

The Stopping of the Sacrifices

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[0 : 00] Good morning, church. It's good to see you all this morning. Our text this morning is Hebrews 10, verses 1 through 10. Let me invite you to turn there with me. It's page 1006 in the Pew Bible.

If you want to turn there, Hebrews 10. Before I read this passage for us, let me pray.

God, indeed, we know that we are prone to wander. So, Lord, we ask now that you would take your word and, again, call us forth to yourself.

God, grant us hearts that are receptive to hear what you are saying to us through your word this morning and by your spirit. God, help us to see Christ in his beauty this morning.

In deeper and fresher ways, Lord, bind our wandering hearts to him and so to you. God, we ask all this in Christ's name.

[1 : 09] Amen. Hebrews 10, 1 through 10. Let me read this passage for us. For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come, instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins every year.

For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, When he said, When he said above, You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings.

These are offered according to the law. Then he added, Behold, I have come to do your will. He does away with the first in order to establish the second.

And by that will, We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

[2 : 42] I was in the laundry mat on Monday, And there's a bulletin board there with advertisements for all sorts of local businesses.

Pet care, daycare, car care, you name it. If you're ever in the wash tub on Monday morning, you will find me there. One of the ads on this bulletin board was for a gym.

And it simply said in big letters, If you're not working on yourself, you're not working. If you're not working on yourself, you're not working.

Now it strikes me that the sentiment behind that ad is one of the great mantras of our time. One of the beliefs that we nearly all hold is that the greatest project before each one of us is to fashion a self.

To construct my identity. To work on my self. To make a better and more true me.

[3 : 52] And we're told that that is the way to authenticity and to happiness. That self-expression and self-construction, well that's what it means to be human. And if I'm not engaged in that work, well golly, what am I doing with my life?

If you're not working on yourself, well you're not working. You're wasting your time. You're doing nothing really productive at the end of the day. Of course there are all sorts of other things that we could point to to get at this deeply held cultural belief of ours.

Think of the closing stanza of that 19th century poem *Invictus*, which was sort of made popular by the 2009 movie about Nelson Mandela and the South African rugby team with Matt Damon. Here's how that poem goes.

It says, It matters not how straight, that is how narrow, the gate. How charged with punishments, the scroll. I am the master of my fate.

I am the captain of my soul. I am the captain of my soul. It's up to me to determine what will become of me.

[5 : 08] Now for roughly 200 years, this idea has been gaining ground. At least since the Romantic movement of the late 18th century. If you remember from English class, William Wordsworth, you get the idea, right?

And yet one has to wonder whether culturally, now, in our time, whether this idea is finally starting to run out of steam.

Whether we aren't starting to see, finally, how problematic it is. Think on the personal level. We've been told that happiness is found in self-expression, self-construction, and we've been trying to live that way.

And yet, are we happy? Reports tell us that anxiety and depression, and tragically, even suicide, are at alarmingly high levels across the board.

College campuses, just to take one little slice of our culture, are seeing mental health needs rise every year. And of course, there are multiple causes of these things.

[6 : 10] I don't want to oversimplify. But at one level, it's as if this drive to create myself, to be the captain of my own ship, has simply been a burden too great to bear.

We've handed ourselves the keys, and we simply haven't known where to go. But if it's running out of steam personally, then it's also, I think, running out of steam perhaps culturally too.

As our public discourse becomes more and more divided. As something like a common good seems almost an impossible idea. After all, how can there be a common good if we're all creating our own destinies and identities for ourselves, right?

Personally, we're fragmenting. And communally, we're fragmenting. If you're not working on yourself, you're not working.

Perhaps by the time an idea ends up on a laundromat advertisement for a gym, the idea itself is no longer working. But where do we go?

[7 : 22] How do we find our way back out of the maze that 200 plus years have led us into? If my life isn't meant to be lived as one giant self-construction, self-expression project, then how should it be lived?

What's the alternative? What's the hope for us? What's the hope for us? What's the hope for us? What's the hope for us? And Hebrews 10, 1 through 10, actually points us to the answer.

And shockingly to our ears, the answer is met in one who found his identity holy in the will of another.

And in so doing, achieved a perfect wholeness and holiness for everyone who stops trying to construct their own lives and who put their lives completely into his hands.

But before Hebrews gets to that answer, he's going to show us the problem. Look again at verses 1 through 4.

[8 : 35] Verse 1 says, Now, as we've seen in our study of Hebrews, the law here is the law of Moses.

And in particular, he has in mind the sacrificial and ceremonial aspects of the law. The tabernacle, the priesthood, the animal sacrifices, the cleansing rites. And all of that, he says, even the sacrifices themselves can't make you perfect.

And perfect here means not necessarily without flaw, but complete. To be perfect means that you lack nothing to be right with God and have free and intimate access with him.

Which, friends, is exactly what you and I were created for. Could it be that in our search to create the perfect self, one that will express myself to the T and fulfill my being, could it be that we've forgotten who we're actually created for?

And having excluded God from the picture, our hunt for perfection, for completion, still goes on and on and on. We still try to become something, but it's become an endless and tireless search because we don't know where or what we're supposed to become.

[10 : 03] And just like the law prescribed a continual stream of sacrifices every year, don't you and I keep trying to continually reinvent ourselves in a continual stream?

Maybe I'll be a jock or a goth or a prep or a band geek, right? Give it up for band geeks. No, just kidding. And then we grow up and it's maybe I'll be a lawyer or a policymaker or a doctor or a teacher.

Or a vagabond, you know. Or maybe I'll be in this relationship and when that one doesn't work, I'll move to this relationship. And when that one doesn't work, I'll move to this relationship. Maybe I need to be more physically healthy.

Maybe I need to be more intellectually interesting. Maybe I need to get religion. And it keeps going and going and going and it never stops. And because it never stops, doesn't that show us that it never actually works?

That we'll never reach completion that way. And by giving the law 1,500 years before Christ, God was trying to teach not just Israel but all of us some important truths.

[11 : 28] God was trying to teach us something that we needed to know. And first, what the law sacrifices were teaching us, what it was showing us was a reminder of sins.

That's verse 3. Every time a faithful Israelite came to the tabernacle or temple and offered a sacrifice in accordance with the law, he or she was being reminded of the sin that stood between themselves and God.

And because these sacrifices couldn't take away sins, couldn't cleanse the conscience, they couldn't ultimately put us right with God. And for 1,500 years, God in his kindness set up this system that every day reminded humanity that in their most important relationship between themselves and God, a barrier of sin remained.

Isn't it a great kindness in God to show us so patiently for so many years where the true problem lies?

You know, sometimes with my kids, I'm like, one strike and you're out. Boom, timeout, done. I've learned I'm not a very patient man. Friends, how much unlike us is God?

[12 : 48] That in his infinite patience, he would take such great lengths to show us what we truly need and to remind us again and again and again where our real problem lies.

You see, friend, your desire and my desire, our desire to find a self that's whole and that feels fitting and right is there because you were created in God's image to know him and worship him and live him and reflect him.

And why are some of us so relentless to keep working on ourselves? Is it not because deep down there's a sense that something's not right and that all the work isn't actually working?

And we keep believing that maybe this next thing will finally make me right. Maybe this next thing will finally make me clean. Maybe this next thing will finally make me whole. Friends, listen to what the law is telling you.

You were made for God and your sin is what needs to be dealt with. Now, of course, if that's all God was trying to teach us in the law, it'd be a pretty bleak picture, right?

[14 : 13] But look again at verse one. The law is not just a reminder of sins, but it's also a shadow of the good things to come. And of course, a shadow isn't the thing itself, right?

But a shadow points you or shows you something of what that thing is. And Hebrews is saying the law foreshadows the good things, the very reality that's to come.

Imagine on this side, the sort of bright sun of God's plan and God's future. And then on this side, shadows that run the whole way to the wall. Friends, stretching into the distance, that's the old covenant.

That's the Old Testament with its sacrifices and with its temple and with its priesthood. Shadows cast. But of course, the great question is, who is it that's casting the shadow?

Who is the true form of those realities? Who's the one upon whom the light of God's future and God's plan shines that casts such a brilliant picture in the Old Testament?

[15 : 24] Friends, it's Christ. Christ, he's the one who stands at the center of what God is doing in the world.

The light is shining on him. And cast its shadow back into the Old Testament. So when you read the Old Testament, you're looking at four shadows of Christ.

Christ, he's towering across its pages. And God has orchestrated all the elements of the Old Testament, the prophets and priests and kings, the temples and tabernacles and sacrifices, the wisdom and the law and the narratives, all of it as a foreshadowing of the true image to come.

And the question that Hebrews has for his audience and for us is why in the world do we keep on living in the shadows when you can turn and see the thing itself?

Let's read again verses 5 through 7. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, sacrifices and offerings you've not desired, but a body you've prepared for me.

[16 : 42] In burnt offerings and sin offerings, you've taken no pleasure. Then I said, behold, I've come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.

In other words, what the law could not do through all of its sacrifices, Jesus does by submitting himself wholly to the will of the Father.

The eternal Son of God, one with the Father and the Spirit from before all time, takes on a body, a body in the incarnation and lives a life of complete obedience to God the Father.

In Psalm 40, the text that Hebrews is quoting here in verses 5 through 7, it's a Psalm of David, who you remember is ancient Israel's great king. And in these verses, the king is expressing his desire to heed God's word and to obey him.

Because it's over and over again, what the Old Testament says is, what God desires more than sacrifice, his first people to trust him and obey him and to love him. To obey is better than sacrifice.

[17 : 51] And it's fitting that Hebrews would put this Psalm on the lips of Jesus as the words he says upon entering the world in his incarnation.

Because don't they summarize the mission of Christ perfectly? Friends, he is the utterly obedient king. Not a single sacrifice was required for him because he never sinned.

Even the great David fell. Even the best of us in this room are flawed and fallen and haven't trusted and loved and obeyed God like we should and like is right.

But friends, not Jesus. Jesus perfectly obeyed God. He had come to do God's will.

In his earthly ministry, do you remember how Jesus summarized God's moral law in two great commands? The first, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.

[19 : 05] And the second, to love your neighbor as yourself. And you know, the truth is none of us have kept these commands. And in fact, Christianity is for people who know that they haven't kept those commands.

So if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, we're really glad you're here. But let me tell you a little secret that's not so secret. This room is full.

I mean full of sinners. each and every last one of us. And you're welcome here too.

You belong here as well. Because the glory of what this whole thing is about is that into the sea of sinful humanity, Jesus came and lived a life of complete trust trust and love and submission and obedience to the Father.

And that perfect loving obedience led him to be the most compelling person who ever walked the earth. Crowds gathered.

[20 : 25] Outcasts loved him. Religious people had no idea what to do with him. history can't seem to forget him. And his closest followers came to believe the ones who had the closest view of his life day in and day out were the ones who finally came to believe that he was God's true king.

But shockingly as Jesus' submission to the Father's will continues, it eventually leads to conflict and to betrayal and to arrest and to abandonment.

And finally to crucifixion. And on the night he was betrayed, Jesus, knowing that he was about to drink the cup of our death, the cup of God's hatred for our sin, says, Father, not my will, but yours be done.

As Paul put it in the passage we read earlier, he was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. He had come to do the Father's will, and he did it to the end.

And having given his life for our sins, three days later, God raised him from the dead, demonstrating to everyone that the sacrifice was perfect and acceptable.

[22 : 03] And Christ ascended to the right hand of the Father where he sits right now to present his perfect life and his sacrifice for our sins for all who would believe.

And he's commanding all of us to repent and to believe in him and to find our life in his life.

Friend, I wonder when you think about this central claim of Christianity that Jesus died on the cross for sinners, I wonder how you imagine that in your mind when you think about God. Do you imagine an angry father in heaven reluctantly being convinced to change his mind about sinful humanity because Jesus just happened to step in at the last minute?

The sort of angry father and the willing son. Or do you imagine the son being sort of an innocent and reluctant victim, sort of mistakenly finding himself caught up in this plan of a vengeful, of a sort of vengeful and wrathful God?

Friends, too often in our thinking about the work of salvation we pit the father and son against one another, but I hope you see from this text that that is a gross caricature of what we find in scripture.

[23 : 21] In fact, that idea misses it altogether. The Bible teaches nothing of that sort. Instead, what we really find is this. The father in love planning a work of redemption for sinful humanity and the son in love accomplishing that work and even the spirit going forth in love to bring that work to its completion.

salvation. And the wonder of this plan is that God, father, son, and holy spirit brings about salvation for sinners without in any way compromising his holy character or his loving character.

Without rejecting either his perfect holiness or his perfect love. Because in holiness, he condemns sin. And in love, he bears that condemnation himself.

Friends, every other religion will tell you what you have to sacrifice in order to win favor with God.

What you need to perform. Whether it's the sacrifice of a really moral, scrupulous life, or whether it's the performance of daily rituals and prayers.

But at the heart of Christianity is something totally different. In Christianity, God makes the sacrifice. God does the work.

[24 : 50] What God requires of us, perfect human obedience, God provides. The perfect obedience of Christ.

yours through faith. This is God's will, as our passage puts it. His purpose, his plan.

Do you see how incredibly generous and loving that it is? How unlike anything else it is that God would choose to freely forgive and cleanse everyone who puts their life into the hands of the risen Christ.

who died for you? You see, friends, at the end of the day, there are really only two ways to live. You can keep trying to work on your perfect self.

Or you can give your life to the only one who really is perfect. One is a road that will lead eventually to darkness and loneliness far from the God who made us and loves us.

[26 : 05] But the other is a road that leads to freedom and joy in his presence. In fact, the word that Hebrews uses to describe it in verse 10 is sanctified.

sanctified by his, that is by God's will at his initiative, because it's his plan, because he loves, by God's will, we who have trusted in Christ have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Now, sanctified has got to be one of the most religiously sounding words in the planet, right? But it means to make something holy. To be sanctified is to be made holy.

And sometimes in the New Testament, this word sanctification describes an ongoing process of progressively becoming more and more like Jesus after you become a Christian.

But sometimes in the New Testament, this word sanctification, being sanctified, is used to describe not an ongoing process, but something that's definitively true.

[27 : 15] A position, a status that you have before God because you're in Christ. And that's how Hebrews is using it here. He's saying that when God looks at us in Christ, he sees us as holy, as clean, as complete.

Because Christ did all that the law required for us, fulfilling its commands, paying its penalties. Now there's nothing lacking. That's what perfect means.

There's nothing lacking for us to be fit for God's presence and God's purpose. When God looks at you in Christ, he's not looking around for the better version of you.

He's not sizing you up to decide whether or not you'll make the cut. Oh, Stan, he needs to hit the gym. Mmm, that one better do some more penance.

No, friends. He's made you holy. You're in. You're clean. You're complete. Now, yes, he's going to do everything in his power to see that you actually grow and change and actually share his holiness actually in your life.

[28 : 38] We'll get to that in chapter 12. Buckle your seatbelt. But the reason he's doing all of that hard, glorious work in you is because he already accepts you.

Because he's already made you holy in Christ. And all this means three things and then we'll close. First, having been sanctified in Christ, it releases us from our guilt.

Verse 2 said that the law could never deal with our consciousness of sin. No matter what we did, no matter how many sacrifices we made, no matter how hard we tried to be a good person, or how hard we worked at constructing the authentic me, deep down things still weren't right.

And there was a residual sense of guilt and shame. And many of us never even knew why we felt that way because we didn't even believe in God in the first place, but it never went away. And our

psychotherapist told us to go have more sex, so we did it, and that didn't work either.

The preacher just said sex from the pulpit. But now, you see friends, but now that Christ has made us clean through his perfect life, now that we're in him, united to him through faith, our past can no longer accuse us.

[29 : 59] we're free from our guilt. Look, I know that some of us in here have done things that if you knew someone else knew what you did, you would never come back.

But friends, let me say to you that whatever it is, if you're in Christ, it's done. That's not you anymore. it's been cleansed through the offering of his body for you.

You've been sanctified. You've been made holy. And if you're someone who's afflicted by a guilty conscience, remember your baptism. Yeah, we've got this big box up here.

Do you remember how after coming to faith in Christ, you stood before the church and professed your faith in the Lord Jesus? And do you remember how you stood in that water and went down and came back up?

Friends, that is God's way of saying something to you. Are you listening? That through your faith in Christ, you've been cleansed.

[31 : 09] That your sins died with Christ on the cross and that your new life began with him in his resurrection. Baptism is Jesus' gift to you. It's his way of taking that spiritual reality and shouting it into your heart.

You're clean. You're new. You're mine. And he does it publicly, right? We get up in front of people and we do this thing so that everyone can remind you of it when you start to doubt.

And so that whenever anyone else gets baptized, like we'll do this morning, you can be reminded that it's for you too. Here's how the Heidelberg Catechism put it nearly 450 years ago.

Christ instituted this outward washing and with it made a promise that as surely as water washes away the dirt from the body, so certainly his blood and his spirit have washed away my soul's impurity.

that is all my sins. Friends, do you see what they're saying? They're not saying that this water actually does anything to you, but they're saying it's a promise of Christ, that He's speaking something to you, that as surely as you've gone down and up, so surely your sins have been washed away through faith in Christ.

[32 : 39] So when your conscience is troubled and your inner accusations come, remember your baptism. and in so doing remember Jesus' work for you.

The Puritans used to say, for every one look you take it yourself, take ten looks at Christ and who He is and what He's done for you. Now of course this sanctification, this release from guilt doesn't mean that as Christians we'll never feel conviction for sins that we commit after becoming believers because the Holy Spirit lives in us, we definitely will feel conviction.

And doesn't Jesus teach us to pray that we would have to forgive each other just as God has forgiven us. So clearly there's still a place in our Christian life for confession of sins, for continual repentance in our Christian walk.

So friends, if God is laying something on your heart this morning, confess it to Him. If it's something that you've done wrong to another, confess it to them and seek forgiveness and reconciliation. reconciliation. But know that if we've confessed our sins, then He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Your conscience at long last is cleansed and you're released from your guilt. That's one side of having been sanctified or made holy in Christ, being released from guilt.

[34 : 02] But you know the other side of it is that it releases us for good works. You see, when something was sanctified or made holy in the Old Testament, it wasn't just considered pure or clean, but it was also set apart now for a special task.

It had a noble purpose. It was consecrated for God's service, for God's kingdom. Do you remember what Jesus says to His disciples? You are the salt of the earth and you are a light of the world. You're a city on a hill, so let your light shine before others that they might see your good works and give glory to your Father who's in heaven.

Paul says in Ephesians 2.10 that we've been created in Christ Jesus, that is recreated in Christ Jesus, for good works. not by our good works, but for good works.

And if you don't understand the difference between those two, friend, come talk to me after the service. Because that is the difference between religion and Christianity. So you see, when we

come to trust in Christ, His perfect life makes us holy in God's sight, and suddenly a massive shift takes place.

[35 : 20] We no longer have to work on ourselves and obsess about ourselves. Suddenly we're freed from the tyranny of centering our lives on ourselves. Think about it. Before we became Christians, why did we even do good things?

Well, partially because we wanted to help. We had a natural sense of pity. But largely because we wanted to be a good person. We were doing good, largely, for ourselves.

But when Christ cleanses us, we stop needing to live for ourselves. Because He's already done that. And He did it a lot better than I could do it for me.

And now we can start living for others. Friends, one of the strongest forces for good in the world are local churches who know that in Christ they've been sanctified, they've been made holy, not because of what they've done, but because of what Jesus has done.

Imagine not just two or three people living like this, freed from self, to serve others. But friends, imagine whole communities, congregations of hundreds of people covenanted together in membership to love and serve one another and to be salt and light in the city where they live.

[36 : 38] In our school and in our workplaces, in our dorms and in our neighborhoods, living as people who are finally off the hamster wheel of self and who have eyes to see and hearts filled with love for those around them with a love that Christ has shown to them.

Friends, if you can imagine that kind of community, then that's the church. That's our call. Again, it's hard not to make the connection to baptism here.

You see, when someone is baptized, that is the church identifying that person as a genuine believer in Christ, as a member of Christ's kingdom, as one who's been set apart for that noble purpose of being Christ's ambassador in the world.

Just as these waters represent our cleansing in Christ, they represent our calling in Christ. To go and to live new lives in the church for the world to the glory of God.

Christian, I wonder, does your life speak of this cleansing and calling you've received? Are you still living for yourself?

[37 : 53] Or are you living in the freedom from self for others that Christ has won for you because he has sanctified you? After the service today, over lunch, in coffee hour downstairs, maybe talk together about ways in which God has positioned you personally in your work, in your neighborhood, to do good works that glorify his name.

Who has he put in your life to share the gospel with? Certainly that's the greatest good you could do for anyone. And consider as well, who might you meet up with regularly?

Someone who's in your church family here for encouragement, for prayer, for discipleship. And what other needs are you seeing? In the world around you, and how has he gifted you to meet them?

And who else shares this passion and this concern? What avenues for gospel speaking and gospel doing is he placing on your heart? And what practical steps could you take, even this afternoon, to see some of these things start to take shape?

Friends, what I know is this. If in Christ we have been sanctified, set apart for his purpose. It's not a question of whether God has good works for us to do.

[39 : 18] He's already set us apart for his kingdom, and he's already prepared good works for us to do. It's simply a question of where we'll begin. He has released us for good works.

Third and last, having been sanctified by God's will through Christ, it releases us from guilt for good works to trust God's will for our lives in his word.

Friends, if everything we've been saying is true, then notice you see that God certainly has your ultimate good in mind. If the Father would plan from all eternity, and the Son would accomplish in history your redemption, your cleansing, through the horrible death on a cross, if he's done all that for you, then surely you can trust him.

If by that will you've been sanctified, then certainly by that will you will also find continual freedom and life and joy. And where do we find God's will?

Friends, again, the graciousness of God, we find it in his word. Instead of trying to fashion our lives and create our identities according to our own desires, we can now gladly shape our lives according to God's own word.

[40 : 56] After all, the one who created us knows us best. And he knows how best we ought to be. And he knows how best we ought to use our money and our bodies and our status and our privilege and our position so that we might flourish.

And so that others might flourish too. And he's not just our creator, but as we've been saying this morning, he's our cleanser. He's our redeemer. He's the one who loved us and cleansed us. Now surely his commands are not wasted, but they're for our good. Now make no mistake, a life shaped by God's word might not be one filled with ease or wealth or worldly status. You might not actually get your best life now. But friends, it will be one of increasing freedom and joy and hope.

So this is the answer to our problem. As we've gotten lost in the maze of making our own selves and fashioning our own identities, Christ has come and done something completely off the map for us.

[42 : 15] He's lived a life in radical obedience to his father so that we might share in his perfection, in his sanctification, in his wholeness.

And it's there in giving our lives to him and letting him shape our lives that we find true freedom and joy.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you this morning for Christ. God, thank you for giving us in him the perfect cleansing that we need and the calling to go forth and to love you in freedom.

God, take these things and impress them deeply in our hearts today. Lord, help us to see in the days to come how we can start living in line with the truth of this good news. We pray all this in Christ's name.

Amen. Well, as I've been mentioning a lot this morning, we are having two baptisms this morning, which is a great joy for us.

[43 : 28] In Matthew 28, the resurrected Jesus says, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I've commanded you.

And behold, I'm with you always to the end of the ages. So, friends, baptism is something that we do in obedience to Christ's command. It's the way in which disciples of Jesus, who've placed their faith in him, make a public profession of that faith.

And as we've said, what baptism is, it's a powerful portrayal of Jesus' own death and resurrection. That he's gone down into the grave and come up in newness of life.

And baptism also says that we, through faith in Christ, have also died and come to new life in him. That our sins have been cleansed.

That our new life has begun. So I wonder if Lee and Laura would come up at this point. It's been a great joy for us as pastors to get to know, come on up, guys.

[44 : 48] Laura and Lee. Laura's been here for how many years, Laura? Four and a half. And Lee's been coming for about a year, right, Lee? Is that? Yeah. So, since summer. So, they're going to share their testimonies with you all.

And we're going to rejoice with them. So, Laura, why don't you come up and share? Good morning, church. I think for a lot of people, baptism comes together with a new faith.

And for me today, baptism is just one more sign in a long, long list of signs of God's faithfulness to me.

In sustaining me through all kinds of hardships. And refining me, sanctifying me, as we heard in the sermon. And I became a Christian 12 years ago when I was a freshman in high school.

After a time that I had really rebelled against the Lord for many years. I was raised in a Christian home. But during middle school and high school, I started thinking that maybe I knew better than that.

[45 : 59] And I started following the ways of the world. And I can tell you that rebellion only led me to a place of pain and hopelessness.

Toward hatred, toward people who wronged me. Left me feeling like a burned out house with no room for emotion. No hope, no love. Even thoughts of suicide.

And in that time, I thought back to when I had been a young child. Praying to the Lord as my parents had taught me.

Having an innocence and a hope in him. Knowing that he was my father, that he loved me, that I could trust him. And I began reading my Bible again regularly.

I began praying. I began asking God to help me come back to him. To change my heart. And it took a couple months.

[47 : 04] And he brought some people into my life who helped me recognize how I was still holding on to some sins that had become very strong in my life during that rebellion. And helped me to turn from them and repent to them and to truly give my life over to Jesus.

And I remember one night I was praying and reading the word. And I just felt his presence in a completely unmistakable and unprecedented way.

And I just knew that I was his daughter. That he was my father and he had saved me and he would never leave me. And that he had changed my heart so that I wouldn't leave him either.

That he was holding me strong and that nothing could separate me from his love. And since that night, there have been so many times that he has been faithful to me in other ways.

That he's brought me through hardships and trials. Both things that are a product of the fallenness of this world. And also things that are part of my own fallenness and my own weakness.

[48 : 11] And my own tendency to sin. And to disobey the God who loves me so much and gave everything for me. Who rescued me from feeling worthless like so many girls in high school do.

To helping me recognize that lie that I'm not worthless. That the God of the universe loved me enough to die for me. When I was still rebelling against him.

When I was still hating him and spitting in his face. He came and he died for me. Not because I deserve it. But just because he's good. And because he's loving and wonderful and beautiful.

So as I mentioned, I was brought up in a Christian home. I was brought up in a Presbyterian church. And I was baptized as an infant. So though I've been a Christian for 12 years, I'm getting baptized today.

And that again is just through God's faithfulness and patience with me. And working in me. That he's led me to attend churches that really helped me to think about what the scripture does say about baptism.

[49 : 21] To challenge my views on that. And really dig deep into the word. And ask God to reveal his will to me. And so I had some time to really devote my study of the word and my prayer to this question of baptism.

And the Lord did show me how this is what he wants for us. That this is his design in baptism. For us to be repentant. And to accept this baptism as a gift.

Knowing that we have been saved. So I'm accepting the believer's baptism this morning. And as I said, for me it's another sign of his faithfulness.

And the joy for me today is just the simple joy of hearing my Lord's voice and obeying. Just having the pure and simple satisfaction and joy of following him wherever he calls me.

And I'm so thankful that he has allowed me to see this part of him. And for all the ways that he will continue causing me to grow and love him more in the future. Good morning.

[50 : 40] My name is Lee. And I'm just going to tell you a little bit about my journey of faith. In February, I heard Pastor Nick say that the Bible is filled with stories of people who don't deserve God's grace.

But they receive it anyway. Fortunately for me, that has been the case in my life. I grew up in New Jersey where I lived with my mom and my dad and my older brother. Both of my parents are wise and generous and loving.

And my mom's probably crying already. When I was four years old, my mother got saved. So I knew about Jesus from a very young age. And I was taught that we're all sinners.

And we need to believe that Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins. Okay, fair enough. Jesus was my savior. I never doubted this. Church was definitely a big part of my life from a very young age too.

My mom would take my brother and me to a Baptist church every Sunday. But church was not close to my hometown. So Sundays were long and tiring, especially as a kid. As I got a little bit older, I grew resistant to the long services and the long drives.

[51 : 45] I hated going to church. But if I didn't go to church, I was grounded. My mom would say, if you don't have time for God, you don't have time for your friends.

And although I might steal that line and use it on my own kids one day, at the time I really hated it. But reluctantly, I continued to attend church every Sunday. But when I got to middle school, I only grew more resistant.

I was becoming resentful of the rules that were implemented on my life. I wasn't allowed to listen to certain kinds of music. I couldn't read certain books or watch certain movies. I viewed Christianity as a list of everything that I couldn't do.

By the time I hit high school, I had a strange relationship with Christianity. I felt like my faith made me different, and I was embarrassed by it. Still, I never doubted that Jesus was my Savior.

From the time I was in kindergarten, this was all that I'd ever heard. And by that time, I had also become vaguely aware that Jesus was the person that I would talk to in my head all day.

[52 : 45] And I thought that that was enough to make me Christian. But that was the extent of my relationship with Jesus. I didn't want him to invade the other parts of my life. As far as I was concerned, Jesus was seriously cramping my style.

And so I was still resisting God's word and God's love. When I graduated from high school, I felt like my parents had equipped me with strong values and a good moral compass.

I was ready to go be an adult. And in the fall of 2007, I enrolled at Quinnipiac University. And now that I was living on my own, it occurred to me, I don't have to wake up early on Sundays and go to church anymore.

So I enjoyed my newfound freedom, and I didn't bother to find a church in Connecticut. Like most 18-year-olds, I thought that I knew so much about life and how to live it well.

And I probably was better prepared than a lot of my peers. But the truth is, college is going to throw a whole lot of craziness at you that you were not prepared for. Maybe some of the college students in the room might agree.

[53 : 48] You're going to be faced with curveballs that you couldn't have expected. And college is full of scenarios that are going to test your faith and challenge your morals. I thought that I knew how to handle everything that came my way.

But of course, as sinners do, I made a mess of things. I dug myself into some pretty deep holes that I wasn't sure how to get out of. In a time where so much is uncertain, and you're still finding your way, and you're trying to figure out who you are and who you want to be, wouldn't it be nice to have a friend who's always going to have your back, who knows everything that's going to happen to you, and who's going to hold your hand through the entire thing?

I didn't realize it in college, but that's actually the perfect time to rely on God. Unfortunately, many college kids don't. I didn't. But I wish that I had.

It would have saved me from a lot of stress, worrying, pain, and heartache. In the summer of 2013, two years after I graduated from college, I met a new friend here in New Haven, and he was attending Trinity Baptist Church.

I was inspired by his close walk with God, and I recognized it as something that I needed in my life, too. It had been too long since I'd been in church. I was curious to find out if this Baptist church was like the ones that I went to growing up.

[55 : 05] So I started coming here in July, and I joined a small group here, too. What I found was a welcoming and warm and uplifting experience every time I walked through the doors. One Sunday morning last August, Pastor Greg was preaching about God's pursuing love.

And I sat in my pew, and I had a moment of self-reflection. I looked back on the past several years of my life and the mistakes that I had made and how I'd distanced myself from God, especially in college.

I thought about how I'd been resisting Jesus for years, probably my entire life. And I thought to myself, if I were God, I probably would have given up on me by now.

I'd been resisting God for 24 years, but he'd been pursuing me for 24 years, too. And in God's perfect timing, in a roundabout way, I had found myself sitting back in church, in that pew right there.

And I sat in that pew, and I began to sweat, and my breathing became erratic, and my eyes welled up with tears. And I felt strongly that I was sitting in church that day for a reason.

[56 : 14] I guess I always knew that God had been working in my life in some abstract sense. But in that moment, that was the first time that I could really feel it. And it wasn't that God hadn't been working in my life before.

Sadly, I think I'd just been ignoring him for a really long time. But as I was having this realization, I heard Pastor Greg say, God could have given up on me, but he never did. And those words echoed in my head, and I realized that God never gave up on me either.

And I cried in that pew for like 20 minutes. Needless to say, these were good tears. And it wasn't that I had received any new information. I always knew that Jesus loved me, but this was the first time that I could really feel it.

And it's one thing to have the technical knowledge of what salvation is, but it's another thing for the lens in which you view your whole life to actually change. And so while that was certainly a pivotal day for me, I know that salvation is not just one fleeting experience, but it actually brings a permanent change in your life.

And last summer was when I finally stopped resisting God's love. After 24 years of God softening my heart, the desire to obey God and do things his way has finally come naturally.

[57 : 28] My parents are much like my parents. I know that if God sets guidelines for us to follow, it's only because he loves us and wants to protect us from harm or pain or heartache.

He wants us to experience all of the blessings that he has in store for us. So today, just a few days before my 25th birthday, I'm very excited to be celebrating a new chapter in my life by getting baptized.

And when I'm submerged under that water, two things are going to happen. One, I'm going to ruin a perfectly good hair day. And two, I'm giving my life to God and I'm doing things his way from now on.

Thank you for listening. Thank you.