



## **New Life**

## **Easter Sunday**

**Campus Pastor:** This is Edwin Cruz. He wants to share with you how Christ came into his life and transformed it.

**Edwin:** I grew up in a Catholic church where I was put through the motions of being baptized as an infant, my first communion and my confirmation. My mom was a more frequent church-goer, pushing us to go with her most weekends, while my dad was out drinking with family members. I embodied the lifestyle of the men in my life, taking to a life of drinking, smoking and sex. As long as I didn't kill or steal, I felt I would have a good chance of avoiding hell. I struggled with depression and broke up with my girlfriend at the time because I just felt lost. I figured going to the gym and taking care of myself would help, but I still felt something missing.

One night I got behind the wheel after drinking and ended up being convicted with a DUI for going more than double the legal limit. I spoke with my ex-girlfriend about the issue and she told me to find a church. She said she would pray that God would do the impossible and bring me out of the darkness. I started reading the Bible and felt like I was being nurtured. After months of coming to church and doubting, I finally decided to accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior.

God sacrificed His Son by making Him a man of flesh Who lived a perfect life, was tortured and crucified for my sins. I am covered by His blood and now am free to live a life where I am not searching for a purpose in the darkness. I truly feel light in Him and praise Him for loving me as a child of His. I'm getting baptized to publicly show my decision to follow Christ and show that I'm truly devoted to being obedient to His commandments. Today I confess to the church and to all the world that Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.

**Campus Pastor:** Edwin, based on your profession of faith, it's my honor to baptize you now in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Buried in the likeness of His death; raised to walk in newness of life.

**David Platt:** Praise God for new life. That's what we're celebrating all day today at McLean Bible Church, and Lord willing, more of you will be celebrating in this way today. It's good to be together on Easter Sunday.

If you have a Bible, we're going to be in Mark 8. But before we read our passage today, let me share with you why I'm wearing this t-shirt today. My wife wishes I would dress up a little more every Sunday—some of you by your laughing agree with her—especially on Easter Sunday. She says, "Really, Dave? You're going to wear a t-shirt on Easter?" Here's why. Because today I am going to invite all kinds of people here and on other campuses to put on this same shirt which reads "Death to Life".

At the end of our time today, I'm going to offer two specific invitations to you. Here's how I've heard these invitations put by a good friend of mine and fellow pastor, and I cannot improve on his words. First, I'm going to invite you to receive Jesus' invitation for you to experience new life in a relationship with Him. This invitation is for everybody, whether you've grown up in church or this is your first time in church. It's an invitation for people who may not feel like they fit in a setting like this. It's an invitation for people who may feel far from God right now because of your past or even your present. It's an invitation for people who may have felt close to God at some point in your life, but that was a long time ago and a lot has happened since then.

My pastor friend was talking about a girl he met at a store in the community around his church. She found out he was a pastor and that always leads to some interesting conversations. She said, "Yeah, I used to be in church, but I've really wandered from God. I think I may need to go back." My pastor friend said, "You're in luck, because this Sunday coming up at our church is Amnesty Weekend. You can come back to church with no questions asked." She said, "Really?" He said, "Yes!"

I would say the same thing. Truth be told, every weekend is Amnesty Weekend here at McLean Bible Church, including today. Jesus' invitation is open to you—no questions asked. It doesn't matter about your past, present, personality or politics. It doesn't matter about your age or ethnicity. This invitation is for you to experience life in Jesus, either by beginning or by renewing a relationship with Him. If you have any questions about where you stand with Jesus, I want to help you answer those today.

In the second invitation, I'm going to give you a chance to be baptized today, on the spot, if you never have. You see, baptism is the first thing followers of Jesus do. It's like our "going public" celebration of new life in Jesus. It's not how we earn new life in Jesus or a relationship with God. It's a celebration of the life we have in Him. It's how you publicly declare you are not ashamed to be identified as a follower of Jesus and some of you have never done that. It may be because you've yet to become a follower of Jesus; or maybe you became a follower of Jesus years ago or recently, but for whatever reason, you've never taken this step.

Regardless of your story, today I'm going to invite you to take that step. I know that I'm talking to many people who have been baptized before, but I also know that I am talking to a lot of people right now who have never been baptized for a variety of reasons. I'm going to show you that none of those reasons are valid and today is the day to make that decision. You might say, "Well, I got baptized as a

baby. Doesn't that count?" I'll say more on this at the end, but we are so thankful that your parents saw faith as important when you were a child. They expressed that faith on your behalf in a sense. However, every time we see baptism in the Bible, it's a public profession of your own faith, not your parents' faith. So today you have a chance to affirm personally what they wanted for you, however many years ago, in a way that doesn't reject what they did for you, but affirms, "Of my own volition, I choose Jesus." You're going to have an opportunity today to make a call and say, "Mom, Dad, you hoped I would choose to follow Jesus. Today, I made it public that I'm following Him."

As a side note, for children who might come forward, parents, today will begin a process for your children to be baptized in the days to come. We want to start that process with you and your family today. Even teenagers, we want to walk through this process with you and your parents to the extent that's possible.

Now, some of you are already wondering, "Well, I don't have clothes to change into. I don't want to go home wet." We have thought of everything you need. From this dark colored t-shirt to shorts to towels to hair dryers to all kinds of things. We have you covered so you can take this step of faith today. What better day to do that than on Easter Sunday, celebrating new life?

Let's listen to these verses from the Bible, these words from Jesus, and then I'm going to give you an opportunity to respond to these two invitations. Beginning in Mark 8:31, the Bible says:

*<sup>31</sup> And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."*

*<sup>34</sup> And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup> For what can a man give in return for his soul? <sup>38</sup> For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."*

In this passage I want you to see two things: a plain truth and a personal choice. Let's start with the plain truth. The first three verses we just read make three realities crystal clear. If you were to lay out the facts of Easter, this would be the summary.

### **The plain truth: Jesus is God in the flesh.**

When Jesus talks about Himself as the "Son of Man" in this passage, He's referring to a promise way back in the Bible, written hundreds of years before He was even born, about One "like a Son of

Man” Who would come and has all authority over all peoples, Whose rule is everlasting, Whose Kingdom will never be destroyed. It sounds like a description of God, but the title “Son of Man” is obviously a person. The title is depicting God in the flesh, which takes us back even further in the Bible, all the way to the beginning.

Particularly with anybody who’s not familiar with the story of the Bible, here’s the big picture. In the very beginning, God created man and woman—us, you and me—in His image, unlike anything else in all creation. Sure, there is beauty and grandeur in God’s creation all around the world—in mountains and valleys, in skies and seas, in sunrises and sunsets—they all declare Him. They didn’t just come out of nowhere. Creation is the work of a Creator, a Master Designer.

His prize design is people, you and me. Unlike anything else, we are made with the capacity to know God in a way that’s different from mountains and valleys, sunrises and sunsets. You and I were created with the capacity to relate to God, to enjoy God. Every single one of us has been created for a relationship with God.

The problem, though—and we see this from just the third chapter in the Bible—is that we have sinned against God. Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, sinned against God. They decided they knew what was best for their lives better than God did. So they turned from God’s ways to their own ways in a story that has been repeated in every single one of our lives. It looks different in each of our lives, but every one of us has sinned against God, thinking our ways are better than those of the One Who created us. As a result of our sin against God, we are separated from God. Just look around the world, and one conclusion is clear: things are not as they should be.

We woke up this morning to headlines of hundreds of people dying in churches and hotels in Sri Lanka. We live in a world of sin, evil, hurt and suffering which we have all experienced in our lives. We’ve seen it in the lives of people in the world around us in all kinds of ways because we are separated from God.

If we die in this state, the Bible teaches we will spend eternity separated from a relationship with God. But that doesn’t have to happen. Why? Because God has come to us. That’s the story of the Bible. It’s what Jesus is saying here: the Son of Man is God in the flesh. This is so big.

When my six-year-old wants to tell me something he thinks is really important, he’ll say, “Dad, this is humassive.” So I’m going to channel my inner six-year-old son right now and say to you, “This is humassive.”

We have all kinds of religions in the world that are built on how we get back to God, trying to overcome the evil, hurt and suffering we experience in this world. A lot of people look at different religions and think, “They’re all pretty much going after the same thing, so they all look pretty much the same.” I was having a conversation with somebody here in the lobby just a couple weeks ago who said,

"I look at the religions of the world and they all look pretty much the same to me, just different in small ways."

It reminded me of a conversation I've shared before that I had one day outside a temple in Southeast Asia with two men who were both from different religions. They knew I was a follower of Jesus. They were talking about how our religions are pretty much fundamentally the same, just superficially different. I listened for a while, then said, "Let me see if I understand. It's almost like you guys picture God—or whatever you want to call him—at the top of a mountain and we're all at the bottom of the mountain. You may take this path up. I may take another path up, but in the end we'll find ourselves in the same place."

They smiled and said, "Exactly. You understand." I said, "So let me ask you a question. What would you think if I told you that the God at the top of the mountain didn't wait for us to come up to Him, but He actually came down the mountain to where we are?" They said, "That would be great." I said, "Let me introduce you to Jesus."

Realize what Jesus is saying here and how different it is. We don't have to make our way to God, because God has made His way to us. Do you realize what this means in your life? You don't have to fix your life in order to come to God. You don't have to pray a certain number of times. You don't have to do a certain number of good things and hope your good outweighs your bad. You don't have to make some kind of restitution for your past. In fact, you don't have to pay any price at all for your sin against God. That's the whole point of what Jesus is saying here.

### **The plain truth: Jesus came to die for our sin.**

Jesus came to die for your sin and my sin. Did you hear Jesus' words? "*The Son of Man...*" referencing Himself, God in the flesh "...must suffer and be rejected" by the religious rulers of the day—the elders, chief priests and scribes. That's a picture of people who are loading up the crowds with all kinds of burdens and laws and self-righteous regulations, all kinds of things you need to do in order to make yourself good enough for God. Jesus says, "They will reject Me and I must be killed. I came to die."

This now starts to make sense, because God said way back in the beginning of the Bible to Adam and Eve, "If you sin, you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17). The payment for sin before a holy God is death—not just physically, but spiritually separated from God for all of eternity. Yet on the same day man and woman sinned against God, God promised He would come and make a way for us to be forgiven of our sins (Genesis 3:15). In order to be forgiven, the price of sin must be paid. This is what Jesus, God in the flesh, came to do. Jesus came to pay the price for sin—your sin and my sin.

Please don't miss this. "I must be killed," Jesus said. Dying for your sin was not an accident in Jesus' life. Dying for your sin was the reason for Jesus' life. Jesus came to die for your sin against God. And as if that good news was not good enough already, it keeps getting better, because Jesus didn't stay dead for long.

### **The plain truth: Jesus rose in victory over death.**

Did you hear it? The Son of Man must suffer, be rejected and killed, then after three days rise again. What? Rise again? Who dies and rises again? We're talking resurrection here. Not resuscitation. Not reincarnation. We're talking dead for three days, then alive. We're talking about you go to a funeral, seeing a man's body put in a grave and dirt poured over that grave. You leave and next weekend that same guy comes up to you on the street and says, "Hello." That's crazy. It's crazy good! It's the greatest news in the entire world: death has been defeated. The penalty for sin has been paid and conquered.

The Canadian scientist G.B. Hardy said it best:

When I look at religion, I have two questions. One, has anybody ever conquered death? And two, if they have, did they make a way for me to conquer death? So I checked the tomb of Buddha; it was occupied. I checked the tomb of Confucius; it was occupied. I checked the tomb of Mohammed; it was occupied. Then I came to the tomb of Jesus and it was empty. I said, "There is One Who conquered death." So I asked the second question, "Did He make a way for me to do it? And I opened up the Bible and discovered that He said, 'Because I live, you shall live also.'"

See this plain truth—truth that has power to give you new life that will never end. The Bible says that if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, God in the flesh Who has come to save us from our sins and you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved from your sin forever (Romans 10:9-10).

### **The personal choice: Will you live for Jesus?**

This leads to the personal choice, meaning every single one of us has to decide what to do with this truth. To put it simply, every single one of us right here, right now, has two choices. The first is will you live for Jesus? Go back to Mark 8:34. Calling the crowd, Jesus said to them, "*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*" What does that mean?

Don't miss this. Jesus is inviting you and me to experience a new identity in Him that is not based on yourself or what you can do for God, but is based on Who Jesus is and what God has done and will do for you. Think about it this way. What is your identity? It's your sense of self and worth, the basis for what you believe about you. We live in a world that offers all kinds of bases for self-worth.

I heard of one woman who put it this way, talking about different identities she had had in her life:

When I was a young girl, I grew up in a conservative church and home. I felt good about myself, because I was very moral. But that turned me into a pretty self-righteous and judgmental person, which means I put a lot of pressure on myself and others to be good. I felt good about myself, as long as I was moral. But it didn't seem like I could ever measure up. It felt more like a burden.

So I broke out of that and started pursuing relationships with men. Now I felt good about myself because someone said I was beautiful. As long as somebody loved me in that way, I was okay. But then that took a hurtful turn when those feelings changed. So some girlfriends came along and said, "You can't built your identity on morality or men. You need to get a career and be your own person. So I did. I got an education and went into a career. But then I felt just as destroyed when my career hit a bump as I did when a relationship broke up. I guess I felt good about myself as long as I was successful, but I was still empty.

Then somebody else came along and said, "You're working too hard. You need to start caring for people, helping people, doing good deeds." So I started to volunteer. I got involved in all kinds of work with the poor and the oppressed. But even that, as hard as I tried, I never felt like I was doing enough.

Basically what she said was, "First I thought I was somebody because I was moral. Then I thought I was somebody because I was beautiful. Then I thought I was somebody because I was successful. Then I thought I was somebody because I was helpful." Then she said:

I heard the gospel—the good news about Jesus—and I realized I'd been trying to save myself. But I can't do it, I realized the God of the universe, my Creator, loves me, not because of what I've done or can do for Him, but because of what Jesus has done for me. Every other identity I tried was based upon my performance, with all the ups and downs, all the whiplashes that come with them. But now because of Jesus, I could finally rest and find my identity in a relationship with God Himself.

Do you see the echoes of this story in all our lives? As long as I'm good, as long as I'm smart, as long as I'm athletic or fit, as long as I look a certain way, as long as I'm with this person, as long as I'm in that career, as long as I'm comfortable, as long as I'm successful—we're doing everything we can to save ourselves. Yet none of these identities work, because none of us can measure up in all of these ways and we all know these ways leave us empty eventually.

The beauty of what Jesus is saying here is, "You don't have to measure up. You can rest in Me, in who God has created you to be. Don't try to save yourself. You'll lose your life. Follow Me and you'll save your life." This call to self-renunciation in Mark 8:34 is actually a call to self-realization, to become the man or woman you were made by God to be, with a new identity that carries with it eternal security.

Think about all those other identities. What do they all have in common? None of them last. Our minds and bodies wear out. Our beauty fades. Success comes and goes. Careers shift and change. Money and markets rise and fall. Even marriages come to an end.

### **The personal choice: Or will you live for this world?**

In the midst of it all, Jesus is saying, “I offer you an identity that will never fade, will never wear out, will not come and go, shift and change, rise and fall, or ever, ever, ever come to an end.” Which is why this passage puts it this way: will you live for Jesus, or will you live for this world? This world is described in two main ways.

One, it is a world of fading possessions. “*What does it profit a man,*” Jesus asked, “*to gain the whole world?*” Picture that. The whole world. Everything in the world. All that Bill Gates has belongs to you; Jeff Bezos too, and Amazon—and you’re just getting started. All the money, all the possessions in all the world, all the beauty, all the glamour, all the success, all the fame in all the world—what if you have it all, yet you forfeit your soul? What will you have when all those things are gone? And one day they will all be gone. What will you have? You will have lost your soul forever. Jesus asked, “What can you give in return for that?” The answer is: nothing.

I want to use an illustration that a friend of mine used. When I was thinking through these words from Jesus, this illustration immediately came to my mind. I couldn’t think of a better way to put it. I want you to imagine this rope here goes on forever. It doesn’t stop at the end of this big stage; it just keeps going on around the world, everywhere. It doesn’t stop. It keeps going around the world again and again, never, ever, ever ending. I want you to pretend like this rope is a timeline of your life. It starts at a point in time and goes on forever.

Then I want you to imagine that this little red part here represents your life here on this earth—a relatively short amount of time when compared to the rest of your life. What is so baffling is how focused we are in this culture on this little part right here. And not even just this little part, but a tiny part of this little part. It’s like the American Dream. You work really, really hard—work hard, work hard, save, save, save, save—so that right here you can live it up. Granted, you’ll be pretty tired, but hey, live it up.

We’re obsessed with this tiny section of this really, really long rope—our lives. It’s utter foolishness when we think about it. Why are we not obsessed with this longer part? Why are we not consumed with this part? It’s why Jesus says, “What if you gain it all here? You can have it all—everything this world has to offer. What if you gain it all? Because when you get to this point right here, in an instant it’s all going to be gone. What will you have left forever?” Don’t live like that. This world is full of fading possessions and fleeting praise.

This is how Jesus closes out: “*Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation...*” In other words, this is a really good way to summarize the personal choice we all have. Whose praise are you going to live for? Who will be the primary audience in your life? Will it be Jesus, no matter what others say about you in this world? Or will you live for what others—and a world that is set up against God and His ways—say about you? Whose opinion is more important to you? Maybe a better way to put it is whose opinion will matter most in eternity?

This is part of why I am inviting you to be baptized today, to give you an opportunity to say, in your life, in a defining moment today, “I am not ashamed of Jesus and His Word.” I want to urge you to take that opportunity.

So we’ve come to the point when I’m about to give you the two invitations I mentioned earlier. But one last thing before I do. I want you to hear from some men and women who are sitting among you today who have found new life in Jesus and who are happy to be associated with Him. Watch this with me:

**Man #1:** There are things I’m not proud of, especially a failed marriage and being in super-huge debt.

**Woman #1:** I got really involved in drugs and alcohol. I had a lot of abusive relationships. I fully embraced a life of sin.

**Man #2:** My parents were going through a divorce. I was completely dissatisfied with work, even though I’ve got a good job. I’m in a nicer city than I ever expected to live in. Yet happiness was on the decline.

**Woman #2:** My mom was killed. My father was killed. I really just had this feeling of being alone in the world.

**Woman #3:** I definitely remember getting to the point where I started to starve myself as a form of control. My mind was in such a dark place that I just wanted to end everything.

**Man #3:** If you’d have told me that I would have struggled with major depression, had challenges in my marriage where it’s basically falling apart, hardships with my children, I would say, “Look, that’s not going to be my life. You’re crazy.”

**Woman #2:** I would go to church and I had a lot of questions I would ask. One day I remember vividly the sermon was especially emotional for me. There was talk about how we have a God Who would never leave us. He’s the Father to the fatherless and the orphans. I just felt like a lot of pieces in my life were starting to fit together. The pastor came up and did the altar call, saying, “If anyone has not made a decision to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, this is the time to do that.” He was going to count to three and as he said, “One, two, three,” I sprang out of my chair like a jack-in-the-box. I was

surprised. My friends around me were all surprised. I just was all in and wanted to know more about Jesus Christ and how to be His follower.

**Man #3:** In Christ, I have been made a new creation. I have become, not the object of wrath, but the object of love. And that security allows me to now confidently share the Word with people and not be embarrassed about the challenges and struggles I've had.

**Man #2:** Once you put your faith in Christ, you are forgiven of your sin and are a new creation.

**Woman #1:** He will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. That's genuinely what He did for me. The biggest change is the change in my heart, not in anything else.

**Woman #3:** I can't look in myself for any sufficiency, because I will always find areas of insufficiency in myself. But my security needs to be in the Lord.

**Man #2:** And you literally have been given everything there is that's good. God's not holding out on us.

**Man #1:** You can be a child of God and know that He's going to be with you. I want that for everybody.

**Woman #1:** I think about all these different people out there—the people I knew from AA—who just desperately need knowledge of Jesus. I just want to go out there and let everybody know.

**Woman #2:** I have a Savior Who will never leave me or forsake me. I have a relationship and communion with Him every single day. That's why I can sit here today in good spirits, with all the trials that have happened in my life. And that is all because of God's grace and glory for my life.

**David:** I told you I have two invitations for you today. Invitation number one is for you to receive new life in Jesus, to receive a new identity and eternal security today. Again, this might be your first time in church, or you might have grown up in church. Maybe you even call yourself a Christian, but truth be told, if you were to stand before God right now, it would be clear that Jesus is not your life. For many, you have all kinds of excuses for not making Jesus your life. You say, "I've still got questions." That's great. Today you can get them answered. Start that conversation right now.

You say, "Well, the church has too many hypocrites." With all due respect, you know that has nothing to do with it. The medical profession has some crazy people out there too, but you don't ignore all medicine. Someone else's hypocrisy has nothing to do with you. And besides, you've probably had your own hypocritical moments, so be glad Jesus loves hypocrites. That means there's hope for you too. One man said, "The church is a house full of misfits and a kingdom full of miracles," which means there's always room for another misfit and another person who needs a miracle. So you can come on in.

You say, "Yeah, maybe I'll do that later." I want to warn you—there may not be a "later." I'll say this as plainly as possible. You are not guaranteed to be alive tomorrow. Any one of us could die at any

moment. You could die on your way home today and this opportunity, in this moment, would be gone forever. Even if you live for many more years, you don't want to harden your heart toward God today. To hear the voice of God's Spirit speaking to you like He is right now and for you say, "Maybe later," God will let your heart harden all the more and you may never come back to a moment like this.

I say to some of you: this could be your last opportunity. Today is the day, so don't make excuses. Today's excuses will be tomorrow's regrets. Five minutes into eternity, what are you going to be glad that you held on to that kept you from Jesus? The first invitation is for you to receive new life in Jesus today.

Then the second invitation is for you to be baptized today. I want to be clear: baptism and salvation are not the same thing. Baptism is a public celebration of a personal decision. You decide to follow Jesus as the Savior and Lord of your life, and baptism is going public about that decision.

Again, people make all kinds of excuses here. Some of them are the same. You might say, "I'm not ready." But the reality is that if you have trusted in Jesus, you are ready. You don't need a certain level of Bible knowledge or have it all figured out. At what point are you going to have it all figured out? Today is your opportunity to say, "Jesus is my Savior. He is my life." If that's all you know, you are ready.

People say, "Baptism is not really that important. It's not going to make a big difference whether I do this or not." Are you serious? Are you really saying that Jesus' first command to you is not that important? It's not really a big deal to you? If you don't obey Jesus' initial clear command to you, how are you ever going to go all the way with Him?

You say, "This will be really inconvenient to do today for this reason or that reason." Honestly, if you're saying that, please hear me in love. I don't think you get Christianity at all. Jesus just said to follow Him was to take up a cross and die. To put it bluntly, people died today in Sri Lanka for association with Jesus, but it's too inconvenient for you to get wet?

Again, you might say, "Well, I was baptized as a baby." We talked about this earlier. Your baptism as a baby was a profession of someone else's faith, not your own. And praise God for that; you honor that faith in your parents or whomever. But today is the day to profess your faith. You have a chance today, not to reject what they did, but to affirm what they wanted for your life.

You say, "Well, I don't have a change of clothes." Listen, we have everything you could possibly need: T-shirts, towels, shorts. We've tried to think of everything. We even have a hair stylist who will get your hair back in the exact same form it was when you came. Just kidding. We don't actually have that. But we have everything else.

You say, "But I came with friends. They want to go eat after this." Listen, please don't miss the importance of this. They will wait. They will gladly wait, if they're your friends. And if they won't wait,

tell them there's something wrong with their heart and they need to be baptized with you. We will arrange a ride for you if you need it.

Here's the deal. When it comes down to it, it's Mark 8:38. Are you ashamed to be identified with Jesus? Today is a defining day, a day for you to do what God is telling you to do, to spring out of your seat like a jack-in-the-box and say, "I want new life in Jesus," or "I am ready to publicly celebrate new life in Jesus." Two invitations—it's time to respond.

So let me invite you to bow your heads with me. With every head bowed, every eye closed, just between you and God, I want to ask you, first and foremost, right where you're sitting: is Jesus your life? Is Jesus your life? If your answer to that question is not a resounding "Yes!" in your heart, then I want to invite you to pray to God right now. Just say in your heart, "God, I want and need Jesus. I know I have sin in my heart that separates me from You. I know I cannot make my way to You, but I thank You for making Your way to me. Today I trust in Jesus, in His death on the cross for my sin and in His resurrection from the grave as my Lord. I receive new life in Jesus, a new identity with eternal security."

Now, with every head bowed and every eye closed, if you just prayed that and expressed that to God in your heart, would you raise your hand? I know that I can't see everybody, but this is before God. If you would say, "I'm trusting Jesus for new life today," would you just raise your hand right now? Hands are up all across this room!

O God, I pray for all these people—the ones I see and the ones I can't see. I praise You, Jesus, for saving them, for giving new life, eternal life with You. I pray that You would give this group the courage to do what I'm about to invite them and others to do.

As you put your hands down, here's the second invitation. Maybe you just prayed that to God, then today is the day to celebrate that through baptism. Or maybe you were already a Christian when you came today, but you have never been baptized since deciding to follow Jesus. I want you to pray right now, "God, please give me the courage to do what I know You're calling me to do. Give me the courage to take the first step." If you take that first step, I guarantee you God's Spirit will give you all you need to continue every step after that.

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All Scriptures are quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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