

Sunday Sermon – Feb 19

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

sermonaudio.com

Preached On: Sunday, February 19, 2017

Crossroads Ministries

301 S. 8th Street
Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

If you're a first time guest or visitor with us, in just a moment as we do every week, we're going to have just a time of prayer where we if not already, just focus on the things of God as we prepare to hear from the word of God. But today I want to take a little bit of personal liberty. This is always an important part of our service but I want to kind of overemphasize it this morning because today as we walk through a specific passage of Scripture we need to realize that every single one of us has a background, every one of us has traditions, every one of us has preferences, in fact, sometimes I feel like that we can become guilty of taking our background, our history, our preferences, whatever it may be, and we oftentimes allow those to be a lens by which we read or study the Bible through. Today I want you to pray that no matter what your background is, no matter what your history is, no matter what your preference is, no matter what somebody may have or not told or taught you, can we pray today that our only concern will be what does the Bible say? Not what history says, tradition says, they say or those individuals may say. And this may be a little bit difficult because we all have those lenses, we all have those filters by which we have grown up with and so let's pray today that the only voice we will hear is the voice of the Lord.

Let's pray.

Lord, we come this morning and, Lord, you know us better than we know ourselves but if we were to be honest with you, Lord, we have history and we have a background and we have preferences and we have people who are near and dear to our heart and places that are special to us that at times, Lord, we just want to confess from the beginning at times we are guilty of allowing those experiences or those opportunities or those conversations, Lord, to get in the way of what your word says. So Lord, I pray today that as well meaning as our background may be, as important as our history may be, Lord, may your word rise above that and may it have the primary place in our life. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of John 1. We're going to be in a very brief passage of Scripture today, verses 29 to 34 of John 1, but as you're turning to that passage of Scripture, I want to take you back in time about 500 years. In fact, the specific year was 1527. A country that is not really known for its hostility or even its political activism, a country that's known for neutrality and peace, the country is Switzerland but in 1527 in what we know as Switzerland, there was a young

man by the name of Felix Manz who was to be executed that year. He was to have his life removed from him. He was being implemented in what you and I today call capital punishment. For two years earlier, the crime had been committed. Two years earlier, he had committed an act in his life that was seen as so awful, so horrendous, that it was necessary to punish him by death. What had he done? Had he taken somebody's life? Had he stolen somebody's money? Had he conspired against the government or the rulers or the authorities therein? No. Two years earlier in 1525, a man by the last name of Manz came convicted in his belief in Jesus Christ, his understanding that he understood that he was a sinner and that Jesus Christ alone could save him, and as a full-grown adult, he celebrated his salvation, he celebrated his relationship with Jesus Christ by being baptized, allowing himself to be immersed or submerged under the water as an outward testimony of the inward change of his life. Yes, in the early 1500s in the country of Switzerland, to be baptized was a capital punishment crime. He lost his life because he was baptized?

You see, today we're going to come to a subject matter that has a myriad of opinions and ideas and sometimes our view on this subject matter can get so hostile that we don't just segregate and alleviate, we oftentimes take it to the extent of crime and punishment. We're going to talk about baptism today. We're going to talk about that act of worship, that act of obedience of when believers in Jesus Christ allow themselves to testify in front of others about what Jesus has done in their life. So to deal with this subject matter, it only seems fitting that we go to John 1 to the banks of the River Jordan where we find John the Baptist who has been preaching and teaching and what we know as baptizing for at least six months. Jesus shows up in this passage and we have a very brief account of Jesus' baptism here in the Gospel of John. It's more lengthy in the other Gospels. But the purpose of today's message isn't so much to see about the baptism of Jesus, is to more or less distinguish what is baptism, what did John the Baptist teach us, what does Jesus teach us, and what do we need to know today?

Beginning in verse 29, it says:

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming unto him, and said, Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world. 30 This is he of whom I said, After me comes a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. 31 And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. 32 And John bore record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. 33 And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizes with the Holy Ghost. 34 And I saw, and bore record that this is the Son of God.

So on the banks of the Jordan River, this situation, this event where John the Baptist has been baptizing we find Jesus coming, the Spirit coming down and there is this distinguishing statement made, John said, "I am baptizing with water, but Jesus has come

that he might baptize you with the Holy Spirit." And in a world even in what we might call the "church world" with so many different opinions and ideas and concepts and even, yes, tradition, what does the Bible say about baptism? More importantly, what is so important about it? Why is it that people would have such different opinions and different ideologies to where even some in the past have taken such extreme measures as to take one's life because of the way in which they did this activity?

So why is baptism so important? I think the first thing we need to talk about though is: why baptism? Why is this something that needs to be a part of somebody's life? Why was John the Baptist participating? Why did he say that Jesus is going to come and baptize you with the Holy Spirit? Why baptism? Well, I think the first issue we have to deal with is the issue of obligation. What I mean by that is we have to ask ourselves the question: is what we know as baptism, is "getting wet with water" as we see pictured here in John 1, is it absolutely necessary and important for our relationship with Jesus Christ and ultimately our eternal destiny in a place the Bible calls heaven?

Now, I'm about to go through some Scriptures but let me go ahead and get the cart before the horse. Unequivocally, I believe that I can stand before you not according to tradition, not according to what your friends may say, not according to what social media may say, but the word of God I believe makes it very clear that baptism is not necessary for salvation. You do not have to get wet to go to heaven. Just ask the thief on the cross. You don't have to get wet.

Now, there are those who would advocate what I would call over-importance of baptism. Here's the problem, though: the Bible makes it very clear in Romans 10, whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. 1 Timothy 2:5 says there is no salvation, there is no mediator but one, Jesus Christ who stands before us and God. Jesus himself said, "I am the way, the truth, the life; no one comes to the Father but by me." Let's make it very clear today: salvation, forgiveness of sin, your eternal destination is not in a "religious action," it is in a person and his name is Jesus Christ. Our relationship with the Lord, our forgiveness of sins, our salvation is not based upon what we have or have not done, but based on what he alone has done on our behalf. Salvation is in a person, not in an action of humanity.

But even though we see that it's not obligatory, it's not mandatory, it is not necessary, I think what we do see in Scripture is that it is an issue of obedience. In other words, what we see as we walk through the Bible is that those who believed in, those who had faith in Jesus Christ, they followed that faith with obedience of baptism. It wasn't obligatory but it was an act of obedience.

Matthew 28, Jesus is about to ascend. He's not only gone to the cross, he's risen three days later, he's been talking and teaching with his apostles and disciples. He's about to ascend on high and there in Matthew 28, it's a passage we call the Great Commission and beginning in verse 18 of that famous last chapter of Matthew, he makes this statement. He says, "Go unto all the nations." By the way, that means people groups; that means all people. He says, "Go into all the world and teach them," listen, "baptizing them in the

name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." So this act of baptism was important enough for Jesus to very specifically mention it "on his way out."

You get into Acts 8 and we have the first account of what we call personal evangelism, one person telling another person about Jesus and their need for him. We have a man by the name of the Ethiopian eunuch. We don't have his first name, just his description. The Bible says that he's in a carriage, he's on his way back home and he's reading the scroll Isaiah and a man by the name of Philip, one of the first deacons in the early church, comes across his path and they entertain a conversation. The eunuch tells him, he says, "I'm reading Isaiah and I don't understand what I'm reading. Can you help me?" And Philip begins to open the scroll and points him to Jesus, tells him his need for Jesus and that he alone can save him from his sins. In verse 37 of Acts 8, Philip asked him, he said, "Do you believe in Jesus?" And he says, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God." Then you get to verse 38 and it says, "Then what hinders you from being baptized?" And what we see in Acts 8 is that this Ethiopian eunuch's salvation was not in the act of baptism, but his baptism was an obedience to his salvation in Jesus Christ. We don't get baptized to be saved, we're baptized because we are saved. We don't allow ourselves to display this testimony so that "we can go to heaven," but we display it because we are going to heaven.

You get later to Acts 10, there is a man by the name of Cornelius. Cornelius is a Roman Centurion. He's a leader of what is called the Italian Band. He was a man of authority. He was a man of power. He was a man, though, that feared the things of God. He prayed regularly. The Bible even says he gave his alms, his financial resources and he desired to know the things of God. At the same time, a man by the name of Simon Peter, one of the apostles, a man who grew up his entire life in the synagogue around only those of a Jewish descent and background, the Lord comes to him in a very vivid way, a picture of a sheet tied on four corners with all the unclean animals from the Levitical code. Peter says, "I've never eaten anything such as this." The Lord says very clearly, he says, "Do not call unclean what I've called clean."

A few verses later, Simon Peter and Cornelius find themselves and another man by the name of Simon's house. He was a tanner. And at that point, Peter began to share with him his need for salvation, the fact that he was a sinner and that Jesus was the only way to save him. At the end of chapter 10 of the book of Acts, it makes it very clear that while he was preaching they believed on Jesus and it says that the Holy Spirit, the same Holy Spirit that descended in Acts 2, descended there in Acts 10 and guess what? After it happened, they turned to those other Jewish people and said, "Should these not also be baptized as we were?" In other words, you see this testimony all throughout Scripture whether it's the mouth of Jesus, the testimony of Acts 8, 10 or other places, where those who were baptized were not baptized to be saved, to be forgiven or to become a child of God, but because they were forgiven, because they were saved and because they were a child of God.

So when we talk about baptism, here we have John the Baptist at the River Jordan, we have Jesus showing up, we have this whole scene, we have to ask ourselves two

millennia later: why would we even participate in this? Why is this something that is important? Its importance does not lie in its obligation but in its obedience. The second question we have to ask ourselves: then if that is the case, then how is one baptized? How does this take place in one's life? We see the scene where John the Baptist was pointing people to Jesus, he says that Jesus will baptize us in the Spirit so how does this happen? Is it water? Is it Spirit? What's happening here?

Well, we have to look at the issue of the definition. The definition for baptism means to be immersed, to be saturated or to be absolutely consumed. It does not necessarily mean water. Now, in a lot of cases in the Bible, baptism and water are used synonymously but it doesn't have to be. In fact, the first reference chronologically that we have to baptism is actually found in 1 Corinthians 10. The Apostle Paul writes about the book of Exodus and he says, "Do you not remember that the Israelites when they came out of Egypt were baptized unto Moses in the Red Sea?" Now, the last time I checked, none of the Israelites got touched by a drop of water when they came through the Red Sea and so that definition for baptism means to be immersed, to be consumed, to be overwhelmed. It does not necessarily have to be "water."

What does John the Baptist say? He says, "I'm baptizing you with water but this guy, Jesus is going to baptize you with the Spirit." In other words, even though I am demonstrating on the outside what your faith is on the inside, this is obedience, this isn't obligation. When you begin to look at the definition for baptism as immersion or saturation or being consumed, you then take that into its everyday practical implementation and you see people, whether it's the Ethiopian eunuch or Cornelius and these others, and you see that there was a "baptism" that took place in their life.

Some years ago, I had the opportunity of serving in a wonderful congregation and there was a young lady in this church who came to know Jesus as her Savior as part of one of the camps that she participated in. She was excited, her family was excited about it and she wanted to be baptized. She wanted to testify to everybody on the outside the change that Jesus had made on the inside. Here was the only problem: none of her family, now her mom and dad were a part of her immediate family but none of her extended family were believers. None of them were remotely interested in the things of God, much less going to a church service. So she came to me and she said, "I want to be baptized but I don't want to do it until my family is here. I want them all to see it. I want them all to celebrate. I want them to know what Jesus has done for me." I said, "That would be great." She said, "Well, it may take a while before I can get them to come." I said, "That's fine."

Several months went by and finally she came to us and said, "Alright, I've got a date that my family says they'll be here but there's only one hitch." I said, "What's the hitch?" She said, "They'll only come to the early service." Now in that church that I served in, typically most of our baptisms took place in the later service. Not a problem. We can do it in the first service. We said, "We've got this. Easy."

So we began to get everything ready that day. She arrived. Her family arrived. They were all sitting out there in the front two or three rows. I mean, they were nervous. You could tell they felt uncomfortable but we welcomed them. We were grateful they were there. I'm up in the baptistry, now in that baptistry we had two entrances, we had the men's side and we had the ladies' side. Well, because she was a lady and her mom and her sister and others were up there with her, they were on one side of the baptismal pool and myself and a few of the other guys were on the other side and the way that that sanctuary was structured or that building, was that the screens on the side were angled at such a way that you could be on, and it was on that side of the baptistry and you could see the screen from the baptistry, I could see how much time until the service began. We had a countdown clock that was rolling and it said like 1:40 seconds. I mean, it was real soon because we were the very first thing in the service.

So I knew it was about time to go and so I'm looking across the baptismal pool and there is the young lady, there's her mom, and I'm just there to kind of comfort them. I want to ease them, "It's going to be okay. I know you're nervous. We've got this." To which her mom looks at me and says real quietly, she says, "Jeff, are we doing it different?" Different? What are you talking about? She said, "Are we doing it different?" Now, I've been a Baptist pastor for 20, I'm thinking how different can we make it? I mean, it's a Baptist church. It is what it is. I don't know. Are we trying to get creative? Edgy? I don't know. What is different today? We're talking, we're under a minute now and I said, "What are you talking about?" I mean, we're talking like you know how you whisper-yell? We're whisper-yelling across. I said, "What are you talking about?" And she said, "Are we doing it different?" I said, "What?" And she looks down, I look down, there ain't a drop of water in the baptistry. Nothing. I said, "Yeah, that would be different."

So I told one of the guys that was with me, I said, "Just hold off on the service." We met out in the hallway. I said, "Is there any way that your family would stay to the next service?" And they said no. I said, "Well, when in Rome do as the Roman's do." So as I was preaching that morning, the water was filling up the entire time and we baptized her at the end of the service.

But the reason I share that story is when you talk about baptism as an act of obedience, what you see scripturally is that water is involved as a symbol, as a picture of the death, the burial and the resurrection not only of Jesus Christ but ourselves in him, but that is an element that in a baptismal opportunity is present. But one of the questions we have to ask ourselves is: what about the deviations? I mean, as you look through time and you search through traditions and you talk to different people and maybe even you yourself have a background that is kind of eclectic, you discover that the Christian community, that the umbrella of Christianity has not always seen the act of baptism the same way. In fact, there are various ways of which people will take this act of obedience and display it publicly.

The church that you're currently a part of today, every time somebody has the opportunity to be baptized, there is an immersion. They are completely covered in water. There are some traditions, they utilize the water in a sprinkling aspect. There are others that will

pour. And so there are various ways of which we see this and so the question we have to ask is, "Okay, if baptism isn't necessary for forgiveness of sins, it's not necessary for my salvation, then what about the way in which it is done?" I mean, there are all kinds of different ways that people do this. The Bible uses the word "baptize" and the word means "to be completely submerged." It means "to be saturated with."

Some years ago, I got a call from a dear friend of mine. He said, "Jeff, when's the next time you're going to be in town?" where he was living. I said, "It's going to be probably a couple of weeks I'll be passing through. Why?" He said, "Well, my wife and I just need to have a real serious conversation with you." Now, this is in what I call the BC days, before children, and so a couple of weeks passed and I made it there and while I was there, I had the privilege of hearing his wife's testimony, a beautiful story. This young lady, she grew up in a home that was completely non-interested in the things of God. Now, I wouldn't say they were atheists, I mean, they weren't mad at God, they weren't bitter at God, they weren't trying to prove God didn't exist, they just didn't care anything for the things of God. I mean, she had aged 12, she said really the only time I had ever been to church was for a wedding or a funeral or some special something but never as a time of "worship." That just wasn't a part of our lives. But at 12 years of age, there was a church very similar to ours who came through time in the summer, mission trip, young people and college students and they were doing vacation Bible schools in the communities in the neighborhoods and in the parks.

Well, she was interested. Her friends were there and they had snacks and such and they looked like they were having fun. So she went down the street and over the course of that week she didn't just have goldfish crackers and juice, she heard the truth that she was a sinner and that Jesus was the only way that she could be saved and forgiven of her sins.

Toward the end of the week, she made that profession of faith. With a young student, she kneeled down right there in the playground and she asked Jesus to be her Savior. Well, as soon as that took place, this young student said, "You know, where do you go to church?" She said, "I don't go to church. Nobody in my family goes to church." She said, "Is there a church that you could go to?" She said, "Oh, I know one I think I can." "I think it would be really good if you got plugged into the church. And one thing that's very important is to be baptized. Tell others what Jesus did for you." She said, "Okay."

So the next Sunday morning a couple of days later, she gets up early, puts on the best dress that she's got, walks downstairs, her mom and dad are like, "What are you doing? Where are you going?" She said, "Well, I'm going to church." Now, it just so happens there was a little bitty church right around the corner from her house and in those days and in that community, her parents didn't mind. You know, in the days where you'd toss your kids out at the beginning of the day in the summer and bring them back at nighttime, you just kind of rode your bikes everywhere and had a good time. They said, "Well, how bad can it be? You're going to church for an hour. It's not that big a deal. So fine."

So she went down to this little church by herself. She began to get to know people and share with them what happened that week at vacation Bible school. And a couple of

weeks later, she was baptized and in that church they had a tradition that they brought somebody up to the front and rather than a "pool of water" where they were what we call immersed, they took that canister of water and they poured it over her head.

Fast forward 20 years later. She's married. She's in a different community. They're about to start their family. Her and her husband go to join a church. When they go to join that church, the people there begin to ask them about their testimony, their relationship with Jesus, and the subject matter of baptism came up and she told them about her baptism in complete innocence. She said, "Oh yeah, it was a wonderful experience. I went down there, I was 12 years old, and he poured the stuff over my head." The next thing you know, "But what now?" And she began to describe and they began to have a conversation and all of a sudden the walls of tension went up.

I got called in. Not only am I a pastor but I'm a friend. They said, "Jeff, we need some advice here." So I go into their house. She tells her whole story and then she says, "Well, what do you think?" And I said, "Well, ma'am, I'm not trying to be negative toward tradition or personal experience but I know what the word means in the Bible and I know the examples we have in the Bible and I'm not here to dismiss anything of your relationship with the Lord but the Bible says that baptism is an act of immersion and that's the biblical way, not necessarily man's traditional way." To which she said one of the most incredible statements I've ever heard in my life. She said, "Jeff, it's not my fault he did it wrong." It's a good comeback, isn't it? I said, "You're absolutely right. It's not your fault that it wasn't done 'by biblical definition' but more or less by human tradition." And I asked her the same question that Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch, "So what then hinders you from being baptized?"

You see, when we see the various deviations in history and tradition, one of the things we need to realize is that what the Bible says ought to be primary and what man's tradition says ought to be secondary and on this subject matter, though there are lots of different opinions, it's hard to argue with the word and the practice in the biblical days of how baptism took place which brings up the third most important question today is: when? When should somebody go through this act of obedience? When is it right? When is the time for somebody to be baptized?

Well, the first issue we've got to deal with is timing. Now, some traditions say that at a certain age or at a certain chronology of life, after a certain class is completed or after a certain experience has taken place, whatever it may be, but what we see not only in Matthew 28, what we see in Acts 8, Acts 10 and in other passages in the New Testament is that when it comes to the timing of baptism, that one's obedience of baptism takes place after their salvation, not before.

Some years ago, I had a young man approach me. He was 92 years of age. He was a young man at 92. He was a WWII vet. In fact, he spent his service time in a submarine his entire tenure during WWII. This young man at 92 years of age came and made an appointment with me. He said, "Jeff, I need to talk to you about something and it is very important." I'm thinking to myself, I mean, I'm going to be honest with you, 92 years of

age, kind of feeble physically, a good friend of mine, I'm thinking we're making funeral plans. I'm just going to be honest with you. That's what you do at that stage of life. And so I'm prepared, I'm ready. What are the songs you want to sing? Which Scriptures? I mean, I'm getting into the funeral home director mode, so to speak. I'm ready for this. And he says, "Jeff, I want to talk to you about being baptized." And I said, "Brother, you're 92 years old, haven't we taken care of this by now? I mean, surely we have." He said, "Let me tell you my story." He said, "I got baptized when I was 12 years old." He said, "I was in a certain tradition and I took a certain class and they just dunked me under the water and I was 'good to go.'" I said, "Okay." He said, "But when I was 16 years old, I was at youth camp and I got saved." He said, "I met Jesus. I was born again. I was forgiven of my sins." I said, "Well, that's great to hear." He said, "For 70+ years, this has been gnawing on me." He said, "I've known for seven decades that I got it backwards. You don't get baptized and then get saved, you get saved and then you get baptized." He said, "I'm going to ask you a question," he said, "Are you willing to baptize a 92 year old man with bad knees?" I said, "Brother, if you're willing to climb the stairs, we'll take care of it." I said, "If you're not able to make it into the baptistry, I've been in creeks, I've been in ponds, oceans, lakes. In fact, I talked to an individual between our first and second service who at 69 years of age in this church, in our hallways, told me his story that he realized just like my friend he had it backwards and he got baptized in a horse trough."

So it doesn't matter necessarily a formal baptistry, a horse trough, a lake, a pond, the importance is the timing of it. He said, "I know I don't have many years left," and he said, "I just don't want to face my Savior and after seven decades of saying, 'When I get around to it.'" He said, "Would you mind if I got it in the right order?" I said, "Brother, I would love to help you." So when we talk about when we're baptized, it's after we're saved, not before.

But then there's the issue of the testimony. You see, when we are baptized, we're testifying. When John the Baptist here in John 1, when people were coming to him in the River Jordan, they were testifying that they were leaving all previous faith systems and they were now going to focus on the coming Messiah. When Jesus came, when he said, "I am the way, the truth, the life; no one comes to the Father but by me," he was stating very unequivocally that it is he and he alone and you identified with who he is. You see, baptism is a testimony. Whether two are present or 2,000 present, it's our opportunity on the outside to share the importance of what has happened on the inside.

Some years ago, I had a young man approach me and he was 39 years of age. He had just come to know Jesus as his Savior. None of his family were believers. His wife wasn't a believer. His children weren't believers. None of his co-workers, business partners, nobody he played golf with. There was not a single person in his life that knew Jesus but him. He approached myself. I was on staff at that church, myself and the pastor. He said, "I've got a special favor to ask of you. Would you mind baptizing me in my swimming pool?" Now, we thought as we hear these stories, well, maybe he's scared of crowds, maybe he gets nervous in public. We understand this and so it's not unusual at times where people say, "Hey, swimming pool, horse trough, whatever." We said, "Well, that's fine but why the swimming pool?" He said, "In a couple of weeks we're going to be

celebrating my 40th birthday." He said, "All my family is going to be there, all my friends are going to be there, and I know that there is no way that I could ever get them to come to church. I want them to know what Jesus has done in my life. Would y'all baptize me in my swimming pool at my 40th birthday party?" We said, "Well, sure."

So we arrive and show up at the time in which we're supposed to and this young man, 40 years of age, gets in a swimming pool in the shallow end and announces to the crowd, there are about 40-50 people present there, he said, "I want to thank you for coming to my party." He said, "But I've got something important to share with you today. Many of you have commented over the last few weeks that I've been acting different. In fact, some of you said I've been acting strange." He said, "Today I want to tell you why." He said, "I asked you today not to bring any gifts or presents. Your gift to me is for the next few moments, I just want you to be quiet and I just want you to listen and I want you to observe." He said, "I want you to see the change and why the change has been made in my life." We went into that swimming pool and he was baptized and I'm telling you, there were eyes the size of silver dollars, there were jaws that were on the pool deck because they had no idea this was coming.

You see, when we're baptized, it's bigger than the timing, it's the testimony. We're telling people out there whether we have a relationship or not, that Jesus has changed us on the inside. So I don't think baptism should be something that we avoid. I don't think it should be something that we just put off until next week, next year or the next stage of life. In fact, I believe that baptism ought to be something that we get excited about. I want to tell people what Jesus has done for me. I want to show them I'm a different person.

So before we enter into our time of invitation, I thought this morning we would utilize just a few moments to share with you some testimonies of people who got really excited about their baptism and I think maybe they will encourage us to get excited as well. So if you don't mind watching the screen, we're going to show you some folks who got just a little excited about their baptism.

This is a time where we get to tell the world that we're different, we've been changed because of what Jesus has done inside of us. In just a moment, we're going to have a time of invitation and maybe today there's a decision you need to make. Maybe today is that first time decision for Jesus. Maybe today you have been a believer and you've never followed in baptism. Maybe you've gotten the order backwards, the timing. Or maybe today you're saying, "You know, I've got all that right, I just would love to be a part of this church." Or whatever the decision is, we want to invite you to be a part of it but we also want to encourage you because I know throughout time I've talked to so many people about this issue. Their background, their tradition, or whatever it may be and we want to make this as celebratory as possible and so we want you to know that next Sunday night we're going to have a special baptism service. Our Sunday night service next week, those that are in need of being baptized scripturally, we're just going to have a time where we celebrate that. So in just a moment, you're going to have the opportunity to come and speak to us. We'd love to talk to you today or maybe this week, you think about it, you pray about it and you say, "You know, maybe that's something I really need

to follow through in." Make contact with us. Call us. Email us. Next Sunday night, we'd love to just celebrate on the outside what Jesus has already done on the inside.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe you're that person here today that whether or not you have or have not "gotten wet" through the act of baptism, you realized more than water you need Jesus, you need forgiveness, you need salvation. Isn't it good to know that it's not about going through a religious ritual or checking off a box or jumping through a certain set of hoops but that it's found in a person who loves you unconditionally and was willing to give his life in your stead? Maybe you're that person today. I've got great news for you, you don't have to do anything but you need to have a very serious conversation with the Lord. You don't need to talk out loud. You don't even need necessarily to say the same words that I would say but maybe that conversation would go a little something like this. "God, I realize today that I've gone down the wrong path. I've made bad decisions and poor choices at times and ultimately I now realize that means that I've sinned. I'm a sinner and I understand that there is no act of religion that can solve my sin problem, there is no physical church that can solve my sin problem but only Jesus can. I believe today that Jesus loved me enough to come on my behalf. He loved me enough to live a perfect life on my behalf. God, I believe today Jesus loved me enough to go to the cross on behalf of my sins and three days later to raise from the dead. God, I come today and I don't know all the answers to all the problems of life but I do know that Jesus is the only answer to my sin problem and so I'm asking you to forgive me. I'm asking you to save me by the blood of Jesus and nothing else. 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 we'd love the opportunity to speak with you, to have a conversation with you about whatever decision that you either have or need to make in life, whether that's a decision of belief and salvation in Jesus Christ, whether that's following in believers' baptism as obedience, being a part of this great church or anything else. We'd love the privilege to celebrate with you what the Lord has done in your life this day.

Lord, as we come to this time of invitation, thank you. Thank you, God, that you're a God of second chances, a God that at times when we say, do you know what? I look up and maybe I didn't do things quite the way that you orchestrated them but you say that's okay. I love you so much. Here's the way that things are to be ordered. God, thank you that you're a God of love, you're a God of mercy, you're a God of grace, you're a God of compassion but that, God, you're a God of celebration. When we are on the same page as you, when our lives line up with how you want them to line up, you don't condemn us but you celebrate us. So God, as we come to this time of invitation, may that be what it is, a time of celebration for what you've done 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 our team lead us. Whatever decision, we'll be here at the front.