

Blessed Justification

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Let's open up our Bibles to Romans three.

There have only been a few times in instances where I was preaching where I thought to myself, if I could only catch the music director's eye, I would tell him to just keep going. I really appreciate the sermons that we just heard.

Both Ephesians and Colossians, when Paul talks about the spiritual life and he speaks about admonishing, encouraging, teaching one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, you must understand that one of the ways in which you tell whether or not worship is true is: Is the theology correct? Is it didactic? Is it teaching you truth about God?

We heard enough truth in the worship today to have us all simply fasting in silence for a week or so. We did. And it was a great blessing to me. I can always tell when the worship is true, when a sermon is true, because this is what it does. It has this unique ability to point out my failure without driving me to condemnation. It causes me to see where I am lacking, where I am wrong, maybe the coldness of my heart, but it doesn't leave me there. No sooner have I come to that realization than it pushes me beyond that to I just want to be more. I just want to be more devoted, not driven by guilt, not driven by fear, but by just being driven by the beauty of Christ. And I saw that and I just...

Another thing about worship—and I know I am not here to teach on worship, but whenever I do teach on worship and teach worship people, leaders, whatever you call them, this is a good way to look at directing worship in a church. Just go to Los Angeles or New York or Lima, Peru or any large city in the world with just thousands of people in the street, walk down the sidewalk, stop and look up and keep looking up. Just look up. And after a while people will be walking by you and they will be looking at you and they will start... they will look at you and look up and pretty soon you have 20 people around you looking at you and looking up and trying to look at what you are looking at. That is how you direct worship, that people look at you only long enough to try to find out what you are looking at. What has you so mesmerized. And I saw that today. It was a great blessing and I thank you so much. I so needed that. Wow.

Let's look at Romans three. I have about 45 minutes. For me that is usually an introduction. That is one of the bad things about spending most of your time preaching

overseas. If you don't preach three hours you don't even get paid. Americans. What will you do with them?

Romans three verse 23.

“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”¹

As a preacher it is my task to go to unregenerate men, men who do not know Christ and without animosity, without arrogance, but sincerely, boldly and truthfully to tell them—and I am not going to say this in beautiful, flowering terms, but to tell them how vile they are, to explain to them how holy God is so that in the light of that holiness they will see their wretched state. That is my task as a preacher and I have biblical foundation for that. Sometimes when I say that someone will say, “Well, Paul said he didn't have a ministry of condemnation.” And I say, “You are misinterpreting Paul,” because the closest thing we have to a systematic theology in the entire New Testament is the book of Romans and I found it very interesting that he spends basically the first three chapters with one purpose in mind. If you look at verse 19 of chapter three:

“Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God.”²

That is what Paul is seeking to do. He is using every power of his intellect, carried by the Holy Spirit, drawing, as we see in verses 10 through 18 from some of the most explicit texts in the Old Testament regarding the sins of man and this is what Paul is doing. He is laboring to condemn the whole world. Now why? Because man is a creature given to self and the worship of self. He loves to boast in pulling himself up by his own bootstraps to talk about the great things. He wants to literally take the throne by making God his debtor. God owes me because I have a certain virtue, a certain merit. I have done this or that. Therefore God should, must accept me. To coerce and manipulate deity is one of the greatest marks of a sinful man and, therefore, we come against that with the Scriptures and we labor with all our might with illustration, with story, whatever it takes to show men how vile they are.

Had a reporter come to me years ago and he was so angry and he said, “Why are you always talking about sin?” And I said, “Well, because I want you to love God.” And he said, “That is preposterous.” I said, “Have you never read, ‘she loved much, because she was forgiven much?’” I said, “Sir, you do not love much, because you don't know how much you have been forgiven because no one ever told you how vile you actually are.”

Now that is my job. I walk in to a group of lost people, walk into possibly a typical kind of evangelical church in America where so many people believe that they are converted when they are not converted. But now when I come to the people of God pastorally my greatest task is not to point out their sin.

¹ Romans 3:23.

² Romans 3:19.

You see, you get someone truly converted, someone truly becomes born again, one of the marks of their life is they will see their sin and you do not have to walk around pointing it out to them every five minutes. The reason why that is done pastorally from the pulpit is that many times the pastors are preaching to unconverted people. But when someone is truly converted, you do not have to get up in the pulpit day after day counseling session after counseling session telling this person how vile they are, how sinful they are. As a matter of fact you had better be careful with that kind of language around a true believer.

As I said last night I will have sincere believers come up to me and say, "Well, brother Paul, you know, I have just got a wretched God hating old heart." And I go, "Well, what exactly did God do to you when he took out your heart of stone and gave you a heart of flesh?" And I will talk to them. I will say, "Well, brother, I know you learned that language. But let me ask you a question. Do you hate God?" "No, I don't hate God." "Then why are you saying you have a God hating heart? Do you love wickedness?" "No, brother Paul, I don't. When I fall into it I hate it." "Then why are you saying you are not changed?"

You see, it is very important of the lost man to understand who he is, but I want you to know something else. It is very important for the saved person to know understand who they are. Because I have got news for you. Well, let me put it in an illustration. Let's say I come to town and I am the pastor of... this is a church and I am the pastor of this church, of all of you. And as soon as I arrive my first day you come to me and say, "Well, there is this guy named Bob. He has been a member of the church for years, but he hasn't been in our church for five years. Pastor, you need to go visit him. He is a wayward sheep." And so I go visit Bob and Bob invites me into his house. Come on in, pastor. He gives me some tea. He is very cordial with me and I say, "Bob, you haven't been in church in five years." He said, "You know, pastor, you are right. And it is wrong. I just haven't been doing it. You know, sometimes it just bores me to tears, but you are right, pastor. I need to go to church. I need to do the right thing." And I say, "And, Bob. They have been telling me that you have been out drinking and getting drunk publicly." "You are right, pastor. I just love that liquor. I just love just carousing. I love my friends and stuff, but you are right. I need to stop doing that and I need to get myself back into church." And then I say, "And, Bob, I hear you have been running around on your wife." He goes, "Yes, I have." He goes, "I just, you know, I just love women, pastor. But you are right. I need to do the right thing. I need to get my family in order and I need to come to church and I will be there on Sunday."

So Sunday I walk in and there is Bob and the church is all so happy, a wayward sheep has come home. No, he hasn't. A goat has just walked in the church. Bob is not saved. And I will tell you why Bob is not saved, because this is his idea of Christianity. Bob is saying, "You are right, pastor. I am going to stop doing all the wicked things I love and I am going to start doing all the righteous things I hate in order to save myself."

My friends, remember the verse, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation," that is not a new creation. If that is your idea of Christianity you need to talk to me. Regeneration, which I probably won't have time to deal with during this conference, but

regeneration, my friend, is a supernatural work of God that in my opinion far exceeds the creation of the universe. The universe was created ex nihilo, out of nothing. But for God to take a corrupt and vile, radically depraved human being and transform him into a son of light, salvation is a change ontological. You become a new being, a new creature. It doesn't mean that the believer no longer struggles against sin and things like that, because we do. But our desires are different, our passions are different. And when we go wayward, we become nauseous about our waywardness.

Maybe we will have time to talk about that in a little while, but right now I want us to look at verse 23. It says:

“...for have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”³

Now verse 24, being justified. Now he is talking about believers, being justified. Now from my dear friend and mentor, Charles Lighter who has been an influence in my life for only the Lord knows how many years, he came to me one time when I was younger and he said, “Paul, men only have two problems. One is the condemnation of sin. The other is the power of sin. And God deals with both of them through the cross of Calvary and through the work of the Spirit of God.”

I said, “Well, what do you mean?”

He goes, “Let's deal, first of all, with the condemnation of sin. Man is condemned, because he is already guilty, because he has broken God's law. He has offended God's person. And even if man throws up the white flag of surrender, that doesn't solve the problem, because God has still got his gun on him.”

You see, there is a problem of justice. We are going to talk about that tonight. We are going to talk about the cross tonight. The problem of justice is this. You have violated God's law so even if you repent of it, you are still guilty. In order for you to be saved, you must be justified. You must be justified.

Now we are going to talk about how that was made possible through the cross of Christ, but right now we are just going to talk about justification, because you need to understand this. Sometimes, you know, Americans like clichés so they justified, just as if I had never sinned and that kind of thing. Well, no, that is not what it means. Let's look at two ideas of justification at is moment. First of all let's look at the wrong idea. One idea is that the moment you believe in Christ you are somehow infused with righteousness or you are infused with a power that enables you to live a righteous life and gain acceptance before God. I don't know who comes up with these things. But not only are they against Scripture, they are totally an illusion. They are against reality. Anybody who thinks about their own Christian life knows that if they have been infused with some sort of power that makes them righteous they are still not righteous enough. We fail.

Now another thing that you need to understand about righteousness and about

³ Romans 3:23.

justification is this. In order for you to be with God, to be right with God in any fashion, you have to be perfect.

I love when someone asked me on a plane what do I have to do to go to heaven? And I will just look at them. I usually have my Bible open. I will just look at them and I will go, "Oh, that is easy. You just have to be morally perfect from the moment of your birth to the moment of your death," and then I just go back reading. And I have had guys go, "Hey, hold it, no, no, no, no. What...?"

I, "Oh, you didn't understand me? In order to go to heaven you have to be an absolutely morally perfect creatures from the moment of birth when you were a baby to the day you die, no flaws. Have a nice day."

And then you will see the person sitting over there and they are like, you know, they are looking out the window for a while. They are doing this. They look at me and I can... making faces. And finally they... and I... "That is not possible."

I go, "Then you have got a big problem, don't you?"

You see, you have got to understand. He just doesn't make you nice or some sort of good or kind of acceptable. What must you be? You must be absolutely morally perfect and not only does that mean you must not have sin, but it must mean that you must have a this great store of righteousness. You must be righteous, not just neutral, not just I didn't do anything bad. But every moment of my life I did nothing but righteousness. I did the works of righteousness.

See that sometimes I have run into these people, a few of them are street preachers that believe in sinless perfection. And I mean they are amazing fellows, I mean, because they have completely redefined what sin is. But they will say that they are perfect. They haven't sinned in 14 years, 13 years things like that. Here is a good way to get them. Just go... because either way they are either going to have to acknowledge they are a sinner or they are a blasphemer, one of the two. I just go, "What is the greatest sin?" Sometimes people will say, "Well, I don't know." I say, "Well, maybe it is breaking the greatest commandment." What is the greatest commandment? To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength? And then I ask them. In these last 14 years of sinless perfection are you willing to tell me that every moment, every conscious moment of those 14 years you loved God in a way that God deserves, that you gave God in love everything that God as God deserves? And if they say yes, they have blasphemed. You see, we haven't loved God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. We haven't done everything for the glory of God. Not only have we sinned and do we continue to sin, but also we lack in works of righteousness.

Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood And has not sworn deceitfully.⁴

⁴ Psalm 24:3-4.

With his lips there is no deceit. You see, to be with God you have got to be more than forgiven. You have got to actually be righteous and perfectly righteous being. If you just understand that doctrine right there, that eliminates any idea of a right standing with God by means of works, because one failure, you are disqualified. If you have kept most of the law, that is not good enough. It is all of it, all of the time, per perpetually, always, ongoing. You see that.

Now what does it mean for God to justify us? Justification is a legal term. This is very, very important. We use the word legal or forensic. Ok? It is a legal term. What it means is this. God looks down at the sinner. The moment that sinner has believed in Jesus Christ, truly believed unto salvation, God legally declares that sinner to be right with him. Do you see that?

Now that brings us up to a very important thing with regard to study if religions. Most religions in the world if you really get down to it, they are all about how can someone be right with God? And that is an amazing thing. That tells us that Romans chapter one is really true, that God has written his law on the hearts of men and men know they are guilty. So even though they may not accept the God of the Scriptures, maybe they don't even really accept a personal idea of a God, they still have this idea that they are wrong. I mean herein lies the difference between Christianity and every other religion. Every other religion is I am going to heaven because I did this. I am going to heaven because of this store of virtue or merit in my life. Christianity is the only one that says no to that. I am not right with God by my virtue and merit. I am right with God by the virtue and the merit of another, Jesus Christ my Lord.

You see, coming to Christ is, first of all, an emptying. And that is one of the reasons why we preach about sin, because it is an emptying of everything. I have nothing. Many of you love to sing that song:

Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to the cross I cling.

But you don't really understand what you are saying. I mean, you can't even boast in your repentance. You can't even boast in your faith. There is a sense in which we are saved by faith, but there is another sense in which your faith does not save you. Do you realize that? For example, as a friend of mine always says, if this platform just suddenly disappeared and I begin to fall into an abyss, I wouldn't cry out, "Oh, my faith, save me." I wouldn't, would I? I would cry out, "Oh, my Lord, save me." So we don't even boast in some merit of repentance or faith. It is all of him. And that is so important for you to understand, because there are some times if you are sincere believer, you are going to look at your ongoing repentance and realize it is not worth talking about. So how can I be saved? Or you are going to look at your faith and you are going to say, I don't...

Let me share with you something and you can take this and put it onto You Tube and allow people to destroy me with it. I don't care. But sometimes I go to the mission field

whether I am in Asia or India, Nepal, Indonesia and I see the lostness of humanity. And I will be honest with you. I struggle with my faith, even my faith. But do you know what always heals me? Going back to asking one question. Who was Jesus of Nazareth?

So, see even guys who get up and preach sometimes, you know, our faith isn't worth talking about. But, see, our justification is all of what God did for us and never at all what we do for God.

If you grow in your maturity eventually this is what is going to happen. If you grow in your maturity of understanding the gospel, if someone comes up to you and says, "Man, if anybody is going to heaven you are. I mean, you are dedicated to Christ. You are this. you are that." If you are truly growing in your maturity and your understanding of the gospel, do you know what your response is going to be? You want to throw up. No, I am serious. You are going to become nauseous and you are going to cry out, "Away from me, away from me, unto him, and unto him alone be the glory." And then you will do a diatribe of explaining how wicked you are just so that you make sure that not one ounce of glory is removed from the cross work, from Christ.

It is all him. Now but please understand this. You don't now what I am saying. If it is all him, it is none of you. And that is not to demean you. That is to make you strong. Why? If it has nothing to do with me and everything to do with him, I am always safe because he is always righteous and strong. I am always there. I am always loved. There is nothing that can be done against me. There is nothing I can even do to myself. It is him.

Now as Paul had this problem, you start teaching that to people and they are just going to live in sin. No wicked carnal church people, when they hear that, are going to live in sin. But genuine Christians are going to hear that and just like I said about the worship this morning they are just going to want to be more. They are just going to want to be more.

Now we have been saved by the power of the cross. We have been pardoned. Our pardon became possible by his death. But you need to understand that Christ did not just die for you. He lived for you. And you say, "Well, yes, I understand, brother Paul. He had to rise again from the dead." Yes, he had to rise again from the dead, but that is not what I am talking about. Christ not only died for you on the cross, he lived a perfect life for you on this earth. And this is what I want you to see more than anything. The moment you believe in Christ and are truly converted, you are clothed in his righteous life. You are dressed in his righteous deeds.

Do you remember the Father? He always looked down at the Son and he always said, there was never an instance when he did not say, did not think it, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Do you see that? You have been dressed in that life. So now the Father always looks at you and says, "This is my beloved son. This is my beloved daughter in whom I am well pleased."

You say, "Does he not see my sin?"

He does see your sin. He does not take into account. If he took one sin into account after 100 years of living a life of Christianity, being more devoted than anyone else, if he took one sin into account you would still go to hell. He takes no sin into account. He declares you righteous and he treats you as righteous based upon the cross of Christ. And, again, you say, "Well, if I believe that, if people believe that, then they are just going to sin."

No, lost people, religious, lost people who hate God but come to church because they have to, they will sin. They will use it as a loop hole, but if your heart has truly been regenerate, if you truly love God, if you are truly a child of God you will listen to this and go on free. But I am not going to use my freedom for the flesh. I want to be more.

You know, when you are younger, it seems, that your heart will often break, because things are pointed out to you that are so wrong in your life. That will always happen. But it seems as you get older your heart breaks because you understand something new about what he has done for you. You understand something new about him. At the moment you believed in Christ you were pardoned of every sin past, present and future, that the moment you believed in Christ God declared you to be right with him and he began to treat you as someone right with him. That is to say, he treats you as his only begotten Son. That is amazing.

You remember Joseph. His father gave him a multi colored coat which he didn't want... it doesn't seem he wanted to share with his brothers. But we have one who is greater than Joseph who clothes all his brothers in his coat of infinite righteousness. As you begin to walk in the Christian life you begin to see something of an interchange that goes on because of this doctrine.

I will give you an example. This young man wrote me a few years, going into seminary and he was a young man, devoted. The girl he was courting, she was a very, very godly girl, just a splendid couple in Christ. And he wrote me and he said, "You know, brother Paul, I am so ignorant of God and I am so wicked and I am so unrighteousness and I do this and that. And all these things he wrote, he signed it and sent me an email. So wrote him back. I said, "Dear brother, you are far more ignorant and far more ungodly than you now know, love Paul."

I have the gift of mercy. And so he calls me up on the phone and he goes, "Thanks?" And I said, "Brother, in many ways you have advanced beyond me even though you are a young man." I said, "In many ways you are holier than I am." I said, "But I am happier than you are." And he said, "How could that be?" I said, "I have walked a lot longer than you have, which means I have so many more failures. I have seen myself fail so many times that it has drained me of ever attempting to look for some hope or joy in myself for my performance. I have given up and I only look to Christ." I said, "You get up in the morning and if you have a quiet time for eight hours and you memorize the book of Leviticus that morning and you go out and you witness to everybody and you pray all night and sleep an hour," I said, "you feel pretty good about yourself." I said, "But you can't sustain that very long. I know. I tried." And I said, "When I get up in the morning and I have my time with the Lord and I witness and I seem to be walking in the fullness

of the Holy Spirit,” I said, “I am so happy about that.” I said, “But the next morning when I get up and things just don’t go so apostolic in my life I am unmoved. My security isn’t wavered. My joy is not even gone.”

You see I know I am, again... there is so much I want to say to you and there is so little time. But let me give you a difference between the voice of God and the voice of the devil in your life. When God speaks to his people and through the prophets in the books of the prophets, he says some things that are so hard I can’t even mention them in mixed company. He says some very hard things to his people, but here is something he never does. He never ends without calling them back to him and affirming his love for them. And that is the way you discern the voice of God over the voice of the devil.

You see, when I have one of those bad days or when you have one of those bad days, the voice you most often hear is you failed. And how dare you think about opening up your Bible and trying to read it? How dare you think about praying. How dare you even ask for forgiveness? Now go over there and sit in the penalty box for 15 days and if you do good then you can come back.

You see, if you sin and the voice drives you, takes that sin to drive you away from God and away from grace and away from mercy it is not God. But if you sin and it beckons you to come to him... I hate sin and I hate my own sin and don’t misinterpret me here. But there is a sense that even in our weakness and sin it serves to glorify God.

You see, when I look at my life in the mirror of God’s Word and I see where I have failed, whether generally or specifically in a deed during that day, in Christ it doesn’t cause me to go sit in the penalty box. It causes me to run to him even closer. It causes me to hold on even tighter, to pray to him more, to need him more. And that is how the believer gets the victory. You don’t get the victory out of a sinless life. You get the victory that everything, even your... if it is your devotion drives you to Christ and your lack of devotion drives you to Christ. I am here today, Lord, because my heart is aflame for you and I am so devoted. I am here, Lord, because my heart is a stone and I need you. Do you see? It will really change the way you look at things.

Now those of you who are believers will understand this and not use it as a loophole for sin, those of you who are believers. Those of you who are just religious, you will rejoice in this because it will give you freedom to run wild in your flesh and your condemnation is just. Don’t do that.

But I want you, believers, to know this. I want you to know that you are loved. As I said last night the hardest, the most difficult thing you are ever going to have to do is believe God, that he loves you as much as he says he does and he loves you in the way that he says he does. You see, we are always hearing, especially in music and in preaching and poetry the big sighs of God’s love. You know, God loved us so much. But that is not good language left by itself. You see the issue is not just that God loved you a whole bunch. It is the quality or nature of his love. It is... see, when you think God loves a lot,

maybe you are thinking God loves like you, he just does it more. No, it is a different quality of love, a different kind of love.

You see the holiness of God, when you get down to it, is basically... Well, I ask people sometimes. I go, "Is God holy?" Yes. What does that mean? Well, God is without sin. Well, what does it mean that God is righteous? Well, it means he is without sin. Well, which is it? Holiness means primarily ... primarily it is not referring to God with regard to sin. Holiness primarily is referring to the uniqueness or separateness of God. No one is like God. Like R. C. Sproul says, you know, what is closer to God a seraphim standing in the presence of God or a worm, bacteria crawling around in the toilet? Which one is more like God? The answer is neither. God is not like us or like angels just better. He is a completely distinct thing. It is so far beyond us. That is why God is holy in his essence, in his person. No one is like him triune and one and all these teachings. God is holy in his love. What does that mean? No one loves like God. No one has that quality of love. No one has that kind of love. No one has that magnitude of love. You see, we are talking about someone not like you. And so if you look at your best day in loving someone else and being unconditional in your love towards someone else, on your best day that is not even... that is not the love of God. His love goes so far beyond that and it is all rolled up in him and in his Son and his Son's performance, not in you and your performance.

Do you realize there has never been one moment in any moment of your life that you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, not one moment? You don't want this to be 99 percent God and one percent you. This is all God. And you say that is very humbling. It is humbling, but it is beautiful. It is humbling, but it is freeing. I don't have to be anything. I don't have to be anything. I am loved, period. And when you walk through that gate called the kingdom of heaven everything changes, everything.

Now, he says being justified. Now I want you just to go for just a moment to the book of Song of Solomon. Now I am going to... it is in chapter four. I am not going to tell you exactly where, because I just want you to pay attention when I read it to you. Chapter four. Now just listen. I want you to see this as God speaking to you, ok? This is God's Word. I am not going to make it up. It is actually in the text. I am going to show you where. But this is God speaking to you.

Now for some of you big macho guys with muscles to your ears, this will be a little bit difficult to comprehend, but focus, ok? Focus. It is not the type of language that we normally use, but I want you to think about this. This is God speaking to his bride, to you.

"You are altogether beautiful, my darling, And there is no blemish in you."⁵

Have you ever thought that that is the way God looks at you?

"You are altogether beautiful, my darling, And there is no blemish in you."⁶

⁵ Song of Solomon 4:7.

And then he goes on and he says this. Now look at this.

“You have made my heart beat faster, my sister, my bride; You have made my heart beat faster with a single glance of your eyes.”⁷

Now people ask me, what is your greatest verse for prayer? This one. This is my prayer verse. Now look at this. I have three children—Ian, Evan and Rowan—and the biggest battle I have with regard to idolatry is with my children. I could be... I could send my wife to preach and just me be at home and play with the children. I just ... be careful. I will steal your children. I just love children. I mean... and I remember one time. I came from a very difficult background in my childhood, extremely difficult and there is no need to get into it, but painful, scared most of the time, frightened, terrified. And I remember one day when Ian, my oldest son, was about three years old and he was in ... he had crawled up into my bed and I was downstairs doing something and I thought, well, I will go up there and see what that little rascal is doing.

Well, he is in my bed and I came around the corner and the moment he saw me he went... it just drove me back against the wall. I remember as a little boy hearing footsteps and being terrified, just terrified, just let him go past or the footstep stopping at the door and you are going, “What is going to happen now? Is it going to be good? Is it going to be bad?”

But when I walked through that door that little boy went... there wasn't a doubt in his mind that he was loved and that {?} yeah, the party has begun. Dad is here. He had no doubt. One glance of my little girl's eye, just one glance, I am gone. All she has to do is look at me. If I being evil can love my children like that, how much does your heavenly Father love you?

Oh, why are you always talking about prayer? I mean, prayer. Look at this verse. I give one glance to heaven, verse nine, one glance to heaven with my eyes and his heart beats faster. Do you see that? That is absolutely marvelous to me. I look up. I say, “Father, all of heaven is called to be silent.” That is the love of God. That is justification, you see. I have been justified. He looks down at me every time. This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased and I walk in that. He goes, look at this.

“You have made my heart beat faster, my sister, my bride; You have made my heart beat faster with a single glance of your eyes, With a single strand of your necklace.”⁸

Now here is the important thing and we have got to draw this to a close. I have got three minutes. I want to say this. This is the most amazing thing about grace, amazing. It is this. She is a peasant girl. He is a king. Peasant girls don't wear necklaces and if they do it is like a goat's tooth or something. It is not very pretty. I mean, really.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Song of Solomon 4:9.

⁸ Ibid.

But eh looks at this necklace. He says, “You make my heart beat faster with this necklace.” Now here is the thing I want you to see about you and about grace and about justification and everything else. She has nothing. He gives her the necklace. He adorns her with the necklace. He makes her beautiful with his gift and then he loves her in that beauty. And that is what God has done to you. He has dressed you in the righteousness of Christ. And he loves how he has dressed you up. He makes you beautiful and then loves you for being beautiful. And all the while you are in there going, but I am this and I am that and morbidly looking at all the things and all the bad and all of this. And there is need of introspection, but sometimes people carry this far too far. And instead of rejoicing in the beauty that God has made of their life, of their standing in Christ, they are always looking within. Like that old country philosopher said, “You need to come down from the cross, because somebody needs the wood.” You need to stop acting like that. Morbid for morbid’s sake.

I regularly survey my life. I regularly with the mirror of God’s Word examine myself and test myself to see if I am in the faith, but my dear friend. I see people do that, but with no knowledge of justification and it leads to this morbid, horrid doubt. Don’t look so much at you. By now you should be wore out in looking for something wonderful about you. And just look to him. It is all about him. And what that does also is it protects you from the schemes of the devil. If the devil were to walk in this building right now and take bodily form and walk right here and just stand here and accuse me. My only response would be to yawn like haven’t we been through this before? I mean, you are the devil. You are not omniscient. You don’t even know the half of how bad I have been and how much I fail. But I have never said it was about me. It never was about the clothes I earned. It has always been about my elder brother. Do you want me to call him for you so you can talk to him? It has always been about Christ. And the transaction is this. Over the years of your life God will work death in you. He will. He will work death. He will exhaust you in all your labors to be good in your own power and all these other things of trying to work for right standing before him. If you are a child of God he will exhaust you until you are broken and you realize you are nothing. And at that moment is like now the positive work can be done. The person has stopped running so wildly, drinking out of cisterns that hold no water. And you look to Christ and Christ will be everything. Christ will be everything.

So the Christian life—and I promise, I am finishing, but this ... I am going to get as close to a drama right now as I ever get in teaching, ok? This is the Christian life. You are walking around and you are lost. You are not a Christian yet. And then one day someone preaches the gospel to you, but there is a voice within a voice. There is God working, the Spirit of God regenerating, calling, revealing, illuminating. And all of the sudden you see God like you have never seen him before. And when you see God as you have never seen him before, you see yourself as you have never seen yourself before. You see your sin. And a part of that self confidence dies and... but at that moment when you see your sin as you have never seen it before, it does not lead you to despair. If the Holy Spirit is truly working because with that revelation of the holiness of God and the revelation of your sin comes the revelation of the grace of God in the face of Jesus Christ and you

throw yourself upon him. And then in the morning the next day you get up and you start praying and you start walking and you see a greater revelation of God, something new about God as you walk in this Christian life. And because you see God's holiness and God's splendor and beauty and goodness in a way you have never seen it before, you begin to see also your sin as you have never seen it before. If you are a young Christian, realize this. When you are 90 years old, you are going to see a lot more sin than you see now, even though you are going to be a lot more holy. But you are going to see more of your sin. But it is not going to lead you to despair. You are not going to be left to mourning because you are also going to see a greater revelation of the grace of God in the person of Christ and you are going to be filled with joy.

And so what happens over your Christian life is this. More and more you see God's greatness, God's holiness, God's power, his beauty, his excellence, everything about him. And the more you see that, the more you are going to see what you are a part with him. And the deeper is going to be your mourning. But while your mourning goes deeper, at the same time your joy goes higher because now you are seeing greater and greater measures of the grace of God in Christ. And so in the end of your life you are fulfilling both commands. Blessed are those who mourn. You mourn with a depth that a young Christian could not even begin to understand and yet you live with joy unspeakable and full of glory. But now your joy no longer lingers or finds its fountain in you, but all of Christ, all of Christ. And at that moment you are truly glorifying God.

That is the Christian life in a nutshell. God bless you so much that the love of God would prosper you, believers, that it would prosper you, that the love of God would wrench out of you those wrong things you know you do, that you would just be carried by that all the days of your life.

Let's pray.

Father, please bless your people that they would see their weakness, your greatness, what you have done for them in Christ, that they would truly be broken and contrite in heart. And yet as I said, Lord, full of joy, full of glory and joy unspeakable, that they would realize that they are loved, that they are loved, that one glance of their eyes upward to your throne makes your heart beat faster, Lord, that they would walk in love, that they would keep themselves in the love of God in Jesus' name. Amen.