



Fear and Fears - Part 11

The Fear of Perfect Justice

Luke 12:57-59

Well, this week AWANA had their annual pajama night, pajama night. The afternoon before the annual pajama night is always something that takes me off guard because the workers that are employed to lead that and some of the key volunteers end wandering through the hallways on the afternoon of pajama night in their pajamas. And since I don't always keep track of what weird things are going on in AWANA this week, it always takes me off guard, and I think I know our dress code is pretty causal around here at Compass Bible Church but this is out of bounds. And then they remind me that it's pajama night. When I think of myself as the two gals in the hallway look at each other's pajamas and say, "Well, how do I look?" and the one answers, "Oh, you know, you look good." I just want to remind you that, that answer is relative based on the day, because if you're wearing the same thing and ask the same question a week later, I'm hoping you're going to get a different answer because you better know what the event is so that you know how to dress for that event. That's just something we all have to deal with through out our lives. (1:41)

What you wear to bed may not be appropriate for what you should be wearing at the breakfast table with your family. But what you're wearing at the breakfast table with your family probably not appropriate for what you should be wearing at your office, depending on your office. What you wear everyday at the office may not be what you should be wearing for the very important client meeting that you're having that pitch that big deal to that new client, that may be a different dress code for that. And even that sales meeting may be a different kind of outfit that you're going to need for the year end company awards banquet, and even that looking so good at that event it may be you need to have something completely different on when it's your wedding day and your ceremony maybe at church even that may be different. I built that kind of hierarchy of heightening standards for dress you recognize that if you're versed in the Bible, yes, I remember in the Bible you have that concept being tossed out by Jesus just like in our day at the top of the food chain if you will, nothing greater you got to get decked out for than a wedding ceremony. (2:44)

And Jesus said, you know, entering the kingdom is like that. Seeing the king face to face, living this life and being ushered into the kingdom it's like going to this wedding feast and you'd better be dressed appropriately. Now, I'm quoting Matthew 22 when he finds people at the wedding feast that are not dressed appropriately and he says, "How did you get in here?" You remember what happens to people that aren't meeting the dress code at the wedding banquet in Matthew 22? What does the king say? Get out, he tosses them out. (3:13)

Now that illustration of course is based on something we see throughout the Bible and that is the connection or the analogy or the illustration of our righteous deeds, the quality of our righteous deeds being reflected in this illustration of our clothing. So the quality of our righteousness is like the quality of our clothing and so you better have some really good duds on when you die. I mean that's the illustration. And the question I suppose that's asked is, how good do my righteous deeds have to be when I die and meet the king face to face? Now that's the question religions have been asking and trying to answer through out the ages. (3:52)

Now you're a Sunday school graduate are you not? When you start thinking about that and I ask you how good do you have to be to meet the holy God when you die, I hope you say better than you are. As a matter of fact I learned in the Bible from the time I was kid when it comes to my righteousness, my righteous deeds are like filthy rags so I guess there's no outfit that's going to work. And if you're looking at my righteousness, no good quality of righteous deeds are going to measure up when it comes inspection time and I meet the king and I'm standing at the entrance of the kingdom. So that's what the gospel is all about is it not? Naw, we know that. Our righteousness won't cut it, so we need that theologians call an alien righteousness, we need a righteousness that's not our own. We some kind of external righteousness to be the thing that makes me acceptable to a holy God and as Paul so vividly put it in the book of Galatians, it's like us being clothed in Christ. Now that works, the Holy Father looking at the righteousness of his Holy Son now seeing me incased in the righteousness. Well, that's a righteousness that makes the inspection on that day. Well, that's good. (5:01)

That transaction is depicted in our passage this morning as settling a problem of not having what I need come the inspection. Which in this analogy, I'd like you to turn to it, Luke chapter 12, is an analogy of heading to court and I better deal with the problem before I get to court, because if I don't settle out of court when I get to court I'm in big trouble. Because the inspection there, the interrogation there, the evaluation there is only going to prove I got a big problem I can't solve on my own. So you better settle out of court. (5:36)

Now, let me prove to you that this is the illustration that's taking place in the last 3 verses of Luke 12 by – if you've been with us taking your mind back to where we've been – all these multiple illustration in the end of chapter 12 about being ready. Matter fact that one passage even says in verse 35, stay dressed for action. Don't sit there and get your jimmies on and your slippers on and kick back the king is coming, you better be dressed and ready to go. We see all of this talk and all of this instruction about, are you ready to meet your maker, is your value in the right place, the love of Christ does it supersede these others, are you right with God? And when people say, "Well, why are you the one to tell us all this?" We saw in the last section we covered last time we were together you should read the signs. I mean we have the signs that should lead us to Christ knowing he is the answer to our problem. We've got a need we can't solve it, we can't possibly solve it without Christ and he says read the signs. Don't you know? You know how to tell the weather, you can't tell the times you're dealing with right now when I'm fulfilling all these prophecies and walking on the scene as the solution to your ultimate problem? Well that's how we ended it in verse 56. (6:47)

Now we get another rhetorical question that begins our short passage this morning in verse 57, and why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? Now underline that word, right or highlight it or somehow make it jump off the page. Here's something just linguistically that may be helpful for you. When we read the word right, and I hope you've been around church long enough to know this, if not let me explain it to you. There are a lot of English words that we have in our English Bibles that sometimes based on the context translate the very same word in the original language of the document, and in this case, in the New Testament, Greek is the language of the New Testament, that one Greek word translates different words and in this case the word underneath this, dikaios, means here "right". Another way that it's rightly translated and you can look this up in your Bible software sometimes it is, "just". We get from it, justice, we get right, not only right but righteousness, we get the word justification from this. This word is translated variously to describe something that I think in this context we're about to see. If you want to know what's just or what's right or what's righteous, we're about to get something here that explains it. And that is an illustration about being dragged before – look at these – to the magistrate, the judge, the officer, prison. (8:06)

Verse 58, as you go with your accuser before the magistrate; make an effort to settle with him on the way, why? Lest he drag you to the judge and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison. I tell you, you will never get out till you've paid the very last penny. Now here's the basic analogy, you got a problem, the problem is something you've done wrong, apparently you've broken some law, you've got some criminal behavior. Well, you should think about what's just, you should think about what's right, you ought to be able to judge for yourself what is right. Now when you think about that you better settle the problem before you get before the judge. Now that just echoes everything we've been studying in the twelfth chapter of Luke when he says, "Now think about it." When I think about thinking about what's right, or what's just, or what's righteous I think to myself when I'm using words like justification and just and righteous and righteousness I start to recognize when I normally talk in terms of the Bible talk about those things I'm thinking of something that I'm not dealing with in everyday life. In other words, if I say what's right that means a little something different in my own mind, then if I say let's talk about what's righteous. Let's talk about what's just or what's in terms of God's justice, let's talk about those things. It starts to get my mind to another level. As a matter of fact that's where we end up in verse 59, you understand that when you stand before the judge there's going to be a complete accounting of everything and you are not going to get out until you've paid for every last penny and in Greek even that phrase deals with the minute coins of the ancient world. There's an exacting accountability that's coming. (9:43)

Now we looked at through out this passage we've seen illustrations about servants that are serving themselves that aren't saved at all, then you've got servants that are stumbling servants, we looked at that, and we recognize we've got a sin problem, how do we deal with that? How do we deal with that in light of the kind of justice that's described through out the New Testament and that's described here in verse 59 as having to be accounted for to the very last statement of my own mouth? The Bible says we'll be judged according to every word that's come out of our mouth.



Well that's an exacting justice that we're not just talking about normal definitions of right and wrong. Number one on your outline let's just start by pondering that a little bit. If you're taking notes, I'd love for you to write these two words to complete this simple phrase. We need to reconsider perfect justice. (10:28)

1. Reconsider Perfect Justice

Now that's not normally how we think. We don't think about perfect justice, we think about justice in a relative sense, we think about yeah we're looking good for this event, but you're not looking good for that event, if that event has and demands something completely different then the current event. In other words you're wearing pajamas to your wedding that's a problem. Well, not so much today, but it use to be a big problem. Absolute and relative justice. (10:55)

When your neighbors reject the gospel because you tell them you need to get right with God, they tell you, "I think I'll be alright because I'm a good person." Do they not say that? Then you can ask them about what they mean by good and you recognize they're defining it in a relative sense. Well I'm pretty good, I'm better than most. I'm better than a lot. You can point out to them that they've done wrong things but they don't think they're bad people. Am I right? You've tried to share the gospel with people, they don't like seeing themselves as sinners because they say, well in a relative sense I'm good. (11:20)

My Dad was a traffic cop in Long Beach. My Mom use to adjudicate parking citations, employed by the LA bar. Now I've told you this before, I grew up with a cop and a judge as parents. That was a really hard house to live in, didn't get away with much. Imagine going back when they taught me how to drive. Now my Dad use to say, "Everyone breaks dozens of traffic laws everyday." And yet, think about it, not everyone gets dozens of tickets every day. At least I don't and I assume you don't either. Well, how does this work then? Well, it works the way it works in most people's minds and that is there's a relative sense of justice when it comes to everything in the DMV manual, am I right? You don't get busted for every infraction. It really doesn't come down to a violation where you get pulled over and get a ticket unless there's some kind of flagrant violation. And I know you think, well I don't believe that, I've got some tickets that I shouldn't have gotten. But really if you want to think about it, you are getting to the place where you are trying to employ a kind of sliding scale of right and wrong when it comes to the letter of the law means. Because if you think about turning bays, those dotted lines on left turns, where you suppose to stop, how far beyond the line you have to be or can't be. I mean were breaking traffic laws all the time. I mean get the book out, go on-line and download the PDF you will see there are so many rules as to how to drive. I mean how we're breaking laws left and right and we're thinking to ourselves if anyone tried to bust us on all those things we'd be like, what are you doin'? I mean, what's wrong with you? We'd be angry. We're angry even when we get busted for a flagrant violation on the road, am I right? (12:55)

Oh, now you're all quiet, right? Any traffic tickets this week anybody? No, nobody. Don't want to get into that. Now I know what you think when you do get busted. You're angry. You don't think its right. As a matter of fact if I start applying this illustration to God who I'm saying is believing in exacting and perfect justice you'd say, well, that's my problem with God. Why is he so uptight about these things? Why does he have to employ perfect justice? I don't care for that. (13:25)

Let me switch the analogy and may be this will help you. There are things that God asks us to do and I'm telling you that he's asking us to do them in an absolute sense and if we don't he's going to hold us accountable in an absolute sense there will be a call for absolute righteousness and there will be an absolute justice at the end of our lives. And you say that's the part I don't like, but if you think about it there's a reason for that. All I have to do is take you through this simple command that you got when you were a kid when your Mom told you to clean your room. Clean your room. Now she told you to clean your room and then there was an inspection and she would expected you to clean your room and if all you did like me, you just throw a bunch of stuff into the closet and hope that she didn't open the closet you'd recognize that her standards were a little bit higher than your and you'd learn and you'd finally get to the place where you recognize what clean meant in her mind which is different then what clean meant in your mind. So you would find that and you'd be able to pass the inspection. And maybe you went on and let's just say you entered the Marine Corp, you went to MCRD down in San Diego. And they taught you there when they said clean the room it was a little different than your Mom, wasn't it? Had to bounce a quarter off the blanket or you know crease the corners of your bed, it's just a whole different experience for you and you realize the standard is different. Then you get out of the Marine Corp and maybe you become a Doctor, you go and you try to go to your



hospital and when your hospital is saying this room needs to be cleaned and this surgical room, the operating room needs to be clean, that's a whole different definition there. Then you leave that, maybe you go into some kind of manufacturing industry and you say what we really need here is a "clean room" and you mean that in a technical sense. A clean room, you guys know what a clean room is? Wikipedia that one. A clean room is a very expensive room that's got all these filters and when it comes to clean they mean something different when the workers put on this weird white outfit and then they walk in like Oompa-lumpas to try and do their work with gloves and masks and all that and all these filtration systems trying to get every little particle out of the air, all the vapors out of the air all these pollutants and all these tiny little microbes, get rid of all that, why? Because we're doing something here that if we had any microbes in this lens crafting or this, you know, wafers we're making, some kind of pharmaceutical things that we're doing. We can't have any contaminates in here. (15:38)

Now I guess the question was at any level when there's a standard that's to be met by the authority are they being mean? Is your Mom really being mean to tell you, you need to learn not to just shove things under your bed, you need to learn to be a clean person and you recognize when you get older like me and you watch that hoarders program and you go, I guess Mom was right because if I didn't learn that early I don't want to be on the hoarders program. And maybe at the hospital, even when you visit someone there, and the nurse says, you know what put on this mask and wash your hands, scrub your fingers, you can't even go into this room with this sick person until you do. They're not being mean are they? No, there's reasons for that, 'cause there's consequences if you're not. That level of cleanness is important. Now you can't go in and bring your lunch and your burrito and pull off your hat and sit there in the clean room trying to make those things in that R&D or that manufacturing, you know, clean room, you can't do that, and they're not being mean by you not cracking open your, you know, taco bell hot sauce and putting it on in the clean room. They've got reasons for that because you're going to mess things up and there will be sever consequences and the good will not be accomplished. We cannot do the work if we don't keep the standard of clean and that's depending on the context it could be radically different. (16:56)

There's a lot of things in this world we say is right and not right, good and bad, righteous and not righteous. But when you go up into the clean room of heaven, here's what the Bible says in Job 15:15. God, he can't even put his confidence in the angels in the holy ones. The heavens are not pure in his sight, how much less people, men and women, who really from his perspective here's the words he uses, they are abominable, they're corrupt, they drink in injustice like water. Well, I'm not choking on this water. You may not be choking on that water but in God's clean room you're not going to make it there because God is a God who cannot, to put it in the words of Psalm 5 verse 4, he cannot delight in wickedness, he cannot embrace evil. Or Habbakuk chapter 1 as the prophet sits there and says how can the Babylonians be used by God? I don't get it. God is a God I know whose eyes are too pure to look on evil. He cannot approve wrong. See God is a God who cannot, it's not that he will not, it's not that he's being a stickler, it's not that he's being persnickety to say we're going to have to write a citation for every single violation. That's not it at all. God is a God that ceases to be God if he can in some give approval to our sin. He can't and I don't care how minor of an infraction it is because we're dealing with a perfectly holy God and a perfectly holy God will demand perfect justice based on perfect standards of righteousness. (18:21)

So, we need to reverse our thinking. The mystery for us should not be, why would God ever hold people accountable to this standard of righteousness? It's why doesn't God always hold people accountable to this standard of righteousness? It's not going to mean now in the present time. There's a word in the Bible, forbearance that's often used of God, a God who in his forbearance doesn't immediately punish sin. Remember the illustration I gave you a couple weeks back about there's accountability at work, you miss a day at work, they're going to call you. You miss a day at the gym no one cares. There's complete and immediate accountability at work, there's no accountability at the gym but then there's this Christianity thing which is neither of those. There is an exacting accountability it's just that I said it was postponed accountability. That's why these servants could sit around and act like their master wasn't coming back but indeed they would pay for their disobedience because their master was coming back and he would settle his accounts with his servants. (19:25)

So the question for us is, wow, how could a holy God not immediately respond to the sins of people? Let me give you two names, Hophni and Phinehas. If you don't know this Old Testament story here are two priests, sons of the priest Eli and they were according to the Bible, detestable to the Lord. And they sat there day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year doing their priestly work. Now you may think well God is pretty tolerant there, you know God is not tolerant at all, he's just postponed his judgment. And I know that because I look back at the Penatuch and I can see in the first five books of the Bible a story about two other priests named Nadab and

Abihu. Do those names sound familiar? Nadab and Abihu were two other priests, sons of Levi, and the very first moment they walked into that holy place, in the tabernacle, and they did something they were not suppose to do, they offered unauthorized fire on the alter. They did something not according to the prescription that God had laid out. Do you remember what happened to Nadab and Abihu? [Snap] Killed instantly. Now you look at Hophni and Phinehas so self styled priests and you think well, you know, I guess God is not stickler, he doesn't pull people over and give them tickets for everything. No, no, he does. His judgment was coming it just happens to be postponed. Nadab and Abihu was a reminder as God stepped into time and space saying, "Listen I know this may seem like the exception but really what should be a marvel to you is that God doesn't immediately execute perfect justice in every situation." Because you and I sit here every week, we get away with a lot of stuff and God doesn't zap you dead. And you read these passages about Nadab and Abihu and you say, "Ooo, God must be having a bad day." No, that's the normal day for God. The day that you should be really surprised by is the indulgent or the forbearing, to use the Biblical word, day of God which seems to be something he continually does in his grace according to 2 Peter 3 so that more people will see their sin and come voluntarily to repentance. (21:31)

Well, that's all Old Testament stuff Mike, and you know God is much happier in the New Testament. Two words for you, Ananias Sapphira, heard of those guys? They're not guys, husband and wife. In the book of Acts in the season of grace, we've known the law in the Old Testament, now the new covenant of grace, and they come before Peter and the Apostles and they're giving a gift to the Apostles and they deceive in a very subtle way as though what they're giving to the church is the full income, the full price for a property they've sold. Now I'm thinking to myself, well I don't care if you're kind of making it seem like it's a bigger gift, I'm just grateful that you've given something to the work of Christ and the church. Well, that may have been how we respond and it may even be how Peter would have responded but that's not the way God responded. As a matter of fact God was so holy, looking at his people trying to do something in his name that he says, "If you're going to do that in a deceptive manner" [snap] going to kill you. He killed Ananias and Sapphira, dropped them dead just like Nadab and Abihu. And Peter, conduit of God's truth, you lied to the Spirit, there's going to be a judgment, and the Bible says the whole church feared. Why did they fear? Well, they feared because these are people that lied too. Are they not? Who did they stand before? Who was the one that said, "You've lied to the Spirit"? Peter. Well, just back the story up to Matthew 26 when Peter is there in the courtyard of Caiaphas and a teen-aged servant girl comes up to him while Jesus is off in the distance being tried and she says, "You're with him, I know you're with him. Your accent gives you away. You're a follower of Jesus." And what does he say? "No, I'm not" denied, deny, deny I'll even curse to prove to you I'm no holy guy following some religious rabbi. And so you know what happens to Peter in Matthew 26? He drops dead, God kills him. No, he lives another day. He lives to the place of telling Ananias and Sapphira you've lied to the Spirit and they drop dead. See the surprise shouldn't be why did Ananias and Sapphira die, why did Nadab and Abihu die, it's why is Hophni and Phinehas walk around on God's green earth for so long? How is it that this pastor could sit there and be a Pastor in the church of Jerusalem and he is one who – see this is the thing we need to rethink, God's perfect justice is what should come from the throne of God every moment that we sin, but even the first sin when they reached out their hand to grab that fruit that God said, "Do not eat it." He gives them grace, grace that enables them to come to repentance. (24:18)

Peter later on, this was not a one time event for Peter, he even the Apostle Paul had to confront him as he writes to the churches of Galatia and he says, "you know even Cephas, even Peter, was living a duplicitous life, deceiving by the way he would eat one way with certain men for the Jews and over here he would not deal with the Gentiles the way he dealt with them when he was with the Jews. And when the Jews weren't there he would go over and deal with the Gentiles completely different, and Paul has to rebuke him for that, and yet he lived on, saw his sin and repented and moved forward. All I'm telling you is this, God is a God of perfect justice, do not be fooled by his patience and his forbearance. Because according to this passage the whole point of that is to get you to settle on the way to judgment. Settle on the way. Now let's give some words to that, that have to be derived outside of the context. Turn with me if you would to Psalm 130. Psalm 130, draw this passage up and take a look at this text as we think about words that might be helpful in understanding what we are doing if we're going to settle. Now look to the immediate context I suppose and we will get there Lord willing in Luke chapter 13 as he adds the word repentance to this and certainly we know the word faith, but what's the attitudinal direction of the heart when we exercise repentance and faith? Well here it is, it's something in this passage called mercy. New Testament component that even elaborates on that is grace. Matters of fact just before we read this, why don't you jot that down, number 2 we need to plead for mercy and grace. (25:55)

2. Plead for Mercy and Grace



There's the way we're looking for feeling words, we're looking for words of response, here's the way I respond. If I'm going to settle before I go to court, if I'm going to settle before I die, I need to reach out to a God who is a God of perfect righteousness who demands that perfect righteousness, and I know I've failed in my perfect righteousness, I'm no where close to perfect righteousness, I cannot achieve it, he's going to exact perfect justice but you know what? I want a deal, is there a deal? Let's settle. Well, what I need is mercy and grace. Take a look at this. (26:28)

A Song of Ascents, do you see that in Psalm 130? If you're not familiar with that, that's a phrase that precedes as a prescription of these certain Psalms that we find grouped together that were songs that they sang in their Old Testament inspired hymn book as they went on their pilgrimage to Jerusalem which was required of Jews that trusted in Yahweh, in God, they were to go up a few times a year and when they would go they would sing these songs. And here's one of the songs they sang when they went up to the temple mount and they were going to see the priest and they were going to see the alter and they were going to smell that fragrant aroma of the sacrifices and they were going to think of the building they couldn't go in and only the priests could go in part of it and the high priest and the holy of holies. All these barriers to the God enthroned there above that box of the covenant and the glory that was there as a manifestation of God's greatness and they couldn't even get to it and they were going to go there and remember their sin by the sacrifice. All those things they were headed to that, they were envisioning that, they've done it before and they're singing songs like this. (27:24)

Verse 1, Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD! Verse 2, O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my – here it is – pleas for mercy! If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? I mean really if we were going to get busted for every infraction, no one would make it. We can't make it. God we need your mercy and thankfully we know this, part of what your word has promised if we plead for mercy, you'll give us grace. Here's the word, but with you there is forgiveness. No bigger expression of grace then someone to forgive the debt against them. We've sinned against God and God says, "I'll forgive you." And what does that make me do? Take my little free pass out of jail and go skipping down the hallways, excited, now I can live and do whatever I want? No, that leads to a sense of fear, great respect for a God who could and should condemn us but instead gives us a pardon. We fear him. But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. I wait for the LORD, I want this, this is what I need, I'm pleading for this mercy and grace. My soul waits, in his word I hope. You promised, I want this, it's like Jacob wrestling there in the book of Genesis, bless me. Here's the idea of the passion cry of the repentant person. Saying, God I need your mercy, I'm a sinner, I deserve your penalty but I need grace, I want grace. Verse 6 he says it again, my soul waits for the Lord more than the watchmen for the morning, I can't wait for this bathing in the sunlight of the forgiveness that comes through the redemption and grace of God, I need it more than the watchman for the morning. (29:02)

Verse 7, O Israel, hope in the LORD! That's the only hope you have, it's not cleaning up the bad clothes you've got, it's not trying to some how make a deal with God based on my own merit, I need his redemption for with the LORD there is steadfast love. There is covenant love, there's a love that is faithful and tenacious and with him there is plentiful redemption. Now we're seeing pictures of it on the horizon as we see the smoke go up from the alter as we're marching up to Jerusalem and we realize God can forgive, he can punish the innocent for the guilty. God is a God who buys back the sinner and he will redeem Israel, not from some, not from the worse, but from all of his iniquities. Psalm 130 what a great song to remember God's perfect justice is dealt with by God's sacrifice, not of an animal, not of a bull, not of a goat, not of a lamb but as John said when he saw him walking up on the horizon, "There he is, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." Christ. (30:01)

One more passage on this before we leave this great point. Go to Romans chapter 3 with me. If you're not going to turn to any other passage this morning, turn to this one. Romans chapter 3, if you glance through the first half of this you remember, oh this is the passage talking about our sin. Jews are sinners, Gentiles are sinners, we're all sinners. There's that long length of Old Testament quotes on sinners, sinner, sins, sin, sin, we're all sinners. We get it. Now here comes the solution. Sinners who recognize their sin should cry out for mercy and grace. Our mouths, bottom of verse 19, are closed; we're accountable to God, all of us. Because we know, verse 20, no human outfit I can put on to dress up my sin, works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes a knowledge of sin. I only recognize my deficiency when I look at myself, but now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law. There is something that can solve the problem that can beat this inspection. There's something that's going to make me acceptable to a perfectly holy God that demands perfect justice. Well what is that? Well it's something that has been manifested to us in the present; of course we'll find out here in a second, in



Christ, although it wasn't foreign in terms of the preview, the law and the Prophets bore witness to it. The ceremony pointed to it, the sacrifices gave us a sense of it, a paradigm about it, the prophecies foretold it. There would be this Messiah that would come and fulfill all of this. That's why John could look at Christ and say, I know what this is, the fulfillment of the sacrificial system, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. And what is it? (31:43)

Verse 22, the righteousness of God through faith, not our works, in Jesus Christ for all who – now here's the bad translation in English to a word we use too broadly – believe. You do understand that word, *pisteuo*, it means for us to put our confidence in, our trust in, we grasp it like someone who's waiting like a watchman for the morning, we take hold of it because we're hoping in the mercy and the grace of God for those who trust there's no distinction, all of us need it. It's the same exchange whether you're the worst sinner on the 11 o'clock news, or whether you're the most moral person in the neighborhood, there's no distinction. All have sinned, verse 23, and fall short of the glory of God. We're all going to fail the inspection, but those who pass it, they're justified. There's our word by the way. Same word, *dikaioo*, used over there in Luke 12 in our passage, I mean here's the justification that is by grace as a gift. I mean that's a redundant statement, that's what grace is, it's something unearned, it's a gift. Through the purchase that Psalm 130 looked forward to, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, paid for the penalty. He bought us back, the guilty now made innocent. How did that work? (33:00)

Verse 25, whom God put forward as a – underline it - propitiation by his blood. Now you didn't use that in casual conversion this week, did you, the word propitiation? Propitiation, it's an interesting word and translators don't like to translate it. They don't like to translate it, because they know if you translated it directly across from Greek to English then people are going to go, what is that mean? Propitiation, it's a word that's hard to understand in the Greek language and even harder if you just use the most technical word for it, the most literal word, propitiation, so translators say, "I don't like it, I don't like to translate it that way because people won't know what it means." ESV was bold enough just to translate it straight across. I should say that though translators don't like to translate it because people don't know what it means, modern theologians don't like it because they do know what it means and they avoid it. Why? Well, ask Rob Bell up the road this morning. He doesn't like it. Why? Because it means that my real adversary in this case is not the devil, he's the accuser, no my real problem is with God. As Sproul rightly said, you know, who we're being saved from is not the enemy, not Satan. I mean we're really being saved from God in Christ's death, which is exactly what the modern theologians don't like you ever saying. Oh, propitiation that's the picture. I've got a problem and my real problem is with my creator and the only way to solve that is this transaction on a cross where he says, "Satisfied, my justice is satisfied." See modern theologians don't like that. They say, "Aww, that's barbaric, there needs to be some sort of sacrifice to appease the mad and angry Gods." I guess that's a caricature of the real Biblical picture of a perfectly holy God demanding perfect righteousness, necessitating perfect justice, looking at a bunch of imperfect people. And I know we'd like to say, "Well, I don't need some kind of payment for my sin because I'm okay, I'm a pretty nice guy." It's just like a bunch of skunks at a skunk convention complaining about Ralph the really stinky skunk, and isn't he bad, if anybody should be labeled stinky it's Ralph, the stinky skunk. Now, if you're not a skunk and you look at the whole entire skunk convention you say, "You're all a bunch of stinkers. You're smelly." We're sitting here with lateral comparisons, thinking there'll be no payment for our sin, but all of us have fallen short of the glory of God. There has to be payment, an exacting payment on human life, the perfect and infinite worth of the deity enwrapped in humanity, two one in this perfect humanity, perfect deity, dying in our place so that God the Father would say, "Paid" which is exactly what Jesus said on the cross, *tetelestai*, an accounting term, paid in full, done, it is finished, how most translators translate it. (35:53)

Propitiation, that's the picture. How did he buy us back? How did he clothe us? Through the propitiation by his blood to be received by faith, same word, *pisteuo*, for us, in this case it's a noun, *pistis*, same word, that we trust him, throwing ourselves on the mercy and grace of God. This by the way was to show God's righteousness, here's human righteousness paying for sinfulness because his divine forbearance had passed over former sins, he sure was patient. The payment wasn't on the table but he put up with a lot of our sin and it was to show in space and time his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just, he completely continues to maintain his perfect justice and the one who can also step in and justify the sinner. The justifier the one who has trust, confidence, faith in Jesus Christ. (36:50)

And for our part, what do we do? Climb the steps on our knees saying, "Hail Mary's"? No, you put your confidence in Christ with a heart that's penitent, crying out for his mercy and his grace, and to put it back in the terms of Psalm 130, hope in the Lord, his steadfast love, his plentiful redemption and God will redeem us from all our iniquities.

Plead for mercy and grace and that's the key. If you're sitting here this morning, and I can't imagine in a room this size, if not some of you sitting here just playing church it's just some kind of club for you and you don't get it. I don't think it can be any clearer than what we're looking at this morning. Settle out of court. Don't say I'm going to take my chances in court. It's like someone who's got a violation on their mind, and it's one violation, and you think well I have done a couple of things here and that may be a sticking point but I'm going to go and I'm going to hope this works out, not realizing that God from the very beginning of your life has been recording every single word, every single motive, every single action. It's like you trying to fight a traffic ticket in court not realizing that when you get there, everything you've ever done in your car has been taped since you were 16 years old. An exacting justice is going to come your way. Settle out of court. How do you settle? Throw yourself on the mercy and grace of God. And if you do that you'll have forgiveness. (38:10)

Well, how do I know I have forgiveness? Well, I'm glad you've asked that question. That is a good question. This particular passage is confused some people because they look at it and if they don't look at it in context, they think it is a direct instructive for us to make sure that if we have problems with people in our lives we settle those things and we don't ramp it up into some big war and go to court with each other. Now the Bible does talk about us not going to court with each other. We're not going to go litigating each other in some civil court dispute. We're supposed to be Christians we should be able to settle this. As a matter of fact you'll see the very same language; at least some of the phrases used much earlier in Christ's ministry on the Sermon on the Mount when he says over there in the Sermon on the Mount you know what? You should settle your problems with people and you ought to do that knowing you could ramp this up and you could be a loser when you think you could be a winner. And he starts it this way, if you're at the alter presenting your present, your gift to God, and you remember someone is an accuser in your life in these lateral relationships, leave your gift at the alter, and go be reconciled to your brother. Now some people look at that passage and this passage and they think oh it's the same instruction. It's not the same instruction. It's an illustration here and an exhortation there. Same idea used in two different ways. All I want to do here without getting tricky with you is say let's go back to the echo of that ethical command. And let's think, ok if this is an illustration of me settling out of court with a holy God where does that instruction from the Sermon on the Mount that sounds a lot like this, how does that work? Well, it works this way; it works in this way if I am someone who received mercy and grace, well then what's demanded of me that in my lateral relationships I'm merciful and gracious. That would be good to write down. Number 3, be merciful and gracious. (39:48)

3. Be Merciful and Gracious

You receive the forgiveness of God, to put it in simple terms, Colossians chapter 3, you ought to be forgiving, you ought to forgive just as he's forgiven you. And here's the thing you can never do that, not because you can't obey that command because I guarantee you this, no one is going to sin against you as much as you've sinned against the one who has forgiven you everything. No one is going to sin against you, the way you've sinned against a holy God, because I guarantee you, your righteous standards are never as high as God's righteous standards not to mention the complete volumes of sins you've committed against God, there's no possible way you have a single person in your life that has ever sinned against you, as much as you have sinned against a holy God. But God does demand this, hey if you've got someone who's got a problem against you, you better settle with him, you better exercise the same kind of mercy and grace that you've received as it's put in a different context if you freely receive that then you ought to freely give. If God has forgiven you, love this Greek word, *kathos*, you should forgive just as, in the same manner as, in the same way he's forgiven you. (40:56)

We'll wrap it up with this, Matthew chapter 18; turn there if you would with me. Matthew chapter 18, speaking of Peter that knew something at least later in his ministry of the exacting justice of God, watching Ananias and Sapphira fall dead at his feet. He asked the question about people that sin against him, he knows how serious it is to sin against God and he also knows how gracious God has been toward him and seeing him, we'll learn this later in the same book, he's going to learn how gracious God is in forgiving him. But he asked a question about his lateral relationship with human beings on the planet. Verse 21, Matthew 18:21, then Peter came up and said to him, - Christ - "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? How often? As many as say seven, it's a good godly number, seven?" Jesus said to him, verse 22, "Nah I don't say to you seven times, but if you really like that seven number, how about this, seventy seven." Which of course there's some humor here in Christ's words we often miss, because if I say to you go forgive someone seventy seven times, you're going to have to keep track, you better get an app for that, right? Get to the place, okay, I forgive you, 26, 37, 42, 56, I mean this is going to take a while. What's the point, this is stupid. What am I doing? I should understand this about the basics of what it is to love

people the way God has loved me. Here's how it's put in 1 Corinthians 13, keep no record of wrongs. So I know Jesus clearly isn't being literal about this, he's being funny. Hey Peter how about seventy seven times. How do I know he's not being specific and literal about this? Well he tells a story and he makes it very clear, verse 23, therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. That ought to send a chill through your spine and remind you of the inspection. God will settle accounts with all of his people and I don't mean his people in sense of redeemed people, I mean all his people, all the people that he's made. Everybody on planet earth will have their accounts settled. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. A talent by the way, a measure of silver in the ancient world, anywhere from, scholars will say 66 to 72 pounds of silver there is some, there's range in this that we try to figure out in exacting terms today. Silver if you just look at the price of silver, which is a little down since the last time I preached this passage but if you did the numbers on this, this is anywhere from 180 to 200 million dollars. Now this is a servant, a slave of a master, now think about this I don't know how much money you could wrack up in debt with your employer, in your petty cash that you keep, borrowing, the IOUs go, I mean this is a comical amount of money. You want to see Christ's humor, it starts with seventy seven time, let just talk about a guy who owed 200 million dollars to his boss. Wow, that's crazy money. And since he couldn't pay, ha, ha, ha, of course he can't pay that kind of money, his master ordered him to be sold. Well I guess I'll cut my losses here, we'll just sell him, sell his wife, sell his kids, sell all he has, all his future earnings potential, we'll just sell that to someone and that will be the payment. Just cut our losses, offer him a compromise. (44:27)

Verse 26, so the servant fell on his knees, didn't want to be sold, didn't want his family sold, and he implored him. Here's some begging right here for mercy and grace. Have patience with me, I will repay you everything. And again a snicker in the crowd; you can't possibly pay back 180-200 million dollars, not as a servant. I don't care if you've got all kinds of crazy raises in your career; you're not going to pay that kind of money back. Yeah, but at least he had the right heart didn't he? Give me grace, give me mercy, I want to do whatever it takes to get right with you. And out of pity – here's the master now – out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him, which is a bit of a play on words, that's what *aphiemi*, forgiveness means, to let it go, to release it. He released him and he forgave the debt. But when the same servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, denarii is the common wages of a worker in a given day. So this is a hundred days wage, 6000, 7000, 8000 dollars, let's just call it 8000 dollars. 8000 dollars, that's a lot of money between people making minimum wage. That's a lot of money, you can see why in the middle of verse 28 he seizes him and begins to choke him and he says, "Pay me what you owe." So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him. Have patience with me, and I will pay you. *Déjà vu*. I've heard that before. Oh yeah, I said that. Verse 30 so he said, you know I've been forgive much, I'm going to forgive you. No, he refused and he went and put him in prison till he should repay the debt. If I had time we can go through every line in the rest of this parable but you know it doesn't end well. The master does not take kindly to people that want forgiveness but aren't willing to give it. The master doesn't take kindly to people that want mercy and grace in the most profound debt they could ever wrack up and then find debts in their relationships and not be merciful and gracious. God doesn't take kindly to that, as a matters of fact he says if you really have received grace and mercy, guess what you'll demonstrate, grace and mercy. So much so that on the model prayer back in there in the Sermon on the Mount he said in the prayer we ought to pray this way, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Remember that line? Well, then the end of that, the commentary in Matthew he said this, you know what; if you forgive your brothers, the father will forgive you; if you do not forgive the father won't forgive you. What's the point? The hallmark of the truly forgiven, the people that really have reached out in penitence for mercy and grace they're going to reflect mercy and grace. Is it always going to be easy? No. Is it something we need preachers to continuously and periodically preach to us about, yeah, here we are again. Picture those faces in your mind those people that you're bitter toward, the people you can't relinquish the debt. Does that mean I have warm green fuzzy feelings toward everyone who sins against me, I'm not saying that. But I am saying this I've released the debt. I'm not trying to get even anymore. I've done what Romans say, I've turn him over, God's going to deal with this. There's no debt between me and you. (47:42)

I referenced it, but Colossians 3:13 you got to bear with one another, if you have a complaint against one another, forgive each other as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. You have no option here. Sometimes the church you'll get a few good suggestions for application, here's the deal, this is not a suggestion. You must forgive. It's the sign you have been forgiven. You must see in your life the quest in your sanctification to be increasingly merciful and gracious; it's a sign that you've received mercy and grace. And that only makes sense, doesn't it? (48:20)



There's a lot of things in life that I want that I can't afford, but there's really only one thing that I need that I can't afford. You only have one thing in your life that you really ultimately need that you can't afford. Most people in religion think that they can afford the thing they need. They need to deal with the problem of a holy and perfect God that they're going to meet one day, and they think they're going to manage in court. I hope you recognize that what we need we cannot afford. It would be like me saying I know what's coming for California it's the worse earthquake you've ever seen and in my prognostication I'm 100% sure it's going to happen in 15 minutes. It's going to wipe the entire state out, everyone is going to die, it's going to be awful. But I got a solution, I've got a tunnel here and if we start right now we can go down in this tunnel, it's shelter, it goes down about a mile, there's everything down there, I've decked it out for the last 10 years I've been working on it and it's awesome, you can come and be a part of it. It's going to cost 20 million dollars for you per person in cash. So I don't know what your ATM daily allotments are but can you get that? I need it in 5 minutes. You'd have a need, temporally speaking, that you could not afford. I mean that's the picture now of Christ stepping up to someone who starts to recognize their need and saying, you need how much? 20 million, I've got 20 million, here. Let me give you 40 million. And then you have someone sitting next to you going, I'd like to go, nah. You realize what people need from us is so much smaller than what we needed from God. We have in the gospel something so profound God has taken what you need and he has paid it at great expense to himself and he's offered it to you freely. You just need to throw yourself on the mercy and grace of God. You need to cry out to him, you need to seek it like the watchman longs for the morning. You need to know there's plentiful redemption that's provided for you now. How does that change your character? I mean just speaking in human terms that should radically transform who you are. I hope we see that transformation lived out daily, the reflection of that kind of comprehension of the gospel clearly reflected in your lives. If not, you've got to question whether or not you've encountered the gospel if you've responded to the gospel. Maybe something that we're encouraged, motivated, fueled to do this week because we've sat under the teaching of God's word. Let's pray. (51:02)

God, give us hope and help. Give us a sense of your presence in our lives as we seek to live in light of the gospel. For those who are sitting here this morning who are only church attenders, they're here riding on the coattails of their parents or they think going to church makes them a Christian, I pray today be a day for them to see a need in their lives and respond in repentance and faith, trusting and crying out for your mercy and grace. God for those of us who know we have our names written in the Lamb's Book of Life I pray it be a day for us to see what kind of fruit that's bearing for us. God motivate us, convict us where we need conviction, encourage us and fuel us on to live for you this week. In Jesus name, Amen. (51:49)