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CALEB BRIEN MEMORIAL SERVICE

Ecclesiastes 7:2, John 11:17-43

Good morning. I am Pastor Scott Turansky of Calvary Chapel Living Hope. On behalf of the Brien family I want to thank you for coming today. I know that a number of you normally attend Calvary Chapel Living Hope and are grieving the loss of Caleb Brien and I want to thank you for all the work you've done this week, providing food and cards and phone calls and all kinds of support for the family. And they're grateful for that. We also want to thank Dr. Kathie Foster, the superintendent of schools in Robbinsville, and the many on the staff and faculty representing the schools for your attendance here today and for your commitment to our students in Robbinsville. We thank those of you who are Caleb's friends, as students, coworkers, and acquaintances who represent friendship for him. Thank you for being here. We want to thank those who have come from other churches today where you normally worship and serve. We are honored. And for the many friends, neighbors from various walks of life who know the Brien family, thank you for being here. We're all grieving the loss of Caleb Brien. And for the family, we want you to know that we support you as a church and as a community. We're concerned for you. We want to care for you. We trust that this time this morning will be a ministry to you in the things that we've planned and the things that will take place.

In particular I want to speak to the parents of Caleb, Don and Karla. I want to thank you, Don, for being an elder at Calvary Chapel and for leading the church, and, Karla, for your ministry of caring for youth every week and teaching them. I admire your relationship together and your strong marriage. I admire the closeness of your family. It's just amazing how close all of you siblings are and it's a testimony to you. I want to say you are good parents and I am honored that you are here today and I am honored to know you.

Don and Karla, I'm going to invite you to come on the stage and share about Caleb.

[Don] Alright. Usually I talk a lot at work and I was wondering I probably need to type this one out, so I did.

Caleb entered our world in 2000. He's the baby of our family. He was always being picked up, doused with love and affection. Heck, the kid didn't even talk for like two years because his siblings talked for him and he was always being picked up. But that didn't last too long. We soon labeled him our sweet and sour. Ah was he independent. He wanted an autonomy from an early age and he told his mom at the age of three, "I can make my own snacks. I can go to the bus myself, thank you very much." Yeah we quickly saw some intellectual pursuits that began very early, at age four or five. He started writing Fat Cat stories for his family. He didn't have any money, he was the youngest, so that's what he did as gifts. He'd write stories for his siblings and

for us. And he had extensive reading and writing that continued throughout his whole life. The growth of his imagination and wit (yes his wit, he was witty), [indecipherable] his adorable looks.

Caleb's uniqueness rose up in various ways over the years. He picked up on our love of learning. But he chose his own interests to invest in as well. Buying a banjo, picking up French, or growing his English vocabulary. Each night he read everything.

He really loved the comradery and the companionship from family gatherings, sports, and school projects. Yet he also shunned over affection. Space and privacy were kind of paramount to him. He just asked his brothers out if they left a messy bedroom or took one of his shirts or, God forbid, use up three towels in one shower and left it on the floor. Yet he was always a good listener to his siblings. He was a holder of their secrets. I see some smiles there. There's probably some still left untold.

Caleb's interest in track actually went beyond just running well. It went into following the sport, like a Philly's or Eagles fan. You all know what that's like. He'd go to large track meets, like indoor nationals in New York City with Karla and they would have competitions to see who could guess the winning time. She said she won. I don't know.

He was athletic and enjoyed various sports and activities. Unique interests grew up over the years was ultimate frisbee. Saved up to get some several high-end discs and even got a lot of his classmates to join that endeavor.

He also truly loved the orchestra. Classical music. He went to Carnegie Hall several times with Karla over the years. He even put classical music on the radio at the house. It wouldn't drive Mom crazy. If I had to describe a good day in the life of Caleb, it would include coffee, travel, companionship, exploration, and interaction with complex literature, music, art, theater. He was his mother's son. He also reflected me, though, in his ability to analyze, organize, making the routine responsibilities like school really a breeze for him.

Caleb was our quiet man. Solid responsibility in the duties of life, also enjoying traditions. He always looked forward to the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Cooking in the kitchen with his brothers and I to make the Thanksgiving meal. That's a tradition of ours. Searching for the absolute perfect Christmas tree so he can decorate it with his family. Baking for the open house we usually had every Christmas. Watching dozens of favorite Christmas movies and putting together a Christmas puzzle each Christmas Eve while watching *It's a Wonderful Life*.

Caleb's greatest enjoyment this side of heaven seemed to be his dogs (and travel.) His love for his Labrador, Lucy, his long hair dachsy, Beckham. His pups sat next to him, on him, slept with him. His daily doses of joy and unconditional love; they were his true confidence.

Traveling. He'd explore new places. Go to old favorites like LBI or Branson, they were like oxygen to Caleb. Filled his tank up, made the mundane bearable. Just relaxing in the moment. He enjoyed not having to plan or prepare anything. He was just allowed to breathe.

First off, I'm really sorry for changing up the schedule here today. Jack, we'll let you get your schedule back to normal next week hopefully. But talking with Scott we realized a lot more than us just needed to get some healing. What better place than church? Come on, folks.

So Robbinsville community, thank you. Thank you very much. First responders, amazing. Amazing. Neighbors reaching out, the high school being so supportive. We have [indecipherable] therapy that wanted to come today, so hopefully they'll be at the schools this week sometime. Yummy Sushi, Caleb's former employer where he used to work came over to support us with hugs and of course their great cuisine. Man, it's amazing. Saul Funeral Home, just so supportive.

To my Air Force family thank you. Thank you. You reminded me again that readiness is a lot more than training and equipment. It's taking care of people. He cut all the red tape (thank you, sir) so our family could be here so quickly. So many of our Air Force family reaching out, it means a lot to us.

To our church family, thank you. For the meals, to our time yesterday. Just amazing. Just the ministry of presence. Thank you. You've done more than we could ever imagine.

To our family, thank you. You are amazing and everything. I am so proud of you all. I love you all.

One thing we do ask in the coming days and weeks and years – no guilt, no blame. As we peel back the onion and examine Caleb's thoughts and writings, we see he had a lot of pain and loss over the years from moving and moving from Air Force and his anxiousness about college and other things. He didn't share that with us directly. He was always, like I said, our quiet man. He was stubborn. He didn't share with really anyone completely. There was no bullying. There was no mental illness. He was just an individual trying to figure out life. So we all have a new hole in our hearts that needs to get filled in. There's going to be a scar, always a scar. Caleb's Harry Potter scar on his forehead from playing soccer. The scar on his leg from when he broke it and needed surgery. Holes take time to fill in.

Robbinsville community, we're strong. We've been through a lot the last several years. We're not strong enough to fill in that hole. My Air Force family is very strong. (I should know, I'm the Inspector General.) But you're not strong enough to fill in that hole. Our church family is so strong. But even the church is not strong to fill our hole. But our family is really strong. We're not strong enough to fill in that hole. But together we can move forward together. All the families together so much stronger, but still not strong enough to fill in that hole. I rest, my family rests on the rock, the foundation of Christ. That hole will get filled in with Christ. So there will be a scar, but we're going to move forward, but the hole is going to get filled in through Christ. Thank you.

[Scott] Would you bow your heads in prayer with me please.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, it's painful, this experience we're in at the moment and we're asking for your grace to fall down on this place today. Lord, I ask that you would touch each

person here in a way that blesses them. Lord, we appreciate the connection that we have as people together, but we know that there's an ultimate connection with you that touches us in special ways that are different, meaningful, and powerful. So we ask, Lord, that you would do that and that your grace would wrap your arms around us and care for us. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Each Sunday in our church we read the Bible and then we look at the scripture and then we ask the question, how can we apply this to our lives? So we're looking for practical principles out of the Bible that can help us when we leave and we go away.

There's a verse in the Bible I'd like to share with you to start with today. This verse intrigues me in Ecclesiastes 7:2. It says – *It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart.* I pondered that because I wonder in my own mind why is it better to go to a memorial service than to go to a party is what it's saying. And the answer is there. Because it does something to us. It touches us in a deep way. We start asking questions about our own purpose and our meaning and what's important to us, even questions about life itself. So I want to encourage you for a moment to consider your heart, as the verse says.

Sometimes we use the word 'heart' to describe the depth of a person. Sometimes we use the word 'spirit'. When we talk about a spirit, we talk about a team spirit, this idea that the team is rallying together with all of its fans, that's team spirit. There's school spirit where the school rallies together. There's community spirit that takes place in a township. All of which are important. They represent this sense of passion and direction, things coming together, who we are, who we want to be, and how we push forward to get things done. That's that spirit within a group.

In the same way, each one of us has a spirit. Of course this is where it gets very personal because each of us in our own spirit must face the challenges of life. Life is hard. Mountains are often in our way. Mistreatment by others sometimes dominates our thinking. Sometimes the task of living every day sometimes seem unsurmountable. In fact I'm going to make a statement that I want you to consider and evaluate for yourself and see if this statement makes sense to you. I don't believe any of us can face life and its challenges without spiritual strength. Doing life alone is lonely. Now some people are skilled or smart or wealthy or popular. And sometimes those things mask what's happening deep inside of us. But we all have those moments where we see our weaknesses and our pain and our challenges and our difficulties, and those are often bigger than we can imagine solutions for.

I'd like to take you today to a Bible story. A Bible story about Jesus, a day in the life of Jesus as described in the book of John 11. We're jumping into the middle of a story here, so let me set the scene of what's taking place in this story.

In John 11 a young man has died. We don't know his age, but we do know that he died at a younger age than he should have and that you would expect from someone. The young man's name is Lazarus and he had two sisters, Mary and Martha. They were Jesus' best friends. He was on a trip when he heard the news about this and we're going to pick up the story. When He

comes back He enters the situation where they're grieving. You'll see the pain in the story. You'll see how Jesus handles the grieving in the situation.

What I'd like to do after I read the story to you is I'd like to identify four things, four truths that we need that help us in the face of tragedy. Major tragedies, as we're seeing today, but even the tragedies that we all experience in our own lives every day. Minor or major, they are there. We need to have a plan for addressing them.

I put the words to the passage up on the screen so you can read along with me as I read this story and you can experience this story in John 11. It reads this way:

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already spent four days in the tomb. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, less than two miles away, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them in the loss of their brother. So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed home.

Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask him."

"Your brother will rise again," Jesus told her.

Martha replied, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and everyone who believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

"Yes, Lord," she answered, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

After Martha had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here and is asking for you." When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, consoling her, saw how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

When Mary came to Jesus and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they answered.

Jesus wept.

Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept Lazarus from dying?"

Jesus, once again deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," Jesus said.

"But, Lord by now he stinks," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "it has already been four days."

Jesus replied, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I say this for the benefit of the people standing here, so they may believe that you sent me."

After Jesus had said this, he called out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The man who had been dead came out with his hands and feet bound with strips of linen, and his face wrapped in a headcloth.

"Unwrap him and let him go," Jesus told them.

I want to look at four truths briefly from this passage that give us some ability to deal with life, the challenges especially, the grief and trauma and tragedy that we experience.

The first truth that I'd like to point out is this: That Jesus entered into their sorrows. Now I find it fascinating because within about an hour probably He's going to go out to the tomb and He's going to raise Lazarus from the dead. So He knows what's going on. He has the power to bring about change. But that doesn't prevent Him from entering into their sorrows, from weeping with them, from caring about them because of their pain. There's a time to mourn, there's a time to grieve, there's a time to be sad, and Jesus steps into that. It's just a demonstration of the love that Jesus had for His friends. And it's just a demonstration of God's love in general.

God loves us and it's a personal love. It's a love that steps into our hearts in ways that we desperately need in those challenges that we face and those crevices of our lives that getting likes on Facebook won't accomplish. That having friends where we belong isn't enough. That there's something deeper and that God's love takes that place for us and provides us with something very deep inside of us, each one personally that we need in our hearts. Some of us can look pretty good on the outside, but life can get complicated and twisted. And this is one truth that's so important and valuable for us to know that God loves us in a very personal way, each one of us uniquely. That love is a special gift and He loves us so much that He wants to connect with us in a personal way.

But there's another problem in the story we have to address. In this first point we see Jesus wept. He was with them. He was there just connecting with them in a way that God likes to do with each one of us.

The second point is that the world is a broken place. You can see it in the story. You can see the grief, you can see the pain that's existing in the midst of this.

But there's a special part in the passage I just want to draw attention to. It's this part where it says that Jesus is *deeply moved in spirit and troubled*. The word *troubled* there really means the word angry. He was upset. Who was He upset with? Was He upset with the people who were challenging Him and asking Him questions, who were accusing Him maybe? "If you would've been here, he wouldn't have died." There's a lot of opportunity for us in a tragedy or a disappointment in our own lives to start asking questions about whose fault is it? Why is it here? And it generates anger inside of us. We get upset because if we could find a reason, if we could find something to complain that somehow satisfies us... It's interesting to me that Jesus doesn't address those questions. He doesn't respond to them. That the blaming we tend to do when we're in grief, there are no answers. And the blame is often simplistic and I would say even in this place not appropriate.

So Jesus doesn't even address that as He's working with them. But He's angry at death itself. He's angry at the pain that people are experiencing. He's angry with the brokenness of our world. In fact God describes in the Bible a word that describes this brokenness. He uses the word sin. Sometimes the word sin is personal. That is we make mistakes, we have regrets, we've done things that are wrong. We know that and we have to wrestle with that in our hearts. What are we going to do with this problem of mistakes that we made? And sometimes people make the mistake or they think what they can do is I've got these bad things; I need to undo those with good things. So they're on a pilgrimage to do more good than bad. As if they could do more good than bad it'll somehow deal with the bad in their lives. Unfortunately trying to do more good, although a good thing to do, doesn't erase those things that are inside. We're still broken. We have personal issues, personal sin that has caused us problems and people around us problems.

But it's not only personal sin that Jesus is upset with in the passage. It's the brokenness and pain that sometimes is because of the sin that's part of a broken world that's caused by other people and the mistreatment of other people and the bad things that have happened in our world. There's disease, there's injustice, there's mistreatment. They don't have anything to do with me personally or you personally, but they come at us and they start affecting us in personal ways. And that bigger picture of sin is devastating. That is what Jesus is angry about. Even death itself.

We sometimes become very aware of the sin and the way we respond and our need for something deeper inside of us. So we have this fact that God loves us and that's beautiful and great, and we want Him and we want Him to fill in the holes in our lives. That's really important. But we also look at ourselves and we see we have a problem. This problem of sin that's just brokenness and we can't do it ourselves. We just can't. We don't have the spiritual strength to be able to manage that. And that's why we come to these statements, these words that Jesus said.

So the third truth that helps us face tragedy is this fact that Jesus says. As he's writing (and I'll show you in a moment), He offers truth and resurrection and hope. Let's look back at the verses.

He says to Martha – *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and everyone who believes in me will never die.”*

The picture of the Bible and especially in the gospel we learn about Jesus is this message that Jesus came, not just as a historical being, but He came as the Savior of the world. He came as someone to rescue us from the brokenness that we experience. There is sin in our world. There is sin in our lives. And we can't deal with that. We need something outside of us to deal with that and that is Jesus Christ. And He's offering this to them. He's telling them this salvation, as it were, that they can experience, when He talks about this resurrection, this hope. Jesus says this over and over again in His words that are recorded in the Bible.

If we go to John 16, we see these words where Jesus is speaking and He says – *I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In the world you're going to have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*

There is a peace that we can have inside, Jesus says, when we trust in Him, when we understand who He is. Those are Jesus' words that He's saying. He's offering us something bigger than the brokenness that we experience, something that we can hold onto, something that we can experience in our lives.

He also says these words in John 10:10 – *The thief comes only to steal, and to kill, and destroy; but I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full.* There's something about this ability to connect with Jesus as a Savior that allows us not just to survive this world in the midst of all the brokenness, but also to thrive in it. Jesus is the Savior. Not just a historic event on the cross. There is something when He rose from the dead it conquers something that allows us to have peace inside of our hearts. And that's the third principle that we can glean from this particular passage.

There's one more that we see in the passage and that is this: That each person must make a choice to exercise faith. That's what the passage says. Let me go back and we'll just look at it again. Because as Jesus is speaking to Martha, He says to her, notice – *He who believes in me will live. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.* Then He asks the question, a very important question. He says to her – *Do you believe this?*

There is a lot of truth about the world that the Bible teaches that you're not going to be able to experience and embrace without faith. Faith is this ability to enter into truth that we need deeply inside of our hearts. Each person makes that choice on their own. Each person makes a decision about their own life. You don't experience this grace that God provides because your parents follow Christ, because you live in a community where a lot of people follow Christ. It's an individual decision that we all must exercise for ourselves. We have to make that choice to embrace this in our own lives. You choose to put your faith in Jesus Christ, not just for a one-time solution, but it becomes this faith journey where we're allowing God to do something deep inside of our hearts to give us the passion and the purpose to do something in our spirits.

So I want to go back to the verse that we talked about at the very beginning. The verse that says – *It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the*

destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart. Why is it better to go to a memorial service or a funeral than to a party? Because we all need to make that evaluation in our own lives on a regular basis. We need to check our spirits. Is our spirit able to handle the challenges that are available, that are present in our lives? Do we have the ability to manage the challenges that exist wherever we are? When we go to a funeral like this, we are to acknowledge our own weakness, we have to acknowledge our own limitations.

So there are those four truths that help us. Number one – that God loves us so much and He offers us so much through that love. That there's brokenness and sin in our world that corrupts even our own hearts and make it difficult for us to think straight. That there's a Savior, Jesus Christ, who's come in that offers us something that provides much more than we could ever ask, for that's real resurrection in our lives. There's many people who are experiencing death inside of themselves, just feeling disappointment, discouragement, and God wants to create a resurrection inside of their lives.

So there's this response that each one of us must have as we come to this decision. And it's not a decision. It's for death, yes. Everyone must face death and we must be ready for that in each of our own lives. But it's also a decision that helps us to live. To live today with passion. To live today with this understanding of where we're going and what God wants to do in our lives.

I want you to do something with me today. I want you to check your spirit. Maybe you're ready to make a change where you are. Maybe you're ready to take that next step and have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Don and Karla Brien are concerned. Having experienced tragedy and loss in their own family, they're concerned for everyone who would come to an event like this because you don't know what's going on in the life of a person. They want you to know that there is hope. There are solutions. There are answers. If you are stuck, you want to get those answers. If you're discouraged, you want to find that hope. There are answers today.

So I'm going to pray for all of us. I just think we all need prayer in this moment. I'm going to come to God on our behalf. So I'd like to ask you to bow your heads in reverence and close your eyes and just think about your own heart and your own life and where you are. In the midst of that, if God is speaking to you and saying, "Yes, I want you to come to me," and you want to respond to that today, I'd like to include you in my closing prayer. If you'd like to be represented in that prayer while heads are bowed and eyes are closed, would you just lift your hand up and put it back down and I'll include you in that prayer.

This prayer that I'm going to pray is one that you can enter into yourself. If you agree with what I'm saying, I'd encourage you to just pray to God that He's open and ready to hear your prayer. Make this your prayer as I pray now.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, thank you so much for loving us with a love that we need so deeply that offers forgiveness and hope, meaning and purpose. Lord, we're very sensitive about our own brokenness. I'm sensitive about my brokenness, my sin. I thank you that you offer Jesus as a Savior. I want to trust Him to come into my heart now and do that reorganization, that structuring, that purpose that I need in my heart today. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.