Matthew 3 • John the Baptist

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Life Bible Ministry

Good morning, everyone. Good to see you all here today. We're going to read the first 6 verses here and then we'll pray. It says,

"In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,
2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 3 For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said,

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight.'"

4 Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, 6 and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins."" (ESV)

That's very significant. Let's pray as we get started.

Father God as we get into this chapter this morning, we just really pray for Your Holy Spirit to lead us, to be the teacher, and to teach us the things that we need to hear. Lord, we just want to have an open heart, we just want to hear from You, and yet we know that requires a work of Your Holy Spirit in our lives to give us spiritual ears to hear, a spiritual ability to see, and then receive with our heart.

So Lord, we just want to surrender to You, submit to You this morning, that we might receive all that You have for us here today. Guide us and direct us we pray, in Jesus name, amen. Amen.

You'll remember the last thing we were told in the previous chapter is that Jesus was raised in the region of Galilee, and specifically in the city of Nazareth. And therefore, He was known as a Nazarene, even though He really wasn't. He was born in Bethlehem of Judea, but known as a Nazarene nonetheless.

Matthew begins this chapter by saying, *"In those days..."* And this really is now covering the next, really, about a 30 year period where Jesus was raised. We

assume worked in the region of the Galilee during that time until His earthly ministry began.

But before Matthew is going to tell us about Jesus and His ministry, he begins by introducing a particular and main character for this chapter. And that is John the Baptist. And he says simply, *"John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,..."*

You'll remember that John was about 6 months older than Jesus. They were related by blood. And the fact that he came preaching is interesting because Matthew uses a word that means to be a herald or to proclaim. And so that's what John the Baptist came to do. He came to proclaim a message, to make a pronouncement, if you will.

And in fact, this preaching ministry of John was according to Matthew, a fulfillment of what Isaiah had predicted some 700 years earlier when he said, *"this is he who"* was foretold, the one who is called the voice. Saying, *"'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'"* And that was the ministry of John, prepare the hearts of the people of Israel to receive their Messiah.

You'll notice that John's sermon, his message was very simple. He said simply, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* That's it. It doesn't even take any notes. It's a very simple message, repent, turn from your sin because the kingdom is at hand.

And so that was John's message to the people of Israel. It was a call to repentance. And to repent, one has to be aware that they are a sinner. They have to recognize that sin, confess it, and then make a determination to turn from it. Because that's what the word repentance means. To have a change of mind, and a change of direction related to that.

And it turns out that repentance was incredibly important. In fact, we're told that it was a key to people actually receiving from the Lord what He intended to say. In Luke's Gospel, there's this interesting statement about those who came and were baptized by John. Let me put it up on the screen for you so you can see it. It's from Luke 7. It says,

Luke 7:29-30 (NIV84)

All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.

All the people, even the tax collectors, (for that matter) *when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right,* (and look at this) *because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law* (and the like, it says that they) *rejected God's purpose for themselves,* (and once again, we're told why) *because they had not been baptized by John.*

Listen, there was nothing magical about John's baptism. It was a baptism of repentance. That's what made it significant. That's what made it powerful. Because, guys, when we confess our sin, and when we're willing to turn from it in repentance, it opens the heart to God.

Have you ever prayed for a friend or family member who was stubborn in their refusal to hear God's Word and that sort of thing, and you didn't know how to pray?

Well, one of the best things you can pray is that they would receive the revelation of their own personal sin, and that they would confess it, and recognize that sin as a barrier to them and God. That's one of the most powerful things that can happen in a person's life, that helps to prepare them to receive the Word of God. To simply know and be able to say, yeah, I'm a sinner.

When somebody comes down front and they ask for prayer, and I'm not sure if they're saved or not yet, I'll start asking them first thing, well, do you know that you're a sinner and that your sin has separated you from God? Oh yeah.

If they respond in the positive and say, oh, I know, I know that I'm a sinner. I know that we're most of the way there. And it's, now, it's just a matter of introducing them to the Savior and say, well, listen, you know that Jesus died paying the penalty of your sin, right? He paid it completely and all you need to do is receive by faith what He did for you on the cross. And boy, it's just, it's simple from there.

Now you talk to somebody who says something like, well, I'm no worse than anybody else. I mean, sin or, I guess I wouldn't use that word to describe myself. We got a long way to go. A long way to go because they have not had a revelation of their sin, or they have not received that revelation, one of the two.

And there's a distance in that sort of a situation. We see here that John's ministry was very fruitful in preparing people's hearts by simply getting them to recognize their sin and to confess it.

Now, some of you are wondering, there are other things in the Bible that are told to us about the person of John the Baptist. And I've had people ask me, so what's the deal between John and Elijah? I seem to remember there being something. Be patient. We'll get into it. When we get later into the Book of Matthew, Jesus is going to make some interesting statements about John the Baptist related to the prophet Elijah. And we're going to we're going to work all that out and explain what that's all about.

But for right now, beginning in verse 7, we notice here that not everyone who came to hear John came with an open heart. It says, *"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. 10 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

11 "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.""

Stop there for a moment if you would. A lot of really important things that John is saying here to the Pharisees and religious leaders, and we're going to separate them here into 3 categories. We'll put it up on the screen in a bullet point sort of a deal. These are the pronouncements that John is giving to the Sadducees and Pharisees.

Pronouncements of John to the Sadducees and Pharisees

- Confronting their evil hearts
- Contrasting his own ministry to Messiah's
- Announcing judgement with several figurative images

You'll notice that he's going to confront the hearts of the religious leaders. Next, he is going to contrast his own ministry to that of Messiah. And then thirdly,

he's going to speak of the judgment that is to come using some figurative images and some, frankly, some flat out, just clear statements.

But I want you to notice first in verse 7, as he confronts the hearts of the religious leaders. He starts by saying, *"You brood of vipers!"* That gets to the point, doesn't it? And essentially that means you offspring of snakes.

We might say, he's a snake in the grass, which again, as a figurative statement, but it's all to underscore that God had a pretty, took a pretty dim view of the religious leaders of Israel and primarily because they had misrepresented Him to the people. They'd misrepresented His Word.

For one thing, the Pharisees believed that a person's righteous standing came by keeping rules and regulations. And so in doing or in believing that, they misrepresented the law. But they also believed themselves to be capable of keeping the law, which we know that nobody can perfectly do, but they believed that they could perfectly do it.

And they referred to themselves as the righteous of God. They often would add traditions to the Word of God, to the point where Jesus confronted them that they cared more about their traditions than they did the Word of God. In fact, He said, you hold on to your traditions and you will throw away in essence, the Word of God. And that's often what they did.

And I don't have any problem with traditions. I mean, as long as traditions don't usurp the place of the Word of God, there's nothing wrong with tradition. We, our family has traditions about Christmas, and the way we celebrate it, and stuff like that. It's just family…, and yours might be different from ours. No big deal. We don't go around telling people, well, if you don't hold to our traditions, you're not really celebrating the birth of the Lord. But that is essentially what the Pharisees did. They would develop traditions and then they would tell people that they must keep those traditions.

You'll remember that they came to Jesus at one point because they saw his disciples eating without following the tradition of how they were to wash their hands. They went through all these ceremonial washings that were incredibly complex. And if people didn't do it the way, just the way they thought it ought to be done, they would criticize them and tell them they were unclean. And all those kinds of things.

Jesus got to the point where He called them blind guides. Which is a way of saying, you're the blind leading the blind. He said that they were often more

concerned with external matters than they were matters of the heart. And that's an important distinction. Even we Christians can do that. We catch ourselves a lot caring more about externals than internals.

Even though the Bible repeatedly tells us God looks at the heart, and we keep looking at the outside. And so that's a common sort of a thing. But the Pharisees, and religious leaders, and so forth, very hypocritical. Jesus called them often on their hypocrisy.

But you'll notice as it goes on in verse 9, you'll notice that John addressed one of their most cherished beliefs. He said in verse 9, don't *"presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,…'"* Because you see, that's what they did.

The Jews believed that because they were in the biological lineage of Abraham, that they had a free pass to heaven. In fact, they believed that Gentiles could not be saved because they were not in the lineage of Abraham. And so they boasted in their human lineage.

And so John addresses that. He says, don't go around saying, we're good to go because we're Abraham's seed. He says that didn't make any difference at all. God can raise up children of Abraham from the rocks on the road. And this is something that even Christians have erred in.

I remember many years ago asking a particular woman how she knew she was a Christian. And she told me that it was because she'd been raised in a Christian home. And this is really the same response that the Jews gave. We're going to heaven because we're Abraham's descendants.

Well, the fact of the matter is, the gift of salvation is not granted through natural birth. Natural birth has nothing to do with it. If your parents were believers, and your grandparents were believers, wonderful! But you are not going to be accepted based on their faith. You have to have faith yourself. It's been said, God doesn't have any grandchildren, just children. And I think that's an accurate statement.

And the reason your parents and your grandparents were believers is because they personally put their faith in Jesus Christ for their forgiveness of sins, and you have to do the same. So he warns them about that error.

And you'll notice next, John begins to speak of his ministry, contrasting it with that of the ministry of Messiah. Look at verse 11 once again, in your Bible. John

says, *"I baptize you with water for repentance,* (and he goes on to say) *but he* (speaking of the Messiah to come, He's going to) *baptize you with the Holy Spirit and* (with) *fire."*

And if you read between the lines, you can see that what John is saying in essence is, all I'm doing is dunking you in water. And that's an important thing from the standpoint of the confession of your sins and the turning away from them. That's all good and fine, but that's not going to save you.

There's one who's coming after me, who will bring a baptism that is far superior to anything that I bring. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. He will baptize you with fire.

We need to look at these two things. First of all, when John says that the Messiah is going to come and baptize with the Holy Spirit, what exactly does he mean?

Well, he's speaking prophetically of something that's going to happen in the next few years, after Jesus death, burial, and resurrection, when the disciples are all together, as recorded in the Book of Acts and the Holy Spirit falls on them. It's in Acts chapter 2. Let me put it on the screen. It says,

Acts 2:2-4 (ESV)

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues (that means languages) *as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

This is the recording of what John prophesied. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. But you'll notice the passage we just read from Acts chapter 2 doesn't tell you what it's for. It doesn't tell you really anything other than the Holy Spirit fell on them, and they began to speak supernaturally, languages that

they'd never learned before because they were being given the ability to speak in those languages by the Holy Spirit.

But still that doesn't tell you what the baptism of the Holy Spirit's for because it's, believe me, goes way beyond speaking in tongues. And to understand what the baptism of the Spirit is for, you have to pay attention when you're reading through Acts chapter 1, when Jesus is speaking. Let me put it on the screen.

Acts 1:4-5, 8 (ESV)

...while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." "...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

...while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; (notice this, contrasting John's ministry again) *for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."* (and then He explains what it's for) *"...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and* (ultimately) *to the end of the earth."*

We learn there from Acts chapter 1 what the purpose of this Spirit baptism is. It's for power. And who of us, as believers, don't need power to witness? We are up against all kinds of physical and spiritual barriers and enemies, and we need spiritual power to deal with those issues. And that's what the baptism of the Spirit is all about. This is when the Holy Spirit fell upon the church to empower them.

By the way, it's not the first time the Holy Spirit came to the church. The first time the Spirit is given is recorded in the end of John, when the Spirit came to indwell, that they might be born again. But now the Spirit comes to empower. It's a different work of the Holy Spirit. That's what the baptism is about as it relates to believers.

So what is this baptism of fire that John speaks of because he said, you'll be baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Well, a lot of people confuse that statement with the baptism of the Holy Spirit because Luke describes the tongues of fire that were above their heads when they were baptized with the Holy Spirit.

But I believe that's in error because to baptize with fire, fire is a picture of burning, duh. But for the believer, it is a picture of the work of sanctification that takes place in a believer's life. And so one of the references to being baptized with fire is to speak of that process that goes on in our lives, whereby God uses the things that we're going through in life, to form us into the image of Jesus Christ. And some of you guys right now are going through a baptism by fire.

And what I mean by that is you're going through very difficult circumstances right now. And those circumstances could be happening in just about any way, shape, or form in your life. It could be anything.

I think one of the, and I've heard it said that one of the most powerful means of sanctification in our lives is marriage. And I believe it. You really want to, you really want to see where your rough edges are, just get married. I'd be happy to do the wedding. And then I'll pray for you.

Cause I mean, you live with somebody day in and day out and you're going to step on their toes, and they're going to step on your toes, and your reactions to that are going to be very telling as to what's really going on in your heart.

So marriage is probably one of God's most useful tools as it relates to sanctification. Of course, we live in a culture today that says when we're going through marriage problems, we should go get a divorce. And basically what we're doing is, in essence we're not running from, you're not running from your spouse. You're running from the sanctification process of the Lord. Where He wants to change you and you just want to change your circumstances. That's all you want to do. I understand. I've been married 46 years, so I get it.

But it's, and it's not just marriage. There's lots of things that God uses in our life to baptize us by fire. And they're almost always painful, very difficult to go through. But it is through those situations that God does that work of molding you and me into the image of His Son.

But the baptism with fire also comes to unbelievers. And it's not for sanctification, it's for judgment. And that is essentially what brings us to the third pronouncement that John the Baptist makes to the religious leaders when he begins to speak to them about, well, what he calls in verse 7, *"the wrath to come."* He says, *"Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"*

Guys, there is wrath coming upon the face of the earth and I don't personally believe that the church is going to be here to see the outpouring of that wrath.

Some of you disagree with me. That's fine. But the reason that I don't believe it is because the Bible says, we are not appointed unto wrath. We are the bride of Christ and God's not going to pour out His wrath. That's not what He does. God doesn't use His wrath to sanctify Christians.

The Bible says He disciplines those whom He loves. (Hebrews 12:6) That's not wrath. Discipline and wrath are two very different things. God disciplines believers. He pours out wrath on unbelievers for rejecting His Word and the means of salvation through His Son.

But you'll notice that John uses these various figurative pictures to describe the wrath to come. Look in verse 10 with me in your Bible. Notice there he begins to speak of a grove of trees, whether it's an olive grove, or a fig grove, or something. And he begins by saying, *"Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees."* And that's a way of saying, there is an impending judgment that is just standing by. It's ready to happen. It's imminent, and it could happen at any time.

He says, *"Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."* Using that picture of a landowner coming upon a grove of fruit trees that are just no longer producing fruit. They're just dead trees. They're just taking up space, and land, and nutrients from the soil. And he says to his servants, just cut them down, burn them, they're no good. And that's the picture that John gives of the wrath to come.

Notice in verse 12, he changes the figurative images to that of bringing in the wheat harvest. And he says in verse 12, *"His winnowing fork is in his hand,…"* And the winnowing fork was a tool used back in those days to thresh the wheat. And the way they would thresh it was they would take a fork and they would throw the wheat up in the air, and the breeze would carry the chaff, which is the outer shell away, and the heavier wheat kernel would fall to the ground. It was the way of separating the wheat from the chaff.

And so he says, *"His winnowing fork is in his hand,* (again, that picture of imminent wrath) *and* (he says, *and*) *he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."*

And so John likens unbelievers here to the chaff, the worthless outer shell. It's not good for anything except just to be burned. And that is the baptism by fire that comes to unbelievers. And once again, it is not a baptism of sanctification. It is a baptism of terrible judgement.

Finally, we come to the last verses of the chapter, which record the baptism of Jesus. *"[13] Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. [14] John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" [15] But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. [16] And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; [17] and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.""*

And yes, you are seeing the full triune Godhead in this single passage where the Son of God emerges from the water, the Spirit of God descends upon Him in the form of a dove, and the voice of God the Father speaks and says, *"This is my beloved Son."*

Well, this is potentially a confusing story. And the reason it's potentially confusing is because we've already established that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, where people confess their sin. So what's Jesus doing here? Does He have sin for which He needs to confess? Well, let me show you what Peter said about Jesus. On the screen.

1 Peter 2:22 (ESV)

He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

You'll remember that even at one point, Jesus challenged those who were opposing Him, saying this. Recorded in John chapter 8. He says,

John 8:46 (NIV)

Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?

Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?

And by the way, nobody spoke up so this increases the confusion a little bit here. Jesus never sinned so what in the world is He doing walking into the Jordan river to be baptized by John in a baptism of repentance? Why is He doing this? Well, that's what John wants to know. And yet Jesus only responds by saying, *"it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."*

But you'll notice that's not an explanation. It's a reason to do it, but not an explanation. He's not explaining why He's coming into the waters of baptism by John.

Now, had Jesus taken the time to give John an explanation, He probably would have said something like, well, let me tell you about the reason why God sent His Son to be a man. He did not partake of our sin, but He did come to fully identify with those who sin. And that's why Jesus got into the water and was baptized by John.

You see, the people who watched that baptism take place that day, they didn't know who Jesus was. He was just starting things off. As far as they knew, He was just another guy who lived a semi creepy life, and now was sorry about it, and had confessed it, and now He was going into the waters of baptism to repent.

They didn't know that He was the sinless Son of God, right? What's He doing? He's identifying with sinful man. And that identification, that association with you and me, would ultimately move Him to go to the cross and take upon Himself the punishment of sin that He never committed, but that we did. And that's what He went to do.

A punishment that we deserved. He didn't deserve that punishment. We deserved it. They should have nailed every one of us on that cross, but we got a free pass because He went up in our place. He came to identify with mankind in our sin. And you see that's exactly what we do in the waters of Christian baptism.

A lot of people think, they'll they talk about John's baptism and Christian baptism like it's the same thing. It is not the same thing. Those are two different things. Totally different animals. John came preaching repentance to get Israel ready to receive their Messiah. Christian baptism is different.

Now, Jesus identified with you in John's baptism. In Christian baptism, you identify with Him. In His death, burial, and resurrection. And that's the picture that you portray in the waters of Christian baptism by going back down into the water, death. Into the water, burial. Up from the water, resurrection.

You identify with Him the way He identified with you. And what's cool about that picture, and it's more than just a cool picture. Granted, it's a very cool picture, but it's way more than that.

It's a statement that is being made about the fact that you guys traded places, and He took the place of punishment, and you took the place of acceptance, and blessing, and righteousness before God because of what He did. It's a mind blower, guys. It really is. It's a mind blower.

Let me show you how the apostle Paul basically declared it. 2 Corinthians, he said,

2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

For our sake he made him to be sin (that's Jesus) *who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

In other words, a trade took place and we traded with Him the penalty of our sin for His righteous standing before God. He imputed that to us by faith. And I emphasize faith because we all need to be reminded it's by faith. Even though you've heard it many times, even though maybe you've even memorized Ephesians 2:8 and 9: For by grace we have been saved through faith. And this is not yourself ; it is the gift of God, lest anyone should boast.

Great verses, but we forget them. There's this subtle something that begins to creep into our lives at some point along the way, and it begins to say, you need to deserve what He gave you. And the enemy comes along and says, and by the way, you don't deserve it. And then you begin to doubt your salvation.

And I know that happens because I get notes over and over and over again from people who have taken that lie and they've allowed a performance relationship with God to begin to take center stage in their walk with Him, to the point where now, they feel completely undeserving. And that is just…

And then something rotten happens in their life. And then that's a perfect storm because they've begun to allow that subtle belief that I need to deserve God's grace, God's love. And they start feeling unworthy and then something rotten happens in their life. And they write me a note and they say, what did I do to deserve this?

And I know where they're at just by that simple question. They are totally in that realm of performance Christianity. That's where they're living. And they're miserable because of it. Some of you might be miserable today. You might be

even wondering, why have I been so miserable as a believer? Because sometimes we don't even see it coming.

It's the, again, it's so subtle. It's so imperceptible at first, and we start throwing out words like deserve, and worthy, and I just don't feel worthy. Oh, I'm just so tired of hearing that from people. You never will be worthy so get that out of your head. You will never, ever be worthy of God's love ever. You will never be able to measure up, but He doesn't love you because people measure up. He loves you because He chooses to love you, and that has nothing whatsoever to do with your performance.

So get performance out of your head and start thinking along the lines of grace, and that's when the joy is going to return to your heart. Because grace is favor from God that is unmerited, unearned. It has nothing to do with you being worthy, a good Christian. Good grief, there's no such thing. There is only a good God and He's it. And you will never attain to that. And you will continue to deal and struggle with the issues of sin until the day you leave your body or Jesus comes again. But He's going to love you every step of the way and you need to know that you know that you know, that you know that you are forgiven. And you will continue to be forgiven because it's a perpetual spring of forgiveness that is ours through Jesus Christ by faith.

You read through the New Testament. I even challenge you to do this. As you read through the letters of the apostle Paul through the New Testament, write down in your Bible, make a mark in your Bible, every time he mentions something about faith. And you will find that it absolutely permeates his letters. He talks not only about faith, but he talks about the people's faith, and he talks about how he wants to see them strengthened in their faith.

You know why? We're saved by faith, by grace through faith. Trusting, believing, having confidence in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. That's how you're saved. Not by being a good person, not by going to church, reading your Bible, praying, any of those things. Although those are fine things, they just won't save you.

Jesus saves you by putting your faith in His finished work. And I love to say, finished work. I had somebody write me recently and say, what do you mean by finished work? You ought not to say that, pastor Paul. I say that because that's what Jesus said on the cross. It is finished. And that means paid in full. And that means the job is done. The work of salvation is over. And He did it. And He finished it. And now what's left to you to do is to receive.

And you can receive because God has given you free will. It's one of the most precious gifts God has given you. Maybe alongside the brain that you have to figure out that you're a sinner and you need to be saved. But you've been given free will, free choice.

And so basically God lays it all out in front of you and He wants you to choose life. He wants you to choose forgiveness. It's a choice. People say to me sometimes, pastor Paul, how can I know that I'm saved? You choose to believe it based on His promise. He promised it. You believe it. That's how you know.

You know because you know the one who made the promise. And you know He's good with His promises, amen? Amen. Let's stand together. We'll close in prayer.

If all of this talk about being confident in your faith has resonated in your heart and maybe even rattled a little something, don't walk out the door before you just in the quiet of your own heart, just say, Jesus I believe You. I believe You died for me on the cross. I believe You gave your life that I might have life And You rose again to communicate to me that death no longer has dominion over my life. Just in your own heart, in your own heart, just Jesus, I believe. I receive what You did for me on the cross.

Father God, thank You so much for what… These reminders that are here in the Word, Lord. No new revelations here today. Just wonderful reminders of Your love, Your goodness, Your mercy.

Father, I just thank You so much that salvation and heaven is not for those who are good people. It's for those who recognize they're not good people. Who confess that, and who believe that Jesus finished the work of paying for my sins on the cross.

Lord, we believe we trust You because the one who made the promise is faithful and we commit our lives to You.

And now Father, God strengthened us that we could go from this place and live for You. And live for You in such a way that people are going to be drawn to the Savior as they view our lives.

But Lord, we just want to tell You, we don't have the power to live that way. We're going to trust You for that as well. Give us the ability to live our lives in such a way that the people of this world recognize there's something different and may they see and even smell the aroma of life, and be drawn to the Savior.

We thank You and praise You for Your incredible goodness and pray all of these things in the powerful name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. And all God's people said, amen.