

## SERIES: THE CASE FOR CHRIST

### Sermon 3: Embracing the Truth of Christ – Matthew 11:25-30

#### ***[Play Sermon 3 Video Bumper]***

Welcome back for the third week of our series on *The Case for Christ*. *The Case for Christ* movie shows the spiritual journey of a young atheist and investigative reporter, Lee Strobel, who sets out to disprove Christianity and, in his way of thinking at the time, to rescue his wife, Leslie, from her newfound faith in Christ. But, it didn't end in the way he expected. The evidence he found led him to a life-changing encounter with Jesus—and that was only the beginning of Strobel's many experiences of following Christ and talking with others about the truth of the gospel.

Strobel's experiences opened doors for him to talk with all kinds of interesting people—scholars, authors, politicians, celebrities, the president, even the first man on the moon. But Strobel has said that, by far, the most fascinating interview he ever conducted was with a man named Charles Templeton, the most famous spiritual skeptic in Canada. Let me tell you the story:

*It started when Strobel was doing a question-and-answer session at a church in Canada. An atheist reporter stood up and asked what Strobel thought of Charles Templeton's book Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith. Strobel said he'd never heard of the book or Templeton. But Strobel was intrigued by the book's title, so he bought it and read it—and was surprised to find out that Templeton was once a Christian evangelist and the pulpit partner of Billy Graham!*

*In fact, he and Graham were the best of friends in the 1940s and 1950s. Many people thought it was Templeton who would emerge as his generation's biggest evangelist, because he was viewed by some as being more eloquent than Graham. He proclaimed Christ nightly to stadium crowds of up to 30,000 people. But then Templeton went to a liberal seminary and lost his faith. He even tried to talk Graham out of trusting in the Bible, but Graham stood fast and ended up becoming—as we all know—one of history's greatest evangelists. Templeton, the agnostic, went on to become Canada's most notorious critic of Christianity.*

*Like Templeton, Strobel was once a journalist and a spiritual skeptic, but as we've seen in the movie, his investigation into Christianity took him to the opposite conclusion as Templeton: that the evidence of science and history supports Christianity. Still, Strobel wanted to hear Templeton out. So he tracked him down, and the eighty-three-year-old Templeton agreed to an interview.*

*They sat in the living room of Templeton's Toronto penthouse, and Strobel asked him why he no longer believed in God. Templeton raised questions that bother many people: Why would a loving God allow pain and suffering? How could God send people to hell? How can Jesus be the only way to God? But then came a dramatic turn. Strobel asked Templeton what he thought of Jesus, and his tone changed 180 degrees, from critical and biting to thoughtful and reflective.*

*Templeton began to praise Jesus. He said, "He was the greatest human being who has ever lived. He was a moral genius. He was intrinsically the wisest person I've ever encountered in my readings."*

*Strobel was taken aback. He said, "It sounds like you really care about him." Templeton replied, "Well, yes, he was the most important thing in my life. I know it may sound strange, but I have to say . . . I adore him! Everything good I know, everything decent I know, everything pure I know, I learned from Jesus. In my view, he is the most important human being who has ever existed."*

*And that's when Templeton uttered the words Strobel never expected to hear from him. As tears flooded Templeton's eyes, he said, "I . . . miss . . . him!" And he broke down weeping.*

*What in the world was going on? Here was a hardened agnostic, the author of a book called Farewell to God, and he was crying over missing Jesus! Strobel tried to get him to elaborate, but he seemed embarrassed. Finally, with a wave of his hand, he said, "Enough of that." And he changed the subject.*

*Charles Templeton had walked away from his faith, but like the Prodigal Son, something was beckoning him to return Home. Even though Templeton tried to shake off God, Jesus continued to shake up his soul.*

**The Way Home** - So let me ask you today: Have you ever wandered away from God? Or maybe you've walked away from God emotionally. You rarely pray anymore. You don't search the Scriptures very often, and yet something inside of you wants to return. Or maybe you've found the Christian life too demanding, and so you feel like giving up. Some people have a strong sense of urgency that they desperately *need* to get back to God, but they're just not sure how to do it.

**The Tollway** - Into that longing, that searching, that unrest, come the soothing words of Jesus in Matthew 11:28–30: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Anybody here need that kind of rest? Anyone interested in finding the way home? It would be nice if I could tell you today that the way home to Jesus is a freeway—a wide-open road with no tollbooths demanding payment along the way. But the truth is, it's not a freeway. The way home is actually a tollway. A toll *had* to be paid. There *is* a cost—and it's a steep one. But the good news, **the truth that we can all embrace**, is that Jesus has already paid the price for you. He has cleared your path back to him.

The theological term for this is "substitutionary atonement." These are big words with a simple meaning: The perfect Son of God paid the penalty we deserved for our wrongdoing so that we can go free. All we have to do is receive this free gift of his grace, and we're invited into his Home forever.

1 Peter 3:18 puts it this way: "For Christ died for sins once for all, the Righteous for the unrighteous [the Innocent for the guilty] so that He might bring us to God."

And yet, so often we fight the free gift Jesus has paid for. We struggle to accept that our way out of sin has been paid in full. Can you imagine how God might feel when we say, “Yes, I understand Jesus has paid for my sin, but I want to pay at least part of the price so I can feel proud of what I’ve done—so here’s a handful of good deeds I’ve performed to earn my way to heaven.” Can you see how that might frustrate God? Because the price Jesus paid was infinitely expensive—the perfect Son of God sacrificing his life so we can live on with him forever in his Home. He’s not impressed when we offer a few paltry good deeds in payment—our actions simply show that we’re still relying on ourselves, rather than on him and his amazing grace.

Too many Christians—maybe including some of us here today—have trouble resting gratefully in the grace of God. They were saved by grace, and yet if the truth be told, they’re trying to live by the sweat of their own performance.

It’s a performance trap where we try following all the rules perfectly to keep God happy and we condemn others because they aren’t trying as hard as us. The truth is, grace liberates us, but our performance imprisons us.

**The Way of Gratitude** - And so we have the choice: our performance or God’s grace. 1 John 4:10 sets our perspective straight by reminding us, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

How *we* feel about God isn’t as important as how *he* feels about us. It doesn’t matter how good we try to be; what’s important is how good God is. He loved us before we did anything. He doesn’t demand that we become Super Christians. All he wants for us to do is to love him in return.

God doesn’t want you living like a slave—reading the Bible, praying, going to church, serving in a ministry, paying your tithe in order to justify yourself to God. Those activities aren’t bad things to do—they’re good things, *except* if we do them with the wrong motives. God wants you to rest in his grace. To give out of gratitude. To read the Bible and pray out of a sincere desire to draw closer to the God who loves you so much. To go to church because you want to worship the God of grace. To live in obedience motivated by love.

Remember Matthew 11 said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (verse 28)? The Greek word for *rest* means “to revive or restore.” In other words, God is offering to revive us from the inside out—to free us from the relentless pressure of trying to prove God was right, after all, when he invited us into his Home.

There is another way that people can react to the free toll on the highway of life—with a smile and gratitude. That’s what God wants from us when we receive his infinitely valuable gift of forgiveness and eternal life. We don’t have to earn it on the front end or try to prove ourselves worthy on the back end. We’re just sinners who are thrilled to have been saved by grace.

**Embracing the Truth** - Let me urge you to be honest with yourself this morning. Maybe you’re someone who doesn’t know the way Home. You need a road map; you need a navigation system, so to speak. Well, fortunately, the Bible clearly lays out the route. It’s been called the Roman Road by some, because it’s drawn from 3 verses in the book of Romans. And if you follow the path these verses spell out, it will take you Home.

I'd encourage you to mark these verses in your Bible, as a reminder to yourself and so you can help other people find their way Home.

*The first verse is Romans 3:23: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*

We are all sinners, and when we are honest, we don't have to dig very deep to find flaws and shortcomings. I doubt if anyone here would claim that they are perfect. Just go down the list of the Ten Commandments. Have you ever lied? Ever used God's name in vain? Ever stolen anything? Ever committed adultery? Remember, Jesus said anyone who lusts after someone has committed adultery in their heart. All of us have. We have all sinned and fallen short of God's infinitely high standard of morality. We're all sinners who need a Savior.

*The second step comes from Romans 6:23: "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

In other words, the penalty we've earned for our wrongdoing is spiritual death, or eternal separation from God in a place called hell. That's terrible news. But the good news is that God is offering us a free gift of forgiveness and eternal life, which Jesus paid for by his atoning death on the cross. In other words, on the Roman Road, Jesus has already paid our toll.

*So that brings us to the third step, which is found in Romans 10:13: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

Like any gift, this gift of God's grace isn't ours until we receive it. To "call on the name of the Lord" is to admit we've sinned and fallen short of his standards; to repent, or turn from that sin; and to gratefully receive Christ's payment on behalf of our sins. That's how we enter into a relationship with God and the door to his eternal Home is opened for us.

We talked during the first sermon of this series about the faith formula: Believe + Receive = Become. The *Receive* part is what we're doing when we call on the name of the Lord. That's how we receive his salvation. And after we've believed his truth, received his grace and forgiveness, we become a child of God. Let's watch and see how Lee Strobel did this in *The Case for Christ* movie. **[Play Video 3: Embracing the Truth of Christ]**

Before we go, let me tell you the rest of the story about Chuck Templeton. It turned out that Templeton's eight objections to Christianity were the same ones Strobel had wrestled with when he was an atheist. So Strobel hit the road and traveled around the country to get solid answers to each question from top scholars, and then he wrote a book called *The Case for Faith* to respond to those issues.

The book ends with Strobel mailing the manuscript of the book to Templeton, along with a note that said, "Chuck, I hope you'll take to heart what Proverbs 2:3–5 says: 'If you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.'"

As for the rest of the story, Templeton's wife, Madeleine, later wrote to Strobel and said Chuck's Alzheimer's had gotten worse, he had cancer and was blind in one eye. But she read him the manuscript and said he really appreciated it. Strobel never knew if Templeton came back to Jesus before his death, but Madeleine did tell a newspaper columnist that right before Chuck died, he said all excitedly, "Can you see them? Can you see them? Angels are coming to take me Home." So maybe, like the Prodigal Son, Templeton is firmly in the embrace of his Heavenly Father.

Where are you today? Do you find yourself longing to come Home to God? Are you trying to pay your own toll on the road of life? Maybe you're caught in the performance trap of trying to be good enough to earn what you've already been given. Wherever you find yourself on your spiritual journey, I hope you'll **embrace the truth of Christ**, and accept the free gift of grace and allow him to bring you back Home. In Jesus. Amen.