

1 - “The Most Important Sentence in the Bible” // Romans 3:23–26 // *The Whole Disciple #1y*

It was July of 1961 and the 38 members of the Green Bay Packer football team had assembled for the first day of training camp. Their previous season had been fantastic—they’d made it all the way to the National Football Championship--what we today call “the Super Bowl”--and had lost in a heartbreaker. The returning team was even stronger this year, and it was almost certain they’d make it to the championship again. They were the top team in the nation.

This was a group of elite athletes at the top of their sport--which is what made what coach Vince Lombardi did when he walked into the locker room for the first time that season so bizarre. David Maraniss describes the moment in his best-selling biography of Lombardi, called *When Pride Still Mattered*:

“Gentlemen,” he said... “this is a football.”

Lombardi (Maraniss, said) took nothing for granted. He began a tradition of starting from scratch, assuming that the players were blank slates who carried over no knowledge from the year before.

The greatest coaches never take the basics for granted. And so that’s what we’re going to return to today.

This weekend we are beginning a short series called ***“The Whole Disciple”***--**in which we discuss what it means to be a disciple and how we live as one**--and today we’re going to start with the basics.

And I would encourage us not to say, *“Ah, I’ve been in church; I know all this stuff. I don’t need to pay attention,”* for a couple of reasons.

First, it’s possible that a lot of us here don’t know them as well as we think we do. Last year, I spoke **at a Christian High School** chapel and before I spoke I passed out 3x5 cards and asked them to write down their answer to this question of “What is the Gospel?” And then I took up their **responses**:

- About $\frac{1}{3}$ of the kids demonstrated a grasp on at least the basics of the gospel. They may not have said it perfectly, but at least the basics were there.
- Another $\frac{1}{3}$ or so gave an answer that was not wrong, per se... but suffice it to say that what they wrote fell pretty far short of a clear gospel explanation. Answers like, “Believe in God and try to obey Jesus.”
- Another $\frac{1}{3}$ gave answers that were just **flat out wrong**. Like, nothing **ambiguous about it**--this was **well-articulated** heresy.
- **And that was at** one of the best Christian schools in our area!
- So--I figure if some of them are unclear, maybe some of us are, too. And, **today, I want to help you get clear.**

Secondly, even if you do know the basics, the greatest Christians have history have found that going back to the gospel is the way to really grow in the Christian life. Martin Luther always said, “To progress in the Christian life is always to begin again.”

So, here's the question: Do you **KNOW that you KNOW** that you **KNOW** that you belong to Jesus, that you are at peace with him, and that you will go to heaven when you die? **And could you explain that to someone in a clear, compelling way?**

PAUL WROTE **Romans 3:23–26** to answer that question. So **TURN there, if you have your Bibles.**

- **Theologian Leon Morris** said that Romans 3:23–26 is the most important sentence in the Bible (*Those 4 verses, btw, are all one sentence in Greek*). The most important sentence in the Bible, Morris said; indeed, maybe the most important sentence in human history.
- The great reformer **Martin Luther** said that this sentence--these 4 verses--mark "the center point of the whole Bible" and that the entire Christian life rises and falls on our understanding of this sentence.

And let me just say before we dive into this text, today WILL END with a chance for you to be **baptized if you never have...**

- BAPTISM IS your declaration that you understand the truth being communicated in these verses and that you are declaring your loyalty to Jesus.
- **Scripture teaches** us that baptism is to be our FIRST ACT of obedience after surrendering to Jesus, and to be frank, I know there are a number of you in here who haven't done this yet...
 - For **some of you**, that's because you haven't yet fully surrendered to follow Jesus, and today you're going to really grasp the gospel for the first time and your first act of obedience to Jesus will be to get baptized;

- For **others**, you trusted Christ at some point in the past, but you've yet to take the step to declare that through baptism.
- (And **I'm not here to judge you for that**, but to give you a chance to do it as 2024 gets started.
- I know you **may not have come today planning** on this... but God was planning on it, and we were, too, FWIW. We have everything you'll need--we've got **changes of clothes**; someone who can **take your picture**; we have **hair products** and even swim caps for your hair if that's your thing. Seriously, we have **everything you'll need**. That will be at the end. But first, let's look at **the most important sentence in the Bible**:

23 For all have sinned (Paul says) **and fall short of the glory of God**, I covered this verse at Christmas, but let me do it again really quickly.

- **SINNED...**
 - What is sin? "*Gentlemen, this is a football.*" A lot of us think of sins primarily as heinous acts--adultery, murder, racism, and etc. Or maybe you think "sin" is an outdated word indicating a failure to conform to some repressive, Victorian-era standard of morality. But sin, in its essence, is simply rebellion against God.
 - I always told my kids to **define sin by the middle letter: S-"I"-N**.
 - Sin is when "I" think I know better than God; I think my way is better than his; I choose to do what I want to do rather than what he wants me to do because what I want is more important than what he wants.
 - I make myself the focus of my life, instead of making him the center.

- This is a rebellion that **all of us**, Paul says, have participated in. Just ask yourself: Has God *always come first in your thoughts, affections, and actions? Have you always trusted that he knew best in all things and submitted joyfully to him? Has his will and his glory always come before your desires?* I think the answer any honest person would give is “no.”
- All of us have sinned, Paul says, and that means **we all fall short of the glory of God.**
- **Think of God’s Law, the 10 Commandments, as the silhouette of a perfect heart.** A perfect heart would desire, naturally, to obey all those things, and a perfect life would perfectly conform to them.
- How easily and naturally has your heart conformed to God’s law?

Several years ago, as part of a leadership exercise, I got to fly a simulator at the Southwest Airlines Pilot training facility in Dallas--these simulators are amazing. It’s crazy realistic--it’s a hanging cockpit suspended by all these hydraulics so you feel everything just like you were up in the air. If you didn’t know better, you’d think you were in the air. It was me and a couple of other guys--the instructor let us take off and fly around for a while, but when it was time to land, he’d have the autopilot take over.

Well, when you’re flying, there’s a little box that you are supposed to fly through, a little silhouette of a plane you should keep your plane in. And later they’d evaluate you by how well you stayed in that silhouette. When it was my turn, I was having a lot of trouble staying in that box. (Over here; there; up; down...)

The best part was I somehow convinced the instructor, since I was last, to let me take the simulator off autopilot and land it outright. I’m still not sure why he did it; at first he said ‘No, no, no, can’t do that’ blah blah but eventually I convinced him--I think I just wore him down, which seems to be a superpower of mine--and y’all, I brought that big 737 in and I don’t mean to brag, but I totally stuck the landing). And it’s so realistic. The way it bounces and moves... They even have you land at a specific airport and the graphics around you look exactly like that airport. And so I landed at Detroit airport and I pressed forward on top of the pedals to apply the brakes (the brakes in an airplane are on the top of the pedals) but y’all, the plane won’t slow down. And the runway is whizzing around us, and in the graphics around us I can see we’re getting toward the end of the runway and just beyond that is terminal E so I press harder and eventually I’m pressing with all my might (with my back bowed up) but IT WON’T SLOW DOWN and y’all we hit terminal E going several hundred miles an hour and the simulator flashed a red screen and then just went dark and still, and I thought, “Oh, this is what death feels like.”. And the instructor said, “Well, we’re all dead.” And I said, “I don’t understand. I was pressing the brakes. Why wouldn’t the plane slow down?” And the instructor, almost as an afterthought, as he was getting up, pointed to the throttle and said, “You gotta pull that back.” (I still had the throttle halfway open when we landed and hit the terminal.) So, I won’t be your pilot anytime soon.

When it comes to the glory of God, not only did we stray crazy far out of the silhouette we should be flying in, we all crashed and burned. Maybe you’re better than me; maybe you’re not. But compared to the glory of God, we all fall short. Way short.

But good news, Paul's just getting this sentence started. We are, he says, **24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.**

Now, there's a **bunch of really big** words in there, words you don't use a lot in normal conversation, like propitiation and justification and redemption. And you say, 'Pastor, I like small, simple words. Make it simple.' And I'm gonna to try to, but I also need you to understand that **these words contain within them** the secrets of eternal life so you need to learn them. And, I figure if you can memorize the names for your \$14.00, 16-ingredient drinks at Starbucks, you can learn these.

The first word is easy: **Vs. 24**, GRACE. "We are justified **by his GRACE as a gift...**"

- Grace simply means gift. Grace means receiving something you neither earned nor deserved.
- **Many people today (this is common, general cultural wisdom) like to say that all religions are basically the same:** they teach you to love God; they emphasize honesty and kindness and integrity... they may differ in the names they give to certain, but their basic messages are the same. **But that's not true.**
 - You see, every other religious message in the world works off the premise of **"I obey, therefore I will be accepted."**
 - **The GOSPEL, however,** reverses that. The gospel says, **≠ "I am accepted** (by a gift of grace); **therefore** (in response to that) **I obey."**

- Or, here's another way to say it: **Most religions are spelled D-O; it's what you DO that earns your acceptance before God;** the gospel is spelled **≠ D-O-N-E.** It's a gift you receive that makes you right with God.
- My Sunday School teacher when I was a kid always said I could remember GRACE as **God's-Riches-At-Christ's-Expense.**
- **It's free for you, yes, but cost Christ everything.**
- **And that, you see, sets Christianity apart from every other religion in the world!**
- **Philip Yancey**, in his book, "*What's So Amazing About Grace?*" recounts this delightful little story:

"During a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world debated what, if any, belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities. Incarnation? Other religions had different versions of gods' appearing in human form. Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of return from death. The debate went on for some time until C. S. Lewis wandered into the room. 'What's all the rumpus about?' he asked, and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity's unique contribution among world religions. Lewis responded, 'Oh, that's easy. It's grace.'" (and walked out of the room)

Please don't say the uneducated, ignorant thing that all religions teach the same thing. Right or wrong, Christianity teaches a whole different approach to God.

Grace. The 2nd word to note in that sentence, and this a big one: Vs. 25 "...whom God put forward as a PROPITIATION by his blood..."

- PROPITIATION. “Propitiation” is the Greek word “**hilasterion**,” and it means that **wrath has been satisfied**--the **cause for anger** has been taken away. Paul says because of God’s grace, through the work of Christ Jesus, God’s wrath against us has been satisfied.
- Many today find the **concept of God’s wrath difficult** for a couple of reasons. They say, “But isn’t God supposed to be a God of love?”
 - **But see, I always say, that’s a very shallow view of love, because when you love something, you naturally hate, you’re angry at, whatever destroys it.**
 - If you **love the cancer patient**, you hate the cancer destroying their body. **I love my kids**, so I hate seeing the things in them I know will harm them in life: dishonesty, cruelty, bigotry, laziness.
 - In fact, I get angry when I see those things, not despite the fact that I love them, but because I love them.
 - **Wrath, you see, is a necessary component of love.** Anger is not the opposite of love; apathy is.
 - **Which is why God hates sin: You see, all the destruction in the world; all the sickness and pain and divorce and broken relationships ultimately GO BACK TO SIN. And **because of that, God HATES sin.****
 - Some of you, btw, have been the VICTIM of sin--you’ve been **wronged** or **used** or **abused**; and because GOD LOVES YOU he hates the sin that was done to you and he is angry at the person who did it to you.
 - Imagine if YOU were **forced to watch some VIOLENT ASSAULT** on a child or some **RACIAL ASSAULT** on an elderly person. That feeling you’d get in the pit of your stomach... that’s what God feels about sin but multiplied x a billion.
 - So, God is angry at sin because of his love for his glory and his creation.
- **The second problem people have with the concept of propitiation** is they say, “What’s the whole deal with needing a blood sacrifice to offer us forgiveness? Why couldn’t God just give us a stern talking to and say, “OK, I think we all learned our lesson; let’s try this again; everybody back in the pool. All skate going the same direction again. Don’t take the apple next time the snake offers it, okay?”
 - **And the answer is because at the core of who he is, God is justice.**
 - **Psalm 89:14** says that JUSTICE is the very foundation of God’s throne and for God to simply overlook sin would be unjust.
 - **To use a very simple example: Imagine I’ve got a brand new Audi, and you know where I keep my keys so you STEAL it and wreck it but don’t have money to pay for it... Now, imagine we go to court, and the **Judge says to you**, “You are guilty of stealing the car. But I forgive you. You are free to go, no consequences.”**
 - Now, **that might be awesome and moving for you**, but who is left wronged in that situation? Me. I’m glad they were forgiven, but I’m still out of an Audi automobile!”
 - **The same thing is true with us and God. We owe a debt to God’s justice** that has to be paid.
 - **NOW, say in that courtroom** that after the Judge brings down the gavel, sentencing you to pay for my car, **I** say to you, “**I** forgive you! **You don’t owe me any money.**” Am I allowed to

do that? Of course. But, if so, what happened to the debt you incurred with the car? I agreed to pay it myself.

- Propitiation is God absorbing the penalty of his own wrath into himself so that he could give us forgiveness.¹
- That's why Paul says in **vs. 26** that at the cross God **to demonstrate(d) his righteousness**, so that he would be (both) **just and** (could) **the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.**
- At **the cross**, God **accomplished TWO things** that up until that point seemed like they were hopelessly at odds: He **satisfied** the full demands of his justice **AND he saved us.**

Charles Spurgeon tells the story of an ancient Saxon king who had the reputation among his small little Kingdom as being the fairest and most loving king that had ever lived. The people loved him, and he loved him. Well, one day he discovered that money was being stolen from his treasury. And so he gathered the people and announced, "You know I care about you, and that I've always been committed to caring for even the poorest among us. If you have needs, let me know. But you can't steal money from my treasury. That's sabotage."

But every day, money continued to be stolen. So, the king made a decree: Though it breaks my heart, whoever is caught stealing from his treasury will be whipped with ten lashes. Several weeks passed by, and money continued to be stolen. The king upped the penalty to twenty lashes.

Still, money was stolen. The king once again doubled the penalty to forty lashes, which was, in essence, the death penalty. Few people survived 40 lashes.

According to the story, 2 days after this decree, the thief was caught red-handed. It was the king's mother. She was the one who had been stealing the whole time.

And so, the people wondered, "What will the king do?" Some people thought he would punish her, but others asked, "How could such a loving king kill his own mother?" Others thought he would let her go. But this would not be fair. The law was the law.

The king asked for a couple of days to think it over, and when he emerged, he decreed that the law was the law, and the punishment had to be given. So, they took the king's mother out to the whipping post, tied her up, ripped open the back of her shirt, and the guard raised his whip to bring down that first lash.

But just before he did, the king said, "Stop." And the king walked over, looked lovingly at his mother, then took off his royal robe and laid it aside and wrapped his body around hers. Then he looked back at the guard and said, "Now you may hit her." The guard said, "But I can't. If I bring down this lash, I'll hit you." The king said, "I've given you an order. Do it." And so the guard did, but every single lash

¹ "Forgiveness is not merely dismissing a wrong; it is accepting the penalty on behalf of the wrongdoer for the sake of the relationship. It is absorbing the

pain yourself rather than seeking to put it back on the other person." Jeremy Treat, 96.

went into the King's body, and not one touched the mother. And so the King fully lived up to his reputation of being the fairest king ever to live, and also the most loving.

Now, you say, "Is that story true?" Honestly, I'm not sure. But either way, it's a picture of what God did for you on the cross. God was **just** and also **the one who justifies** those who come to him for salvation.

- **BTW, this is why the Messiah had to be God himself. God couldn't send an angel, or some kind of lesser god, to die for us, like the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses teach.** I mean, If Jesus were anything other than God himself, God would not have been forgiving us himself, he'd have been punishing somebody else randomly for our sin. And that wouldn't be gracious and loving; it would be unjust and cruel.
 - If you and I were in business and you wrong me and I say, "Oh, don't worry, I forgive you because I took out my anger on one of my own employees; I docked his pay instead of yours. That's not loving. It's capricious and unjust. It's only grace when you absorb the consequences into yourself--which is what God did at the cross. He took into his own body his anger against sin, and could be both just and the justifier of the one with faith in Jesus.

Which is the next word: **Vs. 24**, justified. "... (we) are **JUSTIFIED...**

- **Justified means "declared righteous."** It refers to a **legal status**: You are **declared to be** something. **In God's eyes, you're seen as righteous, perfect, blameless, even though** in your behavior you aren't those things.

- On the cross, when he died, some of Jesus' last words were, "It is finished." In Greek, what he said was "tetelestai." Archaeologists have found that phrase scrawled across receipts in the first century. After you had paid your debt, the debt collector would write the word "tetelestai," which meant, "This account is settled; nothing more is owed." From that point on, to demand payment on this account would be unjust. That's what the word "justified" means. Declared righteous.
- **Justification DOES NOT MEAN (and this is where a lot of people get confused) that you gradually become, in your behavior, a righteous enough person to go to heaven.**
 - **Becoming a righteous person is important**, of course, but in theological terms, that is called sanctification. You become righteous.
 - Justification is a legal term indicating that **God declares you righteous even while** you are still struggling with sin. My last 24 hours has been filled with sin. But even so, God has **declared** me righteous.
 - **Martin Luther** had a great way to describe this: **simul justus et peccator. Simultaneously righteous and a sinner.**
 - The Christian is simultaneously justified even while he still struggles with sin.
- **This was pictured in the OT process of SACRIFICE:** Once a year each believing family would bring a lamb: a perfect, unblemished lamb, and they would lay it on the altar and place their hand on its head, confessing their sin. The lamb's throat was cut.
 - **In that moment**, that family was **JUSTIFIED**, because the Lamb took their sin and **died there on the altar** and they walked home free.

- **THIS WAS A FORESHADOWING OF WHAT JESUS WOULD DO AND HOW WE WOULD RECEIVE HIM.**
- **On the cross, Paul said, Jesus became MY sin,**
- On the cross Jesus became the liar, the thief, the adulterer, the murderer. He became the husband who has neglected his family or cheated on his wife.
 - He became the immoral woman who wrecked someone else's marriage.
 - He became the drug addict.
 - The teenage girl lying to her parents.
 - The hypocrite living a double-life.
 - He became the abuser.
 - He became the proud, the selfish, and the apathetic.
- He **became those things** and died for them so that when I LAY MY HAND OF FAITH on him—when I claim him as my own—my sin becomes his and his righteousness becomes mine.²
- My sin can never be held against me again. So, when my enemy or my conscience says to me, “What about your lack of generosity? You're such a selfish person. Surely someone like you couldn't belong to God. What about your impure mind? God could never claim you. I say, “Jesus paid it all! It would be unjust of God to ever hold this sin against me because Jesus paid the full price for it already. There's therefore no condemnation for those who are in CJ. I am free. I am innocent. I am forgiven. I am JUSTIFIED.

The 4th word, vs. 24, “...through the **REDEMPTION** that is in Christ Jesus...”

- Redemption means “bought back,” and it points to two things: **PURPOSE and PRICE.**
- **PURPOSE**--when you redeem something, you are restoring a purpose to it.
 - Whenever a 1st century Jew used the word “redemption,” top of their mind was always the Exodus story where God redeemed his people from slavery in Egypt. And the first thing God said to them after bringing them out was, **‘I redeemed you for this purpose**--to make you my people and so you would become my channel of my blessing to others.
- With that imagery in mind, Paul says to us, **God redeemed you for a purpose, too.** You weren't just saved “from sin,” you were saved “for God's glory.” A lot of times Christians talk about salvation only in terms of what we're saved *from*, and rarely in terms of what we're saved *for*. You can hear it in the way we ask the question: Friend, “*If you died tonight, do you know for sure you'd spend eternity with God?*” First, “Why do we assume everyone always dies at night? Don't people sometimes die during the day?” But here's the real issue: Just as important as the question, “*If you died tonight, do you know for sure where you'll spend eternity?*” is the question, “*If you get up tomorrow... how will you live differently?*”
- God saved you for a purpose. To reflect his glory, his character, to be his light to the nations; to be his instrument of blessing.

² “This is that mystery which is rich in divine grace unto sinners; wherein, by a wonderful exchange, our sins are now no longer ours but Christ's: and the righteousness of Christ is ours.” Treat, 57

So, redemption points to a PURPOSE God had in saving you, and it also points to PRICE--when you redeem something, you pay a price to get it back.

- There's a famous story—and I know this one's true—about how King Richard the Lionhearted of England, **in 1190 A.D.**, was sailing back from the Crusades when bad weather forced him to land in the unfriendly territory of Austria. King Richard and his men disguised themselves as the Knights Templar so they could sneak their way back to England as religious pilgrims, but while passing through Vienna, King Richard was identified and taken captive--amazingly, what gave him away was his insistence on eating only roasted chicken for dinner and his fancy rings. Things he just couldn't give up even in disguise.
- So the King of England was put in chains and forced to live as a slave as someone else's property. The Duke of Austria offered England back their King, but at a ransom price of 150,000 marks--\$3.3 billion in today's money, which was 2–3x the annual revenue of England at the time.
- Eventually, England paid it--it was the most expensive ransom of a person in history.
- I read that story and I think, "Would I ever be worth that to someone?" I'm quite sure the United States would not pay that for me. My family might wish to pay that, but of course they never could. And yet God paid infinitely more than that amount--for you. You were redeemed, Peter said, with the **precious blood of Christ, something more valuable than silver or gold, a lamb without blemish and without spot.** Though I was far less valuable to Jesus, in a strategic sense, than King Richard was to England, God paid the fullness of my price without even a second thought, so that I could live as his son and bring him glory.

Hear two things in that, if you will: You have value to God. The value of something is determined by what you'll give up for it. What does the cross say about your value to God? He did that for you. For you.

Justification and propitiation concern the guilt of our sin; redemption addresses the shame--I have no value; I'm not worth anything. Yes you were, you mattered so much to God you were bought at a great price.

Second, think about the power available to you in your salvation. You might feel like you are captive to sin. Addiction. Relationship dysfunctions you can't break. The inability to be happy or find satisfaction. Jesus' purchased your redemption with his blood, and that blood can set you free. God would not purchase you at so great a price to leave you in your sin. He redeemed you for a purpose, at a great price, and with that great price comes the promise of his great power, if you choose to avail yourself of it.

OK, those are 4 BIG words--grace, propitiation, justification, and redemption. And here's our last word, vs. 25:

25 "...to be received by FAITH."

- **Faith is HOW YOU RECEIVE this gift.**
 - "Having faith," in our language, can mean a lot of different things. It can mean you have a generally positive outlook on life, or it can mean you are just a religious person.
 - But when the Bible uses it, it's talking about something very specific.

- Faith is the **HAND ON THE HEAD** of the sacrifice that says, **“This is mine.”**
- The **Greek word “pistis”, that we translate as “faith,” means “to lean your weight on.”**
 - Think about **sitting down in a chair**. I may be fully convinced the chair will hold me up, but I don’t put faith in the chair (pistis) until I sit down.
 - You can only be in 1 of 2 positions related to the chair, standing, with your weight supported by your legs, or sitting, having trusted your weight to the chair. (Standing up here beside the chair is not *“pistis,”* even if I’m fully convinced it will hold me up.) **In the same way, you can only be in 1 of 2 positions with Jesus Christ.** Standing, trusting in your own goodness to get you to heaven, or seated, trusting in his grace and his grace alone, given to you as a gift, as your entry into heaven.
 - The **moment of salvation** is when you lean the whole hope of your salvation (*pistis*) on him. (not when you pray!--Dear chair, thou art a lovely chair; I invite you into my heart to be my personal chair)
- **Sitting down includes 2 elements: TRUST and REPENTANCE**
 - These are both implied in the Greek word faith; but in English we use two different words for them. ‘Trust’ means accepting his offer to save you and trusting his grace, not your good works, to get you into heaven. Repentance--acknowledging him as Lord of your life.
 - BTW, true faith always includes repentance. Sometimes people in **CHURCH** tend to think you can have Jesus without being serious about his Lordship over your life. As in, **you can**

BELIEVE IN HIM AS SAVIOR without submitting to him as Lord. But you **can’t bifurcate Jesus**.

- And surrender, for it to mean anything, has to be total. There are certain relationships that are either all or nothing. Marriage is one of them. When I married Veronica, I didn’t say, “I promise to be at least 98% faithful to you! 98%, after all, is Summa Cum Laude. But what does that mean? Out of 100 girls I know, I consider 98 off limits but 2 still an option?”
- Lordship is also one of those relationships that is all or nothing. We say, “Jesus is either Lord of all, or not Lord at all.” If you’re like, “I’ll give you everything in my life except this one thing,” then you’re still fully in control. BTW, when I say that, I’m not asking if you struggle with obeying sometimes--I struggle all the time--my last 24 hrs have been filled with struggle. I’m talking about a decision that Jesus is Lord over everything in your life. There’s no area, not one, in which you consciously and willfully say, “I’m not going to do what God wants in this area, I’m going to do what I want.” If you have those areas, you are not a disciple of Jesus. The call to follow him means total surrender.
- **It’s like Tertullian, the North African church father**, said in the third century, **“If you attempt to have Jesus without repentance, you will end up with church without heaven.”**

VAMP Grace. Propitiation. Justified. Redemption. Faith. These 5 words are the **gate to paradise**. So, let me ask you some questions:

1. **Do you understand these words?** Maybe for the first time today, you do.

2. But more importantly: Have you received them for yourself?

- Jesus has done everything necessary to save you, but IT'S A GIFT you have to receive it for yourself.
- **I've told you, I think, about one of the most bizarre Supreme Court cases of all time: U.S. vs George Wilson, 1833.** George Wilson had committed a series of crimes and was sentenced to die by hanging. President Andrew Jackson, however, for reasons unknown to us, issued George Wilson a full pardon. But then Wilson (also for reasons unknown to us) refused the pardon and demanded to pay for his crimes. The warden told Wilson that he couldn't execute him because he'd been pardoned by the President of the United States. But Wilson refused the pardon and contested the issue in court. The odd case went all the way to the Supreme Court, and this was their verdict:

"A pardon is a contract, and is therefore not complete without acceptance. A pardon is an act of grace that may then be rejected ... and if it be rejected, we have discovered no power in a court to force it on him."

George Wilson was executed with a Presidential pardon sitting on the warden's desk. I'm not sure if **Chief Justice John Marshall**, who wrote that opinion, was thinking about the gospel when he issued that ruling, but the Bible teaches the same thing about God's pardon: a pardon is only valid if it's received.

3. Have you been baptized?

- The symbol of all of this is BAPTISM. Symbol.
 - **Wedding ring.** This ring symbolizes my marriage; taking it off doesn't mean I'm not married; you putting it on wouldn't mean you were suddenly married to Veronica. But it is an important symbol.
 - Paul says in **Romans 6:3-4** that in baptism you are publicly identifying with Jesus' death and resurrection
 - **There's NOTHING SPECIAL or magical about these waters.** This is City of Raleigh tap water; even at Blue Ridge and Chapel Hill, we aren't baptizing you in Evian ... you'll be dirtier when you come out...

SO, LET ME RETURN TO the **2 groups** I talked about at the beginning:

- **Some of you have yet to fully surrender to and** accept Jesus for yourself.
 - And **today you are going to do that** and then immediately get baptized just like they did in the Bible.
 - EVERY baptism we see in the NT happens IMMEDIATELY after someone accepts Jesus
- **Others of you are already Christians**--you've accepted Jesus at some time in the past--but you've just not taken this step. I want you to do it now.

Now, I know at this point a lot of **excuses** jump into your head...

- You say, **"Well, I ain't got no clothes."**
 - Like I said, we have all you need: T-shirts; shorts...
- *Others of you, if you're honest, are kind of saying to yourself, "Well, I don't think it's that important. I don't need to be baptized to love Jesus and follow him."*

- I always want to say, **“Excuse me? Who are we to decide which of his commands we’re going to obey and which we are not?”**
- Do you really **want to start out your walk** as a disciple by telling God which commands are important and which are not?
- *Some of you say: “I was baptized by sprinkling as a child.”*
 - **Well, first, the Greek word for baptism, “baptizo,”** means immersion. Literally. There is *no question about that. I think Pastor Curtis shared this last year: “baptism” wasn’t even originally a religious word! We have a 1st century document where a doctor named Nicander had written down his favorite recipe for making pickles: He said, and I quote, “To create a pickle, take a cucumber and ‘baptizo’ it in vinegar. Not “sprinkle it with vinegar and it will go to heaven.” No, he said, “Baptize the cucumber, and if you hold it under long enough, the vinegar will soak into the cucumber, and from henceforth the cucumber will be a pickle.”*
 - **So, there’s no question what the word means, and there’s also no question that it is supposed to be a testimony of your faith.** There are **27 baptisms in the book of Acts**. In all 27 times they believed first. Baptism was a testimony that came afterwards as a symbol of your faith.
 - **If you were baptized as a baby,** let me ask you this: WHOSE FAITH was being demonstrated at your baptism? Your parents. Baptism is supposed to be a declaration of YOUR faith.
 - AND I always say: THANK GOD for your parents’ faith... you are going to ratify their decision. You’re not rejecting their wishes, you are fulfilling them.
 - You get to call them today and say, “What you hoped for me— 18, 20, 50—years ago...” (or maybe they are in heaven-- imagine how much joy they’ll have seeing this!)
- **“My family / friends aren't here to see ME.”**
- **Listen: We can take pictures.** We will. YOU hand us your camera, we’ll get it done for you. And if you’re from Alamance County and your phone doesn’t have a camera on it, we’ll take one for you and send it to you in the mail. Just kidding, Alamance
- You say, **“Well, I rode with people.”**
 - They’ll wait, I promise.
 - **I’ll prove it: Raise your hand** if someone rode with you and you’re not willing to wait! (If you raise your hand, I will consider that their acknowledgment that they also need to be baptized)
 - Newsflash: It’s why they invited you!
- **“I’m not sure I’m ready--I still have questions.”**
 - Great. Consider this an invitation to come and start a conversation. If you decide you’re not ready, or we feel like it would be helpful to take some time to talk things through, we’ll push pause and take a couple of weeks or however long it takes.
 - We’ll even let you keep the free T-shirt if you want
- **“I’m nervous to come down there by myself.”**
 - That’s fine. Ask your friend to go with you. Everybody, right now, turn to your neighbor and say, “If you want to go, I’ll go with you.”
- **You say, “I don’t want to become a Baptist... or whatever it is you are here at Summit”**
 - That’s legitimate. But see, this is not about denomination.
 - You are not being baptized in the name of Baptist—or even in the name of the Summit—we don’t put our name on you. You are being baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

NO EXCUSES. This is too important a decision to put off any longer.

*[football] So, ladies and gentlemen, this is a football. **This is the gospel.** Have you received it?*

BOW YOUR HEADS. Do you want to receive Jesus right now? Say, “Lord Jesus, I know I’m a sinner and need to be saved. I turn from my sin right now and acknowledge you as my Lord. I receive you right now as my Savior. (Right now, in my mind, I’m putting my hand on your head, saying that you are my sin-bearer.) Thank you, Jesus, for saving me. Amen.”

Keep your heads bowed. Here’s what is going to happen. In just a minute, I’m going to stand you. I’m going to count to 3 so you EXACTLY when to come... if you need to be baptized, or want to start a conversation, come, all in one motion. And when we stand, Summit members will go crazy with applause, and you come. If the person next to you looks like they want to come, say, I’ll go with you.

So, I’m going to count to 3, and we’ll stand, and you come and members will put their hands together.

(BTW, this is a REALLY bad time to go use the bathroom. You might inadvertently end up making a life changing decision)

Bullpen:

because in his restraint God passed over the sins previously committed.

Before we talk about what Paul meant by “this demonstrates his righteousness,” let me discuss what he means by “*in his restraint God passed over the sins previously committed.*” The sins of all the OT saints had never actually been—paid for—they had only been ‘passed over.’ The blood of **lambs and bulls couldn’t actually pay for human sin.** These were only symbols of what Jesus would do. It took a perfect MAN living the life we were supposed to live and dying in our place to pay for human sins. The lamb was just a temporary symbol. Throughout the OT, God forgave Abraham’s and David’s sins **on credit, in anticipation that one day Jesus would come.**

But now that he has come, God has ²⁶ demonstrate(d) his righteousness at the present time (after the cross)

Main Idea: God’s grace extended to us in Jesus Christ saves us from our sin and empowers us to obedience that testifies to his goodness.

- The rescue from our sinful condition is found by being justified by God’s grace through faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ (3:21–26).
- Because we have all sinned and are saved by faith in Christ alone, we are united by his grace, which empowers us to heartfelt obedience (3:27–31).

Application: Are you looking to anything other than Christ for your salvation?