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God's Righteousness, Our Righteousness

Matthew 5:17-20

Prayer: *Father, we just want to thank you and praise you, Lord, we want you to be glorified in our lives. We just again understand that you have given us the gift of your word to help us grow in our knowledge and our understanding of who you are and just what it is you've done for us. And Father, I pray as we open up your word again this morning that you would give us also the presence of your Holy Spirit, move in our lives, give us the ability to see and to hear and to know and to understand just what it is you've done for us that we may give praises to you, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Anarchy is a scary word, and we hear about anarchy more and more these days and it conjures up this image of a total breakdown in society. Law becomes meaningless and chaos ensues. There are many different ways to approach anarchy, and one way is to have the executive branch of government become so weakened that the citizens know that the laws themselves are really meaningless. Kate Steinle was somebody you may have heard about, young woman of 32 years of

age, she was killed in San Francisco last month by an illegal alien, someone who had been deported and returned to this country five separate times. You see, ignoring the law is a form of anarchy. Multiplying the law is another form of anarchy. It's having so many different laws that you know at any given time the government could arrest you and find something to pin on you. I mean, I know someone who has a farming operation, he has over a hundred employees, and the government sent two auditors to check their books to check out their entire operation; and these two men, they spent an entire week pouring over all of their records. And after a week, they gathered together, he had a meeting, they commended my friend, they told him that they thought his operation was one of the best they'd ever found but nevertheless they were going to fine them over \$60,000. They said, "For what?" Well they, it turns out, had violated a very obscure clause buried in a 600-page document, there was a law that they had broken. And they showed him the law by opening the book and my friend said to them, "How are we supposed to know that?" And they said, "Well, it's not our job to make you know that. It's our job to enforce it." That's anarchy.

The law has taken a beating in our culture as well, I mean, arguably one of the most hated professions there is is that of lawyer. You know, the O.J. Simpson trial showcased lawyers who

knew precisely how to manipulate the system, and even against the most obvious of evidence, they won. There's no question that there's two different standards of how the law's going to treat you depending on whether or not you're wealthy and powerful or poor and powerless. There's widespread suspicion that the entire legal system is breaking down, that somehow or other justice can be bought and sold, that laws are created not to protect citizens but to create revenue, promote social engineering or feather legislator's nests.

Well God's law, thank goodness, is just the opposite. It's express purpose and design is vastly different than human legislation, and that's what we're going to be looking at this morning. Jesus said in *Matthew 5:17-20*: *"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."*

Okay. Jesus says, he tells them I have come to fulfill the law, and he said not one jot, not one tittle would pass from the law until he had accomplished it. Well, this is what we want to know this morning. What did Jesus mean by that? I mean, what law was he talking about and how does he fulfill it? Well, we need to back up a little bit. First we need to give this scripture a context. Understand Jesus has just finished delivering the beatitudes and remember what he's doing within that, he is describing what a kingdom citizen is. He says this, kingdom citizen is someone who knows that he is spiritually bankrupt. This is someone who knows and mourns his sin, he mourns what his sin has done to his Savior, he is meek, he is hungry for God, he is merciful, he is pure in heart, he's a peacemaker who is often times persecuted for the righteousness that he is pursuing. Jesus goes on to describe him as salt, someone who represents a cleansing, a covenant and a warning of the condemnation that exists outside of the kingdom of God. Jesus says he's not only salt but he is light, that is, he shines this light that God has given him into the darkness for the glory of God. In fact he understands he is the only light that this darkness is ever going to see. In other words he or she is not your typical citizen, and when it comes to the law, a kingdom citizen just happens to be a square peg in the Pharisees' round hole. He is tremendously out of sync with the prevailing view of the religious people as to what a man or woman of God is supposed

to be. And right off the bat Jesus makes it clear that something was drastically wrong with the Pharisees' idea of what righteousness was. Listen to what Jesus is saying here. He says: *"Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."* Those are clearly fighting words. And when it comes to the Pharisees, Jesus never, never minced words.

So he first addresses what he knows is the mindset of the Pharisees. He says in *Matthew 5:17*: *"Do not think that I have come to the abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."* You see, there were many, no doubt at that time who imagine that Jesus was there to abolish the law. This law had been co-opted by the relentless teachings of the scribes and the Pharisees and they taught that righteousness was not something that you had by faith. Instead they taught that righteousness was something that you gained, and you gained it by following rigorously their rules. It was something that you acquired through a diligent pursuit of the law that God had given them in the Old Testament. But these people had no idea what that law was given and why that law was given in the first place. And by Jesus' day, law had come into the same state of anarchy that we see today in our own country, I mean, instead of the ten commandments, thanks to the Pharisees, they now had 248. And along

with those 248, they had 365 separate prohibitions or hedge laws. These laws never came from God. They were the invention of men who thought that they could become righteous just by keeping to a strict set of rules. The problem was following these rules brought no one at all closer to God. In fact it usually had the opposite effect. I mean, it made people proud of their law keeping and it turned God into a caricature of themselves. You know, in their minds God was this nit-picking demigod who cared more, far more, about performance than he did about the state of someone's heart. Jesus hated, he hated how they twisted the love of his Father into a pretzel and turned the hearts of his people into stone. And so he reserved his harshest criticism for them. This is what he said in *Matthew 15*, he said: *"You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"* He also went on to describe the devastation they wreaked in *Matthew 23*. This is what he said there, he said: *"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte -- that's a convert -- and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves."* That's quite a track record.

I mean, what Jesus is saying is in short, you are better off ignorant than to be taught by these teachers.

And for the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is introducing us to six different areas of righteous living by telling the people that in each of these six appears areas, their teachers are dead wrong. Six times he defines the Pharisees' position and he does it by saying, "You have heard it said," but then he counters that and he contrasts it with his own position by saying, "But I say." He starts off by saying, "You have heard it said, 'Do not murder.'" And then he says, "But I say." He next says, "You have heard it said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I say." Then he says, "You have heard it said, 'Do not divorce a wife without a certificate.' But I say." "You have heard it said, 'Do not break an oath. But I say.'" "You have heard it said, 'An eye for an eye. But I say.'" And he says, "You have heard it said, 'Love your neighbor, hate your enemy.' But I say."

What did Jesus say? Well, did he explain how harsh and rude and exploitive these phony manmade rules were? No, he didn't do that. Did he point out how empty and pride-filled the followers of these rules became? Well, the answer to that is no as well. What Jesus did was he just used the law the way God intended it to be used. See, he used it not as a set of rules that'll make you good enough

for God but rather as a standard of God's holiness that proves that his goodness belongs only to God. See, one of the purposes of the law is not to make you good. It's to make you realize that the goodness that the law demands is something you could never supply. You know, I've often said the law's like those signs that you see at amusement parks. You know when you come up to the stand and there's a sign there that says you must be this tall to ride on this ride. The sign is very much like the law. The sign is not able to give you anything in terms of making you worthy of riding on that ride. It can't make you grow an inch, it can't make you grow a centimeter, it can just tell you you're not tall enough, you don't meet the standard. Well, that's what the law does as well. That's all it can do is tell you that you don't meet the standard. It can't give you any ability to meet it, it can simply say you don't. But our response to the law is not to understand what it's saying, it's to try to shrink it down and so that we look at the law and we say, well, let's make this law doable. It may be onerous, it may have lots and lots of rules associated with it, 274 on one side, 365 on another, but at least it's doable. Well, Jesus is simply exposing us to the folly of thinking we can measure up to the perfection that God is, and he does it by expanding on what the law demands of us. You know, what Jesus does with the law, it's kind of like what we do with a smart phone or with Windows 10. If you've got Windows 10, you know what that's like. If you want to

expand it, you just put your fingers on it and you just open your fingers and all of a sudden it gets bigger and bigger and bigger until it fills up the entire screen. That's exactly what Jesus is doing with the law. In each case he's taking what the law says and he's putting his finger on it and he's blowing it up and he's making it much, much more difficult. I mean, if it was difficult before Jesus speaks of it, it becomes almost impossible afterwards.

Listen to what he says. This is Jesus in *Matthew 5:27*, using the same formula he says: "You have heard it said" -- that's what they say -- he says: "You have heard it said, 'Do not commit adultery,'" and then he adds his part, he says, "But I tell you." "*You have heard it said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you a simple lustful look is adultery!*" He's just put his finger on it and expanded it, it's gotten so much bigger, so much more difficult. Then he goes on to say in *Matthew 5:29*: "*If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.*"

Now you might be asking yourself is this the same Jesus who said in *Matthew 11*: "*For my yoke is easy and my burden is light?*" I mean

Jesus is addressing folks who have been taught that mere external compliance to the rules was all that was necessary to be considered right with God, and he's turning that notion right on its head. What Jesus is offering here is far more difficult than any solution the Pharisees ever concocted because he's expanding the law to include motives and intents. Let me give you a modern example of what Jesus is saying here. I mean, Jesus is saying in God's eyes, every single one of you who has an Ashley Madison account is an adulterer, I mean, regardless of whether or not you ever even accessed it and so is anyone who ever even considered getting an Ashley Madison account. By the way, that's a website that facilitates adulterous affairs between men and women -- married men and women. This is a website that was hacked and all of the names of all of the people that were involved in this were released. They were all exposed and the havoc it's wreaked has been incredible, I mean, two people already have committed suicide because they've been exposed. But you know according to the Pharisees, what's the big deal? I mean after all, they taught it was the act itself that made you guilty. So if your name was on that list but you hadn't yet found the time or the money or the chutzpah to actually do it, well then you're okay. You see, as far as they were concerned, no harm, no foul. You see the Pharisees looked at bad deeds the exact same way they looked at good deeds. All that counted was what you did. Where your heart was, what your

intent was, that meant nothing. But Jesus went beyond that even to bad intentions that would never even see the light of day. And to those who thought they could earn their salvation by obeying all of the rules, Jesus is saying in effect you want rules? You want to figure out a way that you can work your way up to God, you want to work your way up to being good enough for God? Fine. Here are the rules regarding flawless transcendent perfection. Have at it.

What Jesus was pointing to was a standard no one would ever be able to meet if they had all of eternity to do it. See, Jesus is tipping the cup of the law and all of these jots and tittles are spilling out and each one is more deadly than the last. And then Jesus directly addresses the rumors and the distortions that the Pharisees have spread about him. He says in *Matthew 5:17*: "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*"

So we ask well, what is the point? What's the point that Jesus is getting at here? And the point is that in over 2,000 years, nothing really has changed. You know, folks today think exactly the way the Pharisees think, I mean, they think that God's standard of righteousness is somehow or other doable. I mean today's standard differs from the Pharisees only that we in North America, we prefer a numeric approach. Most folks don't like to even think about the idea of judgment but when they do -- I'm not being

facetious here -- most people in their minds and their thoughts, they imagine that St. Peter's going to meet us up at heaven's gate, and he's going to have a clipboard and on that clipboard's going to be a piece of paper and on that piece of paper is going to be your record and if your good deeds somehow outweigh your bad deeds then on into the pearly gates you're going to go. And people just live their lives saying I hope, I hope, I hope. You know, I hope it's 51-49 on my side. That may be the prevailing notion but I have to tell you that is a lie, and it's a lie straight from hell. I mean there certainly is a St. Peter but he's not going to be checking lists at the pearly gates. There will be only one perfect standard of God's law and it will be there telling you that you must be transcendentally flawless to enter into the presence of God. And the vast majority of people who see that and hear that and understand that are going to be speechless. This is exactly what God says in *Romans 3:19*, he says: *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.* See, God says, he says it flat out, he says through the law does not come a way to righteousness but through the law comes the knowledge of sin. What God is saying here is that look, when it comes to my standard, you are either flawless or you are not good. It's all or nothing.

James 2:10 says: Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. Galatians 3:10 says: For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." That's impossible. Nobody can do that. But Jesus said he had come to fulfill the law. In Matthew 5:17, he said: "Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." If the law that Jesus is referring to was the whole of the Old Testament, it was called the Law and the Prophets, and the purpose of the law, the purpose of the law is actually threefold, but first in this instance it was to declare who God was and secondly, to declare who man was not. Who God was was absolute perfection. You know Psalm 18: This God -- his way is perfect. The law is simply a reflection, it's a mirror of God's perfection. And when that same standard of perfection is applied to us, it serves to reveal our imperfection. Psalm 14 declares: They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one.

But understand, this is not the way things always were. There was a time when God looked at his creation, us included, and saw it as very, very good. That was in the Garden of Eden before the fall. And there God in his perfection and Adam and Eve in their

perfection coexisted and lived together. But the fall shattered that. You see, man according to God was very good before the fall and none who does good after it. The problem is that man in the Old Testament and man in Jesus's day and man today, he doesn't believe that. I mean we fail physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually, that is who we are. We say to err is human. It is our nature to fail. So we just naturally assume that God looks at us and says well, we can't do this so I'll mark on a curve, but he doesn't. I mean, we are so used to imperfection that we see it as God's problem much more than ours. I mean after all, he's the one who sets the standard, he's the one who defines failure and his problem is he sets the bar way, way too high. We insist that God mark us on a curve, and God's perfection insists that he can't. That's the problem. According to God's laws there are only two moral categories in the universe, you are either perfect and good or not perfect and not good. God says *there is none who does good, no, not one*. The apostle Paul in Romans 3, he expands on that definition. He says this, he says: *As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. they have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one."* We look at this and we say -- scratch my head and say wait a minute, where's no one who does good? I mean not even one? You think to yourself, how can it be when a person comes down with a

terrible disease and there's hundreds of volunteers who line up to donate blood and bone marrow and that kind of thing, that's not good? You know, there's a terrible earthquake or a hurricane and thousands of volunteers get in their cars and they drive down to offer aid and help and support and that's not good? By my standards that's not just good, that's very good. But God doesn't judge by my standards. In fact he says in *Isaiah 64:6*: *But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.* Notice the prophet is not saying that our sins are like filthy rags. What he is saying is far more horrifying than that. He says it is our righteousness or our righteous deeds that are like filthy rags. And again we ask how in the -- how can this be? Well, it all comes down to standards. You know, six times Jesus said: "You have heard it said. But I say." Well, the Pharisees had one standard, Jesus had another. His standard was perfection.

Let me apply that for a moment. Let me give you an example on why this makes it so exquisitely difficult for us. Let's say that I did something extraordinarily good, let's say that I donated one of my kidneys to a complete stranger. That would qualify, would you say, as a really good thing. But let's apply God's standard, and God's standard says that everything that I do must be accompanied by love. Paul says if I don't have love, I have nothing. So my

donation must be accompanied by love but what does the love actually mean? Where does the love come from? How is that love defined? Well, God defines love. He defines it in *1 Corinthians 13*. So if I meet his standards for love, then I can call my kidney donation good, but only if I meet those standards. Most of us know what the love chapter is, you've heard it at weddings, it's been read over and over again, it's always recited at weddings and it's not just a lovely description of what love is, it's a benchmark for what love is supposed to be according to God. And according to this passage, this is *1 Corinthians 13*, it says: *Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.*

We see that and it warms our heart because it sounds so wonderful, but what if this is God's standard for love and how to apply -- how do I apply my love to that standard? Does my love meet that standard? I mean is my love perfectly patient? Is it perfectly kind? Is it completely without envy and no boasting whatsoever? After all, I'm just giving away a kidney. Come on. No boasting at all, no hint of pride? No rudeness, no self-seeking whatsoever? It never gets angry, never remembers the past. It always hates

wrong doing, it always rejoices in the truth while perfectly protecting, trusting, hoping, and persevering forever. That's the standard. That's God's standard. And God says if I don't meet that standard at every single point perfectly, then my love is not good. I mean even my kidney donation fails the test of perfection. We say this is crushing. We say this is brutal. This is impossible. But it is the standard that God meets, and it's the standard that he met perfectly, it's the standard that Jesus met throughout his entire life. What Jesus is doing in the Sermon on the Mount is he's using the law just as God intended it, not as a means of achieving perfection but as a proof that perfection by human effort is absolutely impossible. Jesus said: *"You have heard it said 'Do not murder.' But I tell you simply calling someone a fool will put you in danger of the fire of hell."* God is doing -- Jesus is doing with God's standard what we do with our iPhones, he's just poking it and it's getting bigger and bigger and bigger and the more you poke it, the bigger it's going to get. The more you think you can make it, the more it's going to prove to you you can't. You see the standard that Jesus Christ is calling us to? It's the very standard that he was living by. And every one of the impossible things that he demands of us, guess what, he accomplished. Every time Jesus said "but I say," he invoked his own standard in how he lived his own life. We just find that impossible. Jesus sums up the impossibility of it all when he says

in *Matthew 5:48*: "You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Jesus knows that what he's asking is impossible. But he's not asking. He's demanding. You want to live a life acceptable to God? Be ye perfect. Live life like I'm living it, says Jesus.

He says in *Matthew 5*: "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but fulfill." Now do you know what he meant by that? What he meant was that every single jot, every single tittle, every single tiny detail of thought, word, and deed was lived out perfectly by one man and one man only, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. There was no standard of perfection that he did not meet perfectly. I mean when it came to love, he alone was patient and kind, he didn't envy, he didn't boast, he wasn't proud, he wasn't rude or self-seeking, he didn't get angry, he kept no record of wrongdoing, didn't delight in evil but rejoiced in the truth, he always protected, trusted, hoped, persevered and he never failed, ever. That was just one of the standards that the law demanded. There were thousands of others, all of which he met perfectly. And yet that alone was not the complete fulfillment of the law. You know what the fulfillment of the law was? The fulfillment was perfectly meeting every single standard the law demanded then paying the price for violating virtually all of them. You know, *2 Corinthians 5:21* says: *For our*

sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Jesus' transcendentally flawless execution of everything the law demanded only qualified him to become sin for us. Every single act his sheep committed that was less than perfect qualified as sin that the Good Shepherd had to pay for. I mean, have you ever considered that? Jesus was the only one who had ever achieved goodness by doing perfectly every single thing that the law demanded. You know, we say it over and over again, he lived the life we could never live, then he died the death we deserved to die.

We consider God's standard not only when it comes to perfection but also when it comes to sin itself. You know, what do you think of when somebody says, "Oh, he sinned," or what do you think of when we hear of the word "sinned?" We think of somebody did something bad. But God's definition is just like hitting that smart phone, it gets much bigger, much harder, much more inclusive. Listen to what God's definition of sin is. He says in *Romans 3:23*: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* What is he saying? God is saying every single thing we do that falls short of the transcendent perfection of his glory is sin. Being less than flawless is sin? Yeah, it's sin. See, Jesus Christ went to the cross to fulfill the law's demands on us and this law demands perfection in everything. And again, *Matthew 5:48* makes that as

clear as it can, *"Be ye perfect."* That's what's pressing down on us. That's not a suggestion; it's a demand. In other words don't think of your greatest sin alone as needing the cross. Consider also your finest deed that you might have ever done in your life including donating a kidney as something that also needs to be redeemed by Christ, because no matter what it was, it wasn't perfect; and He is. And when Jesus says: "You have heard it said, but I say," he is calling us to make perfection our standard. That's also why he said in verse 20: *"For I say to you that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."*

Jesus has laid out an impossible standard. We cannot meet his standard, but he can. And it's not we who meet the standard but he who is in us who does. See, Jesus's standards are nothing more than a reflection of who he is. And when we by faith ask him to be the Lord of our lives, his standards, again by faith, become ours. We begin to own his righteousness, that is if he's living inside you. Again *Romans 8:9: You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.* And you know, if you understand just one definition, understand this. A Christian is a person who has the Spirit of Christ living within them. If the Spirit of God lives in you then Jesus Christ is

literally in the process of becoming second nature to you, that's to say his nature is becoming yours, his standards, his righteousness, his power is becoming yours. Think about it. God says in *Romans 8:29*: *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.* That's what God is doing in our lives. He's conforming us into the very image of his Son. But it's not us, it's Christ in us. Listen to what Paul says in *Galatians 2:20*, he says: *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* By faith we believe God. He accounts that belief as righteousness, the only perfect righteousness a perfect God can accept. There's only one response we can have to a God like that and it must be amazement. I mean, we are blown away constantly. I mean, that's what happened to Paul routinely, you see Paul in his writings, he routinely gets overwhelmed with the enormity of the gift of God. His amazement just bursts out of the page. In *Romans 11:33* he's writing about the salvation of Israel, and you can see his amazement at God's wisdom and mercy and grace is just overwhelming him, and he has to kind of put the pen down and he starts to shout, he says this: *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"*

"Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. That's what amazement looks like. You know, we sing Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. You know, folks like to point out that the author of that hymn was a slave trader. That's where the wretch part comes from. Not so. You and I could write that hymn, so could Mother Teresa, so could the apostle Paul. You see, anyone who is less than perfect stands before God a wretch, just like John Newton, the guy who wrote the song. All of us qualified because all of us were lost and found blind and now we see.

There's an excellent article that was commenting on the state of contemporary Christian music written by John Fisher who's an artist. He was talking about this whole idea of how Christian music reflects the culture that has grown up over the last forty or fifty years and how it kind of pushes out the idea that we should be amazed at God's grace. Listen to what he says.

He says: "While most contemporary worship songs tend to focus on praise and worship through repeatedly blessing God, there are many old relics that major on gospel themes of redemption, salvation, and grace. One sentiment in particular that I keep encountering that has all but dropped out of the current scene is the shock and

gratitude of the guilty, undeserving sinner who surprisingly finds him or herself as the most unlikely recipient of the free gift of God's grace. As a part of this revealing self-portrait there seems to be no difficulty at all in describing oneself in the most incriminating way possible." He gives these old lyrics which I'm sure you're familiar with, he says: "The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day/and there may I, though vile as he, wash all my sins away." Or: "Alas and did my Savior bleed and did my sovereign die, would he devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?" He says "There are only a couple of examples along with the famous amazing grace that he saved a wretch like me." It goes on to say: "You don't hear much of this 'sinner talk' today from our music or from our pulpits for that matter. You have don't hear much of it anywhere. This could very well be the result of a culture that is saturated with self-worth and self-important philosophies. Jesus dying for me these days is more like God getting a good deal than it is a sinner being redeemed. The cross is often used today as a proof of our value. I.e., God saw us as being so valuable that he died for us and considered the blood of his son a reasonable price for what he was getting. We would indeed be hard-pressed to get an Isaac Watts or Charles Wesley to swallow this perspective. Instead, the hymn writers of old would teach us that our worth comes as a result of Christ dying for us, not as a cause of it. It's not that God got a good deal here. We

are the ones who got the deal. We became valuable at the cross and not a second before. We were not worthy of this death. He made us worthy in this death. He put the value on us when he redeemed us by his blood. He didn't have to do this. No great law of the universe would've held God in court for permanently doing away with his own sinful scarred creation. He was a spotless lamb. We are the guilty sinners and in this incomprehensible transaction at the cross he gave us righteousness and took on our sin. In the cross alone, I am righteous. I am worthy to be called his because of what he did, not because of what I am. His death on the cross bestowed this value on me. The result of this gospel is that we are eternally caught by surprise, out of breath, flabbergasted that this would happen to us. And the amazement never gets old because we are constantly aware of our sin and all the new angles we are capable of putting on it. If we are no longer amazed then it can only be assumed that we don't see ourselves as being so bad off or in such a precarious position after all."

That leads me to my question this morning, and that is this: Are you flabbergasted at this gospel? Do you realize how far God came to meet us? Do you realize what it cost him to purchase you, to redeem your life? I mean, it cost him the holy rage of his perfect Father poured out in agony on the Son he loved so that he could pay the price of our penalty and purchase our perfection. He gets our

sin, we get his righteousness. God's law met God's grace at the cross and so my question this morning is: Are you amazed? Are you flabbergasted at a grace so great? Let's offer our praise to him this morning.

Father, we are flabbergasted at what you have done for us. We see the standard of your perfection and we see how incredibly impossible that is to meet. We are pressed down by the law that demands absolute flawless transcendent perfection, and we know we can't do that but we also know that you came and lived that very life and then you offered up that life to your Father on our behalf. If we would by faith accept that sacrifice, then we too have your righteousness. What a gift, what an amazing gift. We thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.