

Excuses are like  
3-Year Bible Reading Plan  
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**Bible Text:** Romans 2  
**Preached On:** Monday, January 28, 2019

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"Savior, Savior, hear my humble cry. While on others thou art calling, do not pass me by." You realize I go to sleep every night listening to a sermon but I wake up every morning singing a hymn. Think about that for a moment because it is the music, it is the hymnology, it is the songs of our faith that come out of our heart and so that being said, let me encourage you to wake up singing a song. I didn't say I sang in the proper key, I just said I woke up singing.

So let's pray together.

*Lord, that is our prayer tonight, that you would hear our humble cry, our humble cry for you to teach us, our humble cry for you to show us in your word what we desperately need to hear and heed tonight. And Lord, I do pray that as we feast on your holy word, that it would cause a song to rise up in our heart and in our soul, that whether we're waking or whether we're going to sleep or whether we're going throughout our day, we will always declare the truth of who you are to all of those who are around us. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

You know, I find it intriguing that we mention a song that has 50 verses and we get excited, a sermon that has 50 points and we leave. But tonight as we go to the book of Romans 2, I promise there are not 50 points to the message but there are two times the normal Baptist sermon, meaning there are six this evening.

While you're turning to Romans 2, I'm sure many of you are familiar with this story rooted in history but the famed pastor for 50 years of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, TX, W. A. or Wallie Amos Criswell on his 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the church, they asked him what he wanted and this is what he asked, he said, "I don't want a gift. I don't want a love offering. I don't want any type of celebration, so to speak." He said, "I just want the privilege to stand up on the pulpit and preach as long as I want to preach. No time frames for television. No calls for lunch." So they arranged on New Year's Eve that year beginning at 7 PM central time that he would start preaching and they told him that because it was his gift on his anniversary he could go as long as he wanted.

Now they set up some things to help everybody. They realized that a lot of people would not want to stay for the duration of this and so they made the lights where he was unable to see the movement among the congregation. The stage was lit and the audience was somewhat in a darkened state so that if people needed to leave or come later, whatever it was, there would not be a distraction to him or to others.

That night at 7 PM central time, he opened the word of God to the book of Genesis and a little after midnight five hours later, he finished his message entitled "The Scarlet Thread of the Bible" where he traced the prophecies and the proclamation and the parousia or the second coming of Jesus Christ through all 66 books of the Bible. The clock struck midnight, the new year had turned, and they turned the lights and nobody had left. In fact, there were people that were standing along the back walls and seated in the aisles.

I've only been here 2 ½ years so in 22 ½ years we will duplicate that feat but for tonight, Romans 2. Hopefully you're following along in our Bible reading program and plan. You'll notice that over the course of the next few days as we get into what we know as the book of Romans, we're kind of somewhat putting the brakes on. In fact, there are some days instead of reading a chapter a day, it's only half of a chapter a day. As I mentioned this morning, kind of the thesis of Christianity, biblical Christianity, the book of Romans just seems to take everything that we believe and wrap it up in an nice condensed package and we wanted to make sure that you got the meat of the message and didn't just hurry through the contents there but allowed it to soak in and tonight as we go to Romans 2 and today's reading in Romans 3, at least a portion thereof, I heard one of the best outlines of the book of Romans in recent days this week when someone said in Romans 1, it's the story of the Gentiles that are messed up; in Romans 2, it's the story that the Jews are messed up; and in Romans 3, it's the story that we're all messed up in case somehow we missed us in chapters 1 and 2. But tonight in chapter 2, the fact that the Jews being messed up, those who were religious, those who took their faith seriously, those who Jesus, if we'll allow ourselves to say, criticized the most because their traditions and their religiosity and their framework of thinking oftentimes got in the way of hearing what Jesus had to say to them, and oftentimes allowed them to miss the miracle that was before their face because they could not get past their own structures and systems of tradition.

Today in chapter 2 of the book of Romans, I'm going to read the entirety of its 29 verses and then we're going to go back and just look at some highlight points dealing with the issues of excuses. It says,

1 Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein you judge another, you condemn yourself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. 2 But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. 3 And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? 4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? 5 But after

thy hardness and impenitent heart treasureth up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; 6 Who will render to every man according to his deeds: 7 To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: 8 But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, 9 Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; 10 But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: 11 For there is no respect of persons with God. 12 For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; 13 (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. 14 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: 15 Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) 16 In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel. 17 Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, 18 And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; 19 And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, 20 An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. 21 Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? 22 Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? 23 Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? 24 For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written. 25 For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. 26 Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? 27 And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? 28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: 29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Allow me to summarize Romans 2, 29 verses, in one simple rhetorical question: who do you think you are? In other words, in this entire chapter of Scripture, the Apostle Paul is declaring who do we think we are, who do we think we are putting ourselves in a position to judge and to guide and to direct when we find ourselves as guilty as those whom we proverbially preach to? In the context here, obviously speaking both of Jew and of

Gentile and to the church at Rome which would have been primarily of a Gentile background, but he's addressing those whom Jesus held his harshest remarks for. The woman who was caught in adultery, the woman who had had a multiplicity of husbands, and the like, Jesus extended grace and mercy and guidance and direction, but to those who refused to admit that their tradition was usurping the things of God, he called them whitewashed tombs, he said that their children were twice the children of hell of themselves. Jesus' harshest words were for those who continued to side with their religious tradition rather than the truth of God's word.

So tonight from these 29 verses, I just want to hit what I call six excuses that we tend to use to defend ourselves in light of the truth of God's word. Now tonight's title is "Excuses are like..." I get this phrase from an old baseball coach of mine who despised the use of excuses. When there was a play that went wrong in the field and we'd come back to the dugout and he'd say, "What happened out there?" You know what typical teenage boys would do, we would begin to make excuses, "Well, they... Well, this..." And his phrase was, "Excuses are like armpits. We all got 'em but they all stink," and I think you're all wise enough to know he didn't use armpits but that's a whole other sermon for a whole other day. But that's what excuses are like, they're like an armpit. We all got 'em and all they are are different levels of stink.

So tonight as we look at this passage, I want to look at six excuses that I think we oftentimes fall in the trap of even not even realizing we're doing so. Beginning in verse 1, it's excuse of comparison. It says, "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you that judge you do the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things." One of the things he's saying is, "How dare you say to somebody that they are in sin and they are wrong when you're doing the exact same thing?" We make this excuse of comparison and I call this the excuse of teenagers.

Now you might be what we call a senior adult and you might be practicing this. Well, what you're doing is practicing teenage Christianity. As a teenager and we've all done this, we did it as teenagers and those of us who have had children in our home, we've seen this in our own children, we call them on the carpet or we're called on the carpet for something and we say, "Why are you doing this? Why are you participating in this? Why is this happening in your life?" What is our immediate go-to? "At least I'm not doing what So-and-so is doing," as if that makes what we're doing right. There is this idea that on some scale of rightness versus wrongness, that if what we are doing is not as bad from our perspective as other things we could be doing, then therefore it justifies our behavior yet in the book of James 2 it says, "If you've broken one of the laws, you've broken all of them." And yet how guilty are we of saying, "Well, I may be struggling with this and I may have difficulty with that, but at least I'm not doing this."

That's exactly what's happening in these first three verses of Romans 2, but I want you to notice what happens in the middle of verse 2, "But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to your comparison to other people." Is that what it says? No, is according to

what? "Truth." Our life, our decisions, our mannerisms, our behavior, is not to be judged based on how it looks compared to somebody else but how does it line up with Scripture, and what the Apostle Paul is communicating, what the Lord has inspired in him to say, "Rightfully so, you're not guilty of murder, rightfully so, you're not guilty of some of these things, however that which you are doing and that which you are supporting that Scripture is against, you find yourself in the same pool of rebellion as they are. How dare you compare yourself to them because in God's eyes and from God's perspective, you're all paddling in the same boat, so to speak." How guilty we are of the excuse of comparison, "At least we're not like them or at least I'm not doing what they're doing," or, "I'm so much better than they."

The second one begins in verse 4, in fact, it's verse 4 through 11, and I won't read the entirety since we've read the entire chapter together, but I call it the excuse of compassion because in verse 4 it says, "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" I call it the excuse of compassion because it's been stated back in verse 3 that our standard is truth, our standard is the word of God, and yet here in verse 4 there is this clear indication that those who stand guilty, those who have gone contrary to the things of God, are not even acknowledging God's goodness to share that with them and so they're not coming to repentance and what happens is we fall into the excuse of saying this, "If I were God, that's not how I would judge things. If I were God, that's not how I would do things."

This is how, by the way, that today we have what some of us call the social Gospel. The social Gospel is this idea that we provide a cup of cold water, we provide clothing, we provide shelter, but don't dare tell somebody they need to repent of their sins because all we essentially need to do is just show some compassion to them. The problem is your goodness is not leading them to repentance because the Gospel isn't being proclaimed and we have this incredible mindset today that our standards are better than God's. You do realize this is what God has messed up in the garden of Eden, right? In the garden of Eden, the Lord was a very narrow-minded instructor. He said, "Eat of every tree but this one," but what did we say? "Oh no, no, no, we ought to be able to eat of others and this other one in particular because of reasons 1, 2, and 3." What we did is we opened up our perspective and said, "Well, if I were in charge, if I were making the rules, if I were establishing the rules for engagement, this is how I would do it." Let me share with you how this plays out in real life. "I know what the Bible says but... I know what the Bible says but from this perspective or if you look at it from this angle, or if you look at it from this perspective," and what we do is we tend to open up this spectrum of compassion in the name of love, in the name of acceptance, in the name of everybody being all in the same room together singing Kumbaya. We forsake the truth of our need for repentance.

You know, I know it's not a direct correlation to this passage in Romans 2, but have you noticed that those who claim to have the most open of minds actually have the most closed of minds? Think about this for a moment. We live in a culture today that says believe whatever you want to believe until what you believe is biblical Christianity. We are told that on university campuses and the culture at large that all ideas are welcome

unless it's the Bible. Shouldn't the Bible be included in "all ideas"? Shouldn't Christianity be accepted in all perspectives? But no, and so what ends up happening here and this is the practical take-away from the second excuse of compassion, when we start broadening the spectrum and saying, "But if I were God and if I were establishing the rules," what ends up happening is we created this path of righteousness from our own eyes that is the way we see it and no other way. What's interesting is we actually create a path more narrow than the Lord envisioned himself. He said, "I, if I be lifted up, I will gather all men unto me," and yet at the same time what do we do? We end up saying, "Well, not for those and not that and not this."

We move on to verse 12 and it's the excuse of what I call concern. It says, "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law," then there's this discourse that feels like Romans 7, you see, in Romans 7 it says, "The things I want to do, I don't do. The things I don't want to do, I do," and here it says if you're in the law but you're not of the law, there's a back and forth. It's almost a table tennis of theology here and the reason that I say it is the excuse of concern is that we oftentimes have this excuse, "Well, nobody's perfect. Nobody fulfills all the law. Nobody gets it perfect. Nobody is that good." In other words, we make the excuse, "Well, we're all gonna fail in some capacity, we're all gonna slip up in some areas, so we'll just give them a pass because nobody is perfect."

In fact, you see this in the discourse in Matthew 19 where the Pharisees and the scribes come to Jesus reaching all the way back into Deuteronomy, and they're basically peppering him with questions in regards to marriage and family and divorce and all these structures, and they're talking about the bill of divorcement, and this isn't a message on that, but Jesus makes this statement, he says, "Moses gave you that because of the hardness of your heart." Basically what the Pharisees were saying is, "But Jesus, you don't expect everybody to be perfect. But Jesus, I mean, surely we all have our issues. Can we not just excuse those things we struggle with because nobody is perfect?" And the problem is because you struggle with something I don't struggle with, and somebody else struggles with something you don't struggle with, if we all want to excuse what we struggle with, then we end up excusing everything because our concern is that, "Well, nobody's perfect."

But notice what is spoken here, it says that those who are without the law, the Gentiles by nature, who do the things in the law that are by nature the law, it is a law unto themselves. Let me share with you kind of the conundrum here. When we make the statement that, "Well, surely nobody's perfect. We'll just excuse that. That's just their little pet struggle here," the very fact that there are areas of obedience in our lives, the very fact that there are some elements of righteousness in our lives defines the fact that we cannot excuse them or ourselves for our substandard lives, living and decision making.

But, oh, we're so good at excuses, are we not? We compare ourselves to others, we make the excuse of, "If I were God, I'd make it a broader spectrum," the excuse of, "Well, nobody's perfect," and then verse 17, what I call the Baptist excuse. I am one so I can say

that. It says, "Behold, thou art called a Jew, and rest in the law, and make thy boast of God, And know his will, and approve the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness." It's the excuse of what I would call the conjunction. You say, "What do you mean the excuse of the conjunction?" "I know what the Bible says but," that's a conjunction. Let me tell you where we're guilty of this and this is where it's gonna hit home for all of us and I said all of us personally, is we are so guilty at making the excuse, "But I'm a Baptist." I've got news for you, when we get to heaven one day, there's not going to be a Baptist entrance and a somebody else entrance. There is one entrance and that's through Jesus Christ. I've said this a thousand times, I'm gonna say it again: there are things that are Baptist that are not biblical. It's true. Find for me the committee on committee subcommittee in Scripture. There are things that are biblical that aren't Baptist and my goal, my desire, and I hope yours is as well, is I'd rather be a biblicist than a Baptist any day because the Bible has been around forever, the Lord gave it to us, Baptists, I hate to tell you but we haven't been around that long.

All that being said, basically what they're saying in verse 17 is, "But I'm a Jew. I got this. I'm special. There should be special consideration for me. But we're Baptists." And I've heard this so many times, "That's just what Baptists do." Can I be honest with you? I don't care if that's what Baptists do, what does the Bible say? Back in verse 2 our standard is truth, not a denominational heritage or history.

Now I want to qualify something because I know some of you are getting a little worried about me. Let me tell you, let me tell you why I'm a Baptist, it's real simple, because today if you were to take all of the groups of believers as they set their beliefs to the side and as they began to form and fashion each other, I'm of the belief that we're as close to Scripture as anybody. That's why. Do you know one of the history books about Baptists is called "People of the Book"? But the problem is we have these excuses but let me broaden it a little more. "But that's just how I was raised. That's just how my people are. That's just what we do here."

My son George and I had the privilege this week of going on his man-trip, as I call it, I take each one of them on individually when they turn a certain age. It was interesting how many times in the north we were told, "That's how we do it here," and I'd say, "Well, I've never seen it this way or I've never heard it that way." "That's how we do it here," as if to say, "But we're in Ohio." How guilty are we of saying, "But that's how we do it here"?

So there is this conjunction and I think we're often guilty, "But we're Southerners. But we're Baptists. But we're this. But we're that." If I'm not mistaken, in Galatians 3 it talks about our salvation in Jesus Christ and it says, "There is neither male nor female, nor slave nor servant," in other words, Jesus Christ is our common denominator, Scripture is our common truth, and all other things should be substandard and fall in obedience to.

As we make our way toward the end of this chapter beginning in verse 20, it's what I call the excuse of consideration. It says, "An instructor of the foolish," what a compliment, "a

teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law." Can I give some commentary on what the Apostle Paul is saying there? You're not who you think you are. You think you've got all this working for you, you think you've got everything happening but you're an instructor of foolish, a leader of babes, you have a form of knowledge. And the reason I call it the excuse of consideration is in verse 21 it says, "Thou therefore which teachest another, do you not teach yourself? You preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? Do you say a man should not commit adultery, yet you commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?" You see, here's the difference in the first excuse: the first excuse was this comparison, "Well, at least I'm not doing that," in this one, what I call the excuse of consideration, is you're considering somebody else's behavior sinful and calling it out and yet you're doing the same thing, just nobody knows it.

You see, that is the definition of a Pharisee. You know, that's one of those terms, we use it so loosely in church, this concept of, "Well, they're Pharisees," and we typically say that a Pharisee is somebody who is legalistic, and that is rightfully so, but let me give you my definition of a Pharisee: a Pharisee is somebody who holds somebody else to a standard that they themselves are not holding themselves up to, because what did Jesus reveal about the Pharisees? They were guilty of the same sins as those that they were trying to get him to condemn. For example, the famous story of the woman that was caught in adultery. Do you find it odd "the woman" caught in adultery and not "the couple" that was caught in adultery? Isn't it convenient who they selected to be the beneficiary of what they thought would be Jesus' judgment, yet he says, "Do you claim someone else is and yet yourself you say don't steal, and yet you do yourself?"

I want to give you a statement that my wife and I talk about this all the time and it's a great statement. I don't know who came up with it so I'm gonna take the credit for it. Here we go: whatever people tend to preach about the most is what they tend to struggle with the most. Now let me unpack that. How many times have we seen a public personality decry the sins of sexuality and decry the breakdown of the family and discover that they were in illicit relationships themselves? How many times have we seen very public figures talk about other people who are mishandling and misappropriating money and we find out that they were on the take the whole time? You see, oftentimes our preaching and, by the way, that doesn't just mean pastors, our positions that we hold, those axes we like to grind, so to speak, in life, is really what he was saying here in these four verses. We have this tendency to call out others for that which we have yet to be caught as being a part of. So we have this excuse, "At least I haven't been caught."

You know, one of the verses that resonates so much in my life is at the end of the book of 1 Timothy and it says some men's works go before judgment and others are discovered at judgment. Some men's righteousness is on this side of judgment while others are discovered at judgment. Basically what it's saying is this, that we don't oftentimes understand why do the rebellious get rewarded and the righteous get overlooked, but whether on this side it is discovered or not, can I be honest with you? It will be discovered when we meet the Lord face-to-face. And oftentimes we make the excuse of

saying, "Well, at least I'm not doing that," when in actuality that which we often point out is that which we are guilty of as well.

Now I know what some of y'all are gonna do, you're gonna go back and pull up the sermon archive and see what I preach about the most to see what I struggle with the most. Just make an appointment and I'll just tell ya, okay? I'll be very transparent.

Last but not least, verse 24, what I call the excuse of commendation, "For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written. For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." Let me tell you what the final excuse is, "But look at all the good I do. I've been circumcised," not literally, proverbially here, "I have gone through an outward display. I have done, I have said, I have been a part of," and on the inside it's rotten, and that's essentially what the Jewish people as a whole were. These same individuals who claimed to be the representatives of the one true God looked at a man who had never sinned, Jesus Christ, one who was a serial killer and said, "Give us Barabbas," and oftentimes what this excuse does is it makes us feel better about ourselves. We don't look at our insufficiencies, we don't look at our sin, we don't look at our rebellion and we say, "But I am... And I have done... And I have been a part of..."

Tonight as we close, I want you to turn to the Gospel of Matthew 7 and I want to close with what I oftentimes call the scariest passage in all of the Bible. I realize all Scripture is inspired by God but there are some that are a little scarier than others and in Matthew 7, Jesus is wrapping up what we know as the Sermon on the Mount and in verse 21 of Matthew 7, there is a very strong statement made by Jesus against those of us who would say, "But look at the mission trips I've been on. Look at the doors that I opened. Look at this. Look at that." He says, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." In other words, what Jesus Christ is saying here it's about a relationship with him, not a certain set of deeds that we use as an excuse to justify ourselves. I've got news for us: on that day which we appear before the Lord, there are a lot of folks that are going to show up to what we know as the Pearly Gates and say, "B,b, but I went on five or six mission trips. But I gave faithfully. But I did this. But I did that." How many times some will say, "But I was a Baptist"? He says, "Depart from me. I never knew you."

Do you know what the problem about excuses? Whether they're excuses on the ball field or excuses with the Lord, they only serve one purpose, to make us feel better about

ourselves. That's what they do. If I can excuse my behavior, then I don't have to take blame for the bad play. If I can shift the blame and say, "The woman that you gave me," from Genesis 3, or the woman who said, "The serpent who beguiled me," then all of a sudden Adam feels better about his decision and Eve feels better about her decision and we feel better about our decision.

I didn't have 50 excuses tonight, but I did have six, but there are many that we're guilty of and the real problem is back to verse 2, that our standard is not the truth of God's word, our standard is what we want it to be, when we want it to be, where and how we would like it to be so that we feel better about ourselves. You know, 21<sup>st</sup> century contemporary Christianity, that's not a comment on style, that's a comment on time, I think our greatest struggle is we want to feel good about ourselves, we want to somehow excuse ourselves and think that we're better than we really are and not deal with who we really are on the inside which is the same problem these Jewish individuals and the Pharisees and the scribes had, they wanted to present a facade and say, "Isn't everything pretty?"

I'll close tonight with a very social illustration. There's a song that I think in our culture at least, we appreciate singing, "God Bless America." It's a song that we have at patriotic events. It's a song we have at military expositions. It's a song we have at ballgames. In that song it talks about our alabaster cities. Did you know that that line in that famous song that we sing all the time is a reference to the World's Fair that was held in the early 1900's where they created the city of the future covered in this beautiful bright alabaster? The problem was that when the rains and the winds came, the alabaster began to erode and the city that was built as a demonstration of what we could become one day was really a demonstration of who we really were, just a facade, just an outward demonstration of an inward substructure. Yet we get up all the time and talk about our alabaster cities when our real cities are falling apart. How often do we say, "But look at what we're doing. Look at what I've done. Look at who we are." But it is the goodness of God which calls us to repentance.

Friends, we've all got excuses but they're all like armpits, they all stink.

Let's pray.

*Heavenly Father, as we come to the close tonight, as we come to a time of decision, Lord, I know for most of us in this room that decision will not comprise of stepping out and stepping forward, professing one's faith or joining this incredible church, although it may be, but I do know that every single one of us has the opportunity to walk out tonight determined to find ourselves on the right page and in the right place with you. Help us, O God, to allow the alabaster of our life to fall down. Help us to allow the facade of life to crumble so that we might be transparent with you, we might be transparent with each other, so therefore you can do a mighty work in our lives. O God, I pray, take our human structures, take our facades, take our alabaster, God, and tear them down so that you would work mightily in our lives. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as John leads us. Any and all decisions, I'm gonna be right here at the front.