

The Spirit of Christmas

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Preached On: Sunday, December 17, 2017

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Silence. I don't know about your world but that's a rarity in mine. In this season where so much noise and so much activity and so much hustling and bustling takes place, isn't it nice just for a few moments to think about the quietness of that evening, the quietness of that time where God made such a dramatic entrance in the birth of Jesus Christ. So let us pray just in a quiet tone, relish the silence, relish the quietness.

Lord, this morning we confess that we are probably busier than we should be, we probably are louder than we should be and in the midst of our busyness and our volume, Lord, we confess that it's easy to miss you this season. So Lord, as we are in this place with a copy of your word, help us, O God, help us to focus upon you, help us not to miss you this season, help us to grasp and to understand that it is in those silent moments where we can hear your voice the best. Give us the ears to hear this day. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the Gospel of John 13. As you are turning to John 13, today I want to address an issue that's going to sound very cultural but, trust me, we're going to turn it and make it very biblical. I want to talk about the spirit of Christmas. You know, when we talk about the spirit of Christmas in our culture, in our vernacular, I think we all grasp what that means. It's this time of the year where we tend to lend a helping hand where maybe we wouldn't otherwise; it's this time of year where we tend to be a little bit more generous than we might normally be. The spirit of Christmas is that of selflessness, it's that of generosity, and today I want to talk about the power of the spirit of Christmas. What happens in the supernatural, what happens in the spiritual realm when we truly grasp what it means to be selfless and to be generous and to allow ourselves to imitate what Jesus Christ demonstrates in this passage today.

As you turn to John 13, you're going to find yourself in a very unique portion of Scripture. This is a place that we call the farewell discourse. This is the night before the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. We are hours away from his trial. We are about 12 hours away from him taking that famous cross up Calvary's hill. If you are a guest or visitor with us today, you may be wondering to yourself this is Christmas, this is the time where we sing "Silent Night, Holy Night," and "Joy to the World," why are we going to focus on a passage regarding his death? Allow me to share with you if it were not for the death

of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, no one would ever sing about the birth of Jesus Christ.

So in John 13, we find ourselves just hours from his trial, 12 hours from his death, and I want you to hear the words, but more importantly I want you to see the actions of Jesus in John 13. It says,

1 Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. 2 And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him; 3 Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; 4 He rose from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. 5 After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. 6 Then came he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, are you going to wash my feet? 7 Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do you do not know now; but you will know hereafter. 8 Peter said unto him, You will never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I don't wash then you have no part with me. 9 Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. 10 Jesus said to him, He that is washed need not save to wash his feet, but is clean everywhere: and you are clean, but not all. 11 For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, You are not all clean. 12 So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Do you know what I have done to you? 13 You call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. 16 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. 17 If you know these things, happy are you if you do them. 18 I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eats bread with me has lifted up his heel against me. 19 Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, you may believe that I am he. 20 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receives whomsoever I send receives me; and he that receives me receives him that sent me.

As I mentioned, this is what we call the farewell discourse. This is the night before Jesus' eventual crucifixion and ultimately his resurrection. If we want to truly grasp the power of the spirit of Christmas, we must begin with what I'm going to call a preface today, and I know some of you are thinking, "Oh, that's a literature term and why would we deal with that?" Well, a preface is that which is contained in a work to give the guidelines, the expectations. It gives us the framework about what we are going to read.

Now I'll be honest with you, I'm going to confess my inner nerd and I'm going to confess that today. I always read the preface to a book and I have discovered that sometimes reading the preface can serve as curing the pain for having read the book, and here's what I mean by that: you read the preface to a book, it tells you what you are in store for. When you read the preface to a book, it tells you the guidelines, it tells you what to expect, it tells you – listen – it tells you the why the book was written. When you read the preface you understand the why and what we discover is here is Jesus just a few hours from his crucifixion and ultimate resurrection, and beginning in chapter 13 and ending with chapter 17, both by word and deed, he is going to communicate and demonstrate to those that are before him the why of everything.

Now I want you to think about this for just a moment: chapters 13 through 17, those four chapters, those five, they contain 20%, one fifth of all the words of the Gospel of John and it only took four hours for them to take place. Think about that for just a moment: 33 years of life, three and a half years of ministry, and you dedicate 20% of the message to one simple evening. You see, in chapter 13, Jesus sits down as what we know the passover meal with his disciples. He's going to communicate to them the power and influence of the Holy Spirit in chapter 14 and 16. He's going to talk about what does it mean for him to be the vine and for us to be the branches. And in chapter 17, he's going to lay his heart out to the Father in the garden of Gethsemane. But these first two verses, this is the preface. It lays out everything for us, what can we expect, and notice what it begins with: and the passover drew nigh. The passover, the oldest celebration of a religious nature among humanity, going back thousands of years. Every year the Israelites, the Jewish people, they gather together at what we know as the passover. Why? They celebrate the deliverance by the hand of God. They celebrate the fact that for 400 years, 10 generations, pharaohs came and pharaohs went but they still were enslaved. Then a man whom the Lord used by the name of Moses came to deliver his people. That famous tenth plague, you know the one, the plague of death, the firstborn of every family would lose his life unless a very specific condition was met, a lamb without blemish, a lamb to be slain. The blood would be placed on the threshold of the door and when that blood was placed on the threshold, then death would – listen – pass over that home. It was a celebration of life. It was a celebration of grace. It was a celebration of mercy. Why is it mentioned, not just the chronology, not just the gathering? Because the passover is not just a celebration of what God has done in the past, the entire meal is an expectation of what God is going to do in the future through the person of the Messiah. And listen, the passover was seated with them at the table. John the Baptist made this declaration three and half years earlier when Jesus came to the river Jordan, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

This passage begins, these chapters of Scripture begin with an initial statement about passover. Why? Because the passover is not just a remembrance of Egypt, the passover was a looking forward to the Messiah and the Messiah was seated at the table. But it's also the preface about the plan of God. Notice what it says in verse 1, it says he loved his own. In fact, he loved them to the end. But Jesus makes this very unique statement in verse 1, he says that he is going to return to the Father. You see, the plan was not just to be born, the plan was not just to live a sinless life, the plan wasn't about just walking on

water, multiplying food, the plan did not even end when he breathed his last breath on Calvary. What does he say here? He says, "I am going to return to the Father." What we see is the plan of God being laid out. It is his birth, it is his life, his death, his resurrection, and ultimately his ascension as we will talk about more in just a moment.

But kind of the code of commentary behind this is found in Genesis 22. It's the story of Abraham and if you're not familiar with the story, allow me just a few moments to explore this preface material. Abraham is older in age, in fact he and his wife are past what we would call the childbearing days. The Lord comes to him and says, "through your seed, through your descendants, the Messiah will come." We know that there was a child of promise, a young man by the name of Isaac. Isaac was born and in his early teenage years in Genesis 22, the Lord recounts how he asked Abraham and Isaac to go on a mountaintop for a sacrifice, for the ending of one's life. And that story in Genesis 22, Abraham and Isaac get to the foot of the hill, Abram tells his three young lads, he says, "Y'all wait here. We're going to go up." Then they began the journey up the mountain. In that journey, maybe it's just me because I have three young men in my home, but allow me to give you a little insight into this journey. There is something different about us guys that is completely different than you girls. Girls, you have got to be talking to communicate, guys, we don't need words, do we? I mean we really don't. In fact, yesterday I had the opportunity to be in the car with one of my sons for about two hours. I think we said about three sentences and at the end I'm like, "Are you good?" I'm good, we are all good. I mean, that's what we can do, right, guys? I mean, you can sit in a deer blind with a guy for all hours of the day and everything is good. Girls, if you sat in silence for six hours with one of your friends and nobody said a word, you'd be texting everybody going, "What's wrong? What's wrong?" Guys are good with silence. You say, "Why is that important?" Because in Genesis 22 when they were headed up the hill, Isaac started talking. He said, "Dad, I see the wood, I see the knife, but I don't see the item of sacrifice." And Abraham said, "Oh, don't worry, son, the Lord will provide."

The way the rest of the story lays out is Isaac is placed on that famous altar. The hand of Abraham goes up with a knife and the angel of the Lord interjects and he says, "Stop!" Abraham looks to the side and there is a ram that is caught in the thicket. The reason I share all of that story is that verse 5 of Genesis 22 when those three young men were left at the bottom, Abraham walking up with his son Isaac said, "You guys stay here. We will return." You see, over in Hebrews 11:19, it said that Abraham believed that God was able to raise him from the dead. You see, when Jesus makes the statement here in verse 1, "I have loved them to the end. I will return unto the Father," he is disclosing the entire plan of God. You see, in just a few hours there is going to be scourging, there is going to be mocking, there is going to be death instilled into the human body, but what Jesus is saying at the beginning is, "Don't panic. I got this. Not only am I coming back three days later but I will raise on high. I will return to the Father."

So at the very beginning of this discourse, we not only have the imagery of the passover, we have the plan of God, but we also have the plot of the enemy. Notice what happens in verse 2, it says, "And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him." Now I'm not going to go into all the details

about this character by the name of Judas Iscariot in Scripture but he is a unique guy. In fact, in John 6, Jesus says, "I have chosen all of you but one of you is a devil." Later in John 17, Jesus says, "Those who I have come," speaking of his disciples, "all of them are saved except one, the son of perdition." Interesting, the only other time that phrase is used is to describe the antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2. Judas is the only character in Scripture that when he dies the Bible says he goes to his own place. He's also the only person in the Bible that the Bible says Satan entered him.

You see, here was the plot. The plot from thousands of years previous at the hands of Satan himself was to somehow derail the Messiah. You go throughout the lineage of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and what do you see? You see kings coming and kings go, you see rulers in rebellion and in iniquity, and it looks like we were without hope until that silent night, holy night, when supernaturally God came down. There was Mary, conceived of the Holy Spirit. The plot time after time after time again had been and would continue to be foiled and yet here we are hours away from this Judas Iscariot with 500 people behind him coming to the garden of Gethsemane. Do you remember what Jesus said to him? He said, "You come and you betray the Son of Man with a kiss, friend?" You know, Jesus was actually alluding to Scripture. Psalm 41, King David is writing about his enemies. He's writing about those who have encircled around him, who are giving him all kinds of trouble, and in verse 9 it says, "And I am betrayed by a friend."

You see, in the first two verses of these four hours that take up 20% of the Gospel of John, we have the imagery of the passover, we have the plan of God outlined, and we have the plot to the enemy disclosed, but then beginning in verse 4, Jesus Christ gives us an incredible picture. Now, this is the washing of the feet of the disciples and in just a few moments, we're going to talk about the practicality of this, in just a few moments we are going to talk about the real-world application of this, but allow me to share with you the picture that Jesus has given us beginning in verse 4. It says, "He rose from supper, he laid aside his garments, he took a towel, and he girded himself." Now I want you to fast forward to verse 12, "So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Do you know what I have done to you?" Now the simpleton in me would have said, "Well, yeah, you washed my feet." But, you see, Jesus is giving us even a greater picture of this and this is key to understanding the power of the spirit of Christmas. The first thing that he did is that he rose from supper. Now, if you've ever had the opportunity to have the Jewish Passover celebration meal, this is a significant piece of the equation. Why? Because whoever was leading the meal, whoever was the patriarchal figure in the home, would sit in the grandest of chairs and in the most important position.

I remember some years ago a friend of mine in the community I was living, an individual who was Jewish by birth and Jewish by faith, so that we could have a little insight to this celebration, he came down to the church where I was serving and for a select group of people, he actually led us in the Jewish Passover both in Hebrew and in English. Now we had the full meal deal, no pun intended. In fact, his family, they prepared the food because they wanted to make sure that it was kosher, and one of the things he shared with

me, he said, "The chair that I sit in," he was going to be the dad of the evening, he said, "it needs to be the biggest chair you've got. I mean, it needs to say authority." Well, we're in a good old Baptist Church and I said, "Well, I'll do what I can." I remember when he walked in that evening, he saw the best that we had and he goes, "That's as big as you've got?" I said, "That's it." And he goes, "Well, it'll do." And what I learned through that experience is whoever was the key voice in that Passover meal was the one who communicated the power, the authority and the presence over the celebration.

Notice what happens here in verse 4, he rose from supper. In other words, Jesus removes himself from the seat of authority, he removes himself from the seat of presentation, and what is he ultimately going to do? He is going to kneel on the floor? Do you see the picture? In John 1, beginning in verse 1, it says, "In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God. The Word was God. There was nothing that was made that it was not made by his hand." A declaration that everything that we know in the universe came from the mouth and the hands of Jesus Christ himself. Then in verse 14 of the same chapter, "The Word," who was always with God and always was God, "became flesh." You see, when Jesus enacts verse 4 of John 13, he's not just picturing what it means to wash somebody's feet, he's picturing the Gospel. Here is one seated in position who's about to make himself of no reputation. Is that not what happened when Jesus descended at what we celebrate as Christmas? When he left what we know as the elders and angels, a declaration that, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." When he descended below the crystal sea and out of the thunderings and lightnings to the dust and the dirt of the Middle East, he went from his position of authority and power unto a position much the opposite.

Then it says in verse 4 that he took off his garments, those clothes that were reserved for that one who would lead this infamous meal, the clothes of presentation, the clothes of authority, the clothes of power, and he laid them aside. Philippians 2, beginning in verse 5, one of the greatest passages in Scripture that describes how this worked out in life and ministry of Jesus. It says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." It said what he did later on in that passage, he said, "Not thinking it strange to be equal with God, humbled himself into the likeness of man." You see, Philippians 2 says that what Jesus did in his Incarnation is he didn't give up his deity, he didn't give up who he was as God, he added the flesh of humanity and he walked among us. Do you see the picture Jesus has given us? He is leaving a position of authority and he is girding himself, he is clothing himself with the apparel of humanity.

The third thing he does, he takes up a towel. Is there any symbol that could be more pertinent for that of a servant? That which is to wipe up a mess or to help with a request, whatever it may be, and Jesus comes and he picks up the towel and the Bible records that he begins to wash their feet. Mark 10:45 it says that Jesus did not come to be served but to serve, and notice this last statement, "to give himself as a ransom for many." I want you to see the picture of what's happening in John 13: Jesus has exchanged places. Originally at the meal he was seated in authority and now he is seated below those who were around the table. He has gone from a position of presence to a position of servanthood. He has exchanged positions.

You do realize that is the story of Christmas. We needed someone who desperately could pay the price for our sins. We needed someone to go in our stead and in our place and what did he do? He traded places. You see, the story of the washing of the feet is the story of the Gospel but it doesn't end there, in fact if you go to verse 12, this is the part that I find so fascinating about the actions of Jesus. So he had washed their feet, he took his garments and he sat back down again. "Do you know what I've done?" Hebrews 10:12, it says that Jesus Christ "ever lives to make intercession for us, that once he gave himself for our sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Father." Now I want you to see the picture here. Jesus Christ seated in the chair of authority takes off his garments, he places a towel around himself, he gets down into the feet of the disciples, he washes their feet, places his garments back on and sits back down. That's the Gospel in a nutshell. That's what it is. When we talk about Christmas, that's what we're talking about, leaving a position of authority, getting into the lives, in fact under the lives of those that are struggling and having difficulty, washing them and turning back to one's proper place.

Notice how he ends this display, "Do you understand what I have done to you?" What Jesus is declaring is this is more than just clean feet, this is more than just an act of gratitude, it is a picture of the Gospel. And what that does for us, it leads us to verse 15, "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." What Jesus is encouraging us to do is picture the Gospel in people's lives. You know, years ago there was a famous theologian who said, "Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words." He says, "I've given you an example. Do this unto others."

You know, when you think about this example, when you think about this concept of this idea of what I want to call the power of the spirit of Christmas, think about the expectations that humanity has when it comes to graciousness, generosity, selflessness. Can we just be honest today? We don't expect much out of people, do we? In fact, I'm kind of one of those amateur sociologists. I love just kind of watching how things play out with humanity. I'm that guy and I do have a genuine heart but I like watching people. Have you ever done this, have you ever walked into some store or maybe a restaurant and there is kind of this order of how people move. You know, if you're there and somebody is two or three steps behind you, obviously you should keep the door open for them and be gracious. Have you ever kept the door open for somebody who's about 12 or 14 steps behind and seen the look on their face when they realized you are being nice to them? Because we don't live in a society that's used to that, do we? Or how about this one, a few days ago I was at a busy place, a retail place, and it wasn't Black Friday but it felt like Black Friday and people were everywhere and people were in all kinds of commerce, and the young girl that was a cashier, man, she was doing a fabulous job but in the heat of the moment she gave me too much change back. I'm on my way out, got my receipt, counting everything and I noticed I have too much money. I turned around to give her the money back and she looked at me like I had 14 heads. Who returns money? Well, it wasn't mine to begin with. But nonetheless, the expectations of humanity is rarely do we expect people to be gracious, rarely do we expect people to lend a hand and to be selfless, in fact, we usually expect the opposite, do we not?

This week, the script got flipped on me. I've been the one holding the doors, I've been the one returning the money, I've been the one typically extending that hand of graciousness, but this week the script got flipped. My wife and I decided, we purchased an item and we decided because we are in the south, you know, we can do this, right? You know, here guys, watch this. Do you know that famous phrase? Even though technically the measurements said that it could fit in our family minivan, I don't think it was quite right but, boy, did we make it fit. I mean, we got it in there and it was about three times heavier than we expected it to be, and we found the place where we were going to unload this item. It was a very busy area of our city and it just wouldn't budge. I mean, the cardboard box it was stuck in there, I was pulling, my wife, I don't mean to embarrass her but she has already heard me tell the story, she was inside the van with her back against the front seat pushing with her legs. I mean, this is the environment that we are in here. Right out in front of God and everybody. People honking, waving, "Merry Christmas! Everything, until all of a sudden this old beater of a car shows up. Now, understand when I describe a car of that age and magnitude, you'll understand why in a moment. This old beater of a car pulls over and a man gets out of the car who by all intents and purposes, he is retirement age plus some, an older gentleman in an older car. He makes his way to our family minivan. I'm pulling, she's pushing, and with this beautiful countenance he goes, "Hey buddy, you need some help?" I was shocked. I didn't know how to respond because we don't expect people to help us in our time of crisis. We expect people to let us down. We expect people to fail. We expect to get back in the van and say, "Isn't it nice somebody helped us, honey?" that sarcasm pouring out of our lives. This guy came, greater of age than what appeared to be physical strength, and if it hadn't been for him, we may not have been able to pull it off.

You see, the expectations of humanity much like that upper room, do you think the disciples expected this to happen? In fact, Peter said, "What are you doing?" And Jesus said, "I have given you an example." What Jesus was saying is when we get into people's lives and when we assist them and we help them and we go the extra mile, we're picturing the Gospel.

You know, when we talk about this event of the washing of the feet of the disciples, there are really kind of two options we have to what it may have looked like. Option A. This was a wealthy man. This man had an upper room, that's code for rich guy, that's what that is. And Jesus told the disciples earlier, "Go and prepare. I've got everything ready." And Option A is this guy was of great wealth and of great magnitude and he would have had servants down at the base of the home and when the disciples had shown up, he would have made sure their feet were washed before they entered his home. Option B is that he was not present, that's why he allowed Jesus and the disciples to borrow his home for the Passover meal and he had "turned the keys over to them," therefore the servants would not have been at the bottom and the feet of the disciples would have been truly dirty and filthy. Now I'll be honest with you, I think we could flip a coin for Option A and Option B and I don't think we could come to any resolve but can I just confess my belief? I don't care which option you pick, it's nasty. I mean, it's nasty. I don't know about you but six inches away from people's toe jam, I don't care how clean the feet are, that's not fun. But what does Jesus do? He gets down on the floor and it doesn't matter how "clean and/or

dirty" those feet may have been, when he places that towel on their feet, he is picturing getting into the muck and the mire of people's lives.

Let me give you the example of the season: you have two ears and a mouth for a reason. Some people just need you to listen to what's going on in their life. People will be amazed when you give up the most valuable commodity that you have, you know what that commodity is? Your time. "I'll listen to you. I'll assist you. I'll help you. I will give to you." Do you see the example that Jesus is giving in the story when he leaves his position of comfort, when he leaves his position of rightful authority and he exchanges places. He allows himself to be beneath. He allows himself the position of a servant. He allows himself to be inconvenienced for others' sake.

Verse 15, he says, "I have given you an example." Now I have dear friends of mine and God bless them, they believe that this should be what we call the third ordinance of the church, and if you're not familiar what that fancy terminology means, when it comes to ordinances, when a person confesses Jesus Christ as their Savior, we baptize them. It's a declaration, it's a picture of the death and burial with Christ unto a resurrection of new life. The ordinance of the Lord's supper where we gather to do what 1 Corinthians 11 says, we remember his death until his coming. I have dear friends of mine that believe that washing feet is the third ordinance and there is elaborate and yet humble ceremonies and I've been a part of those and they are wonderful, but I don't think we should relegate this passage just to towels and physical feet. You know, sometimes it's harder to give somebody an hour of your time than it is to wash a dirty part of the body. Sometimes it's harder to give financially to one who needs it greater than you than it is to wash someone's physical feet. And the example that Jesus is giving is more than just physical feet and a physical towel, it's about getting into the dirty parts of people's lives and serving and giving and going.

Then there is the explanation, he says, "Do you know what I've done? I've given you an example." The explanation is he has pictured the Gospel. A few days ago when the script got flipped on my wife and I, this guy came, he assisted, he helped and he was gone. I hardly had an opportunity to say thanks. I hardly had the opportunity to say, "Man, I appreciate. Can I compensate? Can I help?" Man, he was here and he was gone. I mean, the Bible says we have entertained angels unaware. He might have been one of those guys, I don't know, but I would think angels would drive nicer cars. But that's another story for another day. But nonetheless, if he had stayed and if I had the opportunity to have a conversation, a real conversation with him, do you know what I bet my question would have been? "Why are you helping me? Why?" You see, when we give people our time, oftentimes we say, "Why are you helping?" When we give of our resources, we say, "Why are you doing this?" Do you realize that is the open door to the Gospel. Why are you helping me? Because Jesus has helped me. Why are you giving to me? Because Jesus has even to me. Why are you listening to me? Because Jesus has listened to me as well.

It is the key – listen – it is the power of the spirit of Christmas. If we go and if we give and if we help yet we don't share the why, we have missed the greatest opportunity we have to tell people of why Christmas really exists. We give and we go and we do so that

we can picture the power of the Gospel. We listen to people's stories, we give them the time that we don't think we have to give and the resources that are barely there to begin with because by giving and by going and by doing and by listening, we are demonstrating the Gospel in deed and prayerfully hoping we'll have the opportunity to share the reason why.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. As we talked today about the picture of the Gospel, you know, maybe just maybe you're that individual who hears the stories and the description and the challenge thereof but never has experienced it personally. I've got some exciting news for you. To experience the saving power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you don't have to sign up for a bunch of classes, you don't have to check off a bunch of boxes, you don't have to pass a test here and there, in fact the Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Let me encourage you this morning if you're that individual, just have a conversation with the Lord. You don't have to have this conversation out loud, in fact you don't even have to use the same words I would say, but maybe your conversation would go a little something like this. "God, in all of the busyness of my life, I realize today I've missed the most important aspect, I've missed the most important person. Lord, I understand today that you loved me so much that you were actually willing to send Jesus on my behalf and I believe that Jesus lived a sinless life and I believe he exchanged my place for his by going to the cross and I believe he rose from the dead. And God, this isn't just a cerebral acknowledgment, I realize the why behind this is because Jesus wants to forgive me, he wants to save me, God, and I have missed it up until this point but not today. I'm not missing it today, God, because I not only understand it, I believe it, and I'm asking you, God, I'm asking you to forgive me, and I'm asking you to save me not based on my deeds, not based on how I think I'll get better at something and not be bad at something else, but I'm laying it all down at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ. Lord, today I don't know a lot of the answers to the world's problems but I do know that Jesus is the answer to my sin problem. I'm asking you to save me. I'm asking you to forgive me. In the best way I know how, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, in just a moment if you had that conversation with the Lord, we'd love to have a conversation with you, just the opportunity to celebrate what the Lord is doing. But today, maybe the decision isn't one that requires you coming to have a conversation with one of us, maybe the decision is to leave this place today with a new understanding of the power of the spirit of Christmas, realizing that when we give and when we go and when we do, it doesn't just turn heads and mesmerize people but it gives the opportunity for them to see and to ultimately hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Maybe our decision today isn't about coming and having a conversation with someone in this room but about having a conversation with somebody outside of this room.

Lord, as we come to this time, grateful, we are grateful that you are a God of mercy. You are a God of love, you are a God of grace, and this day your desire is not to leave us in the muck in the mire of our sin and our rebellion but to take us to a place, to bring us alongside of you into your grace and your mercy and your love and so, God, help us this

day whatever it is we have to decide, whatever it is we need to do. God, help us to be right where you desire us to be. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

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