

“GOD’S JUSTIFYING GRACE”
Isaiah 53:4-6, Romans 3:21-26, I Timothy 2:3-6
November 18 & 19, 2023

“It was 1944 and...Bert Frizen was an infantryman on the front lines in Europe. American forces had advanced in the face of intermittent shelling and small arms fire throughout the morning hours, but now all was quiet. His patrol reached the edge of a wooded area with an open field before them. Unbeknownst to the Americans, a battery of Germans was ready and waiting in a hedgerow about two hundred yards across the field.

“Bert was one of the two scouts who moved out into the clearing. Once he was half-way across the field, the remainder of his battalion followed. Suddenly the Germans opened fire and machine gun fire ripped into both of Bert’s legs. The American battalion withdrew into the woods for protection, while a rapid exchange of fire continued.

“Bert lay helplessly in a small stream as shots volleyed overhead from side to side. There seemed to be no way out of his dilemma. To make matters worse, he now noticed that a German soldier was crawling toward him. Death appeared imminent; he closed his eyes and waited. To his surprise, a considerable period passed without the expected attack, so he ventured opening his eyes again. He was startled to see the German kneeling at his side, smiling. He then noticed that the shooting had stopped. Troops from both sides of the battlefield watched anxiously. Without any verbal exchange, this mysterious German reached down to lift Bert in his strong arms, and proceeded to carry him to the safety of his American comrades.

“Having accomplished his self-appointed mission, and still without speaking a word, the German soldier turned and walked back across the field to his own troop. No one dared break the silence of this sacred moment. Moments later the cease-fire ended, but not before all those present had witnessed the power of self-abdicating love, how one man risked everything for his enemy.

“Bert’s life was saved through the compassion of one man, his enemy. This courageous act pictures what Jesus risked for us: *While we were still God’s enemies, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8).”

This is just one of the amazing stories that came out of the Second World War.¹ And I want to thank all of our men and women who have served in the military for their commitment as they put themselves into harm's way to bring peace and freedom. It's a week late, but better late than never, right?

We're investigating this amazing gift of God called grace. We've seen how God took the initiative to provide forgiveness and life to us, even before we recognized the need for His Salvation. We call that God's **Prevenient Grace**, showing His love to us even though we were His enemies.

Then, we saw how God calls out to each one of us to help us to notice that our lives are up-side-down without Him as our Lord, and He invites us to repent of our wickedness and turn back to His ways. This is God's **Convincing Grace**, opening our eyes to our sinfulness so that we might change our ways and find His Salvation.

Today we are looking at the way that God changes us, having responded to His prevenient grace and having found His convincing grace, and having come to the point when we turn our lives over to the Lord's control. God takes us off the battlefield of life, shows us His deep love for us, and then makes everything brand new as He gives us His life. Since because of our sinfulness and rebellion against God's ways we become God's enemies, we would expect His wrath to be poured out onto us. But out of His great love for us, God is determined to do everything He can to bring us back home safely from the ultimate destruction and death that waits for all those who will not turn from their own wicked ways back to the Lord's ways. God loves us enough to renew us and redeem us from wretched sinners into resounding saints. This is God's **Justifying Grace**.

Our Old Testament lesson of Isaiah 53 tells us what God planned to do for all the people of the world. God provided a perfect Sacrifice for us that would take away our sins, and bring us at last back to Him again when we claim that sacrifice as our own. Only a perfect Sacrifice could redeem the sins of the whole world. So God sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, to us for the reason of our Salvation from the wages of sin and death. Jesus "*took up our pain and bore our suffering*" (53:4), "*He was pierced for our*

¹ (Edward K. Rowell, *1000 Quotes, Illustrations, and Humorous Stories*, [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books 2008] pg. 213)

*transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed” (53:5). He took our place, endured our punishment, and paid the price for our sins BECAUSE HE LOVES US. If God didn’t love us, He would just have wiped us out. Yet, He sent His only Son, Jesus, to us to save us and bring us back home. “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; AND THE LORD **has laid on Him** the iniquity of us all” (53:6).*

God does not want us to be destroyed, forever in His absence, to suffer the eternal consequences of our rejection of His righteous ways. God loves us enough to give us the chance to choose Him. From the point of our conception to the very last breath we breathe here on this earth, God has provided a way for us to come back into His presence to become renewed, redeemed and restored in His image through the life, crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is no other way for us to find eternal life! No other way is possible for us to rid ourselves of our sinfulness so that we might find ourselves pure and holy in God’s presence. Jesus Christ Is God’s Savior, God’s Messiah to the world, so that we might become justified again for the glory of God. God says it perfectly, “*My righteous servant will justify many, and He will bear their iniquities*” (Is. 53:11). Jesus is the One who brings Salvation to all who will believe in Him, receive Him as their Savior, and follow His ways.

Chuck Swindoll explains it like this. “Someone once told me, ‘Justification is the sovereign act of God whereby He declares righteous the believing sinner while he is still in his sinning state.’ It means that while we were still prone to sin, God saw us in Christ and said, ‘You’re righteous! I declare you to be right in My eyes. You don’t have to work to find favor with Me.’ Grace says, God reached down in Christ, captured us, declared us righteous and said, ‘You’re right from now on in My eyes.’

“Some people have misused this word and taught that it means ‘just as if I’d never sinned,’ using the little syllables ‘just-if-ied.’ That’s too shallow. That doesn’t say enough. It is rather, ‘Although I am terribly sinful, He declared me righteous,’ not just as if I’d never been sinful.

Chuck says, “Let me illustrate it. A couple of friends of mine from the church and I rented a

rototiller to replant the backyard for the fourth time. Out there in that dirt, we began to run that rototiller. Dust and dirt and junk went everywhere, and all of it settled on our bodies, so that from head to foot we were really dirty.

“We finished up and I walked into the shower and turned on that fresh water. I got all cleaned up and toweled off. I could have walked in front of the mirror and said, ‘Ah, it’s just as if I’d never been dirty.’ But that wouldn’t have adequately conveyed the power and the value of the water and soap. I could otherwise look in the mirror and say, ‘I was filthy and now I’m clean.’ That’s the difference.”²

You see folks, that’s the power of the justifying grace of Jesus Christ. Romans 3:21-26 tells us that it is only by the power of Jesus that we are washed clean from all our sinful filthiness. Though we were once soiled and grimy because of our rebellion against God’s perfect law, Jesus paid the price, and took our sinfulness upon Himself so that we might be freed from it. Jesus gives us His righteousness and takes upon Himself our filthiness.

Paul tells us, *“This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus...He did it to demonstrate His righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the One who justifies those who have faith in Jesus”* (Rom. 3:22-24, 26).

So all who come to understand their separation from God because of their sins, and those who claim the righteousness of Jesus through His sacrifice on the cross, find their lives transformed and changed because they are no longer condemned, but now saved. The justification of Jesus Christ redeems them so that they are able to come into the very presence of God, all because of Jesus’ sacrifice for us. When we trust in Him, He takes all our grubby sins away and makes us brand new in Him.

Max Lucado states it like this. He says, “I make no claim to being a good golfer, but I love to play golf, watch golf, and on good nights I even dream golf.

² (Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998] pg. 326)

“So when I was invited to attend the Masters Golf Tournament, I was thrilled. A pass to the Masters is the golfer's Holy Grail. Mine came via pro golfer Scott Simpson.

“Off we went to Augusta National Country Club in Georgia where golf heritage hangs like moss from the trees. I was a kid in a candy store. It wasn't enough to see the course and walk the grounds; I wanted to see the locker room where the clubs of Ben Hogan and Paul Azinger are displayed.

“But they wouldn't let me in. A guard stopped me at the entrance. I showed him my pass, but he shook his head. I told him I knew Scott, but that didn't matter. ‘Only caddies and players,’ he explained.

“Well, he knew I wasn't a player or a caddie. Caddies are required to wear white coveralls. My clothing was a dead giveaway. So I left, knowing I had made it all the way to the door of that locker room but was denied entrance.

“God has one requirement for entrance into heaven: that we be clothed in Christ.

“When someone prays, ‘Take away my [sinful] rags and clothe me in your grace,’ Jesus, in an act visible only to the eyes of heaven, removes the stained robes we are wearing and replaces them with His robe of righteousness.

But then “what did Jesus do for you and me? He put on our coat of sin and wore it to the cross. As He died, His blood flowed over our sins and they were cleansed. Because of this, we have no fear of being turned away at the door of heaven.”³ Our place in God's kingdom is secured because we have put our faith and trust in the saving sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And that changes everything!

Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 2:3-6 how God invites us to turn to Christ Jesus and let Him become our Savior through faith in Him. Listen to these words. (READ 1 Timothy 2:3-6)

You see, we live in a world that wants us to believe that we don't need God. The world says we can live our lives perfectly well without Him telling us what we have to do.

We live in a world that tells us that we have to live life on our own terms, to gut it out and push

³ (Max Lucado, "Back Door," *Christian Reader* (May/June 2000), p. 96, found in *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Tyndale House, 2003], p. 154-155)

hard with all we've got if we want any kind of success or lasting reward. But our strength and wisdom and knowledge are all limited and flawed at best. There is no way we can secure any kind of lasting success on our own, because when we die, all we've worked so hard for goes to someone else. On our own there is no lasting future for us. We can work ourselves to death and never achieve eternal life.

We live in a world that wants to convince us that to profess our need for Jesus to be Lord of our lives is a crutch, and to put our faith in Jesus and humble ourselves to His control in our lives is a sign of weakness. But when your life is broken and you don't have the strength to live a righteous life or atone for any of our mistakes and failures, a crutch comes in mighty handy, especially if that crutch cancels out all of our mistakes and failures and helps us walk in the righteousness of the Lord.

We live in a world that invites us to live hard and get all the gusto we can get. But what does that get us? We all die, and those with the most toys at the end still die. Living it up involves not caring about the person next to us. Living it up to get all the gusto we can get means that we put the focus only on us, and we end up doing horrible things to others just so that we can have all we want, whenever we want it, no matter if it affects another person or not. Living it up means stepping on everyone else just so that we get to the top of the heap in an attempt to make ourselves look like something special.

But all that the world tells us, all that the world wants to have us believe, all that the world tries to convince us into having in our lives, is a lie! It's an outright lie! We don't get real life by using others to get what we want! We don't get real life by putting others down! We don't get real life by becoming so self-centered that no one else matters! NO! We get real life as we humble ourselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and let Him use us as His servants to lift up the broken, heal the hurting, assist the less fortunate, and bring light to those lost in the darkness of this world. And that doesn't work if we focus only on ourselves.

God "*wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth*" of Jesus Christ (1 Tim.2:4). It's not all about us, but it's about us sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with those around us so that they might find forgiveness of their sins through His Salvation. It's not about getting

all the worldly possessions we can get, because even after all that, our souls are required of us (Luke 12:20). Our life does not consist of the amount of wealth we have, but rather on the number of people we bring to salvation through Jesus Christ. And it's not a competition to see how many souls we can save, but it's about sharing the love of Jesus with the ones around us, so that they might also find their lives justified by His grace as they confess their sins and become followers of the truth, free from all unrighteousness. It's about living as a witness of the love of God so others can come to Him, too.

You see, it's only through Jesus Christ that we can find the real life that the world tries to convince us we can have on our own. *"There is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all people"* (1 Tim. 2:5-6). Jesus is the only one who can make our life successful. He is the only one who can bring us a true lasting reward as we live for Him. Jesus is the only one who is able to stand between God and us and negotiate our salvation, and He did that on the cross. By His blood we are healed. By His death we are freed. By His resurrection we find eternal life. By His grace we can stand in the presence of Almighty God, sinners redeemed by the blood of Jesus, washed stain-free, redeemed back to God, and made holy through the justifying grace of God. Only through the love of Jesus Christ are we able to find our way back into God's presence.

It works like this: "An engagement ring that fell into the sea off the west coast of Sweden in 1994 miraculously found its way back to its owner. The ring was consumed by a mussel that turned up in a load of shellfish caught by fisherman Peder Carlsson.

"Carlsson was able to return the ring to its owner because the woman, Agneta Wingstedt, had her name engraved on the inside.

"If we bear Christ's name, we know we'll be returned to Him one day."⁴ All those who put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ belong to Him and have His name written on their hearts. Then, no matter what we face or what hardship or trial we endure here in this world, we will be claimed by Him as His

⁴ (Edward K. Rowell, *1000 Quotes, Illustrations, and Humorous Stories*, pg. 214)

very own. Though we may be counted as lost by the world, when we turn to Jesus and give Him our life and our soul, we now have eternal value to the Lord, and nothing will be able to keep us away from Him.

I heard an amazing witness of the justifying grace of the Lord Jesus at the Ephesians 5 Men's Breakfast. One of the men gave his testimony of how God led him out of drug addiction, violence, sexual promiscuity, and lawlessness. His life was transformed by the love of Jesus Christ, to the point where now he is using that testimony to reach out to other men who are in the same situation he was in, to help them to see the difference that Jesus makes in their lives when they trust in Him. Even in his sinful life, God had justified him so that with his sins washed away by the blood of Christ Jesus, he could be a new man, serving the Lord and touching the lives of those around Him.

That's the difference Jesus wants to make in your life, too. Though many still believe that they are so messed up, so dirty, and so despicable that there is no way that God wants them in His kingdom, God's love goes beyond all that to pick us up out of the muck and mire of this world and create us a brand new creature in Christ. God loves you so much that He sent Jesus to this world, so that to all who will believe in Him and receive Him as their Savior, will not perish into eternal death, but be brought into eternal life. Don't give up on God. He loves you more than you can ever know. Trust in Him and let Him re-create you into the person He knows you can be.

Let's pray. Father, thank You so much for all that You have done for us through Your Son, Jesus. We now have hope for a new life because Jesus died for us and paid all the cost for us to become pure and holy in Your sight. But it is up to us to believe it, and receive it, and then to live it. None of us deserve it. None of us has done anything good enough to merit it. But out of Your great love for us, You have made it available for us so that we might be with You forever. Give us the courage to recognize the need for a change in our lives. Give us the resolution to turn to You with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. AMEN.