

## Introduction

Today is week two of the "Help My Unbelief" series. We are just looking at some different encounters in Scripture with people in different contexts or backgrounds and how the Gospel met them or encountered them or just that they experienced the truth of the Gospel. That's what's kind of cool about the Gospel and how we see the Scripture and about a Christian testimony: It is that there's an aspect to each encounter that's totally unique and different, according to the people involved, and yet there's an aspect that is the same... the thread of the Gospel that doesn't change... so that when you share your testimony of how you came to Christ, it's unique to you and your experiences and your background and your upbringing and all that kind of stuff. But when you come to the cross, all the testimonies come together. Right? This is the way of salvation, and this is how you come to know the Lord.

We're going to look at John chapter 3 that Steve just read... an encounter with Jesus and a man named Nicodemus. Today's message is "Belief for the Religious", so this may be most of you. This is definitely me, if you look at where I've come from and my upbringing. But also, not just the Christian religious, but I think you could apply some of this to people of other faiths as well, especially as you start to dig down and say, "Okay, what is your faith about?" Most... if not all... faiths outside of Christianity are works-based. You just kind of have to boil it down and say, "Basically, what you do or don't do, you're trying to earn some kind of favor or treasure or reward." But Christianity and the message of the cross and the message of Christ is about the Gospel of grace and how that is a gift that is, again, given to us by the loving will of God and not by something we earn. We're going to look at that today.

### 1. Religion's Failings

This man Nicodemus, just to give a little bit of context, if you see at the beginning of the chapter, he is introduced as a man of the Pharisees, and he's introduced as a ruler of the Jews. The Pharisees were known for being very legalistic, knowing the Law, and trying to match up the Law. Even if you separate some of the abuses or perversions of that mindset, in theory, they had the Law of God and they knew it, they taught it, and they lived it... so they were very Law-centered. Beyond that, "Not just a Pharisee but a ruler of the Jews" means that he was most likely part of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin... this group, they find their roots in Exodus. If you remember a few weeks ago, we were talking about Moses and how all the people were bringing their problems to him, and he was having to settle every dispute. It was just taking up too much of his time, and he needed to be doing other things and involved in other things. Jethro came to him and said, "Hey, we're going to set up this group of people. We're going to select some Godly, honorable, trustworthy, wise men and say that they're the group that you bring your problems to, so we can delegate this. So they'll hear the problems and the cases of the people. They'll decide and if they can't, then we'll move it up the line to you. That's the group that the Sanhedrin is kind of formed from; that's where the origins are for the Sanhedrin. It's a group of educated, well-respected, very moral, and very knowledgeable of the Law of God that ruled over the Jews and settled these kinds of disputes. So, if there was a problem or an issue, the people would come to the Sanhedrin and say, "Here's our cultural court system," because they're not going to take it to the Roman courts because the Roman courts would not have any concern about most of the things that they were upset about. So the Jewish people would go to the Sanhedrin and say, "Okay, we need a verdict here; we need a ruling here." Nicodemus is a member of that group, so that means he's not just educated in the Law of God, the Mosaic Law, but he had to know about other faiths. He had to know about some of the things that were being studied in science, he had to be a wise person, and he had to be a morally upright person. There were some qualifications here on

these people because it wasn't that you throw anybody into the Sanhedrin. They had to be really qualified and really deserving of the position.

So if you took the idea of Nicodemus and you say, "Well, I don't understand Jewish culture or any of that kind of stuff and just said, "What does that look like here?" This is the Nicodemus who grew up going to Sunday school every week. He was a Royal Ambassador; maybe he was an Awana. Maybe he was doing all these things. He was in the youth choir; he was doing everything the church had all the time and never missed a Sunday; he was just a good, good person. He was a good person who has a lot of religious activity in his life and a lot of head knowledge of the Scripture. That might be you. You might know someone like that. I've grown up going to church basically all of my life, so I can resonate a little bit here with Nicodemus. That's the kind of person here who is coming to Jesus, it says, "by night." Some people say that he was maybe ashamed to be going to ask these questions. Some say it was just kind of symbolic of the fact that those who are apart from Christ are in darkness, and they come to the light. So coming to Jesus is like coming into the light, and so that's not something to get hung up on but just some cool things to think about. This very religious, moral, upright, wise, educated person comes to Jesus because he has seen something in Jesus that has told him, "You have to be 'of God.' The signs You've done have clued me in that I need to come to You." He calls Him "Rabbi" which is an extreme sign of respect, coming from someone of the Sanhedrin, to Jesus and to call Him "Rabbi." So Jesus responds to him with the Gospel, basically. So this religious person who has devoted his life to religion, to ceremony, to ritual, to upright living, to moral lifestyle... and Jesus' response to him is, "Here's the Gospel; here's what you really need to hear." We can take from this how religion has failed Nicodemus and how religion often fails us. When I use the term "religion," I'm talking about the lifestyle, the activities, the works, the programs, the ceremony, the ritual of spiritual things... church life, basically... but we're separating that from "in Christ."

So Jesus responds to him and tells him in verse 3: *"...unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."* He tells him again in verse 5: *"...unless one is born of water and Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God."* In verses 14 through 18, which have some very familiar passages to us, He talks about belief: *"Anyone who believes in Jesus will have eternal life."* So He's basically telling him, "All your good works and deeds and ceremony and effort and all this kind of stuff that you've accomplished for yourself, and even how you are good toward other people and discerning, none of that has secured or earned salvation for you." Salvation is not something to be earned. It was earned by Christ for us. Man cannot earn it. So His response to the very religious person, the very religious lifestyle, is that religion does not save you. Your efforts, your works, your good deeds, your good thoughts, your monetary donations and tithes and offerings and your service projects and feeding the hungry and all of that kind of stuff, is good... it's morally good. It is not saving. Salvation is not found in those things. So Jesus is trying to drive home the point that "Listen; salvation is spiritual, so it comes through the Spirit. If it's a spiritual new birth, if you're looking for spiritual new life, you're trying to find fellowship with God who is Spirit, why do you think that you can earn it through the physical?" Because that's who we are... that's where we live... that's how we walk... that's what we see. So Jesus is trying to drive home the point, "Salvation is found in Him, through faith, through belief, through trust." These are things that are not tangible. It's hard for us to think, "Well wait a second; how do it do that? How do I accomplish that?" So Nicodemus... you could tell, God had stirred in his heart to say, "There's something more than this religious life, and so I want to go and find out about this." And Jesus responds with, "You're right; there is something more. Salvation comes by faith. It's an act of faith. It's the work of the Spirit."

Something cool to point out there in verses 14 and 15, when it talks about Moses lifting up the serpent and how Jesus must be lifted up as well, you can see how this should affirm that his study of Scripture was not a

bad thing... to learn God's Word, to know God's Word, to meditate on it to try to understand it. Jesus points back to it, as He tells the Gospel to Nicodemus. He refers to a passage in Numbers 21 when Moses had a serpent made out of copper or bronze and lifted it up, and those who were bitten looked to the serpent that was raised up, and if they saw it, they lived. So Jesus makes the illustration here and says, "Just as the serpent was raised up and those who looked on the serpent were given life, the Son of Man (Himself... Jesus) would be lifted up, and those who look on Him would find life." So how cool is that that He's pointing back to, "Listen... I'm not trying to do away with all of your religious accomplishments and say that they don't matter at all, or there's no good to them at all... by referencing the fact that you've studied the Scriptures, and just as you have studied in the Scripture that Moses raised a serpent, and those who looked on it gained life... The Son of man, Jesus, will be raised up and those who trust in Him... look on Him... would find eternal life." It's really cool how He puts that together for us and points to the fact that there is good in religion, there is good in what he has studied and what he has done, but still try to point out to him that it doesn't come by man's will or efforts, but it's a work of the Spirit.

In verse 8, He says, *"The wind blows where it wishes and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."* This is encouraging but also kind of a downer, a little bit, because we think, "We want to conjure that, we want to be able to predict it; we want to be able to come up with the formula that says, 'If we do this, this, and this, the Spirit shows up.'" We cannot do that. This is the Spirit of God. He responds to the will of the Father, not the will of man. So as He's telling Nicodemus, "Just like the wind, you don't know where it's coming from or where it's going. You can't predict when it will show up." That's how the Spirit of God works. It's a spiritual matter. It's hard for us to wrap our physical brains around to say, "Wait a second. I want to put a sign up in front of our church and put it on the calendar and say, 'Revival: This Wednesday night at 7:00 p.m.'" That's not how the Spirit of God works. The Spirit shows up and we experience that, and we go "Yeah... we want to do that again. How do we get that? How do we do that?" Jesus is trying to tell us. "You can't conjure or manipulate the Holy Spirit. He shows up at the will of the Father. He works by the will of the Father. He creates new life in us that **we** can't create, so we are so removed from the process. That's what He's trying to get through to the religious mindset. You're trying to work your way or figure your way as you ponder things, and reason your way. You can't... you cannot. It's a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. Why would we ever think that we could just go "Poof"... Right? ...and He'll just show up. It's not a genie in a lamp. It's the Spirit of God. He's telling Nicodemus, "Just like the wind, you cannot predict it; the same with the Holy Spirit." Live expectantly? ...Yes. Long for the Holy Spirit to show up? ...Yes ...Because when He does, that's what we want. We should be a church that puts a sign up that says, "Hey... last week, the Holy Spirit showed up." Not... "Hey... this week, the Holy Spirit is going to show up and we can bank on it." We want to respond by saying, "We have experienced the power of the Holy Spirit, and we just trust that He'll work as He wants to. When He does, it's amazing, but He does things that we cannot do." So that's what Jesus is trying to tell Nicodemus. "You can't save yourself. It's not your efforts; it's not your will but it's the will of the Father."

In I Corinthians 12:3, Paul writes that you can't confess Jesus as Lord unless by the Spirit. So you could literally, physically say, "Jesus is Lord." but your heart cannot confess in agreement with the fact that Jesus is Lord unless the Spirit has convicted and convinced your heart to do so. The Spirit draws us and regenerates us. That's what Jesus is trying to tell Nicodemus. "It's a spiritual matter. Quit trying to focus on the physical." But that's where we get caught up. In Ephesians 2:8-9, a very familiar passage to some of you: *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. This is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."* Nicodemus, who had devoted his life to living the right way

according to the Law and learning the Scriptures and always trying to do the right thing, he could very easily... he had a high social status... he could very easily look across the street and say, "Truly, I'm getting in, compared to that person. These pagans or these Gentiles or these people who are poor... these people who don't know anything... these people who do more bad than good... Surely I'm in a better standing with God than they are." But Paul reminds us that that's not where salvation comes from, so we can't do that. We can't boast. I can't say, "I got in safely to heaven; you barely got into heaven." Right? Then we start comparing. When we come to the cross, you've probably heard this... the ground is level at the foot of the cross because it's a work of God... not a work that we do so that we can't compare. It's like when we share those testimonies that I was talking about earlier. We all have different stories until we come to the cross and then it's the same. That's the design of grace. That's the Gospel of grace. It can't be earned or achieved or bought. It's the Gospel of grace. This message of Christianity... it's a Gospel of grace... It's pretty amazing. So religion fails to save us. It failed to save Nicodemus. It fails to save us.

## 2. Religion's Blind Spot.

What about the blind spot? What is religion's blind spot? It's pretty interesting when Nicodemus, in verse 9, is having this conversation with Jesus and he says, "*How can these things be?*" He doesn't understand. Right? He is still kind of focused on the physical. When Jesus said, "*You have to be born again,*" Nicodemus is thinking, "Okay, hmm... based on what I know of anatomy and just... my height... and width and body mass... How is that possible?" He jumps right away to the physical... "Born... Okay, I know who people are born... how to be born again? Well, about that... Hmmm, I don't see that happening." Right? For us, that term is not that strange, "Born-again Christian." We use it more as an adjective. Jesus is saying, "You must be born again." It's a passive verb there. "You must be born again." Nicodemus doesn't get it. "How can I physically be born again?" There's some kind of blind spot that's been created. He says, "How can these things be?"

Jesus' response in verse 10: "*Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?*" So basically Nicodemus says, "How is this possible?" and Jesus says "How is it possible that you've missed this?" There's some kind of blind spot created. "If you've been pursuing God... if you've been pursuing the Yahweh God of Israel through the Scripture, how do you not understand the things that I am telling to you about being born again... being born of water and Spirit?" Most likely He's referring to Ezekiel 36:25-26: The Lord said, "*I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new Spirit I will put within you.*" And the Lord said, "*I will take your heart of stone... and give you a heart of flesh.*" It's the idea of new life... the idea of being born again... the idea of being born of water and Spirit... this cleansing water that only the Lord can provide. So Jesus is trying to say, "You've studied the Scripture, you know this verse." If He quoted this passage from Ezekiel, Nicodemus would say, "Yes, I know that." That's why Jesus is saying, "You marvel at the things I say, but I'm maybe feigning some surprise that you don't understand what I'm saying." He's saying, "You should understand because you've studied the Word of God. This should not be a surprise." So there's some kind of blind spot that's been created through this religious lifestyle, through his devotion to religion. He has changed his focus; he has fixed his eyes on the wrong things, and he has missed the power of the Gospel.

It's not just Nicodemus that missed it. This is pretty cool; this is one of those grammar things. Some of you hate grammar, I know; but it's cool when it makes a difference. Verse 12: "*If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?*" "You" in that verse is plural. It's not just Nicodemus. He is basically saying, "y'all." Right? We're not in Cowboy Church, but still... Jesus

said, "If I have told y'all earthly things and y'all do not believe them, how can y'all believe if I tell y'all heavenly things?" I told the first service, "I feel weird quoting Jesus and saying 'y'all,'" but He's saying you all... you, plural... "Not just you, Nicodemus, but the religious like you," and I would argue not just the religious Sanhedrin but us... the culturally religious in Houston, Texas. If He tells us spiritual things, we miss them because we're focused on the wrong things. There's a blind spot spiritually that we've created through our religious activity and culture and lifestyle. It's tempting to focus on the works and efforts because we like the tangible. We like to do a project, step back, and say, "It's finished. Here's the work of my hand." We like to keep score. I say "we"... maybe just me, but I like that. I like to see where I stand. I like to know that I've accomplished something, and I think that's human nature that we want to feel, "I've done enough. I've done good things." We want to keep track of that because in our mind there's something still hanging in the balance. If we're considering our eternal security, right... we want to make sure that the scales tip in our favor so we cling to those things, we long for those things because they are easier for us to see, to understand, to hold onto. But if religion becomes a means to an end, we will miss the power of the Gospel. Religion devoid of faith can mimic the fruit or character of God, but it is powerless apart from the Spirit of God.

You can see this in Nicodemus in verse 2, when he comes to Jesus and says, "The signs that You do... the works that You do... have to be done by the power of God." He knew... "I've studied Scripture, I've studied the things of God but there's something more. There's something beyond that. It's empty in and of itself. There's got to be something to this that I'm not getting... some kind of blind spot that I've missed in this religious lifestyle." Then when he sees Jesus, and the work of God through Jesus, he recognizes, "That's what I'm missing. That's what I need. This person knows the answer." That's who he goes after. If we just want to pursue godliness, apart from the Spirit of God, we're in a bad place.

In II Timothy 3:5, Paul warns people that are living by faith, they're not transformed, yet still... here's the quote, *"...having the appearance of godliness but denying its power."* I struggle with this all the time. I know how to appear Godly. I know how to live a lifestyle that makes it look like I'm in right standing with God. Paul warns that there are people who will walk in a lifestyle of godliness but deny the power of the Spirit of God. So we can somehow live a religious, good, moral lifestyle but not be walking by faith in Christ, to the glory of God. That's a dangerous place to be. We try to preach the Gospel here because we don't want you to ever think that if you'll just come and attend and sing the songs and plug in and be a part of Bible studies and do all of the activities of the church that you're in right standing with God. Unless you are in Christ, unless you are "born again," you are not in right standing with God... no matter how much attendance you can muster or how much tithes or offerings you can donate or how many mission trips or service projects you can be a part of... unless you are "born again" by the Spirit of God, you are not in a right standing with God. That's the message that Jesus is trying to tell Nicodemus, and that's the message that I think we need to tell those who are religious... maybe even avidly devout, religious people... for them to consider, for us to consider, "What is my religion based on? What are my efforts focused on? What are they driven by?" There's kind of a difference you can see, and you've probably felt this when you do something without conviction. You're just kind of just going through the motions... as opposed to, if you truly believe, your heart has been convinced.

I try to liken this to something in my own life. You may resonate with this or you may not. If you're not a sports fan or a college football fan... just maybe tune out for the next couple of minutes, or if you're still upset about something last night... (Laughter) ...we'll pray through that together, like I am. So there's a difference between being "all-in," under conviction, and really walking in the truth of what it means to be a fan of something. The Aggies would draw a difference between a "two percenter" and a real fan... like a

true Aggie. Right? I've observed some Aggie culture, but I don't walk by experience in that culture, so I can't speak to that. So here's my example: I have to go back a few years because it's been a while since the team I root for has been very good. But here's how I realized I was a fan with conviction for my team. When I started working here at the church, I worked with Chris Mayfield, Casey Curtis, and Randy Thompson... three of the most rabid, avid, Longhorn fans you'll ever meet in your life. I was around it... Randy had his office painted burnt orange... no lie. It's not even there anymore now. So I was around it: I heard the propaganda, I heard the fandom, I saw it in them, and it was real... It was real in them. But I was just kind of like... "Well, I like sports; I like football." So I watched and kind of took a rooting interest, like, "Okay, I'll root for them; I don't have anything against them... whatever." My interest began to grow as I experienced and saw... it was an easy time to root for them, I'll admit; but I've been a fan since. This was back in 2005, so they probably picked up a lot of fans that year. If you're one of those who judges... like, "You didn't even go there..." If I was rooting for your team, you would probably welcome me aboard your bandwagon. Right? (Laughter) So let's just withhold the judgement a little bit. So it was that season... the dream season... the amazing season... I could tell you more about it later, but I don't have time right now. I'm sitting in my apartment alone, watching the game... which, as I said earlier, it's an illustration for another day and another time... watching the Longhorns play football. This was an undefeated season, so this was just a masterpiece at work. Every game was amazing... to watch Vince Young. He broke this long touchdown run. I'm into the game; I'm feeling excited. The next thing I know... my hand goes up. I'm hooking my horns... (Laughter) ...by myself! (Laughter) No one is around me. (Laughter) The players can't see me... the other fans in the stadium can't see me. No one outside... because it's just me... by myself... and I involuntarily just reacted out of the conviction for my team... "Hook 'Em." That's when I knew. I kind of hit "pause" because the moment struck me and I thought, "What am I doing? I guess I'm a fan." Right?

So that's the difference between just kind of going through the motions, buying a tee shirt, showing up and kind of doing the cheers, going to the games, and leaving at halftime, and then really being a fan... being convicted that this is where my heart is. That's the difference between someone who just lives the religious lifestyle, isn't really into it; it's not fulfilling, there's no peace in your heart, no peace in your mind. You're just spinning your wheels, and someone who is, by conviction, walking in faith and living a religious lifestyle. There's a difference there. That's what Jesus is trying to point out to Nicodemus. He's saying, "It's not just like a hamster or a rat running on one of those wheels." It's not going anywhere... it's fruitless... it's meaningless... it's purposeless. He's saying, "There's something more to it. Your religion shouldn't be a means to an end."

### 3. Religion's Purpose.

So what should it be? What is religion's purpose? There has to be some benefit to these good works and this religious lifestyle. That same passage that I read earlier: Ephesians 2:8-9... the very next verse, Ephesians 2:10 says, "*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*" So there is something to good works. It's not that you come to Christ by faith and then do whatever you want. God has called us to good works, but they are in response to the faith that we have. They are done by faith because we have been changed by the Gospel. We've been changed by Christ. One of the purposes of religion we see that led to Nicodemus coming to Christ... it can reveal a need for a Saviour. This religious lifestyle that Nicodemus lived... he had studied the Word, he was doing good and living morally upright... so it wasn't someone who could say, "Man, I'm doing things terribly in the eyes of the world. I must need a Saviour." This was someone who was living according to the Law... someone that you would probably trust as a neighbor to check on your house or your kids or whatever when you're out of town. This is someone who was straight A, in Sunday school...

just awesome and yet it pointed him to something else. He was left lacking. It's not just a moral lifestyle. There's something missing. So it pointed out his need for something more.

Scripture tells us that the Law doesn't save us, but the Law leads us to Christ. The Law tells us, "Here's the standard of God," and when we try to meet it, we can't, so it opens our eyes to the fact that we need a Savior. So that's one purpose to the Law or to religion or to a religious lifestyle. It's to let us know, we can't earn it, we can't do it. I can't keep up with the demand that God has put on my life to earn salvation. I'll fall short every time.

The second purpose that I want to point out is that it's a Gospel witness. In verse 21 when Jesus tells Nicodemus, *"...whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."* If we walk by faith... if our religion, our religious activity, our devotion, our worship... if it's done by faith to the glory of God, then it will be to the glory of God. People will see it in us, and they will glorify God. People will see it in us and they will glorify God. We read this in 1 Peter 2:12 and Matthew 5:16: *"When the world sees our good works that are done by faith, they will glorify God."* They won't glorify us. They'll know that there's something bigger... something beyond... something behind the works that we are doing. It tells them that we've been changed. It tells them we have a different reason or purpose for being, so when we do these things, we have a reason for the hope we have. That's the challenge before us. It's a Gospel witness.

Another purpose for religion... I thought this one was very cool... is our sanctification. Romans 6:15-19: *"What then? Are we to sin because we are not under Law but under grace?"* "So... if it's just about grace and not my works, then it doesn't matter what I do. I can come to the cross, find salvation, and just live however I want." Paul has a response here. *"Are we to sin because we are not under Law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin which leads to death or of obedience which leads to righteousness. But thanks be to God that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart..."* This isn't just disciplining our actions... getting into muscle memory, trying to do the right thing. This is obedience from the heart, a heart that's changed by the Holy Spirit. *"...to the standard of teaching to which you were committed."* Verse 18: *"...and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification."*

What is Paul saying? He says that this religious, moral, upright lifestyle... it doesn't save you and yet you are saved to it. You are saved TO good works. We are saved TO righteousness because, when we do those things by the power of the Spirit, what we're saying is... "I deny myself. I submit to the will of the Father." Guess who did that His whole life? Jesus Christ. So when we do that, we are more like Christ, and when we become more like Christ; we are sanctified. It's the sanctification process. We have right standing and fellowship with God and eternal security at salvation, but from that point on, we're called to sanctification... becoming more and more like Christ. So this religious lifestyle, our worship attendance, the songs we sing, the tithes and offerings we give, shouldn't be begrudgingly... it shouldn't be a chore. It shouldn't be something that leaves us unfulfilled and unsatisfied. It should be a response by faith to the life that God has called us to. So, to His glory, we live this life, and when we submit and surrender our will to His, we are like Jesus. So, the sanctification process works through us as we live the religious lifestyle.

Some people say, "Religion... I don't like religion. I like Jesus but I don't like religion." Well, Jesus was all about religion... not as a means to salvation but as a life that He has called us to. It has been perverted and abused and mistreated and so, yeah... religion and the institution of the church can leave a bad taste in a lot of people's mouths, but it's probably because the church, myself included for so long, has been living the religious lifestyle, like that's where our salvation was found. It causes us to puff up sometimes. It causes us to be discouraged or disheartened sometimes. It causes us to lord those things over other people who aren't as morally upright or weren't brought up the same way as we were... when what it should be is a celebration of the Gospel transformation in our lives. That's the Church... that's the religion that draws people to it. When Jesus is lifted high, just like the serpent... just like Jesus was raised on the cross and raised to the Father, we lift high the name of Jesus ... that's what draws people. That's Church... that's religion as it's meant to be. So may we be a people who respond by faith to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, walk in the Gospel by faith, to the glory of God. Let's pray.

"God, I thank You for the truth of the Gospel. When I consider my works as morally upright or good as I think I've been, God, I know my sin... I know my failure... I know where I fall short. So, God, I thank You for a means of salvation that doesn't rely on my effort or my work or my good deeds. God, I thank You for a salvation that comes through faith in Christ... a salvation that's offered to anyone who will believe in His name. That's clearly the message You taught us in Scripture... it overcomes our skepticism, it overcomes our doubt, it overcomes our sin, and it overcomes our religiousness. It is a salvation that comes by grace. We can't earn it or buy it or conjure it. It comes by the power of the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. It's the same Spirit that raises us from the dead and brings new life to our hearts. God, I pray that during this next song that people would be responding to this message of grace, this message of Good News, this Gospel of Jesus Christ... God, that You would continue to stir in our hearts to know You, to make You known, to live religious lives for Your glory, God... to walk by faith... that our deeds and our service and all of our acts and actions, God, would just be a faith response to the heart change that You have brought us. We ask these things in the name of Jesus. Amen."