

Not Weighing Your Merits

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[0 : 0 0] so we have lots of very cute little kids in the church today which is very very it's a very good thing and it's also Father's Day by the way which I guess I'll have to say Happy Father's Day in case I forget to say it later on which would be quite likely to happen with me one of the things which is interesting about young children obviously Caspar is not even close to that is that at some point in time they start to become morally aware and are able to make wrong choices like very self-consciously wrong choices I don't know and those of you who have parents of young kids you can maybe have a bit of a discussion about when that comes I think of it somewhere in their twos you'll have a time when the child is you know just playing around and and maybe there's a something on a table or a counter that they're not supposed to touch and they go wandering over to it and and you say to them we'll just call call it we'll pretend it's a boy and his name is Bobby and you say to to say to Bobby Bobby you know you're not supposed to touch that and and here's the up until then you know they just do whatever they're doing they're just little little tiny kids just doing whatever sort of pops into their heads and sometimes weird things pop into their heads or cute things but this time you say you know Bobby you know you're not supposed to touch that and Bobby stops and looks at the parent like he he looks at the parent and you say again to the child Bobby don't touch that you know you're not supposed to and Bobby looks at the parent and then Bobby touches the object and you know that Bobby has chosen to do something which is wrong and that's something which happens to every child in fact if you met a parent who said that never happened to my child you might not say anything to the parent but inwardly you know that that parent's just deluded because the fact of the matter is is that there always comes a time when a young child will gratuitously no it's a big word but gratuitously freely just choose to do something that's wrong now last week I said a couple of things about the problem of evil usually conceived as the problem of why evil exists in the world and what God does about it but prior to that there's a far more there's a far deeper profound human question that most of us turn our eyes away from in terms of thinking about and that is why is it that you and I gratuitously choose to do things that are wrong like if one of you says you don't do it that just shows you're not self-aware but the fact the matter is is that every single one of us even the best will have times when we know it's wrong there's no nothing forcing us it's not like you know I don't know we have to steal because we're starving to death it's you know not because we have guns pointed to our head and you know we have to make some terrible moral choice or anything like that there are fact every single one of us have times where we just freely knowingly choose to do something that's wrong we do why is that what is it about human beings that that is part of what makes a human being a human being at least today part of the problem is that it's hard for us to think about this and come to an answer to it without being demoralized without thinking that there's just it's it's hard for us to bear the idea that there's just something in us which is just broken in a way like that and and so it's demoralizing so we don't we don't think about it and most of the time what we just do is we

pretend it's not there it's not an elephant in the room and and or we pretend that it's not really something that happens to us very often because we're very good at making excuses for the wrong that we do and don't want to acknowledge that we have an opportunity to forgive and we choose not to forgive we have an opportunity to let go of resentment and we choose not to let go of resentment we have a chance to to to to help another person and we just choose not to do it and we don't like to that's not something that we like to think about as being true to us the story that we're going to look at today and it's so i invite you to turn in your bibles to genesis chapter 20 and as i i sort of said in my prayer it's a on the surface it's a very very simple story but it's actually some simple stories can be very deep and profound um i know i might be igniting a few people by saying this but the fact the matter is is that depth psychologists like freud and and jung have often gone to

some of these very ancient stories in the book of genesis to mine their depths in modern days jordan peterson's lectures on some of these stories have gotten in the millions in terms of views have seen in a sense the profound depth in these very simple stories we're going to look at one of these very simple stories and it points the way forward to thinking about the evil that we do the wrong that we do in a way that won't lead us to pretend and won't demoralize us so if you turn in your bibles to genesis chapter 20 and um last week i i borrowed something that i learned from an australian anglican scholar by the name of john woodhouse telling the story in terms of scenes and i think i'm going to do that again this week so scene number one trusting in lies to protect you that's what scene number one is called trusting in lies to protect you verses one and two from there uh that is uh where he'd been like by the tree and and sort of close to sodom and and gomorrah from there abraham journeyed toward the territory of the negev uh he's sort of going south closer to egypt from there abraham journeyed toward the territory of the negev and lived between kadesh and shir and he sojourned in gerar which was an important uh center for caravan routes uh where there was water etc and so people would stop there was an important uh resting spot in a in a city so but back so he he sojourned in gerar and abraham said of sarah his wife she is my sister and abimelech the king of gerar sent and took sarah so the implication here is that uh abimelech uh takes sarah to be one of his wives to be in his harem and what we see here right off the bat is that what abraham has done is he's lied in a way to protect himself we're going to discover in a few scenes why it is that he in his own self-consciousness why he is that he chose to lie but one of the things which is very interesting here i've talked to many people over the years who've said you know if god really wanted me to know him why doesn't he just reveal himself to me in a way which is very blatant and obvious and if he just revealed himself to me then i would believe in him well the fact of the matter is is that the the bible shows time and time and time again that that is rarely true what has just gone on before this is the most an un just a spectacular and in in many ways horrific demonstration of the existence of of god with the destruction of sodom and gomorrah with the land being destroyed and and the smoke going up into into the heavens and abraham knew that god was going to do this and and god did it and and very few people on the history of the planet have ever had a more remarkable demonstration of the existence of god and yet very shortly after this abraham is not trusting in god to protect him but decides that he will trust in lies and deception for him to be protected and in fact one of many of us could start to wonder and this is going to be one of the main questions as this story progresses if abraham lies and deceives to protect himself why on earth would god choose him as somebody special like why would god choose a liar to be the the founder of the promised people like that that is actually wrong like that's just wrong that god would do that scene two the lord intervenes look at verse three but god came to abimelech in a dream by night and said to him behold you are a dead man because actually it's funny that like that's what it says in the in hebrew you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken for she is a man's wife now abimelech had not approached her in other words they hadn't had sexual relations so he said lord will you kill an innocent people did he not himself say to me she is my sister and she herself said he is my brother in the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my and the innocence of my hands i have done this so the lord intervenes to speak to abimelech in a dream and one of the things that we discover here is that not only has abraham lied but sarah has lied they've been partners in lying and deceiving now there's another big question here which some of you might not know but others who've been following along knows and that is this sarah is 89 years old now i hope to get to that age and probably in my own eyes i'm still going to be a good looking chap at 89 but there's a type of obvious question why on earth did abimelech choose an 89 year old woman to be his wife so just very very briefly a part of what's going on here in the story is this the story is going to maintain time and time and time again that the birth of isaac in fulfillment to the promises of god's saying that he's going to start to bless the nations through this line it's going to be shown time and time again that abraham and sarah contributed nothing that is completely and utterly a miracle of god in fact not only that that abraham and sarah continually sabotage what god wants to do which is what they're doing right here that what's going to happen abraham leaves and now he can't take his wife with him because now she's with abimelech how's how on earth is isaac the promised child of abraham going to happen so they actually constantly act in ways which undermines god doing something so it's going to be very very clear that only god was able to accomplish this the second the second thing is and and this is probably part of it is that god's desiring god's plan to create a line through which the entire world will be blessed and which salvation will come he seems to have acted in a way so that many of these early patriarchs live far

longer lives than they normally had but there's still a bit of a mystery here the two stories pre previous to this it takes very very clear that sarah has gotten too old she she know she's uh she's uh she's menopausal post-menopausal she's she's old so i'm just going to suggest something here you can take with it as you want you can discuss it over coffee you can think george is completely and utterly ridiculous that's fine but abimelech wants to get married to sarah and i wonder if some of modern fiction is pointing to

what maybe has happened here that the miracle that's going on is god reverses sarah's aging in the very next story the baby will be born and i wonder if what's happening is that sarah is in a sense going backwards in time from 89 to looking young enough and being young enough to bear a child that's pure speculation on my part you can do with it as you will all i'm trying to do is piece together he chose a woman to marry and in the very next story she gives birth take with it as you want the next scene is god's clear but confusing message verses six and seven then god said to abimelech in the dream yes i know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart and it was i who kept you from sinning against me therefore i did not let you touch her now then return the man's wife here's the here's the here's the confusing bit for he is a prophet so that he will pray for you and you shall live but if you do not return her know that you shall surely die you and all were yours now i'm not going to spend very much time on it for some people it's a shock that god might do something that might he might kill i guess all i want to do is that part of what's going on here and it's going to continue throughout the rest of the bible is to try to help us to understand that god is not a labradoodle god is not a labradoodle he's not just a tame little pet that will follow you around god is a consuming fire he creates all things out of nothing he sustains all things out of nothing heaven and earth flees from his presence he is the transcendent and imminent god he is uncreated and needs no environment and if god was to reveal himself fully and completely to us it would unmake us and that is who the true and living god actually is but the other part which is this is the prophet like how could god choose abraham to be a prophet he lies he's not good does this mean that god sort of enables his favorites does god sort of reward some people for living lies of deception and it's going to even get worse as the story progresses the yuck factor of abraham and sarah is going to increase once we get a couple of scenes down but first scene four the virtuous pagans look at verse eight so abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants and told them all these things and the men were very much afraid then abimelech called abraham and said to him what have you done to us and how have i sinned against you that you have brought on me in my kingdom a great sin you have done to me things that ought not to be done and abimelech said to abraham what did you see that you did this thing now what abraham what abimelech is doing here is he's being very virtuous he in fact does fear god to the extent that he understands god uh he's making clear that he would not have taken another man's wife and he wants to make sure that there's a public airing of this so there is no appearance of evil and there's going to be restitution now by the way this is something that we need desperately in our country do we have in fact and i'm not picking on politics particular politicians do we have

a clear airing of things which they have done wrong i have done something which is wrong i apologize and if necessary i will resign this is a consistent message to our country and it's not just to politicians but to people in churches and business and communities where in fact you do not have this very clear public acknowledgement that something has gone on and a desire to clear it to clear the air to acknowledge responsibility to make restitution to make very clear what the right path is and what we see here is that the pagans are virtuous and abraham and sarah are not and we in canada today could learn from the virtuous pagans in gerar and once again we wondered to ourselves why didn't god choose abimelech rather than abraham why didn't he choose a virtuous man rather than abraham and sarah well as i said it gets worse for abraham and sarah next scene scene five is deception and blame shifting verses 11 to 13 so abraham answers abimelech's questions abraham said i did it because i thought there is no fear of god at all in this place and they will kill me because of my wife besides she is indeed my sister the daughter of my father the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother and she became my wife and when god caused me to wander from my father's house i said to her this is the kindness you must do to me at every place to which we come say of me he is my brother we see here the seeds of prejudice don't we the problem with i don't know the irish i'm irish the problem with the irish if you go to ireland they're just always looking to try to steal your stuff or take your stuff or just just pick your pick your racial group or your ethnic group or your your your racial group it's a standard part of prejudice that everybody there they're just going to want to rip you off they're just going to take advantage of you

and here we see abraham's prejudice despite the fact that the pagans in fact are more virtuous and the other thing is it's not as in in the original language when he says and when god caused me to wander what he's doing is blame shifting he's saying listen it's not my fault god caused me to wander and because god caused me to wander i had to do all of these things to protect myself he's blame shifting trying to pass away his responsibility for his freely chosen doing of something which is wrong and now even when he's confronted he doesn't accept responsibility but in fact doubles down on it and blames god for it and then once again how on earth could they pick abraham and sarah he married his sister is the bible saying that's all right like is the bible saying it's all right to marry your sister you might not always have been clear about it occasionally i've made these little references like if you pick something like the lord of the rings it's six books and if you were just to try to to read one story in the in the in the in the first book and not read the rest of the story you're not going to be able to interpret it correctly uh... for instance not giving any spoilers if you just took if you skip the beginning and and end of book one and you just read a few of boromer's speeches you might understand you might believe that he's a a far better man than he actually was but he actually does want to steal the ring and and the understanding that the depth of the problem only becomes more clear as you read all six books

[20 : 22] and and genesis is book one of a five book series all written fundamentally ultimately by mooses uh... genesis exodus leuiticus numbers and deuteronomy are a five book series and so if you just look at this story if this was the only story i'd have to say god says it's all right for a man for a guy to marry his sister but if you read all five of the books it becomes very clear that what abraham and sarah had done is wrong in god's eyes i'm sorry it's not going to be up there on the thing but if you have your own bibles if you turn to leuiticus i'll just sort of show it to you leuiticus chapter 18 uh... verse 9 and verse 11 uh... it says this leuiticus uh... chapter 18 verse 9 um... you shall not uncover the nakedness of your sister your father's daughter or your mother's daughter whether brought up in the family or another in another home in other words you shouldn't have it's another way of saying sexual relations and then if you go down to verse 11 you shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife's daughter brought up in your father's family since she is your sister another language of sexual knowing it's forbidden and then again in deuteronomy chapter 27 verse 22 deuteronomy chapter 27 verse 22 cursed be anyone who lies with his sister whether the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother and all the people shall say amen so the bible makes it clear that abraham and sarah are doing something that is wrong in god's eyes once again how on earth are abraham and sarah worthy like what's going on with god scene six abimelech makes right turn to verses 14 to 16 then abimelech took sheep and oxen and male servants and female servants and gave them to abraham and returned sarah his wife to him and abimelech said behold my land is before you dwell where it pleases you to sarah he said behold now just notice this little dig abimelech is making a very very even though he can argue that he's not been guilty of anything he wants to make sure there's no appearance of evil so he's going to make a gift of lots of gold and servants and he's saying there's no hard feelings the whole land is before you

I want you to be able to stay but he gets in the little dig notice the little dig verse 15 behold the land my land is before you dwell where it pleases you verse 16 to sarah he said behold I have given your brother not husband i've given you a brother a thousand pieces of silver it is a sign of your innocence in the eyes of all who are with you and for everyone that you are vindicated at the expense to himself he makes sure the other person is vindicated once again profound lessons for how we should live today and then finally the final scene entitled why on earth Abraham then verse 17 then Abraham prayed to God and God healed Abimelech and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children for the Lord had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Abraham

Sarah's wife Abraham's prayer worked in the sense that Abraham prayed and God said yes occasionally people when they find out i'm a minister they might say something like we're having a picnic this afternoon if you could do something if you could pray for good weather i'd really appreciate it and i always say i'm in sales not management my prayers don't work any better than yours and then i'll usually say my wife is closer to management than i am maybe you should ask her to pray so we tend to have a thought here though isn't it that in fact that that if we're closer to God God will answer our prayers so what on earth is going on here in this particular story he prays as a prophet and God says yes so he it's very easy to look at this and say this is just the problem with religion and religious texts that what goes on in religion is that there's one rule for me another

for thee that's not just a problem for religion it's a problem in politics it's a problem in university faculties it's a problem in media establishments and in businesses one rule for me another for thee and I as soon as I say that all of you can think of instances where it's the case but it seems to often be the case in religious institutions one rule for me another for thee and how on earth can you say George that God is showing mercy and grace to Abraham if Abraham has been doing very very bad things and it's not mercy and grace if it's unjust or unfair or wrong Abraham is undeserving and if Abraham is undeserving then it's wrong for God to favor him it's you know you can't have mercy and grace if there's injustice if there's favoritism you can't just sort of pick it's just George you know it was bad if when Trump was leaving office and he lets his crony he gives last second you know get them out of jail and declares them innocent for their cronies and it'll be just as wrong if Biden does it at the end of his term if in his final week he just starts taking all of the guys who are his golfing buddies and his campaign donors and he just makes their criminal charges go away and that's just wrong and this seems like that's what's going on here and it's just wrong George and if after reading the story you think that that's a good thing so I just want to talk about three types of things to try to help us to understand why this story is deep and profound why it's in the Bible and here's the first thing there is this Bible text reveals to you and me that there is a natural or common there's a natural spiritual imagination where there's a natural religious intuition there's something which is common to almost all human beings about how spiritual and religious things should work it's how our imagination works it's a profound institution intuition and it's common to all and it's common to every religion and in fact many versions of Christianity are in fact times when people forget what the gospel is and just allow the natural religious spiritual intuition and imagination re-read the text and so Christianity becomes a form of this natural imagination about how religion and spirituality should work and if you could put up the first slide that would be really good hopefully you can see it and those of you watching online it will be at the bottom and here it is

[28 : 17] I call it the what do I call it here I call it the I think I have the no I have the right thing I call it the natural spiritual imagination I think I just called it that and here's the thing here's how it works first of all you start doing better then you start being spiritual or engaging in spiritual things and then as you proceed along because you're doing a better and better you're living a better and better life and you're getting better at doing spiritual or religious things you come to the point where God accepts you which I guess we could call salvation and you see that in Christians as well you have a person who used to be a practicing Christian and they have been away for a long time and they start to feel like maybe they need to get back to church but they can't come back to church because they've been living a very bad life so they talk to you and they say you know I've been living a very bad life and normally I've been living a bad life often I've been living an unsuccessful life like my family's a little bit messed up my business is a little bit messed up and you know frankly I have some other problems and so what we say is well once I start to do a little bit better

I'll come to church and coming to church and then doing it and then maybe as well they'll start to do a few other things like this is just the Christian version they'll start to read the Bible and they'll start to do a few other types of things and then they're sort of doing better they're living a better life and they're more have a more successful life and they're going to church and doing religious things regularly and the sense is that if you do those things at some point in time God accepts you you're saved and this is not just this is like it's the same you know with with you know whether it's Hinduism and the different types of rules that you need to follow and getting your life in order and then the spiritual practices so that you're going to do better as a Hindu you know I've talked to some people who grew up Muslim and they've left they don't go to the mosque or anything like that and they like to drink a lot which is wrong and they eat pork sandwiches which is wrong and they sort of say you know I need to start getting some of those things under control stop watching porn and stop drinking beer and once I do maybe I'll start going back to the mosque and I start to do those religious practices and it's the common way that the religious imagination works and it's the way we judge Abraham right like how on earth could Abraham be God's prophet why well because the way our mind naturally works is that if you're going to be a prophet like that's like a really high level acceptance by God so surely you got to get your life in order and then after that you got to be doing the religious practices and if you're doing all of those things then eventually you're going to be able to be sort of like a prophet like high up up here because that's just the way it works you do

God you don't choose a prophet a guy who married his sister like that's just that will never happen that's just that goes against how we understand religion and spirituality it goes against our imagination it goes against our intuitions it's just wrong and it's wrong whether it's it's a bespoke spirituality you know whether it's it's a mystical thing whether it's Buddhism Hinduism whether it's it's Islam you know whether it's many forms of Christianity and and and one of the reasons in our culture many people are rejecting religion is because they look at that and and they and they just say well this doesn't just doesn't work you know because fact the matter is that I know because you see there's an extra thing to that that this is what should happen in our culture is that okay you know I've lived a messy type of life and you know my job's not going very well and my you know there's problems in my marriage and all of that I'm going to start getting some control over that so I'm starting to do better now that I'm doing better

I can go to the mosque I can go to the temple I can go to the church and and after I start to do that and get involved in that now I'm actually connected to God and the result of that is going to be that God is now going to take care of me and bless me and what often happens is then you get the cancer diagnosis for your mom then you don't get the promotion then you're the stocks that you invested in go go belly up and and and now you're mad at God because good grief God I was doing my part of the deal I good grief I stopped watching the porn I stopped drinking the beer I'm going to church and now this happens like God you let down your part of the deal the second thing the problem there's a big problem and the big problem is what I began the sermon with the mystery of your wrongdoing the mystery of your wrongdoing like what why is it why is it that you can have an opportunity you get a phone call and somebody says

I'd really like to take pick you up I'd love to treat you to a good meal buy a couple of beers have a really good afternoon and you say no because I'm going to watch porn like I mean you know it's wrong like why would you do that like good grief you have your good friend just said he'll take you out pay for your meal you'll have a really good time like that sounds wonderful like why would you gratuitously do the other thing and you you can multiply like why is it that we do things like that but why is it that the natural religious spiritual imagination pretends that that part of our doing wrong doesn't exist because the fact the matter is that we sometimes gratuitously choose what is wrong and no amount of depth therapy changes that no amount of behavior modification changes that no amount of finding coaches who can give you techniques about human behavior that doesn't change it no amount of spiritual practices removes it and given the fact that we have a part of us that just gratuitously do something which is wrong it means that the natural spiritual imagination is doomed it will never ever work to my

[35 : 01] Buddhist friends you will never get enlightenment to my Hindu friends you will never stop the cycle of life and rebirth never to my Muslim friends it doesn't work you choose to do wrong so do I so do you why is it that we cling to this religious model and we know that we choose wrong and you see what happens is because we choose wrong what do we do we have one rule for me and another rule for thee we become very good at blame shifting we become very good at pretend and what's the problem with blame shifting and pretending that we're far more righteous far more together I mean in good grief if there is ever an age where we have a problem with this is people don't actually want to eat a good tasting cupcake they even if the cupcake or the donut at

Tim Hortons at one fifth the price is twenty times more tasty we want the Facebook Instagram TikTok moment to make it look like things are good and what happens it makes us profoundly insecure it makes us profoundly insecure and we reject religion because it's just in image management and it's hard for us to think of the fact that we do things which are wrong without being profoundly demoralizing so the first thing is the natural way that our religious and spiritual imagination works the second thing is the mystery of our wrongdoing isn't that what we see in the story of Abraham we evaluate Abraham as being unworthy because of our natural religious imagination we look at Abraham and see that he gratuitously chose to do what was wrong the third and final thing is the subversive fulfillment of the gospel the subversive fulfillment of the gospel by that

I mean is the gospel subverts the natural religious imagination but it fulfills our deeper desire to live a life that is right with God that's transparent and honest and doesn't have to pretend that there's not a part of us that choose to do what's wrong it's the good news that God subverts but he actually fulfills at a deeper level what we desire if you could put up the final slide the scandalous grace of the triune God and the way the gospel works is there's an announcement Abraham you are a bad man

George you are a bad man but it begins with God accepting me as his child by salvation by grace I'll explain more about that in a moment and then it leads from that to begin practicing the means of grace which is another way a better way a gospel way of talking about religious observance it's not religious observance it's practicing the means of grace and we begin with being accepted by God completely and utterly undeserved and it's from that place that we begin to live and practice the means of grace and it's from that place that we become more and more convinced that it's important that not only do we do things like justice and mercy and compassion but also that we write songs that are good and dance dances that are beautiful and start businesses which are successful and rise up in the civil service not as just a person who just puts everybody down but to be known as a man and woman of integrity that we start to do better once again I don't have it in here but remember that we're looking at the stories of

Abraham and within the stories of Abraham itself there is a pointer at the very very end a very very famous story of Abraham and we're going to be looking at it in two weeks time and it's in Genesis chapter 22 verse 8 and it's the story of now Abraham has his child and Ishmael is gone and it's only Isaac and God says to Abraham I want you to take your son your only son whom you love your only son whom you love and I want you to take him up onto the mountain and I want you to kill him as a sacrifice for me and Abraham goes and does it and there's this very famous line that as they're going up the mountain and he's gotten rid of the servants it's just Abraham and his son Isaac and Abraham it's verse 8 of chapter 22 at verse 7 it goes and Isaac said to his father Abraham my father and Abraham said here I am my son and Isaac says behold the fire and the wood but where is the lamb for the burnt offering and Abraham's famous answer is God will provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering my son at the end of the story after Abraham is going to go ahead and do it there is a ram that is provided and God reveals to Abraham he's not to kill his son and there's a ram not the lamb but a ram and then in the other stories we're going to discover in the book of

[40 : 53] Exodus and in the book of Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy that there's to be the sacrifices but as the story unfolds because there's books after these first five that make up the 39 books of the Old Testament there is this realization at a deeper and deeper level that the mere sacrifice of animals for a human being is not going to be sufficient and then the very first historical record we have of Jesus is when John the Baptist says at the beginning of Jesus' ministry behold the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world Abraham's not worthy by the religious imagination he does wrong he needs grace and he needs grace that is also going to be at one with justice and how is that the case God looks at you and he looks at me and I cannot be perfect

I choose to do wrong at different times and so God provides for me in a way that I cannot provide for myself he provides I am made in the image of God he takes the one of whom every human being is made in the image of and that one who every one of us is in the image of he takes flesh and becomes human being and he lives amongst us he becomes my representative who can better be my representative than he whose image I am made in and he comes and dwells amongst us and knows every trial and temptation that you and I do only without sin he knows the depth of temptation I give in he doesn't give in he identifies with me even more deeply than I am able to experience myself he my representative he identifies with me he chooses to be my substitute to take my place so that the wrongdoing that I have done is dealt with in him and he can do it why because he's my representative and he's identified with me he knows what he's doing and he offers in exchange for him for him taking my doom the destiny which he deserves there is no sacrificing of God's justice but mercy without sacrificing justice is greater than justice and that is what God offers us in the person of Christ and that's why the gospel subverts this but fulfills the religious imagination Jesus knew the wrong that I have done and every wrong that I have done has been dealt with by him and my standing with him is not on me being able to do right and not do wrong and it's not by having one rule for me and another rule for other people and it's not by me being really really good at jumping at other people for having specks in their eye while I have a log in mine it's by me understanding that God knew the depth of the wrongdoing and everything about me when he died for when Jesus died for me on the cross it's all been dealt with and that means that week by week one of the means of grace is that I can gather with other brothers and sisters in Christ and we can gather around the Lord's table and we can remember that Jesus died on the cross that he shed his blood that his body was pierced and he did this knowing the truth the mystery the secret the riddle the enigma of who I am and who you are and he knew that when he died for me and so I can confess my sins confident in his forgiveness I am not going to

unearth anything in my past that is so terrible that he did not turn away from me but he died for me and so I have a place where I don't have to pretend and it's really hard because I like pretending and I like having different rules for other people and I like seeing specks in other people's eyes and not noticing the logs of mine I'm addicted to that but week by week as part of the means of grace I loves me and

I can start to look at the wrong that I've done and said that is wrong that is gratuitous and I can start to have the self possession and standing in Christ to say yes this week I've done this and yes this week I've done this and I can't even begin to count them and I'm sorry for them but I am so thankful for grace I'm so thankful for the cross I'm so thankful for Christ I thank you for these means of grace of reading your word and of a common one another life with brothers and sisters and of the Lord's table and of the songs and that I can recommit and once again I can say thank you Jesus you know this week I had a chance to do justice and I chose to be silent I recommit help me to live in a way which spreads the gospel which does good for this city which brings you glory invite you to stand if you're here or you're watching and if you've never given your life to

[46 : 34] Christ it's no better time right now to say Jesus I now understand what it is that you've done for me on the cross and I'm tired of being demoralized by my wrongdoing I'm tired of play acting I'm tired of pretending I'm glad that I can be honest with you and honestly I want you Jesus to be my savior and my lord and I thank you that you will never let me go and there's no better time than today to say quietness of my heart but surrounded by my brothers and sisters there will be a time for me later to say that I'm sorry for what I've done and to recommit to you to be gripped by the gospel and to live in a way that brings you glory and recommit to the means of grace fellowship with other believers whether it's one on one or mentors or small groups and weekly meetings that I recommit thank you that you accept me Christ thank you let's bow our heads in prayer father pour out the holy spirit upon us with gentle but very deep and penetrating power we ask that you would help us to put to death our natural religious imagination and intuition that you would grip us by the scandalous nature of your grace that we would learn to live out of the promise of the scandalous subversive fulfillment of your grace offered to people like me and that you would help us to see the world from those perspectives and those eyes and we ask

Lord that you would do this wonderful work we thank you for Jesus and we ask it all in his name and we say together Amen