

By His Word

By Hunter Ellis

A shiver runs down my neck. My whole body twitches slightly. Every hair on my arms and legs stands up. I grab the back of my neck and let out a sigh. I am standing outside of Pastor Michaels's green room selected among hundreds to have my prayers answered during today's televised service. The people standing around me likely share the same zeal for the man World Magazine calls "the closest thing to our messiah."

"You may now enter," says one of security officers standing outside of the green room.

The feeling of final judgment passes over me. My legs move forward without my mind signaling. My head follows.

Pastor Michaels is standing in the center of the room. He is holding his arms above his head. He says nothing until everyone that has been waiting in line filters in. The door to the room closes.

"We are gathered here today to celebrate the righteousness of his life, our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ," says Pastor Michaels.

I notice most people in the crowd have closed close their eyes in reverence.

"You are here today as the chosen few that will appear on stage during the broadcast. I wish to confer with each of you privately in order to better understand what ails you, brothers and sisters."

The room falls silent as Pastor Michaels leads the room in prayer. Afterwards, handlers instruct us to sit in our designated chair until it is time for us to speak directly with Pastor Michael. One of the handlers gives me a nametag with a number twenty-five on it. I turn to the gentleman sitting next to my left in an attempt to pass the time faster.

"Have you read Pastor Michaels' latest book?" I say.

"Three times. I was not a man of faith until Pastor Michaels made the truth so abundantly clear to me."

"I just can't believe he was willing to come out to Bluffington, Indiana. Most famous Christian preachers go straight for the larger venues."

The man nods his head and returns to reading a flyer that was passed out to everyone while waiting in line, detailing the procedure for the service. I sit back in my chair and close my eyes. Above me I make out the sound of what I think is a contemporary Christian song. I cannot make out the exact song over the din of the room. I close my eyes again.

"Twenty-four. You are up," the security guard says.

The gentleman glances up from the flyer and moves towards Pastor Michaels.

"Twenty-five. You are up."

Walking towards Pastor Michaels I notice his presence. He seems completely comfortable making small talk with all gathered around him. He is absolutely buzzing with warmth and radiation. I now understand how he became so famous.

"And what might your name be, brother?" says Pastor Michaels.

"It is Gregory Matthews, Pastor."

"What seems to be ailing you?"

"Well, my sister is in the hospital. She was in a bad car accident."

"Tell me more about her. Has she professed Jesus Christ as her savior?"

I pause for a moment. I take note of Pastor Michaels's hands – one curled into a fist and the other flat like paper.

"Lezlie is a professor in the School of Social Work at Indiana University. She was hit by a drunk driver three days ago commuting from work," I say forgetting to answer his second question.

"This Lezlie sounds like a wonderful person. Tell me, has she watched the program before?"

"She has not. We grew up Episcopalians, but she has not been to church since high school."

"Have you explained the importance of discovering Jesus Christ to her?"

"She converted to Islam two years ago after attending mosque with her then-boyfriend."

"Then she is in league against our cause, Gregory," says Pastor Michaels.

The warm demeanor surrounding the pastor is now gone. He appears visibly upset.

"Gregory, allow me to quote Psalm 34:7, 'The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.'"

"Will you help pray for my sister?" I ask.

"Your sister has turned her back on Jesus. My sermon is not a place to pray for those who would work against the Lord's ultimate goal."

I digest Pastor Michaels's words. He extends a hand to signify the end of our conversation.

"Well, thanks for taking the time to listen to my troubles, Pastor," I say.

We shake hands. As I walk away Pastor Michaels says something under his breath, "The Lord sees to it that the wicked are punished in order to strengthen his flock."

A security guard escorts me to the door I entered from earlier. The warm exuberance surrounding Pastor Michaels returns. I can make out the song playing overhead. I make out the structure of the song. The song is the same one that I heard before. It is Genesis' *Jesus He Knows Me*. I leave Pastor Michaels's green room and begin walking towards the parking lot.