

“When Being Good Isn’t Good Enough” //

Matthew 5:17–22 // Sermon on the Mount # 2¹

Sun 9:45

Announcement

[1] Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. [2] And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying...

17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

¹ Sources consulted: Tim Keller, “[Law and Love](#)”, April 29, 2012, Redeemer Presbyterian; Jen Wilkin, “A People of Influence”, Session 3 of Sermon on the Mount Bible Study, January 24, 2024; Joby Martin, “[Salt and Light](#)”, April 26, 2020,

21 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

Reader: *This is the Word of God for the people of God*
 Congregation: **Thanks be to God**

You may be seated.

Hey, real quick before we get started. We’re entering into election season... I know that makes a lot of you nervous, but I also know a lot of you want to know more about what the Bible says about how to think about political issues--we have a whole bevy of resources available to you at summitchurch.com/vote or you can text VOTE to 33933 and we can get these resources to you. But please don’t do that now or you won’t pay any attention to what I’m up here saying. But I think you’ll find that helpful. Also, **the Bullpen** podcast that we just launched--we get into a lot of that stuff on there. And my wife is on the podcast this week, and you’ll definitely want to know what she’s got to say on this stuff. But, I wanted to make you aware of those resources.

The Church of Eleven22; Bryan Lorrits, “[The Work of Reconciliation](#)”, September 25, 2024, Bryan Lorrits Podcast; Skip Heitzig, “[Expound: Matthew 5:17-32](#)”, October 26, 2011, Calvary Church; Tommy Nelson, “[The Heart of the People of God](#)”, May 11, 2008, Denton Bible Church. And others as noted throughout.

One more thing: Today is all-call Baptism Sunday--the weekend where we give you a chance to be baptized if you never have--it's one of the best weeks of the year around here, so get excited. A lot of people have already been baptized today, and by God's grace this weekend a lot more will join.

(Title Slide) OK, if you have your Bibles and haven't yet found Matthew 5, please do that.

If you're under the age of 35, like me, the name ENRON may not mean that much to you, but around the turn of the century, Enron was one of the hottest companies in America. It was this massive energy conglomerate located in Houston, TX. *Fortune* magazine named it "America's Most Innovative Company" six years in a row and its stock was soaring!

There was just one problem: Their whole reputation was built on lies. Behind their impressive numbers, they were hiding enormous losses, and in 2001 the whole thing collapsed in one of the biggest corporate scandals in American history.² After the debris settled, all these incredible "how did nobody see this?" kind of stories started coming out. For example, in 1998, the WSJ had sent a bunch of analysts to do an article on the company, and so Enron took 75 of their employees—people like secretaries and custodians—and set them up on a fake trading floor and had them pretend to be energy traders while the analysts walked through. They even brought in family photos and personal items to make their desks look lived-in, and when the analysts walked through the floor, these people picked up their phones and held fake business conversations. And apparently, it worked: the WSJ gave Enron a great rating, and the deception lived on for 3 more years until the whole thing imploded.

² They hid \$600 million in losses. Between August of 2000 and late 2001 the stock price had dropped from \$90/share to less than \$1/share.

That's a pretty good picture of what Jesus is confronting in Matthew 5: Jesus says a lot of people do with religion what Enron did on that fake trading floor: they stage success. They substitute external religious busyness with internal spiritual health.

Jesus puts his finger on the problem in vs 20 when he says, "...unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Let that phrase sink in for a minute. Jesus is not one prone to exaggeration (READ AGAIN).

We're in week 2 of our study on "The Sermon on the Mount"--which is arguably the most important sermon ever preached. It certainly was the most revolutionary--and I would argue that vv 17–20, the passage we're looking at today--encapsulates the heart of this sermon.

Let's review: Last week Pastor Bryan said that one of the reasons Jesus went up into a mountain to give this sermon was that in those days, revolutions always started in the mountains, and so Jesus going up into the mountain shows that he intended to start a revolution. And that's certainly true. But there's something else important happening here. You see, the most famous Lawgiver in Israel's history, a man named Moses, had also gone up into the mountain to receive his Law--so Jesus going up into the mountain to teach his law is him doing a whole "second Moses" kind of thing.

The Gospel writer Matthew is not even subtle in how he sets this up. Basically, in his Gospel, Matthew lays out how the first part of Jesus's life tracks alongside Moses. Check this out:

MOSES	JESUS
 Egypt — Pharaoh tries to kill him	Matthew 2  Egypt — Herod tries to kill him
 Through the water — Red Sea	Matthew 3  Through the water — Baptism
 Wilderness — 40 years	Matthew 4  Wilderness — 40 days
 Up the mountain — Mt. Sinai	Matthew 5  Up the mountain — Sermon on the Mount
 Moses receives the Law	 Jesus fulfills & authoritatively teaches the Law

MOSES → JESUS

Matthew wants you to feel the parallel!

In Matthew 2, Matthew tells us that as a kid, Jesus and his parents had fled to Egypt to escape being killed by Herod, the Jewish King, which was like Moses who had been kept safe in Egypt when Pharaoh, the Egyptian King, tried to kill him.

In Matthew 3, Matthew shows us that Jesus's ministry started with his baptism, where he passed through water and was anointed by God's Spirit. This also was like Moses, who delivered Israel through the Red Sea, which Scripture says was a kind of baptism, after which the presence of God came upon them.

In Matthew 4, Matthew tells us that after Jesus's baptism, he was driven into the desert for 40 days where he was tempted by Satan, which is like Moses and the children of Israel who spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness being tested.

And that brings us to Matthew 5: Just like Moses had gone up into a mountain, Mt Sinai, to receive God's Law, Jesus goes up on a mountain to issue a 'New' Law. **Matthew wants you to feel the parallels between Moses and Jesus.**

But then there's two huge differences between what Moses did and what Jesus did. First, whereas Moses simply *relayed* God's Law to the people (he was just the conduit of it), Jesus **claims to be the source of this Law**. Which is why, throughout this Sermon, Jesus says things like, **vs 21, "You have heard that it was said of those of old... (referring to the Law that Moses gave, now watch this) (vs 22) But I say to you..."** (See how he claims to be the source of the new Law?) Who was the source of Moses's Law? God. Who is the source of this New Law? Jesus himself. See how he's making himself

equal with God? (BTW, whenever you hear someone say the colossally ignorant thing that Jesus never directly claimed to be God in the Gospels, this kind of thing is what you should point out. In so many ways and places, Jesus literally put himself *in the place of God*, *making himself the equal of God*. I mean--to say, like Jesus does in Matthew 5, "God said this... but now I'm saying this..." I mean, unless Jesus is outright the greatest blasphemer ever to walk the face of the earth, he's taking on an authority that doesn't make sense if he doesn't actually think he's God.

So, that's the first difference. The second difference is encapsulated in that phrase back in vs 20, "...unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

The scribes and Pharisees were the groups that had perfected obedience to the Mosaic Law. When Jesus made this statement, everybody would've gasped and started whispering to each other, because nobody could exceed the devotion these guys showed to keeping the Law. It would be like Jesus saying, 'Unless you're in better shape than Seal Team 6, you'll never make the cut.' Seriously, these guys were like the most OCD of religious OCD'ers.

Normal Jewish day-to-day lives were governed by 613 different Laws, but the Pharisees and scribes had developed a whole system of laws on top of those Laws called "the Mishnah," which was basically a bunch of extra laws to make sure they didn't break one of the 613.

For example,

- **The Law said to tithe**--which means to give God the first 10% of your income and all your possessions--but the Pharisees asked, "What all did that apply to?" So the Mishnah specified what in

your life you had to tithe on and what you didn't. For example, if your cow has 10 calves, you have to tithe 1 of them back to God. But if you have a cat and it has kittens, do you have to tithe one of those kittens back to God? And the answer was... No, God doesn't want any of your nasty cats. (That's true, look it up!) The Mishnah also said you should tithe on the spices that you grew in your garden. So, for every 10 mint leaves, you were supposed to give 1 back to God. I mean, y'all, when we take up the offering and you're putting in stuff from your spice drawer, that's serious business.

- **Here's another one:** The Law said you shouldn't work on the Sabbath, but what exactly counts as work? The Mishnah gave you an allotment of steps you could take on the Sabbath before it technically counted as "work." 2000 steps was the limit.³ If they'd had Oura Rings back then, some member of the family at church would have been checking that thing: "1,998...1,999... STOP! Everybody stop. Nobody move! Any step from this point on is sin."
- **One more, just for fun:** The Law says you shouldn't work on the Sabbath, and transporting stuff from point A to point B was a kind of work,⁴ but that raises the question: "What *technically* counts as 'carrying'?" Here's what the Pharisees concluded--and I'm not making this up; I actually looked it up this week. This is Mishnah chapter 10, section 3, I copied this down verbatim: They said if you carry something in the *normal* way—meaning in one of your hands or on your back or slung over your shoulder—that was carrying and obviously a Sabbath violation. But if you carried it in an *abnormal* way, which they defined as...
 - ...on the back of your hand
 - in your mouth
 - in or around your ear
 - in your hair

³ Technically, it was 2000 cubits, but they estimated 1 cubit per step.

⁴ Numbers 15:32–36; Jeremiah 17:21–22.

- o tucked between your belt and clothing
- o in the hem of your garment (meaning down here at the cuff of your pants)
- o in your shoe, or, best of all,
- o balanced on your elbow (Mishnah 10:3)⁵

...that was NOT a Sabbath violation. I expect you guys with Bibles to walk out carrying them on your elbow this morning.

That was how meticulous they got with the Law. None of that is a joke, btw. The point is, if anybody looked righteous, it was these guys.

And Jesus looks at the crowd and says (vs 20), “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Can’t you imagine everybody thinking, “Exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees? The step-counting guys? The balancing-stuff-on-my-elbow guys? How am I supposed to ever do that?”

Now, question: Do you think Jesus was saying, “These guys obey 613 rules; I want you to obey 713!” No, what he’s saying is actually even MORE extreme! He explains himself in vv 21–22: “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

Moses said you shouldn’t murder. Jesus says, “But God cares about more than whether or not you actually murder someone. God cares about what goes on in your heart—as in, how you feel about people who make you mad. And if you’re angry with someone to the point that you insult them, or curse them, or wish their harm in any way—then you have the spirit of murder in you even if you don’t follow through with the action.

Here’s what Jesus is asking you to consider: Do you ever get angry with somebody to the point that you wish pain or harm on them? You’re in a stand still on 540 and somebody whips out into that lane beside you that’s not really a lane and starts to pass everybody and you think, “I’d really love to just side-swipe you right now.” This would be what Jesus is talking about.

Or, you’re just mad at somebody and think, “*I really want to slap you right now. I hate you. I wish bad things would happen to you. I wish somebody would put you in your place—and I’d really love for that person to be me. I hope you do something where you really embarrass yourself. I’m enjoying fantasizing about you embarrassing yourself. I hope you get acne and gain lots of weight.*” Something really negative. Anybody? Look at **vs 22**: That’s the murderous spirit Jesus is exposing.

Or how about this: Are you ever in an argument with someone and you say something really rude or mean to them—maybe in a text, or in the heat of a moment—and later you feel bad, and so you go to them and say, “Hey, I’m really sorry I said that. I called you stupid, incompetent, a loser, a worthless waste of skin...” something like that,

⁵ https://www.sefaria.org/English_Explanation_of_Mishnah_Shabbat.10.3

and ***what do we almost always say next?*** We say, “I didn’t mean that. That’s not how I really feel.”

Except... in that moment, that was EXACTLY how you felt. And it was precisely what you meant. Amirite? It’s just that now you feel bad about that and you’re embarrassed because, for one moment, what was actually in your heart escaped the half-dozen filters that normally keep your feelings and emotions hidden.

One pastor friend of mine refers to it as the “Where did *THAT* come from?” moment. You say or do something ugly and you immediately think, “Where did that come from? That’s not like me!”

But guess where it came from? You! That ugly thing you said wasn’t an alien intruder that temporarily took you over. No, the situation simply revealed a capability that was already in your heart.

Jesus says, “That. That’s what I’m talking about.” That’s where real sin lives: in the motivations, desires, and secret thoughts of the heart.⁶

In **vs 27** Jesus gives us a second example of this: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ [28] But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

We’ll spend a lot more time on this next week, but here’s the main point Jesus gets at: The prohibition against adultery is not just about not having sex with people you’re married to, **it’s about what goes on in here** (heart) and here (head). You could legitimately only have sexual intercourse with one person, within the boundaries of marriage, for your entire life and still be pitch-black guilty of breaking

this commandment. It’s what goes through your mind on a day-by-day basis. Where your mind goes when it idles.

I’ve asked you before to consider: You know how your phone has the little ‘Find My’ app or Life360 where other people can track your whereabouts if you’ve given them permission? That’s a wonderful safety feature, but it can also be annoying, right? Teenagers, your parents are like, “Why were you at so-and-so’s house last night at 2am? You were supposed to be at this other guy’s house asleep.” Or, college students, your parents are like, “Hey, why aren’t you in class right now? I see on the app that you’re still in your dorm room. Are you skipping class?” Or, “Hey, it’s Sunday morning, why aren’t you in church?” Some of my friends are like, “*J.D., why are you at McDonald’s again? This is the second time today.*” Of course, if you are up to actual no-good, other people being able to track your whereabouts can really get you into trouble.

What would life be like for you if there was a little app that let friends and family or whomever you gave permission see exactly what you were thinking at any given moment? Meaning, at any moment, they could open the app and see your exact thoughts? Would you give *anyone* permission to view that? I wouldn’t. I probably couldn’t keep my job here for very long if that was the case, right? Or imagine if you had a display monitor attached to the front of your head that displayed what you were thinking at any given moment—how many conversations would that end rather awkwardly?

Jesus says, “But that’s where God lives. That’s what he sees and evaluates.” And maybe right there you say, “Well, why does God care what’s in our heart, so long as it doesn’t affect our behavior?”

⁶ From Andy Stanley, message: *From the Heart*

Because God is Spirit, and where he abides with us and relates to us is in our spirit.

I mean, think about this in relation to those that you love: If I knew every time my wife was with me she was always wishing she was with some other guy, some old boyfriend, and every time she kissed me she was imagining him... If I knew that's really how she felt, do you think I'd be ok with that as long as she acted like a faithful wife to me? No, I'd be broken-hearted. Or imagine if a middle-school kid knew that whenever his dad came to one of his games all his dad was thinking about was the 1000 other places he'd rather be than with his son, or about how boring this is and how disappointed he is with his son--do you think the middle school kid would be ok with that just so long as the dad fulfilled his obligations?

No. Hear this: **(vs 20), "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."**

Because God sees the heart. God, you see, is not just after righteous behavior. He's after a whole new kind of righteousness. A righteousness that grows from desire. A righteousness where you seek God because you love God; a righteousness where you do righteousness because you love righteousness. A righteousness that exceeds even that of the scribes and Pharisees.

And that's the dilemma with the Mosaic law. It's the dilemma with all religious laws--Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, all of them. No law--not even a perfect law, can change the heart. Laws can only correct external behaviors; they can't transform internal desires. And God wants people in heaven who love him more than anything and desire his Kingdom more than anything, who don't obey because they have to, but because *they want to*.

One more example: Imagine you've got an employee you don't trust--he's always coming in late; he watches YouTubes all day; he's constantly stealing stuff from the company--so you put a security camera over his desk and you show him that security camera. Suddenly he's Employee of the Month! He's there on time. He works hard. He quits stealing stuff from the supply closet. Has his heart really changed? Would it be wise to make him your CFO after 2 months of good behavior? No, ***the camera didn't change him, it merely restrained him***. Take away the camera and he'll probably go back to being the same old person he really is.

That's the difference Jesus is getting at: religion puts cameras up all over your life: Rules. Accountability. Consequences. Reputation. Fear of getting caught. Those things can restrain ugly behavior. But ***Restraint is not Transformation***.

God isn't looking for people who have the self-control not to murder because they don't want the consequences but secretly hate others, or people who stay faithful to their marriages but are eaten up with selfish lust; **(vs 17)** or people who crave revenge but manage to keep smiling because they know somebody, somewhere is watching. God wants a new kind of righteousness—a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees--a righteousness that flows from transformation.

And if you have any self-awareness at all; any knowledge of your own heart, this will bring you to the point of despair. How can I ever have this kind of righteousness--the kind of righteousness that exceeds that of even the scribes and Pharisees? The kind of righteousness where I change AT THE HEART LEVEL?

Do you have that, friend? Is that the story of your life? It's certainly not my story. I'm a walking illustration of the prophet Jeremiah's statement: the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked--who can know it?

So, with an impossible standard like this, who can possibly expect to get to heaven? Great question. Jesus anticipated it: Vs 17 **"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."**

First, Jesus says, "Don't think I'm coming around saying: 'You know what? Moses was a little bit uptight, amirite? God's not a legalist. Relax; take it easy. God grades on the curve. Just be a good person, try to love others and do your best and God's cool with that.'" That's how most people in our culture interpret Jesus; Jesus was like a nice, substitute teacher for the Mosaic law. He wore Birkenstocks and was pretty chill and just kind of cool with everything--he's like, "Just do your best, try hard, and he's gonna be OK with it. But that wasn't Jesus's message at all. Look at vs 18: **For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven...**

Sooner will heaven or earth pass away than the standards of God's perfection will dim by one iota.

⁷ Jesus alludes to that curse in this passage. Vs 21, break the law and you will be 'liable to judgment.' Vs 22, break the law and you'll be 'liable to the council' and

Jesus's answer to our dilemma is in that one word in **vs 17, fulfill**. **I came not to abolish the Law or Prophets but fulfill them. Jesus fulfilled the Law in 3 ways.** This is so important, you should be writing this down:

1. **Jesus and Jesus alone lived out the demands of the Law perfectly.** Jesus is the only person who's ever lived who obeyed God fully, in every situation, from the heart, with the right motives. And not because he was being watched; and not because he was trying to earn God's blessing, but because he loved God with his whole heart and pleasing God and loving others was what he genuinely wanted to do.
2. **Jesus fulfilled the Law's curses.** When Moses gave the Old Testament Law, he gave it with a curse: Deut 27:26: if you fail to obey these things, you will die.⁷ But the Law also says, **Deut 21:22: "And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and you hang him on a tree... he is cursed by God."** BTW: this was a bit of a random insertion. You've got all these curses attached to the Law--"If you don't obey these things you will be cursed"--and then randomly Moses says that anyone who dies hung up on a tree is cursed by God. That's because this Law was prophesying that one day a Savior would come who would obey this Law perfectly and still die by being hanged on a tree, thus fulfilling all of the Law's curses.
3. **Because of that, Jesus can give us the righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees.** And that comes to us in 2 ways: First, **A. Positionally:** We are credited with Jesus's righteousness. Because on the cross Jesus took our record of sins, he can now credit us with his record of perfect righteousness. The gospel is that we traded places; that's why when people get baptized here,

headed for 'hell's fire.' He mentions hell and judgment multiple times in this chapter.

they wear a shirt that says “Jesus in my place.” Jesus took my curse of sin and death and I get his record of perfect righteousness. Ephesians says we now wear the “breastplate of righteousness,” and I love the breastplate analogy... ever seen the movie *Gladiator*? **PIC** No matter what you have going on under here, when you put on the breastplate, you’ve got perfect abs. When Paul says God has given you the breastplate of righteousness, probably somewhere in his mind is this dimension of it: I’ve got Jesus’s perfect righteousness abs. I wear his righteousness, and God registers me as perfect in his sight even though I’m not. Because I’ve been gifted Christ’s righteousness, I have the righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

But that leads me to the second way he gives this “righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees” is

B. Transformationally: His Spirit literally comes in and changes our hearts. If any man is in Christ, **2 Cor 5:17 says...** Old things have passed away; they literally die. All things become new. That means a new heart. New life. Renewed emotions. Jesus wasn’t calling for a better version of you; he’s saying you need a new you.

Last week **Pastor Bryan** said the Kingdom of God comes to those at the end of themselves. To those poor in spirit; to those who mourn,

- To those who are discouraged; who have come to the end of themselves and concluded again that they just can’t do it.
- To those who KNOW they aren’t good enough
- To those who have the honesty to admit this weekend, “I’m an addict.” “I’m broken.” I’ve made a mess of my life. It’s like Pastor Bryan said last week, “The truth is, we’re all broken, just some of us don’t know how to admit it, yet!”

But see, when you admit it, you’ll be ready to receive Christ’s righteousness and his power.

VAMP

I got this letter this week from someone who just finished our Alpha course and now serves it as a leader:

“I grew up in church and knew a lot about God, but by college, I had quietly walked away from him. Then a coworker invited me to a Summit worship and prayer night. I’m still shocked that I actually went.”

That night, I completely broke down. For the first time, I understood what it meant to be poor in spirit, to realize I had nothing to offer God, no righteousness to stand on, and no way to fix myself.

But when I finally turned to God, I didn’t find rejection. I found mercy. I was on the ground pleading for God, and he was already reaching down to help me back up.

Shortly after that, I went through Alpha and slowly found my way back to faith. I decided to go

all in on following Jesus. Now, I serve on our Alpha team, and I'm planning to start seminary in the Spring to learn more and explore whether full-time ministry might be my next step." -- Zach

Friend, that can be your story!

Jesus said that unless you have a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you have no hope of ever entering heaven. Let that sink in. But, believe it or not, there is a way for you to obtain that kind righteousness, and the way you do it is by acknowledging your poverty in spirit and acknowledging that Jesus did for you what you couldn't do for yourself

Read this verse in light of the Beatitudes. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Those who realize they have no hope of righteousness on their own; to those who come as beggars with empty hands to Jesus--their is the Kingdom of heaven.

When you trust Jesus and ask him to put his Spirit into you to change you in ways you could never change yourself, he'll do it. We call that "receiving Christ" (ever hear that in church?). Receiving Christ. And that's not just a quick little prayer you pray or a ritual you go through; it's you giving Jesus your whole life.

Jesus is willing to do that for you, if you want him to, but he never forces that on you; you have to choose to receive it. And you receive it simply by... receiving it; by calling on him in faith, saying, *"Jesus, I need your righteousness. I need you to put your Spirit into me. I can't be righteous enough to earn heaven; I can't fix myself; I can't make myself into the man or the husband or the mother you want me to be.*

When it comes to righteousness, Jesus, I'm poor. Poorer than poor. I need what only you can give."

And then after you receive that, you show it by baptism, which we're going to give you a chance to do today if you never have. We do this a few times a year at the Summit Church. Baptism is your public profession that you are trading places with Jesus, giving your life to Jesus. You come up at one of our campuses, and you confess your belief that Jesus is Lord, and we dip you under the water for a second to show you are accepting Christ's death and resurrection as your own. Over the years when we do this, I always hear the same excuses from people for why they won't do it. They'll say,

Yeah, well, this is great, but I didn't come ready to get baptized today. The good news is that we came ready for you.

People say, "I didn't bring a towel." Trust me, we got towels. Literally, thousands of them. We have an unreasonable number of towels. If the zombie apocalypse comes, Summit Church will be the regional towel distribution center. We've got you covered—literally.

People say, *"I can't get these clothes wet."* We have clothes for you.

You say, *"Yeah, but you're not gonna have my size."* We have every size from Baby Gap to queen size bed sheet. We got 'em all. Seriously.

You say, *"What about my underwear?"* We have underwear for you. I'm not joking. It's the weirdest thing we order every year, but we do it. And we don't want them back. Yours to keep. Free gift from us. Says "Summit Church" across the back; just kidding. That's not true.

You say, *"What about my hair?"* We have shower caps at every single campus.

Again, you didn't come ready for him. We came ready for you, and more importantly, let that point you to the fact that HE came ready for you. He's done all the work, all you have to do is step into it...

For some of you, your objection is less practical and more substantive:

- You say, "It's **embarrassing** to get wet in front of a bunch of people." I'm tempted here to point out that God sovereignly sent a hurricane to take away that excuse from you. But, yes, I'll grant it's a little inconvenient. But it's a command of Jesus. It kind of shows whether you're really serious about following Jesus. I mean, if you won't follow Jesus in this one, simple command, how do you expect to follow him in more difficult ones? And, btw, do you realize how much Jesus sacrificed to save you? He died on a cross for your sin, but you're not willing to inconvenience yourself even a little bit to obey his command? That doesn't make any sense.
- Some say, "**I was baptized as a kid...**" **That's great.** And that was a wonderful expression of faith by your parents. But in Scripture, baptism is always a confession of your faith. You can ratify it. People say to me, "Well, I don't want to reject what my parents taught me, or do something that implies my previous baptism as a baby was no good." Don't think about it that way. Think about the hope they expressed over you at your baptism. They were hoping... / you get to call them!
- You say, "**But they're not here and I want them to see this.**" Good news, whoever is with you has a camera, and they'll get great pictures. If not, ask us and we'll make sure to get one.

Stop making excuses when Jesus has given a command. Today should be the day of your obedience.

- One more: **I know a lot of people who tell me they are waiting to get baptized...** because they feel like they're not ready--that they need to get better at church and better at living out the Christian life before they take a big step like baptism. But see, listen--you've got the order reversed. You're like, "When my righteousness is sufficient enough, then I'll get baptized." That ain't ever gonna happen. It would have to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. You see, it's not that you 'live the Christian life well' and then baptism is your reward or your crown. No, your baptism becomes the power that **ENABLES** you to live the Christian life. **Baptism is not your crown. It's your root.** That's what you see in the life of Jesus: Jesus's baptism happened at the beginning of his ministry--before he started. The Holy Spirit came on him *after* he was baptized. The same is true for you. **Listen: Spiritually, you'll grow from your baptism, not toward it. Baptism becomes the fountain of your growth; that's why you do it at the beginning.** Does that make sense? Without your baptism, you are depriving yourself of one of the most important and valuable resources of the Christian life

Think about what baptism represents...

- **When you get baptized, you go into the water representing your identification with Christ's death.** That perfect life he lived--it was for you. That cursed death he died--he was doing it in your place and you are claiming it, receiving it as yours. And you accept all that as your own, and in baptism you are identifying with it. It's as if the old you is dying--the you that was trying to be good enough to get to God; the old, cursed flesh that could never obey God--you're dying to it, and the new life of Christ, resurrection life, the power of the Spirit, comes into you.
- One of the reasons we cheer whenever someone comes up out of the water is that we are watching a literal resurrection. For that person in the water, their old sinful selves are dying and they are

being raised to new life--eternal life, in Christ! How can your heart not explode with joy seeing that?

This is what you have a chance to do today. Every head bowed...

- **(Pray to Receive Christ):** If you died right now, are you 100% sure that you would go to heaven? Is there any doubt at all? Let me ask it this way: If you were to stand before God right now and God said, "Why should I let you into heaven?" What would you say? Would you say, "Well, I've tried to be a good person. I was sincere. I tried to do the right thing. I never did anything really bad and tried to make up for my mistakes." If what fills your mind when I ask you that is anything you've done or not done--you're relying on your righteousness, and I'm telling you, you don't have sufficient righteousness to even get close to heaven. Jesus said unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, it's woefully inefficient.

Now, see, If God asked me why he should let me into heaven, I'd say, "Because Jesus traded places with me. I received his righteousness, which means I have the righteousness that exceeds that of scribes and Pharisees because it's his righteousness. Jesus and I traded places: on the cross he took all my sin, and I now wear his righteousness. You can't turn me away, God. To turn me away, you'd have to turn Jesus away because I'm in him now! I'm as sure of heaven as Jesus is, because Jesus is my surety of heaven... And he can be yours today, too, if you want him to.

If you're not 100% sure that you've ever officially made that trade and embraced Christ as your own, pray this with me:

"Jesus, I know that I can't save myself and only you can save me. I know it. I receive you as my Savior, and I surrender to you as Lord."

- **Some of you need to show this decision through baptism.**

Counselors in the aisle. Maybe you just received Christ just now--you prayed with me; OR maybe you received Christ a while ago and have just never shown that through a public profession in baptism. **Either way,** I want to invite you to step out and come

- Don't want to come alone? Bring a friend
- Have questions? It's ok. Come start a conversation.

I'll count to 3; we'll stand and step, and Summit, we'll cheer for all we know God is doing today, OK?