

How to Enter the Kingdom

Well hey everybody, good to be here with you. If you have a bible, go ahead and go with me to the book of **Matthew, chapter 3**. Because *today*, we are beginning a new series, or maybe something even bigger than a series, through the entire book of Matthew. Now you may be asking “then why are we starting in chapter 3—because *that’s* not how *numbers* work.” Understood. I got you. I’ll explain why that is here in a bit.

First though, I just wanted to unpack a little bit of **why and how we are going to study** the book of Matthew. First, *why* study Matthew? Well the **first reason** for it is relatively simple: **the book of Matthew is all about Jesus, and Jesus is a pretty big deal to us around here**. The first part of City Church’s “vision statement”—the statement that describes why we exist as a church—is that we are “*Jesus-centered*.” Meaning that everything we are and everything we do finds its basis and motivation in the person and work of Jesus. And there are four books in our bible that pretty exclusively focus on the life and ministry of Jesus, and *Matthew* is one of those books.

The second, **more specific reason** is this. It probably goes without saying that there is a lot of *uncertainty* in the world right now. Truth be told, we don’t know what life this fall or for the next year is going to look like. There is a worldwide pandemic that might be over soon or might be over in two-plus years. In the last week, there has been an earthquake in North Carolina and a hurricane in Chicago (that’s legit—you can Google it). And perhaps most seriously...college football may or may not be cancelled. To put it mildly, there’s a lot we just don’t know right now. If 2020 were an emoji, it would be this one: 🤖👁️. So we figure, **with there being so much uncertainty in our world, why not spend an extended amount of time studying and learning about the most certain, tried and true thing in the universe, and that’s Jesus and his kingdom**. Amen?

Which all brings us to **how we’re going to study** the book of Matthew. Because if you know anything about Matthew, it is a *loooooooong* book. Like, *very* long. It ties with Acts for the most number of *chapters* in a New Testament book—28 of them, to be exact. Matthew contains a whopping 1,071 verses by the end of it all. Which would make it the longest book of the bible we have ever studied before on Sundays, by about, say, 900 verses or so.

So **here’s how** we’re going to go about it. We are going to study Matthew in “installments.” Matthew is conveniently divided up into a handful of what we might call “movements.” In each of those *movements*, the focus of the book *shifts*, at least a little.

So rather than start Matthew today and go straight through it for like two years without stopping, we're going to do one of those *sections* of Matthew, and then do another series. Then do another section of Matthew, and then maybe another series or two. And then back to Matthew. That's how we'll plan to tackle it. I think doing it that way will allow us to pause periodically and digest the things we're learning in Matthew, as well as give us the ability to teach through other things that may be timely or relevant for our church family. Make sense? So **think of this less as a "series" about Matthew, and more like many different series, that eventually take us all the way through Matthew.** That's the plan.

Now, even though each "movement" in the book of Matthew does focus on a slightly different *idea*, **there is one idea** that runs all the way through the entire book. And that's a little something called "**the kingdom of God**" or sometimes it's called "the kingdom of *heaven*," or just "the kingdom." And I want us to spend just a little time on this before we get into our passage, because **understanding the kingdom of God is massively important to understanding the book of Matthew as a whole—because it sort of serves as the backdrop of the entire storyline.**

And that, in *part*, **is why we are starting in chapter three** of Matthew. Because chapter 3 is the first time that this "kingdom" gets mentioned explicitly. The first two chapters of the book are largely about Jesus' *birth*—the events surrounding our traditional Christmas story—so we're going to save those chapters to cover in the weeks around Christmas one year. But for today, we're going to start in chapter three, where we first hear about this "kingdom" of God for the first time.

So let's try to **wrap our minds around what the kingdom is**: what is meant by the "*kingdom* of God"? Well, for starters, to have a *kingdom*, you first need a *what*? This part should be easy. A *king*. For there to be a kingdom, you need a king. And according to the book of Matthew, that king is to be *who*? *Jesus*. Always a safe guess when you're in a church. You guys are absolutely *nailing* this so far.

Jesus, in the biblical narrative **is the king** of this kingdom. **In fact, that's exactly what the word "Christ" means. A lot of people assume "Christ" is something like Jesus' last name (Mr. Christ). It does often sound like that the way we say it, but it's actually not. "Christ" is a translation of the Old Testament word Messiah—which means "anointed king."** So **when we say "Jesus Christ"**—at least when we say it in the literal sense and not in the "I just stubbed my toe" sense—**what we are actually saying is "King Jesus."** We are proclaiming that Jesus is some type of *king* over a *kingdom*.

Which **leads to the question**: *what* is that kingdom? **The kingdom is the language used in the Bible to talk about God's rule and God's reign.** But obviously, when Jesus says the kingdom of God is here, he doesn't mean that he is bringing with him a literal crown and a scepter and a throne to sit on. And he also doesn't mean that he is going to set up, a geographical area on earth and declare himself king of that region—at least not in the *short* term. So in more modern terminology, we might say that the kingdom of God describes **“God's way of doing things.”**

So it might help to **think about it like this**. In the late 1990s, a company named *Apple Computers* was not doing well. They had just posted their worst financial quarter ever in 1997—things were not great. But then something happened. Specifically, *a person* happened. Apple decided to hire back Steve Jobs as their “interim CEO” (or was forced to hire him back, depending on how you look at it). And when he came back, he brought with him an entire way of *doing things* that was *different* from how they were doing things previously. He had an eye for design—making Apple products not only *work*, but also *look* beautiful. He also had an eye for making products enjoyable to use—fun, even. He thought about things differently—in fact that was their slogan for a number of years: *think different*.

And largely **because of Steve Jobs' way of doing things**, within the next four years, Apple would debut both the iMac and the iPod—two of the most successful product launches of all time. Today, Apple is one of the most successful *companies* of all time. It was just announced last week that Tim Cook, Apple's current CEO, is now a *billionaire*. So Steve Jobs' arrival on the scene, and his way of doing things made things significantly *better* as a result. Using biblical language, Apple is a type of *kingdom*. It is a *way of doing things* that was in many ways set into motion by one man.

And **the kingdom of God** is like that, in a way. But it is far more than a company that sells products. It is a place and a community and a state of existence where **God's will is always done.** **Where what God wants to happen, happens.** Put as simply as I can, **there are places in our world right now where things are not as God intended them to be.** Can we at least all agree on that much? *When people do not have access to food or to safe drinking water, that is not as God intended his world to be. When children are taken from their homes and exploited, that is not as God intended things to be. When crime runs rampant in cities, and when some police become a part of that crime, rather than protectors against it—that is not as God intended his world to be.*

And we could go on with a multitude of different examples. But **there are so many** places in our world right now, where God's will is *not* done. There are places and situations where "God's way of doing things" is not a reality at all. **Which is why in places like Matthew 6, Jesus is going to tell his people to pray for "God's kingdom to come," and "God's will to be done, on earth as it is in heaven."** That would imply that there are times and places *now* where God's kingdom *has yet* to come, and God's will *has yet* to be done." Everybody with me so far?

Okay, so **the book of Matthew**, in large part, is about how Jesus came into precisely those types of broken situations. And how he came, in order to proclaim and set into motion "God's way of doing things" in the world. And therefore about how you and I, as followers of Jesus, become *active participants* in all of that. **How you and I participate** in bringing God's *kingdom* to bear in all sorts of different ways. **Ultimately, what is best for us individually, and what is best for the world at large, is for God's kingdom to come in its fullness.** And **Matthew wants to describe for us what that looks like, and how that happens.** That, in many ways, is what the book of Matthew is about.

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But **for any of that to become a reality, we first have to be a part** of the kingdom of God ourselves. We can't bring *about* the kingdom in our *world*, if *we* are not a part of that kingdom in the first place. And *today's* passage is actually about *that very thing*: how does a person *enter* and *become a part of* the kingdom of God? So let's find out more. Starting in Matthew chapter 3, v. 1. Are you guys ready for the gospel of Matthew? Here we go:

[1] In those days John the Baptist [just for clarity: that's a description of what he was *doing*, not of a church denomination he belonged to. Sometimes you just gotta squash that weird denominational pride before it even starts. So John the *Baptist*, or we might say John the *baptizer*] *came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, [2] "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven [so there's our central idea] is at hand."*

If you like to circle or underline things in your bible, circle or underline that word "*repent*" there in v. 2—that's *central* to understanding this passage. In John's mind, apparently, **the fact that the kingdom is arriving on the scene means that we need to repent.** We're going to what that *means* here in just a bit. But *first* let's hear about *who* this John the Baptist is and what he's *like*. And I just want to forewarn you—he's a bit odd. Keep reading in v. 3:

[3] For this is he who was **spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said** [and this is a quote from the book of Isaiah], *“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”* [4] Now, John wore a **garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.**

Okay some of us just read that and were like **“I’m sorry...what?”** He wore *what*? He ate *what*, exactly? So there’s a lot of this that just seems strange to us. And that’s because *Matthew*, the author, is referencing some things in the Old Testament that most of us aren’t very familiar with. John’s peculiar outfit is a reference to the Old Testament prophet *Elijah*.¹ And in another book—the book of *Malachi*—there is a prophecy about how, before the *Messiah* comes to bring his kingdom, God is going to *send Elijah*—or we might read that as “someone *like Elijah*”—to *prepare* the nation of Israel for this kingdom. So *Matthew* includes all these details about what John is wearing and what he’s like in order to confirm, “yep—this is the guy.” This is who *Isaiah* and *Malachi* were referring to when they said all those things: this is the king and the kingdom that God’s people had been waiting for. Make sense?

Which actually **explains a lot of what happens next** in the passage. Because look at v. 5:

[5] **Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him** [meaning, going out to where **John was**], [6] **and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.**

So think about this—if **John was simply some eccentric guy** in the wilderness as we might be inclined to think—people would not be *going out to the wilderness, in multitudes*, to be baptized by him. Right? If there’s just a strange guy out in the woods yelling at people, you just let the authorities know and go on about your life. You would stay as far away from him as you possibly can. But these people in the *story* do the *opposite*: they *come out to him* in *droves* and let him baptize them. Why that response?

Because again, from their perspective, John the Baptist “crying out in the wilderness” **meant it was “go time”** for the coming kingdom of God. **If this guy who resembled Elijah was preaching about the coming king, that meant God and his kingdom were going to arrive on the scene any day now.** And they wanted to make sure they

¹ 2 Kings 1:8

were *ready*. The functional understanding of most Israelites was that the day that God brought about his kingdom would be both a wonderful and terrible day. Wonderful for the people on the *right* side of it—all those that lived according to God's law and God's standards—and a *terrible* day for everyone else. And **the way to be on the right side of that equation was to, in a word, repent.** So they come out to John to do just that, and to be baptized as a representation of that. Which meant they needed to *repent*.

Now **let's talk** for just a few about that word **repent**. Because my guess is that for at least some people, it doesn't have the *best* of connotations. For some, "repent" might conjure up images of a stern pastor behind a pulpit pointing his bony finger as he tells people to stop doing whatever enjoyable thing it is that they're doing. Or maybe a street preacher on Market Square standing on top of a crate, holding a large sign with big red block letters. But just like we do with *any* word or phrase in the bible, we want to examine it, not for what it has *come to mean* in our culture, but for what it *meant* to the biblical authors.

So the word "repent" here in Matthew 3 in the Greek is the word **metanoëó**. And most literally, it just means to *change your mind* about something. But not just to change your mind about *anything*. You wouldn't use the word *repent* to describe how you were going to get Zaxby's for lunch, and instead changed your mind to get Chick-Fil-A (even though we all know that is an important, needed, correct decision). Usually, at least in the *bible*, *metanoëó* means **changing your mind about something significant**. To change your mind about the way you go about life *in general*, and how you go about significant, major portions of your life.

Repentance carries the connotation of **not just thinking differently** about something, but actually adjusting your life to be *in line with* that new kind of thinking. **Repentance** is **a shift in your thinking, that leads to a shift in the very fabric of your life**. And *that* is what the Scriptures are saying you *need* in order to **enter the kingdom of God: you need repentance**. You must be willing to *reconsider* the way you *think*, and therefore reconsider the way you approach *life* as a result. Now at this point in the narrative, Matthew nor John say specifically what repentance means changing your mind *to*—that in many ways is what the rest of the book is about. But at this point it's clear that entering the kingdom does require *repentance*.

Now I think most of us would agree that there are **some people who very much need to repent**. We see people living what we consider to be very overt, obviously sinful or destructive lifestyles and go "yeah, those people obviously need to *repent*." So **Charlie**

Sheen needs to repent. *Joe Exotic* needs to repent. Nickelback needs to stop making all music effective immediately...and also probably repent. But my point is that we get how *certain* people would need to repent—that makes total sense to us. But what *John* does next seems to indicate is that it's not just *those people* who need to repent—it's *everyone*. Look with me at v. 7:

[7] *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism* [real quickly: if *anyone* was *already, ready* for the coming kingdom of God, it was Pharisees and the Sadducees. They were the *epitome* of righteousness and morality. They *embodied* obedience and holiness—at least to most people. And *yet* when *they* show up to see what's going on with John the Baptist, they get treated the same as everybody else, if not a bit worse. Look at the second half of v. 7...], *he said to them, "You brood of vipers!* [just in case you were confused—*not* a compliment] *Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?* [8] *Bear fruit in keeping with repentance* [there's our word again].

Stop right there for a second. So **evidently in John's mind, it's not just the people with stereotypical "sinful" lifestyles that need to repent—it's these guys too.** *They also* need to rethink, reapproach, and reconsider everything about how they think about God, and how they go about their life as a whole. Their obedience and morality does not exclude them from any of this. They too need to *repent*. No one gets to bypass *repentance* in God's kingdom.

Now John, because he's smart, **anticipates an objection** that these groups of people might have to what he just said. Look at v. 9 with me:

[9] *And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. [10] Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree (i.e. person) therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

So a brief **explainer** on that line, **"we have Abraham as our father."** Back then, far more than in American society today, people put a lot of stock in their *upbringing*, their family line, and their heritage. And specifically, *Israelites* knew that the line of Abraham was the line that God was going to bring his blessing to the world *through*. So John is anticipating that, after he tells these people to repent, they might say to him, "enough with all this repentance talk—we're good already. We come from Abraham's family, so that's all we need to be accepted by God."

To which **John responds by saying** “hey—God can make these rocks on the ground into children for Abraham.” In other words, your heritage, your upbringing, your family stock doesn’t necessarily mean *anything* here. And they certainly don’t *exempt* you from needing to *repent* like everybody else. It doesn’t give you a free pass on what everyone is called to do, to enter the kingdom of God.

Now, while **you and I probably wouldn’t respond** to John with “oh but we’re children of Abraham,” we *might still* respond with things that sound pretty similar. Things like “oh well I grew up in a Christian home—so I’m good to go.” Things like “oh I actually made this decision one time when I was 9—so I’m all set.” Or things like “I’m really a pretty good person to begin with—so I just don’t have much that I need to repent of, if I’m honest.” And just to be clear, all of those can be great things: it’s *great* to grow up in a Christian home, it’s *great* to make a decision at a young age to follow Jesus, it’s *great* to be a good person. But **when those become reasons in your mind that you don’t need to repent, you find yourself in exactly the same position as the Pharisees and the Sadducees** here. And Jesus would say to *you*, “bear fruit in keeping with repentance.”

And **one important clarification** here on *repentance*: **for a follower of Jesus, repentance is not just a one-time thing**. Sure, for all of us there is a moment where we, for the very *first* time, acknowledge that we have been thinking about things the wrong way, and make the decision to start going about things God’s way. We might call that the moment of “*big R*” *repentance*. But also, life as a follower of Jesus is marked by an even more regular, *ongoing pattern* of repentance. Jesus once said “if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross *daily* and follow me.”² The word *daily* would seem to indicate that it should be happening more than *once*. **Following Jesus is about ongoing repentance—not just a one-time repentance.**

So with that said, I would just ask *you* to consider: **is your life marked by regular, obvious, ongoing repentance?** John said to the Pharisees and Sadducees, “*bear fruit in keeping with repentance.*” Meaning **if repentance is a regular thing in your life, there will be fruit—there will be evidence—of that.** So let me ask *you*: **Is there evidence in your life of repentance? Is there evidence, for example, that you are turning from the way the world around us teaches us to view our money and our possessions, and choosing to approach your money and possessions differently? Is there evidence that you turning from the way the world around us teaches us to approach sex and sexuality,**

² Luke 9:23

and choosing to approach all of *that* differently? Is there *evidence* that you are turning from the way that our world teaches us to view those who are *different* than us, and treating them with kindness and humility, rather than suspicion and fear? Okay, how about your *time*? How about your *career*? Your *marriage*? Your *singleness*? And we could go on. But if you are a follower of Jesus, your life will be marked on some level by *repentance*. And if your life is marked by *repentance*, there will be *evidence* of that.

Now hear me on this: evidence of *repentance* in your life is **not the same thing** as evidence of **perfection**. Are you with me on that? Your life being marked by repentance is not the same as people looking at you and going “wow, they never do anything wrong!” In fact, it’s *quite different* from that. **If anything, being marked by *repentance* requires regularly *acknowledging* the things you do *wrong*, in order to *repent of them***, right? “Changing your mind” about something *assumes* that you were *thinking wrong* about it in the first place. It even says it right here in our passage: when people came out to repent and be baptized by John it says in v. 6 they *came*, “confessing their sins,”—in other words, *acknowledging* where they had been wrong. So repentance is not the same thing as moral perfection—in some ways, it’s the opposite. But it does mean that your life is *marked* by a continual *setting* and *re-setting* on the way of Jesus.

Now keep reading, because John is going to point us *next* to where the *ability to do all of this* comes from. Picking it up in v. 11:

[11] “I baptize you with water for *repentance*, but he who is coming after me [the king, the Messiah himself] is *mightier than I*, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.**”

So John’s baptism is a baptism of *repentance*—it was intended simply to *prepare* people for the coming kingdom. But then he says that the *king himself—Jesus*—will come and his baptism will consist of the **Holy Spirit and fire**. The “Holy Spirit” here, we think implies that **when we follow Jesus, we are not just given the *call* to repent, but are given the very Spirit of God who makes *repentance possible***. We aren’t just *told* that we *need* to repent, we’re given the ability and the desire to *do* so. The Holy Spirit living within us opens our eyes to things we need to *repent of*, and then gives us the motivation and the power and the endurance to actually go through with it.

And “fire” here seems to refer to the idea of **refining fire**. For certain metals, the way you purify them and make them more pure and more valuable is that you put them in intense *heat (or fire)*, to burn away the “dross”—which is a brand new word I learned in prepping for this sermon and am very proud of. And repeatedly in the New Testament, the authors use this burning away of *dross* as an image for how God refines *us* as followers of Jesus. That often, he will use adverse situations and difficulty in our life to make *us* more and more like Jesus.

And **at times**, it may actually be **precisely those trials and difficulties** of life that provide *opportunities* for us to *repent* of things that we wouldn't have been aware of otherwise. God might use losing a job to expose that our identity had been too much in that *job*. God might use a break-up to expose that our approach to romantic relationships wasn't healthy in the first place. Or God might use persecution or a loss of reputation to expose an unhealthy obsession with other people's opinions of us. Listen—I'm not saying everytime something bad happens in your life it's a lesson—sometimes life is just hard and the world is just broken. But I am saying that **there are times when trials and difficulties aren't just things to get through, but also things God can use to make us more like him**. And I think it would do us some good to keep that in mind when those difficulties come.

Now let's wrap up with v. 12, and as we do the band can come back up:

[12] His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

A **winnowing fork** was a tool used to separate the usable portions of wheat from the *unusable portions*. The good from the bad. So the picture here is that there will be a *clear distinction* between those who are a part of God's coming kingdom and those who aren't. Matthew it clear that when the king comes, entrance into his kingdom will not be based on questions like, "do you think of yourself as mostly a good person?" It won't be based on questions like "did you make a one-time decision when you were 9?" It won't be "did you mostly try to follow God's rules?" **Entrance into the kingdom of God will be based on whether or not your life was marked by repentance.** *That's* how you enter the kingdom of God. Through *repenting*.

So I want to just **end things a little differently** today. Generally I try to give you tons of specific things to think about and filters to run your life through to see what you need to do with the teaching each Sunday. Today, especially in light of what John just said, I

want to allow the *Spirit of God* to do that work. John ended by saying that the one who comes after him—Jesus—will baptize us via the *Spirit* and by *fire*.

So if you will, I'd love for you to just go ahead and **bow your heads**, close your eyes. And once you do, I have just two questions I want you to pray through:

1. With your head bowed, your eyes closed, let's start here. John chapter 16 tells us that the Holy Spirit will **convict us** regarding sin and righteousness and judgment. So, there is a place for letting *community* speak into what we need to repent of, there's a place for letting the *bible* speak into what we need to repent of—we're real big on both of those things here. But right now, in this moment, I want us to give the *Holy Spirit* space to speak to us. You can just ask him the simple question, "Holy Spirit, is there anything in my life *right now* that I need to *repent* of? Is there anything that is inconsistent with the kingdom of God—with God's way of doing things—and if so, what would you have me do about it?" Ask that question now, and I'll give you a few moments to listen for a response. Let's do that now.
2. Okay, next. Still with your head bowed and eyes closed, let's consider what John said about us being **baptized with "fire."** What in your life right now is *difficult*? Where is life *hard*? Where do you feel like, in many ways, you're being put through the furnace? Okay if the Scriptures are right, there could be ways that God is using *those circumstances* to expose a need for *repentance* in you. So with this one, what I want you to do is to ask the Spirit, "in *this* scenario, is there anything you'd have me *learn*? Is there anything you'd have me *grow* in? Is there anything you'd have me *repent* of? Spirit, are there things that aren't okay in my life that you are using these circumstances to expose?" Ask him, and then let him speak anything he wants to speak. I'll give you a moment to do that now.

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, we thank you for your voice. God, I confess just for myself that I often do not slow down long enough and sit still for long enough to listen to it. But God, right now: we're listening. And we want to listen more. So God if there are things that you have used this morning to expose, or to shine a light on, or to convict us of—I pray that you would give us the desire and the courage to hear you out on that. To hear, and then to respond with repentance. God we desire to be a part of your kingdom, and we know that the way there is repentance. So would you prompt and generate that in us? Amen.*

We're going to move now into a **time of response** and celebration. But as we do, I'd love to just **read one other passage** over us. **There is a story in the bible about a son who spent a lot of time in his life avoiding *repentance*, and then one day decided to**

give it a shot. And I just want to read that part of the story over us before we worship to give us a picture of what we *encounter* when we decide to repent too. This is Luke 15, from the Message translation:

*When the son was still a long way off, his father **saw him**. His heart **pounding**, he ran out, **embraced** him, and **kissed** him. The son started his repentance speech: 'Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't **deserve** to be called your son **ever again**.' **But the father wasn't listening**. He was calling to the servants, 'Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then get a grain-fed heifer and roast it. We're going to **feast!** We're going to have a wonderful time! My son is here—**given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!**' And they began to **celebrate**.*

Friends, **this is what is waiting for us** with the Father when we repent. I think one of the reasons some of us put *off* repentance for so long is because we think what we're going to encounter once we do is a stern rebuke. We feel like when we return to God and his way of doing things, he's going to say something like "well it's about time." Or, "good, now *don't* do it again—stay in *line* this time." But that's *not* who the Father is. Not at all. The Father is waiting, with more grace than we have sin. That's what the *cross* was all about. That's what the *resurrection* was all about. It was about the Father's unswerving, unrelenting, never-exhausted *love* for us.

So the **Father stands ready** today—not to rebuke you, not to remind you of all the things you've done wrong and just how bad they are—but ready to *celebrate* that you're home. So this morning for the *first* time or the *hundredth* time, will you come home? It's up to you, but he's waiting. Let's stand, sing and celebrate the love of God together.