

The Why of Christmas

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As you're walking around the campus and particularly as you see the worship guide you received when you came on our campus, you see this advertisement for the Lottie Moon Christmas offering, and I know sometimes we look at that and maybe it's verbiage that we are used to but we are not quite clear on what it is. Lottie Moon was a missionary who served over 100 years ago in what we know as China and she wrote back to her family, her church family in the state of Georgia, and talked about how she didn't have the funds, she didn't have the resources to reach the people with the Gospel, particularly the children that she was ministering to. And she solicited those funds and the money was pulled together and was sent and she was able to accomplish the goal for that year and it started a precedent where every year we gather together with tens of thousands of churches all over our country and as we give over and above to what we know as the Lottie Moon Christmas offering, you are giving directly to what we know as international missions in places that many of us are familiar with, even in some places that we can't even communicate where they are serving. In fact, this is not only something that we join tens of thousands of other churches with, but we have representatives of First Baptist, Opelika, who are the beneficiaries of this Lottie Moon Christmas offering as well. We just want you to understand why are we doing it, not just the what and how much is the goal, but why are we doing this because people are continuing to be called to the Gospel ministry and we want to make sure they have the resources necessary.

Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time in our service, I know oftentimes we are familiar with the what, we are familiar with the who, we are familiar with the how, but rarely do we take a look at the why. So God, I pray that as we open your word today, as we are challenged by your word, it would be more than just the facts, it would be more than just the names and the locations and such but, God, help us understand the why, the reason behind it all. Lord, convict us, encourage us, but more than anything, may you be the only voice we hear in this moment. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to two places. First is the Gospel of John 12, and secondly the book of Isaiah 9. Now we're only going to spend a little bit of time in Isaiah 9, a classic Christmas passage of Scripture that I'm sure many of you are familiar with, if not so scripturally, you've seen it on Christmas cards; if you've ever been to Handel's Messiah, it's one of the critical pieces there. But most of our time is

going to be spent in John 12. If you weren't with us last week, there is a group of people who have come to meet Jesus. They are Greeks, they are Gentiles, they are much like you and I, and they find Philip and they find Andrew and all of what we know as the disciples and they asked a very critical question, they said, "We want to see Jesus." In other words, "Where can we find him? We want to hear from him." And Jesus begins to communicate to this crowd who he is. In fact, it's very much the Gospel in a nutshell, just a very succinct summary of who he is and what his purpose as Messiah will be.

Well, as always, every time Jesus opened his mouth, every time he spoke, he gathered the crowds. People always wanted to hear what he had to say and what we are going to discover in this passage in John 12 is there is another group of people who have shown up. It's that famous group that's been almost everywhere Jesus has been. It's his critics, it's his skeptics, and the majority of them are from a Jewish background. What's interesting is in John 12, it says beginning in verse 42, it says,

42 Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: 43 For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

I'm going to stop there for just a moment. This is a group of individuals who had heard the facts. They knew the who, they knew the what, they knew the when and where and the how, but they needed to know the why. And beginning in the next verse, Jesus begins to explain to us the why. What is the reason behind it all? In particular today, what is the why of Christmas? Why is it so important that he was wrapped in swaddling clothes? Why is it so important that God became flesh? Why is the story, why is the person of Jesus so important? So today is not so much the who, the what, the when, the where, how, today is about the why. Why do we celebrate this season? Why do we emphasize this season? Why is it so important?

Beginning in verse 44 it says,

44 Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. 45 And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me. 46 I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believes on me should not abide in darkness. 47 And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. 48 He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judges him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. 49 For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. 50 And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.

When you get to this point in the life and the ministry of Jesus Christ, we are literally knocking on the door in the Gospel of John of what we know as the Passion Week, the

crucifixion and resurrection experience of Jesus Christ. By the time we get to this passage, everybody who is there with a critical spirit, everybody that is there that is struggling with who Jesus is, they know who he claims to be. They have seen what he has done. They have heard what he has said and so here Jesus twists a little bit and he says, "I want you to know the why to it all." What I want to share with us today as we celebrate what we know as this Christmas season, is the why of Christmas. Why do we celebrate? Why do we acknowledge? What is so critical? What is the why behind everything?

Jesus begins in verse 44, the first why is because of the sending, because he sent. Notice what it says, he says, "I have not come of my own but my Father who sent me." The very first why of Christmas is to send. Why do we have Christmas? Why do we celebrate? Because the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

I would encourage you to go back to Isaiah 9. As I mentioned, this may be a very familiar passage to you. It may not be familiar but as you'll notice on Christmas cards and particularly in the music of the season, Isaiah 9:6 and 7 it says,

6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.
7 Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

As I mentioned, one of the most famous well-known passages of the "Christmas season," - "for unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." But as you take that passage, you begin to break it down, what you will notice is to send or the sending of Christmas is actually broken down into three distinct parts. Notice the first part, "unto us a child is born." Why is that so critical? Because that was the very first prophecy the Lord gave us about the Messiah whom we know as Jesus Christ. All the way back in the garden of Eden, humanity, Adam and Eve, we messed up, we sinned, and the Lord comes and begins to distribute what we know as the repercussions, the consequences of sin and he begins with the serpent and he makes this declaration that the seed of the woman will crush the head of the seed of the serpent. Why is that important? Why is that critical? The very first prophecy of the Messiah is that a child would be born.

Now I want you to think about this in context. The very next chapter of Scripture, Adam and Eve conceived a child. His name is Cain. And you can sense the excitement in her voice. She says, "I have received a manchild of the Lord." It's almost as if you get the idea of saying, "Is this going to be the one who will save us? Is this going to be the one that allows us to reenter what we know as the garden of Eden?" And what took place? You know the story of Cain and Abel, death came knocking very soon. Soon thereafter, a man by the name of Abram, the Lord approached him. He would one day become Abraham and what was the promise, what was the prophecy? That a child would come, that a son, that a child would be born, and from him would be this lineage, would be this

heritage that the Messiah would descend. That is why Abram went to Isaac and Isaac to Jacob and Jacob to the 12 tribes and Judah, because ultimately the promise, the prophecy was that a child would be born. You make it all the way to the Gospel of Luke and there is a man by the name of Simeon, an older gentleman who said that he heard from the Lord that he would not die until he saw the child born. "Unto us a child is born."

Notice the next statement, "unto us a son is given." Now typically we take those two passages and we just kind of smash them together, right? "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given," but there is a distinct difference. Do you remember that famous verse in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." You see, unto us a child was born, the fulfillment of the promise, but unto us a son is given, that's not about the birth of Jesus, that's about the death and resurrection of Jesus, because without his death and without his resurrection, there would be no need to celebrate his birth.

"Unto us a son is given." In fact, earlier in the Gospel of John he says, "Nobody takes my life lest I give it." His last statement in the Bible it says, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." And the Gospel of Luke records, "And he gave up the ghost." Unto us a son is given. He willingly, volitionally offered his life in our stead for our sin and our rebellion.

So when we talk about the why of Christmas is to send, it wasn't just to send a child to be born, it was to send a son to give his life. The Bible calls it propitiation. That's a big fancy word, to pay the price in our stead for our sin. But notice the majority of Isaiah 9 6 and 7 is not about a child being born, it's not even about a son being given, it then begins that. "The government shall be upon his shoulders. He shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Then it says "and of his kingdom shall be no end. He shall sit on the throne of David." Do you find it interesting, I do, that the greatest amount of quantity about the sending of Jesus isn't about his birth, it's not even about his death and resurrection, it's about his soon coming return; that there is coming a day. That is why we sing, "Joy to the world/ The Lord is come/ Let earth receive her King." One who comes eventually at the end of your Bible, he descends to reign as Isaiah 9 says forever and ever.

So when we talk about the why of Christmas, allow me to share with you it is so much more than the manger scene. It is so much more than the swaddling clothes. It is so much more than the shepherds and what we know as the wise men, for in one of the great passages about him being sent to us, yes it speaks of his birth, but then there is his death, then there is his resurrection, and there is his soon coming what we know as second coming. So when we talk about the why of Christmas, the first why that Jesus spoke was that he was sent of the Father, not just to be born but to live, to die, to raise from the dead and return again one day.

Back to John 12. Jesus continues. He says it's not just that I was sent but the second why of Christmas is that he was to shine. Notice what it says in verse 46, he says, "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness."

Now all throughout the Bible, particularly the Gospel of John, Jesus has communicated that he is the light into a dark world. In fact, in John 8:12 he says, "I am the light of the world," one of those famous seven "I am" statements in the Gospel of John. But this is the very nature of God himself. 1 John 1:5 says, "God is light and in him is no darkness at all." In fact, you go to the very first chapter of the Bible, Genesis 1, what we know as that first day of creation, what did the Lord say? "And let there be light." You get to the last couple of chapters of your Bible, the book of Revelation, it says there is a day coming where there is going to be a new heaven, a new earth, a new Jerusalem, and it says in Revelation 21 that there is no need of the sun therefore Jesus is the light thereof.

And here he makes this statement, "Not only have I been sent, but I have come to shine. I have come to be the light in a dark world." Here's the problem: John 3, the famous story of Nicodemus. We quoted verse 16 earlier. I'm sure you're familiar with it. Here is this religious man, much like these guys in John 12. He has grown up in "church." He has grown up with the Scriptures but he is missing Jesus. He says, "I just don't grasp how to have eternal life." In verse 19 of John 3, Jesus makes a very profound statement, he says, "men loved darkness rather than light," and it is that darkness, it is that zeal to do it our way. That's what Adam and Eve did in the garden of Eden, they said, "We know better than you do, God." But what does Jesus say? He says, "I have come to be the light to dispel the darkness."

Now, this last week I had a wonderful opportunity that came my way through a contact that I have. I received an invitation and I gladly accepted that invitation. Last Thursday night, I was there in person at the Falcon-Saints game up in Atlanta. The new arena that was there and I may be from Dallas, Texas but I hate to tell Jerry Jones, I think he has been one-upped on this one. But nonetheless there I was in this arena and they opened the doors two hours before game time starts and I didn't understand, why two hours? What's so important? Well, because there is so much to see, there is so much to do, and so for two hours, can I tell you what I did? I just walked and ate. It was a beautiful experience. I would walk, eat, walk a little more, eat, feel a little guilty, walk a little more, eat a little more. It was a great time. But for two hours I just circled that arena on the outside and I got the experience of seeing it. In fact, everybody was enjoying themselves. It was a great time. It was festive not just because of the season but because of the game, and anytime the Falcons and the Saints get together there is always a fervor in the air.

So after a couple of hours of eating and walking and walking and eating, we made our way to our seats. They began the pregame display and as at any event of an athletic nature, there is always this big kind of hyped type experience, but no one prepared me for it. I guess I should have known and I didn't. But just a few minutes before the kickoff, every light in the arena went out and the people lost their ever-loving mind. They got so excited. They hollered. They cheered. They screamed. And then it happened, every item in that arena, that brand-new billion dollar, I don't care if it is four by four inch or it was the massive screen circling the field, everything that could be lit up got lit up all at one time. I mean, they lit the whole place up and all of a sudden there was no darkness to be found. The intensity of the light was so extreme. Maybe it was the placebo effect, maybe

it was my imagination, I think I could actually feel the heat from all the lights. We went from total darkness to total light in a split second.

You know, that's exactly what happened at what we know as Christmas. It went from the darkness of this sort. A man by the name of Caesar who had declared that humanity wasn't paying enough taxes, you need to pay just a little bit more, and everybody go to your hometown and there is Mary and Joseph riding all the way to Bethlehem. You know, oftentimes when we recount the Christmas story, we talk about the fact that most people missed Christmas and that is true, but it didn't change the fact that Jesus shined in the midst of the darkness. In fact, when he descended that Bethlehem evening, the last time I checked, the angels showed up and when they showed up to the shepherds, it was as bright as the heavens. It was quite a splash. In fact, the light of Jesus shined so much of what we know as Christmas that a few guys who we call wise hundreds of miles to the east noticed his star and made their way west.

So what Jesus shares with these individuals is the first why of Christmas, is that he was sent. He was sent to be born. He was sent to live. He was sent to die. He was sent to one day return. Secondly, he was sent to shine. He was sent to take the darkness of this world and to dispel it and to remove it. He did so in such a magnificent fashion at his birth but he did so also on his death and resurrection. You remember the story of when the women came on that fateful day that we call Easter morning. The angelic beings above the tomb shining with a brilliant light and what did they declare? "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" And when he one day returns, according to Revelation 1:8, it says every eye will see him and everyone will notice his appearance because when Jesus shows up in the midst of the darkness of life, it is of such a brightness it cannot be missed if we are looking for it. Much like the other night, in the midst of the darkness when all the lights came on, it changed everything.

Jesus said, "I was sent by the Father. I came to shine out the darkness of life." But here's the third point, he said, "I have come to save." Notice what verse 47 says, it says, "if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world." You know, earlier we quoted John 3:16, I'm sure most of us are familiar with it, but it's the next verse that rarely gets quoted. Jesus makes this statement, "For I came into the world not to condemn the world but that the world through me might be saved." And the reason that's important to this passage when Jesus said, "I have come to save, not to condemn," he says, "to he who believes." That's critical to our understanding because in John 3 we have a man by the name of Nicodemus. Nicodemus was religious. Nicodemus was very much intertwined in the political social networking of his day. Nobody would have done more, given more, or been more than this guy by the name of Nicodemus, yet Jesus says, "You must believe on me."

You know, we find ourselves at this very interesting season of life. I know we know it is Christmas, this one particular month where we celebrate as a culture like none other, and this is a month where oftentimes, if you allow me to say, we brag about how much we do, how much we give and how much we go. This is the season where people will give more to charitable causes than any other time of the year. This is the season where more people

will give community service hours than any other time of the year. This is the season for doing but Jesus says it's not about doing, it's about believing. In fact, it was earlier in Matthew 7, Jesus said, "There is going to come a day when people come up to me and say, did you not see what we did? Did you not hear what we said?" And Jesus says, "Depart from me, you evildoers, because I never knew you."

It is so easy to get trapped into doing and going and being about did I do enough or not do enough, except what did Jesus say? He said, "He that believes not." In fact, I think a lesson we can all learn today is the lesson of what we know as the prodigal son, another very familiar story in Scripture. Luke 15. There is a man with two sons. He has an older and a younger, of course, and the youngest comes to him and says, "Dad, I want my inheritance." You realize it's the same saga as the garden of Eden. "I know better than you do. If I would just have what you have a right to give me, I will do it better than what you would lay out for me. So give it to me now." The picture of the father who is a picture of the Lord in this story, gives the inheritance and the Bible says he goes out and experiences – I love this phrase – riotous living. Now what is riotous living? It means anything you want to do that you shouldn't do. That's what it means. Riotous living. It says he spent the money. He had friends but when the money ran dry, the friends ran away and he found himself broke, penniless and friendless, wallowing in the mud of the swine.

Verse 17 of Luke 15, this "prodigal son" makes this statement, it says, "He came to his senses. If I just return unto my father, maybe I'll be a hired servant." You know, the hired servant is somebody who does something for somebody else. Once I've done this labor, once I've done my time, I receive a reward. But the father who is pictured as the Lord in the story, the only time the Lord is ever pictured as getting in a hurry, he runs out to meet his son. He doesn't treat him like a servant. He doesn't talk to him as a servant. In fact, he puts on him the rope and the ring of a son. That's why Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again."

When Jesus is communicating in John 12, he says, "I was sent, I have come to shine, but I've also come to save." And he lays it out very clearly: he who does not believe. What we need to grasp this Christmas season which is often time a season of doing and giving and being a part of so many things, is Jesus' criteria for forgiveness wasn't about doing more or stopping this or that, it was about believing on him as he said that he came to be born, to live, to die, and to raise again as the forgiver and the Savior of our sins.

But Jesus doesn't stop there. In fact, that's where most of us would stop the story, but he continues in verse 48 and he says, "He that rejects me, and receives not my words, has one that judge him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." Now when we speak about the why of Christmas, why the person and the life, the death, the resurrection, the coming of Jesus is so important, yes we have to understand the first why is because he was sent, the second why is because he has come to shine out the darkness of our life, the third is he came to save, but here is the fourth: to stand. To stand.

Notice what this passage says, that one day every single one of us will stand before God. Now that's usually not a theme we talk about a whole lot at "Christmas time," but understand we can't just leave Jesus in the manger, folks, we've got to look at the whole package here. Every one of us is going to stand before God. You get to Revelation 20, one of the last chapters of your Bible, there is a fulfillment of a biblical prophecy that all the material world, all the things that we strive for and grasp for and desire in life will be dissolved in a great ball of fire. And according to verse 10 of that passage it says, "and I saw one seated on a throne." The next verse says, "and all of humanity great and small, free and enslaved, stood before him."

You see, the why of Christmas isn't just that he was sent, the why of Christmas isn't just the fact that he is to shine out the darkness, the why of Christmas isn't just that he desires to and can and wants to save us, the why of Christmas is that we need Christmas because we're going to stand before God one day and we're going to give an account of our life. According to Revelation 20 it says, "and the books were opened and he that was not found written in the book of life was judged according to their works." Do you notice a theme here? Jesus said, "He that believes not shall be judged." Rather than being in the book of life because of their beliefs, they are in the book of works because they thought they could be good enough, they thought they could do enough, they thought they could become religious enough, but Jesus said, "He who believes." One day each and every one of us, we're going to stand before God, a holy, powerful, infinite, eternal God, and what do we have to stand on? Our self-righteousness? The fact that "in one month of every year we gave a little bit more or did a little extra"?

He says, "He that was not found written in the book of life," but the standing is not just the fact that we're going to stand before God, the picture that you get in that scene in Revelation 20 is that all of humanity stands condemned. We all have fallen short of the glory of God, correct? We've all messed up. We've all sinned. But the picture you get, the idea, the construct that you get is that when the judgment should be and rightly pronounced as we stand before God that Jesus Christ whom we believed on, stands in our stead, he stands on our behalf and says, "Father, I paid the price for their sins. Father, I have poured out my blood for their iniquities. I'm," listen, "standing in their place." The why of Christmas, not just that he was sent, not just that he shines out the darkness, not just that he saves, but that he stands – listen – in our stead on the day that we stand before the Father's judgment seat.

Christmas is so much more than just a lowly stable. Christmas is so much more than just swaddling clothes because if it were not for the rest of the story, we wouldn't sing the songs we sing, and we wouldn't send the cards that we send. You see, there is so much more than just the who, the what, the when and the where of Christmas, there is the why.

And then there is one last issue that Jesus addresses. Not only that he was sent, not only that he shines, not only that he saves, and not only to stand, but to speak. The last two verses of this chapter, verses 49 and 50, it says, "For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak

therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak." In two verses, four times Jesus says, "I am speaking. I am declaring." And I want you to notice this key word, "whatsoever." We're going to get to that word in just a moment. That's critical. You know, the very last passage of what we know as Matthew 28, Jesus after his resurrection makes this statement, "All authority has been given unto me." Then he declares what we know as the Great Commission, the Gospel proclamation to go into all the earth with the Gospel.

But all authority and he says here, "whatsoever I speak." Now that word "whatsoever" is so critical and here is why, because Christmas is more than just a manger. If that were the case, then he couldn't use the word "whatsoever," it would just be about what his birth could do. But when he says "whatsoever I speak," that includes birth, that includes life, that includes death, that includes resurrection, and yes that does one day include his return, which means whatever we are struggling with, whatever we are dealing with, whatever is problematic in our life, listen, he has the ability to speak into that in our life. "Whatsoever I speak," because he has all authority.

This may be the Christmas season, it may be a particular month out of the year, but I think all of us would recognize maybe more greatly so at this season that some of us are struggling. We are struggling physically, maybe we are struggling with health, maybe we are struggling with our finances, maybe we are struggling with our schedules. Last time I checked, don't those classify under "whatsoever"? Or maybe this season, the struggle is not physical, maybe it's emotional, and maybe the battle is just between your ears or maybe it's with somebody else or maybe it's with family or within your business. Let me ask: does this not qualify as "whatsoever"? You see, when Jesus used that term "whatsoever I speak," if Christmas was just about a manger, then we'd have to qualify that into a very specific amount of things that he could speak to, but because Christmas is more than the manger and it's about the life, the death, the resurrection, and the return, that means the whole package: the struggles that are physical, the struggles that are financial, the struggles that are emotional, but more importantly the struggles that are spiritual. This is that time of year where even in the midst of the hype of the season, so many people are despondent about their life, struggling with purpose, struggling with reason, struggling with just sometimes getting up the next day, but what word did Jesus use? "Whatsoever."

You see, if the Christmas story was just about his birth, then it would be limited to the birth and we've all experienced that so it would be over. If Christmas was just about his life, well, we're living life and sometimes that's not very much fun. But because the Christmas story is about the whole package, "whatsoever" doesn't just include birth, it doesn't just include life, it even includes every construct and thing that we are struggling with. And maybe today, maybe today your struggling spiritually, maybe the physical is fine, maybe the emotional may be okay, but spiritually deep down inside there is what an old theologian of years gone by said, there is a God-shaped vacuum that only God can fill. Here's the wonderful news today: not only can he fill, he desires to fill, and he says, "That is why I came. I have been sent by the Father to remove the darkness of your life. To save you from your sins, and to stand in your stead one day when you stand before the

throne of God." Then four times at the end he says, "And I am speaking this, not just of my own but the Father as well."

So let me ask you today: what is your Christmas struggle? What are you dealing with? What is bothering you? What is difficult at this time? Aren't you grateful for the why of his speaking, that whatsoever it is, he is not only capable but willing and desirous to address.

Let's pray together with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. You know, maybe this morning you may be struggling physically, you may be struggling emotionally, but maybe more important than that, maybe you're struggling spiritually. Maybe there are doubts. Maybe there are questions. Maybe there are things that to be honest with you, you are bothered by them. Here's the great news: today it's not just about the birth of Jesus, in fact it's not just about the life, it is about the death and resurrection, and if he is able to raise from the dead, then he is able to save you, he is able to forgive you, and he is able to infuse your life. The great news today is you don't have to go through a bunch of courses, you don't have to check off a bunch of boxes, in fact the Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Maybe today is that day where you go beyond the who and the what and when and where and you go to the why. Why do you need Jesus? Because ever since humanity fell in the garden, we've all needed Jesus. We've all needed someone to bear the price of our sin. We've all needed someone who could go in our stead. And maybe today is the day that you make that profession, you make that confession, man, I've got some great news for you, all you need to do is call on the name of the Lord. No special classes. No checking off boxes. Just have this conversation. You don't have to have it out loud. In fact, you don't even have to say the same words I would say but maybe your conversation would go a little something like this, "God, today I just want to be honest with you. I just want to come clean. I just want to confess. I've tried my best. I really have tried but I recognize today it's pretty much been for naught. I've got to recognize I'm never going to be good enough and it doesn't matter how much I stop doing that I shouldn't do, it's never going to add up, and so I realize, I believe today, I desperately desperately need Jesus. I believe that Jesus loved me so much that he was born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus loved me so much that he did live a sinless life on my behalf. I believe Jesus loved me so much he was willing to pay the price of my sin on the cross and raise from the dead so I could be forgiven and I could be saved. And 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 just want to ask you to forgive me, ask you to save me, and I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, in just a few moments, we'd love the opportunity just to engage in a conversation if you had that conversation with the Lord. Or maybe today our conversation isn't about your salvation, maybe that took place years ago, and maybe today you've realized as you've seen all throughout time, you need to be that one who stands in the water, you need to be that one who pictures the death and burial and resurrection of Jesus in your own life. You may have been saved for decades but you've never followed in believer's baptism. Or maybe today you're that individual, that couple, maybe that family, who said, "You know, we've been praying about, we've

been thinking about it, this is our church home. This is where we need to plug in and we need to kind of nail that down." Or maybe your decision is something else. Whatever it may be, we just want to celebrate with you. We just want to have a conversation with you. So after I pray, we want to give you that opportunity.

Lord, as we come to this time, Lord, a time of decision, of what do we do with what you have given us out of your word, God, I want to thank you, thank you that you haven't given up on us, thank you that you haven't pushed us to the side and said, "No more, I'm done," but that your desire is to take broken pieces of clay and to somehow as only you can supernaturally put it all back together. So God, help us to see that our own endeavors will never fix the problems, our own efforts and those of our peers will never solve this but only Jesus can. So whatever that means for our lives today, God, give us the conviction, give us the courage to just do, just to follow, just to be where your Spirit has called us this day. Lord, thank you again for the opportunity not to wander where we desire to be, but to be exactly where you want us to be. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I want to encourage you this morning to stand with me as our team leads us. If there is a decision to be made, I'll be here at the front.