Justifying Grace Talk

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A story is told about a well known opera singer, Rachael Smith, in the Seattle, Washington area who because of her wonderful voice was constantly asked to sing at a variety of events. Because of her very tight schedule with work and her family she did not answer yes to many requests.

However she did make an exception when her best friend asked if she would sing at her

daughter’s wedding. It was going to be the who’s who social event of the year and so she offered to share her musical talents for her best friends' daughter's wedding.

She went to the rehearsal and all things went fine. On the day of the wedding Rachael mesmerized the guest with her vocals. After the wedding she and her husband headed off to the reception which was going to be held on the top floor of a well known restaurant in downtown Seattle.

The reception began with drinks and hors d’oeuvres on the lower half of the top floor and the

dinner itself was to take place at the top of the upper floor. Rachael says it was very elegant and everybody was dressed to the nines. In the center of the lower floor was a massive staircase that made its way up to the upper floor.

Shortly after arriving at the reception the guest were invited to make their way up to the upper

level, where an attendant would check the guest registry, and seat the guest. So Rachael and her husband began to make their way up the winding stairs. Once they arrived at the attendant’s station he asked Rachael her name and she told him Rachael Smith. The attendant began to look through the guest book. He couldn't find her name. She encouraged him to look some more but still with no success. She then informed the attendant that the mother of the bride was her best friend and that she had sung at the wedding. The attendant looked but still her name was nowhere to be found. There was no place for Rachael and her husband at the wedding reception.

Rachael says that she and her husband had to turn around and begin to make their way back through the crowded stairway. Passing people that they knew and passing many of the who's who of the city of Seattle. How embarrassed she was.

When they finally made their way down to the parking garage and got into the car to go home Rachael says the she burst out in the tears. She was embarrassed beyond embarrassment. She was not going to enjoy the reception of her best friends' daughter's wedding.

When they got about halfway home she it suddenly dawned on her that she had forgotten to do something and she spoke up and informed her husband that the reason why they were not sitting at the wedding reception at that moment was that she had forgotten to send back the wedding reception invitation and because of that she and her husband's names were nowhere to be found on the guest list.

The second grace talk involves the action of a loving God, doing for us what we could not and would not do for ourselves but it also involves the action of the one who has been offered this gracious gift and returning His invitation thus justifying, making right, the one who is invited to receive it... That's you and me.

The name of this talk is Justifying Grace and my name is Jeff Belt.

Justifying Grace tells the story of how an individual accepts the relationship that God offers to each of us. Note that I said the relationship of unconditional love and grace that God offers to us. It is God who has taken the first step and provided a way through which each of us can be in a personal relationship with Him. Each of us needs to remember that from the very beginning **all that God created was good**. That included the relationship He had established with the first man and woman.

**That relationship was shattered when the first couple made wrong choices that went against or** **disobeyed God’s will** for them and as a result it brought about separation from the One who truly loves us and it as well diminished us as humans.

**Out of God’s grace and because we are created after God’s image and likeness to be in a** **relationship with Him, NOTHING else will satisfy us, save a relationship with Him**. **Thus the** **central theme of the all the Scriptures is the God who made us and loves us calling us back** **into a relationship with Him**. At the height of this calling us back into a relationship with Him, God sends the Son, **Jesus the Christ, to show us that relationship and calls us to accept that** **personal relationship that He offers us**. There are two passages of scripture that speaks of this and they are **the Gospel of Matthew chapter 11 verse 28, that is Matthew 11:28 and in the** **Gospel of Luke chapter 19 verses 1-10, that is Luke 19:1-10.**

In the Prevenient Grace talk you heard this morning you heard about the God who is like the Hound of Heaven on a constant pursuit doing everything He can to show you just how much He loves you and your need for Him by revealing how lost and powerless you really are and then to offer you a new relationship, a new beginning, through His Son Jesus Christ.

In my own story I had grown up going to church at different times in my life. I had heard some of the stories of the Bible. I had seen a number of the biblical movies that had been released at that time, such as “The Robe and “The Greatest Story Ever Told”. God used these movies to show me how much he loved me by sending His Son to die on the cross. But it wasn't until, at the age of 19, that with the help of God I began to put all of this together. I had understood the historical Jesus and what he had done on the cross but I had not personalized what he had done because of me and for me.

I began to see my need for a Savior and my powerlessness to change my life. For the first time I realized that God through Christ loved Jeff Belt. The result of that was that I invited Christ into my life. As I grew in my relationship with Christ and began to read the Scriptures I realized that I had been made right, I was justified in God's sight because of what Jesus had done for me. I discovered that it was not based on how good a person I had been, because I was not, or could ever be and not based upon my church attendance or anything that I could possibly do or ever become. **So God out of His grace and graciousness offers us this relationship through His Son** **Jesus Christ and justifying grace is at work in the moment that we say yes to that relationship and** **it then changes everything.**

It is out of God's grace, His unmerited favor that He has reached out to us and reaches out to us through His prevenient grace and brings us to the cross of His Son to show us our sin and to offer us forgiveness and to declare us righteous in His sight. A significant part of God's justifying grace is our turning around, our awakened awareness, our eyes being opened to our own sin that stands between us and God. And we are then justified, made right by God when we respond to His offer through Christ. This awareness of our lack and need in our own lives is illustrated in this cartoon that I came across many years ago.

Two cows were grazing alongside a highway when a tank truck of milk on its way to the distributor happened to pass by. On one side of the truck in big read letters was a sign that read Pasteurized, Homogenized, Standardized, Vitamin A and D added. One cow turned to the other and remarked "Makes you feel sort of inadequate, doesn’t it."

In order for each of us to be justified in God’s sight we first must see that we are inadequate to please God, please others, to face our problems and to change our own lives. In many ways it is like an individual who is an alcoholic. They cannot begin to recover until they admit that they are an alcoholic. And until they do they cannot begin to recover. We do the same. It begins by us seeing ourselves as God sees us.

The apostle Paul paints for us a picture of this inadequacy in one of his letters that he wrote to the Roman Christians. Please write these Scripture references down. In Romans chapter 3 verses 10-18, that is Romans 3:10-18 it says that there is no one righteous, or right before God, not even one. In fact no one even understands God’s holy nature and because of their sinful nature no seeks after God. For all have turned away, they have all together become worthless, there is no one who does well as God defines good, not even one.

Paul in another part of this letter to the Christian Romans again in chapter 3 verse 23, that is Romans 3: 23 says the same thing but in a little different way, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God". In other words because we have sinned, chosen to go our own way apart from God, each of us cannot attain His original intent that He had chosen for us.

And because of this we stand condemned by a Holy God that demands justice for the wrongs

committed but at the same time desires a relationship with each person that has ever or will ever come into this world. But due to our sin do not seek the relationship that He so desires.

Paul drives this point home when he says in Romans chapter 6 and verse 23, that is Romans 6:23, "For the wages or payment for sin is death, but here comes the grace of God, “but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

In order for God to satisfy His justice in regards to our sin, which broke the relationship He so desires with us, He sent His One and Only Son, Jesus the Christ. One of the most familiar passages from the Bible speaks of this in John's gospel the third chapter and verse sixteen, that is John 3:16" For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son and that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life".

Even though each of us has painted ourselves into a corner God had a plan to recover us from that corner we find ourselves in and bring us back to Himself. And He did it by becoming

human and entering into the same world that we live.

Once again I refer to the apostle Paul in his letter to a church at Corinth. It is Second Corinthians chapter 5, verse 21. That is 2 Corinthians 5:21 "God made Jesus who knew no sin, who did not sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

In other words Jesus Christ who was pure before a Holy God took upon himself our sin and in exchange He gave us His right standing before God. This whole process of seeing ourselves as God sees, acknowledging our own sin and accepting **God’s gift of salvation through Jesus is both instantaneous and continuous. You can say: I was saved by grace, I am saved by grace, and I** **will be saved by grace.**

I mentioned earlier in this talk that it was when I had encountered the true Jesus of the Scriptures that I came to realize my own sin and what He had done for me when He died on the cross. I knew then that Jesus went to the cross for me and in my place took the penalty for my sin upon Him.

Another way of looking at this is that justifying grace always is equal to the cross. For it is at the cross that Jesus gave his life to show God’s love for us. One of the passages from the Bible that really touches my heart is found in Romans chapter 5 and verse 8.That is Romans 5:8, " God commended His love toward us, in this way, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." What a gracious God to sacrifice the very best He had to pay for what our sin has done through His Son Jesus Christ.

**As you look at the cross you will see both a vertical and horizontal component to it.** **On** **the vertical piece where Jesus hung and sacrificed his life we see that this sacrifice restores our** **relationship with God. As you look at the horizontal piece where Jesus had his arms** **outstretched you will notice that his sacrifice restores our relationship with one another.**

The picture that I have painted thus far is this: God created us to be in relationship with Him but sin has broken this relationship. God’s justice must be satisfied because He is a Holy God. The wrong has to be paid in full. And out of God's grace, His unmerited favor, sent Jesus His Son to do for us what we could not and would not do for ourselves to pay for the penalty of our sin through the sacrificing of Him on the cross.

God has done all that He can do to make things right between Himself and us. He has paid for

our sin through the sacrifice of His' Son's life and like the opera singer in my opening story we have a choice to make. We have to respond to the gift that God has given to us.

In the Book of Acts chapter 7 verse 30, that is Acts 7:30, Luke the author writes, “God commands that all people everywhere to repent, to turn from walking away from God and to now turn and walk towards Him, to turn way from our sin and to accept the offer He has made us through His Son Jesus Christ." This repentance that is spoken of in this verse means a change of our minds and our wills that first agrees with God's assessment of ourselves as being sinful and to accept with no conditions the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as payment for our sin.

God offers each of us the opportunity to return the invitation, to say yes to His offer. And when we turn away from our sin and accept the offer of Jesus Christ we are immediately made right in God's sight, in other words we have experienced His justifying grace.

**When we say yes to God’s offer in Jesus Christ a conversion takes place in our hearts and it continues as we continue to say yes to Jesus every day. This saying yes enables us to:**

**Understand ourselves better, acknowledge our need for Christ, understand God better, seek** **God’s will in our lives and to practice essential spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible-reading,** **meditation, and obedience as we give God our wills.**

Thus it is our faith in the work of Jesus' sacrifice that justifies us, makes us righteous in God's

sight. Again the apostle Paul says it well in Romans chapter 3 and verse 24.That is Romans 3:24

"And are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ." It is by grace through faith that we are saved, not by our own goodness or good deeds, that we are justified in God's s and in exchange He gave us His right standing before God.

**Remember this Justified simply means "Just If I’d Never Sinned”**

The result of us being justified by God's grace is that now we can be at peace with God because our relationship has been restored, God has forgiven us, and in God's sight we are as righteous as His very own Son, Jesus Christ.

As you have heard me share with you this afternoon this appeal is very reasonable, I hope that the words that I have shared have touched your emotions, but thankfully responding to God out of faith is not based on your feelings. And the wonderful thing is that God does not twist your arm or usurp your will because God's appeal to you is born out of His unconditional love for each of you.

It is God's grace that enables you to bring about change in your life and when you say yes to

God, to His offer, it will be necessary for you to continue to grow in your relationship with God by spending time with Him, listening and talking to Him and by reading His word. You will hear much more about this during this weekend.

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My time with you has been to show you another aspect or part of God's graciousness, His

grace that justifies you. Let me close by sharing another example of His justifying grace with you.

This happened to me about eight years ago. I was pulled over by a Zanesville City police officer for not coming to a complete stop at a stop sign. When I pulled over and the officer stopped his car he approached my car and I must admit at the time I was not sure why he had stopped me at that time. He wanted the usual license and registration. He went back to his car and wrote out a nice ticket for me to pay. I must admit that at the time I was shocked and somewhat upset that this had happened. And by no means had the officer shown me any grace whatsoever. I did get the just penalty for not coming to a complete stop as I should have. However, what if the officer had shown me grace? What would that look like?

Well, he pulls me over and comes to my car and gets the info that he needs. But now he tells me to make sure that I have come to a complete stop and lets me go. That's not really grace either, although at the time that would have been wonderful to me. How about he writes out the ticket but cuts the fine in half. Really that is not showing grace to me either.

This is what grace, true grace would look like. He pulls me over, gets the info that He needs. He radios the info into the police station. He comes back to my car with the ticket in hand. He then proceeds to tell me what I had done wrong and hands me the ticket with the full amount of the fine in plain view. He then takes back the ticket. He signs his own name on the ticket on line where it states guilty as charged. He then turns in the ticket with his name on it and pays the full amount of the fine with his own money. Now that’s grace, God's wonderful grace.

This is what God has done for each one of us. He paid the penalty for what we had done wrong. He signed His name on the line where it says guilty as charged and paid the fine with the blood of His own Son.

I simply want to say that God loves you. Let me say it again, God loves you. No matter what you have done, God loves you. No matter who you have hurt, God loves you. No matter how many times you have fallen, God loves you.

Do you and I deserve it? Do we deserve this incredible gift called His justifying grace? Not

really, but God in His unconditional, unending love, has offered it to us that we may have the opportunity to dwell, live with Him for eternity.

Oooooohh... Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found was blind but now I see.

One of the many tangible ways that you are experiencing God's grace this week is through the prayers and support of so many. Others who have taken this walk that you are on this weekend have given countless hours of their time, because this walk means so much to them as they have been touched by God's grace.

These expressions of their grace that I have in my hand are just a few of the words of encouragement that they would like for me to share with you at this time. I would like to read just a few of them and they will then be posted for you to take a look at during this weekend. [Read the Agape letters.] **DeColores**