

Introduction

If you have your Bible with you, and I hope that you do, I want to invite you at this time to go ahead and open with me to the Book of Revelation. We are going to be in Revelation chapter 2 today. We are going to be starting in verse 8... Revelation 2, starting in verse 8. As you're headed over there, a couple of things just to make you aware of real quick. First of all, if you're our guest, I'm so glad that you're here today; I hope that you sense God's presence in this place. I hope that you're encouraged. Our goal is to make Houston more like heaven by helping you become more like Jesus, and we want to do that by helping you study the Scriptures, walk with Him, and learn to be in obedience to Jesus. Our goal and our hope is that you encounter Him here in this place today. If you're new, I want to encourage you to either take this card that's in front of you... in the seat pocket in front of you... or to take that QR code that's on the seat back in front of you and scan that. Either one. You'll be taken to a Connection Card, if you do that online. Fill that out and let us know that you're here, so that we can help you take your next step and know what it is that God has for you to help you grow closer in your knowledge and your relationship with Him.

Also, I want to let you know that we have a lot of great opportunities for folks to join groups. We have a Group Connect team out in the Commons today right after our service is done. One thing I'm excited about is that we had a great men's group back in the fall; we met on Sunday nights at 7 p.m. It is starting back up again tonight... so tonight at 7 p.m. in the Student Building, we will be having a study talking about what it means to be a man who can live your faith in the public square, so I hope that you will be part of that with us tonight at 7 o'clock over in the Student Building.

I'm going to give a brief introduction to the Bible, I'll pray, and then we'll jump in together today. The Bible is divided into two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament gives us a record of God's chosen people Israel and tells us about their need... they're waiting for a Rescuer, for a Redeemer. They used the word "Messiah." We wait, trying to find out who it is that this Messiah is. Then we find out in the New Testament. In the New Testament we discover His name is Jesus. We find out that He is not just a teacher, not just a prophet but that He is indeed God's Son, born of a virgin, lives a sinless human life... that He dies a sacrificial death on a cross to pay the penalty for your sin and for mine, but not just enough that we're forgiven from sin, but three days later He comes back from the dead. He does that to show us that we don't need to fear death... that death has been conquered. The earliest believers in Jesus were so amazed at the fact that He came back from the dead... they went and they told everyone, "We found the Chosen One, the Messiah. If you follow Him, if you place your faith in Him... you'll have life, you'll have a new way to live." And the things that He taught, they referred to that as the Kingdom of God. So they said, "We're going to live out this Kingdom way, and this Good News... this Gospel... that this Jesus brings us life." In a very real way, the people in this room two thousand years later are the spiritual inheritors of what God did in Jesus two thousand years ago. One of the earliest followers of Jesus was a man named John, and he wrote down a vision that God gave him... that's the Book of Revelation. It's the Revelation of John. So today, in chapter 2 starting in verse 8, we're going to be looking at a vision that Jesus gave to John to speak to one of the churches in Asia, the church of Smyrna. So let me pray over us and then we'll read what this portion of the vision was to the church in Smyrna.

"Father, we thank You... we thank You for Your goodness, and God, we pray today... speak to us; God, let us hear Your truth. Move among us, Lord. God, I pray that as I speak, somehow You would do the miracle that You do, and that Your Spirit would move among this room. God, I pray in the name of Jesus, that You take Satan out of this place... that the enemy would have no power here and that, Lord, You would be in full control of everything that happens as Your Word is spoken. Lord, I ask that people would

be drawn to You as I lift Jesus up and that people today who have yet to place their faith in You would do so today. That's our prayer. We ask this, God, in the name of Jesus. Amen."

Revelation 2, starting in verse 8: *"Write to the angel of the church in Smyrna, ' thus says the First and the Last, the One who was dead and came to life. 'I know your affliction and poverty, but you are rich. I know the slander of those who say they are Jews, and they are not but are a synagogue of Satan. Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, the Devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will experience affliction for ten days. Be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. Let anyone who has ears to hear, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will never be harmed by the second death.'"* This is the Word of the Lord.

So there's a phrase that's making a comeback right now. Its: "If you know, you know." Maybe you've seen this on people's posts on social media. They will hashtag it: "#IYKYK... If you know, you know." They will post their favorite food or whatever. It might be from some obscure place, and it's "If you know, you know." You know this is a good thing. Or we might even have used it back in the day whenever Marvel movies were new and nobody knew that you had to stay all the way through the credits to get these bonus scenes... these top-secret scenes... and people would say things like, "Hey... well if you know, you know." You know... because this is a big deal for us to know. We like to be "in the know." We're the sort of people who don't want to be surprised. We like to have knowledge. That's why, I think, it's really comforting for us to have a God who knows. But I think it's important for us to understand that God's knowledge is sometimes different than the way that we think about knowledge because, for us, most of the time whenever we say "knowledge" we're talking about simply head knowledge. But here in the letter to the church in Smyrna, Jesus says a couple of times, "I know..." But what does He mean when He says, "I know"? That's what I want us to jump into today.

Before we do that, I want us to just get a brief overview of the city of Smyrna from the ancient world. Smyrna was sort of the little brother city to Ephesus. Ephesus was the church we talked about last week. It was the big city. It would be the most known city in the region. It would be the big brother, and Smyrna would be the little brother, and you know how little brothers are with their big brothers... they don't like that, and so they want to have something unique about themselves. So Smyrna did that. Smyrna's name came actually from the same derivative from the word "myrrh." Myrrh was a very common product here in the area, so it was known for its myrrh production... a very wealthy city. Whenever Alexander the Great conquered... took over... Smyrna, he made Smyrna the only master-planned city in the entire region. It had a massive boulevard with temples to emperors and with temples to gods down the middle of the city... tons of columns. It was a beautiful, beautiful city. So because they were sort of the little brother, they liked to promote themselves as being the first in a variety of different things. One of their claims to fame: Homer, the ancient Greek poet, was born in Smyrna. They were like, "Hey, we're first in the arts because Homer was born here." In the ancient Greek world... Homer and Plato... they were the two biggies. They also... on their coins... they had a phrase that they would put on their coins that says, "First city of Asia in size and beauty." They were a little self-conscious but also liked to talk about themselves as "The First." I think, then, it's absolutely zero accident that as Jesus addresses the church in Smyrna... what does He say in verse 8? *"...thus says the First and the Last..."* I think He is saying, "Yah, you think you're first but actually I'm First." And He comes and He speaks a word. So what is it that He says? Well, He is going to tell them that He knows some things. And what is it that He comes to tell them?

1. He Knows Your Pain. (v. 9)

Number one: He says that He knows your pain. Jesus says in verse 9... *"I know your affliction and poverty..."* The Greek word there "affliction" is the word "thlipsis." "Thlipsis" probably is better translated in our world as "pressure." They had pressure. The government was after them, looking to shut down the churches. They had pressure because, believe it or not, there was an incentive for people to turn Christians in, in the city of Smyrna. Christians who were turned in in the city of Smyrna, the one who did the turning in... the snitch, so to speak... would get ten percent of the Christian's wealth. On top of that, there was pressure to worship the emperor. You were supposed to take a little bit of incense and offer it up as a sacrifice to the emperor, and in doing so, then you would get some papers to show that you were allowed to worship freely. The Christians were facing this pressure from all different sides. And yet they weren't going to give in, right? They had this pressure on them. The next word that's given there... "poverty." We already mentioned it. They had people against them... trying to turn them in and taking their money. But also because they weren't worshipping the emperor... they didn't have these papers... their businesses were having to operate, oftentimes underground, so they weren't making as much money. And the city, remember, is enormously wealthy. Everyone in the city is making all kinds of money, except for the Christians... so they are getting pressed and they are poor. Maybe you can identify with the idea of having pressure... this "thlipsis." Maybe you might look at your life and you'd say, "Well, you know, the last couple of years have been tough..." or "things happening in our nation" or "things happening in my world," or whatever... and you would say, "Man, that's been pressure on me." Maybe you would sit here today and say that you get it.

In addition to that, there's this other piece that's a little bit puzzling there in the back half of verse 9 that says that Jesus *"...knows the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not."* So what do we mean whenever we read that someone says that they are a Jew and they are not and yet they're slandering? Probably what is happening here is that the Jewish people, for whatever reason, had received an exemption from having to sacrifice to the emperor. And because they didn't have to sacrifice to the emperor, they were afraid that Christians... many of whom were Jews and not sacrificing to the emperor... would bring attention to them. So, probably, there were some people who were slandering some of the earliest believers. We're not positive about that. John clearly says that's not truly Jewish behavior there in verse 9. But there's all of this mounting pressure that's on top of the earliest believers in the city of Smyrna... just more and more "thlipsis." I don't know about you, but if I'm under that kind of pressure and I'm going to get a word from Jesus, what I want Jesus to say to me is something like, "I'm going to show up, and I'm going to end it." But He doesn't say that. He just says, "I know what you're going through." Is that encouraging? Is it encouraging for the God who, it feels in our heads, could bring it all to an end to just look at us and say, "I know what you're going through"? I think it is but only if we think about it in the right way. You see, this isn't Jesus just saying, "I know, theoretically, what you're talking about..." This is something very different.

In the Book of Hebrews 4:15 we read this: *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but One who has been tempted in every way, as we are, yet without sin."* What does that mean? Jesus, according to the Book of Hebrews, is not someone who just says, "Oh yah... yah; I kind of know what you're talking about." No... what the Bible says is that we have a high priest, Jesus, who has been tempted in every way we have been tempted. I want you to think about Jesus in the garden... before His death, on His knees, crying out to God, "Father, if this cup can pass from Me..." The sweat like drops of blood... this is what Jesus is enduring. And He will be led to an excruciating death on the cross. The Bible says, "He is tempted in all of these ways... He is pressed... He knows 'thlipsis.' He knows real pressure." This is so different from the ancient Greek conception of God that the people in Smyrna would have been surrounded with. Right? The ancient Greek gods... they are up there at Olympus... they're

watching; they're observing." They don't actually participate in what humans are going through. This is what makes Jesus unique.

I don't know what it is that you're going through today, but I would guarantee you that if we started over here and we went all the way around the room, all the way over here... every person is going through something different where they would say, "This is really, really hard. It's tough. I want to quit." And Jesus would look at you and say, "I know... but I don't know here; I actually know because I've been a human, and I have walked the human road." Somebody say, "Amen." That is good. It is good for us to know that this Jesus has walked with us. He has had real affliction... real "thlipsis"... real pressure. He has been rejected. He has been reviled. He has been attacked. He has been doubted. He has been chased. He knows what we have gone through. And that's not just what I say; that's what Hebrews 4:15 says as well.

Over the years, we've had a number of different recovery programs here at Houston Northwest... a couple of different ones. And one of the things that I've learned watching recovery ministry here at Houston Northwest and at other places is that if you're going to, for instance, go through a ministry that's going to walk you through the breaking of alcohol addiction, you're going to have a mentor, and that mentor is going to be someone who has walked through alcohol addiction. There's something powerful about having an individual who has experienced the same thing you have experienced and walking through it with you. And this is what the Bible says. Jesus knows our affliction... He knows our pain because He's been in pain too. He is not just a casual observer, but He is, instead, a God who took on flesh and walked in this world so that He might understand the pain that you have as well. So Jesus surprises us because He says that you're impoverished because they are stealing your money and not letting your businesses flourish, but guess what? He says in verse 9, "You're rich." How are we rich? We're rich because He is walking with us, and He never leaves us. Your great treasure is the presence of Jesus, no matter how much money you have, no matter the pressure that's on you... Jesus never fails. He is your great gift. Jesus is not just aware of what you're going through; He has experienced it and He walks with you. He knows your pain.

2. He Knows Your Fear. (v. 10)

Verse 10... He doesn't just know your pain... "He knows your fear." Look at verse 10: *"Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, the Devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will experience affliction for ten days. Be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."* So what's the ten days about there? There's a lot of debate about that from a lot of scholars. We don't honestly know totally for sure. Some people say that "ten days" was the colloquialism for how we would say "a couple of weeks... you're going to be in prison a couple of weeks." Other people would say, "No... it's a literal ten days." But the truth is that Jesus is saying, "The enemy is going to come for you, and he is going to throw some of you into prison, and you're going to be pressed, and then... good news... at the end of it, they are going to kill you." "Wow... this doesn't sound like a good pep talk, Jesus." Right? But He says, *"Be faithful to the point of death..."* and before that He says, *"Don't be afraid."* Don't be afraid. I mean, it feels a little hollow at first, right? Jesus says, "They are going to come for you; they're going to throw you into prison, and then they are going to kill you. But you don't need to be afraid." How could He say that?

Matt Emerson is a professor of theology at Oklahoma Baptist University. He has written a book called "He Descended to the Dead; A Theology of Holy Saturday." In that book, Emerson has a lot of different theories that he tells you people have believed over the years about what happens to Jesus between the time that He dies on Good Friday and the Resurrection on Easter Sunday. Where does Jesus go? I don't have time to

go into all the theories, but I will tell you this... that Emerson makes it clear that whatever happened in that moment, Jesus... the Church has agreed on this for two thousand years... Jesus experienced death. Jesus literally died. And in death, somehow, He then defeated it. Why do we care?

A long time ago... maybe twenty years ago... I was going on a trip to California. I hadn't been to California in a long time. I was headed to California, and somebody says to me, "Oh... California. You're going to need to go try 'In 'N' Out.'" "What's 'In 'N' Out'?" "It's this burger place out there; it's run by some Christians. You're going to love 'In 'N' Out Burger.'" I was like, "Okay, great. I'll go check it out then." "Now wait, Steve. You can't just go in to 'In 'N' Out'." "Oh... I can't?" "No, no, no. You've got to know the secret menu." I was like, "The menu is a secret? How do you order?" "No, no, no... there's a secret menu. There's what's printed but then there's a menu that the people who go there know about, and you've got to order the secret menu." Sure enough, I go walking into "In 'N' Out" armed with this very precious information... feeling a little bit crazy, right? You wonder, "Is this person just playing a practical joke on me?" (Laughter) You walk up and you're like, "Yes... I'd would like to get my burger 'animal style.'" And they go like, "Oh yes... of course." And they punch it in. "It worked. I had secret insider information."

Years ago, I remember whenever our kids were little, we went to Disney... we took them and ahead of time we looked up all these different ways to approach Disney, and there was this website out there that said, "Go to this park on this day... ride the rides in this order and then you won't have to wait in line." All this kind of stuff. And I remember... this was back in the days before smart phones... we had a file folder we printed out these instructions... (Laughter) and we went in to Disney and we were like, "Okay... it's time to ride the Dumbo elephants... what's next?" We did that and we felt so empowered because we had this insider information. There is something oddly comforting about someone who has been somewhere, and they give you information that you couldn't have, but they share it with you. Jesus says, "Oh, death? ...Been there. Don't worry about it. No reason to be afraid. Why? Because I've already beat it." Jesus says that even those who will be thrown into jail, and even if they choose to kill you, you don't need to be afraid because," He says, "I've already been there, and let Me tell you what. I've already beat it, so it's nothing that you need to fear. In fact, you can walk into death knowing that if you're faithful to the point of death, you will then receive..." He says, "a 'stephanos'... the crown of life." That's Greek for "the victor's crown." It's actually the same Greek word from which my name is derived. "Crowned one" ...that's the name Steven. It's the person who was faithful to the point of death. The "stephanos"... the "victor's crown"... the one who wins the game, and in that moment, they place a crown upon your head. You are the one who has won. And Jesus says, "Listen... if you will not be afraid... if you'll walk into this without fear, you will actually be able to stare down death, and you won't be ashamed. You will instead be crowned." (Clapping) Yah... incredible, right? You don't need to fear. So here's the thing that's crazy: most of us today probably aren't facing death. Some of us are. Some of us have a diagnosis, some of us are walking through grief: "Death is very real in our house right now." But others of us, death is not what we're facing. So why is death the thing in the pages of the Bible? ...Because death... I think we could all agree... is kind of at the top of things that we would be afraid of. And yet Jesus says, "I've already beat it."

In the novel "Dune" by Frank Herbert... many times his characters will have this phrase they say. They say, "Fear is the mind killer." It's actually been backed up by psychologists and psychiatrists over the years; we know that whenever people come into something that feels dangerous, they either flight, fight, or freeze. Fear puts us into this mode: We don't really know what to do; we stop thinking and we just start reacting. And what Jesus is saying, "Listen... I don't know what you're up against... even if it's death itself or it's

something much smaller, and you're feeling overwhelmed, you don't need to be afraid... because I've beaten death and I can beat anything else. I'm bigger than whatever you're up against."

In First John, the same man who wrote this Book... wrote a letter, and in that letter, 1 John 4:18, we read this: *"There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear because fear involves punishment."* Fear involves punishment... and Jesus says, "There won't be any punishment in death because I've taken away the fear of death." Martin Luther King Day was on Monday, and MLK put it this way: "The kind of love which led Christ to a cross and kept Paul un-embittered amid the angry torrents of persecution is not soft, anemic, and sentimental. Such love confronts evil without flinching and shows in our popular parlance an infinite capacity to take it. Such love overcomes the world, even from a rough-hewn cross against the skyline. Love is not afraid because love knows there will be no punishment after death." Jesus doesn't just know your pain; Jesus knows what you're afraid of, and He has got enough experience to say, "I've already been there and you're going to be just fine... you're going to be okay."

3. He Knows Your Future.

Then verse 11... look at verse 11. *"Let anyone who has ears to hear, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will never be harmed by the second death."* He doesn't just know your pain, and He doesn't just know your fear. He knows your future. Quick history lesson: In 115 AD, about probably like 25 years after this letter was written, a man became the bishop of the Church of Smyrna. His name was Polycarp... great name; I love that name. Somebody name your kid Polycarp, alright? That name needs to keep going. Polycarp... so in 115 AD he becomes the bishop of the Church in Smyrna. For whatever reason, the Roman authorities decided to execute Polycarp, the bishop of the Church. And there's different details in the historical accounts of this, but whenever they come to find Polycarp, they try to hide him... the Church did because he was the bishop... and someone apparently in the Church ratted out his location. So even though the guards don't want to kill him, he's an older man at this point... they come... they have to. They are taking him to the Coliseum. So they take him to the Coliseum; there publicly they are going to execute him. They are going to burn him at the stake, and they say, "We won't kill you if you'll just renounce your faith; that's all you have to do." And he has this great quote... I don't want to mess it up. This is what he says, "Fourscore and six years..." so, 86 years... "86 years have I served Him, and He has never done me injury. How then can I now blaspheme my King and my Savior?" So Polycarp is either 86 years old or he has been a Christian for 86 years. Either way, he is an older man. He says, "Nope... I'm not going to do it." So they say, "Well, okay; we've got to kill you. We are going to tie you to the stake." As this final flex at 86 years of age, Polycarp says, "You don't need to tie me up; I'll just stand here against the post by myself." He just leans up against the post, and so they have the indignity of burning an old man at the stake who doesn't even need to be tied. He is like, "I ain't scared of death." Now, of course, the thing about this that's so baffling is "How would Polycarp do this?" Polycarp probably grew up in Smyrna; Polycarp probably, as a younger man, heard this letter read. He heard, "To the one who conquers, you'll never fear the second death." Polycarp says, "Bring it on." He had heard that letter as a younger man, became the bishop, and says, "You can't kill me."

Now, we're Americans, right? And in America we have our phrases: "Give me liberty or give me death." Even worse than that, we're Texans... we have the Alamo. "Let's go eat some enchiladas and then look at the place where everyone was wiped out. We're proud of it." We stand there and we said, "Yep, they came for us and we all died but, man, we're Texan, right?" It's kind of bred into us as Texans... as Americans: We'll fight for our freedom. But Polycarp didn't even fight. He said, "Oh... it's time to die; that's fine. You can't kill me." The thing that blows me away here is that Polycarp had heard the words of John, probably,

as a younger man, that he would never be harmed by the second death which begs the question, "What is the second death?"

I'm glad you asked. Revelation chapter 20, verses 11 through 15 says this: *"Then I saw a great white throne and One seated on it. Earth and heaven fled from His presence, and no place was found for them. I also saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened which was the book of life, and the dead were judged according to their works by what was written in the books. Then the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and Death and Hades gave up their dead that were in them. Each one was judged according to their works. Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire."*

That's the second death. The second death is that everybody is going to die, but then there's going to be a day of judgement, and on that day, there will be a moment when some will die again. Now, if you didn't hear that whole description... what the Scripture says in Revelation 20, we're going to get to that in several weeks... but in Revelation 20, there's a moment where Jesus returns and He says, "Okay, bring Me all the people who have already died." So from the cemeteries around the world, the resurrection happens. Then we read, "...in the sea..."; the people who have been buried at sea. The dead come up out of that. Then it says "Death and Hades" all the people who have died. They line them up and then it says, "There's all these books... so many books... and the books have what each of us have done in the books. And then they say, "Okay, we're going to open the books, and we are going to judge you based on what you've done." Now, most people think, "Well, if I've done more good than I've done bad, then I'm okay." But that's actually not what's happening here. What's happening here in Revelation chapter 20 is you are being judged to see, "Did you live a life as good as Jesus?" If you didn't live a life as good as Jesus, then you're in trouble. News flash: I'm in trouble. News flash: You're in trouble. Except... there's all of these books, but then there's one book over to the side; it's called the Lamb's Book of Life. And anyone whose name is found in the Lamb's Book of Life, it doesn't matter what happened in those books... you don't have to be thrown in the lake of fire. There's no second death. I don't know about you, but I want my name to be in that book... because, if my name is not in that book... the lake of fire. They don't really describe what happens, but I've been swimming... and if there's a lake made out of fire, I don't want to go into it. And the Scripture says, "There's one way out of that... it's to have your name written in the Lamb's Book of Life." So we read here, in verse 11... *"The one who conquers will never be harmed by the second death."* Polycarp said, "You can't kill me. The second death can't touch me because I've been born again. My name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life."

If I stand up here and I tell you, "After church today, I'm going to eat some lunch and then probably after that I'm going to take a nap," you would not be like, "Wow, Steve can predict the future." (Laughter) You'd be like, "Okay, great; if that's what you're going to do, fine." Why? Because you would say, "He's probably in charge of when he's going to eat and when he is going to take a nap, so he can do that." Here's the thing... We read this and we think Jesus is predicting the future. No He's not; He is in charge. He is just telling you what's going to happen. That's the same thing as Jesus saying, "This is what I'm going to have for lunch." He is telling you what will happen because He is the One who is in charge. The question is, "Do you want to be in the lake of fire, or do you want your name in the Lamb's Book of Life?"

The pastor E.V. Hill puts it this way... I love this: "The ones who are born once, die twice; those who are born twice, die once." If you have been born twice... of your mother and of the Spirit... then you'll only die once. But if you're only born once and you're never born again of the Spirit, then you will die twice. That's not Steve Bezner... that's the Bible. So the question today is for you... who wants to only die once... and

who wants to be born twice... and who wants to live forever? ...Because this is what God wants: He wants you to conquer, He wants you to be rescued, He wants you to know because He knows. He knows your pain, He knows your fear, and He knows your future. What will you choose today? Let's pray.

"Father, today I want to pray for those who have heard this, and they have said that life has been hard... life has been painful, and they need You to come and to make things right. Father, today they have heard that You can redeem pain, so Lord, I want to pray and ask that You would take their pain and redeem it. I don't know who is feeling that today, but I know somebody in a room this size... probably multiple somebodies feel that way. Lord, I pray that You would make that right... that You would show them that You can take their pain and their fear and You're bigger than that. Lord, I also want to stand up here and I want to pray for those who have never said 'Yes' to You, but today they have heard the message, and they've said, 'I don't want a second death; I want a new life. I want to live a life of forgiveness and freedom in the person of Jesus. I want to live with Jesus forever. I want to be saved; I want to be changed. I don't want to die.' Lord, I pray that right now they would join me. If that's you, if you're ready to do that, just join me in this prayer. 'Lord, I don't want to die; I want to give my life to You. I believe in Your Son Jesus; I'm ready to follow Him; I'm ready to live for Him. I'm going give You my life; let me know You Lord... let me trust You.'"

Nobody's looking around but if that's you and you just placed your faith in Jesus for the very first time, I'd love to just pray for you and give you some next steps. Would you just let me know; if that was you... would you just look at me? Let me see your eyes or maybe wave at me if you think I can't see you. Just let me know, "Hey, that was me; I'm ready to place my faith in Jesus here today." Just look at me. "Lord, I thank You... thank You for these who've said they're ready to say 'Yes' and Lord, thank you to those who are ready to put their pain in Your hands. Lord, we love You and we trust You. We pray this in the name of Your Son Jesus. Amen."

If God just spoke to you today, there's going to be a number up on the screen. I'd like to ask you to text us. If you just came to faith in Jesus, just text the word "Jesus" to us. We've got some folks who will text with you and give you some next steps. Maybe there's something else that you need to do today. Maybe you need to say, "I need to be baptized" or "I'm new here" or "I have questions" or "Pray for me." Whatever that is; it doesn't matter... just text in. We've got real folks on the other end of the line; they'd love to talk to you. If you prefer, you can use one of these cards to communicate with us and drop them in the box on your way out or come talk to me on the back porch after service. But whatever you do, take an opportunity to respond to Him today. I pray this and ask that we will follow Him as we go about our week. Amen and amen.