

News of a New King

by Bayless Conley

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Can we pray?

Heavenly Father, thank You for the privilege to gather with Your family. Thank You for the Holy Spirit, who is present here among us and dwells within us individually. Holy Spirit, we know that one of the things You do is illuminate truth to our spirits. Open our eyes to behold wondrous things from Your Word today; we pray. May Jesus Christ be glorified through it all. Amen.

Hello to everyone on the plaza. To anyone who is watching, wherever you might be, we are glad to have you with us. I'm going to talk to you about the Christmas story. We're going to talk about some of the different characters in the Christmas story and how they responded to the news of the coming King. It actually represents how many people today respond to the news that a King has come, that the Savior of the world has come. It actually parallels people today. We're going to begin by talking about the good person. Matthew 1:18–21 NLT says,

¹⁸ This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man...

Everyone say "Was a good man." Some translations say he was a just man. Joseph was a good man.

...and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. ²⁰ As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

Joseph was a good man. He didn't want to ruin Mary's life. He didn't want to get revenge on her. He was thinking about her reputation, even though she had broken his heart. Imagine the conversation that must have taken place between them. "Joe, I've got something to tell you." "What, Mary? What?" She says, "Well, I'm going to have a baby." He says, "I know we've talked about it. We're going to have lots of kids." "No, Joseph. I'm pregnant now." "Cut it out, Mary. That's not funny." "No, Joe, it's true. I'm pregnant." Every guy's mind immediately is going to think, "All right. Who was it, Mary? Was it one of our friends? Was it one of my friends?" "No, Joseph. It wasn't one of our friends." "It was the guy I did tile work for a few months ago. I remember the way he ogled you when you brought me lunch." "No, it wasn't that guy." "Who was it? Was it one of my co-workers?" "No." "Mary, did you have sex with a stranger?" "No, Joseph, I didn't have sex with a stranger. It was God." "You had sex with God? Mary, this is Judaism. This is not Greek mythology. Come on." "No, Joseph, an angel came—." "Are you telling me you had relations with an angel now?" "No, Joseph, it wasn't like that. An angel came

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and told me I was going to give birth to God's Son, and the Holy Spirit would come on me. It happened, and I'm pregnant." "Really, Mary? Just get out. Just leave. I need to think."

The Scripture says he was thinking about putting her away quietly. He didn't want to ruin her reputation. He was thinking about her. Amazing, if you consider it. The Scripture says he was a good man, and humanly speaking, he was a good man. There are many people like that. They want to do right. They don't want to hurt anyone, even those who have hurt them. They don't want to hurt them back. As we read about Joseph, humanly speaking, there are good people with good hearts. Even though Joseph was good and just, a good guy from a human standpoint, he still needed to be saved from his sins.

The angel said, "You're going to call His name Jesus. He's going to save His people from their sins. Joseph, you're included in that crowd." The Bible says the whole world stands guilty before God, and we've all sinned and come short of the glory of God. I think when we consider people who have lived devotional, sacrificial lives, generally at the top of the list or coming close to the top of the list is Mother Teresa. In 1950, she established the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta, India, to minister and help the poorest of the poor, the dejected, the outcast, the unwanted, and the ostracized. Her work became legendary. Actually, 500 other organizations sprouted from that Missionaries of Charity operating in a hundred different countries. Some people think, "Well, certainly, with such a sacrificial and devotional life as that, she earned entrance into heaven." The Scripture is the only authoritative Word when it comes to that. This is what the Scripture says, Ephesians 2:8–9 NLT,

⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

The Bible says in Titus 3:4–5 NLT,

⁴ But—When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, ⁵ he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit.

Joseph was a good man, but it didn't earn him salvation. He was a just man, but it didn't somehow cancel his need of a Savior. I think about my dad. He had his flaws. I was quite aware of those flaws. I battled some of the same flaws myself. I think maybe it's just the environment of being raised in the home. All of a sudden, you look in the mirror and think, "I'm becoming my father. Help!" Despite the fact that my dad had some obvious flaws in his life, he was a good man, humanly speaking. I never knew my father to break his word once. If he gave you his word, he would literally die trying to keep it. That was just the way my dad was. He absolutely bled integrity, but he was lost. He needed a Savior. He needed to repent of his sins and put his trust in Jesus Christ. Isaiah 64:6 NLT says,

⁶ We are all infected and impure with sin. When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags. Like autumn leaves, we wither and fall, and our sins sweep us away like the wind.

My friend, we all need a Savior. To the good men and to the good women here who are trying to do it right, if you have not put your trust in Christ, you are lost. The whole world stands guilty before God. We have all sinned, and we all need a Savior. No one can point to their good deeds, their personal sacrifice, or their personal devotion and think that, somehow, it will gain

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them an entrance into God's family. It never will. We move from the good person to the seeker. This is represented by the wise men. Matthew 2:1–2 NKJV,

¹ Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

Verses 9–11 NKJV,

⁹ When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. ¹¹ And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

These wise men were seekers. They were hungry for truth, and they had been seeking after God. God had been speaking to them through creation. To those who are quiet enough to hear the whisper of creation's voice and discerning enough to realize that there is a master craftsman behind it all, as they journey, just like the wise men of old, they will always end up at Jesus Christ. Anyone who is truly seeking after the truth with an honest heart will always end up at Jesus.

I was backpacking with some friends years ago. We were in the high Sierras. It was about an eight, maybe nine-day trip. It took a day and a half of hard hiking to get to our spot. We spent about five days there. Then, it took a day and a half of hard hiking to get out. We were hiking maybe eight to ten hours a day. It's amazing to be in the backcountry. If you never have, and you are physically able to, I would encourage you to try and see God's creation. It's an amazing thing. Back there, you're catching and eating trout. Generally, you take dehydrated food because it's lighter, and you rehydrate it. It's okay. But after a week of eating trout, rehydrated food, and drinking out of the river, you start thinking about things like hamburgers and a hot shower. You start thinking about those things a lot. We're hiking out, a day and a half hike to get out, and I'm thinking hamburgers. I think I'm going to have two. Hamburgers and a hot shower, hamburgers, and a hot shower. We've been hiking for five hours, and I'm thinking, "Hamburgers and a hot shower. Hamburgers and a hot shower."

We're finally down. It's the very last stretch. It's maybe a half of a mile down to the trailhead, and from there, it's just a brisk 20-minute walk to where we have the cars parked. I'm going along, and everybody's picking up their pace. It just happens. "Hamburgers and hot showers. Hamburgers and hot showers. Hamburgers and hot showers." There is a couple coming up the trail. The ones coming up always have the right of way. So, you step out of the way and let them go by. I said, "Hey," and this guy and his girlfriend went on. After they went by me, I felt like the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart. He said, "Go talk to him." I'm going, "Hamburgers and hot showers. Hamburgers and hot showers." It's like the Holy Spirit wouldn't leave me alone. "I want you to go speak to him." "Hot showers and hamburgers. Hot showers and hamburgers." I keep going. I'm thinking about the hot shower, and so are all the guys in our little group. Everybody has picked up their pace. Finally, I just said, "All right." I took off my pack. I laid it down on a rock, and I went running after this guy and his girlfriend.

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Now, they are like a quarter of a mile up the trail. I get up to him. I go, "Hey." He turns around. I said, "We passed on the trail a few minutes ago." He says, "Yes, I saw you." I said, "I feel like I'm supposed to tell you something." He lifted an eyebrow. I said, "You're a seeker, aren't you?" I said, "You're seeking after truth." He said, "Well, actually, yes, I am." He said something interesting. "You're the second person who stopped me today to tell me that." I said, "Well, I'm going to go a step further." I said, "I felt like I was supposed to tell you that God is the one who told me to tell you that. He also wants you to know that your journey is going to bring you to Jesus Christ." At that, he rolled his eyes. He and his girlfriend took off. He was all in until I mentioned Jesus. The fact is, any person who is truly seeking after truth—I looked for truth, but in all the wrong places for many, many years. That journey brought me to Jesus Christ. It always will. Let me read something to you from Romans 1 beginning in verse 18 NLT says,

¹⁸ But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness.

It didn't say they didn't know it. They suppress it. Verses 19–20 NLT,

¹⁹ They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. ²⁰ For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

I believe there's a self-evident truth here. If someone, rather than suppress the truth, when nature speaks to them about the fact that there must be a mastermind behind this, rather than suppress if they choose to seek, God will move heaven and earth to get the answer they are looking for to them. Just this last week, I have read several testimonies from the world's leading astrophysicists. These are men with some of the brightest minds on planet Earth. They have spent their lives studying the cosmos, galaxies, planets, and stars. These men who are so brilliant and study the universe have become believers in Jesus Christ.

Invariably, their testimony was that the mathematics of the thing are just impossible unless there's a Creator behind this. There has to be intelligent design. There has to be. Then, the next question: is it possible to know this Creator personally? Then, their journey brings them to the Scriptures. The Scriptures bring them to Jesus. Now, some of them devote their life to sharing scientific reasons for faith. It's very interesting. God spoke to them. They were open, honest, and seeking. If you're here today, and you are seeking, listen, friend. I hope it's today. I'm telling you, your journey is going to bring you to Jesus Christ, if you are truly looking and searching for the truth. The next one we come to, our next character, is the hater. This is represented by King Herod. The wise men have just met with him in verse 3 of Matthew 2 NKJV.

³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

Verse 12 NKJV, talking about the wise men,

¹² Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

In verse 16 NKJV,

¹⁶ Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem

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and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.

Herod represents those who are antagonistic to Christ and to the gospel. Herod did everything he could to eradicate anything that had to do with Christ and his birth, not just from his personal home and palace but from among the people. I don't know if you're aware of it. You would have to be living under a rock somewhere if you're not aware of it. There are multitudes of cities across our country that have banned nativity scenes from being displayed anywhere in public. They used to have them in front of City Hall or here or there, and they have actually banned nativity scenes. They said it's offensive. I read a story about a public school in New Jersey. They had a Christmas production, and the kids were all singing a 200-year-old Christmas carol. As they sang Silent Night, they took out every reference to Christ from the Christmas carol. They took out "Round Young Virgin." They took out "Mother and Child." They took out, "Christ, the Savior is born." They took out "Holy Infant." Could you imagine trying to sing Silent Night without all that? That's what they did.

There was another group in Times Square that put up a huge billboard. It said Christmas, but Christ was X'd out of it. The tagline was, who needs Christ at Christmas? You don't have to go far to find the same thing. You just don't. It is everywhere. There are some who would like to close every church and remove every reference to Christ in society. My wife and I have a friend. He and his wife moved into a retirement community a few years ago. It's very large, with about 3,000, 4,000 people maybe living in this retirement community. After they moved in, they found out that the stated/written policy of the community was that you were not allowed to address anyone by saying "Merry Christmas" or "God bless you" because it was offensive. You could say, "Happy Holidays." If you said "Merry Christmas" even to your neighbors and got reported, it was grounds for you to be removed from the community. Yes, we're talking about the good old U.S. of A., my friend.

That's why Paul prayed in 2 Thessalonians for us to be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men. Some people are just unreasonable. It's irrational. You can't have a rational conversation. Take Christ out of Christmas? That's what Christmas is about. It's about the birth of Christ. With some people, it's just irrational. You can't have a reasonable conversation. Why? Because we don't wrestle against flesh and blood but against principalities, powers, and wicked spirits. Those wicked spirits are blinding them and causing them to not hear, see, or understand. My friend, it is a spiritual battle. Some have given themselves over to those spirits, and they literally want to not just eradicate everything that has to do with Christ, Christmas, a Savior, and a King from their own life, they want to eradicate it from your life as well. They want to silence you, put tape over your mouth, and make it so that you cannot say anything. That's the hater. Herod failed in his attempt to silence the message then, just like those will fail in their attempt to silence the message today. My friend, the gospel will continue to march on. You cannot stop God. You cannot stop God's Spirit. You cannot stop the message of the gospel.

Next, we come to the doubter. There is a man named Zacharias. He's a priest. He and his wife, Elizabeth, are serving God. She's never been able to get pregnant. They have prayed and prayed to have a baby. He is in the temple doing his service before God. The angel, Gabriel, appears to him and says, "Zacharias, your prayer has been heard. Your wife, Elizabeth, is going to get pregnant. You're to call that baby John. He is going to prepare the way for Christ. He is going to prepare the way for the Lord, the coming King." This angel, resplendent with God's glory, is standing before him. Listen, Gabriel is no lesser angel. He is at the top of the food chain when it comes to God's angels. This is his response. Luke 1:18–20 NKJV says,

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¹⁸ And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years." ¹⁹ And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. ²⁰ But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time."

It's really pretty ridiculous. Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, appears to Zacharias. Gabriel says, "God heard your prayer. Your wife is going to get pregnant." Zacharias basically asks, "Can you give me a sign?" How many just think that maybe having God's mightiest, most glorious angel come and stand in front of you might be sign enough? Listen, some people, the doubters, always want more. They always want more. They always want more. I think about Gideon in the Old Testament. You have to realize Gideon lived before the day of the new birth. He lived before the day the Holy Spirit would come in and dwell with people. His father was a pagan. He was raised in a pagan home. His father had his own pagan shrine. Israel, wholesale, had backslidden and gone away from God. An angel appears to Gideon and says, "Hey, mighty man of valor, you're going to lead God's people and get free from the Midianites." Gideon says, "Look, God, if I'm supposed to do this, don't be mad, but I'm going to put out a fleece. Let it be wet on the fleece in the morning and dry on the ground all around it. Then I'll know it's You."

Sure enough, it was wet on the fleece and dry on the ground. Then he says, "Look, God, don't get mad. Tomorrow, let it be wet on the ground and dry on the fleece. Then I'll know for sure." That was it. For some of us, if we had been in Gideon's place, it would have been, "Okay, on the third day, Lord, let the fleece be red. On the fourth day, let it be green. Let it disappear. Let it reappear. Let it look like Abraham's beard. Let it look like Poncho B's mustache." It's just like there's never enough. Friend, at some point, you have to take a step of faith. There are people here where, listen to me, God has already spoken to you. He's already given you all the signs you need. You need to stop doubting Him and just believe His Word. Step out and do something.

Yes, God certainly answers prayer, and He answers questions, but He is not going to show you everything. The just are to live by faith. I think of the story Jesus told about the rich man and Lazarus. They both died. The rich man went to hell. Lazarus was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man, in torment, lifted up his eyes to Father Abraham and said, "Send Lazarus across here so he can just put a little water on my tongue. I'm tormented in this flame." Abraham says, "There's a chasm between us. Those who want to come from here to there can't. You want to come from there to here. You can't do it." Then the rich man says, "I have five brothers. Send Lazarus to talk to them and warn them, lest they come to this place of torment so they can turn to God and repent."

Did you know everyone in hell believes in evangelism? Abraham said, "Son, they have Moses and the prophets. They have the Word of God. If they won't believe God's Word, they would not believe the one who was raised from the dead." At some point, His Word has to be enough. That you don't require anything else. It's happened many times in similar ways. In fact, it happens quite regularly. I have people come up and say, "This is amazing! The stuff we were talking about together before we came to church is what was preached from the pulpit. The answers came. This is God." That happens all the time. People come up and tell me that all the time. Here's the story, and this has happened numerous times as well: a guy comes up bringing his girl in tow. He says, "Hey, preacher, it's my first time here today." I said, "Okay." He says, "My girlfriend's been coming for a while. She told me I needed to come to this church with her. Finally, I came." He says, "I just want to clear something up. She called you, didn't she?" I said,

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“I don’t understand.” Said, “She called you and told you what to say, right? Because we were discussing certain things, and you talked about all those things. I know she called you and told you what to talk about today.” I said, “Actually, I’ve never met your girlfriend before. So, no, she didn’t call me.” Then he says, “What a coincidence.” Okay, Zacharias. Now, at some point, you have to just step out and trust His Word alone. Now, in great contrast, we move to the believer, Mary. The same angel, Gabriel, appears to her and gives her news. He tells her she’s going to give birth to the Son of God. He’s going to be great, and you’re to call His name Jesus. Her response is in verses 34–35 of Luke 1. It says,

³⁴ Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?”

How many think that is a fair question? “I’ve never had intercourse, Mr. Angel. How am I going to have a baby?” It’s a fair question. The response,

³⁵ And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.

Verse 38,

³⁸ Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.”

I’m going to paraphrase what she said. “Even though I can’t get my head around this, I’m all in. You say the Holy Spirit is going to come. He’s going to change me. Okay, I accept your word.” Now, the same angel that came to Zacharias came to Mary, but the promise he gave to Mary was far more outlandish. To Zechariah, he said, “Hey, you’ve been praying. Your wife hasn’t been able to get pregnant. She’s going to conceive, and you guys are going to have a baby.” He goes, “Can I have a sign?” To Mary, he says, “Mary, without having sex, you are going to get pregnant and give birth to the Son of God. The Holy Spirit’s going to come on you.” “Okay.” Amazing.

Now, friend, when you say “yes” to Christ, the Holy Spirit will change you, and you will never be able to work out the wonder of it all. Jesus said, “Those who are born again, it’s like the wind. It blows where it wishes. You hear the sound thereof, and it leaves. You don’t know where it came from. You don’t know where it’s going.” He says, “So is everyone who is born in the Spirit.” In other words, there is an element of mystery to it. I see the effects of the wind. I see it blow on the leaves. I saw it blow that lady’s hat off. I can feel it when it’s blowing against me. I don’t know where it came from. I don’t know where it’s going. I can’t see it. There’s an element of mystery. So, there is with being born of the Spirit of God. You need to say “yes” to Jesus. If you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead and confess Him with your mouth as Lord, you will be saved. The Holy Spirit will come upon you and change you. Literally, recreate your spirit. The Bible says, “If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation.” Literally, a new species of being that has never existed before. God will change you. You need to accept and trust.

I’ve shared often about getting saved in a little street mission in Medford, Oregon. God answered some of my questions, and I knew Jesus was real. So, I went all in, but the fact is I had a whole bunch of unanswered questions as well that I still left on the shelf, but I knew Jesus was real. I just basically said, “God, I’m leaving the rest of those questions to You. I’m stepping out on the water. I’m going for it. I’m all in.” Through the process of time, those other questions

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of the van. We're driving five miles an hour, and there's this bright, canary yellow, moving truck in front of us, just 10 feet in front. I can't even see the thing. Then, all of a sudden, the atmosphere just changed. I can't describe it, but it just suddenly changed, and there was this weird calm. I look out the window into a field, and there is a huge tornado, maybe 400 yards out in the field, moving towards us. We pull over into a gas station. There was an 18-wheeler semi-truck parked next to us. No one was in it, and we just figured we'd park here. That tornado came and picked up the semi-truck right next to us. It picked it up in the air, turned it upside down, crashed it back on the ground, and didn't touch us. We were just feet away. You can't understand it. It'll take a car and throw it a mile away. It's hard to comprehend the power one has.

We have friends who live in Oklahoma. They live in a tornado alley. They built a new home and a tornado room. When you close the door and go in there, it feels like you're in a tomb, the sound that it makes when it shuts. I think the thing would withstand an atomic blast. It's a place to go if a tornado comes through. The house may go, but everything will remain standing. Let's say they are there. They see what may be twin tornadoes coming their way. They know it's inevitable that it's going to come. It's right along the path where their neighborhood is. So, they go outside, and some of the neighborhood kids are out playing soccer in their front yard. Another neighbor is talking to his daughter. Some other guy has his headphones on, and he's mowing his lawn. They quietly slip into their tornado room and don't talk to anybody.

After about 20 minutes, they realize, because they can hear sound, even through those thick walls, that those tornadoes have touched down. After a while, it's quiet. They go outside, and their house is gone. All that is standing is that tornado room. They look, and most of the other houses in the neighborhood are gone. That neighbor who was talking to his daughter is walking around, dazed, calling his daughter's name. She's nowhere to be found. The kids who were playing soccer are gone. The guy who was mowing his yard is gone. The house is gone. There are neighbors straggling around. They come and say, "You had a tornado room? Why didn't you didn't tell us it was a safe place?" He said, "Well, we just didn't want to upset anyone. We didn't want you to think we were pushy." How many think they maybe should have told the neighbors there's a safe place?

Well, I'm telling you. There are twin tornadoes called Hell and Death. They are coming, and they are inevitable. There is a safe place. It's called the Rock of Ages. "Rock of Ages cleft for me. Let me hide myself in thee." We need to tell people there is a place of safety because judgment is coming. Eternity is coming. This life is short. It is just a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away, my friend. We have, and we know, the only safe place; His name is Jesus Christ. How can we not tell those around us just like these shepherds told everyone they met? I think you can do that without being a weirdo. Some people are going to think you're weird. Some people are going to think you're a bit pushy. When you think about the stakes, do we truly believe that there is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun? Do we truly believe the words of Jesus? We truly believe that He died on the cross for the sins of the world. There's no other way into a relationship with God except through Him.

Listen, to the good men and the good women here today, I want to tell you. Look away from your good works. Don't trust in your own good works to somehow merit favor with God. It will never save you. To the seeker, your journey has brought you here today. Maybe you're watching this in some other language besides English, somewhere in the world right now. Your journey has brought you here. Jesus is the answer. If you are truly searching, I'm telling you, Jesus is your answer. To the hater, you can repent and still put your faith in God. The apostle Paul, also called Saul of Tarsus, persecuted the church and had men and women hauled off,

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thrown into jail, and was responsible for the deaths of believers. He did everything in his power to eradicate Christianity, not just from his own life but from the lives of others. He found Jesus on that road to Damascus. If you've been a hater, if you've been an opponent of the gospel, I'm telling you, there is mercy for you. There is forgiveness for you if you will just receive it.

To the doubters, I just want to tell you it's time to lay those doubts aside and take a step of faith right into the arms of Jesus. You do have to take a step of faith. I want to lead you in a simple prayer. Everybody in the house here and to those who are outside on the plaza as well, I really think this might be our most important moments together right now. God is moving in people's hearts. And if you have not embraced Jesus, you need to know He loves you. He died for you. He was raised from the dead for you, and He will not turn you away if you come to Him. If you are a follower of Christ, He wants to draw you closer. He wants to bring you further down the pathway of God's plan and will for your life. He wants to make you an effective disciple for Him. We get to do a lot of cool stuff while living this life. Some of you have amazing careers, amazing families, and fabulous friends. You get to do a lot of cool stuff, but the most important thing is to do God's Will in your life. To know Him and to make Him known. In all of our doing, our sports, our hobbies, our careers, and all of that, we need to do it for the glory of God. We need to be making Christ known. I know He wants to bring all of us farther along that pathway of embracing His will and His plan for our lives.

I would like to lead you in a prayer. Maybe you came with a friend today, maybe with a family member, or maybe by yourself. I'm going to give you the words to a prayer. Now, any parrot can be taught to say a prayer. You can teach a parrot to cuss. You can teach a parrot to pray. But just because the parrot prays a prayer doesn't mean the parrot gets saved. You can say the words, but the important thing is that they are connected to a genuine heart. You need to tie your heart around the words and speak them to God. He'll meet you. He'll answer you if you will do that. If it helps you to close your eyes when you pray, you can do that. It's up to you. I think it's good sometimes just to block out distractions and to get alone with the Lord. Would you pray after me? Say,

Dear Lord, I humbly come to You. I thank You for loving me so much that You died on the cross for me. That You would bear the weight of all my sin. That You would take the punishment for those sins on Yourself and take them away. I believe You were raised from the dead. I ask You now, Jesus, come into my life. Wash me clean. Give me a fresh start. I put my trust in You. I call You, Lord. From this moment forward, I will follow You. Amen.

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