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

Memorial Service for Irene MacArthur January 18, 1999
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: GTY68

Thanks to Dr. Dick Mayhue for reading that...Lance Quinn, beloved Lance having arrived a little late, was going to do that.

You know, my life is so flooded with memories at this point. I didn't think I could read that and I was probably pretty right. But I have just a few thoughts, maybe selfishly, to share with you. One is that I think my Mom now knows that the theology of her husband and her son was right. (Laughter) And if it wasn't, she'll figure out a way to get us a message. (Laughter)

I guess you never think you'll preach your mother's funeral, especially when she's so healthy. We lived in 17 houses by my seventeenth birthday. The houses changed, but she never did. And life was solid, rock solid because she was so unchanging. She...she never changed, as far as I can tell. as long as I've ever known her. For all the 59 years of my life she's always been just the same. It's always wonderful when somebody grows old sweetly, isn't it.

And I, from the very beginning, was given a gift by God in my parents. I'm sure many of you feel the same way about your own parents. The great treasure that God gave me it goes without saying that if it weren't for them it wouldn't be the way it is for me. And I will ever an always be grateful for their love and their affection and their leadership and their wisdom and their tolerance and their patience in my life.

There could be no end to the nostalgia, no end to the memories because they're all good. When I think back to the years when it was just, first of all, you know Jeanette and myself, and then along came Julie and then along came Jane, and I look at all that's come after that, all these marriages and all these kids and grandkids and great grandkids who are over in the nursery and some of them are. You just are thankful to the Lord for all that has come out of this wonderful union between Jack and Irene.

My purpose in this moment is to speak to you from the Word of God. My goal is not to try to eulogize my mother, that would be to proverbially gild the lily. And Dad said earlier in the week, "What's to say, everybody who knows her understands." But my purpose is to look at her biography not from a human side, we could spend a lot of time doing that, we've been doing that, as you can imagine, over the many hours and will continue to do that. But my purpose is not to look at her biography from the human side, but to look at her biography from the divine side. And while it is true that her life was

unique, humanly speaking, spiritually speaking her life followed a path identical to every other Christian.

We could talk about her life from the human side. We could talk about her family and Prince Edward Island on the east of Canada. We could talk about how they came to Vancouver, Canada, how her mother had eight daughters. We could talk about how her mother ended up alone, her husband having left with those eight daughters. We could talk about how Dad's family came from Calgary down to the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. Mom came to Los Angeles, they met, they were married...go through the litany of going back to Philadelphia for your last year of seminary together. We could talk about the fact that Dad's been preaching since 1937 and Mom always at his side and always his greatest support. He said the worse thing she would ever say about him when the sermon was really bad was, "You didn't seem to feel well," or something like that. "You're tired," oh that was it. "You must be tired, Jack." There had to be an explanation for him not performing at the maximum level, it must have been that he was tired.

And we could talk about all of the memories of kids and grandkids. And she adored them. And if you were to go in the house now you'd see a refrigerator just stacked with pictures of little baby faces everywhere. There's another picture about this big that's in the bedroom and it's just got all kinds of little baby faces on it that are part of our...of our family and family was really so very important to Mom. We could talk about how the Lord used her in so many ways through all these many, many years. That would be the human side and it would be absolutely unique, there's only been one of her.

But my purpose is to talk about her from the divine side, to talk about what is true of every believer. And in the case of every believer there is a four-epoch biography. There is a four-dimensional story to be told about every one who belongs in the Kingdom of God. And the apostle Paul identifies those four great epochs in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, let me read what he says. "We are bound to give thanks to God always for you brethren, beloved by the Lord." He's writing to a church, a congregation. We don't know how large that congregation was but it was perhaps a hundred, perhaps a little more than that. He's writing to a group of people and he basically describes their biography and it's the same. He says, "Brethren, beloved, God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth to which He called you by our gospel for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now there were diverse people in that church with all kinds of different human biographies. Each of them would have been unique and lived a unique life in unique circumstances, but when it came to their spiritual biography it was identical. So he could speak to them collectively and say, "You've all come through the same epochs and here they are...election, justification, sanctification and glorification," and in the case of Irene MacArthur, in the case of anybody else who belongs to God. Glorification is the culmination of God's redemptive epochs. This is not a sad ending. This is the reason why it all began in the first place.

The Thessalonian believers had some concerns. They were worried about what happened to Christians who died. That's sort of the issue lying behind the letter. And Paul writing to them gives a description of the biography of a believer that ultimately answers that question. He says that you don't have to worry, there is a process going on here. It begins with election, God from the beginning chose you. And when was the beginning? If you go to Titus chapter 1 it tells us there that God made this plan before time began. It says the same thing in 2 Timothy chapter 1 verse 9, before time began. In the book of Revelation it says the names of believers were written in the Lamb's Book of Life from before the foundation of the world.

This would be a meager attempt to explain...summing up all of Scripture let me make an attempt at it. When no creation existed, when there were no angels and there were no humans, and there was no universe as we know it, and there was no Earth as we live on it, when there was only God, trinitarian God, God the Father determined to give a love gift to the Son. Perfect love results in generosity and perfect giving. The love of the Father sought to be expressed to the Son in a gift. What would that gift be? By God's design He determined before the foundation of the world, before time began to give to the Son a redeemed humanity. That's why in John 6 Jesus said, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me." That's why in the same chapter He said, "No one comes to the Father but by Me and no one comes to Me except the Father draws Him." The Father in an expression of perfect love said to the Son, "I want to show My love to You, I want to give You a redeemed humanity."

Why? "I want to give you beings who forever and ever and ever will praise and glorify Your name." And by the way, if you happen to read the book of Revelation, it's not too long into the book, get into the fourth and fifth chapter, you get a visit to heaven, and when you get up there you meet the saints. And what are they saying? "Worthy is the Lamb to receive glory and honor and power," and all the rest. And that's a picture of the redeemed saints in glory doing what God designed for them to do from before the foundation of the world and that is to praise and glorify and honor His Son.

There's another component. It says in 1 John 3:2 that when we see Him we shall be like Him. And in Romans 8:29 it says that we were chosen, we were elected, we were predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.

You can sum up the doctrine of election in a very simple way. God, before the foundation of the world, determined to give a redeemed humanity to His Son to reflect His glory and to praise Him forever and ever and ever. What happens in our lives on earth is in the big picture somewhat incidental. The goal that God had from before the foundation of the world for Irene MacArthur has now entered into its fulfillment. All the rest was really prologue. But it all started with election. It's an incredible reality, isn't it? God not only knew, God chose.

Then there was justification. Once born into this world the believer must hear the message of salvation and God's Spirit then prompts the heart and salvation occurs. Mom was justified. She was declared righteous. Some of us might think she was declared righteous because she earned it. Not true. "By the deeds of the law no flesh is justified." She like all the rest of us was a sinner and in need of grace.

Do you understand how justification works? Do you understand what that word means? It is a forensic word. It's a legal term that means to be declared righteous, to be declared holy, to be declared acceptable to God. Obviously humanly speaking none of us is qualified. So at some point in order that God's plan founded in election can come to glorification, God has to get down to dealing with the issue of sin.

How does He do it? Well, sin has to be punished and this is the great miracle of the Christian faith, He punished Jesus in our place. Jesus died on the cross, follow this thought, executed by God as if He had committed every sin ever committed by every person who would ever believe, though in fact He committed none of them. If you understand that, you understand the core of the Christian gospel. God treated Jesus on the cross as if He had committed every sin ever committed by every person who would ever believe, though in fact He committed none of them. He died in our place.

There's another part of this great truth as well. I tend to take the fast route to things if I can and I suppose if I had been God I might have made the plan a little simpler and said to the Son, "Really, all You need to do is go down on Friday and die and rise on Monday and you can come back...or rise on Sunday, you can come back Monday. This could be a, You know, a four-day deal for You."

The question is...why did He have to come and live for 33 years? And we don't even know anything about those thirty-three years. What was Jesus like as a little boy? You ever wonder about that? Did...did His father work real hard in the carpenter shop to make a table and He came in and said, "Table"? What was He like, God in human flesh? It doesn't tell us. All we have is one tiny glimpse at the age of twelve when He was asking questions in Jerusalem of those religious authorities. Why 33 years? Why 30 years of absolute anonymity? Nobody really understood who He was. He didn't make any great divine splash, if you will, in the city of Nazareth, or the village of Nazareth. Why all those years?

Well, I think it's really summed up when He was baptized and John the Baptist said, "Why do You want to be baptized?" And He said, "In order that I might fulfill all righteousness." This is a great truth. It must be understood. Jesus needed to live a perfect life, a full and perfect life so that it could be imputed to us.

Let me sum it up this way. On the cross Jesus was without sin. He was spotless, wasn't He? He was sinless, harmless, holy, undefiled, separate from sin, Hebrews says. On the cross He was sinless.

God treated Him as if He was a sinner. And let me tell you something, you're not righteous and I'm not either, but God treats us as if we were. He executed Jesus as if He lived your life so He could treat you as if you lived His. That's the doctrine of substitution. That's what justification does. And there was a day in the life of Mom when God in His marvelous grace moved that elective purpose one step further into justification and she heard the gospel, she believed the gospel and God imputed the righteousness of Christ to her and her sin to the Savior who died on the cross and she was saved.

That wasn't the end because there's a next step in the unfolding of this. Election, He chose you for salvation, that's justification, through sanctification by the Spirit. The third great epoch in the life of a believer is sanctification. What is that? It ties...it's tied into belief, it's tied into obedience. It's just that progressive unfolding of a believer's life lived in obedience to God. We all...we all lived with Mom through that great epoch.

How old was she when she was saved, Dad? Do you remember? Fourteen. So a 70-year epoch...and you first met her...she was how old? (Chuckle) Well, you were there for the whole time of her sanctification...that progressive sancti...and for 59 years I was there and I don't want to say how old the girls are, but old enough to have been there a long time, right? And we...we watched Mom, always that ever gracious...I think so much of her graciousness and I think of the word goodness...just a goodness the always noble thoughts and always excelling in her personal virtue. And, you know, that was the work of the Spirit because apart from the work of the Spirit we would all become the worst that we could be.

Her biography is no different than any of yours if you know Christ. You're living through this time of gradually being ever more separated from sin.

That's not the end. He says in verse 14, "To which He called you," He called you to this justification, He called you to this sanctification, He called you to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is incredible. That's glorification. From election to justification through sanctification to glorification and that is simply a statement that says a believer in the end obtains, that is participates in the very glory of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. She's entered into that glory. She has no more sin. She is sinless. She reflects the glory of Christ. She was predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son, she is now bearing that image. She is not God. She is not deity. But she is as holy, she is as holy as God. Is that an amazing thought? Because it's an absolute holiness.

For this she was born. For this she was saved. For this she lived. And this is her shining moment. And for all of us who belong to God, the biography is the same, isn't it? It's the same.

Now I don't want to minimize her uniqueness but I do need to say that from God's standpoint she is one of the chosen to belong to the heavenly hallelujah chorus who forever will reflect the glory of Christ and worship and praise His name.

We do not fear as those who have no hope. We who love Christ are just waiting for the reunion. People always ask me, "Well, will she be waiting for us?" Well, she's in a world with no time. If you don't have time, you don't have waiting. Besides, there's plenty to keep her occupied without worrying about us. For the first time she will be free from that.

So, Paul says since you know this, since you know that the spiritual biography of Irene MacArthur, Mom, Buddy as she was known to all of us, since you know her biography was from election to justification to sanctification to glorification, you realize that this is the great fulfillment that God has planned. Since you know that is true and you have nothing to fear and nothing to be concerned about, Paul says, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast." Don't be shaken...don't be shaken.

And this benediction, verse 16, "May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and our God and Father who has loved us and given us ever lasting comfort and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work."

I don't know about you but I'm greatly comforted in this truth, aren't you? This is not an aberration, this isn't something that went wrong. This is something that went perfectly right, perfectly right. And this is very personal, this verse, "May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and our God and Father who has loved us and given us everlasting comfort and good hope by grace comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work." Don't shake. Don't be afraid. Don't waver. Stand fast, hang on to the truth, the traditions you were taught, hold on to everything she ever taught, Dad's ever taught us, hold on whether by word or our letter, he says, hold on and receive the comfort that comes and strengthens and establishes you in every good word and work.

It would be a great tragedy, and I say this to the family in particular, it would be a great tragedy were we not to stand fast in the truth that she lived for. I mean, that would be the ultimate tragedy. Were we not to be faithful in every good word and work, it would almost seem as if all that she did would be wasted. Stand fast. Hold the traditions you were taught. Receive the personal comfort of Christ and God Himself and be established in every good word and work. This is our biography, isn't it? And we'll all be there...we'll all be there if we know Him.

Father, it is a blessing, benediction beyond words to have had Mom in our lives. It is beyond that, Lord, a blessing to know that she lives and will never die and that she has gone to be glorified. And we shall join her in Your glorious presence. Father, we are overwhelmed by the grace that chose us, justified us, sanctified us and will glorify us. May we be strong, standing fast in the things that she stood for, in the truth may we be comforted, and may we endeavor to serve You in every good word and work that she might not have lived in vain and that You above all may be glorified in Christ's name. Amen.

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