

# The Cross In Light of Christmas

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As we are worshiping corporately, one of the things, in fact they say confession is good for the soul. One of the things that I participate in as we are seen together is my mind is always drifting to the Scripture that the song we are singing is based on or, in this case, actually derived from. Revelation 12 is where that song comes from. In the midst of spiritual conflict, in the midst of spiritual warfare, in fact as you read Revelation 12, the picture is that Satan himself is wreaking havoc in the lives of those who claim Jesus Christ and they are in the midst of that persecution, in the midst of that warfare, the saints of God declare that we have overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony. So if those saints in that chapter of Scripture can make that declaration, what stops us from making the same? We can declare today that we have overcome not by our strength but by his blood, and the word of our testimony which is him working in and through us.

Let's pray.

*Lord, as we come to this time where we are going to be challenged, where hopefully we will be convicted by your word, what a wonderful declaration that we can overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony through Jesus Christ. Lord, I pray that we will no longer this hour see ourselves as defeated, see ourselves as downtrodden, because according to your word, we are children of the King, according to your word, we are children of the Most High God, and so, Lord, I pray today somehow, some way, remove the scales from our eyes so we will no longer see our world as the world tells us to but as you tell us to. May your words pierce our heart. May your Holy Spirit weave them through our soul so that we can definitively declare that we have overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony. 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 12, and if you haven't noticed, the seasons have changed here. Now, the weather hasn't changed as of yet but the season has changed. It is Christmas. In fact, everywhere you go, the decorations are different, the music is different. Let's be honest, some of the stores that we frequent, they have been playing Christmas music since Labor Day but nonetheless, it is the Christmas season. This is the time of the year where we set aside, at least in our culture, more days of the year for one single celebration than any other time. In fact, we dedicate almost a month of our calendar to the Christmas season. This is the time where

we will have special gatherings. This is the reason, can we be honest, this is why we have the New Year's resolution of losing weight, it's because of Christmas, because we eat so much and we gather so much and we shop so much and we give gifts so much. This is a season of celebration. This is a season of festivity. This is a season that if you allow me to say if it were not for an empty tomb, we wouldn't even have it. In fact, if Jesus Christ did not raise from the dead, nobody would care about his life, nobody would care about his birth, and I daresay we wouldn't gather around and eat fudge and exchange presents – that was a hint, eat fudge, that was a hint – if it were not for his resurrection.

So today I want us to look at John 12. It's a story of the cross. It's a story of the death and the eventual resurrection of Jesus Christ and it may seem somewhat antithetical to the Christmas season but it's not. In fact, it's completely apropos and here's why: if it were not for the cross and if it were not for the resurrection, we wouldn't even have this season. So today I want us to look at the cross in light of Christmas as we turn to John 12 beginning in verse 20. It says,

20 And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: 21 The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus.

I'm going to pause for just a moment. That is the mentality, that is the attitude, that is the approach that we need to have to the season, that we would see Jesus. Now I'm going to give you kind of a little forethought here: they asked to see Jesus, Jesus is about to be seen and he is going to speak and Jesus is not going to mention his birth, Jesus is not going to mention walking on water, Jesus is going to talk about the cross because apart from the cross, the rest doesn't matter.

Beginning in verse 22 it says,

22 Philip came he told Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus. 23 And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. 24 Verily, verily, [or truly, truly] I say unto you, Except [or unless] a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone: but if it die, it brings forth much fruit. 25 He that loves his life shall lose it; and he that hates his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. 26 If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour. 27 Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. 29 The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him. 30 Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes. 31 Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. 32 And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. 33 This he said, signifying what death he should die. 34 The

people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man?

In the context here, we're just a few days away from what we know as the cross or the passion experience, we're just a few days away from the nails in his hands and his feet, the crown of thorns upon his head, and a few people, a few Greeks, Gentiles like you and I, those who weren't raised in the synagogue, those who were not raised celebrating the Passover, they said, "We just want to see Jesus." And what does Jesus say? "You'll never truly understand who I am until you go through the cross."

So today I want to talk about Christmas in light of the cross or the cross in light of Christmas, and three main areas I want to address. The first one, the first part of this passage, I want to talk about the burden of his birth. Now, in our culture today, we celebrate the birth of a child and rightly so, but we understand that Jesus' entire reason, his entire Incarnation, his birth was for the purpose of death. Can we declare that a burden? And here in verse 24, Jesus lays it out very simply, he says, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Interesting that when asked to see Jesus and when asked to know what's going on here, Jesus begins not with birth, he doesn't begin with life, he doesn't begin with miracles, he doesn't begin with teachings, where does he begin? He begins with death.

I want you to notice the protocol here. Now you may be thinking to yourself, protocol, that's kind of a strange word he utilized. No, protocol is a series of events with a very known and expected end. In other words, if we do A and B, we're going to get C. I want you to notice the protocol in verse 24. He begins with unless or except. You realize that Jesus was very politically incorrect. Jesus didn't say, "Well, I think my way is a good way." He said, "Unless this occurs or except this occurs." In fact, Jesus was very exclusive yet he was inclusive. He said, "It's only by me yet all of you may come."

So what we see is he says except, notice this, a corn of wheat. Now you may not think that's significant, why would he use wheat? Remember earlier in the Gospels, Jesus gave some very important parables, one of which he made this statement, he said, "There are wheat and there are tares." The tare looks like wheat and from a distance you can't tell the difference, but when you harvest it, you can tell the tare isn't wheat. It's very different than the wheat. Here's what Jesus is saying: that unless the true one, unless the one who is authentic, unless the one who is actually real, what does he do? Unless it falls into the ground and dies. You see, Jesus isn't just telling a cute little parable, he's telling the Gospel story in one very simple verse.

He says unless this one who is the real thing, unless he fall to the ground. Notice it doesn't say is forced into the ground or made to go into the ground, because earlier in the Gospel of John, Jesus made the statement, he said, "Nobody takes my life lest I give it." He was willing to, in fact, he desired to give of his life.

Unless it fall into the ground and die. You know, it's interesting that Jesus made mention of the fact that he was going to die; though it was prophesied by the Old Testament, he made it very clear that, "My death has to happen. It is necessary." In fact, Peter, you remember in Matthew 16 Peter said, "Oh, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said, "Oh, flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father which is in heaven. By the way, the way this is going to happen is I'm going to die." Do you remember what Peter said? "Not on my watch." And Jesus said, "Get behind me, Satan." In other words, he's saying that this is the only way that it can occur is he which is the real deal, he which is true speaking of himself, "I must willingly die. I must willingly give of my life so that I can bear much fruit." In other words, Jesus speaking it's not just about being in the tomb for three days but the resurrection is a necessary component.

Twenty-five years ago, I had the distinct privilege of being a resident of a town known as Waco, Texas. Now, I know Waco, Texas is known now for reality shows but 25 years ago, we were known as Wacko, Texas because there was a guy some of you may have heard of by the name of David Karesh. David Karesh gathered a group of folks around the area and decided to have a little conflict, shall we say, that for 53 days made international news. That house, that compound, has now been eradicated but the cement platform, the cement pad still exists. You say, "Why is this significant?" Did you know that 25 years later, there are still followers of David Karesh who go to that cement pad in Waco, Texas waiting for him to come back from the dead? Why? Because it doesn't do us any good if our heroes just die. It doesn't do us any good if those whom we idolize just die. We need some life. We need some resurrection and Jesus said, "Hey, I'm going to fall in the ground and die and then I'm going to bear much fruit," which means there is going to be life that comes forth out of this death, and when he rose three days later, remember what the angel said? "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is alive."

So the protocol in one very simple verse Jesus made it very clear except a corn of wheat fall and die in the ground, it shall bear much fruit. But then he gives us a picture beginning in verse 25, it says, "He that loves his life shall lose it; and he that hates his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour." Now you may be thinking to yourself, "Whoa, whoa, time out. Jesus is talking about dying, he's talking about life ceasing, why does he say follow me?" And there is this imagery all throughout the Gospels. In Luke 9:23 it says, "If any man come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross," that's an experience of death, "and follow me." All throughout the Scriptures, he who gains his life will lose it but he who loses his life shall gain it.

But what Jesus has given us is an incredible picture. In fact, I want to encourage you if able to turn over to the book of Romans 6. I want to show you the picture that Jesus has given us. In fact, it's a picture that we see on a very frequent basis that you may not have thought of in contexts of Christmas, particularly John 12. So Jesus has laid out the protocol that he is willingly going to lay down his life and take it back up again so that

we can be saved, we can be forgiven, we can be redeemed, we can be reconciled. Then he says, "Here's the picture of it, you need to follow me."

In Romans 6, beginning in verse 3, it says, "Do you not know, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." Do you know that the picture that the Lord is foreshadowing in John 12 that we are seeing in fruition in Romans 6, it's the picture of what we know as baptism, and think about that concept or that construct of baptism and we're going to have two them in the next service. We've had over 100 in the last 12 months. What takes place? Somebody gets up before friends and family and even strangers, and the declaration is that they are dead in their sins, buried with Christ in baptism, raised to walk in newness of life. Now hear me clearly: you are not anymore saved when you are wet than when you were dry. Your sins are no more absolved on the backside of the water than on the front side. Baptism is a picture of salvation. It is a picture of us following him. It is a picture of us being buried with him. It is a picture of us dying with him.

It is a picture of the life that only he can bring and I know oftentimes following in believer's baptism is a struggle. That's one of the reasons I love the Christmas season. This is my second Christmas season to share with you here at First Baptist, Opelika, but as we walk through our Christmas Eve services, one of the things I love to make available is to follow the Lord in believer's baptism on Christmas Eve. Why? Family are there, friends of there, strangers are there, and to be honest with you, Christmas may be one of the best times of the year to celebrate our newness in life because if it were not for his raised life, we could not experience it. So as we go through in the weeks ahead, you'll have the opportunity, others will have the opportunity if you profess faith in Christ to follow in believer's baptism. Why? Because what better picture to give than the picture of what he has done in our life. We were dead and we have been raised because he died and rose for us. He said, "Follow me."

But notice the purpose. Notice verse 27, he says for this cause, he said now is my time of trouble and what should I say to the Father? "Save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour." Now that phrase "hour," that time period mentioned all throughout the Gospel of John beginning in chapter 2 is the designated time or appointment of what we know as the Passion experience or the cross experience. Beginning in chapter 2, the famous turning of water into wine. Mary, his earthly mother comes to him and says, "Jesus, they are out of wine. What are you going to do?" He says, "Woman, mine hour is not yet come." You say, "Why would he use that phrase?" Because back in Deuteronomy 32 it says the blood of the grape is what is utilized in that mechanism.

So in other words what Jesus is saying from the very beginning of his earthly ministry, his very first miracle said it's all about me shedding my blood for the sins of humanity, and all throughout Scripture his hour this, his hour that, and now we get to John 12 and

these Greeks have come, these Gentiles have come and said, "Hey, we just want to see you, Jesus." He says, "Here's the deal: if you want to follow me, realize I'm about to die. Oh, I'm going to raise from the dead but this is not going to be pretty, this is going to be ugly in the world's eyes." Then he says, "But you understand this is why I came. This was my reason. This was my purpose." He was – listen – he was born to die and if you look at the life and the ministry of Jesus, it's amazing. You've got walking on water. You've got feeding of thousands with a sack lunch. You've got people healed of their blindness, healed of diseases doctors couldn't cure. You've got all kinds of things happening but his reason was to bear the sins of the world. He says, "Should I want to escape this? No, no, this is why I came."

Think about the burden of Christmas as we sing "Hark the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King." Yes, a King, yes, newborn, but born to die. Born to sacrifice. Born to give. The burden of Christmas is that it was still all about the cross. Let me give you a challenge this year: don't leave Christmas in a cradle but take it all the way to the cross. Now this is just something the Meyers family does. You don't have to duplicate it or emulate it but when we put a Christmas tree up in our house, we actually have a crown of thorns as the tree topper. Why? It's a reminder that the whole reason for his birth was for his death.

It's the burden, but then we have the benefit. Notice what happens immediately after this in verse 28, Jesus says, "Father, glorify your name." Then this voice comes down out of heaven and it begins to speak and people are confused and they say, some people say, "Well, I think it was thunder." Other people say, "Did I hear angels?" But you get the idea that this passage is a lot like a couple of other passages in Scripture we'll deal with in just a moment, but I want you to notice the protocol here. Once again, an expected series of events with a known outcome. There are those who hear nothing. There are those that hear something that is unintelligible. And there are definitely those who hear very clearly because notice what happens in verse 30, "this voice came not because of me, but for your sakes." Notice that protocol. Jesus is saying the whole reason that the Father spoke is so that you would believe, so that you would understand, so you will grasp what's happening here.

Remember Matthew 3, Jesus goes down to the river Jordan and there is John the Baptist and he says, "Here's the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world. I'm not even worthy to untie your shoes." Jesus says, "The prophecy must be fulfilled." So Jesus goes, he is immersed, he is placed under the water, he comes up, then a voice from heaven comes out and says, "This is my Son whom I am well pleased with." Do you know there was those there in Matthew 3, they just heard thunder. There were those who heard some noise but didn't know what it was. But John the Baptists and many others distinctly heard the voice.

You go to Acts 9 and a man by the name of Saul, a mercenary who is going to Damascus, his whole purpose is to crucify, to eliminate, to martyr believers in Jesus. He sees a bright light and what does he hear? He hears a voice from heaven, does he not? The voice says, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Those that were riding with him they heard a

sound but it sounded like, that's right, it sounded like thunder. What did Jesus answer? What was the question? We would see Jesus.

And here is the benefit of his birth, that if we want to hear from him, he will speak into our lives. In fact, in Isaiah 30 he says, "If you'll listen to a soft voice say to the right, you can go to the right, to the left, go to the left." Here's our problem, as the old song says: while we are looking for lightning and listening for thunder, he is quietly whispering in our ears. Interesting, these folks say, "I just heard thunder. Maybe it was some angels. I don't know what it was." But those who came to see Jesus, he said, "This voice wasn't for me, this was for your sake."

But I want you to notice the picture. Look in verse 31. This is an interesting passage of Scripture from the mouth of Jesus, "Now is the judgment of this world." That's an interesting picture that Jesus is giving because all throughout Scripture there have been prophecies of and speaking of the judgment of this world. You and I live in a tainted according to Romans 8:22, messed up world. In fact, you go back to this event known in Genesis as Noah's flood, you go back to the Tower of Babel, you go back to all the cataclysmic events all throughout the Old Testament and future in the book of Revelation, and what do you discover? You discover that this world one day – listen to me – is going to get remade. It's going to get an overhaul. It's going to be the original fixer-upper, so to speak. Why? Because the Bible says in 2 Peter 3 that one day like a ball of fire the Lord is going to descend and he is going to eradicate everything that we know in the physical world but then he is going to begin anew. According to Revelation 21, a new heaven, a new earth, a new Jerusalem.

You say, "Well, why is that important?" Because there is a word in Scripture that you need to be familiar with, it's called regeneration. Regeneration means to be born again. It means to make that which is dead alive and it is spoken in Matthew 19 by the mouth of Jesus in regards to the earth being judged. He speaks that the day is coming where this earth will be regenerated, that which was old and decrepit and fallen will be taken away and something completely new will be put in its place. Why is that an important picture? Jesus speaking of the cross, Jesus speaking of him giving his life, what does he say? "Now is this world judged." Did you know the only other time that word is used is in Titus 3:5 where it says, "Not by works of righteousness but we are regenerated by the Spirit of God." In other words, it's not based on what we do or what we stop doing, the only way to be born again, the only way to become a new creation is through the Spirit of God in Jesus Christ. That's it.

Is that not the picture that happens in our life when we come to Jesus? Here we are a messed up, broken object that he takes, removes the old and according to 2 Corinthians 5:17, makes us a new creation. So when Jesus says now is this world judged, the Greeks, the Jews, everyone understood the context of what's coming one day, the old being torn down, the new coming to life. Jesus is speaking of the cross. Jesus is speaking of his body. He's saying, "Hey, this is the picture. What you know to happen in the physical world can now happen in your life."

But notice the purpose, the very last verse, 31, the last part of it, it says now the prince of this world is judged and cast out. Isn't that an interesting statement for Jesus to throw in? Why would he bring up the devil? Why would he bring up Satan? Why is that so significant? Because Jesus is talking about the cross and Jesus is talking about what is the significance of all that is happening here and when you go back into Genesis 3 in the garden of Eden when we messed up as humanity, guess who was there? That's right, that old serpent, the devil, according to Revelation 12, that red dragon. What did he convince us of? He had us convinced that we were smarter than God. He had us convinced that we were wiser than God. He had us convinced that we knew what we were doing but we didn't. We fell into sin. We bit the bait. And beginning in verse 15, God begins to hand out the punishment for the garden of Eden. He begins with the serpent, he begins with who we know as Satan himself. Here's what he says in verse 15, he says to the serpent that his seed will crush the heel of the woman's seed, but the woman's seed will crush the head of his seed. Oftentimes we call that the very first Gospel and what is it saying? That Satan himself will pierce, he will crush the foot of the coming Messiah but the Messiah will crush the head of Satan.

Now I don't have time to elaborate on all this today but I want to give you a theological construct that hopefully you will percolate on for hours and hopefully days ahead. I think oftentimes we have this construct that the thing that Satan wanted more than anything was for Jesus to die. I just don't believe that. I believe the last thing Satan wanted was Jesus to go to that cross. From the very beginning it says, "Hey, unless a corn of wheat fall into the ground," you do realize that at the Christmas season, the birth of Jesus, what did Herod do? He tried to kill all the babies because, "I don't need this guy." In other words, we can't allow him the temptation in the wilderness, all throughout the darkness on the cross, you see, it's when Jesus said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit," and three days later when he rose from the dead, guess what? The devil's last card had been played. He had been cast out. That is why we can sing the song that we sing, that by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony. Why? Because he has been cast out. That is the purpose of what we know as the benefit of Christmas. Not only does the Lord speak into our lives, not only does he communicate when we seek him, but he can regenerate us, make that which is old new and that which has been attempting and that which has been testing and that which has been making a mess of our lives, he can be cast out not just for eternity but in our midst as well.

Finally I want to talk about the blessing of his birth. Verse 32. In fact, I think it's a verse that all believers should memorize. It says, "I, if I be lifted up, I will gather all men unto me." I want you to think about the protocol again. Remember, protocol is a series of events with an expected end. "I if I perform miracles." No. "I if I walk on water." No. "I if I teach great sermons." No. He says, "I, if I be lifted up."

Now don't read too much when it says the word "if," because I know what our tendency to do is, our tendency is to say if means it could happen, it might happen, but it's not guaranteed to happen. However, the word "if" also very frequently means "since" or "when." Let me give you a practical example. I know this is going to surprise some of y'all but I don't move real slow. In fact, I'm kind of like the old line from Top Gun, Mach

2 with your hair on fire. I mean, I like to get going, okay? I like to drive fast, I like to walk fast, I like to talk fast so when I'm in the home and I am walking through our family room, I'm usually going at a pretty good pace and when I'm walking through the family room, there is one place that all men head from the family room, we're going to the kitchen because we are hungry, we want to eat. And I am headed to the kitchen, there is no question where I'm going. It's the only door that comes out. Do you know what my wife often will say? She'll say, "If you're going to the kitchen, bring me a drink." Do you know what she really means? "Since you're going to the kitchen." What she really means is, "When you get to the kitchen instead of bringing one back, could you bring back two?" How many times do we use that statement in our everyday life, "If you're going to be in the area, drop by and see me"? What we really mean is, "Since you're scheduled to be in the area, I'd love to get a cup of coffee with you." When Jesus says, "If I be lifted up," what he is saying in protocol is, "When I go to the cross, when I allow the nails to be put in my feet, when I allow them in my hands, the crown of thorns on my head, when I allow them to mock me and make fun of me and to harass me," that's the protocol, "when or since I will be lifted up," notice the picture, "I will gather all men."

Interesting. This picture goes all the way back to Genesis. Genesis 12, humanity, can I just say we made a series of drastic grave mistakes. The Garden of Eden debacle, pretty bad, right? Then there was the whole Noah's flood thing that only eight of those were on the boat. And how about the Tower of Babel? The Lord said scatter, we said gather. What did we do? We created some type of entity to say, "God, we know better than you. We're going to thumb our nose at you." So when chapter 12, the Lord descends, finds a guy by the name of Abram who would later become Abraham and he says, "Hey, you and your wife, I want you to go to a place you've never seen, hang out with people you've never heard of, and I want you to have a child of promise," from which we know of Isaac and Jacob and Judah and eventually Jesus Christ, he says, "that all nations will be blessed by you." The promise, the picture that the Lord gives us all the way back in Genesis 12 is that when the Messiah is born, that he is pictured for all people and all nations and all tongues and all tribes.

Fast forward to the book of Revelation 7 and it's a picture of heaven and there is this throng that is gathered and in verse 9 and 10 it says there was a number that no man could number of every – listen – people, nation, tribe and tongue. And the picture that we have is that when the protocol, he is lifted up to the cross, it doesn't matter what your skin color is, it doesn't matter what your primary language is, it doesn't matter what the balance of your bank account is, all that matters is that he was willing to pay the price for your sin and your rebellion. And what is the purpose? Notice the very last word, "me." It's personal. The purpose of the cross was so that he could sacrifice for our benefit and blessing.

You know, in Hebrews 12:1 and 2 this statement is made, it says, "Now that we are surrounded with such a great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside the weights that hinder us and the sin that so easily besets us, looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith," and notice this, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the shame of the cross." The joy of being pierced. The joy of being made fun of. The joy of being

ridiculed publicly. The joy of bleeding in a public format. What was the joy? The joy was that a relationship that was broken could be restored. The joy was the crown of creation that had fallen into sin can now be redeemed unto salvation. And what we see, the blessing of Christmas is that Christmas is a part of the story. It may be beginning as far as the earthly ministry, it's the beginning of the story of how a God who created us and formed us and fashioned us and loves us constructed a plan to save us and to redeem us and to heal us. He was willing to fall as a grain of wheat, to die and pay the price for our sins so that there should be much fruit born.

This season, we are going to attend a multitude of parties, we're going to hear music on almost every station in every environment, but let us always remember that you will miss Christmas if you bypass an empty grave because if it were not for an empty grave, there would never be a Christmas.

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed. You know, maybe you're that person today, maybe you're that individual either here in person or maybe a part of our media ministry who realized for the first time that you know all the songs of Christmas, you understand all the traditions of Christmas, but you've missed the Jesus of Christmas. Well, I've got some great news for you. You don't have to sign up to take a series of courses, you don't have to pass a bunch of tests, in fact the Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. So this morning let me implore you, let me encourage you just to have a very sincere conversation with the Lord. You don't have to have this conversation 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 share, I just want to admit that what you already know about me. I've been living life according to my own direction, according to my own standards, my own way. Lord, I realize that has led me down the wrong path. Lord, I just want you to know I have sinned, I have messed up, I have done things I shouldn't have done, I've said things I shouldn't have said, I've thought things I shouldn't have thought. Lord, I realize today that the only way that's going to be taken care of is because of Jesus. Not my good works, not my somehow stop and doing enough stuff but, Lord, I believe today that Jesus is the one who gave of himself so I could be forgiven and saved. God, I believe, I believe it all. I believe he came on my behalf. I believe he lived on my behalf. I believe he died on my behalf. I believe he rose from the dead so I could be forgiven and I could be saved. God, the best way I know how, I'm just asking you to forgive me. I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you are that person today who had that conversation with the Lord for the very first time. We'd love to have a conversation with you. We'd love to celebrate what the Lord is doing in your life. In just a few moments as we continue our service, we want you to know the conversation that you've had with the Lord, we'd love to hear face-to-face on this property. Or maybe you're here today and you realize that you've never pictured the salvation Jesus has given you and you need to follow in believer's baptism. Or maybe you're here today and saying as a person, a couple, a family, you say, "This is my family of faith. This is where we need to plug in. This is where we need to grow spiritually." Or maybe it's something else,

the Spirit of God has moved through his word in your life today and all we want to do is celebrate by knowing what is happening.

Let's pray.

*Lord, as we come to this time, thank you that in the midst of our rebellion, in the midst of our waywardness, that this is a season that we remember that you did not leave us to our own devilish devices but that you pursued us, you came after us, you were incarnated to come and to dwell among us, to be our Immanuel, to be our God with us, but to also be the one to pay the price for our sins and open up the door to forgiveness and salvation. Lord, thank you for that opportunity. May we never take it for granted. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

I'm going to encourage you this morning to stand with me as our team leads us. Any decision, I'll be here at the front.