

When God Doesn't Make Sense

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In just a few moments, we're going to open up the word of God and we're going to be challenged. You know, it's at this time that oftentimes we are privileged to know the who, the what, the when, the where, and sometimes even the how, but today is one of those days that we are going to address the why. Why is it that sometimes God doesn't make sense? Why is it that sometimes you look at your life and you question is God even there at all? If you're going through one of those times or you have been through one of those times where you have questioned does God even know you exist, does he hear your prayers, if you have ever looked at the sky and just said, "God, are you even still there?" today is that day that we are going to see a story of a family who is going through the same thing you're going through this hour as well.

Let's pray.

Lord, as we prepare to be challenged by your word, in some way it's comforting knowing that we're not the only ones with questions, we're not the only ones who are struggling, we're not the only ones who at times question not just your existence but your activity in our lives. So Lord, I pray today as we read these timeless words, as we study the story of how you interacted with a family much like ours, Lord, help us to see that it's not our environment, it's not our circumstance, it's not what we see and hear around us that determines who you are but much the opposite. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the Gospel of John 11. Now John 11 is one of the most famous chapters in all of the Bible because of one principal character: a man by the name of Lazarus. Of all the miracles that Jesus performed, of all the things of which he did, this is probably one of the best known of all of them. This is the chapter where Lazarus is raised from the dead.

Now, today I've got good news and bad news. The good news is Lazarus is going to come out of the grave, the bad news is not today. We're not going to talk about that today. In fact, today we're going to look at the first half of this chapter, the first 18 verses, and we're going to talk about the back story, the story behind the story that leads up to this famous event. Why? Because we see Jesus interacting with a family who is struggling with the loss of a brother. We see Jesus interacting with his disciples who don't understand, "Lord, when you heard about this bad news, why did you wait around for two

days?" This is a story today that is going to help us understand what's really happening behind the curtain when God doesn't make sense, when we don't understand why he does what he does and when and where he does it.

So today in John 11, beginning with the first verse, it says,

1 Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 (It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) 3 Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom you love is sick. 4 When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. 5 Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. 6 When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode [or stayed] two days still in the same place where he was. 7 Then after that said he to his disciples, Let us go into Judaea again. 8 His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone you; and you go there again? 9 Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. 10 But if a man walk in the night, he stumbles, because there is no light in him. 11 These things said he: and after that he said unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleeps; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. 12 Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. 13 Howbeit Jesus spoke of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. 14 Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. 15 And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent that you may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him. 16 Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him. 17 Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already. 18 Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs away.

Here is the story behind the story and what it allows us to see today is with this famous account of Lazarus being raised from the dead, what was happening behind the scenes? What was happening with his family? They were struggling. They were having difficulty. Even the disciples. So today we're going to talk about when God doesn't make sense. When we have those times that we look up and say, "God, are you even there? Are you paying attention? Do you even love me at all?"

But I think the first thing we need to recognize in light of this story is that God sees the big picture. God doesn't just see what's happening now. In fact, we as humanity, we struggle, we often lose the forest for the trees. We are so caught up with the here and now that we rarely look at the past nor the future. How many times have you heard this said or maybe you've said it yourself: if I only knew then what I know now? What we need to grasp is this: that God's perspective is timeless. He is outside of time. In fact, the Bible says a day with him is as a thousand years. What humanity sees as two to three millennia,

the Lord just sees as a simple weekend. He's not just caught up in, he is completely outside of time. Look at verse 4. Look what he says, he says, "this is not unto death." But yet a few verses later he says, "Let me tell it to you plainly: Lazarus is dead." Now, Jesus was not contradicting himself, what he was showing us is that he is timeless in his perspective.

Now, let me tell you what death is. Death is when you cease to live. I know you're thinking, "Well, that's a pretty elementary definition," but that means you are no longer alive. Lazarus did eventually die. In fact, when you get to chapter 12, it says that his testimony of Jesus raising him from the dead was so powerful that those who sought to kill Jesus now are trying to kill Lazarus. So we know that Lazarus died. By the way, we don't know exactly what happened to him. Some believe he was martyred for his faith. Others believe he lived a long and "prosperous" life. We don't know but here's what we do know: that in this story, Lazarus is sick with something and it's not what killed him. This is important for our understanding today because how many times do you say, "Lord, this is killing me"? God said, "This isn't unto death." In other words, he is timeless. He is outside of our current struggle and our situation and oftentimes our whole world revolves around this one issue but he sees so much more. So when he says, "This is not unto death," what he was saying is, "Oh, Lazarus, you're eventually going to cease to live but this isn't the one that's going to eventually get you."

So not only do we see the big picture of a timeless perspective, but a timely picture. Have you ever wondered, at least I have in the past, why did Jesus wait around for two days? I mean, after all, the Bible says he loved Martha, he loved Mary, he loved Lazarus. This is one of only two places in the Bible where Jesus weeps or cries: one time over Jerusalem and now over a family. So why two days? He hears news that he's dead or is very sick and he actually waits around two days until he dies and then he says, "Oh, but this is actually a good problem." Have you ever wondered how is this good?

You know, this is one of three incidences in Scripture where Jesus raises somebody from the dead. In Luke 7, there is a widow woman from Nain whose son Jesus raises from the dead. In Luke 8, there is a man named Jairus whose daughter Jesus raises from the dead. And it's very different than this story. In both of those accounts, the person who had died was dead within about 24 hours. In other words, they died, Jesus got word of it, he went to the situation, rose them from the dead. In fact, Jairus' daughter in Luke 8, Jesus might have brought her back from the dead within the hour of hearing about it. But in this passage, notice what Jesus says: he's been dead four days. Can we just be honest? He's really dead. I mean, really dead.

Now, that sounds kind of jokingly kind of like when someone says, "Are you pregnant?" and they say, "Barely." You're not just barely pregnant, you either are or you are not. I mean, you are either dead, I mean, you're just dead. But here's what you need to understand: in Jewish culture in those days and in their philosophy of life, they believed – listen to this – they believed that the spirit of a man or of a woman did not leave until the fourth day. In other words, oh, it's impressive Jesus, that this widow's son you raised from

the dead, and it's impressive, Jairus' daughter, but if you really want to do it, if you want to really show power over death, then wait four days.

You see, Jesus is being very timely here. In fact, we see another picture of this in Luke 24 when Jesus, this is by the way, what we call Easter Sunday morning. The women by the way, some of the same women in this story, they go to the tomb of Jesus. Do you remember what they have? They have the anointing, the spices to prepare his body because at that point, there is no more hope.

You see, that's what you need to understand. When Lazarus is dead in this story and Jesus waited two days, there is not a single person listening who thought there was any chance Lazarus was ever coming back. It's over. I mean, he's not just dead, he's really dead. And what does Jesus do? You know the story, he calls him forth. It's a picture not just of his power over death but his eventual resurrection which, by the way, is within about 90 days of this story happening.

So God has a timeless perspective. This is a timely picture. And third, I want you to understand this: that what we see here is the true purpose of God. Notice what Jesus says, that this was for the glory of God.

Now, I want you to put yourself in Lazarus' family shoes. This was not fun. His sisters are grieving. His friends are grieving. A community is grieving and the Lord is saying this is actually a good thing. This is for God's glory. You see, one of the problems that we have seeing it from God's perspective is this and this is tough for us, particularly in the 21st century: it's not about us, it's about him. And we say, "But what about me? This isn't fun. I don't like this. This stinks, God." And he says, "Oh, you don't understand because when I take what you think stinks and I raise it from the dead, I'm going to get all the glory because people are going to look at you and say you didn't do that."

You see, there are a lot of folks who were just unconscious that woke up. There are a lot of folks that were in comas and woke up. But I'm going to give you a head start in about two weeks, do you know what his sisters say to Jesus? "Behold, Lord, he stinketh." There is no hope here. So when Lazarus raises from the dead, nobody can go around and go, "Man, glad you're feeling better. That was a close call, wasn't it?" When he's walking around, he says, "I've got news for you folks, I was stinking and Jesus called me forth."

What that leads us to understand today, though, is very important and I want you to hear me clearly: do not let your circumstances dictate your theology. Now, theology is a word we've all heard and it basically means our understanding of, our grasp of God, what we think of God. Don't let your environment, don't let what's happening around you determine what you think about who God is in your life.

Now let's look at this story for a moment. One of the circumstances they experienced was the silence of God. Imagine being Mary and Martha. You come to Jesus who claims to love you and your brother and say, "Hey, we've got a problem. We need your help." And he says, "Don't worry about it. I'm good." For two days he says nothing. Maybe you've

experienced this in your life, I know I have and I'm not too ashamed to admit it: there are days, there are times in my life I have looked up to the skies and said, "Hey God, are you still there?" Please tell me I'm not the only one. Because sometimes there is this eerie silence and I've learned that the silence of God is louder at times than the voice of God, because all we can hear is the silence. Why? I've got some good news for you: if you are or you have experienced the silence of God and you're struggling with that, you're in good company. Let me introduce you to some of the great persons in Scripture who experienced the silence of God.

Let's begin with Noah. Now, the story of Noah is a great story. It's Noah's ark. He builds the boat. They get on the boat. All is good, right? But if you study Genesis 6 through 8, here's what you discover: that God came to Noah and said, "Here's the deal, I want you to build a boat. It's going to be really big and I want you to do it exactly the way I tell you." Later on, the Lord comes to him and says, "All right, the animals are going to come. I need you to take them two by two." That's all we've got. You say, "Well, what's significant about that?" Noah took 120 years to build the ark. Let's just take 120 and divide it by 2 and what do you get? Sixty, last time I checked. That means that possibly Noah went 60 years between God talking to him. Can you imagine? I'm going to give you my perspective. When I would be at about year 27, I would be like, "Hey God, am I doing this right because I haven't heard from you in a while?" Nothing for 60 plus years.

All right, let's move on to a guy by the name of Abraham. Now, we know father Abraham, right? Unfortunately he runs into this situation with Hagar and Ishmael, the Lord doesn't show up again for over 10 years of his life.

How about Moses? We know Moses. Man, I mean, he delivers the Israelites. He goes into the famous plagues. "Let my people go." Everybody loves the story of Moses, the 10 Commandments, the staff in the sea, the water parting. But do you know that after he killed the Egyptian, he's out with his father-in-law attending the flock and all of a sudden the burning bush. Now, can we just be honest with ourselves? Don't we all want a burning bush experience? I mean, we really do. I don't know about you but there are days I'd like to just walk outside and there is this bush on fire and it's not being consumed and out of the heavens the Lord says, "You're standing on holy ground. Take your shoes off, boy. Let's have a conversation." You say, "Man, I would love that to happen." Do you know what preceded it? Forty years of silence. Forty years.

The Israelites, the end of your Old Testament, 400 years between the last word of the prophets and Jesus' arrival.

How about the Apostle Paul? After his salvation experience on the road to Damascus, the Bible says he went into Arabia for three years.

Now, let's think about these characters: Paul, obviously Jesus his Messiah; Moses, Abraham, Noah. The last time I checked the story worked out pretty well, didn't it? And the reason is because God saw the big picture. God saw all that was happening and they did not allow the circumstance of their silence or his silence to dictate how they saw God.

But there is a second circumstance here, not just silence but you have the circumstance of their sincerity. In this story, it's Mary and it's Martha and the Bible makes a point to say, "Hey, hey, this is the same one who anointed Jesus. This is the same one who fixed him a meal. This is the one who sat at his feet. This is somebody who we have served, we've loved, we've taken care of a lot in our lives." I don't know if you found yourself in this situation but there are sometimes where you serve the Lord, you have given of your time, you have given of your resources, and you keep giving and you keep going and you keep doing, and sometimes you're like, "Hello God, do you not notice any of this? Do you not notice anything that I'm doing? Is it just not in your view today?"

Let me introduce you to who needs to be your good friend, his name is Job. The Bible, there is a character by the name of Job who is well known because of his circumstance and situation. Here's a man in the Bible who is called the greatest in the East. I mean, this guy not only had a lot of finances, he had 10 children, he had a lot of cattle, had a lot of land, had a lot of money, but he had a lot of respect and even reverence from God himself. If you're not familiar with the story, let me tell you what happens. In one day he loses it all. He loses his family. He loses his income. He loses his business. He loses everything but his wife and that's probably who he would have liked to have lost when the story goes on. She comes to him and says, "Hey Job, things are going so well for you, buddy. You know, you were up there praying this morning, you were offering sacrifices this morning. How did this work out? Why don't you just curse God and die?" Remember what he says? "Naked I came into the world, naked I will return. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Chapter 2 of that story. Now the affliction comes upon his body and he is on the dunghill. He's out in the trash heap. He's scraping the sores with pottery. The Bible says the dogs are licking his sores and then something occurs, he has three individuals show up, "friends." Now, I'm going to give you all some good biblical advice: if anybody wants to befriend you in real life or on social media and their name is Bildad, Zophar or Eliphaz, run. Run away. Why? Because these guys show up, for seven days they sit there with him, they cry with him, they moan with him, they hurt with him, and then they begin and they say, "Hey Job, let me tell you why this happened, because you didn't love God enough. You didn't serve him enough. You did it wrong here, you did it wrong there. You just did not do enough." In other words, they thought that his circumstance, his pain, his loss because somehow he didn't do enough "for God."

When you get to the end of the story, God tells his friends to repent. He doesn't tell Job to repent. Then he gives him 10 more kids, doubles his income, doubles his business, and blesses him immeasurably. And what we discover is sometimes the silence is deafening but at other times just because we are serving the Lord, just because we're doing everything we know to do, does not mean at times we are going to be confused going, "Hey, God, this doesn't make sense. I'm giving you everything I've got and it just seems like everything is falling apart."

But there is one last circumstance that I think oftentimes misconstrues our theology. It's the sentiment of God, the love of God. In this passage it says he loved Martha, he loved Mary, he loved Lazarus. One of only two passages where Jesus himself cries. He weeps. His love, his compassion for them. And sometimes we think if things don't make sense, if things aren't working out the way I wish they would or I hope they would, maybe God doesn't love me anymore.

You know, Revelation 3:19 says, "whom the Lord chastens, he loves." You get to Hebrews 12, it says one of the ways that we know God loves us is because sometimes things in life don't go exactly the way we wish they would. And what we realize is God sees the big picture and I know that in my life as a parent, and I now look back as a child, let me give you a little hint here: when I was a child and I'm just going to admit it, I didn't think my parents knew anything. "Why do you keep me from doing that? Why do you say I can't have that? Why are you putting limits on me?" Then I became an adult and said, "Man, they are geniuses." Why? Because I now realize that what I thought didn't make sense then was because they loved me so much they knew it wouldn't benefit me, they knew it wouldn't help me.

So sometimes when God doesn't make sense, you say, "Why am I hurting? Why am I experiencing loss? Do you just not love me anymore, God?" What we may be dealing with just like in this story is that God sees everything, God does love you, he does love me, he does love us, and he's got a bigger picture happening than we could ever imagine. Don't lose the forest for the trees.

The question is: how do we respond? Now you're going to probably be intrigued by the character who speaks up. I want you to notice at the end of this passage Thomas speaks up. Now, we typically know Thomas by the adjective that goes along with him, doubting Thomas. In this story, Lazarus is dead, his sisters are upset, the disciples are confused, and here's what Thomas says in verse 16, "Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him." What a response of the heart. Literally what Thomas is saying here is, "Hey, I don't get this, I don't understand this, this doesn't make any sense, this Lazarus guy, man, Jesus really likes, he loves this guy, he's dead but, hey, let's go and die with him." Not just die with Lazarus but die with Jesus who had said, "Hey, these guys want to kill you." Do you see that response, that heartfelt response of, "Hey, I don't get this, I don't understand it, it doesn't make a lick of sense, I'm just going to go with it." What an incredible response that we need to learn from here that when things don't make sense, when God doesn't make sense, we need just to go with what God has given us and let him work out the details.

Let me share with you where it gets to be a problem. Turn a few pages to the right to chapter 14. Do you know one of the greatest problems you've got is 18 inches away from your heart and it's called your head? Any time humanity starts thinking, we're going to get in trouble. By the time you get to chapter 14, we are at the night before the crucifixion and I want you to think about Thomas for just a moment, the same guy who said, "Man, I will die with you, Jesus." The same guy. He has left his family. He has left his business. He has left everything and we are within 24 hours of Jesus being put in the grave. I want

you to notice what Thomas says here in chapter 14 of John. Jesus says, "Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And whither I go you know, and the way you know." Is that not what Jesus has been teaching for three and half years?

Look at what Thomas says in verse 5, "Thomas said unto him, Lord, we know not where you go; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Do you know what got in Thomas's way? His head. Have you ever heard of paralysis by analysis? What happened is Thomas started thinking, "Uh-oh, this isn't going to bode very well for me. I've given up my job for three and half years and I don't think they have the position open if this doesn't turn out well. My family already thought I was a little crazy, now they're going to know I'm nuts if this happens the way he says." In other words, he started thinking about what was happening and it harmed him.

Some years ago I had the privilege where I was serving at, we brought one of these groups in, these guys that, you know they have like muscles in their earlobes, they break things in the name of Jesus basically. And they come in and they do all these things and they share the Gospel. It's an incredible experience. But a couple of years ago, these guys that came into the church where I was serving and it was the last night of the evangelistic outreach and they said, "Hey, pastor, after you do the welcome tonight, why don't you stay on stage on the back part of the stage with us. We want to talk to you about doing something." I said, "Okay, no problem." So I go and I do the welcome like I had every night. I put the microphone down and I went backstage and then it happened, I mean, the music got loud and they started setting things on fire, there are bricks, there is wood. I mean, it was crazy in there. I'm sitting in the back of the stage and one of these big old muscle guys looked at me and said, "Hey, do you see that stack of bricks that's on fire?" "Yeah." He goes, "On the count of three, I want you to go and break them." I said, "What?" He said, "Three, go." Bam. Well, what do you think I did? I'm a guy, "Let's do this." So I run out there and there is film, I broke these bricks.

Now, after that night was over and all the hair on this arm was singed, I pulled that guy aside and I said, "Hey, hey, hey, why didn't you give me a little heads up here? It would have been nice to know what I was going to do." And he said, "Oh, no, no, no. We learned that a long time ago. We don't need to give you pastors any warning." He said, "If we tell you in advance, you start thinking about it and that's when you get hurt and get sent to the hospital." He said, "When we get your head out of it and your heart takes over, it always works out."

Do you no one of the biggest problems that we've got? It's not our heart, it's our head and when Thomas started thinking, "What is this going to do? And I don't know the ramifications here and what are the consequences going to be?" When he started analyzing it, he got messed up. When his heart was there, it was great but when his head got involved, he started slipping.

Now let me talk to you about the heat and what I mean by that heat is when things got really heated up, go to chapter 20 of the Gospel of John and I want you to see what happens after the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus has been raised from the dead. The tomb is empty. The women saw the tomb was empty. Peter and John have already raced to the tomb. They discovered that it was empty. The whole town is abuzz because it's empty. Jesus has appeared several times to several folks. Now I want you to notice what happens in verse 24, "But Thomas." You see, this is the passage that we know Thomas for. This was the passage where he "doubts," because it says, "But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then said he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus said unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

Let me tell you what happened when the heat began, in other words, when the community started buzzing, when people started making all kinds of accusations, Peter has already denied him three times, there are all of these things happening around him. Here's basically what Thomas falls into the trap of. He's saying, "Hey God, this wasn't on my spreadsheet. This wasn't how I mapped it out. This isn't, listen, this isn't what I signed up for." Have you ever had those emotions? Have you ever had those feelings? Have you ever said those words to God saying, "Hey God, this isn't quite the way, listen, I would have done it."

Hey, let me tell you how good we are at doing it, let me take you back to the Garden of Eden. How well did we do? We said, "Hey God, you know this whole plan you've got with the trees? Not liking it. I think it would be better if we ate of this tree." It didn't work out well, did it? You see, what about a couple of chapters later when we say, "Hey God, you are a long ways up. I think we need to build a tower to show you how good we really are." You see, every time we say, "God, my plan is better," what does it do? It produces a "But Thomas."

But notice what Thomas does here. He falls down on his face and he says, "But Lord, my God." Do you know what the definition for repentance is? Repentance is to be heading in one direction and turning completely and about-face to the other. Do you know what Thomas does in this passage? When he sees Jesus, he abandons his spreadsheet. He doesn't think about it and he goes back to his heart and he says, "My Lord and my God."

The last time I checked, God is not always going to make sense and a lot of times there are periods of silence, sometimes there are periods of confusion, and when we start to over analyze it, when we start to say, "But what about this and what about that and it's

going to look like this and it's going to look like that," we end up, "But Thomas." A resurrected Savior changing the world and we don't even bother showing up because we are so bothered that it didn't look like what we wanted it to look like, but when he got out of the heat and when he dismissed what his head was thinking and just went back to his heart, he fell down and said, "My Lord and my God."

Maybe today is that day where you quit overthinking. Maybe today is that day where you say, "You know, maybe the silence isn't that bad after all." Maybe today is the day where you say, "Okay Lord, I will die with you."

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. You know, maybe you're here this morning and you're one of those folks that it's more than just an illness in the family, it's more than just your finances, it's more than just your expectations for a career path, and maybe today you are that person who thought you had it all planned out when it came not just to this life but the next. You thought that you had a plan, you thought you had it all mapped out but you realize today that your best plans are rarely half of what the Lord can do and maybe today you realize for the first time that Jesus does know best, and not only does he know best, but he has sacrificed, he has given himself on your behalf.

If you find yourself in that position today, I've got some great news for you. You don't have to jump through bunch of religious hoops but you need to have a sincere conversation with the Lord. You don't have to have this conversation out loud, you don't even have to say the same words that I might say, but maybe your conversation would go a little something like this. "God, today I just want to share with you that which you already know about me. I've tried to do it my way and it hasn't worked and today, today I'm confessing I need to do it your way. You see, I'm admitting that I'm the problem and that Jesus is the answer. I'm admitting I'm the one who has sinned but Jesus is the one who can forgive. I believe that Jesus loved me so much that he came on my behalf. I believe that Jesus loved me so much he lived a sinless life on my behalf. I believe Jesus loved me so much he went to that cross and he rose from the dead so that I could be forgiven and I could be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to all the world's problems but I do know that Jesus is the answer to my sin problem. In the best way I know how, I'm turning my life over to you."

Maybe you're that person today who had that conversation with the Lord. We would love to hear about it. We would love to have a conversation with you. Or maybe the Lord through his word today has shown you an area of obedience or an area of following him maybe through baptism, becoming a part of this great church, or maybe something else. All we want to do is have the opportunity to celebrate what the Lord is doing in your life.

Lord, as we come to this time, it's time to respond. Lord, we have heard the challenge. We have heard the encouragement from your word. Now we have the privilege to respond to it and, God, I just pray right now that whatever it is you have spoken into our lives, we would just simply respond appropriately. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as our team leads us, any decision, I'll be here at the front.