



The Secret to the Christian Life, Continued

The Story of Scripture – Part 30

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open with me to 1 Thessalonians 5. I have been looking forward to this Sunday ever since last Sunday, when more people were restored to a relationship to God through Jesus, and more people celebrated that through baptisms.

I've heard all kinds of stories from different campuses and we even have some pictures. We're not celebrating death. We're celebrating life!

There were people coming to faith in Christ, people celebrating life in Christ through baptism. There was a couple in Loudoun, a husband and wife who were going through a struggle in marriage, who decided, "We need to go to church one Sunday." And it just so happened they found MBC Loudoun. They came to church and both came forward to say, "We want to trust in Christ." They were both baptized.



Here at Tysons, we had a pool set up out in the lobby. All kinds of people gathered around as people shared their stories. There was cheering, celebrating new life in Jesus. As people were walking out or coming in, they were saying, "What is going on over there?"

One story in particular happened during the 1:00 gathering in here, but you could hear it in here. We have over 100 nations represented here in our church. Last week there was a Nepali woman who was baptized. She shared in her testimony how her family was Buddhist and when she came to Christ, it meant abandonment and persecution for her. But she stood in that pool surrounded by Nepali brothers and sisters and others, and with tears she shared how she was trusting Jesus as her life. She went down into that water and came out—and I wish you could have seen the look in her face and hear the shouts in the lobby.

What happened next was awesome. A Nepali brother pulled out a guitar and everyone started singing on the spot, "I have decided to follow Jesus—no turning back." She was standing in the pool with

her arms raised and tears in her eyes. Everybody around her was singing, “Though none go with me, still I will follow. No turning back, no turning back.” There were hugs all around. It was awesome.

That was one story among many. Another woman came with a coworker who had invited her. This woman was not a follower of Jesus when she came into this room last week. She heard the good news of God’s love for her and in a way she had not planned, she put her faith in Jesus and found herself being baptized to celebrate His love for her.

Teenagers, young adults, men, women, senior adults, people of all ages and background were celebrating new life in Jesus. So here’s the deal. We’re going to do that again today. I’m wearing this shirt again. Heather asked me, “Are you going to wear that shirt every week?” I said, “I don’t know. It kind of simplifies choosing an outfit.” Not that I have that much variety in my wardrobe anyway. I’m wearing it because I want to invite more people to put this shirt on today and celebrate life in Jesus. I know that today, just like every Sunday, there are people in this room right now and in other campuses who either are not truly followers of Jesus, or are followers of Jesus but have not been baptized since becoming a follower of Jesus.

I don’t believe it’s an accident that you are here today. So today I want to invite you to begin and/or celebrate life in Jesus. We have shirts, shorts, towels, everything you need. I’ve been praying all week that God would lead more people to take this step of faith today, maybe in a way they didn’t plan on when they were coming in today. I’m praying that God will do that every time we gather together. I want us to come praying for that and expecting God to answer. I want us to invite people—friends, coworkers, family members who don’t have a relationship with God through Jesus—to come and experience God and to receive eternal life with Him. There’s nothing more important than this.

In fact, let me pray now for what’s about to happen.

O God, I pray that in the next few minutes You would speak through Your Word to hearts in this room and in other campuses so that people’s lives would be changed forever. I know there are people who are not ready to stand before You, but they could find themselves standing before you at any moment. If that were to happen right now, they would be separated from You for all of eternity.

God, I pray that when we give time to respond to Your Word, that You would give humility for people to do whatever You’re calling us to do. I pray specifically that You would draw many people to new life in Jesus and to celebrate life in Jesus through baptism today. O God, only You can do this. I know there’s nothing I can say that can manufacture that. Only You can do this by Your Spirit. So we pray that You would move in power among us. We plead for this, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Jesus died for you so that He might live in you.

Last week we looked at the secret to the Christian life. It’s not something new that no one’s ever heard of, but it’s the key to living the Christian life that so many true followers of Christ are missing out

on. We looked at one verse, Galatians 2:20, where we saw that the secret to living the Christian life is grasping the mammoth reality that Jesus died for you so that He might live in you. In the words of Galatians 2:20, *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me...”* Hopefully those of you who were here last week got a picture of who you are with Christ in you. It changes everything about how you view your life.

This leads right into the continued part I want to pick up on today. Even if you weren't here last week, I'm going to pick that back up and unpack it this week based on two verses: 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24. Let's read these two short verses, then think about what God is saying to us right now through them. *“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”*

Jesus in you transforms everything about you.

Last week we saw that Jesus died for you so that He might live in you. This week I want to show you how Jesus in you transforms everything about you. I want to show you how putting your faith in Jesus is not merely about making a decision one day and then moving on with your life until you get to heaven. I want to show you how putting your faith in Jesus begins a journey of total transformation in every area of your life.

As I already mentioned, I know there are people here who are not true followers of Jesus right now. Every week we have people from all kinds of different backgrounds who are not following Jesus, or maybe are nominally Christian—Christians in name only—or maybe they have a totally different faith. You've come with friends or family or coworkers, or maybe you're just visiting on your own. We are so thankful that you're here. I want to ask you in particular to hang with me in this first part.

Based on this passage in God's Word, I want to share two prayers this passage leads us to pray for each other. The first prayer is specifically a prayer for people who have put their faith in Jesus. Then the second prayer is a bit more general, a prayer for all of us regardless of where we stand with Jesus right now. So if at this moment you're not a follower of Jesus during this first part, I want to invite you to listen in on what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

There are a lot of people who call themselves Christians who are not actually followers of Christ. That Christian label can be used in all sorts of ways. Even here in our city, you may hear about the “evangelical vote” or the “Christian vote.” I want to show you what the Bible teaches about followers of Christ, which is oftentimes different from what the world labels “Christian.” So hang with me through this first prayer, then I want to bring us all back together for the second prayer that's going to lead us to a time of response. Let's start with the first prayer.

I pray that God will make you more and more like Jesus.

I've been praying this prayer personally for followers of Christ across our church all week long. This is something we also can pray for each other. Based on 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, I pray that God will make you more and more like Jesus.

This verse is a prayer for Christians at Thessalonica, a city in the first century Roman Empire, who—much like the Nepali woman I mentioned earlier—had experienced all kinds of opposition and persecution for placing their faith in Jesus. In fact, turn back to 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10, where you'll hear a little bit of the story about how they've come to faith in Christ. The Bible says:

For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Get the picture here. They had turned from the worship of idols to the worship of God. They had received the gospel. Now, for those of you who are not followers of Jesus right now, the gospel is the good news that the God Who created you and me loves each one of us, even though we have all sinned against Him (Romans 3:23). This basically means we have rebelled against God's ways, choosing our own ways instead. It looks different in each of our lives, but all of us have sinned against God and we are all separated from Him as a result. The penalty for sin before a holy God is death—and not just physical death (Romans 6:23). If we die in the state of separation from God, we will spend eternity separated from God. We'll talk more about that in a minute.

The good news is God has made a way for us to be forgiven of all our sin and restored to a right relationship with Him. God has come to us in the person of Jesus Who has paid the price of sin for us. Jesus, Who had no sin in Him, died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin (1 Corinthians 5:21). Then He rose from the dead, conquering sin (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Now, forgiveness of sins and eternal life are possible for all who turn and trust in Him, all who turn from the idols of this world—namely ourselves—and trust in Jesus alone as our life.

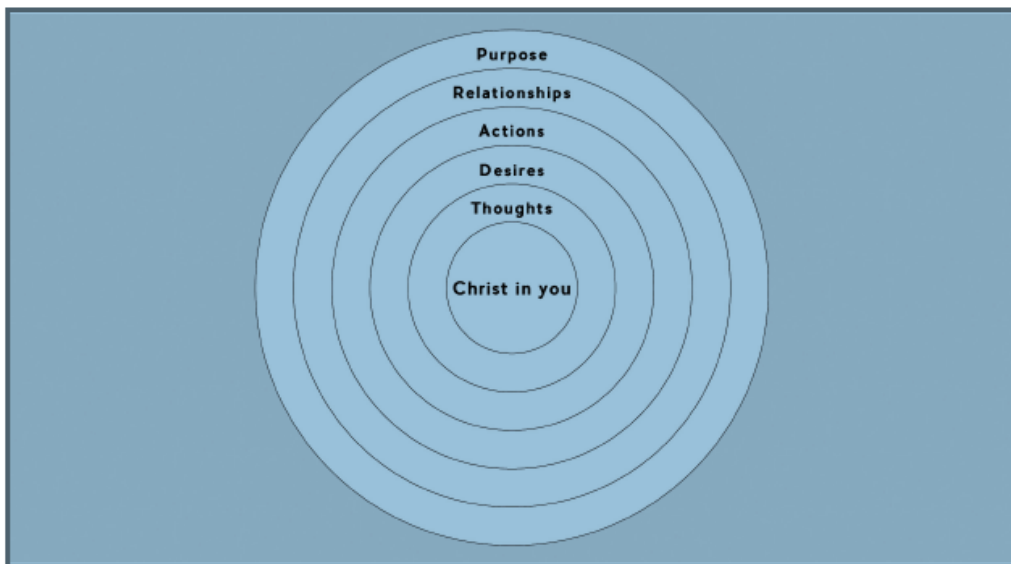
That's what had happened in Thessalonica. When they trusted in Jesus as their life, that triggered a process by which Jesus began to transform everything about their lives. That's what this prayer is all about in 1 Thessalonians 5:23: *"Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely..."* Notice, the God of peace does this Himself. I wish we had more time to go in depth here. Peace is not just a

reference to some sort of inner tranquility; it refers to a whole and healthy life as God intends for us to live.

This makes sense when you think about it, right? God—the One Who created you, Who fashioned and formed you, right where you are sitting, is all-knowing, all-powerful and all-loving. God knows what is best for your life—better than you know what is best for your life. Sin is at the core a denial of this. Sin is saying, “I know better than God what is best for my life.” But when you trust in Jesus to forgive you of your sin, you are restored to a relationship with God, as you say, “God, I trust that You know what is best for my life. I’m trusting You with my life.” That’s the confession of every Christian. “Jesus, take over my life. Transform every single thing about me according to Your ways, not my ways anymore.”

That’s what this prayer is about. It’s about God sanctifying us. That word literally means setting us apart to experience the full, abundant life God has created you and me to live in every way. Who does not want the full, abundant life your Creator has designed for you to live? This verse is a prayer for that: *“May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely...”* Some translations say, “Through and through.” The picture is all of you—your whole spirit and soul and body. Everything about you is totally transformed by Jesus’ life in you.

I want to give you a chart of concentric circles. No, this is not a bull’s eye. These are concentric circles to help you think about how Jesus in you transforms everything about you from the inside out.



The moment you place your faith in Jesus, the moment you become a Christian, the moment you say, “I’ve been crucified with Christ. I no longer live, but Jesus lives in me. I’m trusting Jesus as my life,” that moment starts a process over time by which you become more and more like Jesus in your life. This process is called sanctification and it affects everything about you.

Picture this with me. We can go throughout the Bible with each of these, but I've chosen some different verses at different points to talk about the ways Jesus transforms you from the inside out. In this inner circle is "Christ in you." When you trust in Jesus as Lord of your life, He doesn't just forgive you of your sins and then you move on with your life. No, He forgives you of your sin and fills you with His Spirit. The Holy Spirit of God is living in you which is Christ in you.

Think about how His Spirit in you then begins to transform everything about you. The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit transforms your thoughts, which is the second circle from the middle. We read in Romans 12:2, "*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...*" In 2 Corinthians 10:5 we are instructed to "*...take every thought captive to obey Christ.*" At the end of 1 Corinthians 2 it talks about how we have the mind of Christ.

So Jesus transforms the way we think about our lives, about everything in the world around us and about what's important in our lives in the world around us. We begin to think like Jesus thinks. That's why being in God's Word is so important, because that's where we learn how Jesus thinks. He transforms our minds as we soak in His Word. Our minds are molded to become more and more like Jesus.

This then affects our **desires**, which is the next circle. Jesus doesn't just transform what we think; He transforms how we feel. I think many Christians totally miss this. For so many, faith is intellectual but not emotional. We know truths in our head, but we disconnect them from our hearts. The result for many is a practically emotionless faith which it should not be. I realize different people express emotions in different ways, but just think about how the Bible depicts the Christian life. It's a life of love for God, as we see in Psalm 63:1-5:

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food.

That's desire for God! Christians don't worship God like we're bored. We worship God like we're thrilled to know Him, like our souls are satisfied in God. What gets our emotions going is not money, not sports, not success, not accolades, not achievements—not all this stuff of the world. Those things pale in comparison to the glory of our God. He's so much better and our emotions are incited by Him. When we worship Him, it's not because it's our duty—it's our delight.

This is biblical Christianity. We love God more than life itself. If we claim to know God, but we do not feel for God, there is a problem with our faith. We're missing out on the transforming work of Christ in us. And it's not just desire for God, but compassion and care and concern for others. This is one of the reasons I wrote this book that came out last week, Something Needs to Change, because of

conviction in my own life along these lines. Seeing extreme poverty, trafficking and dire spiritual need in the world, I found myself on my face in the Himalayas weeping uncontrollably.

As I sobbed, I wondered why that emotion was so uncommon for me. Jesus weeps over those in need, and His life is my life. Why, out of the countless church gatherings I have been in in my life, can I count on one hand the number of times when we were just crying out together for the desperate needs in the world? Something is missing. Desire is a fundamental part of life in Christ—passion for God and compassion for others.

There is also contrition over sin. It's not just that we see sin in our lives and think, "Okay, I know that's wrong." No, we hate it. We don't want to sin. We have gratitude for grace. It's not just, "Oh, thank You for grace." It's, "God, thank You!" With tears in our eyes, we thank Him for forgiving us. Jesus transforms our desires.

This then leads to the next circle, which is **transformed actions**. As we think as Jesus thinks and desire as Jesus desires, we will begin to live as Jesus lives. He transforms the words we speak, the decisions we make, the actions we take, the priorities we set and the money we spend. We could go on and on. Everything we do is dictated by Christ in us.

Let me pause here and put this together. Part of my hope in giving you this chart is to help you see what I think is all over the Bible. The way we act is rooted in and based on how we feel and think, on what we believe. Let me give you an example. Think about the very first sin in the world. Adam and Eve ate a piece of fruit God had said not to eat. Just a simple action—they ate. But it didn't start there. If you look back at that passage, it all started when the tempter said, "Did God really say, 'Don't eat that'?" God said that because He doesn't want what's good for you." Subtly, Eve started to think that God's ways were not good and that her ways were better.

Listen to the words of Genesis 3:6: "*So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise...*" Can you see the thoughts and emotions all over that verse? When that happened, "*...she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.*" The first sin did not start with doing contrary to God's ways; it started with thinking and desiring contrary to God's ways.

This is so significant for our lives. I think this is why so many Christians miss the secret to the Christian life here, because we think the Christian life is all about doing, this fourth circle. "Go to church. Read your Bible. Pray. Do this; do that. That's Christianity." So many people do—or try to do—all these things, but if we're honest, we're still empty, frustrated, even discouraged or defeated in our Christian lives. But this is not the life we were created for—just doing, doing, doing in our own strength and our own efforts. No, we were created to experience the life of Christ in us, transforming everything about us from the inside out. His life in you can transform the way you think, so that you actually can believe God is good and that His ways are better than your ways. You don't think, "I have to spend time in God's

Word.” You think, “I’m so glad I have God’s Word so I can know God’s ways, because they are so much better than my ways.”

The Christian actually wants God’s Word. It’s more important than daily bread for you. You desire His Word because you desire Him. You desire communion with God and you desire to obey God. Why? Because you know, believe and desire His ways more than your own. Do you see how Jesus in us transforms us from the inside out? That changes everything.! This is so huge.

I was speaking at the University of Maryland a couple weeks ago, out in an open amphitheater. I was sharing the gospel and was reminded yet again of some statistics. I also read an article this week that said overwhelming numbers of supposedly Christian students from the church go off to college and fall away from their faith. The majority of them fall away. I’m just not content with that. Lord willing, I don’t want the majority of my kids to fall away. Or yours.

So why is that the case? I wonder if it’s because we’re missing the secret here. I don’t want to oversimplify this, but I wonder if a significant part of it is because in the church we have a tendency to tell our children and students, “Do this. Do this.” We focus on this fourth circle—actions—all the time. But we—as parents or as the church—are not giving them what they most need: a deep and thorough knowledge of what it means for Christ to be in them, nurturing them with His Word. We’re not making sure they understand that His Spirit is in them so they grow to think like Jesus thinks and feel what Jesus feels and want what Jesus wants. Without that kind of core foundation, the first time they encounter an atheistic professor in a college classroom, or the freedom and pleasures of this world on a college campus, their faith collapses in the middle and exposes what is ultimately a hollow, virtually Christ-less Christianity.

And not just in the future—what about now? High school students are battling with impurity because of so many temptations around them. So what do we give them? Just a bunch of talks, saying, “Do this. Don’t do that.” Sure, in one sense we talk actions, but what is most needed at the core is the life of Christ growing in them through His Word and His Spirit, transforming their minds and hearts to know and love Jesus, to think and desire like Jesus, so they want to follow the leading of the Spirit in their lives.

It’s not just students; it’s what we all need. Just think about adults and temptation, adults and battles with impurity. Men and women are into pornography. I read another article this week that said the vast majority of men are engulfed in pornography. Don’t you see that the answer is not, “Just stop doing that”? At the core, we need new hearts. We need totally transformed thoughts and desires that are so much deeper than what the world is offering on a daily basis.

We’re at an epidemic level when so many men in our culture are not leading their families in a way that honors God. How do you change that? Just tell them, “Start doing this”? That will only go so far. Far more importantly, let’s pray that men will cultivate the life of Christ and that they’ll believe His ways are better than the success this world offers. Let’s pray that men will listen to God’s Word, love it and

grow in their desire for God, worshiping God with all their hearts and weeping before God over sin in their lives and in those around them. This will change the way men live and lead their families.

This leads to the next circle: **relationships**. Jesus in us doesn't just affect the way we live. Jesus in us affects the way we love the people around us—friends, co-workers, family. It affects the way we love our spouses, kids, parents, church and a world in need. Do you see it? The more you become like Jesus, the better it will be for those around you.

On a practical level, husbands, your wife's greatest need is for you to look more like Jesus. Wives, your husband's greatest need from you is for you to look more like Jesus. Parents, your children's greatest need from you is not carting them around from place to place so they can get a good education, be good at sports, get a good scholarship and get a good job. No, that's nowhere close. It's infinitely more important to realize your children's greatest need is for you to look like Jesus. And children, that's your parents' greatest need from you too. Regardless of family status—single or married—friends, neighbors, co-workers, people in urgent need around us here and around the world, their greatest need from us is for us to look like Jesus. It's what the world needs most from us.

This leads to the last circle: **purpose**. The more we think, feel, live and love like Jesus, the more our lives conform to His purpose in the world. Jesus doesn't just want you and me to experience full and abundant eternal life. He wants others to experience life in Him, so we live to point others to Him. The cause of leading others to the love of Christ dictates everything we do. This is what it means to be a Christian. We live to point others to Jesus, to speak about Him to others, to invite people to come and hear about Him in a setting like this.

If you put it all together, we will do that when in our thoughts we actually believe that Jesus is the only way to eternal life with God; when in our hearts we desire others' good more than we desire our own reputation, more than we fear being awkward in a conversation. So we speak and live and love because we want to lead people to Jesus, because we know this is what matters forever.

I was speaking to a group of professional athletes this last week. They were about to go out on a field in front of tens of thousands of people. I encouraged them, "Yes, work hard at the job God has given you and gifted you for. But at some point, just look up at those tens of thousands of people and realize every single one of those people is either going to experience eternal life with God or eternal death away from God. Live like that's far more important than the stats." This changes the way you live when you go to work. It changes the way you live when you go home and look at the people around you.

This is where I want to bring everybody back together for the second prayer. I just want to urge everybody to listen closely to it. Look up here, if you're not already doing that, because I don't want you to miss this.

I pray that God will prepare you to come face-to-face with Jesus.

Based on God's Word, not my word, in 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, I pray that God will prepare you to come face-to-face with Jesus. I wish I could make eye contact with every single person here. I pray that God will prepare you to come face-to-face with Jesus. Let me show you this in God's Word. This is not me speaking. First Thessalonians 5 is talking about a day that is coming in the future. Listen to this again: *"Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

It's interesting and every single chapter in the book of 1 Thessalonians ends with a reference to the fact that Jesus is coming back. It's constantly being put before people's minds in this book. Look at this with me.

- 1 Thessalonians 1:10: *"Wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."* It's talking about Jesus coming back to deliver us from the judgment of God that is coming upon sin.
- 1 Thessalonians 2:19: *"For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming?"* He's coming back.
- 1 Thessalonians 3:13, in words that are almost exactly the same as the prayer in chapter five: *"...may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints."*
- 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 gives us the whole picture: *"For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord."* Are you noticing a theme here?
- 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3. At the very beginning it talks about this day in detail: *"For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape."* Jump down to verse nine and listen to what's at stake on that day: *"For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him."*

Let me explain what we just read. I want to plead for everybody to listen closely. One day everybody in this room, every one of us, will stand face-to-face with Jesus. This is what God's Word is saying. Either you will die and come face-to-face with Jesus, or Jesus will come back while we're still alive, then we'll be face-to-face with Him. Either could be any day for any one of us. That's the point here. God is saying that moment will be sudden, like a thief in the night.

If you know a thief is coming to your house tonight, what do you do? I'm guessing all kinds of things are coming into your mind. The point is you prepare accordingly. You don't say, "There is peace and security," then go to sleep. What is this world telling you and me, day after day? "You have a good job, good health, a place to live, a 401k, you go to church—you're fine. You're secure."

I'm urging you: don't say that. In an instant, all of those things will be gone and it could be this afternoon for any one of us on the way home, if not before. Your job, your health, your house, your 401k, your attendance at church—these do not guarantee that you will wake up tomorrow. Today you or I could meet Jesus. In that instant, our hearts will be fully exposed before God, laid bare. And in that instant, it will be clear whether or not Jesus was indeed our life. Some of the most haunting words in the entire Bible are found in Matthew 7:21-23, where Jesus Himself says:

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."

Did you hear that? Many people will be shocked. Jesus says many, not a few. He says many people will be shocked to stand before Him one day and hear Him say, "I never knew you. Away from Me." In an instant, our hearts will be exposed. In that instant, our lives will stand alone.

Jesus talked about His return in Matthew 24:40-41, saying, *"Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left."* Whether it's the day you breathe your last breath or the day when Jesus comes back, it won't matter what location you're in, who you were or were not married to, what your parents believed, how you grew up, where you spent your life, who you were around. On that day, your life will stand alone. You will come face-to-face with Jesus, the Judge of the world and the Judge of your life. And His judgment will be final. On that day, your decision will have been made and there will be no second chances. Every one of us is going to stand before Jesus as Judge any day and those who do not know Him will experience eternal destruction away from Him.

You say, "Destruction? Isn't that a strong term?" The only reason I use that term is because, out of all the terms God chose to use, that's the one He employed. We just read it. In the very next chapter of the Bible, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, these are God's words:

When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.

This is exactly what we talked about earlier. If we die in our sin, separated from God, having rejected Jesus—the only One Who can reconcile us to God—we will spend eternity separated from God. People say, "Well, how is that loving of God?" This is loving of God because He is telling us, He is warning us and saying, "I've made a way for you to be safe on that day, based on nothing you do, but based on trust in My love for you."

So I am urging you today to trust in His love for you. Today, now, God is graciously warning you, bringing every one of us to hear His Word, to hear His love and that He's made a way for you to know and enjoy Him forever. I'm talking about all kinds of people for whom the truth is that you've not yet trusted in Jesus as your life.

Some are playing games with a façade of Christianity, but Jesus is not actually your life. Others may be atheists or agnostics, or maybe some other religion like Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist. I'm urging you today to make sure you are banking your eternity on that which is true and not to play games here. I'm urging you to hear God saying in His Word, "I've made a way for you to have life forever with Me, if you trust in Me before it is too late."

Last week from a self-proclaimed agnostic in his mid-20s, on the rise in the professional world, about to get married, came to a church we planted not long ago. The only reason he came was to appease his family. He said he wasn't even expecting to listen to the sermon—just kind of be there and endure it. He ended up realizing Who Jesus is and what Jesus has done for him, so that day he turned and trusted in Jesus as his life. He came that day not ready to come face-to-face with Jesus. He left that day looking forward to coming face-to-face with Jesus.

And looking forward is the right way to describe it. Don't miss this. On that day, all who know Him will enjoy eternal satisfaction with Him. All who know Him long for His coming, because sin and sorrow and suffering will be no more. Injustice will be no more. He will wipe away every tear from our eyes. The old will be gone and the new will have come. Eternal satisfaction, by God's grace, can be yours through faith in Jesus.

I've been reading a book by a guy named John Owen from the 17th century. He put this so well, imagining the perspective of Jesus speaking to you:

Why will you die? Why will you perish? Why will you not have compassion on your own soul? Can your heart endure or can your hands be strong in the day of wrath that is approaching? Look to Me and be saved. Come to Me and I will ease you of all sins, sorrows, fears, burdens and give rest to your soul. Come, I entreat you. Lay aside all procrastinations, all delays. Put Me off no more. Eternity lies at the door. Do not so hate Me as that you will rather perish than accept a deliverance by Me.

Let me ask you to bow your heads with me. Put aside any and all distractions. I've prayed for this moment now. I want to invite you, right where you're sitting, to come before God and respond to His Word. The first thing I want to do is ask each of you one question: "Is Christ in you? Is Jesus your life?" I'm not asking you if you've gone to church before, called yourself a Christian before, or even believed in Jesus. The Bible says even demons believe in Jesus (James 2:19). The question is: is Jesus your life?

If the answer to that question is not a resounding yes, then I want to give you an opportunity to say yes in your heart right now. Right where you're sitting, say in your heart to God, "Dear God, I know I've sinned against You. I know I've chosen my ways over Your ways and that I am separated from You.

But I believe Jesus died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead in victory over sin. So I'm asking You today to forgive me of my sins, fill me with Your life and restore me to relationship with You." Pray, "O God, today and forever, I want Jesus to be my life."

If you just prayed that to God, I want to invite you to do something. With every head bowed and eyes closed, I want to invite you to raise your hand, just between you and God, as a picture of you saying, "Jesus is now my life." If you just prayed that to God, let me invite you to lift your hand before God.

Jesus, You see these hands and You know their hearts. I praise You for those who are experiencing new life right now in You. I pray that You would give them courage to celebrate new life in You through baptism today.

In just a moment, I'm going to pray, then after I say amen, we are going to share with you how you can be baptized today, to celebrate life in Jesus today, just like we see in the Bible. Then we're also going to lead us to respond to what we've just heard from God's Word. For those who are followers of Jesus and have been baptized, I want to ask where do you need to become more like Jesus in your life? In what ways does Jesus need to transform your thoughts, desires, actions, relationships and understanding of your purpose in this world? I want us to have some time to respond to God personally, to pray to the God Who is indeed faithful, Who will indeed do this work in you—if you let Him through His life in you.

O God, we pray that You would guide our time of response right now, that many people today might celebrate new life in You. I pray that we would respond to the specific ways You are calling us to be more like Jesus. I pray that in the next few minutes You would give humility and courage to respond to Your Word. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Here's what I want us to do in the next few minutes. It's going to play out similarly to what we did last week. We have a couple songs worth of time before we take the Lord's Supper together. I want to invite you, during these songs, to respond in one of two ways.

First, let me make sure you understand that baptism is not some way we earn new life in Jesus. Baptism is the celebration of the life we have in Jesus. If you've trusted in Jesus as your life today and raised your hand a moment ago, the Bible calls you to confess that through baptism, which is a public picture of how you are trusting Jesus as your life.

Some of you maybe began trusting Jesus as your life before today, but you've never been baptized as a follower of Jesus. Maybe you were even baptized as a baby, but you've never of your own volition taken that step to say publicly, "Jesus is my life." So during this time, I want to invite you—if that's you—to leave your seat. You can go alone or take somebody with you. But make your way out to the lobby and walk toward that pool in the middle of the lobby.

Somebody will meet you there. They won't just throw you in the pool, they will go with you across the hall where you can talk and ask any questions you have. Then, if you're ready, you can be

baptized today. We have everything you need—shirts, shorts, towels, everything. Just like many people in the first gathering were celebrating in the lobby afterwards, I want to invite many people to do that today.

Then second, as people are going to the lobby to prepare for baptism, I want to invite followers of Jesus who have been baptized, to pray during this time in response to what we just heard from God's Word. You can pray there in your seat, or—much like last week—I'm going to ask lay pastors, small group leader, other leaders in our church, both men and women, to come and stand beside these communion tables and be available to pray with those who come. This is what we do as a church—we pray with one another, for one another.

So as you think about your life—your thoughts, desires, actions and relationships—and about how God is calling you to become more and more like Jesus, I want to invite you to spend time with God where you're standing, then if you like, to have the freedom to go to somebody and say, "Hey, would you pray for me?" Share whatever you're comfortable sharing, then let somebody pray for you. So, you can pray where you're standing, or with somebody else, or just sing these songs of prayer that we're singing together.

Then, sometime during the next two songs—preferably after you've had some time to reflect and pray—I want to invite followers of Christ to come and get these elements from these tables. We'll participate in the Lord's Supper after we've sung these two songs. Let me pray one more time.

O God, by Your Holy Spirit, please lead this time of response. Don't let us just go through religious motions where we come and listen to a sermon and then just move on. Help us respond to Your Spirit speaking right now. We pray that You will give courage, grace, strength and humility for people to take the first step, to make their way out to that lobby and begin the process of being baptized, celebrating new life in You.

Then for others, we pray for humility just to say, "I need prayer in this area. I'm struggling in this way or that way. I want to pray for victory in this way or that way."

God, please help us respond to You however You're speaking to us right now. Be honored, we pray, as we meet with You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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