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Everything We Believe Begins with Him
Hebrews 12:1-2

December 2, 2007- 11 AM -- Dr. David H. McKinley

[Dr. McKinley, message, Everything We Believe Begins with Him]

Jesus saves. He has; He obviously has. Many of you've responded to that song as though He has saved you. He does! And that's the great truth of this Christmas season and of every season; is that Jesus does save, and He will because the Bible says [Acts 2:21] "*whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*" And I pray that even today before the close of this service that you, if you never have, will call on the name of Jesus, that you might be set free, that you might know this heart expression of worship to the Lord Jesus Christ that you've seen reflected in the lives of so many here today.

And ah... I am just grateful that you're here. I am incredibly thankful for the privilege the pastor's given me in these days to bring the Christmas series here at Prestonwood. There could not be any greater opportunity in my life, nor a great responsibility that I feel than to have this time in life with you, that I'm thankful for it and excited about what God is going to do in it.

I want to invite you to take your Bible, the Book that really is written to tell us one thing: Jesus saves. And I want you to open this Book to the book of Hebrew... Hebrews chapter 12... Hebrews chapter 12, and in just a moment we will read what I hope is going to become a theme... a text for us throughout the month of December.

Of course, you know that this week ah... officially like no other time the race is on for Christmas. In fact the headlines of USA Today newspaper on Monday morning said this: Holiday Shoppers Get Off to Fast Start. And, of course, it's almost like the gun at the starting line of a race, that everything begins to pace and to pulse toward the shopping days that are left till Christmas. Twenty-three, by the way today are the number of days that you have left and I know that many of you even were tempted to go shopping instead of coming to church today, but I thank you for coming on here and being here anyway this morning.

But as we gather today we realize that we are being tracked... In fact we... the throngs... the mobs as you see in these scenes are pictures of what are [is] going on in the malls and in our communities. As you're driving you need to be extra careful. People are sort of out of their heads right now. They realize that Christmas is coming and everything in life is a little faster and... and a little bit more ah... as they tracked Black Friday... last Friday, the day after Thanksgiving. Ah... We now know that 147 million people purchased 8.3 more percent than they did this time last year, and so they're tracing every movement that you're making. Cyber Monday, this past Monday when people don't go to the malls but go back to work and go to

their desk, they actually estimate that 450 million dollars were lost in productivity across America because people were online... they were shopping and ah... trying to get ahead of the race for Christmas.

And just as if you were in a marathon or any other kind of race where they attach a little microchip to your shoelace so that they can keep up with every step, where you are every part of the race, even down to the milliseconds, so it is that today you're being tracked through this Christmas season as you are in the race and as you on pace for all that is going to happen. And, of course, when we get caught up in all of this activity and all of the race of Christmas, it's very easy for us to lose sight of what Christmas is really all about.

I heard about a mother who was out in the final days before Christmas, shopping with her little son. He was three years of age and she turned around to all of the sudden realize that he was gone! Not there with her. If you've ever been a parent, ever lost a child, you know the absolute panic that goes through your heart when you realize they're not with you. And so, of course, they were in a crowded mall, people were moving everywhere. She turned around but all the sudden she spotted him. She made her way back as she saw him standing up next to a... a glass window, and he had his little face pressed there. And about that time she called his name, and when she did, he looked up and he said, "Mommy, mommy, look! It's Baby Jesus! He's laying in the hay." And about that time she got to him, she grabbed his hand and she said, "Don't you know we don't have time for all that! Mommy's trying to get ready for Christmas!" [laughter]

What's Christmas all about? What is Christmas? And certainly in my life and in your life, if we're not careful, the pace... the hustle, the bustle, the activity... all of the demands, all of the invitations, all of the best intentions of Christmas can cause us to lose sight of what Christmas is really all about.

You know the Bible says in Hebrews 12 that the Christian life is like a race. Everyone of us are in this race. All of us are surrounded by those who have gone before and are surrounded by those who are running as well in this day and time. And yet, in Hebrews chapter 12 the writer of the book of Hebrews says that there is a great danger of losing focus in the race of faith. And when we lose our focus, we lose our balance; and when we lose our balance, we ultimately lose our way. And there's a tendency in the Christmas season to lose sight of Jesus, just as there is a tendency in all of life to let the clutter... to let the conflict... to let the confusion and congestion of life get our eyes off of Jesus. Let's read this passage together:

- 1) *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight...*

Just think of people walking through the malls with all; their packages, and how weighed down they are! They've got all these weights. And that's

kinda how we get in life, isn't it? We just... We start going through life and we're gathering more and more, and carrying more and more and more. And the next thing you know, we look like overloaded shoppers at Christmas. It says:

1) *Let us lay aside every weight. (And then it says) and the sin which so closely clings to us.*

You know, as you go through this world, things just start clinging to you. And before long, you've got things clinging to you that are a part of your past and a part of your mistakes and a part of your failures. Suddenly you're overloaded with the weight, and you're clung to by your sins. And so it says instead:

1) *Let us run the race with endurance that is set before us (And then here's this little phrase. Do you see it?) ...looking to Jesus.*

Would you just say that little phrase with me? "Looking to Jesus." If I were to say to you what is Christmas all about, strip away everything else that gets in our way at Christmas, what is Christmas all about? And the church would answer and say what? "Looking to Jesus."

Isn't that the heart of Christmas? Isn't that the focus that you want, that I want during this Christmas season, that I would live my life looking to Jesus. Why? Because:

2) *He is the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame and He is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

The Bible describes Jesus in three ways. It says we look to Him because He is the founder of our faith. Literally everything we believe begins with Jesus. This is going to be for focus of our message today... that everything we believe... everything that we embrace and act upon in faith begins with Jesus. He is the founder of our faith.

Then next week we're going to look together at the fact that Jesus is the perfecter. Literally that everything that we need is found in Him. Anything that I lack... everything that I need is found in the perfecter Jesus. And then the Bible says, "He is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God." He is a Ruler, and therefore, as the Ruler everything that we hope for is going to be fulfilled in Him.

Everything we believe begins with Him, everything we need is found in Him and everything that we hope for will be fulfilled in Jesus, and this will be the focus of our time and of our messages over the next few weeks.

Now, today we're going to begin with the founder... the idea that Jesus is the founder. And you know, I love preaching on this day because there's not a Cowboy game today. [laughter] That means nobody's on a timeclock; we

don't have anything to worry about. I've got as long as I want to preach [laughter]. I'm just kidding. There's some big red letters right there that remind me what time it is. Now whether or not I pay attention to it is not your business. [laughter] It's my business to preach; your business to listen.

But there's a word... there's a word here that talks about the founder and it's the Greek word *archegon*... *archegon*. The word *archegon* in the Greek is a very significant term because it means first in order, honor, or rank. It means the starting point, the absolute beginning, the first cause. It can be translated ruler, leader, pioneer, founder (as we mentioned), author in some translations, and it means one who has authority.

So from the very beginning it's important for us to understand as we celebrate the Christmas season that when we talk about looking to Jesus we're talking about looking to the One who is the founder of our faith. In fact if you have an English Standard version, this word is translated founder in your translation.

Now there's a problem with our idea of founder. When we think of a founder, we think of just going back in history to someone who founded something, and most of the world would concede that Jesus is the Founder of the Christian religion. In fact if you were to make progression through history, you would say that there's Adam and there's Noah; there's Abraham who is the founder of Judaism. And then you come forward through David and Solomon and the prophets. And finally you get to Jesus who is now the founder of Christianity. And there is a sense historically in which we look back to the birth of Christ and that He is our founder.

But I want you to know that when the Bible says that He is the founder of our faith, this word means much more than that when applied to Jesus because Jesus is not one of many in progression in history, though He stepped into history; He is One from whom all of history derives its start... its beginning and its meaning. Jesus is not just the founder of faith; Jesus is the Founder of everything. Jesus is God! Jesus is Deity. And long before He ever took on the humanity, the flesh of the nativity, Jesus Christ is the one that is presented in eternity as our Creator-God. He is the Founder of all things!

Now just so you know I'm not up here making this up, let me just show you the testimony of Scripture. John chapter 1 and verse 1 says this:

1) *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word (what? Say it with me) was God. 2) He was in the beginning with God! 3) All things were made through Him and without Him was not anything made that was made. 4) In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. (And verse 12 [14] says:)* 14) *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...*

The Bible makes it clear from the very outset that Jesus who came into this world was actually the One who started this world; He is the Creator-God.

And while He was born as a peasant... born in humility, He was anything but a peasant.

A number of years ago there was a community celebration for a man out in west Texas who had accomplished quite a bit in his lifetime. In this west Texas town and community they were celebrating the fact that there was seven major buildings that he had been a part of constructing in their downtown facility. There was a bank that this man had actually started. It was his own bank. This man also had a school that was named after him and as they gathered to have a little community celebration and to honor this kinda founding father of the community, he talked about the fact that 50 years earlier he had walked down a railroad track with nothing but the clothes on his back and a little bandana... a stick with a bandana and all of his worldly possessions in that little bandana. Of course, the people applauded and affirmed the incredible things that this man had done in his years of service to that community. Well, when the little party and celebration was over, a young man made his way up to this older gentleman and said, "Sir, you know, I'm curious. I just want to know something." He said, "You said that 50 years ago when you came here, you walked down the railroad tracks with nothing but the clothes on your back and a stick and a bandana with all your earthly possessions with you. What did you have wrapped up in that bandana?" He said, "A hundred thousand dollars in cash and fifty thousand dollars in government bonds." Ha! [laughter]

Sometimes things aren't just the way they seem, are they? And when we're talking about Jesus, while He was born in humility in the nativity, I want you to know that this Jesus who was born in Bethlehem are the very hands that created all of the earth and everything in it! And I want you to know that He created you; He made you for Himself. You were made for worship. And you cannot know life apart from knowing the Creator-God who made you. And this Creator-God stepped out of heaven and stepped into earth! And Jesus is the Founder of our faith in that He is the Creator of our very beings!

But there's something else that I want you to see about this word *archegon*... This one word... founder. It's not only translated founder as it is in my translation... the E... ah... the English Standard version. But if you have a King James or a New King James in all likelihood it is translated author. We sang that earlier... He is the author of our salvation. And there is a very real sense in which Jesus can be seen as the author of all things.

If I could take you from this room over across the hall to the office and the study that I occupy on a regular basis, you would see that I have many books in my study. And as those shelves are lined with all of those books, every one of those books are the expressions of authors. Long before there was ever a book that was bound and put in print, there were thoughts, there were experiences, there were circumstances in the life of an author that allowed him or her to bring those things together and then ultimately to put them in book form to share it in a way that would make a difference with me or with you or whoever would read it.

And I'm reminded as I think of that of the fact that when I speak of Jesus as being the author, that just as a book is written to reveal the thoughts of an author, Jesus came to reveal the very thought of God. Why did Jesus come? So that we may know and understand who God is, and what God has planned for us. Jesus became flesh that we might see and know who God is and what God is like. Listen to the book of Colossians, chapter 1, beginning in verse 15:

15) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16) For by Him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. And all things were created through Him and for Him. He is before all things and in Him all things hold together.

Everything that we know about truth... about life is ultimately revealed to us from God in the person of Jesus Christ. And Jesus came that we might know the thought of God in the word of God. This is the word of God in the Book, but Jesus is the Word of God in the body! At Jesus the Word became flesh that we might know who God is and what God is like.

So a book is written to reveal the thoughts of an author, but books are also written to identify with the needs of the reader. Most of the books that I have, I have because they connected with a need in my life or potentially with a need in the lives of those to whom I would speak. You buy a book because it connects with a need. Maybe you have a need in your marriage and these are days where you're struggling and you're trying to figure out who can speak to this need in my life. Maybe you have a need to have some wisdom about some financial management. Maybe you need to grow in area of... of personal ah... improvement that would relate to a part of your business that you do. Maybe you have a need as a parent for insight. We go out; we find books... we buy books because there's something in that book that connects with a need in our lives.

Well, in the same way, Jesus the author of our salvation has come to reveal to us our deepest need and to identify with us at every point of that need. If you'll hold your hand in Hebrews 12, turn back just a few pages to Hebrews chapter 4. You understand that this is what Jesus came to do for us. He came to identify with the needs of our lives. In fact if you don't have this verse marked in the Bible that you have in your hand, I want you to mark it. Now that is, of course, if it's yours. If it's the pew Bible, don't mark in it, okay? [laughter] But if it's your Bible I want you to make these words... these verses... ah... Hebrews chapter 4, beginning in verse 15 and 16:

15) For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16) Let us therefore have confidence to draw near the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in a time of need.

Jesus came and took on flesh that He might identify with you and with me, that He might bear the burdens of our lives and feel the hurts and the pains of this world in which we live. God becoming flesh to touch and to identify with His creation, that He through His grace might meet every need that we have. Jesus is the author of our salvation. And just as an author writes a... a book to reveal his thoughts, God revealed Himself in the Person of Christ. And just as an author writes to connect with and identify with the needs of the reader, so Jesus has come to identify with us. That's why the Baby was born in the manger.

But also we recognize that books are written to record or pass along a message. Every writer wants a message to go forth. There's something they want to have people take away. And God wants us to take away the message of Jesus the author of our faith. If we read together in the book of Colossians chapter 1, beginning in verse 19 and following, we read:

19) For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20) and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.

The Bible says that God's Son was born into this world to die on a cross, to make peace and to reconcile. What? A creation that had gone amuck! A created being that had gone astray! We are separated from God by our sins, by our guilt, and we need a Savior! And therefore, Jesus came to proclaim the message that... of salvation, and that's why we sing and celebrate what we did just a moment ago... Jesus saves. He breaks the curse of bondage. He offers life and hope and peace. And Jesus is the author of salvation that is offered to you!

Have you received it? Have you received Him? Have you let Him right into your life? The promise of life and forgiveness and of peace! Jesus wants to write this message in you! Jesus wants to change the script of your life and He can, and He will, if only you'll see Him... look to Him as the author of your salvation.

The Bible says [2 Corinthians 5:17], "*If anyone is in Christ they're new creatures: old things are passed away; all things are become new.*" Whatever your life is or whatever your life has become, I want you to hear me clearly today. There is a new life available for you in Christ if you will open your heart and receive the author of salvation and let Him change the script of your life from this day forward. He'll cancel the sins of the past; He'll give you a new life. He will fill you with joy and hope and peace. That's why the angels sang on that first Christmas morning, because the founder of our faith had come, the author of our salvation has written into this world.

But there's one other thing that this word can mean, and it can mean pioneer. Jesus is the pioneer of our faith and of our future. History books, of course, are filled with the stories of great pioneers who have gone before us. And yet so many times we recognize the influence of

pioneers in history, and yet we deny the influence of Christ who is the pioneer of life and of our future.

I read just this week, speaking of forgetting, that a school in Washington printed and put out a calendar. Let me just read the article to you:

"In a December newsletter to families of elementary school students Spokane's public schools list of important dates didn't include Christmas. Hanukkah, Human Rights day, Winter break, the Islamic day of Eid Ul Adha, first day of winter and Kwanzaa all made the list but no Christmas. It says it was an absolute error of the mission said the district's spokesperson. In our efforts to be inclusive, we missed the obvious." I'll say!!

You know I find that very interesting because educators go to seed on the idea of plagiarism. If you're in any kind of school or academic environment, you know that everything you do is put through a grid work of... of trying to test and determine whether or not you plagiarize anything.

And yet I find in our world that we live in a culture that's plagiarized Christmas. We take it and call it Winter Holiday, family break, everything but what it is! It's all about the pioneer and His name is Jesus! We're not even being true to history! [extended applause] Let's just be honest about history because it's all about Jesus! And therefore you can't have Christmas unless you look to Jesus.

But speaking of great pioneers in history, we're all grateful for the endeavors of pioneers that we honor in history. In the month of December we're always grateful for the Wright brothers who were willing to take the risk of flying in an airplane. Many of you this week have been somewhere else in the nation or the world and have come back here today because of the early endeavors of the pioneers Orville and Wilbur Wright.

Alexander Graham Bell and the development of the telephone... Would that guy be amazed with what we've done with his little device? [laughter] And then we have Thomas Edison who pioneered the light bulb. I don't know about you, but I sure like just plugging in my Christmas lights instead of lighting candles and burning down my house at Christmas time! Benjamin Franklin pioneered the glasses.

And then there was a rough hewn pioneer by the name of Davy Crockett who helped Texas to become a part of the United States. In 1830 more than 20,000 Americans migrated to Texas to settle, and Davy Crockett, looking for new frontiers, was one of the ones who came to assist in the settlement. He later lost his life in the Alamo. But Davy Crockett once said this, He said: "As the country no longer requires my services, I've made up my mind to go to Texas. I start anew upon my own hook, and God grant that it may be strong enough to support the weight that may be hung upon it." I plant my own hook and I pray to God that it will support the weight of everything that will be hung on it.

Well, I want you to know when I speak of Jesus being a pioneer, Jesus was hung on a cross, that the weight of the world may be put upon Him and that He is the pioneer who would taste death for every one of us would provide the deliverance and the hope of the life; life that matters today and life eternal in heaven. In the book of Colossians again, chapter 1, verse 13, the Bible describes this work of Christ. It says:

13) He delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son 14) in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins 15) because He is the image of the invisible God. He is the firstborn, He is the pioneer of all creation.

Yes, this Jesus that we look to is the founder of our faith. He is the author of our salvation. He is the pioneer of our future. We look to Him at Christmas.

But what does this really mean? I mean, what I've affirmed to you is a great truth. The Bible says [Hebrews 13:8] "*Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*" And we've talked about this Christ and what He has done yesterday, but what does the founding authorship and pioneering work of Christ mean to us during this Christmas season in 2007?

Well, I believe it means several things. One, I believe that today and in this Christmas time when we talk about looking to Jesus as the founder, knowing that everything we believe begins with Him, I believe that it means that Christmas is a time to refocus my attention on Jesus, to really get my attention on Him. I don't want Jesus to just be an accessory of my Christmas celebration. I want Jesus to be the focus of my Christmas. I believe that's what Christmas is about. I believe that's what life is about.

If you ever see a nativity, nine times out of ten when a nativity is set up it will always be set up where you have the Baby Jesus, and then you have Mary and Joseph, and then typically you have a donkey and have some sheep and cattle, and then you have some shepherds, and then you know in our day we want all the best parts so we go ahead and put the Wise Men in there, although the Bible makes it clear they came a little while later. We... we... we put them there and we sort of put each piece in it's place and stretch them out so that all of the nativity is stretched out, and you can walk up and see everybody that was there. But in most nativities they're all looking out; they're all looking out so you can see who was at the nativity. But if we were to truly to set up a nativity the way it should be done, it would look more like a huddle on a football field. Really, everybody would be brought in, and would be brought together and you wouldn't be able to see anything but the backs of all the characters because every one of them were looking at Jesus.

What about you and what about me? What is our posture this Christmas? Am I going to be like the rest of the world and set up a nativity, and I'm just one of many people who've strung out everything else in my life, and yet Jesus is there, too? Or is there going to be in my life and in your life a

different posture? A posture that literally turns our back on the world so that we may look at Jesus.

I know it's not really appropriate for me to have my back turned to you when I'm speaking to you. I also realize I have a big headlight right in the middle of my head that's looking back at you. [laughter] But you know I wonder is there anything about my posture at Christmas that would make people want to look over my shoulder and to see Jesus? I believe that looking to Jesus means focusing my attention on Him, so that I call others to put their eyes on Jesus.

I believe there's a second thing that matters, and that is that not only is Christmas a time to focus our attention on Jesus, but I believe that Christmas is a time that calls me or that call... that brings about a rebuke to the indulgence of the self-focused life.

Just a few days ago I read something from David Jeremiah, a great pastor-preacher out in San Diego when he was talking about "Me-mas", and how many people celebrate Me-mas; not Christmas, but Me-mas. It's all about me. That's how most people live their lives, isn't it? It's all about me; it's about my job, my position, who knows me, what I have, what I got, what... what I make... all these things. And nowhere do we see that sometimes more than Christmas, that we get all caught up in this self-indulgence and this self-focused life. And I believe that Christmas is intended by God to be a rebuke to everything in me that wants to make life about me, when it's really all centered around Jesus.

What is the center of your life? Oh, we have all kinds of centers in our world. We have medical centers, and child care centers, and convention centers, and athletic centers and arenas. We have the Lincoln Center in New York, and we have the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, and we have the Hurricane Center in Miami, and the Kennedy Center in Washington. And we have centers here and centers there! And most of us live our lives with me-centers... everything's about me.

May I respectfully tell you something today? I don't care how much money you make. I don't care what kind of car you drive. I don't care what the label is in the clothes you wear. I don't care what kind of shoes you have on your feet. I don't care what kind of purse you're carrying. I don't care who knows you. I don't care what you have, how much education you have. If you are the center of your world, you will always wobble if you don't know Jesus. Something will always be off center! And the more you add, it will just be clutter and confusion for a life that's not being lived for the purpose for which you were made, because you were made to know God and to live with Him, and to experience Him in your life! And I challenge you this Christmas to turn from Me-mas living and to look to Jesus.

There's one other thing that I believe that is important at Christmas when we talk about looking to Jesus who is the Founder of our faith, and that is that I believe that Christmas is a call to rekindle the tenderness of our

affection for Jesus. That there really does need to be an emotional component to the Christmas season. But it doesn't just need to be sentimentalism; it needs to be devotion to Christ. There needs to be such a recognition of who this Jesus is, that there is a tenderness and reclaiming of our affection and of our love for Him.

You know isn't it interesting in life how many times we... those of us who are married go through life and we have an anniversary and we pause to celebrate that anniversary? There are all these other days and things that we do, but there's something about that anniversary (Well, guys, if we remember it) something about that anniversary that when we get there and we start looking at each other and talking about life, that there's a rekindling of what matters in our lives and our love and our hearts. And sometimes a recapturing of what this commitment is all about.

And I believe that Christmas time needs to recapture the tender affection of our heart for Jesus. It's so easy to lose our first love; it's so easy to be captured with other affections and to fail to see Christ.

Katie Fisher was a seventeen year old girl who was diagnosed with Burchett's lymphoma. It was a fast-growing malignancy. She spent many months in the hospital, numerous rounds of chemotherapy. She struggled with a lot of pain in her life. And yet young Katie came to a place where she had a reprieve... she had a time where she was able to get beyond all of the cancer treatment and the cancer impact. And she decided that she wanted to have a little bit of normalcy in her life and to live the kind of life that most seventeen year old girls live.

Katie came from a family of very limited means, and needless to say all of the medical cost had only added to that. She lived on a farm and her family raised all kinds of livestock and Katie had a little lamb. And Katie decided that she was going to take her lamb to the community center where there was a junior livestock sale. And she was going to sell a lamb that she'd had from the time she was a little girl to... to try to sell off this lamb and maybe get a little money and just take a day and go shopping.

As Katie entered that building that day with other people from the community, the average cost on the price of the lambs were going for about \$2 a pound. But as Katie's lamb was put on the auction block the price started going up. In fact when it was all said and done, Katie's little lamb sold for \$11.50 a pound. And as soon as the auctioneer landed the [strike] gavel and said, "Sold, for \$11.50 a pound!" there was a cry from the audience that said, "Resell!" And they did it again. And then they did it again. And then they did it again. All in all, Katie's lamb sold 36 times that day, and Katie Fisher walked away with \$16,000 from people in her community who saw a girl in need and who just wanted to love her in that moment and respond to her.

I wonder if there's anything about the way that you see Jesus, not with His need, but with His power and with His glory that makes you want to respond

to Him the way that community responded to Katie. Isn't it true that the church of Jesus Christ should not simply walk through Christmas and just let it be another busy time, but that it needs to be the very essence of our hearts; that there would be a tenderness and an affection that would just cause an outpouring of ourselves to Jesus because we love Him and because we look to Him?

Surely in the course of this Christmas season, in our own worship and in the marketplace, many of us will hear and many of us will sing the songs of Christmas. And one of the carols that is most loved and one of the carols that we will certainly honor is "O Holy Night". There's a sense of wonder about that song; there's a sense of beauty and honor in that song. Ultimately a song that causes us to "fall on our knees".

But as we go through this season, I not only want you to think of the wonder of Christmas and that O holy night, but I want you to take the words of a poem that was written in 1882 by William D. Longstaff. It was a poem that was later put to verse and song, and it has become a great hymn. Though it's not often sung today, it's a powerful testimony of what I want to challenge you to do this Christmas. Listen to these words:

Take time to be holy; Speak oft' with thy Lord./ Abide in Him always and feed on His word./ Make friends of God's children; Help those who are weak./ Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek./ Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;/ Much time spend in secret, with Jesus alone./ By looking to Jesus, like Him thou shalt be;/ Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see.

Look to Jesus; that's what Christmas is all about.

Father, I thank You today for the challenge of Your word. And Lord, You know the tendency that we all have to become weighted down, to become overwhelmed and to lose our focus. But I pray today, Lord Jesus, that in this place and this time and this moment that we would begin afresh and anew to refocus upon Jesus, to repent of the self-indulgence that so often captures our lives. And Lord, to live with a tender affection for You, a first love. That would not just be the sentiment of the season but that would be the very passion of devotion of our lives. [music begins] Lord, I thank You today for the call to look to Jesus. And I pray that in this hour, in this moment, that there would be men and women, students and children who would look to Jesus that they may live and have life in His name. For it is in the name of Jesus I pray, AMEN.

As you look up, I want you to stand with me. I want you to stand because we're going to close this service today with a hymn of invitation. I do want to ask that you not be leaving. This is not the moment to break the huddle; this is the moment to focus our attention on what we've been talking about... looking to Jesus. I encourage you today to look to Jesus because He is mighty to save. We sang that in a beautiful chorus earlier. He is mighty to save! And this Jesus, no matter where you are, what you're

facing, what kind of weights and burdens and sins you may have in your life, I want you to know that if you will look to Jesus, you will live, you will be forgiven, you will be changed! Look to Him and call upon His name!

In just a moment as we begin to sing, the ministers of our church are going to stand at the head of each aisle here at the front on the lower floor for those of you on the floor and in the terrace. If you're there in the balcony, just behind you there are ministers stationed at each of the walls and the walkways there. They're there to help you. If you're in the upper part, just step down to them.

But whether you're there in the balcony or here on the floor, there's an opportunity to respond to this look, to take a step, to be a Christ-follower today. And today I want to urge you if you've never done it, to say today “I'm looking.....”