

Caleb EVans (17)

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Date: 24 June 2018

Preacher: Fr. Caleb Evans

[0:00] Amen. Amen.

So, we don't like to think of ourselves as ordinary, do we? No? I don't know. Well, think of it this way. Can you imagine giving an anniversary card to your spouse, thanking them for being such an ordinary husband or wife?

That probably wouldn't go over so well. The striking thing is that this morning's epistle reading reminds us not to regard anyone according to the flesh. What that means is that there is no such thing as an ordinary person.

C.S. Lewis had some striking things to say on that point. C.S. Lewis reminds us to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare.

All day long, we are in some degree helping each other to one of these destinations. There are no ordinary people. You will never talk to a mere mortal nations, cultures, arts, civilizations.

[1:57] These are mortal. And their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit.

Immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. Well, that got intense quickly, didn't it? But, we should be clear, sin undealt with will make us into immortal horrors, creatures from a nightmare.

But, the grace of God in Jesus Christ will change those who believe into everlasting splendors. something beautiful beyond all description.

How does the grace of God, how does the gospel impact us in that way? And then, having been changed by the gospel, what are we called to do? That's what I want us to think about this morning, in light of our 2 Corinthians 5 passage.

So, please open your Bibles, look there with me. Now, what does the gospel message, the message of Christ and Him crucified, mean for us?

[3:12] I think we have to start with what I think is one of the clearest, most succinct statements of the gospel in all of the scriptures. Found in verse 21.

So, look there with me. We read, For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. So, God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

Now, you could be asking yourself, what does that mean? Was that priest lying to me when he said that this was a clear statement of the gospel? I don't think I did.

Don't think I lied to you. I hope I can convince you of the same. This is one of those passages that led the great theologian and reformer Martin Luther to talk about what he called the great exchange of the cross.

What kind of exchange happened with the death of Jesus on the cross? I'm glad you asked. Quite simple, really, but profound. Jesus took our sins.

[4:21] He took our burdens. He took the consequences of our sin. He took what we deserve. He took it all in Himself. And what do we get in return?

Because Jesus died for us and we are in Him. We get His perfect righteousness. What a glorious exchange that is. Isn't it? Luther said this about it.

He died for me. He made His righteousness mine and made my sin His own. And if He made my sin His own, then I do not have it and I am free.

What an awesome, what an amazing promise that that is to all who are in Christ, to all who trust in Jesus. Jesus has made our sin His own and has paid the debt fully.

And if the debt is fully paid, then we are free. Praise God. In the words of the great Anglican theologian, Richard Hooker, such we are in the sight of God the Father, as is the very Son of God Himself.

[5:29] And what that means, of course, is that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. And no condemnation, by the way, really does mean no condemnation.

We are fully accepted and forgiven in Jesus and can be certain that we have eternal life. Question. Did we do anything to earn that?

Did we do anything to deserve that? No. Of course not. It's a free gift. Salvation accomplished by God and given to us freely through faith in Christ.

Now, I've got to be honest with you, that flies in the face of everything we naturally tend to think about God and how we find acceptance with Him, doesn't it? We so naturally think, if I'm good, if I'm good, then God will love me and accept me.

This, by the way, is what many people we encounter think that the message of Christianity is. That we're telling people to be good so that God will love them and accept them.

[6:36] We need to be clear when we talk about the Gospel that this is not what we mean. The Gospel isn't religion as usual.

It isn't straighten up and be good. That is not the message of salvation. We need to be especially careful that this isn't how we ourselves think.

Because if we think this way, if we think, if I'm good or religious or whatever, then God will accept me, we'll end up thinking one of two things. If we think we're doing a pretty good job of it, we'll be proud, we'll be self-righteous, we'll look down on others.

And that's bad enough, but here's the worst thing about that. If we think that we are right with God because we're good, well, we're deceiving ourselves and we're still in our sins.

If we have anyone here this morning, I would go so far to say, we're still in that place and I don't know that we do, but if we do, please repent of that attitude and believe the Gospel.

[7:42] On the other hand, if we are honest, we know that we are sinners, we know that we're sinners and then we think that God will only accept us if we're good because we're good, then that leads to only one conclusion.

God could never love or accept me. Now, I have talked to so many people who have been in this kind of bondage and misery. What about you?

They know enough about God to know about God's judgment against sin, and that's an important thing to know, but they don't know that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

They don't know about the full pardon that is found in Jesus. They don't know that His yoke is easy and that His burden is light and that they can find rest in Him. The Gospel actually sets us free and drives away our fears, doesn't it?

What a glorious thing that is. And the cross makes all the difference. As the great preacher Charles Spurgeon once put it, my faith rests not in what I am or shall be or feel or know, but in what Christ is, what He has done, and what He is now doing for me.

[9:00] And what is He now doing for us? Anyone? Yes? Standing in heaven as our great high priest and mediator, right?

That's amazing. Now, if we don't get the great exchange, if we don't understand that, our sin for His righteousness, we don't get that right, we end up without a full, proper understanding of the forgiveness of sin.

So when we talk about how the Gospel impacts us, how it changes us, we need to start there. But we also need to be careful not to stop there. Our Reformers would remind us that while we are justified, that is, made right with God, or declared not guilty by God, justified through faith alone, the faith that justifies is never alone.

In other words, faith in Jesus will change your life, will change the way you live. Do we have anyone here who can attest to that? Thought we might.

We read in verse 17, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, He is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. To go back to C.S. Lewis, sorry, I guess I'm on a Lewis streak this morning, forgive me.

[10:30] Lewis once said this, The Christian is in a different position from other people who are trying to be good. They hope by being good to please God if there is one, or if they think there is not, at least they hope to deserve approval from good men.

But the Christian thinks that any good he does comes from the Christ life inside him. He does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because he loves us. Just as the roof of a greenhouse does not attract the sun because it is bright, but it becomes bright because the sun shines on it. Now, there is a very big difference there, isn't there?

God will make me good because he loves me versus God loves me because I am good. Striking difference, really, isn't it?

So the Christian life is one of growth and grace, of growth and holiness, of growth and faithfulness to Christ.

[11:37] By the way, not because we live in absolute terror of God and think that we have to be good for him to love us, but because we know that we are loved, we are forgiven, and we are free.

That is the only way to true holiness, true godliness, and true Christ-likeness. Now, here's a couple of things that God making us good because he loves us doesn't mean.

It doesn't mean that we get to look down on other people. I will say that again. It doesn't mean that we get to look down on other people. Not that I think that you guys are particularly prone to that, but as humans, you kind of are, and so am I.

It doesn't mean, also, that God's final acceptance of us depends on how good we become in this life. Now, let's break that down piece by piece.

First, the person who has been saved by God's grace alone and Christ alone has no place to be proud. What is there to be proud of? Has God changed your life?

[12:52] Has he? Well, praise him for it. Is it because you were awesome? No.

Not at all. It is all a gift. It's all of grace. And the next point is a really important one. There are some theological systems that would say, of course you're saved by grace through faith at first, but at the final judgment, the verdict will depend on how many good works you've done or how holy you are.

Let me be very clear. You must be saved by Christ from first to last or you won't be saved at all.

Does our acceptance with God depend on what we have done or what Christ has done?

If it's what Christ has done, that means that if we are in Christ through faith in his blood, the final verdict on us has already been pronounced.

And what is that verdict? It is not guilty. If you're a Christian, you are already free from the guilt of sin and you are being set free from sin's power over you.

[14:06] More and more in this life and you will be set free completely in the life to come. We are in Christ. We are a new creation and God, we have the promise, will make us into what he says we are.

Now, an important question, will we be without sin in this life? There are some people who would say, yes, that's possible. I have a hard time looking at myself and saying, yes, that's possible.

I don't know about you. The Holy Spirit will make us more and more like Christ in this life. And in the life to come, we have the promise that we will be like Christ, free from sin completely.

In other words, God will make us good because he loves us. We will be everlasting splendors all because of what Jesus has done.

In the meantime, we are free to live not for ourselves, but for Jesus Christ our Lord. And what a glorious privilege that is. But even now, if we are a Christian, imperfect though we may be, we can say, I'm not the person I used to be, but thank God, or sorry, got that backwards.

[15:31] I'm not the person I should be, but thank God I am not the person I used to be. My pastor growing up used to say that when a person becomes a Christian, even his or her dog notices the difference in benefits from it.

You know, he was a Baptist preacher from the South. But it changes who we are and the way we live.

Praise God for that. We are forgiven, we are a new creation. What now? I say we follow the example of the Apostle Paul and his companions.

We read in verse 20, Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

So you, me, having been forgiven in Christ, having been made a new creation in Christ, we are now called to be ambassadors for Christ.

[16:37] Now I should mention that Paul in this verse is referring specifically to himself and his fellow ministers. Ambassadors, they were called to preach and to teach in the church.

Now, not all of us share that calling, especially my baby who's making all kinds of noise over there. But, I believe that we are all called to be ambassadors for Christ because, as an Anglican, I believe, and I think the scriptures support this, in the doctrine known as the priesthood of all believers. Now, what does that mean? First of all, it means that all Christians have direct access to God through Christ. You don't have to go through me as your pastor, as your priest, to get to God. I'm sure that's a relief to all of us. It also means that all of us are ministers. We might not all be ordained, called to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments, but make no mistake, we are all called to be ambassadors for Christ.

What is an ambassador? Isn't it someone who represents their native country and a foreign land? We are citizens of heaven called to represent Christ in this world.

[18:04] You know, a while back I was talking to someone, those of you who have heard me preach at Senate have already, I already heard me mention this in a sermon, but it struck me so much that I felt I needed to include it again.

A while back I was talking to someone who asked me, what if you want to go to church but you're a sinner and you're afraid people will judge you? Now, to begin with, if being a sinner should keep someone out of church, I wouldn't be standing in this pulpit this morning.

That aside, I want us to realize this, there are people who are spiritually hungry for Jesus who are unlikely to walk through the doors of our church.

The question for us is this, will we go to them as ambassadors for Christ with the saving, life-changing message of the gospel? How many people do you know who don't know Jesus? Anyone who doesn't know anyone who doesn't know Jesus? Sorry, a lot of double negatives in that sentence. I hope you got my point. Well, if the answer is I know a whole lot of people who don't know Jesus, that's fantastic.

[19:29] There's your mission field. Get to work. Start praying about how you might reach them. Now, if you don't know people who don't know Jesus, you're not off the hook.

Why don't you know people who don't know Jesus? What do you need to do to seek them out? Maybe it's just a matter of getting to know your neighbors or co-workers better.

Maybe you just need to adopt a new hobby to meet new people. Maybe you need to jump into an outreach ministry or start a new one. But if you are not seeking to build relationships with unbelievers to be ambassadors for Christ, now is the time to start today.

You cannot be an ambassador for Christ if you're only hanging out with fellow Christians. It's like being an ambassador who never leaves the embassy building. It just doesn't work.

It's so important to be reconciled to God yourself, to have forgiveness yourself, to be a new creation being transformed by the Holy Spirit yourself, then to be an ambassador for Christ, to urge others to be reconciled to God.

[20:53] God's God's Because no one in all the world would be regarded according to the flesh. No one is an ordinary person.

The question for us is this, don't we want them to become eternal splendors rather than immortal horrors? don't we? I say, thank you Jesus for becoming sin for us.

Thank you Jesus for giving us your righteousness. Thank you Jesus for calling us to be your ambassadors. all praise and glory and honor be to your holy name forever and ever.

Amen.