

Authentic Christianity #4

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

sermonaudio.com

Preached On: Monday, August 29, 2016

Crossroads Ministries

301 S. 8th Street
Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

If you're a first time guest or visitor or maybe you've had the privilege of being with our church for a long time but maybe you haven't been with us the last few weeks, we're walking through this passage of the Bible, the book of 1 John, studying a subject matter that is desperately needed in our culture. In a world of opinions and ideas and all kinds of concepts, we have a task set before us through the word of God to recapture what is authentic Christianity. What does real Christianity look like. Not what a group says it should be or a poll says it should be but what does the word of God say it should be.

Today we're going to begin in the book of 1 John and we're going to end in the book of 1 John, but in the middle of the message, we're going to find ourselves in the book of Matthew 23. We're going to find ourselves in the midst of a message, a sermon that Jesus delivers that gives great illustration to the topic at hand. Today we're going to deal with a subject matter that I do not believe anybody intentionally falls into the trap thereof, in fact, I believe that it can become an issue of the best intentions. You know, oftentimes in life we have the best intentions, we believe we're headed down the right path and then lo and behold we find ourselves in the midst of a horrible situation.

My last semester, my senior year in high school, I found myself in a position that I had been many times before. I grew up in a community and there were friends of mine and we played ball together, hung out together, and it was very commonplace, particularly on the weekends when we didn't have a scheduled ball game, that we would get together at somebody's house to play some type of sporting event. Now, at this time of the year, January or February because it's cold, usually the sport of choice was what we know as basketball. Now, I know it's not going to surprise anybody here but of all the sports in the world, that's probably the one I struggled with the most. You actually laughed. I find that somewhat sad but I can dribble and I can pass, shooting is a struggle when you're 5'6" but nonetheless, I liked the game of basketball, I liked to play, and when it's not a sanctioned organized game, hanging out with some friends, it's a lot of fun and we had a good time that day.

Well, at the end because we're friends and just having a good time, I don't know whose idea it was and it really doesn't matter, they decided that they were going to have a slam dunk contest. Now, we're not talking NBA All-Star game here, just a bunch of guys having fun, seeing who can outdo who. Well, they were out there having a good time, one hand, two hand, all kinds of, in their opinion, creative dunks, and I'm just sitting back

watching. Why? Because I've never much less dunked, I've never even touched the net of a basketball goal before so I'm just kind of hanging back until finally with the best intentions, didn't mean any harm, I just said, "Hey guys, can I participate?" They kind of looked at me the way some of you are looking at me, "Like what do you mean participate?" I said, "Well, why don't I grab a chair and I'll jump off a chair to dunk the basketball." Well, they laughed about it and said, "Well, why not?"

So we put it out there and I made a few practice runs and there I went. I ran as hard as I could, I jumped off that chair and I did what in my opinion, in my opinion, my humble and not accurate opinion, was the best two handed dunk you've ever seen a 5'6" guy do. I mean, I brought it home with both hands. I mean, I shook the goal. Now, it wasn't Shaquille O'Neal break the glass but I gave it everything I had, but I found myself in a precarious position. I had never dunked a basketball before. I had never hung from a basketball rim and I'm just sitting there dangling ten feet in the air and I'm looking down at my friends and I said, "What do I do?" They said, "Let go." I said, "Okay." So I let go of the basketball rim and as I fell to the ground below, my foot was in an awkward position and when it hit the ground, it ruptured my Achilles tendon, that small piece on the back of the heel of your body that can literally take all of your other strength and speed and bring it to a screeching halt. For the final semester of my senior year all sports activities were gone, all endeavors of that magnitude I couldn't participate in because I had a ruptured Achilles tendon.

Now we all know the story of the mythological Greek story of Achilles and there are different variations of it but it goes a little something like this, that there was a man that was strong in valor in war, particularly the Trojan war, of which his mom dipped him in the river Styx and dropped him in there all but the back of his heel that she was holding onto so that his entire body was fortified and it was strong, could not be defeated, however it was that little small part that if compromised, would bring destruction and ultimately death. The way the story is told in mythology is there was a poison arrow one day in the heat of battle and it wasn't even a strategic shot that hit him in the back of the heel and he dropped dead. The phrase Achilles tendon is not only commonplace in athletics and in what we know the medical world today in our culture, but it has even a more colorful picture than that. It pictures for us something that is strong, something that is great, something of great magnitude that is brought down by what appears to be the smallest of matters.

Today from the book of 1 John 2, I want to deal with what I call the Achilles heel of Christianity, that one small area that trips us up every single time. It's a word we're familiar with, it's called hypocrisy. Now let me warn you from the very beginning, every single one of us struggles with this issue. Every one of us faces the struggles of hypocrisy because by definition a hypocrite or hypocrisy is somebody or something that is done in the form of acting or playing a part. In other words, it's authentic Christianity on one day, it's make-believe on another. It's all for Jesus on Sunday and something else on Monday. And I believe as we study the word of God today, I don't believe anybody, I don't believe anybody who believes in Jesus Christ wakes up one day and says, "Yup, I'm gonna be a hypocrite. That's what I'm gonna be." It doesn't happen that way and what we're going to

see from the word of God is it just kind of creeps and seeps into our lives and the next thing we know, we have the consequences thereof.

The book of 1 John 2, beginning in verse 3. It says, "hereby we do know that we know him," that's Jesus, "if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keeps not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keeps his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that says he abides in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." Verse 6 of 1 John 2 is one of those verses that if not already, I believe all believers should commit to memory; that if we say we abide in him, we ought to walk even as he walked. In other words, what we're going to see in just a moment is that our lives should be consistent, that they should be the same on Monday as they are on Sunday and it's why or it's that reason of that hypocrisy that seeps in that's become the Achilles heel of what we know as the church of Jesus Christ, an entity that is large, that is grand, that has resources but oftentimes is taken down and out by the simplest of hypocritical matters.

I want you to turn to Matthew 23 as Jesus deals with the subject of hypocrisy. We're going to see in just a moment he's addressing some specific individuals. We'll talk about them in specific in just a moment. But these were individuals who meant well. These individuals had generations of desiring well and what we're going to see is they would allow some certain things to happen. I want us to begin with what I call the characteristics of hypocrisy. Now, understand in Matthew 23, there are eight times, eight times where Jesus says, "Woe unto you." Now, let me give you some warning: if Jesus ever says woe unto you, you need to stop what you're doing and pay attention because it's not good. Eight times he says, "Woe unto you." We can probably deal with 30 characteristics of a hypocrite here in this passage but I thought for the sake of time and everybody is probably hungry by now, how about just three? Is that okay?

So here are three. The first one is that hypocrisy kind of creeps up in our life when we focus on the attention that one receives. A hypocrite seeks attention. Let me show you what I mean in verse 3 of Matthew 23, it says, "All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do," listen, "for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues." Now interesting, contextually speaking, all that Jesus is accusing them of doing is actually something that back in Deuteronomy 6 was to be a part of their "religious expression." There in Deuteronomy 6, speaking not only to individuals but to the family and to the family of faith at large, he says that these phylacteries or these boxes that Scriptures were to be placed on their bodies, that they were to have certain garments with Scriptures on them so that in the morning, in the evening, and every time in between, the word of God was always before them. There were seats, there were special seats for those that were in authority and those who had position so nothing that is mentioned is an inherently evil and/or hypocritical of itself, it was the approach they were

taking. What happened was they took the attention, they took, if you'll allow me to say, the spotlight that should have been on the Lord and it was then on themselves.

It's real easy to happen in our lives, in fact, many times even in my own life, in my own family's life, there are t-shirts that we wear that have verses of Scripture or descriptions of our faith, there is jewelry that is worn, there are signs and placards on houses, there are bumper stickers on cars, and there is nothing, I mean, honestly they're a good witnessing tool to let people know who you are and what and whom you stand for, the problem is when we place something in our life, on our body, or we plaster it on a wall, not so that the Lord will get the spotlight but so that we will be noticed by doing so. It easily happens. It's incremental. It happens over time and pretty soon it's not what people will think of the Lord, it's how they will view us by what we have allowed to be displayed in our lives. It's an unfortunate natural expression of our flesh. It just creeps up in our life and what happens is we end up seeking the attention that is reserved for the Lord himself.

Another characteristic of one who struggles with hypocrisy is that they have an attitude. In fact, I want you to notice in verse 16 and 17, it says, "Woe unto you," there is that phrase again, "you blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! You fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?" Let me share with you what Jesus was talking about in this passage. There is this temple, this building no longer in existence but then at this time in the center of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. There it had been built originally not by David who desired to but Solomon, his son. It had been destroyed by the Babylonians. It had been rebuilt in the fifth century, BC. It was the center of all worship. It was the focal point of the feasts, particularly what we know as Passover. It was a beautiful building, ornate with gold, and what these individuals were saying is that the value of the building, in particular the gold, was of greater value than the presence of whom the building was built for. In other words, it was the financial monetary value of the outside that was more important than the reason that it was built to house the ark of the covenant and the presence of God.

Let me share with you how this works out in the 21st century. What happens is that hypocrisy creeps in when we have an attitude where we major on the minors and we minor on the majors. In other words, the things that are really important to God, we don't put too much attention to. The things that really don't matter that much to God, that's where we put all of our time and energy.

A few years ago, I found myself in very much the same position as I am today, I was a new pastor of a new local church, I had been there about maybe 4 to 6 weeks, just kind of getting everything in order and between our services, I had a man, an elderly stately man, one whom I knew had a great reputation and just a fine man. He came up to me in the hallway, he put his arm around me. He had a big smile on his face so I knew I was in good, it was going to be an okay day. He begins to walk me down the hall and share with me how excited he is that I'm his pastor. He said, "I want you to know I knew from the beginning that you were gonna be a great pastor." I began to think to myself, "If he knew that I was gonna be great and he had to tell me, was there somebody telling him I wasn't

gonna be great?" But that's a whole other story. So he began to tell me how great I was going to be and I asked the question I shouldn't have asked. I should have let the dead dog lie but I didn't, I said, "Sir, how did you know I was gonna be a great pastor?" He said, "I knew you were gonna be a great pastor because you preach in a suit."

Can I just ask a very casual theological question? What does that have to do with anything? I mean, seriously. Because you have a suit on, that all of a sudden makes you godly? I mean, there are probably a lot of folks today in t-shirts and shorts that are more theological than some guys that are wearing suits and so it's not necessarily what's on the outside, in fact, Jesus said over and over and over, he said, "Do you know what corrupts somebody? It's not what enters the mouth, it's what comes out of the heart of man." And one of the attitudes of hypocrisy is we get so focused on the outside. In fact, later in this passage, Jesus said, "You guys are like white-washed tombs. You are beautiful on the outside but you are corrupt and you are dead on the inside." And that's what happens in hypocrisy. When the spotlight gets off of God and onto ourselves, then pretty soon that which is real important to God is not that important to us, and that which shouldn't be that big a deal all of a sudden is a huge deal to us. It's an attitude that creeps in.

Then there's an appearance that manifests. In fact, it's at the end of this passage in verses 30 and 31 of the book of Matthew 23, that Jesus puts words in their mouth but he's declaring what they have said over time and time again. It says, "And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore you are witnesses unto yourselves, that you are the children of them who killed the prophets." What Jesus was saying is: these individuals who hypocrisy had crept up in their lives, that had gotten into this habit of saying that if we had been in that situation, if we had been presented with that temptation, if we had had that opportunity, we would not have messed up like others. In other words, there is this appearance that they do no wrong.

How does this manifest in our culture and communities today? Maybe you've had this thought, I hope you haven't but maybe you have: you read the book of Genesis, in particular chapters 2 and 3, you see Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, you see the Lord make it pretty simple, there are two trees, eat of one not of the other. The rules are not difficult. How many times have you looked at that story and said, "If I had been in the garden, I would not have eaten of the wrong tree. No. No, not me." I've got news for you, if it hadn't been Adam and Eve, it would've been you or me. One of us would have done it. Then there are guys that say, "Well, if I had been King David, that night when I went on top of the house and there was Bathsheba in the night bathing, I wouldn't have given into temptation. I'm tougher. I'm stronger than that." Or how about the crucifixion event with Peter denying the Lord three times, you say, "If I had been in Jerusalem, I'd have never denied the Lord." Yes, you would have.

You see, the reality is that every single one of us is subject to temptation, every one of us is subject to fall, because the Bible says all have sinned. You see, the appearance that they were giving off is because the spotlight was off of God and on themselves, because they got the majors and the minors mixed up, pretty soon, listen to what happens: you

begin to think that God needs you. I've got news for you, church, God doesn't need you. You need him. And what happens is we think, "Well, God, you couldn't do it without me." I've got news for you, he's been doing it for a long time without you and when you're gone, he'll do it a long time without you. But we get this idea that somehow, some way, God needs me. You see, hypocrisy begins by taking the spotlight off of God and putting it on ourselves and pretty soon we think that we can do God's job for him. You see, that's what happened here in Matthew 23 and that's what unfortunately can happen in our lives as well.

So what are the consequences? What happens if we allow hypocrisy to fester? What happens if we ignore it and say, "It's really not that big a deal. Time will take care of it." Well, it will only get worse with time so what are the consequences? The first thing and this isn't really a specific verse in Matthew 23 but there is a culture of elitism that begins. A culture of elitism means there are those who find themselves in this position, the proverbial "us versus them," that they are okay and others are not, and what happens is they begin to form somewhat of a small alliance with each other that they're the only ones who are right and everybody else is wrong. You see, in Matthew 23, Jesus was addressing a certain group of people, we've seen their names: the Pharisees, the scribes. In other passages we hear of the Sadducees. In Revelation 2, they are the Nicolaitans. They are a group of people who are very religious and pious in nature who believe, they honestly believed that they were more valuable to God than anybody else. They were spiritual elitists and what happens is that's what hypocrisy does, you actually begin to think that God favors you more than somebody else.

Then what happens is we get a climate of religiosity. Now, one of the things I've been saying all through this series is Christianity is not a religion, it is a relationship. You see, a religion is crossing t's, dotting i's and checking off boxes. I want you to see what happens in Matthew 23:23. Jesus gives these individuals what appears to be a compliment but then he says, "Don't stop doing what you're doing, the problem is you've got things out of order." He says, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone." What Jesus was saying is, "There are certain things that you're doing that you ought to keep on doing, don't stop doing those because those are great, but what happened is that you have replaced more important things, the majors with the minors, and you think that's not that important."

Let me put this in contemporary language. I got up and went to church. Check. I went to Sunday school. Check. Offering plate came by. Check. Loved my enemies. Not so much interested. Prayed for my neighbors. Couldn't care less. Do you see how that works out? It's so easy to get into an idea of religiosity because it becomes about checking off boxes and if I just show up at the right place at the right time with the right people and don't end up at the wrong place with the wrong people, all of a sudden everything is okay. And Jesus said, "Don't quit giving, what you're giving is great." He said, "The problem is you have not done the weightier matters." And when hypocrisy begins to form in our lives, one of the consequences is that we just check off the boxes, listen, that we want to check

off because they're important to us because we've set the rules, right? And we neglect what's really important to the Lord.

But ultimately there is a consequence that is grave, in fact, I want to call it today, it's a casualty. I want you to go back in Matthew 23 to verse 15. Jesus has some very strategic words for these individuals. Now remember, they are struggling with hypocrisy. They've allowed the flesh to creep up, the spotlight is on the wrong person. Verse 15, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." How's that for positive preaching this morning from the mouth of Jesus? He said, "Guys, the problem is because you've gotten into this crossing t's, dotting i's, checking off the box religion and not relationship, those who are coming behind you, those who are watching you, those who are learning from you, they're twofold the children of hell."

Now, one of the ways that I like to categorize our culture today is through both wars and conflicts. I just think it's easy to identify the generations. We've got what we call the WWII generation. The Vietnam generation. The go forward generation. And now the war on terror generation. It's just an easy way for me to categorize our culture at large. But if you begin to look at the age gaps in those generations in America, one of the things that you will discover is that as you get younger, in other words those that are now the millennials, those that are in their teenage and early 20s, you see there's a stark difference between them and their grandparents and great grandparents, even their parents. What you see as you get younger with age, is you see less people who believe the Bible is true, less people who believe that Jesus is God, and less people who believe that Christianity is actually the way, the truth and the life.

Why is that? I'm going to tell you why: because we have allowed too often in our lives hypocrisy to creep in to where we become what I call t-shirt Christians. Let me tell you what a t-shirt Christian is: on Sunday morning you get up, put your t-shirt of Jesus on, you're good to go. Then Monday, you take it off and put a different shirt on. Tuesday a different shirt. Wednesday. And what happens is, you end up just wearing the t-shirt of whatever you're interested in that day and on Sunday, you wear the Jesus t-shirt and what happens is those who are coming behind, whether they're kids, grandkids, neighbors or anybody, they see this competing lifestyle. They see as the word hypocrite says, acting. There is Jesus on Sunday but something else on Monday and maybe Mahatma Gandhi had something going when he said, you know, he was really interested in the things of Christianity until he got to know Christians because he saw what was happening.

So what we discover is, that there is a casualty and there is unfortunately way too many people even in our culture today who they think – now listen to me – they think that one day when they breathe their last breath, they're going to stand before a holy God at the pearly gates and when he says, "Why should you be allowed into heaven?" they're going to say, "I was a Baptist." It doesn't fly, folks. Some of you say, "Well, I'm at First Baptist. That makes me like a double Baptist. I'm like really Baptist." Or, "I went to church. I went... I, I gave to disaster relief. That's why." The Lord says, "Depart from me, I never knew you." You see, it's not about checking boxes, cross t's and dotting i's, it's about a

relationship. And he says, "The problem with these individuals is their lifestyle that they've been living has caused those who are coming behind them to have a false message of what Christianity really is to be. It's not a religion, it's a relationship."

Now, that's all the bad news. Let's get to the good news. What's the cure? Let's go back to 1 John 2. It would be completely unfair today if all I did was give you the bad, the negative. I want to give you the positive. How can hypocrisy be cured? Not just in your life, the church's life, a community's life, a culture's life. The Lord has made it very clear in 1 John 2 what the cure is and here's the first step: conversion. Now, I'm going to go back to the verses we read last week, verses 1 and 2. It says, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that you sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." In other words, if we find ourselves in a position where we really believe it's checking off boxes, crossing t's and dotting i's, we discover that Jesus Christ alone is the Advocate and the propitiation of our sins.

The initial cure, the initial cure for hypocrisy is conversion, however, I realize that in this context today, I would dare say there are many of us who have already been converted, there are many of us who have already gone from darkness to light, we were lost, now we're found, what do you do with a believer in Jesus Christ? What do you do with someone who is saved? Who has allowed hypocrisy to creep in, maybe even unintentionally? You never meant it to happen but it has. Well, I think the thing that needs to take place is conviction. Notice verse 5, "whosoever keeps his word."

Years ago, I found myself on a collegiate campus. There was a man who was a mentor to me who walked me through a discipleship program and he had in the front of his Bible and I had it in the front of mine for years and I've committed it so much to memory, I no longer write it in there, I've just got it. But in reference to the Bible, in reference to the word of God, it said simply this: this book will keep me from sin but sin will keep me from this book. What we discover is that the word of God convicts us about what we should be and what we should be is t-shirt Christians. Some of you think, "I thought you just said t-shirt Christians weren't good? You've got Jesus on Sunday, something else on Monday?" We all wear different t-shirts: we've got family; we've got job; we've got school; we volunteer; we coach ball; whatever it may be. We all wear different shirts, here's the thing I want to communicate: the word of God convicts us that no matter what shirt we're wearing, it's the "Jesus shirt" that covers all the other shirts so that he is presented 24/7.

Now, I want to share with you something that just personally just, it just grates me. Have you ever had those conversations that it's like fingernails on the chalkboard? Do you know what I'm talking about? I mean, it just hurts to hear? Now, if you and I ever have this conversation, if we ever have it, I will never embarrass you, I will never call you out, you won't even know that it's bothering me, I'll just nod very politely and move on down the way. I will never do anything impolite to you. You say, "Well, what kind of conversation could we be having?" There are various variations of it but it goes a little something like this. "Hey, preacher, I'm not going to tell you this story because we're in

church." Or, "Hey, we're not in church so listen to this joke." I've got news for you: if you shouldn't say it in church, don't say it at the ball field. If you shouldn't watch it in church, don't watch it at home. It's real simple. In fact, this is what I'm speaking about about conviction here is that if we wouldn't do it, watch it, say it or think it sitting in these pews, we shouldn't do it outside of these pews as well and that's the problem with hypocrisy is we are viewed and we are seen and maybe even become people who live one way on one day and in a location but live a different way in a different location. I'm just a firm believer that the word of God teaches us and convicts us that we should be out there the same as we are in here and if what we profess in here is lived out there, then all of a sudden we're going to see a reverse in our culture. No longer will hypocrisy be the Achilles heel because there will be nothing of which to take us down.

But there is one last cure. There is conversion. There is conviction. But then there's this last thing: consistency. Verse 6, if we say we abide in him, we ought to walk even as he walked. Simply put that the Jesus we sing about, we celebrate, we study and we address in this place at this hour in this time, is the same everywhere we go.

My wife and I were having this conversation just this week. It's kind of a concern we have as we look out at the world around us in totality. I think it's one of the struggles that we have as believers and I think we mean well by this, I don't think we mean any harm. We talk about going to church, going to the house of God, the place of God, but according to 1 Corinthians 6 it says that as a believer in Jesus Christ, verses 19 and 20, "you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit." What that means is, that you and I can really theologically, we really can't say we go to church because we are the church. When we go to work, guess what? The temple of God, the Holy Spirit is at work. The Holy Spirit is at school. The Holy Spirit is at home. And if we would understand that this consistent lifestyle isn't relegated to one or two hours on this campus on a given day but 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, wherever you go as a child of God, so goes the Holy Spirit and so goes the church. I know it's easy for us to say, "Well, we went to church today," but last time I checked as a believer in Jesus Christ, wherever you are, the church is where you are.

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed, as we come to this time of our service, what we call an invitation. In just a moment, our worship team is going to come up, I'm going to pray over us and you're going to have the opportunity to respond to whatever the Lord has challenged you with from his word today. You know, maybe you're that individual when I mentioned the word "conversion" earlier, maybe you're that person, maybe you've been basing all of your eternity on checking boxes, on being in the right place at the right time or not in the wrong place at the wrong time. I've got news for you, according to the word of God, you can never be good enough and you can never avoid enough bad to be saved. The Bible makes it clear that it's only by the blood of Jesus Christ as we just read, the propitiation of our sins.

If you're in that position this morning, I've got great news for you: you don't need to check off a box, you don't need to cross a t or dot an i, you just need to have a serious conversation with God. You may not have it out loud, you don't even have to say the

same words I would say but maybe that conversation would go a little something like this. "God, I realize this morning what you already know about me, I'm the problem and Jesus is the answer. I understand today I can never be good enough. I can never be good enough. God, I'll never do enough good or avoid enough bad to be forgiven. It has to be the blood of Jesus Christ. So today I want you to know I believe that Jesus loves me. I believe he lived for me. I believe he died for me. I believe he rose from the grave so I could be forgiven and I could be saved. And God, today I don't have all the answers but I've got the answer to this one problem, my sin problem, it's Jesus Christ alone. In the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me and I want you to know that I want to live my life for you."

With our heads still bowed, our eyes still closed, maybe that's who you are today. In just a moment after I pray for us, I'm going to encourage you just to step out, step forward. I would love the privilege of meeting with you. Or maybe you're that person that's been a believer in Jesus for years, maybe even decades, the invitation today is not necessarily for you to step out and step forward, maybe the invitation is when you step out of this building that you are the same outside these walls as you are on the inside. Or maybe you're like the other families who came today who said this is where the Lord was leading them to plant their spiritual lives, to plant their families, to grow among this body of believers. Whatever decision it may be, after I pray I'll be here at the front. I would love the opportunity to celebrate with you.

Lord, as we come to this time of invitation, how good it is to know that you're giving some of us a second chance. Lord, I believe there is somebody here today who may have thought that you had given up on them and they realized today there's still an opportunity, there's still forgiveness available, there is still salvation, there is still restoration. Lord, wherever we are in relation to you, Lord, we know today that you've spoken to us, you've communicated clearly from your word what we need to do, help us now, Lord. Give us the courage of your Holy Spirit just to do what we need to do. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

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