion who was not a follower of Jesus but saw His love, saw His heart, saw His mercy, saw who He was looked on and said, "I didn't believe before but I believe now. Surely, that man was no ordinary man. Surely, that man was the Son of God."

Just as Jesus had predicted, "I will give my life and three days later, I'll rise from the dead." Three days later, the women went to the tomb where he was buried. The stone was rolled away and He was not there. Peter who had just denied Jesus. "Do you know Him?" "No." "Were you one of His disciples" "No." "You were hanging out with Him." "Not me." Peter was completely transformed because the tomb was empty and preached pastorally on the resurrection.

In Act 3:15, he said this to the religious leaders, he said, "You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead." You killed the author of life but He is not dead anymore. He has risen from the dead. You killed the author of life but God raised Him from the dead." Then, he said, and this is the key, he said, "We are witnesses of this." We are witnesses of this. We are witnesses. We saw Him. We saw Him. That's why these men were willing to give their lives for Jesus they were denying days earlier because they saw the power of the resurrection. The resurrection, it all hinges on the resurrection.

What's so funny to me is some people try to say, "The Roman soldiers stole the body." No, no, no. The Roman soldiers would have loved nothing more than to produce a dead body. Some people say, "The disciples stole the body of Jesus." That's right, these unarmed men overpowered the trained armed Roman soldiers. You still would have had the testimony of the Roman guards who would have sworn that that's what happened. Do you really expect any rational person to believe that eleven average uneducated men devised the greatest scheme in history, pulled it off, kept it a secret all at tremendous personal cause to themselves, and cheated the world to become a better place all at the same time? No. We're witnesses of this. We're witnesses of this.

Ten of the eleven remaining disciples. Judas took his life, there were eleven left. Ten of them died the death of a martyr. Why? Why were they willing to die? Who would die for a lie? They died because they saw it. The only who remained living was John was exiled to the Isle of Patmos and died in his old age alone.

My favorite one is Thomas because Thomas was a lot like me. Thomas was the doubter. Thomas is a lot like some of you. You want to believe but you're not sure and you need a little bit more. Thomas needed a little bit more. He said, "I want to see? Can I see? I want to see. I want to touch." Jesus said, "See, here you can see, you can touch." He needed more. Some of you, you're like that, you need more. Today you're going to get what you need just like Thomas got what he needed.

You know what Thomas the Doubter ended up doing? Thomas the Doubter took the Gospel to India. He became the first evangelist to India. That's how much the doubter believe. When they said, "Thomas, deny your faith and we'll let you live but if you stand by Jesus, we're going to kill you." You know what Thomas the Doubter said? He said, "I will never deny the faith of the one who died and rose again for me. I will stand by him for the rest of life." You know what they did to Thomas? They drove a stake straight through his body. They impaled him. Why? Because he was an eyewitness that the tomb was empty, that Christ was risen from the dead.

The early church was born, 3000 people saved. 2000 years later there are millions of people and hundreds of thousands of churches that placed their faith in the empty tomb. He is not there. He is risen from the dead. Consider Jesus. Consider his ministry. Consider the resurrection.

Then, third thing if you're taking notes is consider the eternal message of Jesus. The eternal message of Jesus. How are we made right with God? How are we made right with God? Romans 3:22 tells us, we are made right with God by doing what? Let's say it loud. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. Say it again, we are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ.

Notice what it doesn't say? It doesn't say we're made right with God by being good enough, by not being bad, by not saying bad words in golf course, by not yelling at our kids in the car, by not getting in a fight with our wife on the way to Easter Church. "Shut up we're going to worship Jesus. Smile, come here, and look like you love it. Glory to God, glory to God. Shut up, wait till we get in the car." Why does that always happen? We just take separate cars. I'm just laughing because it's true.

We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. Here's what Paul said, "We're made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ." This is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. Don't miss this, this is true for everyone who believes. This is true for you if you believe. It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter what you've done. It doesn't matter how bad you've been. It doesn't matter how bad your life is messed up right now. It doesn't matter how many people that you've hurt. It doesn't matter how many times you've sinned. You're not made right with God by you being good enough. You made right with God because Jesus was perfect, and He took the penalty, and paid the price for your sins.

It's a difference between religion and relationship. Don't miss it, Jesus did not come to start a religion. Jesus came to offer us eternal life. Jesus didn't come to start a religion. He came to show us the love of God. Religion is all about how you perform. Relationship is about how Jesus performed. Religion says if you work hard enough, maybe God will love you. Relationships says because God loves me, I want to obey him. Religion is all about what you do, what you do. Relationship tells you Jesus already did it all for you. Consider the eternal message that you're not made right with God by your own good works, but by the grace and the Love of Jesus.

Here's where I stand. Ready? If there is a God who claims to be the Son of God, and says He is the only way to the Father, and He predicts his death, and He predicts His resurrection, and He dies, and He rises again, I'm going with that God. I'm going with that God is like. The heart of God who sends His son not for the healthy but for the sick, not for the righteous but for the sinners. Because of what He did for me, my only reasonable response is, "Jesus, take my whole life. Take my whole life."

Some of you, that's where you are today. You got what you needed. You're considering Jesus, and you're looking at it, and you're saying, "Because of who You are, because of what You did, my only response is to say yes. Take my life. I' give it completely to you." Father, we pray that you would do miracle after miracle today

because of the perfect work of Jesus. All of our churches praying. Some of you are followers of Jesus and you have loved ones that are not, and you want to pray for them today. All of our churches, if you say yes, I am a follower of Jesus and there are people that I know and love, family members, coworkers, close friends whatever it is that don't know the freedom and grace that Jesus offers, and I want to pray for them today. Would you lift up your hands right now, just lift up your hands?

Father, today, we pray for those who need to know Your grace. We ask that You would do whatever it takes to bring them into a place of submission repentance, that they would find true life in Jesus. God, help them to recognize that He came for those who are hurting. He came for the lost and the broken. He came for people like all of us, not to make us religious, but to offer us His life, His goodness, eternal life, grace, to serve You on this earth. We thank you, God, that You'll hear our prayer and do miracle after miracle.

As you keep praying today at all of our churches, there are many of you, you're not a church person. Some of you're a church person. This isn't your first rodeo, this isn't your first Easter, but for you, Jesus has been in your head, He's never been in your heart. It's been more of a religious thing, not a relational thing. Guess what? If that's you today, you're going to let Jesus move 18 inches from your head down into your heart, and you can never be the same again. Others of you, you can't even believe you're in church or watching Church Online. You're like, "Man, the roof hadn't fallen down yet. It's almost done. I think we're going to make it. We're going to make it. We're going to make it," but something is happening to you. You're mysteriously and strangely being drawn toward God.

What is that? That is loving kindness of God. That's His Holy Spirit doing what He does. God is reaching out to you, and He wants you to say yes to his His love. At all of our churches, there are those of you, you're about to become a miracle right now. You look back years from now on this day and say, "Yeah, that Easter weekend, I walked in one person and I walked out somebody different, not a better version of me, but a new version. A new person in Christ. The old is gone. Some of you, you've got the weight of your sin upon you. You feel the guilt. When you confess your sin to God, He forgives your sins. He cleanses you from unrighteousness. You become completely brand new not because you are good enough but because of the perfect work of Jesus.

Consider who He is. Consider what He did when He gave his life just for you. Some of you will say, "That's it. That's not what we need." My response is I give my life back to Him. All of our churches, those who say, "Yes, I need his grace. I need this forgiveness. Today, by faith, I surrender my life to Him." That's your prayer. In all of our churches say, "Yes, I give my life to Him." Lift your hands now, all over the place, and say, "Yes. That's my prayer."

Both hands right here. God bless you, guys. Right back over here in this section as well. Over here, God bless you guys. Others of you way back here toward the back,

say yes. Way back over here, yes Jesus. Over here on the side. Others today right here on this side section, all the way back here, toward the back. Others, I call on His name. You're leaning into it, say yes. Back here on the back, God bless you as well. Church Online, you guys click right below me. Everybody join your voices and pray together.

Pray, Heavenly Father, forgive me of all my sins. I give my life to You. Fill me with Your Spirit so I could follow You and serve You for the rest of my life. My life is not my own. Today, I give it to You. Thank you for new life. Now, you have mine. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Would you all worship big, worship loud? Welcome to those who are born in to God's family today.