

**PBC20071209AM2**

**Everything We Need is Found in Him  
Hebrews 12:1-2**

December 9, 2007- 11 AM -- Dr. David H. McKinley

**[Dr. McKinley, message, Everything We Need is Found in Him]**

[Service begins with a video of Luke 2 being read in many languages.]

Read in any language the Christmas story is dramatic, but it is much more than a drama. The story of Christmas is a declaration, for the Bible says that it was declared to the shepherds by the angels, that [Luke 2:11] *"unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord."*

Jesus Christ came on a saving mission. And that's why this is the greatest story ever told; because it addresses the greatest need of the human life and the human condition, and has provided for us the background and the backdrop for everything that we celebrate at Christmas. From the very beginning we are told that Jesus was born to pay a debt that He did not owe; a debt that we cannot pay.

Now, of course, I'm getting very close to home when I speak about debt at Christmas. In fact I was reading just this past week that there are a significant number of people... 65 percent of those who made purchases last Christmas who still have debt from Christmas-past that they'll be addressing this year. In fact it was interesting to note that of the some \$400 billion that is estimated to be spent on Christmas this year, \$120 billion of that is going to be paid by credit cards. And so knowing that this a reality... knowing that we're stretching in all of our spending, most of us understand that maybe some of the blues that we feel after Christmas aren't just the let down from the sentiment and the emotion of the holidays, but sometimes it's the reality that ah... it's going to take a long time to get out of this hole in life.

We know what it is to have debt; we know the impact of debt economically. But may I say to you to a much greater degree the Bible expresses the fact that Jesus Christ came into this world because of a debt. A debt... a deficit that is true in all of our lives and that Christ and Christ alone is able to pay and is able to relieve. And for this reason this is the greatest story ever told.

Now having said that, everyday in life we hear stories. The news reports and all of the extended media provide us with a continuous backdrop of stories that... that let us know what's happening in the world and then we have the analysis of the story and the story behind the story, and the investigative reporting that goes on along side the story.

And so given the fact that the story at Christmas is the greatest story ever told, does it not make sense that it might be smart for us to take a little bit of time at church to do some investigative reporting on this

story... to ask and to answer some important questions about why this story matters to all of us, and what the significance of this story is.

And so I'm going to invite you to open your Bible with me once again today to Hebrews chapter 12... Hebrews chapter 12, beginning in verse 1 and 2, because I want us to read something more about this story and I want us to see that here in this passage there's a backdrop to something that we need to understand about the story. The Bible says in Hebrews 12:1:

1) *Therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...* (Here's your cue, church. We're reading the next phrase out loud...) *looking...*

Somehow I feel like I'm all alone... [laughter] Let's try that one more time.

1) *... and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us* 2) *[looking to Jesus] looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Last week we began our focus on Christmas by talking about this phrase "*looking to Jesus.*" And in this passage it describes for us something of who Christ is and why Christ came. You see, it's so important for us to understand that it's not important that Jesus simply came into this world. There are many babies born in this world. But it is why Jesus came into this world and who Jesus Christ is. And because of who He is, it has everything to do with why He came and therefore what He has done.

Now we spent all of our time last week talking about Jesus. We are looking to Him because He is the founder of our faith. That word *founder* could be translated *founder*, it could be *author*, it can be *creator*, it can be *pioneer*. And we said that when we come to worship Jesus at Christmas, we do so because of who He is. One of the most loved and oft' repeated of all the prophecies of the Old Testament is the prophet Isaiah, chapter 7 and verse 14, that says, "*Behold a virgin shall conceive and bring forth a Son, and you will call His name Immanuel.*"

What does the name Immanuel mean? It means "God with us." And when we say that Jesus... we look to Him because He is the Founder. Jesus wasn't simply a normal human birth, it was indeed a divine and a miraculous conception whereby God stepped out of heaven and stepped into earth in a virgin's womb, and was born and became one of us, that He might ultimately be the pioneer of our salvation, the author of our faith. And we talked all about that last week together. Looking to Jesus who is the founder.

But today we want to look at the second phrase. It says that we look to Jesus who is the "*founder and the perfecter of our faith... the perfecter of our faith.*" Now how many of you have a translation in your hand that uses that word *perfecter*? How many of you have a Bible that says *perfecter*?

Okay. Good. How many of you have a Bible in your hand that says *finisher*? How many of you've got that? A number of you have that. Because this word can really be translated either way. It can be translated *perfecter*, meaning that He brings it to final conclusion. He takes what is unfit and un... incomplete and brings it to completion. He makes it perfect. And on the other hand, it can also mean that He is the *finisher*. He takes what is undone... what is unfinished... what is incomplete, and He finishes the work.

Therefore, when we talk about why Jesus came and the greatest story ever told, this story is a great story not only because Jesus is the founder of our faith, but He is the *perfecter*; He has finished the work... the unfinished business between us and God. Jesus is our *finisher*!

Now this word *perfecter* or *finisher* is actually ah... connected to and translated from the Greek word *teleios*. The Greek word *teleios* means end, completion, finish, termination. The meaning of those things. But in particular it was a common use word in the marketplace of the New Testament time and it would often be used to seal a financial or a legal transaction. When they would complete the transfer of a piece of property or the ownership of goods, it was not uncommon that documentation... Yes, just like a receipt that you get today...

You know how you go out shopping, you come home with a pocket load of receipts these days? They would have a receipt, but it would not be like our receipt. They would simply take a document, they would drop wax on it and then they would seal in that wax, a single word from the marketplace in that day. It was the word *tetelestai*. And the word *tetelestai* means "paid in full". And that is the same word... that is the same root that is used here when it says that Jesus is the *perfecter* of our faith. He is the one who has paid the debt in full. He has finished the unfinished business of salvation.

So, that brings me to the first question in our investigation. What is this unfinished business that Jesus needed to settle? What is the unfinished business that is spoken of that Jesus came to accomplish as our *perfecter*? Well, let me ask you this question: How many of you, sitting here listening to me today can say, "I am absolutely finished with all of my Christmas shopping. I have been to the store, I've got everything, it's wrapped, it's under the tree. I'm finished. It's done!" Who can say that today?

These are truly remarkable people! [laughter] You ought to watch them... put your hands up again cause y'all need to get an autograph on some of these people. I mean they... you talk about time management wizards! They can teach you something.

Now how many of you would say, it's unfinished. I don't have it done. Now let's just get... Be honest now. Come on, get with it. We confess publicly in this church. Let's do it! [laughter] How many of you would say, I'm stressed out about it, too? Okay, there we go.

You know when things are unfinished like Christmas shopping, there's a lot of stress associated with it. There's this pressure, this sense that I need to get there, I need to get it done, I've got to get on with it! And when things are unfinished, it can imply that there's a stress point in life.

There's another way that we can think of things being unfinished... certainly in what's going on with the housing market in America right now. There's a lot of concern about foreclosures and all types of problems that are going on with homes and mortgages, but it's also impacting developers. And maybe you've seen as I've seen that there are some areas where people have gone in and begun the process of building homes and the homes that were to be the fulfillment of dreams! They were to be the source of backing and support for those who built them and to be the fulfillment of dreams for those who would purchase them. One of the saddest things that we see at a time like this economically is when you drive into an area... to a neighborhood and you see the structure of a home that was put up but there's no longer anyone there working on it. And the shell that may look good on the outside is empty on the inside. And sometimes when things are unfinished there's an... an emptiness. There's something that's lacking; there's something that's missing and it needs to be completed.

I don't know how many of you have seen in the last 24 hours that one of the news agencies is reporting on the messiest house in America. Anybody seen that? It's not an unfinished home; it's a finished home, but frankly, nothing is in order. Everything is unfit, everything is out of place. It's... it's untidy. It's actually in Sarasota, Florida. So that's... that's going to be one of their new claims to fame. They've got one of the messiest homes in America in Sarasota, Florida.

But I say all that to say, that when things are unfinished... when things are out of place... when things are not perfect, there is stress, there is emptiness and there is a mess. That's the condition of our world without Christ. That's the condition of a human life that is not rightly related to it's founder Creator-God. When we are not rightly related to God we live with a stress like no other, the stress of realizing that no matter what we try to do or to be, that somehow we're always inadequate. The sense that we never measure up. That even when we want to be good, we can't be good. We can't do all that we want to do.

I read just a few weeks back in USA Today newspaper in the Life section that there was a... a gentleman... he was a self avowed agnostic who simply said that he decided that he wanted to cloak himself in the Bible for a year. He took on a little project that he ultimately wrote in a book called The Year of Living Biblically. And he says that what he did was he decided to wear white. Now I don't know where he got that. I guess from the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament. But he decided to wear white, to wear a robe and sandals, to herd sheep and to eat crickets. So he decided that he was going to at least kind of connect with the ah... the ancient world in his life experience. But then he decided that he was going to take a vow that... that he would not sin. And so here's what he said.

He said, "My biggest challenge was that there would be no coveting, no lying, no gossiping." He said, "They're little sins but they're just killers. My year made me realize how many of these sins I commit everyday, and refraining from them a year is really hard."

Ha, well let's just be honest. He didn't refrain for a year. No one can! Because the Bible teaches that we are born into sin. We are sinners by birth, we are sinners by nature, we are sinners by choice, we are sinners by practice! And the unfinished business that Jesus came to settle is the problem of sin and it's consequence in the human heart.

The Bible says in Romans 3 [Romans 3:23] "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." That we don't live up... we don't measure up to what God intended. We are unfinished. We are imperfect. We are unfit. The Bible tells us again in the book of Isaiah chapter 53 and verse 6, speaking of Christ and what He came to do. "*All we like sheep are gone astray. We turned every one to his own way. But the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*" And the unfinished business that Jesus came to resolve... to settle, was to take our sins and to bring about peace with God. So what is the unfinished business? It is the work of Christ on behalf of us for sin.

Therefore, let me ask this question: How did He finish the business? How did Jesus take this unfinished, unfit... this stress, this mess, this emptiness, and how did He change it, and how did He fill it? Let me suggest several ways in which He did that.

Now before I say that, let me say this: Do you remember in John 19 and verse 30 that when Jesus was hanging on the cross, the last words that He spoke that were recorded, were these words... What do you know to be the last words of Christ? What are they? "*It is finished.*" Do you know what word Jesus used there... finish? *Tetelestai*. It's done, it's completed; it's paid for!

Jesus didn't hang His head on the cross and say, "I am finished; I'm defeated." He said, "It is finished." And when Jesus hung His head on the cross, He was the finisher of our salvation! The perfecter of everything that was lacking because of the finished work He accomplished for us.

Now to help you remember the significance of this work, I want to give you some key words. First is the word substitution... the word substitution. Jesus, who is the pure, perfect and sinless Son of God, exchanged Himself as a substitute for our sins.

Many of you will get gifts this Christmas that are unfit; that is, they don't fit and they are unfinished because you can't use them. And so what are you going to do with gifts that you receive that are not right? They don't fit, they don't work, you can't use them. What are you going to do with those gifts? I know. Many of you are going to regift them. You're going to take them and give them to somebody else. [laughter] But most of us are going to take those gifts and we're going to go back to the store

and what are we going to do? We're going to exchange them. We're going to take what is unfit and unfinished and we're going to get what we need. We're going to make a substitution.

Do you understand that the reason that Jesus Christ came to this world and became one of us is because we were unfit to provide a payment for the debt of our salvation? And Christ the Savior was born in order that He might become the payment for our sin. That's why the Bible tells us in the book of Isaiah [Isaiah 9:6], *"Unto us a child is born; unto us a Son is given."* Jesus is the one and only Son of God who came and was given on the cross to provide a payment, a satisfactory payment for our sins.

This great exchange that I mention to you is recorded in the book of Corinthians... 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 21... simply says this: 21) *"For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that we in Him might become the righteousness of God."* I'm unrighteous; Jesus is righteous! I'm sinful; Jesus is sinless! Jesus went to the cross. He took my sin and the great exchange took place. By His substitution, I now have forgiveness and freedom, and I now have righteousness in Christ! That's the requirement that God has for us. And we cannot be righteous of our own accord. It is unfinished business. Jesus has finished it and brought about righteousness.

But not only is there the word substitution; there is the word triumph! Triumph! Say that with me, [triumph!] Triumph! Why does that word matter? Because the Bible tells us in the book of Hebrews chapter 2... Keep your hand in Hebrews 12, but in Hebrews chapter 2, beginning in verse 9, you need to see this. The Bible says:

9) *But we see Him (that is, Jesus) who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.* 10) *For it was fitting that He, for whom all things and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons together, should be made the founder of their salvation (Jesus is the founder) and perfect through suffering.*

Jesus suffered and died on the cross so that we would not have to fear the consequence and the penalty of death.

For many of us Christmas will be different this year. Someone in your family circle... someone in your friendship circle is not going to be with you, who's been with you every other Christmas. And obviously the holiday time adds grief and struggle. It's a time when we... we realize that life has changed and we struggle with the pain of our enemy called death. I love the fact that in 1 Corinthians 15 the Bible describes death as an enemy. In fact it says this [1 Corinthians 15:26]: *"The last enemy that will be destroyed is death."* Death is an enemy. It's an enemy to everything I love; it's an enemy to everything that I live for; it's an enemy to everything I accomplish, everything I do, because death takes my life and just removes it. And it separates and it divides.

But here's the good news of Christmas. Jesus Christ came into this world and tasted death for every one of us that we might not fear the triumph of death but that we by looking to Jesus might be able to triumph over death through the power and the life that Jesus gives through what He has done for us. That is the story of Christmas!

It's the story of a... of a gift of life. It's the... the story of a birth, not just of a baby, but a second birth that can happen in you, in me and we don't have to fear death. And Jesus has tasted death that we might have triumph in life. I pray for you if you're grieving this Christmas, but I pray that through your tears that you will look to Jesus who is the triumph of life over death.

There's a third word that I want you to see and that's not only the word substitution and triumph, it is the word atonement... the word atonement. To... the word atonement means to cover; that something is covered. Instead of being exposed and... instead of being ah... used against, it is now taken away. This word can be used to speak of a legal action when there is a judgment leveraged against someone. But to have an atonement is to have the consequence of that judgment taken away. To have atonement means to have something that would otherwise be shameful and exposed to now be covered. And the Bible says that Jesus Christ came and was born in order that He might provide an atonement, a covering for our sins!

One of my favorite parts of this incredible musical presentation that we're doing this weekend called Gloria is a time when we do a little song called "Jesus Saves." Because there's a big graffiti board with all kinds of sins written on that board that comes down and develops before your eyes here on this platform. And then in the end all of that is covered; it's all erased, it's all taken away and finally all that remains is that Jesus saves.

And I don't know what may be against you today. I don't know what kind of guilt you may have in your life today. I don't know what kind of shame you may be bearing inwardly. I don't know what kind of sin or rejection that you have known in your life, but I want you to know today that because of who Christ is, your sins are covered in His blood. And that's why the Bible says in Romans chapter 8 and beginning in verse 1:

*1) There is no condemnation... no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..., 2) for the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. 3) For God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do, by sending His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin: He condemned sin in the flesh.*

For the Bible goes on to say:

*4) In order that the righteous requirement of the law might now be fulfilled in us who no longer walk according to the flesh, but to the Spirit.*

I want you to know you're not condemned in Christ. And Jesus was born to settle the unfinished business of your salvation, but to take away the consequence and the condemnation of sin in your life. Today you can know that you're forgiven. Today you can know that your sins are covered. Today you can know the atoning work of Jesus Christ. How important it is to know His atonement.

Have you ever been out shopping and found what you thought was the perfect gift? I mean you've been looking and looking and looking, and finally you got to that rack, you got to that... that showcase, you got to that place and you said, "That's it! That's what I'm looking for! That... that's the gift I want." Only to take the gift and turn it over and find out that it cost too much. Only to suddenly realize that it's over your head, you can't pay for it. You don't have satisfaction.

I want you to know that in life time and time again we wake up to realize that even when we have wanted life to be different or wanted something else, we feel like it's all out of reach and it's all over our heads. But I want you to know that when you realize who Christ is and what He has done you realize that He's paid it, He's atoned for it, He's satisfied it and there's not anything that is out of the reach of His cover for us.

There's one final thing that I want you to see about this work that Christ has finished and that is the word reconciliation... reconciliation. That is to bring together. The Dictionary of New Testament Theology says it this way: "To reconcile is to end a relation of enmity and to substitute it for one of peace and goodwill. It is not necessarily implied that the enmity existed on one side only, but it is plainly stated that it is the case, the initiative to reconcile was God's who found in the death of His Son a way in which His love for the sinner and His wrath against sin could be commanded, so that He might both be righteous Himself and justify man, the sinful man who relies on faith in Jesus."

Jesus has reconciled us to the Father. And this work of reconciliation is a work that is now being brought about in our lives. And so I share this with you to say to you today that God has given us a new life, and God has established a new relationship. And the relationship that we have with Him is now a relationship whereby we are reconciled to Him.

So what are the four words that I've said to you this morning? I want you to say them back with me. Are you ready? Let's say them. Word number one: substitution. Word number two: triumph. Word number three: atonement. Word number four: reconciliation. I never wants you to see the star... the star of Christmas, the hope of Christmas, and not realize that the declaration of the star to the shepherds, to the wise men, to all even today is a star that speaks of substitution, of triumph, of atonement, of reconciliation because it's all found in one place and one person and His name...What is His name, church? Say it with me. Jesus [Jesus]. Jesus has finished the work.



And that brings me to the final question: What does the finished work of Christ mean to me? If I had unfinished business with God and Jesus has now finished it, through His substitution, triumph, atonement and reconciliation, then what does all this mean to me? Well, I think it means several things.

One, I think it means I have absolutely nothing to complain about this Christmas. I just can't walk around letting the world sing *Joy to the World* and me walk around with a scowl and acting like I have no joy. Because there is great joy in knowing Christ and knowing what Christ has done for us!

Just before Thanksgiving, Connie my wife, my daughter Lizzie and myself flew from here to Orlando, Florida. I have a son who lives in south Florida who was coming up to meet us there, and we were going to spend some days together before Thanksgiving. Of course, there were a lot of travelers during the course of that week... a lot of people packed together, a lot of movement, but we were on a flight and actually flying Southwest from here over to Orlando, and there was an... at least an unpublished stop on that, and we stopped in Birmingham, Alabama.

When we touched down in Birmingham and as we taxed up to the gate, the flight attendant came on and said, "I'm wondering do I have two people on this flight, a boy and a girl by the name of... I don't remember their names... Jack and Suzy Smith. Let's just call them Jack and Suzy. And he said, "If you are Jack or Suzy, would you stand up and wave your hand at me?" And so all the sudden somewhere up near the front of the plane, ahead of me, I saw two kids stand up and wave their hands. And about that time he flight attendant said, "Jack and Suzy, I've got news for you." He said, "Your mom and dad told you that were getting on this flight and coming to Birmingham to go see your family who live not far from here. But I am here to tell you today that you're not going to Birmingham, Alabama. You are staying on this plane. You're going to Orlando, Florida! You are headed to Disneyworld!"

Well, I mean Jack and Suzy exploded at the front of the plane. And about that time the whole [begins clapping] plane erupted into a big applause. Flashes went off as mom and dad were capturing the moment. And it was... it was amazing! The whole plane... all the tension, all the frustration, all the "We gotta get there... we gotta change pl..." All of it was gone away because two kids were getting to go to Disneyworld. I mean it was great news!

Well, I'm just telling you, if you know this Jesus, it's great news! And I don't care what else happens in the world around you! We don't have anything to complain about this Christmas! And I just want to encourage you as you go through the motions of all of the movement and all the mayhem that can happen during the Christmas season, that you make it your practice to absolutely shock people at the checkout counter by being the one person who's got joy! [laughter] I mean you just watch the rest of them!

Now don't you dare imitate what most of them do. Just watch them! I'm telling you if you've got brightness in your eyes, a smile on your face, and joy in your heart... if you are kind and pleasant, you may just see somebody behind a checkout counter just pass out. They may not know what to do [laughter] because of what you do.

I don't have anything to complain about. Here's what the Bible says. The Bible says to us (Wow, that was slick. Man, we got some movement going on up here. I got to be careful. Be swaying like these kids up here.)

The Bible says in Romans 8:31:

*31) What things shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32) He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not freely give us all things?*

What in the world can I complain about? God has demonstrated His love in the person of Christ! I have nothing but joy this Christmas!

There's something else that I need to understand and that is that not only do I not have anything to complain about, but we don't need to be comparing ourselves with other believers. It seems that sometimes we get caught up in this comparison game... what God did for you, God didn't do for me. And all this back and forth about whose kinda got better blessings from God. And I just want you to know that that's not the way to live our lives. In fact here in Hebrews chapter 12 beginning in verse 1, I'm going to read it to you in the Amplified Bible because I think it says it so clearly. It says:

*"Therefore then since we're surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses who have born testimony to the truth, let us strip off and throw aside every encumbrance, unnecessary weight, and that sin which so readily, deftly, and cleverly clings to and entangles us, and let us run with patient endurance, steady and active persistence, the appointed course of the race that is set before us."*

Run [tap]your [tap] race [tap]! Don't look at everybody else. Don't compare yourself with everybody else. I... I think most of you are aware that... that the White Rock Marathon is going on in Dallas this morning. Boy, am I ever glad I didn't make that decision this year! [laughter] It was more like a swimathon than a marathon. I guarantee you there's been more prayer on that track than probably there has been people in this church this morning for the conditions that we've had. People have just been trying to survive to get through it.

But can you imagine trying to run a marathon and while you're out there and it's raining and it's cold and you're... you're having a hard time, You're there thinking, "I wish I had his shoes." "Wish I had her jacket." Boy, it's not fair, they're running faster than I am." "Hey, why didn't they hand me a cup of water?" You know... I mean, all... Let me tell you something. If that's the way you try to run the race, I can tell you right now you'll

never finish the race. You will never finish the race because it's not their race, it's your race.

And when it comes to Christmas, it's easy for us to start comparing what we have. You know to say, "don't you know that the greatest nightmare of every parent is when they have more than one child and they're trying to give their kids presents at Christmas, that one child would feel affirmed and the other child would feel rejected. "Well, they love Bobby more than they love me." I mean, don't you know that as a parent, you just want your kids to know you love them. You're not going to get them all the same things because they have different needs... they're... they're different kids, they're different stages! But you're going to meet their needs because you love them! And because Jesus Christ loves you, He's going to meet the needs of your life. Don't compare your life to others.

Run the race that God has set before you. And the secret is this, verse 2:

*2) Looking away from all that will distract to Jesus, who is the leader and the source of our faith, giving the first incentive for our belief. Everything we believe begins with Him. And is also it's finisher, bringing it to maturity and perfection.*

Jesus is going to complete your life. And while that... there may be some unfinished areas for you right now, the Bible says that God will will and work for His good pleasure in your life. Don't compare.

The final thing that I would say to you this morning is this: the unfinished business of Christ means we cannot compete with the finished work of Christ. Would you just quit trying to find your way to God on your own? Would you just quit trying to set your own standards and be the measure of your own righteousness? Would you come to the place in your life that you realize that just as you can't take a flair tip pen and go over and add something to the Mona Lisa that doesn't destroy it, that you can't add to the work of Christ and His finished work on the cross by any good thing that you try to do! Your religion, your philosophy, your best effort will always fail in comparison to the one thing that brings salvation and that is calling upon the name of Jesus because He alone is our substitute, our triumph, our atonement and our reconciliation.

You can't add to it. You can't finish it. You can't do it. And that's why there is such danger in a cult of success in our world today; that says, just make Jesus one of the accessories of your life and then you just try to have a successful life. Jesus didn't come to make you successful; Jesus came to save you from sin. And you can't have Christianity without the cross and you cannot have the cross without the Christ who was born that He might die and bear the burden of our sins! It's not a cult of success; it's a confession of brokenness. It's an admission of imperfection. It's the understanding of how unfit we are apart from Christ. And all that we can do is to look to Jesus.

If you do just a little bit of people watching during this Christmas season, I can assure you that you'll see mothers and fathers who are out with their children and many times when they come to a checkout counter, the children are going to come, holding something in their hands. But you know there's something I've noticed about children... little children. When they come to a checkout counter and they're holding something in their hands, they don't walk up to the counter and reach into their pocket to say let me get my wallet out so I can pay for this. [laughter] They don't pull out a checkbook and start writing a check. They don't whip out a credit card and say, "Here, put it on my MasterCard." Now, when they get a little older they do that... say, "Put it on my dad's MasterCard, put it on my mom's MasterCard." But you know when they're little you know what they do? They stand there and hold that item and then they just look. They look up to their mom, they look up to their dad because they are looking to them.

And the Bible says the only way you can be saved is that you have to look to Jesus. Take everything you are, everything you're not; everything you have, everything you don't; and you look to Jesus. That's the reason that I believe that one of the greatest Christmas carols ever written is really just a hymn that we've often sung. And this morning this hymn is the expression of this work that Christ has done for us.

[Singer begins] Jesus paid it all; all to Him I owe./ Sin had left a crimson stain; He washed it white as snow./ I hear the Savior say, "Thy strength indeed is small!/ Child of weakness, watch and pray, Find in Me thine all and all."/ And when before the throne I stand in Him complete,/ "Jesus died my soul to save," My lips shall still repeat./ (Let's sing it together) Jesus paid it all, All to Him I owe; / Sin had left a crimson stain--He washed it white as snow./ My Jesus paid it all, All to Him I owe;/ Sin had left a crimson stain--He washed it white as snow.

*Lord Jesus, thank You for the finished work of salvation. Thank You that all that you ask of us is faith, a faith that turns from sin, repentant, understanding that we are unfinished, [music begins] unfit, marred, shamed; that we're stressed and we're a mess, that we need You. And I pray that right now if there is anyone here who has never experienced the finished work of Christ in their heart, that this day and this moment would be that moment for them. Thank You for what You've done. Thank You for the opportunity, Lord, to worship You today and to lift up praise and devotion, submission to You because of what You've done. Father, we realize that the only debt that we have is a great debt of gratitude. And I pray that we would not live filled with pride and arrogance, but of gratitude that is humble and willing to serve and eager to follow. Lord, I pray right now for the work of Your Spirit in this place and in hearts, and I pray that You would let this story be written in us. In Jesus' name. Amen*

I want you to look up and as you look up I invite you to stand with me. I do want to ask that no one be leaving. This is a very important moment. We're only going to be here for another few minutes.

But I have a question... a very important question to ask you today. Is this your story? It's called the greatest story ever told and it is to the world, but is it your story? Do you know that your sins are forgiven? Do you know that you're covered? Have you looked to Jesus as your Savior?

If you want to do that... if you want to know how to do that... if you just feel compelled to say, "I want to know this Jesus", in just a moment we're going to begin to sing, and as we do, I'm going to ask you to do something that's not comfortable, but something that's essential. And that is that you be willing to step from where you are into one of these aisles and we'll have a minister standing right here if you're on the lower floor. If you're there in the terrace I want you just to move to an aisle and come and say to a minister, "Today, I'm looking to Jesus." That's all you need to say. "Today I'm looking to Him." And we'll talk to you about what Christ can do and how you can know this, and how you can be confident in the finished work of Christ.

You don't have to wonder if you're going to heaven. You don't have to wonder if you can be forgiven. I'm telling you it is signed, sealed, delivered in Christ! You just need to receive it today.

Others of you have trusted Christ, but you need to follow Him in baptism. Just like these did at the beginning of the service, it's a declaration of the death, the burial, the resurrection of Christ! You're saying the triumph of Christ is my triumph! And you're identifying with Him. And if you're willing to follow Him in baptism, I want you to come.

Others of you this Christmas need a church home and church family. You need not only to be here for some special moments, you need to be here! You need to be connected; you need to be serving. You need to begin a new year with new community in your life and new commitment in your life. And I want to ask you in particular if you're a believer and have followed Christ, but need a church home to lead the way, and just to do this publicly. I mean, ladies and gentlemen, if Jesus can go to the cross... if He could bear sin and shame for us, can we not step out in a carpeted church aisle where we have a roof over our head, dry clothes on our bodies, and walk forward and say, "I mean business with God today!"

His business is done. What about your business? Don't leave here with unfinished business. Right now come and follow Jesus. Here on the lower floor; there in the balcony, we're standing right there, waiting to receive you. Just step to those ministers right behind you. You don't have to come here. Just go right there. For we're waiting come right now.