

The Scariest Passage in the Bible

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Matthew

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Tonight I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the gospel of Matthew chapter 7. Now, to begin with, if you're here with us for the very first time on Sunday evenings, we've been walking through the gospel of Matthew in a very strategic, yet, I must confess, slow manner, because it is, to me, the key to understanding all of scripture, not only because it's the first book of the New Testament, but because it is so much filled with the fulfillment of the Old Testament scriptures. One of the things you discover in the book of Matthew is how many times it says, "as it is written," or "because it is written," and we find ourselves tonight in chapter 7 of Matthew, which finds us in what we know as the famous Sermon on the Mount, and as advertised this morning, tonight I want to address what I consider the most frightening passage of scripture in the Bible. Now let's be honest with ourselves. There are some passages that give us great comfort. I just quoted one of them, 1 Peter 5:7. It says, "we cast our cares upon him because he careth for us." That is comforting to know that the Lord cares about what I care about, but what we're about to read in Matthew chapter 7, there's not a whole lot of comfort in this passage. In fact, it is a passage that can bring conviction, but more often than not, it can bring confusion.

Now, before we read it, and I'm sure you've already read ahead, allow me to remind each and every one of us of a very necessary strategy, not just for this evening, but for any time we open up the Bible, whether it's on a Sunday morning, a Sunday night, or in your living room early in the morning with a cup of coffee. It doesn't matter when, where, or what you are studying, every time you open your Bible, every time, every passage that you read, every message that you study, you have to do what 2 Timothy 2:15 says, rightly divide the word of God. And what that means is, we have to see that passage in three very important aspects. The first one is this, every passage of scripture has a historical context. It happened at a certain time, at a certain place, involving certain people, for a certain reason. It simply is, it is what it is and it happened the way the Bible describes it. That's pretty much the simple one. But then there's the doctrinal. The doctrinal aspect of every passage means that that passage was written to a specific people, at a specific time, for a very specific purpose. And then there's what we call the spiritual meaning that as a born-again believer in Jesus Christ, even if it was not originally written to me, even though it had an entirely different audience than you and I tonight, it still has a very practical application to our walk with the Lord.

Now, the easiest and best way to illustrate these three understandings is what we know as the famous 10 Commandments. I think we would all value them and claim that they're pretty important, correct? So historically speaking, we know the Israelites had just come out of captivity after 400 years, and they're headed toward what we know as the Promised Land; kind of an 11-day journey got, shall we say, derailed into 40 years, but that's a whole other message for another day. Moses goes on the mountain. Forty days later, he comes down with the famous 10 Commandments. That's kind of historically how it played out, right? It is what it is, and Charlton Heston showed us what it looked like, right? There you go, the 10 Commandments.

Doctrinally, do you remember what God told the Israelites in Exodus 20? "If you do these things, you are my people, and I am your God." Now, why is that important for our understanding? Because today, in the 21st century, 2,000 years after the empty tomb, you don't go to heaven obeying the 10 Commandments, that is not a doctrinal application for us, but spiritually speaking, you can't look at the 10 Commandments and say, "Oh that was for them at a different time, it doesn't apply to me today," because every one of those 10 Commandments does apply to how you walk with the Lord each and every day of your life. But it's important to dissect and discern the difference, particularly between the doctrinal and the historical.

Now the reason that I've overemphasized this tonight, is the passage that we're about to read in Matthew chapter 7 is the most frightening passage to most people in the Bible, myself included, and what we're gonna do is rightly divide it tonight to see what it actually says and what it doesn't say. Matthew 7 verse 21,

21 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. 22 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? 23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Now do you see why this passage is so frightening? This is one of those passages that in 30 plus years of pastoral life, I've lost count of how many people have come to me with this passage saying, "It scares me to death." It talks about people who claim to live for the Lord that one day are shut out from the things of God, and so therefore it has caused turmoil and a lot of confusion and so, tonight, I just want to take this very simple yet drastic passage and just break it down into its historical, doctrinal, and spiritual applications.

So let's look at it historically. Who is actually listening to the words of Jesus? I've said this almost every time we've gathered to study the Sermon on the Mount: there is not one single born-again Christian present. Not one. Now I know that causes concern for us because there were people that were following Jesus, there were people that were interested in the teachings of Jesus, but not one single person was filled with the Holy

Spirit on the Sermon on the Mount. And the reason is because of the "when." When Jesus is saying what he is saying, it is, this is a big theological term, pre, are you ready for this, pre-propitiation. Now propitiation, I used that word this morning, it's one of my favorite words in all the Bible. The word propitiation means to bear the punishment of or to pay the price of. It's mentioned twice in the New Testament, Romans 3:25 and 1 John 2:1 and 2 where it says that Jesus Christ was the propitiation for our sins.

Now let me illustrate this in terms where we can all grasp and again allow me to illustrate with my own home. You know I have three boys that have been raised in my home, and if you've ever raised three boys, it's like raising three dogs is what it is, but nonetheless not one time, not one time. Now, we've had three boys in the house for 17 years because the youngest is 17, not one time in almost two decades has anybody gotten in trouble in our house and one of the other two brothers said, "Hey, mom and dad, I'll pay the price for that one." What happens when one of the brothers gets in trouble? It's like cockroaches when the light comes on. They're gone. Right? Their history. Propitiation is what Jesus Christ did on the cross. Propitiation is the shedding of blood for the remission of sins. Propitiation is paying the price for the infraction of sinful humanity.

Now don't get me wrong, you read through the Old Testament, there was forgiveness of sin, there was atonement of sin, but there wasn't propitiation because the blood of the Lamb had not yet been spilt. So again, we don't have any born-again believers. Jesus hasn't gone to the cross yet. You say, "Why?" Now I'm gonna talk a little shop with y'all tonight. You say, "What do you mean 'talk shop'?" When you are in training whether it be in seminary, ministry, whatever it may be, and those that supposedly are there to instruct you help you craft and form a message, a sermon, whatever it may be, there are a lot of different acronyms that we use. One of those is what we call the CIT of the text. What is the central idea of the text? No matter what the passage is, no matter what the sermon is, no matter what the message is, every message has a central idea. It may have three points. If you're not Baptist, it may have more than three points, okay? But nonetheless, there's always a central idea. Now this isn't something that a bunch of preaching professors came up with. We learn this from the scriptures. Whether it was Moses in the Old Testament or Jesus or the Apostle Paul in the New Testament, every time they opened their mouth, even though there may have been details and particulars, there was always one, can we say, just one takeaway. What's the one thing you can take away? What was the central idea?

I want you to imagine the scene yet once again. Every single person that was at the Sermon on the Mount, at some level, was doing some type of religious endeavor to make themselves right with God. Whether it was one of the many feasts that the Israelites celebrated, whether the offerings or the sacrifices they would bring, every single one of them at some level and in some manner was doing something to try to "be right with God." I believe the central idea of what we know as the Sermon on the Mount are these three verses. Basically what Jesus is saying is that there are those of you in this audience, go back 2,000 years ago, who think just because you're at the right place, at the right time, with the right amount of turtle doves, everything's okay. There are some that are listening to Jesus who believe that because of the wealth that God has provided for them,

they can do such an abundance of offering that must make them "right with God." And so what does he say? He says, "on that day many will say to me, Lord, Lord, why are we not in?" And remember how he ends it, "I never knew you." This is not just the most frightening passage of scripture in the Bible, I think this is the key to understanding the entire sermon on the mount.

Now let me go back just a little bit, chapter 5. Jesus gives example after example after example of how you and I as humanity sin against one another whether we recognize it or not. Chapter 6, ways in which we sin against God, whether we recognize it or not. Really, kind of the theme is, Romans 3:23, we've all fallen short of the glory of God and because we've all fallen short, it is in verse 21 through 23 of chapter 7 that Jesus says, "There's going to come a day where many of you think that your religious record is going to 'get you in.'" Now, how does he conclude the Sermon on the Mount? Next week, he says, two men build a house, one's on a rock, one's on a shifting sand. The same storm and the same winds came, which house survived? And Jesus is basically going to challenge them that if you build your life on anybody or anything other than him, the rock, then when the rains come, everything will "slide away."

That's the story. That's the Sermon on the Mount. That's this passage. But let's look at this doctrinally. Now this is where we're going to get theologically in the weeds. Remember what Jesus taught us back in chapter 5. He said every word comes from God. Every word is inspired by God. What does it say in verse 21? "Not everyone who said to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." Now the reason that this is an important designation, he says who is it that is "okay" in this passage? "He that does the will of the Father." That's interesting because remember we're on the other side of the cross. We're on the other side of the empty tomb. Can we go to this side for just a moment? Acts chapter 16, Paul's in prison, he and Barnabas, they're in the inner cell, they're singing hymns in the middle of the night. The door flies wide open, the jailer comes in, he says, "What must I do to be saved?" Do you know what Paul does not say? "Just do the will of the Father." That's not what he says. He says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

You go into the book of Romans, and I know we're studying this on Tuesday morning in our men's ministry, but the first five chapters of Romans talk about that we're justified by faith. Chapters 6-8 talk about that we're sanctified by faith. Chapters 9-11 do nothing but talk about those that have a Jewish background, go back all the way into the Old Testament and talk about how these Jewish individuals who had the scriptures, they had the covenants, they had the promises of God, but they still missed Jesus. What does it say in Romans 10:13? "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved," not whoever does the will of the Father.

Now that's a very important designation that Jesus gives us here. He doesn't say whoever believes. He doesn't say whoever calls on him. He says whoever does the will of the Father, and notice this designation, "shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." Now, if you are new to our Sunday night Bible study, allow me to refresh or to remind those that have been here for some time the importance of this phrase. When you walk through the four

gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, there are two phrases that Jesus uses quite often. He uses the phrase "kingdom of heaven," and he uses the phrase "kingdom of God." Now, let me remind you, heaven and God are two different entities. According to John chapter 14, heaven is a real place made of real substance, okay? According to John 4:24 it says God is a spirit and we must worship him in spirit and in truth. With the exception of Matthew chapter 6, verse 33, which says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you," every single time in Matthew it uses the phrase "kingdom of heaven."

You say, "Why is that important to our understanding?" Because the kingdom of heaven as mentioned in the gospels, is the literal reign of Jesus Christ on the earth. The kingdom of God is your personal relationship with him. Let me put this in today's terminology. Right now, for four plus decades, I have been a resident of the kingdom of God but I haven't spent a single moment on the kingdom of heaven. Is Jesus here reigning? Are we reigning with him? Absolutely not. And so the "kingdom of heaven" is a phrase that's used only in the gospel of Matthew. It's not used in Mark, Luke, or John. And every time it's mentioned, it describes the physical reigning of Christ over the earth, not over our hearts. In fact, if you want a good example, you can fast forward to chapter 13 of the gospel of Matthew and do you know what it says? "The kingdom of heaven is like a field where a man sells everything he has to acquire it." You would not for one second claim you can give away your money and "get saved," right? In other words, it's not talking about salvation, it's talking about that coming day in that horrific time period we studied in the book of Revelation known as the tribulation, where literally the Antichrist is reigning, the mark of the beast is rampant and one sells everything they've got just waiting on Jesus to return.

Why is this so important? Because he says, "not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven." He didn't say kingdom of God. He didn't say a personal relationship with him. He is literally talking about when Jesus himself reigns on the earth. Why is this important? Because "many will say to me, in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name?" Now push pause there just for a moment. If you were not with us this morning, this is an important designation. Remember this morning we looked at Revelation chapter 20, verses 11 through 15, that famous great white throne judgment, the one where all those that are lost brought out of hell and they're judged for all of eternity. I brought up a very important point this morning: not one single person in Revelation 20 argues with God. Not one person ever says, "But, but, but, what about me?" What did Jesus just say here in Matthew 7? In that day, many will argue. Many will question. There's actually a dialogue that takes place with God.

There's only one single place in your Bible where those that are being judged actually have a conversation with the Lord. It's found in Matthew chapter 25. Let me set the scene. Matthew 25 comes in what we call the Olivet Discourse. Jesus has taken Peter, James, John, and Andrew. They're on the eastern side of the temple mount. They're looking over that famous temple. It is there for two chapters, Matthew 24 and 25, that Jesus begins to expound on what you and I would call the Second Coming. Okay, all these kind of end time scenarios and things. It is there in chapter 25 where Jesus,

beginning in verse 33, says there's a day coming where he physically will return to the earth to reign. We talk about that a lot in the book of Revelation. And it says there that there are two groups of people he finds, there's the goats and the sheep. Remember it says, "To the sheep on my right hand, go into the kingdom prepared for you from everlasting. To the goats, go to the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Do you remember the context though? When he tells the sheep to enter into his kingdom, they respond, "How did this happen?" They said, "How are we the good guys? What did we do?" And remember what Jesus said? "When I was naked, you clothed me. When I was hungry, you fed me. When I was thirsty, you gave me a drink of water. And when I was sick, you visited me in the hospital." Remember what they said? "When did we do these things?" It's almost like they're going, "I don't understand what's happening here." Do you see the context here? Because it is at that point in Matthew chapter 25 where Jesus has appeared on the earth that he is establishing his kingdom coming out of that horrific time period that the Bible and that he, Jesus, called the great tribulation, that when he "judges," there's actually a dialogue that takes place and there's a group of people that say, "Wow, we had no idea we were doing the will of the Father." But there's another group. They say, "Well what about us? We prophesied in your name. We did wonders in your name. We did all these great things." And what does he say? "I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of iniquity."

Why is this so important? Because doctrinally speaking, hear me very clearly, this passage has nothing to do with you. There's not a single one of you that can do enough things for the Father to earn heaven. It's not going to happen. But there's a time period coming, the Bible speaks of it, calls it the Great Tribulation. There's a time period coming where Jesus is going to come and reign on the earth and when he steps foot, there will be those that have endured that horrific time, half of them, relatively speaking, will be considered the sheep, the other half will be the goats. And isn't it interesting that according to what Jesus said, those that enter into the kingdom had no idea they were doing the will of the Father, and those that go to the lake of fire thought they had everything the way it was supposed to be.

But here's why we've gather tonight, not only to dissect when it was spoken, to whom it was spoken, why it was spoken, but how does this speak into our lives? I want to address this passage from a spiritual perspective. We've already addressed it doctrinally, we've already addressed it historically, but how does this passage that's so frightening, how does it apply to you and I? And the reason is the "who." Even though we're not on the other side of the cross, even though we're not a collection of Jewish adherents trying to "earn our way to heaven," you and I live in a world today that is filled with religious but lost people. We're filled with it. We are filled with a world that thinks just because they are a fill-in-the-blank, they're good with God. They think just because they've done this or just because they've done that.

Some of you may be familiar with the story that took place some years ago. Forgive me, it bears repeating. It's just one of those good stories. Had an individual many years ago that lived on the same street that we did. It just so happened providentially that this woman who was keeping her grandkids, her and I got into a conversation about the Lord,

about eternity, heaven, hell, etc., Jesus, all those things that are eternally waiting. And I asked that diagnostic question. You say, "Diagnostic question, what's that?" Diagnostic question simply says when you're having a conversation with somebody about the gospel, you say to them, "If you were to stand before God right now and he were to ask you, why should you be allowed into heaven, what would you say?" You can learn a lot about somebody and what they believe by asking that question. I asked this young lady, young, grandmother, I said that question, "If you were to stand before God tonight and he'd say, why should you go to heaven, what would you say?" You know what her answer was? "Because I was a Boy Scout troop leader for 21 years." That was her answer. And I said, "Really?" I said, "Could you expound on that?" She said, "I volunteered with those nasty, stinky boys for 21 years. If that doesn't get you to heaven, nothing does."

But again, think about that for a moment. We all have this tendency to put our parameters around what we think God should or should not allow, correct? Do you realize how many religious people are lost? In fact, I would tell you that statistically speaking, more people go to hell being religious than they do being an atheist whether it's a false god, or a misunderstanding of the "one true God." My favorite example, John 3, Nicodemus. Jesus called him a master of Israel. Can I put that in today's terminology? It's like he was the head theologian. Can I say this and please forgive my humor, if a Jewish temple in those days, on Wednesday night, they had Ask Nick, is what they had. What does Genesis mean? And what does Leviticus mean? What do all these things... This man knew what he was doing when it came to the Bible. Remember what he said to Jesus? "How may I have eternal life?" And Jesus said, "You must be born again." He said, "I don't know what you're talking about." Jesus said, "Well, you've gotta be born of the water, you've gotta be born of the Spirit." He said, "I don't understand this." And Jesus said, "How can you, a master of Israel, how can you not understand these things?"

So what is it that would cause somebody to be religious but lost? In our context today, what can happen in somebody's life where they are fervent, they are zealous, they are passionate, they are sincere, but they're still lost? 2 Peter chapter 2, verse 1 and 2, talks about damnable heresies. Now let me extrapolate what that means. Heresy, that word just sounds bad, doesn't it if someone says, "Oh that's a heresy or you're a heretic." The word heresy just means error. That's all it means. Can I be honest, transparent? Every one of us at some point has been a heretic. You have. There is something that you have believed about God or the Bible that was proven later to be wrong. Congratulations, we're all heretics. But a damnable heresy is a belief that you have that means that because you believe that, there is no way you're really saved. There's no way you really understand who Jesus is. There's no way you understand what the gospel is. And in 2 Peter 2:1 and 2, it warns us of false prophets who propagate damnable heresies, even denying the Lord Jesus. If you were with us last time we studied Matthew 7, what was the section before verse 21? False prophets. So again, it's perfectly in context here. So tonight, in brief, I want to walk through some damnable heresies that describe religious lost people in our culture today.

Now, by the way, there's more than just these, but for the sake of time, these are the ones I'm gonna walk through. By the way, they're isms, as we call them. The first one is

adoptionism. You say, "What is adoptionism?" Adoptionism is the idea that Jesus Christ was no different than you, he was no different than me, and that one day, the Lord saw fit to put a plan of redemption in place, he tapped Jesus on the shoulder and said, "I need a volunteer. Would anybody be willing to do so?" And Jesus of Nazareth raised his hand and said, "I will do so." And it was at that point that he was adopted into God's plan to redeem humanity. Now, lest you think that's an abstract concept, there's a whole group of people who are based in Utah who subscribe to this, that Jesus has not always been God, that there came a time where he signed up to do the plan of God.

The second one is what we call swoonism. Now that may be a phrase you're not familiar with, but swoonism, or to swoon, is the idea that Jesus Christ never really died in the tomb, that he never died and rose again three days later, that he appeared to die, his wounds were horrific. You remember at the end of the gospel of Matthew where the Pharisees come and they pay off the Roman soldiers to claim that the disciples came and stole his body? But according to 1 Corinthians chapter 15, it says that Jesus Christ, according to the scriptures, he died, according to the scriptures, he rose from the dead. Probably a better way to describe swoonism is in Matthew 16. where Jesus is at Caesarea Philippi and he says, "Who do people say that I am?" Remember there's a group that say, "Oh, some people think you're a great teacher, some people think you're a great prophet, some people think you're a great leader." In other words, swoonism is the idea that Jesus was a model teacher, a philosopher, but he wasn't one who shed his blood and rose from the dead. Jesus is so much more than just a teacher and a philosopher. He is the Savior.

The third one is what we call sacramentalism. I know it's a big fancy word, but here's what it basically means. A sacrament, by definition, is an item that institutes or brings grace with its consumption. Now, Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For by grace are you saved through faith, and not of works, lest any man should boast." In other words, our salvation in Jesus, there's nothing that we "bring to the table," and there's nothing we have to keep bringing to the table to make it real. In sacramental theology, and by the way, there are billions of people on planet Earth who subscribe to this. They go to church every week. They even claim to read the Bible every week. But they believe that by either taking bread, taking wine, or offering certain prayers to certain people, that by doing that, they are made right with God. That's what sacramentalism is. By the way, do you notice that the tally is getting high, is it not? Of how many people are religious and lost.

Fourthly, pluralism. Pluralism is the idea that you can have more than one path to get to the same place. Now, our smartphones, by the way, that's kind of paradoxical, is it not? Our smartphones, unfortunately, advocate this. Maybe this has never happened in your life, but it's happened in ours, where you pull up a destination that you're desiring to go to, and your phone gives you three different routes. Have you noticed that the fastest route is not always the route you want to take? Sometimes it takes you down roads you never thought existed and places you never thought you'd see, right, but you have options to get to the same place. Here's what pluralism states, pluralism states that Jesus is your path, but he doesn't have to be somebody else's path. If you want to worship Allah, that's your business. If you want to go down the road of Buddha, that's your business. In other words, it is pluralism that says as long as you're faithful to whatever you're faithful to,

you're good to go. The problem is that if Jesus Christ is not the Savior for all, then he's the Savior for none, and in 1 Timothy 2:5, it says there's one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. Acts 4:12, neither is there any other name whereby we must be saved but the name of Jesus. And so again, whether it is claiming that Jesus was just like you and I, was claiming he's simply a great teacher, claiming that somehow our religious fervor and endeavors make us right with God, or saying it doesn't matter really who you believe in as long as you believe, you discover that there's a whole lot of religious lost people in the world.

And then there's what we call universalism. You know what universalism is? It basically says it doesn't matter who you are or what you believe, we're all going to get there one day. It overly literalizes when we all get to heaven. Okay? Now, by the way, I love the song, it's a great song, but you understand that if we were to actually write that song doctrinally, "When we all who believe in Jesus get to heaven," okay? The problem is there's a lot of people who think we're all going there no matter what. If you don't believe me, all you have to do is listen to a post-game interview of a sporting event or the acceptance of an award at a show. Have you noticed it doesn't matter who in their life, mom, dad, family member, band member, teammate, it doesn't matter who's dead, they always say they're watching us from heaven above. True? Have you ever heard somebody at the end of a game say, "Man, I did this game for my daddy. I know he's in hell right now, but he watched me play." We always put everybody in heaven, do we not? If we believe that it doesn't matter what you believe you go to heaven, then you don't understand who Jesus is.

And then finally, for tonight, this is a Myersism. I call it Timexism. You say, Timexism? That's not a theological word. I know it's not. But there is this false understanding that no matter what you believe, what you do, how you live, that when you pass from this life, that God's going to give you another chance to be saved. We call it post-mortem evangelism. That's the fancy word. I call it Timexism. And one of the ways that we have religious lost people is they think that no matter what happens, God will give them another chance on the other side. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 6:2, today is the day of salvation. Not, hey, if you get around to it, don't worry, you get a second chance. And as we studied this morning, Revelation chapter 20, verse 11 through 15, makes it very clear that those that are dead, those that are in hell, are raised not to have an opportunity to decide, but to be condemned.

Why is this important? Because in Hebrews chapter 9, verse 27, it says, "it is appointed unto men once to die and then the judgment," meaning that every single one of us at some level, some place, is going to face Almighty God and here's the question, I don't know if this is the real question he's going to ask, but we're going to use it tonight, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" I've got news for you, just because you're a Baptist doesn't work. Or just because you say, "Oh, I went to church even on Sunday night. God, I didn't give 10%, I gave 11." Oh, you'd be amazed at the answers that some people can come up with, correct? But go back to Matthew 7. Every one of those things that I just said to you humorously are things that people do, and the reason that this passage is so frightening is because we know deep down inside there's never enough we could ever do

to be justified. And so we look at this passage and go, "Wow, I've done all I know to do, there's nothing I can do." You're absolutely right. But if we were to go back 2,000 years ago, on the other side of an empty tomb, on the other side of a blood-stained cross, and you happened to be one of those Jewish, faithful, fervent believers, Jesus was talking your language. The thing he was saying is, "Hey, don't get caught up in who you are and what you do," because as we're going to study next week, there's nothing you can do. Basically, here's what Jesus was saying to them, "You are going to fall short no matter how fervent and faithful you are. You need me, the rock, to weather not just the storms of life, but the big storm called judgment, which is pending."

Now for you and I today, the question becomes, do we trust that one day we'll be in glory because we go to church? Because we do this and we don't do that? Because we have certain standards in our life or rules that we put in place? I'll close with this. I'm sure you've seen this in some capacity, that hell is going to be filled with people who attended church regularly and were baptized more than one time, and there will be residents of heaven who never experienced either. Don't believe me? There's a guy named the thief on the cross who turned to Jesus and he said, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom one day." That man never went to church, never gave a denarius of his income, to use it in context, never got dunked in a baptistry, never taught a Sunday school class, never did any of those things. There's a lot of people who have, but have done so erroneously. Now do you see why this is a frightening, frightening passage? Oh, to be that person the Lord Jesus says, "I never knew you." Religion doesn't get you there. Jesus does.

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed. Maybe tonight, even in a Sunday evening context, you may be one of those Nicodemuses. You may be one of those "religious" lost people. There's no better time to get saved than today. Maybe you're that one who thought by doing things it made you right with God. Maybe tonight's the night where you call out for Jesus to forgive a sinner such as you. The Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Maybe tonight's the night that you call out. Or maybe tonight, as a believer, as one who is a part of the redeemed, as one who's a child of God, maybe tonight the Holy Spirit of God took the Word of God and made it clear how easy it is that even though you're saved, even though you're a child of God, how easy it is to get caught up in rules and in regulations and religiosity. Maybe today was one of those just kind of nudging of the Lord of make sure it's about a relationship. Or maybe today, maybe tonight's one of those nights where you realize that you have a lot of folks in your life that are religious. They mean well, but they don't know Jesus. Maybe tonight's the night you call unto the Lord. Maybe tonight's the night where you correct the ways and direction of your life. Or maybe tonight's the night where you call out on behalf of those that you know are lost, whether they know it or not.

Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of decision, thank you. God, thank you that humanity, myself included, who at times is so hard-headed, so obstinate and so difficult to receive correction and instruction, God, thank you that you made it abundantly clear in your word. We don't have to question. We don't have to have a quandary. God, you've made it

clear. Help us simply to respond to the cold, hard truth of your word. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.