

## **When Common Grace is Uncommon** **Isaiah 3:1-4:1**

Our text this morning is Isaiah, all of chapter 3, to verse 1 of chapter 4. So we'll be reading from Isaiah 3:1 to 4:1. Before the reading, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer. Father in heaven, we ask that you would bless your word to us. May we be given ears that hear, eyes that see, and hearts that understand and obey. These things we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah 3, starting at verse 1: “<sup>1</sup> For behold, the Lord God of hosts is taking away from Jerusalem and from Judah support and supply, all support of bread, and all support of water; <sup>2</sup> the mighty man and the soldier, the judge and the prophet, the diviner and the elder, <sup>3</sup> the captain of fifty and the man of rank, the counselor and the skillful magician and the expert in charms. <sup>4</sup> And I will make boys their princes, and infants shall rule over them. <sup>5</sup> And the people will oppress one another, every one his fellow and every one his neighbor; the youth will be insolent to the elder, and the despised to the honorable.

“<sup>6</sup> For a man will take hold of his brother in the house of his father, saying: ‘You have a cloak; you shall be our leader, and this heap of ruins shall be under your rule’; <sup>7</sup> in that day he will speak out, saying: ‘I will not be a healer; in my house there is neither bread nor cloak; you shall not make me leader of the people.’ <sup>8</sup> For Jerusalem has stumbled, and Judah has fallen, because their speech and their deeds are against the Lord, defying his glorious presence.

“<sup>9</sup> For the look on their faces bears witness against them; they proclaim their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to them! For they have brought evil on themselves. <sup>10</sup> Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds. <sup>11</sup> Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for what his hands have dealt out shall be done to him. <sup>12</sup> My people—infants are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, your guides mislead you and they have swallowed up the course of your paths.

“<sup>13</sup> The Lord has taken his place to contend; he stands to judge peoples. <sup>14</sup> The Lord will enter into judgment with the elders and princes of his people: ‘It is you who have devoured the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses. <sup>15</sup> What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?’ declares the Lord God of hosts.

“<sup>16</sup> The Lord said: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet, <sup>17</sup> therefore the Lord will strike with a scab the heads of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will lay bare their secret parts.

“<sup>18</sup> In that day the Lord will take away the finery of the anklets, the headbands, and the crescents; <sup>19</sup> the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarves; <sup>20</sup> the headdresses, the armllets, the sashes, the perfume boxes, and the amulets; <sup>21</sup> the signet rings and nose rings; <sup>22</sup> the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks, and the handbags; <sup>23</sup> the mirrors, the linen garments, the turbans, and the veils.

“<sup>24</sup> Instead of perfume there will be rotteness; and instead of a belt, a rope; and instead of well-set hair, baldness; and instead of a rich robe, a skirt of sackcloth; and branding instead of beauty.

<sup>25</sup> Your men shall fall by the sword and your mighty men in battle. <sup>26</sup> And her gates shall lament and mourn; empty, she shall sit on the ground. [41:] <sup>1</sup> And seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying, “We will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes, only let us be called by your name; take away our reproach.” Amen. May God bless that word to us.

Theologians, when speaking of grace, like to make two distinctions. They talk about common grace and particular grace, or general grace and particular grace. Common grace—what’s common grace? Common grace is the goodness of God that everybody receives. All the earth, every person in the earth, receives this thing that theologians have called common grace.

What’s common grace? Common grace is the fact, for example, that God orders the seasons. In Genesis chapter 8, part of the promises that God made to Noah after the Flood was there would be springtime, there would be harvest, there would be autumn, there would be winter. In other words, you will have seasons in which you can grow food. Common grace is that God makes it possible for man to live upon this earth. God upholds all things by His will, even the production of food. Common grace is that God speaks to all of humanity from creation.

We started off with a reading from Psalm 19 this morning. How did it start? “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.” And it says that these words, this rule of these words, goes out through all the earth, wherever the sun shines these things are known, and the sun shines over all of the earth.

God by common grace witnesses to all the earth through His creation everywhere in the world that people have been found. Those people have practiced some kind of religion. Now I’m not for a moment saying that those religions are in any way legitimate or salvific, but the very fact that they practice some kind of religion, that they have some kind of religious bent, tells us that they’re aware that there is more in the world than just the physical creation, there’s more than just the ground we stand on, there’s more than just the things that we can feel, that tells us that there’s an unseen world. And Scripture tells us that this is the evidence of God’s common grace, His common word to all of humanity.

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount—turn to Matthew chapter 5. We’ll start at verse 43: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. <sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? <sup>48</sup> You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

For what reason does Jesus say here that we are to love even our enemies? The answer: Because the evidence is that as God gives them the sunshine and the rain and the food, even God loves our enemies, in a manner of speaking. As I said, common grace—the grace that falls upon all people, the goodness of God that is known to all people.

Now this common grace does other things. This common grace restrains wickedness, it restrains evil, it restrains the corrupt nature of humanity. You want to know how bad things can get? Go to a place where the common grace of God has been withdrawn, and there you see nothing but wickedness, murder, corruption, and destruction. And we as a society ought to take warning that God can withdraw common grace from among us.

Often when I pray here, I pray that God would actually lay His common grace over this nation. I pray that He would restrain the evil of our people, for we are a nation that is in the process of turning its back on and rejecting God. And I want that turned around. I want to see God turning this nation around and laying His common grace upon us.

Let's turn very quickly to the book of Romans, chapter 1, starting at verse 18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup> For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

Why are they without excuse? Because God's invisible attributes have been clearly perceived, ever since creation. Creation bears witness, or testimony, of the goodness of God. It leaves all men, all people, women, children, everyone, without excuse. If you haven't fallen to your knees to worship God and submit yourself to His will, there's no excuse—absolutely none. And if you haven't, what does it say? It says you're suppressing the truth.

There's no such thing as an atheist, is what this is saying. There are people who think they're atheists, but have you ever noticed that they hate the God whom they say they don't believe in? You know, I don't believe in leprechauns, and I don't hate leprechauns. But they hate the God whom they say they don't believe in.

Now the reason they say they don't believe in Him is because they know that God requires them to acknowledge Him and to bend the knee. So it's actually rebellion. You can't hate someone you don't think is there. There's no such thing as an atheist, in technical terms, though there may be people who call themselves atheists.

Now what happens with regards to these sinners who suppress the truth? Well let's look at verse Romans chapter 1, starting at verse 21: "<sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. <sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup> because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

"<sup>26</sup> For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; <sup>27</sup> and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing

shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.<sup>28</sup> And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.<sup>29</sup> They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips,<sup>30</sup> slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,<sup>31</sup> foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.<sup>32</sup> Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them."

Notice, three times it's repeated: God gave them up. God gave them up. God gave them up. That's God withdrawing this common grace. They refused to acknowledge God, they refused to acknowledge the goodness of God; therefore, God hands them over to the evil of their hearts, and they become increasingly wicked. God responds to their wickedness by increasing their wickedness.

My friends, the first thing that happens when it comes to sin, is what you get is you get more sin. You want to play in the dirt, God gives you mud. You want to play in the mud, God gives you a sewer. You want to play in the sewer, God puts you in a grave. It's really that simple. You get handed over. God withdraws His restraining, or His common grace.

Move on to Romans chapter 2, and down to verse 14. Here's where Paul speaks about the law written in the heart of all humanity. Now in the book of Romans, he's addressing people who might be thinking, Well, this is all addressed only to the Jews, for they have the Hebrew Scriptures. And Paul says, No. This is addressed to all of humanity. Look at what he says:

"<sup>14</sup>For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. <sup>15</sup>They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them <sup>16</sup>on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."

What does he say about even the Gentiles? Remember, Paul was born of the Jews, of the tribe of Benjamin he tells us in other places. A Jew of the Jews, a Hebrew speaker—a rabbi in the great rabbinic tradition of the Pharisees. And here he says of the Gentiles, whom once he looked upon as nothing other than dogs—"Gentile dogs" would've been the phrase that he used—he says, They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, and their conscience bears witness to this fact. That's the common grace of God.

Now the common grace of God takes this law that is on the hearts of all people, even the unbelievers, even the atheists, and God stimulates their conscience with it, and by that means He restrains evil. And if you live in a society being given over to evil, what's happening? Well, what's happening is the common grace of God is being withdrawn.

And we live in such a society, where men don't want to be men, and women don't want to be women. I mean, just exactly the sins that Paul spoke of in the book of Romans in chapter 1 are actually the characteristics of our nation, the characteristics of our people.

Furthermore, not only do they commit the sins, but they promote the sins. They're bold, they're public—they're like the people of Sodom, like the people whom Isaiah is addressing in Isaiah chapter 3. And I've got three headings again, as we try to make our way through this:

Verses 1 to 9: The Famine of Food and Masculinity. God is going to break down the general support of the nation, and the men are either going to die, or simply cease to behave as God expects men to behave. There's going to be a famine of food and masculinity.

Verses 10 to 15: The Hearing. It's set up as a court case. God appears in judgment, God makes His accusation.

Verses 16 through to chapter 4, verse 1: The Destruction of Femininity. The men and the women—God withdrawing His common grace from these people.

### ***The Famine of Food and Masculinity***

Let's start then looking at the text. We'll read chapter 3, verses 1 to 9: “<sup>1</sup> For behold, the Lord God of hosts is taking away from Jerusalem and from Judah support and supply, all support of bread, and all support of water; <sup>2</sup> the mighty man and the soldier, the judge and the prophet, the diviner and the elder, <sup>3</sup> the captain of fifty and the man of rank, the counselor and the skillful magician and the expert in charms. <sup>4</sup> And I will make boys their princes, and infants shall rule over them. <sup>5</sup> And the people will oppress one another, every one his fellow and every one his neighbor; the youth will be insolent to the elder, and the despised to the honorable.

“<sup>6</sup> For a man will take hold of his brother in the house of his father, saying: ‘You have a cloak; you shall be our leader, and this heap of ruins shall be under your rule’; <sup>7</sup> in that day he will speak out, saying: ‘I will not be a healer; in my house there is neither bread nor cloak; you shall not make me leader of the people.’ <sup>8</sup> For Jerusalem has stumbled, and Judah has fallen, because their speech and their deeds are against the Lord, defying his glorious presence. <sup>9</sup> For the look on their faces bears witness against them; they proclaim their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to them! For they have brought evil on themselves.”

The Lord will take away from them the things in which they have put their trust. Just look back at the last verse we looked at last week, chapter 2 verse 22: “Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?” The people were putting their trust in anything other than the God of Israel—chariots, armies, alliances, anything other than the trust of God. They were relying on anything other than God, and yet God, when He established His covenant with this people, had promised them that if they walk in fellowship with Him through faithful obedience, *He* will be their fortress. He would protect them from the nations around them, He would uphold the kingdom.

But they went for the things of mankind: idols, power, the foolish thoughts and ideas of man. So the result? God is going to take away support and supply. They're going to run out of food, they're going to run out of water. This is a city under siege. He's going to take away from them the men in whom they once relied—the mighty man, the soldier, the judge, the prophet, the

diviner, the elder, the counselor and the skill magician—now that’s an accusation in itself, the diviner and the skillful magician, the one who is an expert in charms. The people were not only relying on soldiers, military strength, foreign alliances—they were relying on things like diviners, things like fortune tellers, and they were relying upon skillful magicians—the occult. The people of God turned away from the word of God and took up false religion.

And that’s something actually that our world seems not to want to realize—You can’t stop people being religious. You can’t stop people believing in something. You push Christianity out of your society, and every form of strange belief and errant philosophy becomes the religion of the people. Take away the word of God, and people submit to the word of the Devil. It’s really that simple.

As I said, there’s no such thing as an atheist. Everybody believes in something. The atheist believes in him or herself—they’re their own god. They think they’re autonomous, they think they make their own choices, they exercise their own power. So they’re self-worshippers, though they may not know it, though they cannot understand this. They’re locked within themselves by their sin. They can’t step into the light and see things as they really are. Blindness.

God is going to take away all these men on whom they have relied. Looking at verse 4: “And I will make boys their princes, and infants shall rule over them.” Move down to verse 6: “For a man will take hold of his brother in the house of his father, saying: ‘You have a cloak; you shall be our leader.’” A little further down it tells us that the people are ruled over by women. Now I don’t think he’s saying that the women are sitting upon the throne. I think what he’s saying in there is actually that the men are behaving badly; that the men are not being men, as He expects them to be men. God has an expectation on men, us men. God expects us to be His kind of man. He has an expectation. There’s something that He expects of humanity. There’s something that He expects of men, there’s something that He expects of women.

Let’s turn to Deuteronomy chapter 22 for a start. I just want to look at verse 5: “A woman shall not wear a man’s garment, nor shall a man put on a woman’s cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.” A woman shall not wear a man’s garment, nor shall a man put on a woman’s cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God. Now don’t take this in a shallow, surface way. I don’t think that in our day and age, this is to say that a woman should only wear a dress and a man should only wear trousers. But what He’s saying is that there is a certain thing, there’s a femininity that He expects to see in a woman, there’s a masculinity that He expects to see in a man, and He doesn’t expect to see any crossover. Men will be men, men are to dress as men, men are to look like men. Women are to be women, look like a woman. And that will change from one culture to the next.

But whatever the norm of your culture is, you’re expected to be a man amongst men, or a woman amongst women. That’s God requirement, and He considers it an abomination to cross-dress. What would He think, therefore, of sex change operations? They’re not actually sex change, are they, because every cell in that person’s body is either male or female. All they’ve done is mutilated the flesh, mutilated their own body, destroyed what God has given them. God expects a certain kind of masculinity.

Turn to the book of Job, chapter 38. Now there's one part here, and I love this part of the book of Job, chapter 38. I remember the first time I read through the Bible, the first time ever. I actually loved this line. Poor old Job, he's lost everything. Family—killed; wealth—gone; health—gone; he's got three friends—they're his chief accusers. He's miserable. He's sitting on an ash heap, scratching pus-like sores with a broken piece of pottery. He's in the most miserable state you can possibly imagine, and he's addressing his complaint to all of creation, in the hearing of God: "God is not fair. I was righteous. I was just. I was doing what is right. Everything that the Lord had taught me, I'm doing. And yet all of this is happened to me."

And his friends are accusing him saying, "It's because you're a sinner." And he's saying, "Look, I understand that I'm a sinner. But I have not committed any particular sin that this should be happening to me." And eventually—eventually—Job asks that he could speak to God. He actually wants to confront God with his questions: "I've got some questions I want to ask God." And what do you know? God comes. Let's look at verse 1:

"<sup>1</sup> Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: <sup>2</sup> 'Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? <sup>3</sup> Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me.'" Dress for action like a man. I can tell you, first time I ever read the Bible, I loved it. Dress for action like a man. Here's this poor guy, everything's gone wrong, and the very first thing God says to this poor guy is, "Get up off the ground and stop whinging! Put on your action gear. I'm going to speak to you, and you, like a man, you're going to answer me."

God had an expectation of this man. He expected this man to be masculine, to actually tough it out, to persevere in the face of difficulty. He expected this man to have integrity and to hold to his integrity. He expected this man to have faith in God and to hold to his faith in God. And He didn't treat him like a poor little boy with a skinned knee. "Oh, dear, dear. I'm going to put some salve on that scraped knee and a band-aid, and Mummy's going to give you a kiss on the forehead." No. "Stand up! Face me like a man. Dress for action. I'm going to speak. I want to hear your answers."

God has an expectation of men. He does not expect men to be foolish children. He does not want them to be feminine. Now I hope you understand. I'm not saying something like, "Man! Man! Man goes and hunts. Man lights fires. Man hits things with hammers." Mind you, I'm a man and I enjoy those things, but it's not that simple. Some men study, some men are introverted, some men are quiet by nature. But even a quiet, introverted man of the books is not to be feminine. He's not to be a woman. He's not to be weakling. He's to be the man that God expects him to be.

Keep looking. Let's go to First Corinthians chapter 16. There's something else that God expects of a man. There I just want to look at verse 13. Here's how Paul says that a man ought to act. He's addressing himself to the Corinthians, a church with problems, a church where things are going wrong. It's a church where, if we were to read right through the letter, we'd see that men are misbehaving and that women are misbehaving. Well this is obviously a word addressed directly to the men. Verse 13: "<sup>13</sup> Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. <sup>14</sup> Let all that you do be done in love."

“Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.” Now think about this. In our present day and age, in our modern world, love is usually presented as something very fluffy. It’s very nice. It’s not dangerous. It can’t cause problems. Love accepts everything and everybody, and love would never, by any means, say that there is something that is wrong, or something that should be corrected. Love doesn’t rebuke, love doesn’t discipline. That’s what you hear if you listen to the world. But that’s not what Paul says. Paul says, “Be watchful, standing firm in the faith.”

So first of all, how does a godly man stand firm in the faith? Well, you have to know what you believe, don’t you? You can’t stand firm in a faith that you don’t know nor understand. A godly man must therefore be a man of the word, a man who knows, studies, and submits to God’s word, and says, “I will submit to God in the face of all assaults and temptations. No one’s going to lead me astray. I’m a man, and I answer to God.” He’s going to be strong—strong in this conviction. But he’s going to let all that he does be done in love.

Fathers, for example, discipline your children. Fail to correct your children, and you’re basically just handing them over to Satan. When you go through the supermarket and you see these crazy, naughty children running around, wreaking chaos and havoc. And you see their mother, and all she seems to want to do is hide behind the next big thing, because she doesn’t want you to actually know that that’s her child. Why is that child so miserable and unhappy? No one loved that child enough to discipline them--because discipline is not only negative, it’s positive.

Discipline not only teaches the child what you don’t want, it teaches the child what you do want, and it’s actually built into a child by the common grace of God that the child wants to please his or her parents. If they know what the parent wants, they want to produce what the parent wants. If you don’t discipline your child, you’re not letting them know anything. And so they’re miserable. They do anything they want to do, but nothing makes them happy.

Doing what you want doesn’t make you happy. Following every desire of the flesh and of your heart doesn’t make you happy. The only thing that can bring happiness in the end is submission to God, submitting to Jesus, begging forgiveness. But following your own heart cannot bring you happiness.

Let all that you do be done in love. These strong men of conviction that Paul speaks of are men who’ve drawn a line—“This is where God’s word takes me, and I won’t cross it”—men who do all things in love. And this love is an expression of their firmness in the faith and an expression of their strength. God expects men to be godly, strong, convicted men, doing things in love.

But as God withdraws His common grace from this people in judgment, they’ll take any man—any man. If we go back to Isaiah chapter 3, verse 6. “You’ve got a coat. You’ve got a nicer jumper than me. You can be the king! You can be the king!” And what does that guy say? “Don’t turn to me. I’m no leader. I don’t want to be a leader. I’ve got nothing to offer, either. I have no character, either. Just because I’ve got a coat doesn’t mean I’m fit to lead.”

Have you noticed something in our modern world—and I keep sort of jumping us into the modern world and into our present day—What is the character and the quality of our leaders



these days, with rare exception? What sort of people are they? Selfish, self-promoting. The only reason they're in leadership is that they see themselves as in some way superior and that they ought to leading. Men of character are not rising up through the ranks, in our nation or in just about any nation of the West. It's just a fact. There are very few exceptions these days. "You've got a million dollars—you can be the leader. You've got a billion dollars—you can be the leader."

Our Prime Minister is our Prime Minister today, why? One, he's convinced that he should be leading. Two, if you don't know it, he's actually a socialist. He's actually a lover of the Labour Party, but he's the Conservative Party Prime Minister. How could that be? I'll tell you. He didn't have the trade union connections necessary to get to the top of the Labour Party, but he had the money to buy and influence his way into the Liberal Party, and so that's why he's our Prime Minister today. You've only got to go back into the records. He's a socialist. His statements are socialist statements. He believes in the great socialist dream of world unity—everybody getting the same from a government that looks after them like a mother. He's there because he's got a good coat. You see, he's there because he has the means to look like a leader; therefore, he's been made a leader.

Their women. Verse 12: "My people—infants are their oppressors, and women rule over them." Now it's really kind of hard to use that in some way that's not offensive or confrontational, I know that. But you've got to understand the context: A man is to be a man, not a woman. A man is to be a man. And God is saying that the men of Jerusalem, the ones that are left after He's destroyed the others through warfare and starvation, the ones that are left, are not real men. They're like children. They're like women. That's what God says of them.

### ***The Hearing***

We'll keep reading. Chapter 3, verses 10 to 15. As I've said, the subtitle I've given it is "The Hearing." This is God's court case, in a way. The picture you've got here is God speaking to the people in accusation, and also a little bit of encouragement. Verse 10: "Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds."<sup>11</sup> Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for what his hands have dealt out shall be done to him."

And here you've got to understand: "Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them." How are they righteous? There's a trap here. People read this and they assume that what God means is those who are outwardly good—the righteous, the ones who do the works that a righteous man does. No. If you're already thinking that, the answer is No.

Let's turn again to the book of Romans, and this time to Romans chapter 4, where Paul tells us how a person was righteous in the Old Testament. We'll read verses 1 to 8. Romans chapter 4, starting at verse 1:

<sup>1</sup>What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? <sup>2</sup>For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup>For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.'

<sup>4</sup>Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. <sup>5</sup>And to the one

who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,<sup>6</sup> just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:<sup>7</sup> ‘Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered;<sup>8</sup> blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.’”

Who are the righteous in the city of Jerusalem? Answer: The righteous are the same as always, those who are justified by faith. The righteous are those who believe. Abraham believed, and it was counted to him as righteousness. David believed, and his lawless deeds were forgiven. His sin was covered. And blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.

Now the quotes there are from Genesis chapter 15, and Psalm 32, if you don’t know. And if you want to know something else, there’s a reason why Paul drew those two quotes together, and the reason comes in the word that in our English translation is, in verse 3, “counted”: “Abraham believed God, and it was *counted* to him as righteousness.” And down in verse 8: “Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not *count* his sin.” The word “count” or “counted” is impute, tallied, judged as something due.

You see, the same word was used in two different places. This is called Biblical Theology, if you want the technical term. It’s where you’re following a theme through Scripture using words and phrases. And Paul, seeing that word “counted” being used, spoken of Abraham—“Abraham was counted as righteous because he believed the promise of God”; and the same word being used concerning those whose sins are forgiven—“Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not *count* his sin”; Paul comes to his theology of justification, his understanding of justification, as being justification by faith. Your sins are cleansed through faith; your righteousness is given through faith. It’s the blessing of God’s righteousness to be accounted righteous in the sight of God—sins removed, righteousness given. The righteousness of faith.

So back in Isaiah chapter 3, when God says through Isaiah, “Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds,” He’s speaking of the faithful, the believing, those who believe the word and the promises of God. “It shall be well with them.” Now that’s not necessarily a promise that they’re not going to suffer with the people alongside them. But when Jerusalem falls, it shall be well with them. When the people are taken off into captivity, it shall be well with them. Think of Daniel and his three friends—all the trials that they went through, but it was well with them. They were righteous by faith, and God supported them and used them wherever they were, whatever the circumstance.

Now that’s where this idea of Christian manliness that I was speaking of comes through. We’re supposed to hold the line, no matter what comes our way. Hold the line. Hold on to your faith, no matter what happens. When we suffer the same sufferings as the world around us, we stand in Christ. That’s what God requires of Christian men. Our children should be able to look at us and see a father who has never strayed from faith in Christ, no matter what happened.

Businesses go broke, loved ones die—whatever. That’s what God requires of men, and that’s how the righteous are, and “it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds,” even if they die in the siege of Jerusalem. Where do they go? Where would the righteous go if they die in the siege of Jerusalem? They go into the presence of the Lord Himself. They go to eternal life. “It shall be well with them.”

Verse 11: “Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for what his hands have dealt out shall be done to him.” Do you see there something pretty similar to what we hear in the Sermon on the Mount, “Do not judge”? The standard by which you judge, it will be meted back to you, pouring over. The wicked shall have done to them what they have dealt out.

Verse 12: “My people—infants are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, your guides mislead you and they have swallowed up the course of your paths. <sup>13</sup> The Lord has taken his place to contend; he stands to judge peoples. <sup>14</sup> The Lord will enter into judgment with the elders and princes of his people: ‘It is you who have devoured the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses. <sup>15</sup> What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?’ declares the Lord God of hosts.”

Remember back in chapter 1, where God’s accusation was that the princes, the people who had been ordained to uphold the law, had failed to do so. Chapter 1, verse 23: “Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not bring justice to the fatherless, and the widow’s cause does not come to them.”

So what’s God saying here? Remember this is coming after this, “Do not trust in man in whose nostrils is breath.” He’s saying that the judges are going to be judged. The judges who have failed to uphold my law, to uphold my grace, to care for the widows and the fatherless—they’re going to be judged. I’m against them. They have ground the face of the poor—“What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?”

You know, this is the arrogance of someone who is wealthy. I’m sure we’ve met them. You meet them. They’ve got a lot of money. Everything has gone right for them in their lives. Every investment has paid off. And sooner or later, a person in that situation is under an extreme temptation, and the temptation is to believe that you’ve got it because you were good. You did what was right; therefore, God has blessed your righteousness. And when a person starts to think that way, when they look at someone whom God is blessing in struggles, they see that—those trials—as a sign that the person is not actually blessed by God.

You don’t measure blessings by materials, but when people do measure blessings by materials, they often end up arrogant and proud, and they assume that the people who suffer deserve to suffer, and if their sufferings increase, so be it. It must have been God’s intention that they were suffering. We’ve all met them. You meet them sometimes in churches—the proud. I mean, what does the Scripture say in many places for that very reason?—Woe to the rich. Woe to the wealthy. Woe to the one who thinks he has security in this world.

### ***The Destruction of Femininity***

Let’s continue reading now. Verses 16 through verse 1 of chapter 4. This is the destruction and the failure of femininity. Not only does God have an expectation of men, He has an expectation of women. Now before we start this reading, I’ll make this point. This is not about the fact that the girls were attractive. God created beauty. I’m sure if we could have met Eve in her beauty, she would probably have been the most beautiful woman we would ever have seen, if we could

have met her within that first couple of weeks of creation. God created beauty. This is not about beauty. But any woman here who is of any maturity and discernment will tell you there's a difference between beauty and flirtatiousness. There's a difference between attractiveness and raw, rampant sexuality. And this is God's accusation against the women of Jerusalem.

Chapter 3, starting at verse 16: "The Lord said: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes,"—now, walk with outstretched necks—what would that be about? It's pride. If the dress standard of your day has you wearing something that covers you from shoulder to ankle and the only part of your body that can be seen is your neck, if you're stretching your neck, you're showing as much flesh as you possibly can.

That might seem stupid to us, because we live in this society where it's skin-o-rama. Honestly. Modesty is just about flying out the window. The billboards that we see, the advertisements that we see—you know, you see a girl in a bikini trying to sell a toilet plunger. And let's be honest, when it comes to temptation, men are visually stimulated. And if you live in a society where the only female flesh that you see is the neck and the feet, to you, the neck and the feet become a very attractive thing, and the more neck you see, the more exciting it is. And if you get to see the ankle, well, that's exciting too. We think that's funny, but the point applies, and it applies today. It's the same principle. It's the display of skin—as much as you can display. It's the pushing of the boundaries.

“<sup>16</sup> The Lord said: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet.” Now this garment that would have gone from the shoulder to the ankles usually had a band around the ankles. This apparently was the height of femininity and beauty in that day. The woman had to walk with each foot falling in front of the other, because the band didn't allow big long steps. So she minced along as she went, and had little bells that tinkled on her ankles with every step that she took. It's just about attracting attention.

“<sup>17</sup> Therefore the Lord will strike with a scab the heads of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will lay bare their secret parts.” What's He saying there? He's saying, You're going to end up diseased and naked. You're going to end up a common slave. You're going to end up being sold in the marketplace.

“<sup>18</sup> In that day the Lord will take away the finery of the anklets, the headbands, and the crescents; <sup>19</sup> the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarves; <sup>20</sup> the headdresses, the armlets, the sashes, the perfume boxes, and the amulets; <sup>21</sup> the signet rings and nose rings; <sup>22</sup> the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks, and the handbags; <sup>23</sup> the mirrors, the linen garments, the turbans, and the veils.

“<sup>24</sup> Instead of perfume there will be rotteness; and instead of a belt, a rope; and instead of well-set hair, baldness; and instead of a rich robe, a skirt of sackcloth; and branding instead of beauty. <sup>25</sup> Your men shall fall by the sword and your mighty men in battle. <sup>26</sup> And her gates shall lament and mourn; empty, she shall sit on the ground.” The listing there, that detailed listing of everything that was an item of supposed beauty and sexual allurements, is all going—you're going to lose it all. You're going to be a nothing and nobody.

You think that your great beauty has made you someone special. God says, I gave you the gift of beauty. You think that because you can turn a man's eye you've got some kind of mighty power. God says, You're going to be a slave in the marketplace—you know, changing a belt for a rope—slaves, dragged through the marketplace tied together like cattle. He's going to expose their secret parts. Forget about fashions, He's saying. Forget about fashions. You wanted to be sexually alluring? Well, you're going to be sold in the meat market. You'll find out what you're worth, in cash. God judges, and He judges us with judgment that suits the sin.

Chapter 4, verse 1: “And seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying, ‘We will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes, only let us be called by your name; take away our reproach.’” Anything to have a man who would say that she's his wife. Anything. All the decent men are gone. All the strong men are gone. Anything to have any man give them a name. It could mean a few different things, and my reading has given me a lot of possible interpretations here. They could be pregnant, and they want a husband to legitimize the pregnancy. They could simply be speaking about the reproach of not actually having children. Of all the blessings that God spoke over His people as He set them up as the covenant nation in the covenant land, one of the blessings was fertility and many children. And it was always considered to be a sign of the judgment of God if a woman did not have children.

“Take away our reproach.” Where's the pride gone? You know, you've got seven women asking a man to marry him, and they don't care if he's got multiple wives. This is the judgment of God falling upon a sinful nation, a nation which has turned its back on God, and God withdraws that restraining common grace, that thread of decency.

Anyone here who's a little bit older—I'm 50, and I've told you before, our house, the front door, was literally on Highway 1, and for the first 16 years of my life, we never locked the door once. Never locked the door once. We'd go away for a day and come back with the door not locked. There was no need. You might say I lived in a quiet little part of the world. Well, I did. But you wouldn't go to that same place today and leave your door unlocked, I can assure you.

Our society—this common restraint, this restraint of sin—it's been taken away from us. When it comes to the destruction of femininity, we should really have a look at what God requires, or how God would describe a woman in her femininity. So we'll turn to First Peter, chapter 3, and we'll start reading at verse 1:

“<sup>1</sup>Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, <sup>2</sup>when they see your respectful and pure conduct. <sup>3</sup>Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—<sup>4</sup>but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. <sup>5</sup>For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, <sup>6</sup>as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.” Look at what he's saying. He's saying, Your adornment is to be your character—“the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.”

Now I make the point again, Peter's not saying that to be an attractive woman is to be sinful. And he's not saying that you shouldn't be dressing yourself up and looking good. Of course he's not saying that. But what he is saying is that you should not be judging yourself by your looks, and you should not be judging yourself by your ability to turn a man's eye. You should not be judging yourself by sexual allurements. You shouldn't be setting yourself up in that way. He's saying that your way of life should be that of Christian faithful obedience.

Verse 6: "Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord." Now Leesa's never called me "lord." She's not going to either. I don't expect it, to be honest. I really don't. I think the point there is that Sarah gave glory to her husband. She made her husband look good. She did all that she could do for her husband, that he would be a leading man amongst men.

The woman described in the last chapter of Proverbs, Proverbs 31—one of the things that woman does is she sets her husband up so that he is respected in the gates of the city. Her work is to make her husband be a godly man. We're to be contributing to each other. We should be contributing to each other in terms of our marriages.

I'm supposed to make Leesa look good. Do I succeed? I don't know. She's supposed to be making me look good. You're supposed to be able to look at us and see a model of Christian marriage. That's what God expects. That's what God requires—a femininity and a beauty that is based upon character, a true faithful character, loving God.

You know, the whole feminist movement is about a rejection of the femininity that God gave to womanhood. That's why they're so desperate to see open, public, legalized abortion. Because what's the ultimate symbol of the femininity that God gave to a woman? That she'll bear a child. Eve was called the "mother of the living." So if you're going to reject God's pattern for a woman, you don't give birth to the living; you give birth to the dead. And that's what abortion is. You kill a baby and you give birth to the dead. You become a mother of the dead. And that's what the feminist movement is so determined to do—to try and break the law of God, to be defiant against the will of God, hating God.

Let's have a look at another relevant Scripture—First Timothy chapter 2. We'll start reading at verse 8: "<sup>8</sup>I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; <sup>9</sup>likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, <sup>10</sup>but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. <sup>11</sup>Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. <sup>12</sup>I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. <sup>13</sup>For Adam was formed first, then Eve; <sup>14</sup>and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. <sup>15</sup>Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control."

There's an awful lot there, isn't there, and it could be taught in a way that is very offensive to this world. But I want you to look at something and understand something. Where does Paul go to for the reason behind what he's saying? He goes back to where? Verse 13: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve." He goes back to the garden, back to God's original creation and God's purpose in creation.

Now here's what you need to understand. God created the male and female, and in that created innocence, they were perfectly happy being male and female. There wasn't a problem. Eve wasn't stamping around the garden, saying, "Men! Men! Why can't I be a man?" And Adam wasn't saying, "Stupid woman, what's the problem?" They were perfectly happy and at peace in the roles that God had given them.

Now what went wrong? We know what went wrong. Sin. The curse. The hardening of the conscience. The rebellion against the law and the word of God. Why, then, is there trouble in marriage? Why, then, are men and women not dwelling at peace the way they should? Sin.

But here's the thing. Jesus came to cleanse us of our sins. And it says in chapter 3 of First John, for example, that He came to destroy the works of the Devil. If we've been restored, and if we've been cleansed of our sin, and if we've been given once again the ability to live in obedience and faithfulness to God, what then should be the result of our relationships, man to woman, woman to man? Where should we be? Back where Adam and Eve were in the garden. And Adam was the king, and Eve was his helpmate.

It doesn't say Eve wasn't fully human. It doesn't say Jesus didn't shed His blood for women. It doesn't say that a woman is not a valuable person in the sight of God. But it says that God established relationships to be lived out in a certain way—male and female, men being men, women being women.

Now here's the thing, and I want you to understand this. When it comes to rewards in heaven, I'm going to be judged as a man. God's going to look at me and He's going to be asking the question, "Scott, how did you fulfill your role?" And I'm going to be rewarded accordingly. I don't understand how there can be better places or better rewards in heaven, but Scripture makes it plain, there are. There will be greater honor for some and lesser honors for others.

I'm going to be judged as a man. My wife is going to be judged as a woman. God's not going to be asking her, Did she do the works of the man, did she do what I require of a man of God? He's going to be asking her, Did she do what I require of a woman of God? She might be a better woman of God than I am a man of God, and greater will be her reward.

Ladies, you're not going to come to the last day of your life and wish that you had fought harder for your rights. You're not going to. I guarantee it. On the last day of your life, you won't be thinking, "Wow, I wish I'd stood up for myself and I wish I'd shown those men how strong I am. And I wish that I had broken the form of our society and showed that a woman is equal to a man," etc., etc. You're not going to be thinking those thoughts.

If you're one hour from meeting Jesus face-to-face, do you think you're going to be arguing and fighting about whether or not you as a woman exercised your freedom and your power and your rights? You're going to be thinking about Jesus, and faith, and obedience, and love, and how you can't wait to meet Him, and how He's been working in your life from the day you bent the knee to Him. You're going to be thinking about Jesus.

And in all of eternity, you're not going to be fighting and arguing about what rights you had when you walked the earth in this short, evil life. It's nothing. This life is a pinhead. Fighting for your rights in this life is like fighting for the possession of a pinhead. And a pinhead's not really worth having. But obeying God is fighting for a greater reward in heaven, an eternal reward—the blessings of God for all eternity for people who fulfill their God-given roles.

And the other point I'll make as we talk about this and Paul's speaking of a woman submitting to her husband—When Jesus walked the earth, when He was incarnate upon this earth, did He submit to the will of God? In all things, He was submitting to the will of God. Was He less than God? Fully divine. The eternally begotten Son of God. Truly God. Truly man. Fully divine. Yet He walked this earth in perfect submission.

It's not saying that you're less. Scripture tells me I've got to submit to God. Scripture tells me that my wife, in Christ, is to be submitting to me. We all sin. I fail to submit to God, she fails to submit to God by not submitting to me, at one time or another. We're not actually perfect. But that's the teaching. That's the way a woman ought to be. She ought not to be as Isaiah was saying, a proud sexual animal, attracting men, doing all that she can to turn a man's eye, doing all that she can to be seen as nothing other than a sexual object.

You know, when people claim that they have some kind of freedom of expression, some kind of power in this life, what do they do? Think of the pop star that appears before us. She turns up as a teenager. She can sing. And her first run around, before the cameras, she's a beautiful virginal girl next door, lovely and sweet. That's the impression, all the picture that she gives. And then she decides to proclaim to the world that "I have power, and I've decided that I am who I am." And so what's the second run around in front of the cameras—stage 2 of the career? The singing whore, showing as much flesh as she can possibly show, singing songs about lust and wickedness.

And that's supposedly self-expression and freedom? Scripture says it's degradation and slavery. It's slavery to sin. And yet, that's what the world promises as freedom, and that's what people swallow uncritically. Freedom! Do whatever you want to do! They don't look at the fact that what they want to do is simply give expression to their sinful nature. It's not freedom, it's slavery.

Let's wrap it up. "Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds." Isaiah constantly speaks both words of condemnation and promise. There's two great themes, I've said it before—Judgment and Salvation. Next week in chapter 4, the Lord willing, we'll be looking at chapter 4, verses 2 through the end of the chapter, and there we'll see the promise of salvation.

The promise of God's salvation—the promise of one who will come, a branch, beautiful, glorious, a great one, a Saviour. And we'll start trying to draw together some of the themes that we're going to pick up in the book of this one, this coming Saviour. Isaiah is the message of a coming Saviour. There is one who is coming, and He will save.



And we're going to learn from Isaiah that this coming Saviour is a servant, and that He's a Lamb, and that He's a son of David, and that He's God. And He's going to be all these things wound together. He's going to be divine, and He's going to be human. And when we get to the end of the book of Isaiah, there's really only going to be one person you can say, "He fulfilled that. He fulfilled that." And that one person we already know—I see you nodding your heads. It's Jesus. Jesus is the fulfillment. Jesus is the one that Isaiah is pointing to.

This failure of the men of their time, this failure of the nation of its time, was ordained of God. Why? God was weaning humanity off humanity; weaning humanity off sin; weaning humanity back on to God. Turn from looking at yourselves. Turn from looking to your own abilities and power. Look only to God. Trust only in God. Submit to God. We'll close in prayer.

Father in heaven, once again, we do thank you for your word. We thank you that you speak to us from your word. We thank you that you have made known to us the way of salvation through Jesus Christ, your only Son. Father, we pray that you would help us to walk in faith and obedience. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.