

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Jesus' Death Shows Us How to Live

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:21

Code: 80-62

This morning as we meditate together on the significance of this season of the year I want to invite you to turn in your Bible to 1 Peter chapter 2. I want to call your attention to one verse, verse 21. And then I want to speak to you on the subject, Jesus' death shows us how to live.

In 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 21 we read this: "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps."

There is little question in anyone's mind that the life of Christ is an example. But I daresay most people would not assume that the death of Christ is an example and yet that is exactly what Peter says. That Christ in suffering and dying has left us an example that we are to follow. Now we understand how we can follow the example of Christ in His life. The Bible tells us that He was the perfect person, the perfect man, that He knew no sin, that He was without sin, that He committed no sin, that He was holy, that He was innocent, that He was undefiled, that He was separate from sinners and that whatever a man could be He was. And so in life He is the perfect example. In fact the Bible says that looking at His life we are to be holy as He was holy. We are to be pure as He was pure. We are to be gentle as He was gentle. We are to be wise as He was wise. We are to be humble as He was humble. We are to be obedient to God as He was obedient to God. We are to be serving as He served. We are to be from the world as free as He was free from the world.

We understand that the life of Christ was an exemplary life. Even a French atheist once said that Jesus is the model of all human virtue. Few people would argue that Jesus lived an exemplary life. But the issue before us in this verse that Peter gives us is not the example in His living but the example in His dying. And that is so crucial because the truth of the matter is that you learn more about the character of a person in their dying than you do in their living.

You say, "What do you mean by that?" What I mean is to say this, that the truest revelation of you and me comes in the time of our deepest trial. Trials reveal character. Adversity reveals virtue or the lack of it. And the greater the trouble and the more severe the adversity, the purer the revelation of what we are. I am not convinced that I know a person whom I only know in the good times, I know a person whom I know in the difficult times, in the trying times, under stress, under duress. That's the truest purest revelation of what you are. And since that it is true it is also true that we find then the purest truest revelation of the character of Jesus Christ in the time of His greatest trial. And that was

the time of His dying. And we find that in His dying He is as perfect as in His living. And His dying only confirms the pure perfect character manifest in His living.

But in His dying He gives us revelations of His character that teach us how to live. I think for the most part we look at His dying and we say, "Well, His dying shows us the significance of sin, it shows us how we had to have a Savior pay the price for our iniquity. His death was for us a substitutionary death by which He took our place, died our death, paid for our sin." But Peter says there's something more. He died not only for us but He died as an example to us. He died to show us how to live. That's what I want you to focus on this morning...the example of Christ in His death.

Now how are we going to know anything about Him in His death? How is His character revealed? It cannot be revealed in something He does because He is nailed to the cross and cannot do anything. It cannot be revealed to us in something that He thinks because we can't read His thoughts. Therefore the only thing we can know about the character of Christ in His dying is in what He says. And through the years, year after year after year, since perhaps the earliest years of the church people have celebrated the Easter season by looking at the seven last sayings of Christ. And that's exactly what I want us to do this morning for a reason that perhaps you have never entertained before, and that is that they reveal the truest purest character of Christ and they teach us how to live. What He said in dying became principles for living. And so we flow through the seven last sayings of Christ.

The first of His sayings is recorded in Luke 23 and verse 34. You don't need to look it up, it's familiar to you. The first thing He said from the cross was this, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." And in so saying He revealed His character. The principle is this, He died forgiving those who sinned against Him...He died forgiving those who sinned against Him. That, dear friends, is a principle for living. Jesus in His dying revealed a forgiving heart, even against those who took His life. Think about it. Men had done their very worst. The one by whom the world was made had come into the world but the world knew Him not. The Lord of glory had tabernacled among men but He was not wanted by men. The eyes which sin had blinded saw in Him no beauty that He should be desired. At His birth there was no room in the inn which foreshadowed the treatment He was to receive at the hands of men all His life and in His death. Shortly after His birth Herod sought to slay Him. And this hostility was only the beginning of a life long hostility which He experienced. Again and again His enemies sought His destruction. And now as we come to the time of the cross their vile treachery has reached its climax. The Son of God has yielded Himself into their hands and they are in the process of executing Him. They had gone through the motions of a mock trial with trumped up false accusations. And though the judge admitted he found no fault in him, he nevertheless yielded to the insistent clamoring of the crowd that hated Him and agreed to His crucifixion. No ordinary deed could satisfy earth or hell and so the implacable foes of Jesus made sure that He died the most painful intense shaming death imaginable, that of hanging on a cross.

And as He hangs on the cross the victim, as it were, from the human perspective of the hatred, animosity, bitterness, vengeance and vile wickedness of a world of men and a host of demons, what is His response? What is His reply? We would have expected as human beings that He might have cried out to God for pity, that He might have shaken His fist in the face of God as one unworthy of such an execution. We might have assumed that He would cry malediction or vengeance upon His killers. But He does none of that. The first thing He says is a prayer. The first prayer He prays is a prayer of forgiveness for the very people who have taken His life. And underlying His prayer for forgiveness is an understanding of the wretchedness of the human heart. And He expresses it in the words, "They do not know what they are doing."

You see, the Lord Jesus understood the sinfulness of men. He understood the blindness of the human heart. He understood the ignorance of depravity. He knew that they neither understood the identity of the victim, nor the enormity of the crime. They understood neither and He knew it. They did not know they were killing the prince of life. They did not know they were executing their creator. They did not know that they were slaughtering the Messiah, the Lord Christ, the Savior. And the deed and the expression of Christ's statement, "They don't know what they're doing," shows how much the carnal mind is at enmity against God.

But the truth of the matter is they needed forgiveness. Because the only way they would ever be ushered into the presence of holy God, the only way they would ever know the joy of walking with God and being with God, the only way they would ever experience heaven, the only way they would ever experience the joy that God gives one who was in fellowship with Him was if their sins were forgiven. And so He prays along the line of their profoundest need. He prays for these wicked murderers to be forgiven. He is more concerned about their forgiveness than He is vengeance upon them for what they've done to Him. He is more concerned about what happens to them than what has happened to Him. He is praying for the people who killed Him to be forgiven for doing what they've done to Him. This is the magnanimous heart of Christ. This is the truest revelation of a pure heart, for a pure heart seeks no vengeance. Peter says, "Being reviled He reviled not again, being insulted He did not insult back but rather He prayed for them who took His life."

Forgiveness is man's greatest need. Forgiveness is man's only way to enter into fellowship with God. Forgiveness is man's only way to be let out of hell. Forgiveness is man's only hope for blessing. Forgiveness is thus what Jesus prayed for. And the first important lesson which everyone needs to learn is that we are sinners and as sinners we are unfit for the presence of a holy God. And because of that it is vain for men to seek noble ideals. It is vain for men to form good resolutions. It is vain for men to adopt formal excellent rules to live by until the question of sin has been dealt with. It is of no use to attempt to develop a beautiful character and aim to do that which will meet with God's approval while there is no relationship between you and God and while there is sin between you and God. It is like fitting shoes to feet that are paralyzed, or getting glasses for eyes that are blind, it is irrelevant.

The question of the forgiveness of sin is the most basic fundamental vital question of all. It does not matter that I am highly respected in the circle of my friends if I am yet in my sins. It does not matter that I have attained a level of human goodness if I am still in my sins. And so the great truth here is that Jesus understood the deep need of man and He understood that the only way man could ever escape hell and know blessing was if His sins were forgiven, and it did not matter to Him that the sin for which He pleaded was the sin of killing Him. In fact, it was for the very sin of killing Him that He was dying. And what a beautiful picture do we see of the principle, He died praying for the forgiveness of those who sinned against Him. There, my friend, is a principle for living. There is a way to live your life, being more concerned with God forgiving the sin of the one who sinned against you than that you should receive vengeance. That's the way to live your life.

Stephen learned that. Stephen, that saint of God, who was stoned to death for loving Christ and preaching Christ as he was being crushed under the bloody stones in Acts 7 and verse 60 it says he said to God, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." He was praying for their forgiveness, too.

How should you live? You should live with a heart of forgiveness toward those who wrong you, being more concerned that they be forgiven than that you get vengeance.

The second word of Christ on the cross is recorded in Luke 23:43. The second utterance that Jesus made from the cross was this, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in paradise." You remember that there were two thieves crucified with Christ, one on the right hand and one on the left. One of those thieves said to Jesus, "Remember me when You come into Your Kingdom." To which Jesus replied, "Today you shall be with Me in paradise." And that teaches us the second great principle. Jesus died bringing the truth of eternal life to a damned soul. Jesus died bringing the truth of eternal life to a damned soul.

That's the way to live your life. Jesus in His dying shows His character and His life commitment was to bring men to God...was to bring people to paradise. And He was doing it in His dying as He had done it in His living.

It is quite remarkable and quite dramatic how this man came to trust in Christ. After all, look at the scene. What is there about Jesus Christ that is at all convincing? What is there at this particular occasion in the life of Christ that's going to convince you that He's the Christ of God, the Savior of the world, the Messiah, the King? Certainly not the circumstances. This is no victor, this is a victim from the human viewpoint. After all, this is one who is dying because He is totally rejected. The society to which He has come has no interest in Him at all. There is no one saying, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." There is no one yet affirming that this in fact is the Son of God, that happens later. Even His friends have forsaken Him. The people to whom He has come hate Him. He is weak and in disgrace. He is in a position of shame. His enemies are triumphing. His crucifixion

is regarded as totally inconsistent with anything related to the Messiah. His lowly condition is a stumbling block to the Jews from the very first and the circumstances of His death can only intensify that. In fact, the thief speaks to Christ and Christ to him before any of the supernatural phenomena occurs that might have convinced him that this was a work of God. The rocks have not split, the earth has not quaked. The darkness has not come. The graves have not opened. The tombs have not released their victims. The centurion has not said, "This truly was the Son of God." None of that has happened yet.

In other words, in the most unfavorable, unconvincing circumstances imaginable this man is convinced that this is the Savior. He says to the other thief as they discuss the situation, the thief is casting insults at Jesus, and the one thief says to Him, "Why are you doing that, this man has done nothing?" And thus he affirmed Christ's sinlessness. He has done nothing wrong, the text actually says. He was convinced of His sinlessness.

Then he turns to Jesus and says, "Remember me." What does he mean by that? He is pleading for forgiveness. So he not only understands Christ's sinlessness, he understands His Saviorhood. He knows that this is the one who can bring him to the Kingdom, the Savior. And then he says, "Remember me when You come." Therefore he is affirming His resurrection and Second Coming. He knows that death isn't the end. And then the thief says, "When You come in Your Kingdom," and he also affirms His sovereignty. There he is on the cross, crucified next to Jesus Christ and in the most unlikely circumstances he sees the sinlessness, the Saviorhood, the sovereignty and the Second Coming of Christ.

Now how so? How can he see that? And the answer is very very simply this, it is not a work of man, salvation, it is a work of God...it is a work of God. And what you see there is the sovereign saving work of God. God moved on his heart to convince him of those things. And, beloved, I remind you that instead of attributing the salvation of lost sinners to the matchless grace of God, many professing Christians seek to account for salvation by the cleverness of human influences, instrumentalities and circumstances...not so...not so. Some think it was the preacher. Some think it was the person who was the individual who shared the gospel. Some think salvation is the direct result of prayer. It is not. It is the indirect result of all of that and the direct result of God's intervening grace. It didn't matter what the circumstances were. It didn't matter what might be negative. When God shattered the darkness of that thief's heart, he believed. But nonetheless it was through the instrumentality of Christ who was sensitive to be used of God to bring a damned soul to salvation.

It's always so with Him. The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost, Luke 19:10 says. Paul writing to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:15 says, "Christ came to save sinners." And that's what He's doing on the cross. What an example. He died forgiving those who sinned against Him and He died bringing the truth of eternal life to a damned soul. Beloved, may I submit to you that that's how to live? That's how to live. That's the truest revelation of what was in His heart.

The third saying of Christ on the cross is found in John 19 verses 26 and 27. On that occasion in John 19:26 and 27 Jesus said this, "Woman, behold your Son," and then He said, "Behold your mother." What is this about? Well the principle here is very simple. Jesus died expressing selfless love. Did you get that? Jesus died expressing selfless love. You see, standing at the foot of the cross was a little group of five people, different than the crowd, the throng, the multitude, the mad mob, different than the chief priests and the scribes and elders. There was this little group. They were huddled around the foot of the cross. Who were they? Well there was John, the only man that's named, John the Apostle. And then there were four women. There was Mary, Mary the mother of our Lord...Mary who by now realized the full force of that prophetic word spoken 30 years before by Simeon when he said her heart would be pierced through by this child; Mary who had all the love a mother could hold for an absolutely perfectly sinless son; Mary who is now hurt and pained and baffled and paralyzed, yet bound by love to the cross; Mary who stands there without strength yet with no hysteria; Mary without wailing and without fainting and yet suffering in weak silence, staring at the beloved Son, there is Mary. Then there is her sister, the Bible says...possibly Salome, the mother of James and John. And then there is Mary the wife of Cleophas who was probably her sister-in-law and then there is Mary Magdalene, her dear friend out of whom Jesus had cast the demons.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

And so four women, three named Mary. Fitting, isn't it, that the word "Mary" means bitterness? Three Marys, a sister and John. Jesus was crucified close to the ground and it is reasonable to assume that they could have touched Him and perhaps they did. They were near enough to Him because He was so close to the ground that they could have heard Him speak, though He spoke in soft tones. And what does He say? He says, "Woman, behold your son." What's the point of that? Woman is Mary His mother. You say, "Why doesn't He call her mother?" Because that relationship is over now and she is not His mother. Once He began His ministry He identified her as woman in John 2 at the wedding at Cana. And now she is woman in the sense that she must look to Him not as her son but as her Savior. But He says to her, "Woman, behold your son." He's not calling attention to Himself because then He turns to John and says, "John, behold your mother." What is He doing? He is giving His mother into the care of John. He is saying, "Mary, John from now on is your son." "John, Mary from now on is yours to care for." He commits His mother to the care of John. As He is dying His mother is on His heart. Out of that little crowd His mother was the neediest of all. It is very likely that Joseph had by this time died. He disappears very early from the scene of gospel history and is no doubt dead or He wouldn't have had to make such a commitment. So Jesus could not commit him to Joseph...commit her to Joseph. He could not commit her either to His brothers, and He did have some brothers and sisters, but in John chapter 7 verse 5 it says they didn't believe in Him and He was not about to commit the care of His believing mother into the hands of His unbelieving half brothers

and sisters.

And so out of compassion He commits Mary to John and John to the care of Mary. And what does this teach us? This is selfless love. Here out of the heart of one who is occupied with the weight of the world's sins, here out of the heart of one who is experiencing the most stupendous agony imaginable under the wrath of almighty God, far greater internal pain than the external pain, in the midst of all of this sin bearing His sympathy is directed towards somebody else...truly this is the purity of His character coming to the surface. This is how we are to live. Never so...mark it now...never so overwhelmed with our own pain that we lose sight of the needs of others. That's a great principle for living. Never so preoccupied with our own hurt that we miss the needs of those around us. Oh the magnificence of looking not on our own things but the things of others...the magnificence of selfless love.

How are we to live? Forgiving those who sin against us, bringing the truth of eternal life to damned souls, and expressing selfless love to others...perhaps even when they have less pain than we have. The fourth word from the cross is recorded in Matthew 27:46, this has the most pathos of all, Jesus said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" What does this tell us? What lesson do we learn? What principle? This, Jesus died understanding the seriousness of sin. He died resenting the implications of sin, is another way to say it. He died resenting, refusing, rejecting the implications of sin. What implications? That sin separates from God. "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" That word "forsaken" is one of the most tragic in the English language, one of the most painful words that anyone can ever speak, to be forsaken, to be left alone and desolate. And when coupled with the opening statement, "My God, My God," we see that it is a forsaking out of intimacy. "My God, My God," with whom I have had eternal unbroken fellowship, "why have You forsaken Me?" It is against the background of an eternal intimacy that the forsaking has its profoundest significance. You see, sin could do...now mark it...sin could do what nothing else in the universe could do. Men could not separate the Father from the Son...demons could not separate the Father from the Son...Satan could not separate the Father from the Son...but sin separated the Father from the Son. It is the most devastating reality in the universe for it separates from God. And He experienced it.

He who was in the Father and the Father in Him, He who was one with the Father and the Father one with Him, He who had enjoyed eternally uninterrupted perfect communion within the trinity is now forsaken by God. Why? Because He's bearing sin and sin separates. God is too holy to look on sin, to pure to behold iniquity, says the prophet Habakkuk. Sin alienates from God.

And, beloved, that's what marks the climax of His suffering. The soldiers had cruelly mocked Him, the soldiers had arrayed Him with a crown of thorns, they had scourged Him and buffeted Him. The soldiers went so far as to spit upon His face and pluck out the hairs of His beard. The soldiers had given Him suffering beyond description but He had suffered in silence without response. They had pierced His hands, they had pierced His feet and yet He endured the cross despising the shame. The

vulgar crowd had taunted Him. The thieves were crucified beside Him had flung their vile epithets into His face yet He never opened His mouth. But now something way beyond the pain of all of that, God has forsaken Him.

Beloved, may I warn you, don't you ever consider any vicissitude or struggle or trial or trouble in life to even come remotely close to the trouble that your own sin will bring because it will separate you from God. And no trouble when the believer is in communion with God is as severe as the separating impact of sin. Jesus experienced personally the profound pain that sin brings because it separates from God. That's how we're to live. We're to live understanding the implications of our sin that they wrench us away from God. Jesus experienced that. The separation that sin brings, the alienation, the loneliness, the forsakenness, the emptiness, the destruction, the devastation and thus teaches us how to live. We must live understanding the serious implications of sin.

The next word from the cross is recorded in John 19 verse 28. The next thing that Jesus uttered from the cross was the simple statement, "I am thirsty...I am thirsty." That indicates to me that He was experiencing the results of true humanity. That's not a spiritual statement. It doesn't mean He was thirsty for God, it means He was thirsty for something to drink. You see Him there in all His humanity and what lesson does that teach us? Simply this, He teaches us to live expressing the frailties of our humanity. He teaches us to live expressing the frailties of our humanity and our dependence. He needed a drink and He couldn't get it for Himself and He needed somebody to get it for Him. He was not unfamiliar with human need, that's why He is such a sympathetic and faithful high priest. He was fully man. He was thirsty. The New Testament says there were times when He was weary. There were times when He was hungry. There were times when He was sleepy. There were times when He was happy. There were times when He was grieved. There were times when He was groaning. He felt all the emotion of human life. And when He was hungry He needed food, and when He was sleepy He needed a place to lie down, and when He was thirsty He needed a drink and He depended on someone to give it to Him. Sometimes it was Mary and Martha, sometimes it was His mother and here He just cries, "I'm thirsty." And in so crying He shows us that we must live in the same way, we must live willing to show our human weakness and depend on someone else to supply what we need. We must learn to live dependently. We must learn to live sharing needs with others.

How are we to live? We are to live the way He died. We're to live forgiving those who sin against us even if it takes our life, being more concerned about their forgiveness and their relationship with God than about our vengeance. We are to live doing everything we can to be available to God that He might use us in bringing the truth to a damned soul. We are to live loving selflessly others who have less pain than we do and forgetting our own in compassion for theirs. We are to live understanding the serious implications of sin and thus avoiding its tremendous power to separate us from God and thus from blessing. And we are to live willing to acknowledge our human weakness and being dependent on those who can meet our needs.

The sixth saying of Christ and the next to the last one is recorded in John's gospel chapter 19 and verse 30, "It is finished." As He came near the end of His life He made a triumphant pronouncement, *Tetelestai*, it is finished. What principle do you see here? He died completing the work God gave Him to do. He died completing the work God gave Him to do.

May I give you an insight into what I'm saying here? It is one thing to end your life, it is another thing to finish it. It is one thing to have your life over, it is another to have your work done. I couldn't help but think of that as I noted the Los Angeles Marathon. Everybody started and everybody stopped, but not everybody finished. For most people in the world life ends and life is over but the work is not done. When Jesus said "it is finished," He had finished the redeeming work, He had come into the world, He had borne the sins of man, He had provided the sacrificial death, He had done the atoning work, He was finished. He came, it says, to take away sin by the sacrifice of Himself and He did it. He bore our sins in His own body. He condemned sin in the flesh. He defeated Satan with a blow to the head. He finished perfectly what God gave Him to do, and that's the way we must live. We must be more concerned with the work God's called us to do than the pain the work takes us through. He endured the pain because He could see the accomplishment. That's always the price of doing the work of God. It's being able to move through the pain and through the difficulty to do the work.

Paul learned from Jesus and at the end of his life could say, "I have finished my course." It wasn't easy, "I fought a fight to get it done, but I finished." That's the way to live your life. Don't just live it till it's over. Don't just live it till it ends. Live it to finish the work of God that He gives you to do.

Christ in His death gives us one other final principle for living. The last words of Jesus are recorded in Luke 23:46, this is the last statement He said on the cross, "Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit...into Thy hands I commit My spirit." What principle is there here? Listen carefully. Jesus died entrusting Himself to the promised care of God. And that's how you're to live, casting all your care on the one who cares for you. You are to live putting your life and your death and your destiny in the promised care of God. You're to live trusting God...a life of faith, a life of trust. God had promised to raise Him from the dead way back in Psalm 16. God had confirmed that promise to Him as often times Jesus said that He would suffer and die but rise again. And He commits Himself to the promised care of God in His death. That's the only way to life, the only way to live is to commit your life to God. Commit your way unto Him, the psalmist said, trust also in Him, He shall direct your path.

Listen, we are to live a life that totally commits itself to God. Romans 12 says that we are to present to God as a living sacrifice ourselves, our life and trust Him for the outcome. Jesus, says Peter, in 1 Peter 2:23 kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously. He just kept giving Himself to God, saying, "God, I give You Myself, no matter how great the pain, no matter how much hostility, no matter how difficult the task, I commit Myself to You, You will do what's right, You will judge righteously, You will bring it to pass, You will care for Me, You've promised. I'll go to the grave, I'll go

to death, I'll face the teeth of hell, I will face the one who has the keys now, that is Satan, and I'll take them out of His hand. I'll face death." The Bible says He even descended into the pit where the demons are bound after He died. "I'll face it all because I know You will not fail Me, You will lift Me out of the grave, You will lift Me to glory." That's the way to live...with confident trust in God.

And so the Lord Jesus Christ lived a perfect life and He died a perfect death. In His living He gave us an example of how to live and in His dying He gave us maybe the greatest example of how to live. And it seems as though in the words that He said He summed up all the greatest elements of life. And He said here is how to live...you are to live forgiving those who sin against you, you are to life giving the truth to those damned soul who without it are lost, you are to live loving selflessly and being compassionate about those whose pain may be less than yours, and making sure their needs are met, you are to live understanding the serious implications of sin and its separating power, you are to live not afraid to admit your weakness and allow others to meet your need that you might build the strength of fellowship, you are to live not until your life is over but you are to live to finish the work God gives you to do and you are to live and die trusting your life and your death and your soul and your eternity to the hands of a caring promising God. That's how to live.

Now listen very carefully as I bring this to a climax. Jesus lived a perfect life and Jesus died a perfect death. And as a result of that the Bible says God did something. You know what it says God did? It says it over and over and over again in the book of Acts, about a dozen times, God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. And then God set Him at His right hand in glory. Listen carefully. God raised Jesus from the dead and gave Him eternal glory because of His perfect life and His perfect death. That was God's affirmation of the perfection of His Son's person and work. Listen carefully. It is because of the perfection of Christ that He was raised from the dead. God has promised that He would raise those who are perfect.

You say, "Well that doesn't sound like good news to me. As much as I would like to be forgiving of those who sin against me, I'm not. I wish I were. As much as I would like to be sensitive to the lost souls around me to bring them the truth, I'm not always. As much as I wish I were selflessly loving and compassionate toward others whose pain may be less than mine, as much as I wish I applied in my life the implications of sin, but I don't. As much as I would like to admit my human need and be dependent on others, my pride holds me from doing it. As much as I would like to finish God's word, I'm lazy so much of the time. As much as I want to trust God I don't do it, I'm imperfect. I will never rise because the Father will never affirm that kind of life." You're right. You're right. And it is precisely the failure to live like that that sends the whole human race to hell. You can't live like that.

You say, "Well then what hope do I have?" I give you great hope in the words of the Holy Spirit in Hebrews 10:14. It says this, "For by one offering...that is the offering of Himself on the cross...Jesus Christ has perfected for all time those who are set apart."

Did you hear that? Listen carefully, you could never attain to resurrection, neither could I. You could never live a life that God would honor like He honored the life of Christ. You could never die a death that God would honor like He honored the death of Christ. You can never be perfect and that's why you're damned and that's why I'm damned. So do you know what God does through Christ? He gives us the very perfection of Christ. He has perfected us. God gives us the perfection of Christ. He covers us with Christ's perfection. He places us in Christ so that Christ's perfection hides us so we can say we are perfect in Christ. That's why Christians are all the time saying, "I'm in Christ...I'm in Christ..." because if I wasn't in Christ I wouldn't be perfect and if I wasn't perfect God wouldn't raise me to glory. But I'm perfect in Christ because Christ is perfect and I'm hidden in Him. That's the gospel. His perfection becomes ours when we receive Him as Savior. When you give your life to Jesus Christ His righteousness clothes you, His perfection hides you. And thus God will lift you to glory as well. In fact the Bible says He will raise you to glory and He will seat you on the very throne with Christ because you are as perfect as Christ in Christ. That's the gospel.

You say, "Well does that mean that once you become a Christian you are actually perfect?" No. We still struggle in this life, we will some day be perfect when we get to heaven. But in the meantime we are covered by the perfection of Christ so that our sin is hidden from an otherwise intolerant holy God. That's the gospel. Because He lives we can live.

He taught us how to live. He made us face the fact that we don't live that way. And then He said for your imperfections I'll cover you with My perfections. And God now sees us as perfect. You say, "But what about living that way?" Well that becomes the pursuit of every Christian. Because Christ has covered me with His perfection I want to do all I can to live as perfectly as possible. I want to be the kind of person that He was. I want to walk as He walked. I want to be forgiving. I want to be evangelizing lost people. I want to be lovingly selfless. I want to be free from sin. I want to be open to share my needs. I want to finish the work God's given me and I want to totally trust God. But I'm motivated to do that not to earn perfection but to live up to the perfection Christ gave me when I received Him as Savior, that's the gospel.

Father, we thank You for the great truths that Jesus teaches us in His dying. We pray that every one of us will be students of these truths and see them become reality in our own lives. Father, I know that in this congregation this morning there are some who have fallen short of Your perfection, who haven't lived up to this standard, but who do not have the perfection of Christ because they've never received Him as Lord and Savior. O God, may this be the day when they open their heart to the living Christ and receive His perfection for their imperfection and with that the hope of eternal heaven.

For those of us as Christians who have received the perfection of Christ, may we with a new zeal commit ourselves to live according to His life and death and follow the pattern that He set. And may

the purest revelation of His character as we see it on the cross become the goal of our own living that He might be glorified and that we might be blessed. Amen.

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