

Meditations on the Gospel

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[0:00] On my refrigerator at home, there's a parenting paper that says this, today I will pray to speak words that are only strong words. Words that make these children feel strong. Grace words. Grace is the only non-toxic air.

All other words I breathe are death words. And I love that. Grace is the only non-toxic air. All the other words I breathe are death words.

And this afternoon I want to speak to you some strong grace words. And that's what you need. That's what you moms and dads need. That's what you husbands and wives need. That's what your children need. That's what sinners need. That's what saints need.

And so tonight, this afternoon, I want to meditate on the gospel with you for a few minutes. And my hope and my prayer is that it will be a breath of heaven to you. That you'll be encouraged with it. Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Galatians chapter 2, verses 15 and 16. Galatians chapter 2, verses 15 and 16. I'll warn you right at the very beginning, this is not really an exposition on these verses. It's more of a meditation on them.

[1:27] These are Paul's words to Peter. These are Paul's words to Peter. And these are Paul's words to the Galatians. And these are God's words to us. The Galatians had stumbled in the gospel. They'd fallen away. And they needed to hear strong, grace words. And while Paul is very firm with the Galatians, he's also very sweet in calling them back to the gospel. So let's read verses 15 and 16.

We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we too have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law. Because by observing the law, no one will be justified.

The key word in Christ. The key word in Christ is justified. The key word in this passage is justified. So we're talking about, Paul is talking about justification, and that's a very familiar word. And when the Bible talks about justification, it's talking about how we are made right with God. And many of you know that. And I hope that it's not something that you've grown callous to.

It means that God is saying to you, woman, daughter, you are right with me. Son, you are right with me. All of your sins are forgiven.

All the righteousness that you need, you have. All that you need to stand in my presence, you have. All that you need to be right with me, you have. Justification answers the deepest need that we as sinners have.

[3:09] And that's to be right with a God who is completely holy, to be right with him. And we've all sinned. We've fallen short of the glory of God. And in justification, God restores us back to that place.

So you can think of it like this. In the beginning, God declared the heavens and the earth as he was making them. And then when he completely had finished, he said everything was good. It was all good.

Then men fell into sin. And this world, as a result, fell under the curse. And the thing that used to be good is no longer good. And we who used to be good in God's sight are no longer good. But justification brings us back to the place where God can declare to us again, you are good. You're right.

So, how were you justified? How were you justified? You'll notice from our passage, it was not by doing anything.

It was not by doing anything. It was all by faith in Jesus Christ. You were simply justified, or you were justified simply by believing in Christ.

[4:21] It had nothing to do with your performance or your law keeping. Listen to how Martin Luther put this. When we are dealing with justification, it's not the time or the place to speak about the law.

The question is, who is Christ? And what benefit has he brought us? Christ is not the law. He's not what I have done or what the law has done.

He is not my love, my obedience, my poverty. He's the Lord of life and death, a mediator, the Savior, the Redeemer of those who are under law and sin.

So, did you hear that? Who is Christ? Well, Christ is not what I've done. We're justified because of him, and Christ is not anything that I've done.

Christ is not my obedience. He's not my love, my sorrow. He's not even my repentance. Christ is not my good parenting or my self-control.

[5:23] He's not my speaking or my silence. He's not my cheerful disposition or my sorrowful disposition over sin. Christ is not how I look or my physique.

Christ is not my reputation. Christ has nothing to do with what I've done or will do or haven't done. So, why am I justified?

Why does God look upon me? Why does God look upon you and say, you are good, you are right, you're justified? It's all because of Christ. Christ. And we have to come back to this again and again because, like the Galatians, we too slip so easily away from the gospel and start adding our works to the mix.

And, you know, we who know the gospel, we start doing this because it's not something that just people back in Galatia did. It's something that we all do. It's our natural tendency to think about what I need to do or what I haven't done.

And so, it's a very self-centered instead of Christ-centered way of thinking. And we're very good at thinking self-centeredly, aren't we? And so, we fall into works. And so, where does that lead us? Well, it leads us either to pride or to despair.

[6:40] It leads either to boasting if we're succeeding, we're proud that what we're doing, of what we're doing, or it leads to despair because of what we haven't done.

It never leads, it never, ever leads to humble rejoicing. That's what the gospel leads to. It doesn't lead us to pride. It leads us to humility. And it doesn't lead us to despair, it leads us to rejoicing. And so, brothers and sisters, we need to get this into our hearts, that Jesus Christ is the Lord of our conscience. Not the law, not what we have done. So, when you sin, and Satan comes to you, or your conscience latches on to the law and starts accusing you and saying, you're guilty, you're guilty, you're guilty.

Now, there's a right place for that. But oftentimes, Satan is taking the law, and he's using it to beat us up.

He's not taking us to the law so that we come to Christ, so that he beats us up. And so, he tells us we're guilty.

[7:52] But he has no right. He has no right to do that. Because the written code that had stood against us has been snatched out of his hand and nailed to the tree. And so, when Satan demands punishment and Satan demands blood, what do you do?

You point to the tree. You point to the place where there was blood. There was punishment. And you say, you want blood, Satan. You want my head. You want me to be miserable.

There was one who was miserable for me. There was one who took justice for me. So, brothers and sisters, Satan never accuses us of any sin except for a forgiven sin.

He never accuses us of anything except a covered sin. Do what Satan can. Do what we can in scraping our insides out. We can never find any sin that isn't covered in his blood.

And he can't uncover any of our sins in God's sight. They're all covered in the blood of the Lamb. See, one drop of that Lamb's blood. Remember, he was God with us. And one drop of that blood would have covered all the sins of the whole world.

[9:03] But you go to the cross. And the blood flowed out of his hands, out of his feet, out of his back, and his head, and his side.

The fountain was open. The deep of God's love and his mercy, it broke open. And it covered all of our sins. And so, Jesus' death for you was not just barely enough.

It was all that God could ever think to ask. He'll ask no more. So, what are your sins now? What are your sins now?

Our hearts and our pride and our despair and our self-righteousness, we like to make our sins into something bigger than what they actually are.

We like to make them into things that are these God-killing monsters that God just can't deal with. Or that God can't forgive. We like to think that our sins are so bad that God, just no way he could forgive me for this.

[10:01] We think so highly of ourselves. Even in our sin, we think so highly of ourselves and so little of Jesus. But we need to go to the cross, brothers and sisters.

God's heart is satisfied. Take courage. Your sins are forgiven. That was God's word, Jesus' words to the crippled man.

Your sins not in part, but the whole, have been nailed to the cross and you bear them no more. They're buried in his blood. And Satan is defenseless.

He has nothing to say. The weapon that he so loved, the law, has been torn out of his hands. And his accusations have a ring of truth. And they are true to a certain degree, but the idea that we can never be forgiven.

They're nothing before our crucified Lord. And so, who are you now? How does God see you now? He sees you as justified. All of Christ's righteousness has been put on your account.

[11:03] It's yours. It's yours. His work, his love, his faith, his obedience, it's all of yours. It's all of yours. And so, faith seizes Christ as your righteousness.

And so, now, what more could God ask? You have his perfect son as your righteousness. You are perfect in his son. Now, is this just a charade?

You know, like a shell game, a sleight of hand trick, a legal fiction. That, you know, we can say these things about we're righteous and we have all these things. But, you know, really, we're not. Well, not at all. By faith, you are the bride of Christ. And all that Christ has is yours.

And all that you had became his. You see, there's two ways to become rich. There's two ways to become rich. You can go to work or go to school. You can work really hard and get really good grades and interview really well and get a good paying job.

[12:08] And then scrimp and save and make a lot of money. And save it all up and then you'll be rich. That's one way that you can become rich. Or there is another way.

It's a much better way, a much easier way. You can marry a rich man. And that's grace. You could have been living in a hole in the ground and not gone to work a day in your life.

And when you marry a rich man, all that he has is now yours. The mansion is yours. The cars are yours. The servants are yours.

The bank accounts are his. They're yours. So, brothers and sisters, Jesus has taken you to himself. He's married you.

You're the bride of Christ. He took you body and soul. He took all of your sin, all of your poverty, all of your bankruptcy. He took all of your failures and he took all of your flaws.

[13:08] He married you. You know what it's like to marry someone and then you get something unexpected along with it? You marry someone and you think they're perfect. And then it turns out you marry their flaws.

And Jesus, knowing our flaws, married us. And he took everything that belonged to you and he gave you everything that belongs to him. He became poor so that we could become rich.

And so, brothers and sisters, we are rich. This isn't a legal fiction. This isn't a charade, sleight of hand trick. You are rich. When you think of Jesus' righteousness, you should be thinking, that's my righteousness.

We're rich in faith. We're rich in good deeds. We're rich in love and worship. God and Christ has made us rich. So, what does that mean for you practically?

It means tomorrow morning you will wake up and you'll be right where you are. And you won't have to face mothering. You won't have to face a difficult spouse or living with hard children or the troubles that you face.

[14:12] You won't have to face any of those things without resources, without all of Christ for you. So, it means that tomorrow when you're fighting sin and fighting temptation and loneliness, you don't suffer and you don't struggle as one who is poor.

You suffer and struggle as one who is rich in Christ. So, he is the vine and you are the branches. Now, what's the vine's job?

The vine's job is to give the branches what they need. It's to give them the life-giving sap. It's not the job of the branches to support the vine.

Ever think of that? We don't need to support Jesus. It's Jesus' work to support us. Jesus, he's your husband. He's your savior.

He's everything that you need. What else does that mean? That you've been married to Christ and all of his righteousness has become yours. It means that tonight you can look over your day and you can see all your failures.

[15 : 21] You can see all your sin. And you can go to sleep not thinking, I could have done better. I should have done better.

Tomorrow, I'll try harder. There's a place for inspection. But I think it's, we act like orphans.

We act like single people without a rich husband. When all we do is go to sleep thinking about our failures and thinking about how we could try again tomorrow. Bless God. When you go to sleep tonight, you can think, I am a mighty sinner.

But I'm a forgiven sinner. Because it's not my works, it's Christ's works. It's not my prayers, it's Christ's prayers.

It's not my righteousness, it's his righteousness. And so I can go to sleep, and you can go to sleep in peace. Because God is smiling on you for Jesus Christ's sake.

[16 : 21] He smiles as you lay your head down, and you can rest. Well, what does it mean? It means that you can forgive those who have sinned against you. When do we have a hard time forgiving people?

When do we hold grudges? When do we think God is holding a grudge against us? Well, when we forget the gospel.

When we forget that Jesus has paid our billion dollar debt. And so now, I can pay these smaller debts. Because Christ has made me rich.

Out of the joy of this forgiveness, I'm able to forgive those who have sinned against me. You know what? Yes, they have belittled you. When your spouse sins against you, when your children sin against you, and when your boss or your co-worker, whoever sins against you, they do belittle you. It does hurt. And they've wronged you. But think about this. God has exalted you. God has lifted up your head. He has given you righteousness. Christ has loved you.

[17 : 23] And so when grace flows, forgiveness flows. And do you see why every other environment, any other air, is toxic? So when do I hold those grudges?

Well, it's when I think God is holding a grudge against me. If I'm strung out on the wire, if I'm walking the tightrope, and I'm always trying to please God by what I'm doing, as if the hammer's going to fall, if it's all based on my performance, I won't be able to forgive my spouse.

I won't be able to forgive my husband or my wife or my children, because I have to live up to God's exacting standard, and so you should too. And I'll beat myself up when I don't do it, and so you should get beat up too.

But when I'm freely forgiven and freely justified for nothing that I did, for any of my performance or any of my law keeping, when that hits me, that God has loved me wildly, freely, forever and ever, then I can freely forgive those who have sinned against me.

These are small debts compared to my great debt that he has forgiven. So when God's grace flows in your life, it flows out to people.

[18 : 46] It inevitably flows into your relationships, and you love and you forgive. And so grace, this free forgiveness, this free love, this free justification, is the sweet air of heaven that we need to breathe in and breathe out.

Your spouse needs you to breathe in the gospel. Because if you're not breathing it in, you're not going to breathe out grace to them.

If you're breathing in and out your deadly air of self-righteousness and self-confidence, that will either make you an unbearable taskmaster or a terrible mope, depending on how you're doing that day.

It destroys families. It ruins marriages. It kills friendships. It destroys churches. It ruins you. It's toxic. And it poisons you, and it poisons everything it touches.

Only grace is not toxic. So what do you need to do? Well, you need to get into those things that we call the means of grace.

[20:02] There are certain places, there are certain fountains, where God's grace flows down to us. There are certain places where we can meet the lover of our soul and receive his love.

And you know them. The preaching of the gospel. The preaching of the word. Prayer. The Bible. Fellowship.

Communion. Fasting. And you might be saying, I've tried those things. I've tried.

Those things don't work for me. I understand they probably work for other people. They don't work for me. I don't feel differently. I don't feel hope. I don't feel like grace is getting to me.

They don't seem to work like that for me. I don't know why that is. But can I suggest that maybe it's because you are treating them as works and not hiding places to meet your lover?

[21:11] You've been treating them as a duty and not a delight. And that's the perversity of our hearts and the pride of our hearts. We turn dates with Jesus into a job that we have to do.

And so our wretched souls will, in our self-righteousness, take prayer from a place where we meet God and find the help that we need into either something that we're good at or we're bad at.

Something we have to obey in or we disobey in. One more thing to bind our conscience. One more thing to make God mad at me. One more duty that we have to do and I don't do it well.

None of us pray well and there it is. Or we aren't good Christians and we turn our Bible reading into some sort of law to keep. Or God frowns on us all day long.

I didn't have my devotions. I feel all out of sorts and I don't know if God loves me. Who could ever find joy in doing something that you have to do or you'll be out of favor with God?

[22:18] Can I say something bold? That means take this with a grain of salt. You don't have to read your Bible. For 1,500 years, Christians didn't have personal Bibles to read.

And for 1,500 years, God wasn't mad at His people. God wasn't saying, you know what, their righteousness is, it's okay, but it's not good enough. For 1,500 years, God smiled on His people because they were justified by faith alone and not by works.

For 1,500 years, Christ clothed His people with righteousness and God smiled on them. So brothers and sisters, God is on your side.

We saw that this morning. God is committed to you. God loves you and you're reading your Bible or you're not reading your Bible or not praying. It doesn't have anything to do with His commitment to love you.

It doesn't have anything to do with that. He chose you in Christ before you ever read your Bible one time because you loved Him. He chose you in Christ before you were even born.

[23:29] He sent His Son to die for you when you were ungodly, when you couldn't care less about reading, when you couldn't care less about praying, when you couldn't care less about loving His people. Grace has won.

That's the message of the gospel. Grace has won. And so you are free. And you should, if that reaches you, that should make you want to go to the places where you drink in this grace. doesn't that make you want to feel more of this love? This love that didn't have anything to do with me observing the law or any of my good works?

And so if it does, then go to the means of grace, but don't go there to be righteous. Go there because you are righteous. So go to your Bibles and scrounge around in the Word until you hit a delicious bit and you stay there and you drink in the water.

No one said you have to read the Bible, the whole Bible every year. No one ever said you had to read a chapter a day. Find the water, stay at the well, and you drink until you feel and know God's love.

[24:40] Listen to those gospel songs. Go to the throne of grace, not because you have to, but because Jesus has promised to meet you there and give you the help that you need. You don't have to do it to be righteous.

You already are righteous for Christ's sake. You're already righteous because Jesus loved you and lived for you and died for you. So breathe in God's free grace and then breathe out God's grace.

What do your children need to hear, parents? They need to hear that Jesus loves sinners. They don't need 10,000 laws. They need to hear the gospel that God in Christ loves sinners.

What do your wild, disobedient, rebellious children need to hear? That Jesus loves wild, disobedient people. He loved the prodigal son.

Remember the story? And he went and ran to meet him. So tell your children about that. Tell them that Jesus loves prodigal sons. What do your perfect little righteous children need?

[25:45] Some of you are blessed with those, or cursed. these children that are so willing to obey you, so self-righteous. What do they need to hear that Jesus loves little, perfect, self-righteous children?

Remember, the father goes out to that son who stayed home and had slaved away. He came out. Everyone is invited to the feast. So breathe in God's grace and breathe out God's grace.

What does your husband and wife or wife need to hear? They are very sinful and yet they have been very loved. You want to have a wonderful marriage?

Then you meet as sinners under the cross. You meet as sinners under the cross and you'll have a wonderful relationship. It won't be perfect because you're sinners. We have a mighty Savior. So breathe in God's grace and breathe out God's grace to your brothers and sisters. There's people here who are broke and hurting. They feel isolated. They feel afraid and they feel sad.

[26:51] Self-righteousness says I've done enough. Done enough. I don't have to take on their problems. I have enough of my problems and I'm managing on my own on those.

But grace says if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ if you have any comfort from His love if you have any fellowship with the Spirit and any tenderness and compassion then your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus who being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but made Himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness and being found in the appearance as a man He humbled Himself and became obedient to death even the death of the cross.

If you've tasted the grace of our Lord Jesus then you can't leave your brothers and sisters suffering alone. Jesus didn't leave you suffering alone. He loved you at great cost to Himself.

He inconvenienced Himself. He sacrificed Himself because He loved you. So then let us love one another.

Let us love one another. Let's pray. Amen. Our Heavenly Father thank You for this time that we can meditate on Your Word.

[28:28] Thank You that Your Word is so full of good news for us that we have been justified freely and forever that Christ's life and death was enough.

His resurrection was our justification that we have been declared right in Your sight our mediator has been accepted our Redeemer has been raised and exalted to the highest throne and so we know that we too sit and we reign with Christ in glory.

We are free from all men and yet we make ourselves servants to all because Christ has loved us and given Himself up for us. I pray that when we start to fall into self-righteousness and works and we start becoming proud and we start isolating ourselves and we start feeling sorry for ourselves and we start doing all the things that come out of our sinful hearts I pray that You would bring the Gospel to us this week pray that You would give my brothers and sisters freedom in the Gospel and bless them with it even as You have give them knowledge that they might know the height and the depth and the width and the length of Your love that You have had for us in Christ Jesus this mammoth love that will take forever and ever to get to the bottom of will You pour that out into their hearts through the Gospel through the demonstration once again of Christ dying for sinners of whom

I am the worst will you please help us to own our sins so that we can come to the cross and find forgiveness in Jesus name Amen