



281.890.1900
TheMETonline.org

Jones Road Campus
13000 Jones Road | Houston, TX 77070

Fry Road Campus | Hopper Middle School
7811 Fry Road | Houston, TX 77433

My name is Scott Rodgers and I'm so excited to be with you guys. I say it every time I'm here because it's true. Pastor Bill [Norman, *Lead Pastor of Administration and Operations*] mentioned earlier, just getting here was a trick; because usually I'll just (kind of) fly in. And this time—the Christmas vacation—the kids are on vacation, so we drove the family. We had this horrendous snow storm in Oklahoma City. Literally, they declared a state of emergency; shut down the freeways. Well, two days later we're coming down and (I mean) we're driving through ice. And I'm thinking—(I mean) the cars are sliding off the road still, two days after—and I'm thinking: Okay, if I go in the ditch, I'm calling Sal and he's coming to tow me out, because this is his fault. But we made it. So we're just glad to be alive; glad to be here with you guys.

How many of you make New Year's resolutions? Come on raise your hand if that's you. Fess up. Be honest. Some of you do. Some of you are like: I tried that. All right, so you're probably like me; keep your hand down. (Like): Okay, I make my New Year's resolution and (I mean) on New Year's Eve—

- I'm into it
- I'm focused
- I'm even going to journal it
- I'm going to write it down

And then New Year's Day I'm watching football all day long and (I mean): I think I'll ease into it. January second comes and I'm like: What resolution was that anyway? I don't think I'm going to do that. And it's just the case for most of us.

Well, today we begin a short two-week series actually. It's called *Resolutions: Lose Your Religion and Find Your Freedom*. I'm really privileged to be with you today, and then also next weekend (as well) to wrap this series up. And it's just going to be a fun, fun time together. I appreciate you guys welcoming me as you always do.

Well, I remember the night that Mark walked in. Mark was a Christian. I was in a rock band. We're in our rehearsal studio and we're playing away. I don't know what it was, but I'm sure Pastor Bill has it on cassette or something still. We're playing something away and Mark walks in. He's just (kind of) looking at us with this disgusted look in his eyes, shaking his head, full of disapproval.

And we just stop playing. We're standing there staring at Mark and he looks at us and says: You boys are gonna burn to learn. Playing the devil's music, you're just going to burn in hell just to learn.

And I'm looking at him, and it was in that moment that I learned my first religious lesson. It was in that moment that Mark's words formed in my mind my perspective of who God might be; because at that point in time I wasn't a believer in God. I wasn't a follower of Christ. But he shaped in my mind that: Okay, if this God does exist, then He certainly does hate what I love, and He'll never like what I do. You're gonna burn to learn.

And so, as I began to formulate this in my mind, I began to think: Okay, well, so is He like some big, cosmic bully with a big ole hammer and He's just ready to pounce on me if I don't do what

He wants me to do? And am I going to burn to learn? What is that? That was my first religious idea that permeated my thinking.

And if we're honest, every one of us has religious ideas and thoughts and beliefs.

RELIGIOUS IDEAS, THOUGHTS, AND BELIEFS

Even if you're not a follower of God—even if you don't believe in God at this point—you've probably thought:

- Well, if God does exist, well then I'm sure that He's like this... (and)
- If He does exist, I'm sure that He would treat people this way... (and)
- If He does exist—we form these ideas of who God is.

And even as people who go to church and maybe followers of Christ, we form our ideas about who God is. And the problem with some of them is that they're not even found in Scripture.

In fact, speaking of the word *religion* itself, did you know (I have an NIV version of the Bible here) in this Bible—the *Old Testament* and *New Testament*—the word *religion* is only found five times? In almost every single time the context is: Hey, why don't you put your life where your mouth is and start living out what you believe?

- Take care of the orphans
- Take care of the widows
- Take care of people
- Love people

Why don't you—if you say you're religious, why don't you do something about it that makes a difference in your neighbor's life? That's (kind of) the context of those five times that the word *religion* is cited.

But Jesus, He wasn't really religious in my mind. Let me explain that to you. So here's Jesus, the Son of God: He's trucking all over the countryside and He's healing people. I mean, literally—

- People—paralyzed people are being raised up and they can walk.
- People with blind eyes, their eyes are being opened and they can see.
- The sick are being healed and it's just amazing.

And His teaching—it's coming with clarity and authority; and the truth of God is washing over people's souls while He speaks.

And one of the reasons I believe Jesus wasn't too religious is because He hung out with prostitutes and partiers and business executives and soccer moms. He'd hang out with NASCAR fans if He had to. He'd hang out with us—everyday people.

But there was one group of people who regularly got under His skin. Who do you think that was? It was the religious people of His day. Here's what Scripture says. Jesus is addressing them in *Matthew 23*. He's talking to these people, who were called Pharisees, in *verse [15]*. And the Pharisees were God-fearing—probably loved God—religious people of that day, and here's what Jesus says:

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!
{There’s an exclamation point in my Bible.} You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.

Matthew 23:15 (NIV)

Wow! He’s pretty straight up, isn’t He? Where did they miss it? I mean after all, these Pharisees probably obeyed more of God’s commands than anybody around them. Where did they miss it? Let’s take a glimpse at the heart of one of these religious people and just see what it looks like.

Jesus is teaching in *Luke, chapter 18*, (this won’t be on your screens; I’m just going to read it to you real quick). In *verse 9* it says, “To some who were confident of their own righteousness” —uh oh!—there’s a hint (number one) of what religion does.

⁹ To some who were confident of their own righteousness {it goes on to say} and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told {them} this parable: ¹⁰ “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee {the religious guy} and the other a tax collector. {Which is an everyday person. And in some sense tax collectors were known to be thieves and liars. So you have this religious guy and this tax collector. And He says:} ¹¹ The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector {over here}. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

{Jesus goes on to say:} ¹³ “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

{And then Jesus concludes what He wanted to communicate:} ¹⁴ “I tell you that this man {the tax collector}, rather than the other {the religious Pharisee}, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Luke 18:9-14 (NIV)

And it’s in that account we begin to see how one of the most popular religious ideas of the history of man begins to play itself out. And if you’re taking notes, you can write this down. Because what man-made religion will do is this: Come up with the idea—it’s very popular—that good people go to Heaven.

RELIGIOUS IDEA: GOOD PEOPLE GO TO HEAVEN

My wife, Shelley, when she was a kid, she asked her mom a spiritual question. Parents, don’t you love it when your kids ask you spiritual questions? And it’s like you’re excited. You’re like:

Wow! Man, this is going to be amazing. This is awesome! And then they ask you these really hard, profound questions. What is it with that? Like my 8-year-old son Dillon, he's been asking me this question lately. We're lying in bed together, just kind of snuggling and talking, and he says: Dad, okay, if God has no beginning and no end, then where did He start? And I'm like: [pantomimes disappointment at being stumped]—so I say what every good father does in that moment. I say: Good question. I don't know, but there's some things we just don't understand; isn't there, buddy?

My wife, when she was a kid, asked—Now here's the thing I'm thinking though is: How come our kids never ask us questions like: Hey, Dad, doesn't the Bible say that you're supposed to honor your mother and father? How can I do that more? They never ask that, do they?—not a chance. Just these really difficult questions (you know): Where'd belly buttons come from?—and all that kind of stuff. And so (you know) Adam and Eve—anyway.

So my wife, when she was a kid, she asked her mom this spiritual question, and she says this point blank. She says: Mom, how do I get to Heaven? And her mom says: Well, honey, you just don't go to prison. Because when you don't go to prison there's always somebody that's done something worse than you. And so if you're never the worst person on the planet, then you're good enough; you're going to go into Heaven. And so my wife grows up most of her life—(I mean) all the way up into her twenties—believing that: Don't go to prison; I'll go to Heaven. Good people go to Heaven.

Well, here's the problem with that: It's the Bible. And here's what the Bible says in *Romans, chapter 3*. Let me show it to you. It tells us this: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." [*Romans 3:23 (NIV)*]

And here's the problem with the good-people-go-to-Heaven kind of deal and don't-go-to-prison is: We build these lists of dos and don'ts—don't we?

I mean:

- *Don't* swear (and)
- *Don't* sing off key (and)
- *Don't* chew (and)
- *Don't* (you know) all this kind of stuff (and)
- *Don't* do all that kind of stuff

And then, but *do* a lot:

- *Do* random acts of kindness
- *Do* love people
- *Do* go to church
- *Do* hate OU [Oklahoma University]

Do whatever you have to do to build your list really high so that you don't come down here and your scale kind of looks like this [pantomiming a scale using his arms with the dos outweighing the don'ts]. Then at some point when we finally die, we slip into Heaven because our scale favors us in that direction—do's and don'ts.

Well, that verse I just read in *Romans, chapter 3*, says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Now, I’m not a linguist, but when I do look up the word *all* in the Greek *New Testament* it literally (watch this; get your pens ready) the word *all* in the Greek literally means *everyone*—you and me and you—every single one of us. And all of our do’s and don’ts—they all fall short. They all fall short. And this very popular religious idea that good people go to Heaven is simply not the truth.

But here’s what the truth is—it’s just as basic—but yet changes people’s lives. It’s not that good people go to Heaven, it’s that forgiven people go to Heaven.

TRUTH: FORGIVEN PEOPLE GO TO HEAVEN

Here’s what Scripture says in *Romans, chapter 6, verse 23*:

For the wages of sin {that’s the payment—that’s the result of our sin} is death, {for every single one of us; and that doesn’t mean only passing from this life into the next; that means eternal separation from the life of God} but the gift of God {Check that out!—the gift of God is what?—say it with me} the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:23 (NIV)

So what I want you to do, because with this many people in a room like this, the chances are that a lot of us have our lists of do’s and don’ts, and we’re trying to do all the right things. Well, maybe we won’t say it out loud:

- I know God loves me (and)
- He always loves me (and)
- He forgives me

But some place in our heart we’re trying to build this list of do’s. Not because we want to just be good to other people and do what’s right, but we want to build this list of good things that God will accept us on.

And what happens is:

- We get paranoid (and)
- We get exhausted trying to do all these rights (and)
- Then when we do one wrong (like)—oh!—we just kind of want to beat ourselves up.

Well, what I want you to do today (if that’s you in any way), I want you to pull out your white flag—your spiritual white flag—and just (kind of) wave it and just surrender, because—

- There’s no list of do’s that’ll get you into Heaven, other than Christ.
- There’s no list of don’ts that will disqualify you from Heaven, other than rejecting Christ.

Do’s and don’ts—just surrender. Everybody, take in a deep breath for me. Come on, participate. Go [inhale]...hold it...hold it. I’m going to test you. Now, let it out...[exhale]. Just relax. Do that in your faith. Just surrender. Jesus has done what’s necessary for you to be forgiven.

Religious idea: Good people go to Heaven.

Well, the truth is: Forgiven people go to Heaven.

But I've been around long enough to know that our religion runs deep. And so, maybe we're thinking: Okay, well uh...okay, forgiven people go to Heaven, but here's the deal. Here's my deal, Scott, is that God won't forgive me because I've gone too far. That's a religious idea that goes and goes and goes.

RELIGIOUS IDEA: GOD WON'T FORGIVE ME, I'VE GONE TOO FAR

Okay, well God will forgive, but He won't forgive me because I've just gone too far. You don't know my sin.

When I was a little kid I thought church people were creepy. I really did. A friend of mine invited me to church one time and I went to this place. At my house there wasn't a lot of affection expressed—hugging and through words and stuff like that. So I go to this church. I walk in and all these adults start hugging me. And I'm not talking like (you know) a pat on the head. I'm talking a smothering hug and I'm like: Ewww, get away from me. These people are creepy. They're freaking me out (you know). I mean—seriously!—it so creeped me out; I left. I'm thinking: Them [sic] people are creepy. I will never go to a church for the rest of my life.

And so a few years later I'm at my house and [demonstrates knuckles knocking] the door knocks and this lady—she's outside the door—I answer it. She says: Hi, my name's so-and-so, and we're going to have a *Vacation Bible School* just down the street at the church. And I'm thinking [pantomimes warning lights flashing]: Creepy, creepy, creepy people! I mean, it's flashing off in my mind and I'm thinking: Okay, not only that but, what'd she say?—*Vacation Bible School*. Okay, it's summer, so I'm already on vacation. Bible?—I have no idea what that is. And school?—I hate school.

So I'm thinking: I'm going to go to a school I don't like, with a Bible I don't know what it is, with a creepy church lady; so um okay, I'll go, check it out. So I go. *Vacation Bible School*. VBS—right?—for short. I'm at VBS and it doesn't take long because:

- I'm restless
- I'm rebellious (and)
- I'm there just a little while (and)
- I get kicked out of Bible school by the creepy church lady

Kicked me out, so I get on my bike—because they're out on the front lawn of this church down the road—I'm (just you know) riding my bike away. I'm huffing and puffing. I'm mad [pantomimes snarling and grumbling:] that's right, that creepy church lady kicking me out.

So I get down the road a little ways and I think: This is just wrong; justice must be served. [I] turned my bike around.

- I'm heading back.
- I'm disgruntled.
- I'm going to state my case.
- I'm going to put my fingerprint on this world.

I go back, set my bike down a ways off, and I start to pick up some rocks and throw stones at the creepy church lady. I'm throwing stones at her and I don't know if I hit her; I can't remember. She was probably dodging and weaving [from] them. Finally, she chases me off. And that's my record: I got kicked out of *Vacation Bible School*. The lady chased me off. So that's who's talking to you today.

But I think later on I'm like: Oh my gosh, I just threw stones at the church lady. God couldn't forgive me (I mean) surely I've gone too far. Have you ever had that thought? (I mean) I say it with a smile and I probably shouldn't. But gosh I've sinned this sin again or I've done this and there's no way that God would forgive me because I've gone too far.

Well, if you ever had that thought, let Scripture speak to you. *1 Timothy 1:15* says this:

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.

1 Timothy 1:15 (NIV)

You know who wrote that?—the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul—the guy that God used to write over half the *New Testament* to take the cause of Christ to the then known world. The Apostle Paul, who was a religious Pharisee; who Jesus comes on the scene and flips upside down his whole religious paradigm, his thoughts and his thinking about who God was.

So Paul gets so mad—he's this religious guy turned into vigilante—and he goes off on this quest. He's putting Christians in jail and he's having them murdered. So here we have a guy who's persecuting the Church of Christ, having believers murdered, and Jesus reveals Himself to him. He comes into this relationship with Christ and he says: Man, I am the worst of sinners.

And if the worst of sinners, who murdered followers of Christ, can be used to change the world with the message of Christ, don't you think you and I have some hope?—because it's not that God won't forgive me, I've gone too far. Here's the truth; it's that, when we are at our worst God's grace is at its best.

TRUTH: WHEN AT OUR WORST, GOD'S GRACE IS AT ITS BEST

Check this out—*Romans, chapter 5, verse 8*:

But God demonstrates {He shows it. He proves it. He puts it into action—but God demonstrates} his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8 (NIV)

Now for some of you, you might be [thinking]: Well, I've read that 10,000 times in my life. Well maybe [for] many of you that's the first time you've heard that. Or maybe it's the first time it ever clicked—it made sense. While we were still in our sin, Christ died for us.

It's not that we've gone too far and God can't forgive us; it's that when we're at our worst God's grace is at its best. When you blow it and you commit that sin that just seems to have you wrapped around its finger—

- You can't stop and you can't stop
- You keep doing it and you keep doing it (and)
- Every time you feel guilty as the noon-day sun and you can't stop

And you're thinking: I'm at my worst and God can't forgive me this time. That's when His grace is at its best; because it is given again—not to approve of the sin but—to forgive the sin.

When you blow it with your spouse (and) in front of your kids you're thinking: Oh, I'm just blowing it again. What am I going to do, God? I have gone too far. That's when God's grace is at its best.

When the telemarketer calls and you lie to get off of the phone—keep doing that—it's okay with me. Don't lie; just tell them you've got something else going on.

When you finally admit that you're addicted to pornography and you think: I can't go any further; I keep doing this. I keep doing this; how can God forgive me? I've gone too far. That's when God's grace is at its best.

When you get caught in the affair and your family is ready to just crumble and you don't know how in the world you're going to save it. You're caught and you've gone so far and you think: I've gone too far. It's in that moment that God's grace is again at its best, reaching out, wanting to restore, (and) wanting to forgive.

This religious lie—that I've gone too far and that God can't forgive me—just isn't the truth. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." That's how He demonstrates it.

So man-made religion will tell us only good people go to Heaven, but Scripture—right here—tells us forgiven people go to Heaven. And then our own conscience and our own idea of what God will do with us is that I've gone too far, He won't forgive me. But when we are at our worst, God's grace is at its best.

And here's the temptation though when we come to that place—

- That God will forgive me
- That God's grace is good enough (and)
- That forgiveness is what it's all about

We have this temptation—I even call it a religious idea because it's how we craft our response to God—and that's this: that I'll just put it off until tomorrow.

RELIGIOUS IDEA: YOU CAN PUT IT OFF UNTIL TOMORROW

My friend Todd and I were driving across the country. We're actually driving from Michigan to Los Angeles, and it was in January. Todd is a follower of Christ. I was far from that. I didn't have a relationship with God. I had no history of anything with God other than being kicked out of *Vacation Bible School* by the creepy church lady—that's my story.

So we're driving across the country and I am locked in this four-wheel drive pick-up truck driving through the ice storms of Nebraska all the way across. And he's telling me about this Jesus—

- Who he is so passionate about
- Who he is so excited about
- Who's changed his life and

I can't go anywhere. I'm in the truck, right? I've got about 2400 miles to go and he's telling me about God, telling me about Christ. And at first I'm resisting. I mean the first day—because it was about a two-and-a-half-day trip—the first day mostly I'm just resistant. I'm like: No-no-no, don't even go there. But we were [such] good friends that it just was okay—we could argue a little bit—he's telling me about Christ.

Well, the second day God just starts to do something in me. I didn't know it was God at that time; but looking back, it was obviously Him. And I began to have questions. I went from having resistance to questions, and then things just started making sense—

- About creation
- About me
- About how I felt on the inside
- About the forgiveness of God (and)
- ...the cross of Christ

All of this stuff, it started making sense.

I remember to the moment that I wanted to ask Christ into my life. I'm in the cab of the pick-up truck on the passenger's side and I wanted to look over to Todd and say: I want this Jesus in my life right now. What do I need to do? I mean, I'm at that place, it's just bubbling up and we come over the horizon—this is a true story—we come over the horizon in the middle of the night and we see Las Vegas just—pow!—[pantomimes starburst]. Man, it just looks really cool. It's at that moment I remember I wanted to turn to Todd and say: I want Christ in my life. What do I need to do right now?

Right before I turned to him to said that, this thought came rushing into my mind. It said this—it was verbal. (I mean) I heard it in my mind—it said: Don't do that; don't give your life to God; because if you do, you're going to be a missionary and live the rest of your life in Africa. Serious! I had no perspective on Africa at that point, be it whatever. I don't know if I ever heard the word missionary. What's that?—missionary. Live the rest of my life in Africa?

Here's what your spiritual enemy will do—

- Whenever God is speaking
- Whenever God is pulling you in toward His goodness
- Whenever God is challenging you to step out in faith and trust Him

—your spiritual enemy, the devil, will come by and say: Put it off until tomorrow.

Satan's in hell. (Now this is going into a joke, all right? Someone's like: What?—oh wow—okay.) Satan is in hell and he has four demons come to him and he's frustrated, because he's like: What are we going to do? We've got to come up with some more lies to tell people so that we can trap more souls.

So the first demon (you know) stands up with some pride and comes up to him: I've got it, boss. I've got it, boss. He says: What is it? Well, let's go tell them there is no God. And Satan says: Tell them there is no God? Well, they're not going to believe that. They're going to look around and see that there is a creator. They're never going to believe there is no God.

The second demon says: I've got it. I know. Let's go tell them there is no Heaven. And Satan is like: Tell them there is no Heaven? Well, almost everybody believes in life after death—and there's more to (just) this life than just what we experience here—and everybody wants to go there. So that's never going to work. It'll never fly.

The third demon says: I've got it. I've got it. He said: What is it? Let's tell them there is no hell. Satan says: That's not going to work either. I mean man's conscience tells them they'll be judged for their sin. It's within them what right and wrong is and that we're called to what's right in the eyes of God. That's never going to work to tell them there is no hell.

The fourth demon just kind of comes up real quietly and says: I think I've got it, boss. Satan says: Well, what is it? Let's go tell them there is no hurry. Hmm...[nodding in agreement].

Satan will tell us: Put it off until tomorrow—what God is asking us to do—to put it off. Even if we know it, even if we believe it—put it off.

But here's what the Bible tells us in *Hebrews, chapter 4*, it's in *verse 7 [NIV]*: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not"—what?—"do not harden your hearts." The best time to respond to God is right now.

TRUTH: RIGHT NOW IS THE BEST TIME TO RESPOND TO GOD

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." Today. Today if you hear God speaking to you, today is the time. Today is the time.

Jesus is speaking to John in *Revelation, chapter 3*, and check this out. He says:

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

Revelation 3:20 (NIV)

The greatest religious idea of history—that good people go to Heaven—just isn't true. Maybe you've believed it. Maybe you've believed that: If that's the case, then I might as well forget it. Or maybe that belief is just hindering you from a rich relationship with God.

Religious idea number two is that—man—okay forgiven people go to Heaven; that's the truth. But the religious idea is: I've gone too far; God won't forgive me. We've just seen it. When we're at our worst, God's grace is at its best. But then we'll put it off until tomorrow. Today when God is speaking, the best time to respond to Him is right now.

2010—now if what I have said; if you're good with this—and you're like: Okay, man, I'm leaning into this—then here's a resolution that I think you can make that will not be gone on January second. But this resolution can last and it can change everything. It's simply this: In 2010 I'm going to lose my religion and grow in my relationship with God. Lose that religious stuff that's not even true, not even scriptural. Lose the religion and grow your relationship with God because He forgives us. His grace is extended to us. Today is the day to respond.

If you're with me on that, say this with me—say: 2010 [congregation repeats]—Wow! The 8:15 [congregation] was louder than that. No, they weren't. Come on [with congregation repeating phrase by phrase]—2010 I lose my religion and grow in my relationship with God. Nah, I don't believe you. Say it again: In 2010 I'm losing my religion and growing in my relationship with God. Give the person next to you a hand clap for yelling at church. Come on. Good job, you guys.

Don't let the religious ideas that are not biblical hinder you from the relationship God wants you to have. This year experience the richness of what He wants to do in your life:

- Surrender—Christ has done it all for you.
- Experience His grace and His forgiveness.
- Whatever He speaks to you to do today, do it today.

Let's bow our heads and let's pray.

Father, I thank You so much for Your Word that shows us what is true and, God, that Your Grace is for us. That You've demonstrated Your love for us in this: that Christ died for us. Lord, I thank You that You're speaking to us right now.

With our heads bowed and our eyes closed and you'd say: Scott, just pray with me that this resolution—to lose my religion and grow in my relationship with God—will be something that I would have at the forefront all year. At the forefront—to pursue my relationship with Christ—if that's you (you want 2010 to be the year you pursue that relationship with Him more than ever before) just lift your hand with a whole bunch of people in here. Just lift your hand. A lot of you guys. In 2010 I'm growing in Him.

Father, I thank You for all of these guys that are lifting their hands, lifting their hearts. Let this year be a great year of our relationship with You. God, not to be cliché or anything like that, but help us to put aside the religious things that are not even from You and to grab ahold of that relationship of love and forgiveness and grace that You have for us. Help us to respond today to what You're saying to us.

With our heads bowed and our eyes still closed, let me say this to you while you're in an attitude of prayer, because this is a personal moment between you and God.

You're sitting here and maybe the first verse I read—when Jesus was speaking to the religious people and He said: "You hypocrites!"—maybe that's your experience with some people who claim to be followers of Christ.

Or maybe you've had an experience at church—like I did—when you were young and it became a stumbling block or it hindered you from leaning into who God might be.

Or maybe you're sitting here and you've thought: I've got to do more good things than do bad things and I can never do more good than bad. So I've just given up and never even thought about the chance of God accepting me. And you do not have a relationship with Christ.

Well, today can be the day that you can begin that relationship with Him. Today can begin the day when you step into His grace, when you receive His forgiveness; because you cannot do anything to win it. Actually, you don't even deserve it—none of us do. It's the work of Christ on the cross. He died for our sins. He died for you and [me] so that you and I can be forgiven; so that you and I could pursue a relationship with God.

Today you're sitting here and God is speaking to you. You're stirring on the inside. Maybe it's a mysterious stirring. That's the Spirit of God drawing you to Him saying: Today, surrender your life to Me. I want this relationship with you. I want to give you forgiveness. You're sitting there saying: Scott, I want Christ in my life. I want to be saved. I want to be changed. Will you pray for me? Today is the day I'm going to do it. I'm not going to hold back. If that's you—that's your prayer—Scott, pray for me. I want Christ in my life today when He's speaking to me—if that's you, just lift your hand. Heads bowed and eyes closed. Lift your hands up [to say]: I want Christ in my life. I want Christ in my life.

I see your hand back there. I see two hands...three hands right here. Praise God for you. Welcome to the family of God. Who else? I see two of you guys up there. Keep them up. I want to see because this is awesome. Who else? I want Christ in my life. Two hands over here...a hand back here. I want Christ in my life. Sir, I see you back there. Praise God for you. I see you right back here. 2010—I see you guys back here and some of you guys up top—this is my year. I'm receiving forgiveness. I see you over to my right, up there up top against the wall. Welcome to the family of God.

You know what we're going to do, guys? We're going to pray together with everyone who's making that decision—that I'm stepping into God's forgiveness; His grace is good enough—so if you've raised your hand, I want you to say this prayer with me. But you're not going to be alone. As a family, we're going to pray this together. Let's do this—let's say: Father God (come on, you guys, help them pray) say:

Father God, today I surrender my life to You. Jesus, thank You that You died for me, that You're the Son of God. I believe You're the Son of God, because You've risen from the dead. So be the Lord of my life, the leader of everything. I surrender to You. I'm forgiven. I'm Your child. In Jesus' name. Amen.

You guys better clap for that because that's good stuff right there: people giving their life to Christ. That's awesome! Congratulations!

I'll tell you, for those of you who are followers of Christ, what may be simple to you—that it's not good people who go to Heaven but it's forgiven [people]—let it be a reminder. Let's reflect that truth to those around us.

And for those of you who just gave your life to Christ, that's a truth that has just changed your eternal destiny. And God will continue a work in you that will change you forever. I want to encourage you: pursue your relationship with Him. This Church, The MET, can help you do that. Pursue your relationship with Him. You're forgiven. You're a child of God. There's nothing greater than just to be able to speak to you right in this moment and to tell you that you have value. Your life has purpose and God wants to step in and He's just done so. So you can be excited that this next year is going to be the beginning of an amazing life for you.

- It's going to be challenging.
- It's going to be thrilling.
- It's going to be tough.
- It's going to be fun.
- It's going to be full of joy.
- It's going to be full of struggle.

It's the life in Christ that we're all called to. Man, I tell you: Go after Him. Go after Him. He loves you and He forgives you.

I want to thank you, guys, for allowing me to be here again this weekend. Next weekend (check this out) I get to be here again to do this two-week series—*Resolutions: Lose Your Religion and Find Your Freedom*. Next weekend I'm going to be talking about finding freedom in forgiving others.

I've spoken this before in some different places. It's amazing what God does in the hearts of people. It's interesting how many of us are bound by bitterness and unforgiveness towards others and some for very good reasons. How can God command us to forgive someone who has deeply hurt us? It doesn't seem fair. It seems impossible but I'm going to show you in His Word. And I pray that by the Spirit of God, He is going to give you the ability to do that; and you can walk out of here free of unforgiveness toward someone who has hurt you.

That's what we're going to be talking about next week. I cannot wait, if I get back through the ice in Oklahoma to get back down here.

Pastor Bill asked me to pray as you guys receive the offering. So I think the ushers are going to come forward.

I do want to say this: The MET, just coming here is a thrill for me. I love you guys. Bill was telling me about the *Big Give* that you just went through. I'm just blown away by the heart of generosity here at this place. You guys are so generous and what you're doing is currently changing lives and is going to impact the lives of tons of people. Your generosity makes a difference. People [who] just gave their life to Christ, and those of you who give and help these

bright lights in my eyes turn on—and all this kind of stuff—you helped to create this moment for God to change lives. That’s some of what your giving does. I just think it’s a privilege for me to remind you of that because God is doing a work in this place.
So, let me pray.

Father, I thank You so much for this time to continue to worship You with our giving. We’ve just seen the biggest thing that we want to have happened, God, and that’s for people to come to Christ. Thank You for being here moving in their hearts.

God, as we give, we worship You. And we thank You that we’re part of Your plan and that You are big enough to take care of every need in our life. We thank You for that. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Guest Speaker: Scott Rodgers

The MET
Metropolitan Baptist Church
13000 Jones Rd
Houston, TX 77070

Sermon Transcript Ministry
resource@TheMETonline.org

⁷ Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you... ¹⁰ The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

John 10:7 and 10
(New King James Version)

Legend:

(words in parentheses) = spoken by the preacher *but unnecessary* to the core sentence idea

[words in square brackets] = additional explanation for clarity *not spoken* by the preacher

{words in curly brackets within indented quote} = spoken explanation *not part of the quote*