

Our Perfect Savior

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Well, I feel wonderfully privileged to return to the book of 1 John this evening with you. We taught through 1 John back in 2012, I believe it was, and to be able to come back in a concentrated form and consider its truths once more in this setting is a real privilege for me and I trust that God will use it as a blessing in your heart as well. There is such value in repetition in our study because we study one thing, we move on to another and then another and some very important foundational truths can kind of drift into the background if we're not careful, and so here we have an opportunity to come back to familiar truths and to study them again, to reinforce them in the thinking of many of us, and for some this will be new and an encouragement to you. So thank you for being with us.

We come to these opening two verses of 1 John which I read just a moment ago and we are considering the whole nature of the Christian life really. You'll recall that John gave three different purpose verses in this letter. He said that he wrote to promote our joy in chapter 1, verse 4; our holiness in chapter 2, verse 1; and ultimately our assurance of salvation in chapter 5, verse 13. You really need to have those reference points in your mind. John is writing about joy, holiness and assurance for believers and it's all grounded on the great august holiness of God that he alludes to in 1 John 1:5. The holiness of God exposes our sinfulness and so we confess it freely and we confess it humbly, and yet at the same time as John is writing about this holiness of God and the reality of our sin, he is reminding us of the shed blood of Jesus Christ on our behalf. The holiness of God was satisfied by the shed blood of our Savior, our perfect Savior the Lord Jesus Christ. So in chapter 1, verse 7, it says, "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." In verse 9 it says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." And so we have this remarkable reality about a Christian, on the one hand we have been declared justified, God accepts us in the Beloved, and as we were just singing, we are faultless to stand before the throne because we are dressed in the perfect righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. His perfect obedience has been counted to our benefit. Our sins have been laid on him where they were punished at the cross and we bear them no more. "Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul," as the hymn writer said. So we have this reality where we are just and yet we are also at the same time we are still sinners. We have not yet been made perfect in heaven and so we have a justified standing before God, and yet as a practical matter we are still sinful in our thoughts, in our words and our deeds, and striking the balance in

understanding that and walking and going forward in the Christian walk with those two things requires some careful thinking and some careful Scripture observation which John gives to us in these opening two verses.

Let's look at those again, if you don't mind, to just set them fresh in our minds. Chapter 2, verses 1 and 2 of 1 John.

1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

And so John in his concern for our joy now comes to address the matter of ongoing sin in the life of a believer. It's not that we love sin anymore like we used to, we hate it. It's not that we embrace it and we're indifferent to it, we repent from it. And Scripture recognizes that there is this tension in the life of a true believer and if you remember that John is writing to promote our joy in Christ, you'll understand why he's writing about holiness in these terms here at chapter 2, verse 1, why it comes up in the letter at this particular point. John is writing to accomplish holiness in our lives and we saw a mind for holiness in our time together on Sunday, but he recognizes, he recognizes that we are going to stumble along the way. We're not yet made perfect. We're moving in that direction, the Holy Spirit is sanctifying us and conforming us to the image of Christ, but you and I both know by sad personal experience that we still stumble and falter along the way. How are we to process that in a way that promotes our holiness without losing our joy?

And I daresay that many of you need this instruction here tonight. You're earnest as a believer but the fact is that you are very introspective. We have a number of people in our congregation that are like that and I want you to know I love each one of you, and more importantly Christ looks at you with favor as one of his children, but your introspective tendencies have a way of interfering with your joy. You wonder how you could be a Christian and still sin like you do, and you look and you ask whether you are repenting enough of your sins, and wouldn't there be something more inside you to show that you were a Christian if you were really saved, and you start asking those questions and pounding yourself in the head with a spiritual ball bat, so to speak, and you end up quite discouraged and it's very hard to get yourself out of that hole. Well, what I want to tell you is when you get into that whole, the first thing that you need to do is to stop digging. Stop digging into your heart looking for certain things and look outside of yourself and look to your perfect Savior and realize that he has made perfect provision for all of your joy and all of your assurance and all of your holiness in the work that he has already done on your behalf. So this is a very important passage for us to consider. How is it that a believer can have continuing joy even when he has sin in his life that he hates? Well, John here in this text explains our position in Christ. When we sin, we can still remain steadfast in joy.

Now as we say that, we've got to remember the fullness of the context. John is assuming at this point the things that he just said. We are confessing our sins. We are walking in

fellowship with God even though we stumble at times. These words are written to people who are repentant and confessing their sins humbly before God based on the shed blood of Jesus which cleanses us from all unrighteousness. There is a huge presupposition that underlies what he is saying here. He's talking to little children who are like that, who are trusting in Christ and approaching God based on the merits of Christ alone, not in their own righteousness. They are mourning over sin rather than being indifferent or hostile to God about it. So there's a certain type of person that's being addressed here, it's a true Christian who has truly repented and put his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. So that's the kind of person that many of you that share those introspective tendencies, that's the kind of person that you are. If you could get out of the vortex of introspection for a time, you would be able to see that, and what John does here is he reminds us of who Christ is and what he has done, he shows us how that is sufficient for us to continue moving forward in our Christian life. It's wonderful truth and by the time we're done, you'll see what a perfect Savior Jesus Christ is and how full and blessed his love is for us as his unworthy children.

So you need to know what manner of sin it is that John is describing here. Let's go to verse 1. He says, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." So he's writing to true Christians and he says, "And if anyone sins," if anyone who is a Christian sins, falls into individual acts of sin, that is, he says this is what you need to remember, "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." So on a very basic level here, John is addressing true Christians in this portion of his letter and he is recognizing that sin does occur in the life of a believer even though it does not have to. It does not have to but it does. Our flesh rises up, we give in to temptation and we stumble along the way. Well, what should we think at that point? What do we need to know at that point? Well, here is the wonderful blessed truth that can speak peace to the troubled waters of your heart, my Christian friend, my Christian brother, my Christian sister, understand this, what this text is teaching us is this: God has anticipated your sins as a believer. Christ did not save you and then leave you on your own to work out in your own energy and your own flesh and by your own self-righteousness the remainder of salvation. No, when Christ died on the cross he died to provide you with a perfect atonement, an atonement that forgives you of all of the sins in your past when you first come to Christ, an atonement that provides for all of your sins subsequent to your conversion, subsequent to that time when the Spirit of God saved you. So his atonement covers your sins in the past and it covers your sins in the present and, beloved, it covers every sin that you will ever commit in the future until Christ takes you to glory. He has forgiven all of your sins. He paid for all of your sins at the cross. Isn't that what he said when he hung there suffering on our behalf? He said, "It is finished." The fullness of atonement had been accomplished. The work was done. The sins were paid in full and there is no sin that he left unpaid, no sin that he left for you to atone for. Christ took them all into his body when he suffered for us at the cross of Calvary, and so that means that the whole environment, the whole foundation of your Christian life is built on that perfect atonement of Christ that dealt with all of your sins at that crucial, on that crucial day 2,000 years ago.

So what we're going to pick up on here today is this, is there are just two parts to tonight's message based on the references, the names that John gives to Christ here in this passage. First of all, we're going to see Christ our Advocate in verse 1, and Christ our propitiation in verse 2, and when you understand these aspects of the work of Christ on our behalf, you'll see why you can continue to walk in joy even as you are repenting in sorrow over your sins, wonderful truth that lies just ahead for us.

So let's look, number 1, at Christ our Advocate. If you wanted a title for tonight's message, the title for tonight's message is "Our Perfect Savior." Our perfect Savior, and here we're going to look at the first aspect of that is that Christ is our Advocate. Look there at the end of verse 1 with me just again. It says, "if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Here's what you're to remember: when you stumble, when you lose your temper, when you've given into a wayward lust, when you've told a lie as a believer and the conviction of that comes upon you and you have that sense, "Oh, I've done it again," and you start to grieve over your sin, well, it's appropriate to be repentant, it's appropriate to confess that but simultaneously you need to be remembering that we have an Advocate with the Father and the idea of the original language is that on an ongoing basis, in an unbroken pattern we continuously possess, we have an Advocate with the Father who is Jesus Christ the righteous. In other words, we have someone who accounts for and has atoned for your sins so that life that we have in the Father, that participation in the life of God is not severed because Jesus Christ has provided an atonement for us which prevents that severance from ever occurring. It's really remarkable truth to realize how much he has loved us and how much he accomplished for us at the cross.

Now that word "Advocate" there and the other three places that it's used in Scripture is translated as "the Helper," and sometimes it's referring to the Holy Spirit in that way.

I want to just mention something here that will give you an understanding of why I'm treating things rather briefly here tonight. This is a series in 1 John that I intend to keep moving and there's, you know, we want to go through this on a somewhat survey level rather than diving deeply into the details like we did eight years ago, and here's why I say that, back in 2012 when we came to these two verses, I did five messages on these two verses explaining in detail what it meant for Christ to be our Advocate, what it meant for him to be our propitiation, and what it meant that he was the propitiation of the world. We're only using two messages for these verses and one of them was this past Sunday, and so I'm just going to allude briefly and give summaries here today and if you have questions about some of the things that are said here tonight, I greatly encourage you to go back and to listen to all five of those messages as a supplement and a reinforcement for everything that you're going to hear tonight. Those five messages from 2012 are my definitive teaching on these verses and I am greatly committed to the things that were taught back then. Here's just a summary of them without going into all of the justification of the positions that we're taking here tonight. So it's important to give you that little bit of a preface. I refer to things tonight, you can go back and study them in greater depth and I greatly encourage you to do that. I had to overcome the temptation to re-preach it all in this series. I call it a temptation, I just need to stay with the goal that we set here.

But what does it mean that Christ is our Advocate? Well, there are many Bible teachers and they are good Bible teachers, they are better men than I am, frankly, but they like to define the idea that Christ is our Advocate by describing him as our defense attorney, and that when we sin, we have a defense attorney who represents us and gets us off the charge before God the Father under the accusations of Satan. I really don't think that's the best way to understand this passage even though I respect the position and the men who hold it and taught it. I believe that if you let Scripture interpret Scripture and you go to multiple passages in the book of Hebrews, I think a far better way to understand the nature of what John has in mind here is that he's thinking about Jesus Christ as our high priest in heaven before God the Father. Here's what the significance of that would be. It's beautiful imagery when you see it from this perspective and it fits with the context that is talking about a propitiatory sacrifice having been made on our behalf. The language of a courtroom really isn't in this passage, it has to be read into it in a way that I don't think is fitting with the context. So I acknowledge that other view, I respect it and I, you know, I just disagree with the interpretation on this particular point, and so let me help you see this from the perspective of Christ being our high priest.

What does a priest do? That's a fundamental question, isn't it? Well, what a priest does most fundamentally is he represents a people to their God and a priest offers sacrifices on behalf of the people to God, and in that sense he helps the people with God, he advocates on their behalf, he makes their case, he pleads for them and he advocates their position before a God that has appointed him and recognizes him as one who can be a mediator between the people and God. Well, when you consider Jesus Christ from that perspective and you remember that a priest offers a sacrifice on behalf of those whom he represents, then you start to see the language of Hebrews coming to the surface here. Let me just repeat it here: a priest represents the people to God, he offers sacrifice on behalf of the people that he represents, and then he intercedes for them based on what he has done.

Look at the book of Hebrews 9 and I'm only looking at one or two passages here rather than the multitude of passages that we looked at when we considered this eight years ago. Hebrews 9, beginning in verse 24, it says this that "Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one," but watch this, oh, I love this, "but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." And in what role, I ask you, is he in the presence of God for us now that he's entered into the holy place after his resurrection and ascension? Verse 25, "nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him." There in verse 25 you see Christ being described as the high priest, the one who entered heaven based on the sacrifice that he had offered. So Christ offered his sacrifice at the cross, the sacrifice of himself. Now ascended into heaven, he appears as a high priest before us, representing us before God on the basis of that perfect sacrifice that he offered

at Calvary. And do you know what God does with his Son now in heaven? He accepts him and he accepts all of the people that this great high priest represents and those for whom he offered the sacrifice.

So Christ is appearing before God now having offered the perfect sacrifice as the perfect high priest, and now having put away our sins forever, he now stands before God in an intercessory role on our behalf and continues that presence of intercession, that presence of representation on our behalf, he is continually there before the throne of God for us, and just like the high priest in the days of Israel had the names of the 12 tribes written and inscribed on the stones that hung on his vestments over his heart, Christ stands before God with the names of his people inscribed, as it were, on his heart. He represents us on a continual basis before God the Father so that there is never a time even when you sin where the sacrifice of Christ is not being made known in the throne room of God that all of your sins have been paid for by that once-for-all sacrifice that he made at the cross on our behalf. And therefore he stands before God on our behalf, he advocates our position, he helps us in our weakness, he helps us even when we have stumbled in sin, and his presence before God is an eternal reminder that those sins have been atoned for, that those sins are not to be held against us because they have already been satisfied and all the penalty required for those sins he has satisfied during his earthly work for us during his incarnation.

So beloved, what does that mean for you? It means that when you have sinned, when you are humbly confessing it before God, you don't need to dive into that deep introspection or let yourself be overwhelmed by the sense, that sense of guilt, rather you look outside of yourself, you look up, as it were, you're like Stephen at the end of the book of Acts, you look up into heaven and you see Christ there. You see Christ representing you and you there in Christ and God has accepted Christ, and because you are in Christ, God accepts you as well so that you do not have to dwell in that morbid introspection and that morbid regret over your sin. Confess it, remember Christ and move on in your life. Jesus Christ is in the Father's presence as your high priest. He sacrificed his life to reconcile you to God and God the Father has accepted that sacrifice. God the Father raised him from the dead showing that the penalty of death no longer had claim on Christ to whom our sins were imputed, nor does death have any claim on those of us that are in Christ because we get the benefit of everything that Christ has done.

So my friend, and I wish I had heard things like this earlier in my Christian life than what I did, it would have saved me a lot of heartache and a lot of struggles over things, your sins as a believer do not break your fellowship with God. As long as you are unrepentant, that you will forfeit some joy for sure and you won't walk in the joy that John says is the purpose of his letter, but in terms of separating you from God, in terms of casting you out of the presence of God, no, that is not what happens. If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father on an ongoing basis and that Advocate is our Lord Jesus Christ. So you are not severed from God. Scripture says that our sins and lawless deeds he will remember no more. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. That is the gift of salvation. That is the gift that we have as believers. And you say, "But I don't deserve that. But I've been so bad." Well, yes, I get

that but we're moving beyond that, we're acknowledging that, we're assuming that to be true. What you need to understand on a higher level, on a deeper ground is the fact that that is why Christ died for you. He died to cover that. He died to remove that from your account. It was never about you deserving the presence of God to begin with. This is all a matter of grace. This is all a matter of lovingkindness poured out upon you that you did not deserve. So we receive that, we accept it by faith. We accept it on the testimony of the word of God and realize that he accepts us in the Beloved. We accept it on the promise of Christ who said, "The one who comes to Me I will never cast out."

My friend, you don't understand, none of us understand the fullness of the reality of what I am about to say and I'm not the first one to say it. My Christian brother, my Christian sister, you must understand this: God is far more willing to forgive your sin than you are to forsake them. God is far more willing to forgive your sin than you are to confess them. His love and acceptance for you in Christ is perfect and your confession and repentance of those things is imperfect. You see, we don't deserve this, we don't merit it. It is what God has given to us as his children, it is what he wanted to do in love for us and therefore all of our sins are covered under the atoning blood of our Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous. While we are Christians and we are in a justified position, we are still sinful but our Advocate is not. He is righteous. Christ conforms with the perfection of the righteousness of God and he has shared that righteousness to our account and it is perfect and it satisfies everything that God requires. So your goal is not to pay a penance. I know some of you former Catholics need to hear this, your goal is not to pay a penance and to pay some kind of self-inflicted penalty and avoid praying and avoid the word for a period of time until you've suffered enough. You've got to stop thinking like that. The suffering for your sin was done completely and perfectly by Christ at the cross. Your responsibility now is to believe that, to receive it, accept it and rest in it based on the promises that we find in God's holy word. So Christ satisfies the righteousness of God because he is God and thus he is able to perfectly represent us before the Father. He represents us. We are in him. He does it on our account. He does it on our behalf.

Look at one more passage in the book of Hebrews, if you would, Hebrews 7, beginning in verse 25. Hebrews 7:25 it says this, "He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." You see, Christ is carrying out the purpose, Christ is carrying out a purpose of making intercession for us. It is a portion of the essence of his existence that this is what he does for his people. So in verse 26 you see this, "it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself." Christ offered himself up as the perfect sacrifice. Now as our high priest who represents us before God, he is in the presence of God, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners. God accepts that priestly work of Christ on our behalf and therefore even when you sin as a believer, your sins are covered, and because they are covered, you can experience the joy that John said was the purpose of writing his letter, "I write that our joy might be made complete," one of the ways that you enter into the fullness of Christian joy is not through some kind of mystical second blessing but recognizing that what Christ

has done has cleansed all of your sin and that you have a Savior who loves you and a Savior who represents you before God and therefore God accepts you despite your sin. Your sins are paid in full, there is no longer any punishment to be given to them. God accepts you in Christ and therefore you can move forward despite your sins.

You know, I realize as I'm standing here that for some of you it's not, maybe it's not a matter of sins of the past day or the past week but a period in your life buried in your past or particularly heinous acts of sin that you committed that you're mindful of. I know some of you have very dark pasts. Well, what I'm saying here, more importantly what Scripture is saying here is this, is that those darkest aspects of the sin in your past have been cleansed by the blood of Christ. We say with the hymn writer, "My sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin not in part but the whole has been nailed to the cross and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul." You see, that burden on your back has been taken away. You are no longer bowing underneath the weight of your sin if you are in Christ. The weight is lifted. The guilt is removed. Christ loves you, Christ died for you, Christ accepts you and now in the fullness of the glory of the throne room of God, you have an Advocate there for you on your behalf and his work is perfectly accepted and therefore you are also, accepted by God, your sins cast away into the depths of the sea, and what a wonderful thing it is, then, isn't it, to be a Christian? Do you see to be a born-again Christian, to be on the receiving end of this kind of grace is by far the most infinitely majestic, wonderful, noble thing that could ever happen to a man, woman or child in this lifetime? You could be President of the United States and you would have nothing to compare to this privilege if you were not a Christian. You could have the greatest of wealth, the greatest of fame, the greatest of power but if you are not in Christ, you are infinitely separated from that which is the most noble thing that any man, woman or child could enter into. Jesus Christ our Advocate, he is our perfect Savior and so perfect it is that he covers and has accounted for and has taken away the sins that we commit even as a believer and that motivates us to love him, that actually motivates us to obey him even more, and as we understand these things, we become more deeply rooted in joy and glad contentment in Christ. So that's the idea of Christ our Advocate.

Well, let's look at the second aspect that we find in this passage and that's this: Christ our propitiation. Christ our propitiation. Christ is not simply our Advocate like this, there's more to what John is saying than the fact that he's our Advocate. He is also our propitiation and look at verse 2 with me now. He has said at the end of verse 1, "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself," there's more to it, there's more to it, for as wonderful as it is to talk about his advocacy, there's this connective word "and," and there's more to the reality that gives you encouragement if anyone sins as a Christian, it's this, "and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins." Propitiation means the sacrifice that turns away the wrath of God.

Now let me remind you of some important truths that we've covered in recent messages that are worth repeating here. God is holy. God is light. God is separate from his creation and he is morally perfect, and there is no sin that is allowed to enter into his presence. He does not countenance sin. He cannot look on evil with favor and therefore if you and I are to enter into his presence, somehow our sin has to be dealt with. Without that, God's

wrath is upon us and so God's wrath has to be satisfied, his justice which calls out for punishment against our sin, it must be satisfied if we are to have eternal life and enter into the kingdom of God. That wrath must be satisfied, the debt must be paid, and what propitiation means and that Christ is our propitiation, what that means is that Christ has satisfied the demands of the wrath of God. When he died on the cross, when darkness descended upon the earth, when he was bearing the load of our sin and he cried out, "My God My God, why have You forsaken Me?" He was bearing the wrath of God on our behalf and God poured out the fullness, he poured out the full cup of the wrath of God on Christ instead of pouring it out upon us.

Can I remind you of something from the birth of Christ that bears on this matter? Back in Matthew 1 when the angel announced the coming birth of Jesus, he told the meaning of his name to Joseph and the angel said, "Call his name Jesus for He will save His people from their sins." In Luke 19:10 Jesus said, "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." And in John 3:16, "God so loved the world, that He sent His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him would not perish, but have eternal life." My friend, when we talk about this reality of Christ our propitiation, we're talking about another aspect of our perfect Savior. Jesus Christ turns away the wrath of God in the context of the entire mission that brought him to earth. He came to save sinners. He came to deliver us from under the wrath of God. He came to deliver us from the bondage of Satan and our deadness in sin and all of that as well, but propitiation is particularly focusing on the significance of the wrath of God and so Christ offered himself as a sacrifice to God on the cross.

Now this was the fulfillment of the shadows of the earlier time in Israel's history when they were offering animal sacrifices under the Old Testament dispensation and you'll remember, we won't look at the Scriptures for those tonight, but they would bring their guilt offering before the priest, they would lay their hands on the head of the animal and then that animal would be slain on their behalf. Now those animal sacrifices did not literally take away their sins, they were simply a symbol pointing forward to that future sacrifice of Christ where sin would truly be atoned for. These animal sacrifices were simply a temporary covering for sin, you might say, but here's what you need to see and here's how they help us understand the reality: those animal sacrifices taught that there was a need for a substitute for the sinner. The sinner rather than being the one sacrificed on the altar himself for his sins, brought a sacrifice who represented him and that representative sacrifice was slain on his behalf after there was this symbolic transfer of guilt to the head of the sacrificial animal. Well, that gave us a picture, it gave a shadowy picture that we now understand the fullness of in Christ. Christ came as a perfect man, the perfect God-man and having lived the perfect life he was entitled, he fulfilled the requirements of righteousness to be a sacrifice on behalf of someone else and the reality of his deity gave an unlimited nature to his sacrifice so that he was able to represent many people and to encompass all of his people in the sacrifice that he made.

Well my friend, what we do now by faith when we put our faith in Christ, in a sense what we're doing is this, when you first came to Christ as a Christian, what we remember now as believers as we confess our sins and trust him to take away our sins by his shed blood,

what we're doing is this, is, as it were, we take our guilty hands and our hands representing all of the things that we have done that are wicked, evil and sinful and a violation against God, and by faith we lay hold of Christ and we lay our hands on Christ and say, "I accept this sacrifice. This sacrifice represents me." At the invitation of Christ, our guilt is transferred to him and we understand that we are no longer trying to satisfy the demands of God's wrath with our own deeds, with our own hands, rather we are trusting the sacrifice that God provided on our behalf to be that which takes away all of our sin. And what that means, my friend is this, is that Jesus Christ lived a life, a perfect life that you did not live, he died a sacrificial death that you did not die, and when you trust Christ what you are doing is this, you are saying that, "I stake my entire eternity on the perfection of what He did and I trust nothing else beside. I do not trust in my own righteousness. I have none. I'm a guilty sinner. I've broken the law of God and I cannot fix it but I see the sacrifice that God has provided for us in Christ, it has been interpreted for me by the pages of the holy Scripture, that that sacrifice takes away the sin of everyone who believes in Him," and in the language of the hymn we say, "O Lamb of God, I come. Because your promise I believe, I come." Not by the deeds that I have done with my own hands but by what Christ has done. I trust in Him, I stake my entire eternity on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Friend, I need to ask you: do you understand that your sin is that devastating? That your sin has so broken you and shattered you and made you so guilty that there is nothing that you can do to satisfy the wrath of God on your own? Do you realize that apart from Christ you're vile, wicked, sinful, and deserving eternal judgment to the fullest and infinite degree? Do you recognize that about yourself because that's the kind of sinner that God accepts when they come to Christ. He does not justify righteous people. Jesus said, "I did not come to call the righteous at all." Jesus came to call men who knew they are sinners. Jesus came to save sinners and God justifies ungodly people who put their faith in Christ, you can read that in Romans 4.

So the call of the Gospel is not a call for you to clean up your life and then come to Christ. The call of the Gospel to repent and believe is not to wait until you feel bad enough about your sins and then you can come. No, it's none of that at all. The call of the Gospel goes out to guilty sinners just like you and says, "Come just as you are. Come in repentance to the Lord Jesus Christ and He will save you from all of your sins and He will give you eternal life. He will grant you a full complete pardon of sin. He will receive you, God will accept you as righteous for the sake of Christ if you will repent of your sins and put your faith in Jesus Christ." You need the help of the Holy Spirit to do that. You don't have the power to do that on your own and if you're struggling with these things, struggling to understand them, you know, I've heard people say, "You know, well, I tried that and it didn't work." Well, that's the wrong spirit with which to approach God. That's still trusting in your own works. "I tried it and it didn't work." Yeah, no kidding. No kidding. Your works cannot save you and your trying cannot save you, and of course it didn't work if you were approaching it in that kind of mindset, my friend. I elevate my voice for the sake of emphasis trying somehow to pierce through that thick skull of yours to understand what the nature of grace is. You are to come to God and cry out for mercy and in total reliance on Christ say, "God, be merciful to me the sinner. If You don't have

mercy on me, I will be eternally lost because I can do nothing to save my own soul." And you see, my friend, when you cry out to Christ like that, with that kind of earnest, desperate flight to Christ recognizing that he made a full propitiation on behalf of sinners who believe in him, God will accept you on that basis and you need to not just cry out once, you need to cry out again and again and again until God shows mercy on you and brings home to your heart and sheds abroad the love of God in your heart and sheds abroad light in your heart that gives you a sense of assurance that you have truly been born again, that you been born from above.

But my friend, my friend, and I'm thinking of some of you young people and some of you who are just so stubborn and so resistant to the Gospel of Christ, but praying even as I speak that perhaps God would pierce through to you even in this hour, what you need to understand is this, is that your eternal destiny is at stake here. We talked about Jesus on hell a few weeks ago. Hell is real, hell is painful and hell is eternal, and that's what lies ahead for you, and what you must understand, then, is that you must seek Christ with all of your heart and you should never stop crying out to him for mercy until you're confident that he has saved you. This is not the kind of thing that you make a halfhearted prayer one time while you're laying in bed before you go to sleep and then you forget about it. There's far too much at stake for you to be so cavalier and indifferent to it like that. No, friend, you cry out to God with all of your heart, mindful that he's a God who has mercy on sinners just like you, and you wait and you pray and you call upon him and ask him for mercy on such an undeserving sinner like you and Scripture tells us that God is glad to receive the prayers of repentant sinners just like that and he'll have mercy on you too. So I urge you to flee to Christ in response to this understanding that he is our Advocate, he's our propitiation, he is our perfect Savior.

Well, here's the question, then, in the context of John: how does all of this, for those of us that are confessing our sins as a believer, how does that promote our joy and how does it promote our holiness? Well, God through his Holy Spirit cleanses that lingering sense of guilt, he restores us in joy, the fruit of the indwelling Spirit is love, joys, peace, patience, kindness, goodness in our hearts, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. The Spirit of God works and instills attitudes and sentiments and affections that are aligned with the righteousness, holiness and grace of God and as the Spirit does that, you appropriate this joy and growing developing holiness in your life as he does. The confession of sin restores your joy and as you confess sin, God teaches you, he helps you understand how black and dark and how much sin is to be resisted and rejected, and as we're humbly confessing our sin, the Spirit of God is strengthening our affections toward Christ particularly as we are confessing with a conscious remembrance that our brother is in heaven helping us, interceding for us, and that that brother in heaven who is doing that present work now did a work in the past of propitiation that has covered everything for us. Christ is pretty wonderful, isn't he? The contemplation of these things overwhelms us with joy, with gratitude, with reverence, with worship and that's the way that it should be.

Well, as we take a final look at verse 2, we see that there is a broader significance to the work of Christ there in verse 2. "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." Now again, I covered this in detail in

two or three messages back in 2012 and I'm going to give a thumbnail synopsis of it here in maybe two minutes and I just want to help you understand the sense of what John is talking about here. When John says not for our sins only but also for the whole world, what he is saying is this, John was an apostle who ministered to Jews, Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles and so the people that John was writing to, these were predominantly believers who came from a Jewish background and what he is saying here is this, is that Christ died not only for Jews but Christ died for Gentiles as well. So the significance of this propitiatory work of Christ was not limited to ethnic Jews, it was available to people of every tribe, tongue and nation.

Jesus Christ came for Gentiles as well and so what we see is this and I'm quoting James Montgomery Boice here, he says the contrast would therefore be between those Jews for whom Christ died and those Gentiles for whom Christ died, both of whom now make up or eventually will make up the church. It's a contrast between Jews and Gentiles. John is not saying here that Christ paid for the sins of every single man who ever lived, including Judas and including everyone who has rejected him and who had rejected God and died in their sins before he was born. John's not saying that. I know that a lot of people want to make this verse say that but that's not what is being taught here. I urge you to go to those fuller messages where this is discussed, I'm just giving the outline here. John is saying that Christ died not only for Jews who would believe but for Gentiles who would believe. He is the propitiation for people throughout the world who will believe in him. Jesus Christ, we could put it another way, Jesus Christ is the only Savior the world has. Think about that. Every other religion is a false religion that seals people in their eternal doom. Jesus Christ is the only Savior that the world has. There is no other name given under heaven by which men must be saved. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life to me; no one comes to the Father except through Me."

So my friends, we come to this concluding realization, this concluding recognition here. You and I who are Christians, we have a perfect Savior even for our sins as a believer, they are covered in heaven and our sins as a believer do not sever our life in Christ, they do not sever us from fellowship with God, fellowship in the sense of that joint participation in the divine life that was imparted to us in our salvation. We see that this is the only place where anyone in the world can find salvation. We see that you as a sinner, you need to come to Christ and to be saved and I plead with you and I beg you and I call you with every ounce of energy that the Lord would give me, with every full exercise of the saving and sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit upon your heart, to recognize that you must come to Christ or you will be miserably and eternally lost. For those of us that are in Christ, we realize in contrast to those words, that we have been wonderfully and eternally saved by our perfect Savior, our Advocate, our propitiation who is Jesus Christ the righteous. May the reality of the work of Christ and the love of Christ bring you joy and cause you to grow in holiness tonight and in the days to come. God bless you.

Let's pray together.

O Christ, You Yourself said, "Come to Me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me for I am gentle and humble in

heart and you will find rest for your souls." In light of that, Lord Jesus, I ask you to be gracious to those tenderhearted believers prone to introspection who understand that they're not good enough but have not yet fully grasped in the fullest sense the measure of the perfection of Your work on their behalf and the perfection of Your love for them. I pray, Lord Jesus, that You would indeed be gentle and humble in Your dealings with them and that Your Spirit would gently bring them to the fullness of You as their Advocate, You as their propitiation, giving them all that is needed to bring them to a settled peace in their heart that they are fully accepted by God in the Beloved.

Father, for those unsaved dears that have received these words here tonight, what can I say, Lord, salvation belongs to You alone, You alone have the power to save sinners, You alone by Your Spirit have the ability to turn a man from darkness to light, from Satan to Christ, from sin to holiness, to deliver them from hell into heaven. Father, I pray that Your Spirit would do that kind of work in the hearts of each unbeliever who receives these words. Father, may You be gracious to them in Christ as You once were to me and have been ever since. Father, may they each one find in Christ that perfect Savior that they so desperately need and may Your Spirit give them no rest until they find their rest in Thee. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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