

Greenwood Baptist Church
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October 4, 2026
Justice and Mercy
Micah 6:8

There's a booth over there that will help you with the app. It's something we've been looking for for a long time, and we finally found the right one, and we're excited about that. I hope that you'll be a part of that as well. There's also a place over there where you can register to vote if you're not registered. That's one of the best things you can do for all those little ones that were up here: vote to ensure their future and their opportunities in Texas. I won't tell you how to vote. If you want to know, you can come ask me afterwards and I'll be happy to tell you. But I won't tell you here. It is important that we vote as believers, that we're part of that process.

As we talked about kids today, I'm going to read something. A grandmother sent me this picture of a school assignment that a young man from our church turned in, and he's here today. I'm not going to point him out, but he's down here to my left. I just thought it was worth reading. I thought he had a pretty good perspective. The assignment was what church or building around here should be a landmark. And here's what he wrote:

"There are so many wonderful churches across the world, but the best one is Greenwood. So it should be a local landmark. One reason Greenwood Church should be a landmark is so many great people go. And you can even see one of your old friends at Greenwood. It is the best church ever. Another reason is it would remind you of 'Sweet, Sweet Victory.'" Yeah. "And they said once Babe Ruth went there for God and Jesus too. And the person who made baseball even went there for the same reason Babe Ruth did. Another reason is you meet great people. And if you have a four-year-old son or daughter or both, if they don't know who God is, they will hear about him." Right. "But this church sings, talks about God 24-7, and welcomes you if you are new to the church. It shows videos of God too, but they are insanely nice, too. Insanely nice, they pray for you and God for everybody. Greenwood should be a landmark."

That's pretty good. So if you're having trouble telling people how nice folks are here and that they should come, just remind them that Babe Ruth went here. Maybe that'll help push them over the edge.

All right. We're going to be in Micah chapter 6, verse 8 today. This has been one of my favorite verses for a long time. And one of the things that struck me is, in our society and the world that we live in, just how hard it is to actually live out this verse. I've just kind of read over it, but never really looked at how difficult some of the things in it really are, and how you have to struggle over them. So we're going to read today Micah 6:8. If you'd please stand in honor of the reading of God's word.

“No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.”

Thank you. You may be seated.

That verse sounds simple. It sounds great. Do what is right. Love mercy. Walk humbly with your God. That part about doing what is right comes from the same word that is interpreted many times in the Old Testament as justice. And justice can be a difficult thing.

We’re supposed to act justly. We’re supposed to treat people fairly, not cheat them, do what is right. But we also, as a people, are called to believe in justice. In this country, government is of the people, for the people, and by the people. And that’s us. We’re the government. And so when it comes to a trial, when there’s justice that has to be done, we’re sometimes called to do jury duty.

How many of y’all saw the movie *12 Angry Men*? I’ve always wanted to be a juror. Anybody? I’m the first one they send out the door. I don’t know why. “Sir, number 78 or whatever, you’re a pastor?” “Yes, I am.” “You’re dismissed.” I’m like, why? Why am I dismissed? But anyway, they kick me out almost immediately every time. I know many of you have been summoned for jury duty. Some of you have gotten out of it however you did. I don’t know. But it really is a privilege. I get that it’s also an inconvenience, but it’s a privilege to be a part of the justice system.

So not only are we to act justly, to treat people fairly, to do right—Jesus said, let your yes be yes and your no be no. We’re not to deceive people. We’re to treat people in a way that is honorable. But we also live in a society where we’re responsible for what happens when it comes to justice. And in the country that we live in, that is becoming more and more difficult.

Justice is becoming a fleeting thing; everybody has their own idea about it. There’s this kind of justice, that kind of justice, whatever. But really, there should be one kind of justice, and that justice falls into the things of God. If you look at the Old Testament and the Old Testament law, the laws God gave are still a huge part of how we do justice. He’s the one who determines what justice is.

And Jesus even told us it’s something we ought to wrestle over. In Matthew 23:23, Jesus is talking to the religious leaders, and he says, **“What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens.”** Your herb gardens. In other words, they’d have a little plant or whatever, and they’d cut off a tenth of the leaf and take it and put it in the plate. Don’t do that. We don’t want your vegetables stuck in our giving time. But that’s what they would do. They were so conscientious. They’d be like, “Okay, I need to make sure I do this.” He says, look, you do that, **“but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You**

should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things.”

Sometimes when you’re following Jesus, it’s a lot easier to just focus on the easier things. “Hey, you know what? I ain’t killed nobody. I’m going to church. I’m trying to do the right thing.” Instead, we need to be wrestling with some of those difficult questions.

When you think about it, justice and mercy seem like they’re diametrically opposed to one another. But that’s one of the things God says as he’s passing by Moses on the mountain where he gave him the commandments. He talks about justice and righteousness, and then he also talks about mercy. Those are some of his characteristics. Those define who he is.

I don’t know about you, but I struggle with those two things, because it seems like justice is giving people what they deserve, and mercy is giving them what they don’t deserve. So how do you make those two things work? We have in this country this idea of, “Well, but they had this, and they had that, and we ought not do this.” And so we’ve lost, I believe, a sense of justice. And when you lose a sense of justice, it gives people free rein to commit more.

Recently there was a case of a woman—it’s even harder to talk about on a day like this, when we’re dedicating children—but she took three of her own children’s lives. That’s shocking enough. Some of y’all are old enough to remember the very first case where that happened. You remember that? A mom drove into a lake, and it was national news for weeks. Now, this case became national news because most of the jury wanted to acquit her. There was one guy—I’d like to meet that dude someday—who said, “Nope, she’s guilty,” and would not back down.

And since then there have been others who, by all accounts, followed that case, were obsessed with it, and then did the same thing. You may not have heard about it. You don’t know why you hadn’t heard about it? Because it’s not big news anymore. Something that at one time captured the entire nation has become so commonplace that it doesn’t even get a spot in the news anymore, because we’ve lost a sense of justice in this country. And you know what? I get it. Maybe there were circumstances that make us feel sorry for her, but that doesn’t relieve the necessity for justice.

So we’re going to talk about justice for just a few minutes. Deuteronomy 16:18-20 says, **“Appoint judges and officials for yourselves from each of your tribes in all the towns the Lord your God is giving you.”** We still do that. We vote for a county judge. We vote for judges in our state. We vote for people that put judges in the federal courts. So we have a part in all that. You ought to be voting if you’re a believer. Like I said, you can register right out there; we’ll help you with that. We are a part of that system. We’re still fulfilling what God said: bring people from each of your tribes; get judges, get officials. And not only that, but we’re called to serve on juries, and we’re called to render a verdict based on the evidence that we’ve seen. We’re part of that system.

And here's what he says: **"They must judge the people fairly. You must never twist justice or show partiality. Never accept a bribe, for bribes blind the eyes of the wise and corrupt the decisions of the godly. Let true justice prevail, so you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you."**

Now, I understand some of these things are really uncomfortable. There are lots of discussions now about the death penalty because of what happened up in Tennessee recently. And I understand that. There are all kinds of questions about it. I even had somebody tell me one time, "Well, how can you be pro-life and be pro-death penalty?" And my question is, how can you be anti-death penalty and pro-abortion? By your sense, you want to execute the innocent, and those that have committed horrible crimes, you want them to go without punishment. How does that make sense? See, I believe in protecting the lives of the innocent. And the Bible tells us there are consequences for actions. We're going to talk about that a little bit more in a minute.

But the next thing it says—well, what about the love-mercy part? Shouldn't we be like, "Well, I know they did this, but we ought to have mercy for them"? Mercy, when Scripture talks about it, is giving what is not due. We should exercise love and mercy. We should be forgiving towards people.

In Matthew 18:21-22, **Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?"** That's what mercy is: us forgiving and being merciful to someone that has wronged us. But here's the thing: I don't have the right to extend mercy or forgiveness to someone that has sinned against someone else. That's not my place. That's between them and God, and them and the person they sinned against. But when it comes to people who have sinned against me, that's my responsibility. How many times should I forgive them?

And you know what? Peter said, "Seven times?" He thought he was being really magnanimous. "Well, that's a lot." And here's what was replied: **"No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven!"** That seven and seventy times seven is a very significant number. It means literally infinity. Because you see, six is the number of man. It is the imperfect number. That's why the mark of the beast, the mark of man, is 666. But when it comes to the things of God, seven is the holy number. That's the right number. That's the perfect number. And so seventy times seven means you just keep forgiving them.

Now, I understand it doesn't mean that there's not justice. It doesn't mean that there aren't consequences for their actions. If you loan them your vehicle and they take it out and they're careless with it and they destroy it, you forgive them. But when you get a new truck or a new car or whatever and they come back and say, "Hey, can I borrow that?"—no. I forgive you, but no.

It also means sometimes justice and forgiveness are separate. I've seen this a few times: a family of somebody that was murdered comes to the courthouse, and they're there during the trial, and

they're interviewed, and they say, "Look, I've forgiven them." But forgiving them doesn't mean they don't have to face the consequences of their actions. Forgiving is something that only a person who's been wronged can do. But justice still should prevail.

Ephesians 4:32: **"Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you."** See, ultimately, we have to remember that we have received mercy. We've been given something we didn't deserve through Jesus. God has said, your sins are wiped out. He has declared us righteous. That's in Romans. And we didn't deserve that. And so when we have the opportunity and someone wrongs us, we forgive them in light of what God did for us through Jesus. We forgive because we've been forgiven.

Now, I understand there are times when justice is still necessary, when there are consequences to actions. And that's where the last part of that scripture in Micah comes in. It says, walk humbly with your God. What does it mean to walk humbly with your God? It means that your will, your ideas, your thoughts are placed under the will of God. And we find that in the Scripture.

There was an Old Testament covenant. God came to Moses on the mountain and gave him not only the Ten Commandments, but he said, "Look, this is what I'm going to do for you. I'm going to take you to this land that you've never been to. I'm going to give you homes that you didn't build. I'm going to give you fields that are ripe for harvest that you didn't cultivate and you didn't plant. You don't deserve that, but I'm going to give it to you. But here's what I want you to do for me." He lines out the sacrifices. He tells them, these are the things you can't do. This is the way you're to live.

And let me make something clear. Back in Genesis, in the days of Abraham, he didn't take him all the way into Canaan. He says it was because the iniquity of those who lived there was not yet full. In other words, God gave them hundreds of years to repent, to change, and they didn't. And finally their iniquity became so great that God said, "Now's the time. We're going to drive them out of the land, and it's going to be yours." That was God's righteous decision. He gave that land to his people.

But he also said there were a number of things that were deserving of the death penalty. In Exodus 22:18-20—I just picked three that were all together—**"You must not allow a sorceress to live. Anyone who has sexual relations with an animal must certainly be put to death. Anyone who sacrifices to any god other than the Lord must be destroyed."** That was under the Mosaic covenant. Now, we're not under that covenant anymore. It even said if two people are caught in the act of adultery, they're to be stoned. You remember they brought that young woman who was caught in the act to Jesus and threw her down in front of him and said, "Are we supposed to do this?" And Jesus said, let him who is without sin cast the first stone.

Now, there's not evidence that a lot of these things were ever carried out. We don't know. Maybe the deterrent was enough, and people were like, "Man, that's going to cost me my life. I ain't

doing that.” Maybe it happened and we don’t know about it. But that was under the Mosaic law. That was God’s penalty for those sins.

We live under a different covenant now. When Jesus came, he fulfilled the law. He died once for all. And now all have the opportunity to repent and come to faith in Jesus. It says in Hebrews 8:6, **“But now Jesus, our High Priest, has been given a ministry that is far superior to the old priesthood, for he is the one who mediates for us a far better covenant with God, based on better promises.”** And that covenant is that if we come to faith in Jesus, we’re declared righteous. All of our sins are forgiven. All of our sins going forward are forgiven.

And so there are people that will tell you, “Well, as Christians, we should be against the death penalty.” I don’t believe that’s right. Here’s why. Because long before God made the Mosaic covenant, he came to Noah in Genesis chapter 9, and here’s what he said: **“And I will require the blood of anyone who takes another person’s life. If a wild animal kills a person, it must die.”**

We would all agree. Any animal that takes a life, any animal that endangers a person, should be put to death, period, if they’re a danger to people. There are social media accounts from the Department of the Interior—I don’t know if y’all follow them—and one of the things they do every year, one of my favorite things, is a thing called Fat Bear Week. They take pictures of all these bears that they track; they have cameras everywhere. And the fattest bear gets declared fat bear king of the year. I love it. And man, they show pictures of bears, and y’all, you just want to go and give them a hug. They’re all cute and everything. They’ve got these big old bellies. But any bear that attacked a person should be put to death. I don’t care how cute the pictures are.

Here’s what he goes on to say: **“And anyone who murders a fellow human must die. If anyone takes a human life, that person’s life will also be taken by human hands. For God made human beings in his own image.”** So you see, man is made in the image of God. And if someone takes the life of someone who’s created in the image of God, their life is forfeit and must be taken by human hands.

And here’s part of why justice can be a struggle. To fulfill that means that we walk humbly with our God; we submit our will to his. And if you’ll notice, he doesn’t say, “Hey, this is what I think you guys ought to do.” The very first verse says—God is speaking—**“I will require the blood of anyone who takes another person’s life.”**

The death penalty is biblical, and it is right, and it is righteous. It’s hard for us to think about. I get it. It’s hard for us to wrestle with. But it is scriptural, and it is God’s requirement, not ours. So why am I pro-death penalty? Because God requires it. Not because I have the right to pronounce sentence on someone—because God requires it. **“I will require the blood of anyone who takes another person’s life.”** It is the right thing. And the practice of it is difficult for us to get our minds around sometimes. I understand that.

Justice and mercy—those two things, we’ve got to wrestle with them. And we need to make sure that we’re on God’s side, that we’re on the right side of things. Why is that? Because at some point we’re going to face God. As hard as it was, I’m sure, to be a juror on that trial with that woman, those three children were created in the image of God. And God requires the blood of anyone who took their life. And this is me talking: it makes it worse, because the one God made to watch over them is the one that took their life. When we don’t follow God’s way, we open the door to more and more murder and more and more carnage.

We have to be willing to fulfill the sentences that God has made. Now, here’s the deal: it’s not my responsibility to go do it, and it’s not yours either. We’re not supposed to be running around going, “I think that person needs to die, so I’m going to take care of that.” That’s not how God designed it. And the New Testament is clear about who does that. It’s the authorities, the government that God has placed, that we’ve elected, that we’ve put into place. They’re the ones to carry that out.

Romans 13:4-5: **“The authorities are God’s servants, sent for your good. But if you are doing wrong, of course you should be afraid, for they have the power to punish you. They are God’s servants, sent for the very purpose of punishing those who do what is wrong.”** And if we have people that we’ve elected who refuse to punish those who do what is wrong, we need to vote them out and vote in people that are willing to fulfill God’s purpose for government, and that is to punish those who do wrong. **“So you must submit to them, not only to avoid punishment, but also to keep a clear conscience.”**

Now, there are two verses that I want to cover just real quickly, about things we’re seeing right now in this country. **“Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent—both are detestable to the Lord.”** That word *detestable* is a strong word, isn’t it? If somebody says, “I don’t really like that person; they’re not really my cup of tea. They’re fine, but I don’t like being around them. We’re not going to be great friends,” you’re like, “Well, okay.” But if they go, “I detest that person,” that’s a whole different deal, isn’t it?

Detestable is a strong word. Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent—both are detestable to the Lord. When God talks about taking someone’s life, there are allowances he makes for manslaughter. There were cities of refuge, where people that had accidentally killed someone, who didn’t mean to, could go and live in freedom. There was self-defense; they weren’t to be given any penalty. And for people that did murder someone, there were very strict guidelines before they could be put to death. It could only be on the words of two or three witnesses.

And you’re like, “Well, witnesses lie.” Let me tell you what God did to make sure that didn’t happen. If you lied in a capital case—you said someone murdered someone when they didn’t—guess what? You were put to death. Maybe we need to go back to that in this country. If

you go and testify and say somebody did something and you know they didn't, then you ought to get the death penalty. That would eliminate a lot of that stuff, wouldn't it? Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent—both are detestable to the Lord.

Isaiah 5:20-21: **“What sorrow for those who say that evil is good and good is evil, that dark is light and light is dark, that bitter is sweet and sweet is bitter. What sorrow for those who are wise in their own eyes and think themselves so clever.”** That's going on every day in this country. Man, that's a verse America should heed. We need to make sure that we're calling evil evil and good good, and that we're standing on the right side. Because here's the deal: we're all going to face God and give an account.

Now, we're not going to have to answer and pay for every sin that we've committed. Jesus did that for us. But we are going to give an account for the life that we live and what we chose to do with it. And I don't know about you, but I want to make sure that I'm on the right side, even of some of these issues that are hard to deal with. I want to be on the right side of those.

Maybe you're thinking, “I'll just stay out of those things. That's not really for me.” I understand that. But what if I told you that four months from now you were going to stand before Jesus and have to answer for what you did or didn't do? And let me tell you something: when you look at the prophecies in Scripture, Jesus could come back any moment. The prophecies describe times like we're living in right now. There will be wars and rumors of wars. That's going on right now. There are wars in the Middle East; we're involved in one. There are rumors of wars. There is greater persecution of Christians. We saw a man killed just a little over a year ago because he was giving his ideas. He was an outspoken Christian. In a lot of the African countries right now, the ones that are dominated by Muslims, Christians are being put to death on a regular basis. There are people every day that are paying the ultimate penalty. And you know what? The Bible says that underneath the throne of God, the blood of those who've given their lives for him cries out. And it's going to intensify. That's one of the signs of Jesus' return.

So I don't know about you, but whatever time we've got left before Jesus comes back—and I'm ready for Jesus to come back, trust me, I'm good with that—I want to make sure I'm living justly and loving mercy and walking humbly with my God. That's what we're called to do.

Mercy means giving people what they don't deserve. We forgive people whether they deserve it or not. We love people. I get it: there are limits. There are consequences. Trust has to be rebuilt. But we're still to love, and we're still to give mercy. But we need to make sure that we're on the right side, that we're calling evil what it is and good what it is, that we're calling darkness darkness.

And there is a lot of darkness that's invading this country. There's a lot of darkness that's getting into the minds of people. People are being confused. It's amazing to me. There was an instance—I know y'all know of it—in New York City, where a guy shot an insurance executive.

He shot him in the back. That was a dark, evil, cowardly act. And yet he's been made a hero by groups of people. That's what it means when it says calling evil good and good evil. That was a cowardly act, and yet we have people that are making him a hero.

Charlie Kirk was assassinated. There are people that are making that guy out to be a hero. That was a cowardly act. It was murder. It was taking the life of someone who was created in God's image. And not only that, it was an outspoken believer who did love people and offered people the opportunity to know who Christ is.

A woman takes the life of her own children, and instead of her being roundly condemned, there are all these people going, "Oh, we need to treat people differently," blah, blah, blah. Where's the justice for those children and for that father? You can have compassion for someone but still expect justice. And we should demand justice. Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent—those things are detestable to God. And they should be detestable to us. We need to stand up for truth and stand up for justice in this country.

And you know what? I get it. It's something that's hard for us to do. "Well, I'm supposed to be merciful. God was merciful to me." But we're also supposed to be just. We should act justly. We should love justice. Why? Because justice is one of the characteristics of God, and justice is demanded by him. We need to be a people who are willing to wrestle with some of those things. I get it: nobody wants to be the person that decides the fate of someone else. But here's part of what that scripture said about someone that takes another person's life: **"If anyone takes a human life, that person's life will also be taken by human hands."** That's part of our responsibility.

So, yeah, as a Christian, as a follower of Christ, I believe in the death penalty. Why do I believe in it? Because God requires it. Do I understand it? Nope. Are there times when they don't ask for it in a murder case? Yeah, that's fine. But there are some extreme cases that demand it. And we should be willing to walk humbly before our God and to stand on the side of justice. We have to wrestle with those things.

That's one of the reasons why I preach on it. Because there are things that are a lot easier to preach on than stuff like this, I can promise you. "Hey, let's talk about God's blessings." Everybody's up for that one. But some of these things are uncomfortable to talk about. They're uncomfortable to deal with. But you know what? One of the things God got onto the religious leaders of the day for was that they were just dealing with the easy things, and they weren't wrestling with the tough parts. I don't want to get called out by God for not wrestling with those things. And I don't want you to either.

Act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God. I love that verse. It's easy to say. It sounds great. It sounds good. It is hard to put into practice. But guess what? Sometimes, as believers, we're called to do hard things, and we've got to be willing to do them.

And you know what? I get it. If you don't agree with me, if you think I'm wrong about this or whatever, that's fine. Get into Scripture and wrestle with it. You want to come talk to me about it? I'll talk to you about it. I don't mind. But be willing to live humbly before God. In other words: "God, what is the right thing here? God, what should we do?" And be willing to listen. If you can show me in the Scripture where I'm wrong, okay, I'll fess up, and I'll come in here next week and say, "I was wrong."

Hey, I might have something I need to confess from last week. I don't know. I didn't feel very good last week; I was fighting an infection. Matter of fact, my wife said—and I didn't even know this, I really didn't—that in between both services I went over to that chair, sat down, dropped my head, and immediately fell asleep. So if you tried to talk to me and I answered, I don't really know what I said. If I need to apologize for something, I apologize.

Y'all can just be thankful they didn't prescribe me any steroids. I love those. And staff's like, "Oh no, he's on steroids again." They can get me fired up, but I didn't even have any of those last week. I wish I did. I love them things. I ain't going to lie. Now, I'm not talking about doing things illegal. I'm talking about the kind a doctor prescribes you to get over stuff. But golly, I love those things. They make me feel good. Y'all are just lucky I ain't on them this week either. Some of y'all are like, "Maybe he's on them right now." No, I'm not.

But I recognize there are times when it's hard to deal with stuff. And sometimes if I say something that's wrong, show me where it's wrong. You can tell me, "Well, I disagree with you." Okay, I understand that. I don't care. Show me in the word of God where I'm wrong, and then we've got something to talk about. We can disagree on things. That's fine. I don't have a problem with that.

But that's the deal. I've tried to show you in Scripture what those things say. They're difficult things to address, difficult things to wrestle with. I'm showing you where I believe is the place for believers to land. But if you can show me Scripture that tells me I'm wrong, I'll look at it again. And if I'm wrong, I'll admit it. I'll come in here next week and say, "Man, you know what? I was wrong last week. Sorry about that." But understand something: it's going to take God's word to show me that. And it ought to do the same thing for you.

I don't care what party believes what. I don't care what the majority think about this. I don't care what the prevailing wisdom is. We need to land on the scriptural side, on God's side. His opinion is the only one that matters. And if we can't agree on that, we're not going to agree on what's right and what's wrong. But when we can agree on that, we'll search it out together, even when it's hard to get to the right spot. That's what we're called to do.

And man, what a gift we've been given: that we have this new covenant and this knowledge of God's word, and that God has revealed himself to us through Jesus. Jesus was willing to do hard things so that we could be saved. I've had people tell me, when you tell them the gospel—and

I'm fixing to go through that—"Man, it just seems too easy." It wasn't easy. Jesus did the hard things for us. But he also commands us to wrestle with the hard things and to come to a place of understanding—mercy, justice, faith—to figure out what that looks like, and what that really means, and what God intended it to be. That's a gift.

Would you bow your heads and close your eyes, please? If you've not made a decision to trust Christ, that's the beginning. It really is a simple thing, because Jesus did the hard work for us. And here's what it requires. The first thing is you've got to admit that you're a sinner and ask forgiveness. **"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** The second thing is you've got to believe in Jesus. He's God's Son. John 3:16: **"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."** Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves. He was the sacrifice without sin, so he was able to die for those of us who believe. You've got to believe in Jesus, that he died on the cross for your sins and he rose on the third day. The last thing is you've got to confess him as Lord. Romans 10:9-10: **"If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."**

It's simple. It's simple because Jesus did the hard part for us. But that's what it takes. And so if you'd like to know today that your sins are forgiven, if you'd like to know that you're in right relationship with God and that you will be forever, I want to lead you in a brief prayer of salvation. You can repeat it after me, or you can pray in your own words. Just pray in your heart; God will hear you. If that's you and you'd like to know those things, pray this with me right now:

"Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for loving me, and thank you for Jesus. God, I know I'm a sinner. Forgive me of my sins. Come into my life and cleanse me. I believe Jesus is your Son. I believe he died on the cross for my sins, and I believe he rose on the third day. So today I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I confess him as my Lord."

Now, without anybody looking around, if you prayed that prayer, I want to pray for you in just a moment. But I also want you to know there's a way you can contact us. There are a couple of ways on the screen. They're also in your bulletin. You can do them when you get home, whenever. But let us know you made that decision. We'll contact you and set up a time to talk, whether it's in person or on the phone. We don't want anything from you. We're not going to ask you for anything. It doesn't mean you join the church. We just love to encourage new believers, answer questions, and help people take the next steps in following him. And that's what we'd love to do with you.

But right now, if you prayed that prayer, I want to pray for you. So if you did that, here's what I want you to do. Without anybody else looking around, I want you to look up at me and keep looking until I see you, so that I can pray for you today. Yes, ma'am. Okay. I see you. Okay? I got you. Thank you. All right. I want to pray for you right now.

Dear Heavenly Father, I thank you for these that have come to a saving knowledge of Jesus. And Lord, I pray you just fill their hearts with the joy that comes from knowing their sins are forgiven and that they are now your son or your daughter—that, Father, you’ve declared them righteous, you’ve adopted them into your family, and that, Lord, is forever. God, I pray for blessings upon them. I pray, God, you’d lead them to the right church, whether it’s here or somewhere else, that they’d be somewhere where the word is taught and they can grow in their walk with you. Father, I thank you for your mercy and your love for each of us. And I lift up particularly these that have made that decision today. Lord, we pray and we ask these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.