

# A Picture of Persecution

*Faithfulness of God*

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Let's pray together.

*Heavenly Father, no truer words could of or should have been spoken this morning: the tree that you allowed yourself to shed your blood on was the tree that we well and honestly and rightfully deserved. So God, today we celebrate the fact that you were willing to bear the price that we're not capable of paying, God, that you were willing to give us a life that we could in no way earn or deserve. So God, today under the umbrella of that reality, would you take your word and would you instruct us, would you teach us, God, would you convict us through your Holy Spirit of how in light of what we've just been challenged with we should live our lives? It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of 1 Samuel 18 in the Old Testament, and for those of you that are guests or visitors with us, I want to welcome you through a journey through what we know as the book of 1 Samuel and really what we're doing in the book of 1 Samuel is not just looking at the respective characters and the stories, although some of them, as we saw last week with the famous David and Goliath, are very famous both inside and outside the church, but as we study the book of 1 Samuel what we're seeing then is what we're living out today. There is this clash of ideologies that is occurring in our culture today. On one hand, you have the Israelites in the book of 1 Samuel who are migrating from the sacred to the secular. In the beginning of 1 Samuel, they are being ruled by the judges according to the word of God and the way of God for their lives, but by the time you get to the eighth chapter they begin to look around at the world that's around them and think that they want to look like, act like, and be like everybody else. So what did they do? They said unto Samuel, they said, "Give us a king." Now Samuel warned them and said, "Now you understand if God gives you a king like everybody else, he's going to take your children, he's going to take your finances?" They said, "That's fine. We just want somebody to fight our battles." And so you see this progression from doing things the way that God has orchestrated them to looking and doing just like everybody else. On the other side that clash is that we see that God remains faithful in spite of the circumstances. He remains faithful in spite of the environment to those people, specifically today as we're going to see, whom we know as David, who are willing to stay committed to the way, to the will, and to the word of God.

And so today as we turn to chapter 18 of the book of 1 Samuel, what we're about to see, what's about to take place is that we're going to enter a new dynamic in this book of the Bible for the rest of 1 Samuel really centers around this interaction with this tension, this relationship between Saul and David. And one of the things that I want you to see today as we begin in chapter 18, is really today is setting or is drawing a picture for us of what does it look like to walk through a time of persecution, what does it look like to face a world that on every side of us is adversarial every time we turn around. Today this may not be your story but it might be your story tomorrow. Today might be a day where the Lord is using his word to encourage you and convict you, but he might be using his word today to prepare you what could potentially lie ahead of you.

Beginning in verse 18 of 1 Samuel, just the first 17 verses, it says,

1 And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. 2 And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house. 3 Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. 4 And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle. 5 And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants. 6 And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of musick. 7 And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. 8 And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? 9 And Saul eyed David from that day and forward. 10 And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand, as at other times: and there was a javelin in Saul's hand. 11 And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice. 12 And Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with him, and was departed from Saul. 13 Therefore Saul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people. 14 And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the LORD was with him. 15 Wherefore when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him. 16 But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them. 17 And Saul said to David, Behold my elder daughter Merab, her will I give thee to wife: only be thou valiant for me, and fight the LORD'S

battles. For Saul said, Let not mine hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him.

What we've just read is the beginning, this is the first chapter of many of this conflict between Saul and David, and the thing that I want to do from the very beginning is I want to draw a parallel for you. I understand that this is an interpersonal conflict. I realize that Saul was the first king, his crown has been removed by the Lord, and David is really the king in waiting, he has been anointed. I understand it is a personal feud, it is a personal conflict, but I want to draw a parallel to our world today.

In the book of 1 Peter 5:8 it says that the devil, our adversary, he walks around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, and the reason I want to draw that parallel is that's exactly what we see in Saul's life. All he does is roam around seeking, "How can I eliminate David? How can I get rid of him?" Now there's a lot of analogies and illustrations that go with that reference point of the king of the jungle being referenced there, but I'm going to focus more on the last part of verse 8. It does not say that he roams around trying to make life a little bit difficult. It doesn't say he roams around because he wants to nibble and pest at us. What does it say? It says he wants to destroy us.

Fast forward to chapter 20, verse 31. I'm going to show you something. If you've ever questioned Saul's agenda, if you've ever questioned his motive, if you've ever questioned did he really want to do what we just read, look in verse 31 of chapter 20, "For as long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom. Wherefore now send and fetch him unto me, for he shall surely die." You understand Saul's desire was to eradicate and eliminate David. If you're a believer in Jesus Christ right now, you have admitted you've got a sin problem, you've asked Jesus to forgive you and save you, I've got what might be some unwelcome news for you: the enemy, Satan, the devil, whatever word you want to give him that's mentioned in the Bible, his purpose for your life is destruction. In fact, Jesus taught us in John 10, "The thief comes to steal, kill, destroy." So we see a parallel happening here between Saul and David that you and I see in our lives today as believers in Jesus Christ. You can put yourself into the role of David, we can put the devil in the role of Saul and see how this plays out, and more importantly see how do we navigate this, how do we respond.

Beginning in verse 7 of chapter 18, we have the process by which Saul initiates this behavior, and in just a moment we're going to walk through seven specific things that Saul does and I'm going to draw a parallel today to what we know as the seven deadly sins. Now let me qualify that for just a moment. I'm not a fan of that designation. Do you know why? Because it makes us think that there are some sins that are not deadly. You do realize in Roman 6 it says the wages of sin is death, it doesn't say the wages of just these seven. You go to the book of James 2:10 and it says if you've broken one of the commandments of God, it's as if you've broken all of them. So I'm not real fan of that designation that we give these, however, they do serve as a pretty good classification of sin. In other words, when we do transgress the things of God, when we do violate his precepts and his commandments, more often than not we will discover that they can be categorized into one of these "seven items." I want to walk through Saul's process, I want

to draw a parallel to where I believe that we can see ourselves fitting into the equation and then see what might be lying ahead for each and every one of us.

It begins in verse 7 with pride. It says, "the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Now this may seem like I'm getting in the weeds a little bit but conjunctions matter. Notice the word used is "and," not "but." The women were not comparing the two, they were simply stating the facts. Now you've heard me say this somewhat tongue-in-cheek but I mean it with all my heart: we live in a society today that says do not let the facts get in the way of your personal agenda. Saul had an agenda. He wanted to destroy David and so it begins with this "sin of pride." In fact, later on he says, "Oh, but the women have said," but that's not what the women said. All they simply stated was here are the facts that David because he's living wisely according to the things of God, is actually living such that's actually more than Saul. So that pride seeps in.

Then we get to verse 8 and we find the sin of covetousness. It says, "And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed." In other words, covetousness is when we desire something that somebody else rightfully has. He did not like the favor that was upon David. He did not like the blessing that was upon David. He did not like the anointing that was upon David. And here's the problem: it was beginning to show. In other words, when they just went out and lived their lives, it was very obvious to everybody that there's a difference here, David is living wisely, David is going forth with the blessing and the favor of God and not so much with Saul. And so he covets that.

Then in verse 9 he begins to lust. Now remember that term or that word "lust" doesn't just mean a fleshly craving. In fact, you go to 1 John 2 beginning in verse 15, it talks about the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes. Lust means just to crave something so much that you have to have it. Verse 9, "And Saul eyed David from that point forward." You get the perspective, and if I can put this kind of in our cultural language, it's almost as if he's sitting in the deer-blind of life just waiting for the opportunity, just waiting for David to misstep, just waiting for David to end up in a place he should not be. It says he eyed him from that day forward.

Now as we begin to look back on the last decades and even the history of our culture, it kind of feels that way, does it not? Does it feel like there's just been eyes upon believers, "Maybe they'll slip up here. Maybe they'll mess up there. Maybe they'll trip and fall there." It's almost as if there's been eyes everywhere which leads to verse 11: anger. It says that Saul cast the javelin. Now if I were going to hedge things here, this is where I would claim that you and I really have become a part of the cultural process today. Have you noticed that every time you turn around everybody is angry about everything? I mean, everybody's angry. I mean, everybody's mad. It doesn't matter what they believe, it doesn't matter who they support, it doesn't matter what position they hold, it's just everybody is angry and it's like everybody has a javelin in their hand and they're going at everybody. We live today in a very tumultuous angry culture and if there's one group of people that everybody can come to a consensus with that they'd like to throw the javelin at it's those Bible-thumping Christians. If they would just hush about this and quit talking

about that, everybody could just get along in the campfire and sing Kumbayah. We are at a stage in our culture today where if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you claim that he is the way, the truth, the life, that the Bible is true, I've got news for you: everybody who's not "in our camp" has a javelin in their hand and they are ready to throw it at you.

That's where we are. Here's the problem: Saul's not done. Notice what he does next, verse 13, "Therefore Saul removed him from him." It's the sin of gluttony. You see, gluttony, though we typically think that in terms of an all-you-can-eat and I'll go back three and four times to the buffet, really what gluttony means is just having more of something you already have enough of. Saul already had enough power. He's the king. Saul already had a palace. Saul already had all these things so what did he do? He said, "I need more of my space. I need more of my safe place." So he sends David out. You say, "Why is this critical to you and I?" Because if this process in Saul and David's relationship works out in our lives, that means the next stage is they're going to begin to marginalize us from the culture. "Get out of our house! Get out of this! You no longer have a place here! The seat that you used to have at the table is no longer reserved for you."

And then there's envy, verse 15, "Wherefore when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them." Even with the marginalization, even with the attempted disposal of, you know why there's envy? Because David still made an incredible impact. Remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 16 and Peter makes this incredible profession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." He says, "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father which is in heaven." And then he makes this incredible statement that hell itself shall never remove God's presence or his kingdom from this earth. Saul could not get rid of David, and I've got news for the culture out there: you can't get rid of Christianity. In fact, if you do a history of the last 2,000 years, here's what's ironic, do you realize the more you persecute Christians the faster they grow? It's true. Now it also weeds out who are the false professors as well, but at the same time you look through some of the greatest shining moments in the history of the church is when the rules and the regulations were the most pressing and the most difficult for the followers of Jesus.

And last but not least, you get to sloth. I know we think of sloth as laziness but really what it is is he called in everybody else and he said, "Do you know what? I can't win this battle. I'm going to call in the reserves. I'm going to call in the troops. I'm going to call in..." And what you begin to see through the course of the rest of chapter 18, 19, and 20, is that anybody who is willing he will employ them to hunt David down and destroy him. What does that mean? Can I put it in the language of the South this time of year? It's an all-out blitz, is what it is. In other words, he's not willing to be who he agreed to be in the first place. Do you remember what Saul originally said? "Oh, I'll fight your battles for you. I'll take care of this." He said, "No, I've got to get everybody else."

So what's the procedure? How does this play out not in just David's life, how does it potentially play out in our lives as well? Well, there's really two procedures that Saul uses and two procedures the enemy uses against you and I today. The first one is on the inside

and the second one is on the outside. If you'll turn to chapter 18, verse 20, I want you to see the marital arrangement that takes place in David's life. Now for the sake of time, we're not going to go simply verse by verse, statement by statement, but this oldest daughter was pledged to, that thing goes sideways.

Verse 20, "And Michal Saul's daughter loved David: and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him." Now push pause for just a moment. Everything sounds good, right? I mean, David's going to be the son-in-law to the king. Saul's finally going to have this man of favor as a part of the family. But look at verse 21, "And Saul said, I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him. Wherefore Saul said to David, Thou shalt this day be my son in law in the one of the two." Why was Saul excited about this relationship? Because he was hoping – listen – he was hoping that she would be true to him and essentially turn David in. He was desirous that he would now have somebody on the inside, he would have somebody who's at the breakfast table, he would have somebody who was in those moments of stillness and quietness who would act as his benefactor, for lack of better terms, for his desire of destruction.

You say, "Well, how does this operate among the body of Christ?" You know, there's this little book in the New Testament that I think unfortunately gets neglected because it's only one to two pages depending on how size or how large the size of the font of your Bible, it's called the book of Jude. One to two little pages right before the book of Revelation. And in verse 3 and 4 it makes this statement that even though there was a desire to encourage, admonish, that there are certain men who crept in unaware and basically their life was so against God that they even denied the Lord Jesus. You understand the first procedure, the first means that Satan always uses in his attack is the inside, to convince us of the same thing he convinced Adam and Eve. Do you remember what the very first statement was made to humanity outside of God? "Yea, hath God said?" If he can convince us that the statements in the Bible that are emphatic are just cultural, if he can convince us that the statements that are exclusive really should be rewritten, in other words, and you and I are seeing this in our day today, you and I are observing there are churches in particular, there are groups collectively that are consistently right now bending their knee to the world and they're throwing out the Bible. They're saying, "It doesn't matter what the Bible said, the question is what do the polls say? It doesn't matter what God said, how do you feel about this?"

You see, I've got news for you: the greatest tactic the devil's ever used on the body of Christ is to get inside to infect us and to convince us that God really didn't mean what God really said. But what if, what if you as an individual, what if we collectively as a body say, "Do you know what? That might happen out there but it's not going to happen here. We're going to stay true. We're going to stand true to what God's word says. It doesn't matter who says, what they say, and who they are when they say it, we will stand true." Well, here's what happens: if he cannot get you to bend and buckle on the inside, then he moves to the outside.

Fast forward to chapter 19. I want you to see what happens and you're going to see this more explicitly in a moment when his inside tactic or procedure did not work. Verse 11, "Saul also sent messengers." Verse 14, "And when Saul sent messengers." Verse 15, "And Saul sent messengers." Verse 20, "And Saul sent messengers." Verse 21, "And when it was told Saul, he sent other messengers." Do you get the pattern? Basically what Saul does, he says, "Okay, if I cannot get him to bend on what he believes, if I cannot get him to compromise his convictions, if I cannot get him to 'throw out the Bible,' then every time he turns around I'm gonna hit him with something else." You know, in the book of Daniel it says one of the goals of the enemy, the devil, is to "wear out the saints." You know one of the biggest struggles about those of us who claim the name of Jesus and believe the scriptures isn't compromise, it's just tiredness. It's exhausting and maybe this is just my story, maybe it's not your story, but I feel like every time I turn around the enemy's punching me and blindsiding me and tripping me with things I didn't even see coming. Do you think David saw all this mess? In fact, I had a mentor of mine years ago, you may have heard me say this, he said every single day if you do not run face-to-face into the devil you might be walking the same direction he is.

What happened here? Every time David. So I just want to put it in perspective. He goes to the grocery store, he gets popped. He goes to the ball field, he gets popped. He goes to work, he gets popped. He goes home, he gets popped. I mean, every time he turns around Saul's sending somebody. You say, "Why is that important for us to understand?" You realize that the enemy wants to destroy you, he wants to destroy us, and if he cannot get you to bend on the word of God, then he's going to wear you out. He's going to get you so tired, he's going to get you so exhausted, he's going to get you so frustrated, it's like parenting teenagers. I'll let that just soak down for a moment. Do you know what happens? You know, those of you who have been through that stage of life, you just get so tired you just say, "I hope I don't find it." That'll soak in later for some of y'all. In other words, you're so exhausted you can't fight.

So how do we respond? Well, there's two things that happen in this story that truly need to be our priority in our life. I've categorized them as our "family and our friends," but let me unpack that. Go back in chapter 19, verse 15. There's this fascinating story. Saul has sent the messengers to David's house. Listen what happens in verse 15, "And Saul sent the messengers again to see David, saying, Bring him up to me in the bed," in other words, in the middle of the night, "that I may slay him. And when the messengers were come in, behold, there was an image in the bed, with a pillow of goats' hair for his bolster. And Saul said unto Michal, Why hast thou deceived me so, and sent away mine enemy, that he is escaped? And Michal answered Saul, He said unto me, Let me go; why should I kill thee?"

Now let me unpack that for just a moment. There's a lot of folks that have a lot of issue with this passage. Saul claims he was deceived by her. You do understand that's kind of like the Pharisees saying that Jesus didn't know what he was talking about. This is the man with the evil spirit. He recognizes that basically that David has gotten away from his agenda to kill him. He claims he's been deceived and a lot of people say, "Why would God honor deception? Why would God honor lying?" Where do you see anywhere in this

passage that Michal said, "Yup, I tried to trick you, dad." No, do you know what she does? She owned it.

You say, "Why is that important?" Because when I talk about our priorities, when I talk about our response, I want you to see what Michal was willing to do. This is important: she was willing to give up her own security, her own well-being, and even her own prosperity so that the anointed man of God would not get harmed. You say, "How does that play out?" In other words, what we ought to be willing to do in our own house, we can't always control what happens in the White House, the courthouse and all those other houses, but in our house we basically should make this statement that godliness and righteousness and holiness and the word of God should be more important than anything this world throws at us. That's exactly what she did in this passage. She said, "I'm willing to lose it all. I'm even willing for you, the king," who technically was her dad, "to slay me."

It reminds me a lot of Queen Esther. You remember the famous story? In fact, there's a celebration known as Purim now because of her. And Queen Esther was of Jewish descent. She finds favor in a Gentile king's eyes and she is in a marital relationship with him. There's a man by the name of Haman who decides to create an edict that all the Jews should be killed. Mordecai, her uncle, and honestly closest, I guess just closest entity in her life, comes to her and says, "Esther, we've got a problem here. You need to go see the king." And she said, "Well, that's a problem because if I go see the king unannounced, he has the right to kill me." He says, "Yeah, that's true but if you don't go see the king he's going to kill you anyway. Maybe just maybe you were born for such a time as this."

Basically what's happening here in verses 15 through 17 is Saul shows up and says, "Do you not realize that because of what you just did I can kill you?" Do you know what she basically says? "Well, if I hadn't done it, you'd killed us both so I might as well do the right thing." I've got news for you: the enemy wants to destroy, the enemy wants to steal, the enemy wants to kill, and if it's going to be that, then we might as well, we might as well be those who say if it's going to happen, at least I'm going to go down in a flame of righteousness, at least I'm going to go down in a ball of godliness because even if I compromise, even if I've been... I've got news and I'm just going to go there because I'm getting too old to care. I've got news for all those churches and all those pastors and all those denominations right now that are bending their knee to the world, I've got news for you, you're going to bend your knee and they're going to eat you anyway. They're going to eat you anyway. You say, "Oh no, they love us." They're Saul. All he wants to do is eradicate and destroy. All you're doing is making it easier for him.

How about the friends? Chapter 20. It's one of the most famous stories in all of the Bible. There's Jonathan, the biological son of Saul, who should be the rightful heir to the throne, however, because of Saul and his behavior it has now been given to David, the son of Jesse. He recognizes this. He and David have a very good friendship. He gives him his armor. He gives him his weapons. He basically says, "Hey, you are the rightful heir. You are the one in spite that Saul is my biological dad." Here's the problem, "My dad hates you. You know it and he wants to kill you and I don't want that to happen." So they create



and arrangement in chapter 20. There's going to be a feast that Saul hosts and David is going to be absent from it. Basically they're just "testing the waters," and he and Jonathan have this conversation that goes a little something like this, "When I'm absent from the feast, if your dad is upset and continues to want to kill me, then we have to set up an arrangement for me to know this." So they did such. Three days after they were going to meet in a certain field. Jonathan was going to go out with one of his servants, the Bible calls him a young lad, and basically he was going to do target practice, he was going to practice shooting his bow and arrow. He said, "David, I'm going to shoot the bow and arrows, if they fall short of the target I'm gonna tell the lad they're on this side and you will know it's safe to come back to the palace, my dad was just full of hot air. But if I send the arrows past the target and I tell the lad get thee from here, that's gonna be our code it's not safe, you're not welcome, you've got to get on the run." For those of you who know the story, you know the story. Jonathan shoots the arrows further than the desired target and David is never in the palace again.

Now how is this and why is this critical to you and I? There's an old evangelist of days gone by, unfortunately deceased from this life, who made a statement years ago that I never forgot. It's so scarily accurate. He said, "You know, the army of God is the only army in the world that shoots its own in the back." Let that just sink in for just a moment. You see, one of the things the enemy is going to do is get you to try to compromise on the word of God. If he can't get you to do that, he's going to get you to try to rat each other out and say, "You know what? I'll take that payment, I'll take that benefit, I'll take this, I don't care what happens to them."

Do you see what happens here with Jonathan? I mean, think about what he's about to face. He's about to go home and say, "Hey, dad, I let the one you want to destroy, I let him go. I tipped him off. I told him." And you look at the rest of the story, it is tumultuous. You see, Michal as his wife, Jonathan as his friend, were willing to stand for the word of God than to save their own reputation, status or life itself.

Now I would love to tell you this morning that this is all just a lovely homily, it's just a sermon of possibilities, but I can't do that. You see, I've read the last 2,000 years of history and the story of Saul and David has been played out more times than we care to count. You know what they say about history, right? The one thing we don't learn from it is to learn from it. So maybe today is one of those days where we realize, do you know what? As a believer it's time to get serious because the heat's about to get turned up. If you're a non-believer, maybe today is the day to become a believer because I've got news for you: you think the heat gets turned up on the Christians, just see what the Bible says about the non-Christians for all of eternity.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe you're that individual this morning, maybe you're here in person, maybe you're watching online, maybe you're listening on the radio, and today is that day where the Spirit of God took the word of God and really really just worked you over, and maybe you're that person saying, "You know, I never took Jesus seriously. I never took this Christianity as something that was real viable for my life." And maybe today it was made very clear your need for Jesus. The

Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. It doesn't say whoever joins a church, whoever becomes a Baptist, whoever passes a test. It says whoever calls on the name of the Lord. Maybe today you're that person who needs to cry out to the Lord. It's not about the statement you make, it's not about the words you say, it's not even about if you say it out loud or not, it's about your heart's cry. Maybe today your heart's cry would go something like this. "God, today much like the story, I'm here to own it. I've got a sin problem and, God, I know what your word says and I've violated it. God, I've transgressed it and I know the result is death but your word says the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ. So God, today I believe, God, today I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he came on my behalf. God, I believe he lived a sinless life on my behalf. God, I believe that he died a sacrificial death. Just like we heard in that song, that was my tree he was on. And God, today I believe that when Jesus Christ rose from the grave he made it possible, it made it feasible for my sin to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. God, today I don't have the answers to all the struggles, issues and problems of life but there's one thing I know, the only person who can cure my sin problem is Jesus Christ. The best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today for the very first time in person, online, you cried out to God. In a moment, we're going to stand and we're going to sing together and we want to invite you just to step out and step forward. We've got a whole team of folks that just want to celebrate with you, they want to pray with you, they want to pray for you. And maybe today you say, "I'm already a believer but I need to follow in believer's baptism." Maybe you say, "Hey, I've already taken care of that but, man, I need to be in a church that said they're not going to compromise on the word of God." We'd love the privilege of having that conversation and praying with you. But before I pray, maybe you say, "Pastor, I've got all that covered. I'm not going to bend and I'm not going to buckle," but in a few moments you're going to leave this place and do you know what's going to happen? The same thing that happened to David, the enemy is going to send his messengers and you're going to fall into the temptation of giving in, giving out, or turning others over. Maybe today is not about stepping out and stepping forward, maybe today is about stepping out of here with the resolve of saying that only hell itself will keep me from doing what God has called me to do.

*Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of decision, God, thank you that in spite of our past you want to rewrite our future, God, in spite of our failures, God, you want to empower us with your Holy Spirit, God, in spite of our missteps, God, you want to purpose every step from this day forward. God, help us today to ignore all the voices that are contrary to yours and just hear your calling upon our life. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*