

I. Welcome

- A. On today's date, twenty one years ago, America was attacked. If you're old enough, you will never forget it. If you don't remember it, you will hear about it year after year.
- B. The attack that day took out 3,000 brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers. People who entered eternity. Our country changed. Our world changed.
- C. Our President said,
 - 1. "Now, we have inscribed a new memory [inside our hearts]. It's a memory of tragedy and shock, of loss and mourning. But not only of loss and mourning. It's also a memory of bravery and self-sacrifice, and the love that lays down its life for a friend—even a friend whose name it never knew. (George W. Bush)
- D. So we pray for peace. We pray for hope. We pray and work to make the kind of country, and the kind of world, that will know the blessing of God — and we believe that can only happen through Christ and his gospel.
- E. And that is what I want to talk about today.

II. Will You Remember?

- A. A little boy asked his Grandpa, "Grandpa, will you remember me an hour from now?"
- B. His Grandpa said, "Yes, I'll remember you an hour from now." The boy said, "Will you remember me a day from now?"
- C. "Of course I'll remember you a day from now." The boy said, "Will you remember me a week from now?"
- D. "Yes," said Grandpa, "I'll still remember you a week from now. And a month from now and a year from now and a hundred years from now." The boy thought for a minute. He said, "Knock knock."
- E. Grandpa said, "Who's there?" The boy said, "I thought you said you'd remember me!"
- F. Tuck that away and let's get into our story today.

III. Title

- A. I invite you today to think with me about:
 - 1. **The Stubborn One**
- B. I don't know what it is that brought you to church today. But here you are.
 - 1. Maybe you feel it's random. Maybe you came because you're meeting someone.
 - 2. Maybe you're not really sure how you wound up here today.
- C. I believe that God was part of that decision, in his own secret and mysterious ways. And I think God in heaven orchestrated your life so that you could not only hear my words today... I believe that God wanted you here so that you could make very important person choice... today. That's coming in a few minutes.
- D. Now, let's get into a pretty dramatic story in the Bible of a very Stubborn Person.

IV. *Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath. He was eager to destroy the Lord's followers, so he went to the high priest. He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there... (Acts 9:1, 2)*

- A. The time is two thousand years ago. Jesus was already crucified.. He's already risen again from the dead. And he as already gone up to heaven.
- B. Meanwhile, back on earth, his little band of followers is multiplying. Literally thousands of people were beginning to put their faith in this Crucified and Risen Savior.
- C. Meet Saul. He will one day be called Paul, but now he is Saul. Saul stands violently against the message of Jesus Christ and against the churches that worship him. He is tough, and brilliant, and powerful.
- D. Saul hates the followers of Jesus with a passion. He wants to wipe them off the map. He goes on a rampage. He goes around arresting, jailing, punishing, persecuting, and killing Christians, mainly in Jerusalem.
- E. When, Saul hears there's a large group in Damascus, he asks the high priest if he can go get them.
 - 1. Saul is obsessed with erasing Christianity from the earth.
 - 2. He's like a dog with a bone. He won't let go. He wants to wipe out Christians everywhere.
 - a) So he travels to Damascus.
- F. I really like the way Christians are identified in Acts 9:2. Christians are called "followers of the Way."
 - 1. Christians are followers of the Way. A road. A pathway.
 - 2. Because every life is a journey and your path is your choice.
 - (1) There are followers of the Way of Jesus. There are followers of ways other than Jesus.
 - 3. This is your choice. The path you walk, the journey you choose, is your choice. What choice will you make?
 - 4. I've chosen the Way of Jesus.
 - (1) It's the way of peace (Luke 1:79), It's the way of salvation (Acts 16:17), It's the way of escape (1 Cor 10:13), It's the way of truth (2 Pet 2:22), It's the way of righteousness (2 Pet 2:21), It's the way of wisdom (Proverbs 4:11), It's the way of life (Prov 6:23)
 - (a) It's the good way (Jer 6:16) and I can testify that I have let my Lord down many many times, but he has never let me down even once.
- G. Like I said, you're not here by accident.
- H. I believe you're here so that you can make a personal choice step onto this way of Jesus Christ... I literally want to TALK YOU THROUGH IT.
 - 1. Don't worry. It won't be weird. I won't pressure you. I won't single you out. I won't have you come forward. Just a simple prayer. I'm not putting any pressure on you.
- I. But Saul was putting pressure on people. This stubborn one, is on his way to Damascus to persecute followers of the way of Jesus.
 - 1. And then, God sent a personal super-nova rip in the space time continuum

- V. **As he was nearing Damascus on this mission, a brilliant light from heaven suddenly beamed down upon him! He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:3, 4)**
- A. Saul was persecuting the followers of Jesus. People who love Jesus. Saul wanted to kill them.
 - B. So Jesus gets in his face.
 - C. It says, “a brilliant light from heaven.”
 - D. Jesus, sitting on his glorious throne in heaven, blasts him with a heavenly light, knocks him to the ground and gets in his face.
 - 1. Saul, you think you’re messing with my followers? You’re really messing with me.
 - a) Jesus takes it personally when anybody messes with his people.
 - E. There are two ways, the followers of the Way of Jesus... and the followers of any other way.
 - F. Saul was on the wrong way.
 - 1. But he didn’t think he was on the wrong path. He thought he was on the right path. That’s possible, right?
 - G. I’m thinking God wants you to think about this for your own life.
 - H. Could you be in the wrong place and not know it?
 - I. A while back, I went to Texas for a few days and had some meetings around Dallas. On the way back to the airport, I was rushing — okay driving like a maniac — but I made it in time.
 - 1. I returned my rental car. Grabbed my stuff from the car. Walked into the airport. Found one of those screens to find what gate to go to. That’s when it got weird. My flight wasn’t on the screen.
 - 2. There was no flight at all was going from TX to CA anywhere near my flight time. I’m looking at my boarding pass.... Right time, right flight number. Everything. But nothing even close on the monitor.
 - 3. I had driven like a maniac to get there for a flight that simply wasn’t there. I was so confused.
 - 4. Until it hit me. I had driven to Dallas-Fort-Worth airport. But it hit me that that’s not the only airport in Dallas.
 - a) There’s also Dallas Love Field Airport.
 - 5. And it also turns out I had driven to the wrong airport. See, my flight was out of DAL. But I drove to DFW.
 - a) And I realized it too late.
 - J. It’s just an illustration... but it’s possible to be in the wrong place, but think you’re in the right place just like Saul.
 - K. And now Jesus is in his face, calling him to the way of life, the way of peace, the way of love, they way of Jesus.
 - L. I think that Jesus is doing the same thing for you right here, right now. He is calling you.
 - 1. Maybe he’s knocking down some pride. Or maybe he’s comforting some brokenness. Maybe he’s clearing up confusion...
 - 2. Or breaking down preconceptions...Or correcting misconceptions...
 - a) But there’s this tug in your heart, this whisper deep inside that you can’t explain. That is God calling out to you.
 - M. And the beautiful thing about God’s call is that God doesn’t force you onto his path. He invites you. He tugs at your heart.
 - N. But your path remains your choice.
 - 1. I hope you make that choice today — you don’t even have to be ready. Just be willing.
 - O. Because God is calling. For Saul, that calling was dramatic. In an epic moment of tough love, God lit him up, blinded him, and knocked him to the ground. Here is this stubborn man groveling on the ground.
 - P. And here is this voice from heaven.
 - Q. Do you know what was the most shocking thing about this? Not the blinding light. Not getting knocked off his horse. Not even the voice from heaven.
- VI. **And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” (Acts 9:5)**
- A. Who are you?
 - 1. I... am... Jesus....
 - B. Jesus?
 - C. Well that had to fry his circuits!
 - 1. Jesus continues... “Whom you are persecuting...”
 - D. Uh oh.
 - 1. This isn’t just academic. It isn’t abstract. It isn’t just theoretical or theological or just religious. It’s personal.
 - 2. What will you do with the One who loved you, and shed his blood for you, and died and rose again for you, and who is calling you today?
 - 3. What will you do with Jesus? It’s personal.
 - a) You might want to argue against salvation.
 - (1) You might be like Paul and say, I’m doing all this hard stuff for you, God. I’m on fire for you!
 - (a) Jesus would say, the only thing that matters is I suffered died for you... don’t think that was enough?
 - b) You can have your own kind of logic, and all the reasons for why you live the way you live, and walk that path you walk.
 - c) You can have friends who think like you think. You can have philosophical rationalizations, and cultural justifications, and a whole set of complex reasons for the path you’re on.
 - d) You can have a whole bunch of reasons... or... You can have no reasons at all.
 - (1) But the question won’t go away. What will you do with Jesus? Who is he to you?
 - (2) You will never get away from that question.
 - E. Jesus serves up a really weird statement:
 - 1. “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”
 - F. This word “goad” meant a sharp, pointy iron rod used to get oxen or mules to move along. That’s the idea here.
 - G. What is Jesus saying? He’s saying this:

1. All life long, your loving Father in heaven goads you toward himself, toward his love, toward his grace, toward his salvation.
 2. God uses experiences. Teachers. Scripture. Trials. Blessings. Talks like this one.
 3. The sum of your life experiences is a divine conspiracy to hem you into grace.
- H. God goads you along.
- I. At the end of it all is an encounter in which you say, “Jesus, my Savior.” I hope you do that today.
- J. These are the goads.
- K. Saul, the stubborn one, resisted all that.
- L. We’ve all done it. We’ve all kicked against the goads. We’re natural-born mules.
- M. But thank God that he never gives up.
- N. A life spent kicking against the gracious “Goads of God” can be summed up in one word: *hard*. “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”
1. Is your life needlessly, strangely, inexplicably HARD?
- O. God sent you to hear me today, so I could say...
1. PLEASE quit kicking against God’s goads.
 2. End your resistance.
 - a) You are resisting a person who loves you.
 - b) You are resisting a person who sees your good, your bad, and your ugly... and loves you with a boundless love anyway.
 - c) You are resisting a person who shed his blood for you, and gave his life for you, and paid for sins for you, and suffered for you.
 - d) You are resisting the person who offers a gift for you called eternal salvation, and died and rose again to unbury you from the avalanche of sin... and save you and bring you to heaven forever.
 - e) You are resisting the One Person who wants you to be you.
 - f) Who wants you to be your truest, deepest self with all that joy added in.
 - (1) Why fight him? Why resist him? Why push away such incredible love? Why persecute him?
 3. Saul, Saul. Why do you persecute me. This life of yours — bucking and kicking and pushing back against my loving embrace — you’re making your life so hard.
 4. If your life feels harder than it needs to be, maybe it’s because you’re always kicking against God.
- P. So there’s Saul quivering like a heap of jello on the ground...
- VII. *So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Then the Lord said to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do. The men with Saul stood speechless with surprise, for they heard the sound of someone’s voice, but they saw no one! As Saul picked himself up off the ground, he found that he was blind... (Acts 9:6-9)*
- A. The next few lines tell us Saul’s fight is over.
 - B. He actually asks Jesus a question — what should I do? What should I do now? What’s next?
 - C. You might be wondering the same thing. What are you talking about? What am I supposed to do?
 - D. And God sent a man to tell him all about Jesus Christ and how to become a follower of His Way.
 - E. And in the very moment, Saul listened.
 - F. He took that life-defining (and eternity-defining) step, and he received Jesus, and put his faith in Christ.... and I’m going to fast forward to where his story ends...
- VIII. *And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is indeed the Son of God!” All who heard him were amazed. “Isn’t this the same man who persecuted Jesus’ followers with such devastation in Jerusalem?” (Acts 9:20, 21)*
- A. In the ancient world, it was really common for people to change their names to reflect their life’s greatest accomplishment.
 - B. Saul did that.
 - C. Saul changed his name to Paul.
 1. Saul was the name of a king. It indicated someone who was important and big. If anyone was stubborn about their own importance, it was this man Saul.
 - a) The name Saul means big man on campus.
 - b) So he changed his name from Saul to Paul.
 2. Paul means little guy. When he finally understood the greatness of the love and grace God gave him, his arrogance melted away, his self-made status melted away, his moral superiority and self-righteousness all melted away.
 - (1) Call me little guy.
 - (2) Paul gave his testimony and said:
 - (a) *All they knew was that people were saying, “The one who used to persecute us now preaches the very faith he tried to destroy!” (Galatians 1:23)*
- IX. The Stubborn One
- A. I’m kind of playing a trick on you today.
 - B. I called my talk The Stubborn One, because that’s what Saul was. And that’s what he had to rise above in order to be saved.
 - C. Saul is definitely the stubborn one.
 - D. But there’s another stubborn person in the story. This other person is even more stubborn than Saul.
 - E. He wouldn’t quit.
 1. He wouldn’t give up.
 2. He wouldn’t stop trying, even when everyone else had turned their backs.
 3. He won’t give up on you, either.
 4. You can tell him to get lost, but he’ll *never* give up on you.

5. You can turn your back on everything he holds dear, but he'll keep waiting at the head of the road, looking for your return.
 6. You can insult him, but he'll still forgive you.
 7. You can hate him, but he'll still love you.
 8. You can ignore him, he'll still care for you.
 9. If you hide, he'll find you.
 10. If you run, he'll follow you.
 11. If you nail him to a cross, he'll stretch out his arms to embrace you.
- F. What is keeping you from receiving Jesus, the lovingly stubborn one, today?
- G. He wants to do for you what he did for Saul. He wants to be your Savior.
- H. And he wants to give you a better name. The name Christian.

X. Invitation

- A. Won't you become a follower of The Way... So many of us are already on that path. With all the compassion and love we have, we invite you to come along.
1. Come along if you feel broken, and hurt beyond repair.
 2. Come along if God has let you down, and you don't want to trust him again.
 3. Come along, if you're doing great, and you don't need God, but you worry that one day you might.
 4. Come along if you've got your doubts.
 5. Come along if you've got your fears.
 6. Come along if you suspect this whole Christianity thing is stupid. God can handle your cynicism, and so can we.
 - a) Come along.
 7. Come along if you're sexually skeptical, or confused, or hurt or even angry... or don't trust yourself to know what's right, or you don't think the Bible has it right. Come along anyway, and see whether God has a better way for you.
 8. Come along if you're a campus leader.
 9. Come along if you think you're a nobody, because God says you're not.
- B. And yes, God still remembers you and he'll remember you forever. No matter how chaotic your family is, or your life is, or your world is, or his messy Church is, God knows you by name, and he loves you.
- C. And he'll remember you a year from you and a hundred years from now and through all the long ages of eternity.
- a) You can be a follower of the Way.
 - (1) You're not ready? That's okay.
 - (2) You don't have to be ready. Just be willing.
 2. Come along if Christians feel weird to you... maybe weird is what you need.
 3. Come along if you've neglected God, and your spiritual joints are rusted tight.
 4. Come along if you're happy.
 5. If you're lonely. If you're grieving. If you're weeping. If you're angry. If you're depressed. If you're different. If you're guilty. If you're ashamed. If you're embarrassed. If you're sorry. If you're if you're ready. If you're not. Whoever, wherever, whenever you are... put one foot in front of the other and join the ranks of millions of people who have literally had their come to Jesus moment.

XI. Invitation

- A. I could go on, but it's time to call for the decision.
- B. There comes a decisive moment when you step on the pathway and ask God to save you.
- C. This can be your decisive moment. I'm going to talk you through the steps, right now.
- D. I won't embarrass you. I won't single you out.
- E. It's just a silent prayer.
- F. I'm going ask you to bow your head and to close your eyes. The reason I ask this is to create a quiet space for yourself. And to extend that courtesy to the people sitting around you.

XII. Prayer

- A. ADMIT: God, I admit I'm on the wrong path. I've been here longer than I should be. I need you. I have let you down. I have not followed your ways. I have kicked against you. I have sinned. And I admit it.
- B. BELIEVE: But God I believe you sent Jesus to fix all this. I believe he is your son. I believe he died on the Cross for me. I believe he rose again for me. I believe he is alive right now, calling out to me. He is my pathway, my way to you now and forever, God, I don't get how all this works, but I'm telling you as best as I can that I believe in Jesus.
- C. CHOOSE: So God, right now, I choose to receive Jesus. I choose step into his way. I choose to trust in Jesus as my only hope. I'm asking you as best as I can, because of Jesus, please save me. Please forgive me. Please make me your child forever.