

This Sunday's texts:

Deuteronomy 30:11-20

James 1:19-25

John 8:31-36

Lifestyle of Grace: Identity

Pastor Joe Hill

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The Gospel reading for today is from the Gospel of John, chapter 8, verses 31 through 36:

To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus said, "If you hold to My teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can You say that we shall be set free?" Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

The word of the Lord. Good morning and greetings, in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. This Lent we will be journeying together through a sermon series called "Lifestyle of Grace" and during this "Lifestyle of Grace" series, we will be exploring how an abiding awareness of God's Grace transforms our hearts, minds, and lives. It's about flipping the script on a world that is convinced that your worth and your value come from what you do, on a world where legalism is the native tongue and saying, rather your worth is not determined by what you do, but it is revealed in what Jesus has done for you and in who He says you are. So we are invited into a life of freedom, power, and purpose as the Holy Spirit of God bears fruit in His people, reminding us over and over again that we are His beloved children.

As I get into it today, I want to tell you some good news. This message is going to be short. It's going to be short and simple and that's because I don't want you to miss it today. My hope is that it sticks with you. My prayer is that it would stick in your head as you enter into this Lenten season and that you could dwell on it in the weeks to come, that God would use it to transform your heart, your mind, and your life, as you meditate on the Grace of God that is for you in Christ Jesus.

Here's the big point for today. What God says about you is the truest thing about you. It's true because He is who He says He is, who He's revealed Himself to be through His Son, Jesus Christ. It's your identity in Christ that is the starting point of the Lifestyle of Grace.

In our Gospel text today, Jesus says this. He says, “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”¹ It’s a simple but profound statement and one that I pray sinks in. You see what Jesus says about you is true. If He says you're free, then you're free. Here's the important part of that. This is true not because of what we do, but because of who He is. Because He's the Son what He says is true. That means that you are not righteous because of how holy of a life you live, but you are righteous because you have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ. You're not forgiven because your repentance is so adequate, that you felt bad enough about your sin. You're forgiven because Jesus shed His blood on the cross and He said that when He did it, He did it for you for the forgiveness of your sins.

It's true because the Son said it's true and He is the One who has the authority. He's the One, who as John 1 says “came into this world, the very Word of God made man,” and he said that He was “full of grace” and He was full of truth.²

Now there are a lot of people out there who want to make claims, who want to make statements about your identity, who want to tell you who you are and it's easy to believe, especially when it's negative. We have this innate tendency to gravitate towards the negative in life. That's why social media algorithms have biases towards negative content, content that makes you feel icky or angry or depressed because they've determined that those are the things that we have a tendency to dwell in the most. I get it because, for me, I could hear a thousand compliments, but I will always dwell on the one negative comment. That will resonate with me more than the thousand compliments ever do. But the truth about this for you and me is that none of those negative voices in the world will ever drown out the word and promises of your Lord, Jesus Christ.

Now when I was preparing for this message, as I often do, I read through several different translations of the Bible. So you'll read through the passages in different translations and see if there are any interesting differences. There was one in this passage this week. In verse 31, that word that is translated in our New International Version as “hold.” Jesus says “If you **hold** to my teaching” It’s interesting. In the New Living Translation, which is one I personally really enjoy, it says “if you **remain faithful** to my teaching.” That's similar, but different. In the English Standard Version, it says “if you **abide** in my teaching, you will be my disciples.” Whenever translations have something different, that's a clue to me to look towards the original text, the original Greek language, and see what that

¹ John 8:36

² John 1:14

word says and why it would have been translated one way versus another. I found something very interesting in the Greek definitions of this word. Sometimes a word can have a range of meanings, as it does in English. One of the ways that this word is used is when somebody comes in from out of town and they enter a lodge, an inn and then they dwell there for a while. It means to take up residence and stay in a place. Jesus says, "If you take up residence in My word, if you abide in it, if you move in, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."

When you believe in Christ, when you're rooted, abiding in His word, when you cling to what He says, you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. When you trust that what He did, He did for you, what He promises He promises to you, and what He has given which is His very life itself, He has given for you. That means that what He says about you is true and it's especially true when it's hard to believe.

So what does God say about you? What does Jesus say about you? He says you're forgiven. He says that you are free. He says that you're loved, that you have a calling and a purpose. He says that the Holy Spirit of God Himself dwells in you. He says that God is for you, that He sees you, and He knows you, that your way isn't unknown to Him. He says that you are His child, that He is your strength, that you are never alone, that you are His, and that nothing can snatch you out of His hand.

And if Jesus says it, then it is true indeed. Now brothers and sisters in Christ, I want you to hear that. If Jesus says it about you, it is true. That means that the voices in your life that tell you otherwise are liars and they are not His. The voices that tell you that you're not loved, the voices that tell you that you need to cling on to the shame and guilt of the past, the things that you have done that you have a hard time letting go, the voices that tell you that God has not let go of them either and they are lies. They're the voices that sow seeds of doubt in you. When you hear those voices, brothers and sisters in Christ, do you know what you can do? When you hear that voice of the serpent from the Garden who says, "Did God really say that?"³ you know what you can say? Yes. Yes, He did and you have no power here because this is the kingdom of God. It is not yours.

My hope for you this Lent is that you would abide in the teachings of Jesus, in the word of God, and that in it, you wouldn't find words of condemnation, but words of affirmation, that you would see in it a love letter, an invitation to be a child of God, an invitation and an offer of new, abundant, and eternal life. My hope for you this Lenten season is that you would hear the voice of God speaking

³ Genesis 3:1

to your heart, reminding you of who you are. For some of you, that means coming before God in prayer and asking Him to teach you that you are forgiven. For some of you, that's coming before God In prayer and asking Him to teach you that you are loved unconditionally because when you look deep inside and when you look in the mirror, you have a hard time seeing someone who's worth loving. But the incredible thing about the love and the grace of God is that when He looks at you, He does not have a hard time at all seeing someone who is worth loving.

God is faithful to His promises. They are for you and it is out of these promises, out of this identity that we have in Christ, that we live the "Lifestyle of Grace." [Pastor Joe takes out an empty glass.] I got this cup and I want you to imagine that this cup is you, or it's me, or it's the person sitting next to you or across the room. I couldn't pour anything out of this cup if I tried. It's empty. There's nothing in there, right? I couldn't pour anything out if I wanted to. When we live



trying to prove our worth to God by the things we do, it's like we're pouring out of an empty cup. [He takes out an empty pitcher to represent God.] It's like we see God there and we're trying to pour from the empty cup and we're saying, "It's not enough! It's not enough!" And it's never going to be enough. We could never pour so much that we satisfied God. That's called "works righteousness." It's the way so many live, seeking the approval of God and others. Even many of us who've grown up in the faith. Yet



luckily, that's not how it works.

[Pastor Joe takes out a Pyrex dish. Using it as a tray, he puts the empty glass in the Pyrex dish. He then takes out another pitcher, this time filled with water.] This pitcher is like God and you're still the cup. [He starts pouring the water out of the pitcher into the glass.] When you put your faith in Jesus Christ and you abide in His teachings, He says I love you and you're forgiven and you're free and you're My son; you're My daughter. [The glass is filled and the water is overflowing out the glass.]



What I really wanted to do is bring in a hose, but Pastor Jim wouldn't write off on it. God pours and He pours and He pours His grace, His love into you. He does it because of who He is and it's inexhaustible. He is the God who is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in loving kindness. Because He is who He is, you are who He says you are. You are loved. You are set free and filled to the brim, filled to overflowing. That's what the lifestyle of Grace is all about. Next week, we're going to begin looking at what it looks like in your life, in my life as the glass begins to overflow into a lifestyle of Grace.



Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we pray that we would be reminded of who we are, Lord, that we would have the humility to let You teach us, that we would not hold on stubbornly to falsehoods about ourselves, to the lies of the devil that say that we are not loved, that we are not worthy, but, rather, that we would cling, that we would take up residence in Your word, in Your teachings, and in Your promises, and know that as we do, we are Yours. We are Your children, set free and full of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.