February 1/2, 2014

Prayerful Trust

A Study of the Epistle of Galatians

Galatians 1:11-24 - 4:20 recap

Pastor Bryan Clark

"The True Gospel"
Galatians 1:11-24

(Bryan via video)

So what do you think was the single greatest concern for you as a Christian today—the single greatest concern of the New Testament writers? What do you think was one of Paul's greatest concerns for the integrity of the gospel less than twenty years after the ascension of Jesus? And when God Himself became flesh and actually walked on this earth, what was the primary source of conflict that would become so intense that He would become executed?

I believe the answer to every single one of those questions is *legalism*. I believe Paul's greatest concern, less than twenty years after the ascension of Jesus, was regarding the integrity of the message of the gospel of grace. To me, this is staggering! It hasn't even been twenty years since Jesus ascended, and the disciples who actually heard the message of the gospel of grace directly out of the mouth of Jesus Himself—in less than twenty years there's a high level of concern that the message is being compromised. Do you think there's a possibility, then, that two thousand years later there could be a problem?

Through all of eternity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit dwelt in relationship with one another—one God, three Persons—the Father delighting in the Son, the Son delighting in the Spirit, the Spirit delighting in the Father—loving, celebrating, delighting in one another...what theologians have often referred to as *The Dance of God.* It's just beautiful. That is the essence of eternal life. The very essence of salvation is God, on the basis of His grace, inviting you into the dance. I love the imagery—like a small child without any inhibitions—just delighting in and dancing in the presence of God, just enjoying the relationship.

There are some of you here this morning, if you were to be honest, you would say, "I have never danced with God. I am up to my eyebrows in religion. I have been hurt by religion; I've been wounded by religion; I've been confused by religion. I have been beat up by legalism. I want this *God thing*, but it's so confusing to me. And I'll tell you this: I have never danced with God."

There are many others of you here this morning, you would say, "I'm a Christian. I've trusted Christ as my Savior." But if you were to be honest with me this morning, you would say, "Bryan, I have to tell you this: It's been a very long time since God and I danced. You see, the volume of legalism becomes so loud, I no longer hear the music of grace, and I just stop dancing. And all that is left is: I just slug it out, day after day after day." My prayer for you would be over the next couple of months we could identify and remove the legalism that holds you in bondage, and that you would find yourself once again dancing with delight in the presence of God.

Every world religion has, at the heart, the same operating system, and that operating system is: there's something, somehow, you can do to merit some favor with the god or gods. Christianity is distinct in saying, *"Actually God did it all for me."* There is absolutely no question that religion glorifies sinful man, and there's no question that grace glorifies a holy God. Some of you have

been told that without a particular church, without a particular denomination, without a particular movement, you cannot be saved. The moment you hear that, red flashing lights ought to go on because suddenly we're defining some terms and we're saying, "Yes, it is salvation by grace through faith…plus our denomination…plus our church…plus these religious rituals." It's plus *something*. That's why you need that church or denomination ultimately to be saved. What the Bible would clearly teach is salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross *alone*. You don't need the Bereans. You don't need the Baptists. You don't need the Adventists. You don't need the Catholics. You don't need any church or any denomination. Salvation is *by* Jesus, and Jesus *alone*.

"Liberty or Bondage"
Galatians 2:1-10

Who decides which sins are acceptable to struggle with and which sins are not? Who decides what the rules are in terms of who's in and who's out? And which sins are okay, and which sins are unacceptable in determining somebody's salvation? I'd be the first one to tell you, "Yes, when you are radically changed by the power of Jesus, Jesus begins to change you from the inside-out." I get that. And I believe, over time, there will clearly be life change. But who determines what sins are acceptable, what sins are unacceptable, when that happens, how quickly it happens? Who makes those rules in determining whether or not somebody is really saved or not?

The scandalous nature of grace is grace *alone*. And when you understand that, it is very powerful. Think of it this way: Let's imagine I'm a Christian, radically changed by the power of Jesus, and you are following me, magically following me through my day. And it happens to be a terrible day. I give in to temptation. I sin. I offend God. I make a mess of things. It's just a disastrous day, and you've watched this disaster as I have so poorly represented Christ today.

Now imagine this metaphorically: You go home with me and you follow me, expecting me to go into the dark room. And in the dark room I will put my face in my hands and I will deal with my shame and my guilt and my disgust and my disappointment and my failure. And I will live with the consequences of my choices, which were disastrous that day. And you're absolutely sure that's what will happen and that's what *should* happen.

But I go through the dark room and quickly run out. I run down the hall and I actually run into the light room, and there is Jesus. And I run and I jump onto the lap of Jesus, and He hugs me and He loves me, and He laughs with me, and He accepts me, and He celebrates me. And there's joy and there's celebration and there's music, and He dances over me, and I dance with Him. And it's a celebration! And you, as an observer, are appalled at this. You're thinking Jesus *has* to know how this loser behaved today. For him to come home at the end of a day like that and act like that is completely unacceptable. As a matter of fact, it's just scandalous!

You're right. You're right! And if you get that, you're starting to understand grace. What sets me free is understanding that my standing before God is based on the righteousness of Christ. And in those moments when I blow it the worst are the moments when I need the most to be in the light. I run to the light! I jump onto the lap of Jesus, and I remember that He loves me and He accepts me, and He forgives me. And what happens in that moment is that my soul comes back to life. I remember who I am in Christ. I remember what's true. I remember what life comes from. I remember what I want—this is what my soul is hungry for—and I have been renewed in my passion

for righteousness. There is no way tomorrow I'm going down the same path because I've been recalibrated, and I remember again: This is where life is found!

There is no way, on your worst days, that you go to the light room unless you understand it's salvation by grace through faith *alone*. It's not performance-driven, and it's there I find my life. That's what makes grace so powerful. That's what makes grace so amazing. And I would suggest to you, that is worth fighting for.

"Why Did Jesus Die?"
Galatians 2:11-21

The new life I have now is not *my* life. It's not *my* power. It's not *my* righteousness. It's the life of Christ in me. I'm a new creation in Christ. I now have the very identity of Christ in me. On my best days and on my worst days I am clothed in the righteousness of Christ. It's His life in me. This is where I would make the case it just simply isn't possible to truly be a born-again Christian and sin as a way of life. It's just not possible. The old boy's dead, and the life that I have is actually the life of Christ. How does Christ go on sinning with no conviction? The problem is the very end of the scale. You *have* been radically changed. You *do* have the power of Jesus in you. You *do* want to walk uprightly. You *do* want to walk pleasing to Him. But you struggle and you fail and you sin and you blow it. And you feel the shame of that. You feel the guilt of that and the condemnation of that. And you're thinking, *I'm never gonna get this. I'm never gonna measure up, and I'm a lousy Christian, and I'm a lousy witness.* And you get in the dark room, and you can't get out of the dark room because you think you've got to beat yourself up and somehow prove to God how sorry you are for your sin. And now you've rebuilt what you once died to, and you're thinking you're defined by your works.

What the text says is the life that I now live, I live how? By faith. What am I believing? I'm believing that He loved me and He gave Himself up for me. I'm believing that He has provided for me, on the basis of his grace, an invitation into the light room. Verse 21:

> **I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law,** (in other words through works) **then Christ died needlessly."** (*NASB, Galatians 2:21)

That's a very powerful statement. If I can go into the dark room and, on the basis of my shame and my guilt and my beating myself up, somehow merit favor with God, there was no reason for Jesus to die. Jesus even asked this question in the Garden of Gethsemane when He said, "Father, is there any other way?" And the fact that He went to the cross is God's answer that there is no other way. He did not die needlessly. He died because He had to die in order to atone for your sin, to offer you salvation freely as a gift.

"The Foolishness of Legalism"
(the charts referred to below are available in the full transcript of "The Foolishness of Legalism")
Galatians 3:1-14

I think for much of my life I believed this is the tension: There's a tension between legalism and license. As long as you believe that's the tension, you will never embrace a full, rigorous, healthy theology of grace. Grace is the invitation to the life of the Spirit. It's the basis by which I experience salvation. It's the basis by which I experience life in the Spirit. Grace is that invitation into God's life. When you understand it that way, there's no way you can talk too much about

grace. There's no way to be too filled with the Spirit. The problem is at the other end: Flesh manifests itself in two ways. It manifests itself in legalism, and it manifests itself in license. The text just told us that an outflow of the flesh is legalism. It's not more spiritual; it's fleshly. A lot of people then buy into this discipleship theory. Now this is "red"—naughty—stop!

You have this religion of works which cannot save you, so you reach a point where you come to the cross. Salvation by grace through faith: New life in Christ. But your theology is such that it's just a ticket to Heaven. And now that I have a ticket to heaven, I'm obligated. I'm obligated to try harder; I'm obligated to go to church; I'm obligated to somehow make myself more righteous. This is the very definition of legalism. When you buy into that, this is the reality that, rather than achieving more righteousness, you're just stuck. You've gone back to something that didn't work. The truth is: you try works. Works don't work, and so you come to a place where you trust Jesus as Savior. *Salvation by grace through faith alone*. At that moment, Romans and Galatians tell us you are justified. You're clothed in the righteousness of Christ and, because the righteousness of Christ will never diminish, it will never diminish in you. So then what is the essence of the Christian life? What is the essence of discipleship? We are trying to live consistent with what is now true.

"The Purpose of the Law"
Galatians 3:15-29

Imagine what it would be like if I could learn to view myself through the lens of grace and, rather than weekly assessing my performance and beating myself up and struggling with that, I was reminded that this isn't performance—it's promise! What if we would focus our attention on Christ rather than our performance? If you go back and count them, seven times in those few verses it names the name of Christ. It's Christ… Christ...Christ...Christ. It's not you. It's not your performance. It is *Christ* who has made the difference from the inside out. If we've learn to understand that and think that way, it changes everything. And imagine if, not only do I view myself that way, but I begin to view my fellow Christians that way. Instead of being prone to pick and fix and correct and change and judge and criticize, we actually view one another through the lens of grace and to see one another as God sees us, and look beyond performance to promise and realize that on your best days and on your worst days there's something to celebrate because, according to who you are in Christ, you have been radically changed. What if in our accountability groups, what if in our small groups, what if in our relationships with Christian friends, rather than always assessing how many ways we've let God down this week—all the ways we failed, all the ways we struggled, all the ways that we're a loser—that we completely change that orientation and we actually see each other through the lens of grace and remind one another what's true in Christ. And it's not performance; it's promise. And the last time I checked the book, even though you had a stinky week, because you were in Christ, I just want to remind you of this: You are awesome! Imagine if we believed this so much that we actually lived like it? Just imagine...

"Sons or Slaves"
Galatians 4:1-20

When we started Galatians, we used the metaphor of this freedom in Christ is like this beautiful dance between two lovers in the light to the music of *Amazing Grace.* But I said there are probably some of you, maybe many of you, if you were to be honest, you would say, "It's been a long time since I danced with Jesus to the music of *Amazing Grace.* Something over time has changed, and the music I dance to most days anymore is the music of *ordinary grace."*

What happened...what happened? How is it that we've gone from being sons to going back to being slaves? At one time I was amazed by grace! I was amazed that God would save a wretch like me. I had no hope, and then suddenly, because of Christ, I have hope; I have a future; I have a new day. My sins have been forgiven. I have new life. This is new and it's exciting, and it's filled with hope. And we're two young lovers dancing to the music of *Amazing Grace*! I didn't need people telling me that I have to do this and I have to do that, and I need *this* religious thing, and I need *this* religious thing and all these external management systems. It was in my heart. That's what I wanted. It was the outflow of my passion.

But over time something happens. Grace goes from being amazing to being ordinary, and we stop dancing as two young lovers. And as the passion cools off, the rules heat up. It always works that way. Now I need all kinds of external religious management systems to compensate for what's not in my heart anymore. I am more passionately in love with Jesus today than I've ever been in my life. I am passionate about Jesus. I'm more amazed by grace today than I've ever been. I just can't understand why He would do this, why He would save me, why He would love me, why He would celebrate me, why He would want to dance with me, why He would want to spend forever with me, why He would give up His own Son to make it possible, why He would put Father, Son and Holy Spirit on the assignment for us to be intimate. I don't understand that, but it is remarkable, and it fires a passion in my heart! This is what I want. This is where life is found. I *want* to be obedient. I *want* to walk in righteousness. I *want* to walk with integrity. I w*ant* to do the right things. I *want* to invest myself in the things that matter. I don't need a bunch of external religion trying to force that. I don't need it to compensate. It's in my heart. It's what I want; it's what I long for. It's my passion!

But here's the deal. I can guarantee you this morning that if you and Jesus are not celebrating a deeply passionate, intimate relationship together this morning, it's *not* Jesus that cooled it off. It's not Jesus that turned down the music. It's not Jesus that ended the relationship—which leaves only one other option. It was *you*. For whatever reason, it was you. You decided you didn't want it anymore. You decided it didn't matter anymore. You decided there were things more important now. Whatever the reason, you're the one that walked away. You're the one who cooled the relationship. And I guarantee you, Jesus awaits as a lover today for you to come home and to rekindle the relationship. He gave up His own life to make it possible, and He calls you back home to experience this intimate relationship with Him. He stands by calling out to you as a lover would call out and inviting you to, *"Please come home*! *Please come home, and can't we dance again to the music of Amazing, Amazing Grace?"*

(Bryan, in person)
Good morning! For those of you that are new, my name is Bryan; I occasionally work here. *(laughter)* Next week we're going to go full speed back into the book of Galatians. I'm just really chomping at the bit to get back to that. But I want to take a few minutes this morning and give you one last update to kind of bring some closure to this, and then move on.

Basically, my big issues with my heart had to do with my aortic valve and the stem. Basically everything went extremely well. With the valve, the new valve is basically referred to as a tissue valve; and this, for me, would be my third aortic valve—and I think we got a winner this time. The valve is actually taken from the tissue sac that goes around the heart of a cow. It's then treated with chemicals. It's stitched onto a titanium rim, and then it is popped into my heart. I think it's probably likely that this valve is currently functioning better than any valve I've had in fifty-five years. So that's a very good thing. The only real side effect is, now and then I get this

overwhelming urge to go out in the pasture and graze on some grass. *(laughter)* And I'll manage that.

The issue that became the more urgent issue was the enlarging of the aortic stem and the risk of an eruption there. It turned out when they got in there, that it was actually quite a bit worse than anticipated and much more extensive, which is what added about an hour and a half to the surgery. They had to remove my coronary arteries, replace much more of that than anticipated, and reattach those arteries. And that repair is a manmade mesh and should last a lifetime, so that concern, that issue, should be taken care of. So that's wonderful. The valve should last basically about twelve years, so somewhere in the neighborhood of twelve years we'll have to replace it again, but the doctors are very confident that in twelve years we'll either be able to go in through the side wall or up through a catheter and replace that. So it's highly unlikely that they'll go back through my chest again, and I'm all for that. *(laughter)*

One of the remarkable things about this particular story really was the recovery in the hospital. Something I heard over and over again, basically because it's a redo—meaning a second open-heart surgery—there are just complications with the surgery. There are complications with the recovery, and I was made well aware of that. But what happened in the hospital was remarkable. As far as I understand it, for someone that has had a redo, that was the fastest anybody has had a surgery and a dismissal from the hospital. I had the surgery on a Friday; I went home on a Tuesday. They basically have kind of this checklist that they have to move through to get you out of ICU, and then ultimately to send you home, and they just kept checking this stuff off. And all I kept hearing from the nurses and the doctors is, "This is amazing; this is remarkable!" As a matter of fact, the day before I went home, the surgeon actually said to me, "Bryan, I'm very uncomfortable with this, but I have no more reason to keep you here. I think you're going home tomorrow...which raises an interesting question.

Why is that? Maybe the first answer would be because of the great doctors and nurses and care. Patty and I would be the first ones to say, from the moment we walked in the doors to the moment we walked out, the care was tremendous from these remarkable doctors and their PA's and these tremendous nurses and these techs. We actually have talked over and over again that we couldn't imagine better care. These people are remarkable. But these are the very people that were saying, "This is very unusual; this is remarkable; this is unexplainable." I'm sure these same amazing people give that same level of attention and compassion and care and skill to everybody. It wasn't just me. And they're the ones saying, "This is so unusual"—which brings us back to the question: How do you explain that? And it seems to me there's only one answer, and that is the power of prayer.

I've been very honest with you over the years that prayer is hard to understand. It's hard to figure out. There's a mystery to how prayer could move the hand of a sovereign God. I've been very honest with you that sometimes when you pray for something, day after day, week after week, month after month, and nothing seems to change, and it seems like God doesn't listen or He doesn't care, that after a while you just have to conclude prayer doesn't work. It's almost like you become a fatalist—that God's going to do what He's going to do and I can't change that. And I stop believing in the power of prayer. I've been honest with you to say I struggle with that myself because of my own story and my own past, and emotionally it's hard to keep believing because you keep setting yourself up with this hope and nothing changes.

I think we've become very good at grabbing and holding on to the times when God doesn't seem to answer our prayers. We're not so good at grabbing and holding on to those times when He does. And you have to grab and hold on to those times when He does in order to have hope, in order to believe that nothing's impossible, in order to rekindle that belief that there is power in prayer.

How does one say thank you to people that so loved us that they consistently believed in the power of prayer and prayed for us, and you moved the hand of God on my behalf? Patty and I could not find the words to tell you how thankful we are that you did that for me. But this is what I'd ask you: In the weeks and months to come, if God uses me to touch your heart, if God uses me to open up the Word, if God uses me to change the life of somebody else, or maybe you just see me in the hall talking to my wife and to my girls and to the people around me, I would just ask you to remember that you have become a part of my story because of your faithfulness to pray, and you will always be part of my story. And when you see me, I hope you remember that because you interceded on my behalf, you actually moved the hand of God, and I am still here. And in that moment, you will remember that it is possible that prayer moves the hand of God, that nothing is impossible, and for whatever you're going through, you will remember that it is possible that your prayers offered in faith can actually move the hand of a sovereign God.

The other thing I thought a lot about—and it's kind of where we started back in November—is kind of where I want to end this discussion. And that is the fact that life presents us with a long list of things we can choose to worry about. There's no shortage of things to bring us anxiety, no shortage of things to cause us fear and worry. Jesus told us if you spend your days filled with worry and fear and anxiety, you are not focused on the things that matter. You're not able to seek first the kingdom of God.

For the last couple of years and certainly for the last couple of months, I've been reminded on a daily basis there is a long list of things I could worry about—things I can't control, things I can't change. But no amount of worry fixes that. No amount of worry changes that. No amount of worry makes it better. And you do have a choice every day to discipline yourself and make a decision: Will my day today be filled with worry and anxiety and fear over things I can't change and I can't control? Or will I choose to trust God with those things and seek first the kingdom of God? To remember that every day is filled with wonder. Every day is filled with some magic. Every day has moments that matter, and matter forever. But there is no way I'm going to capture that if my days are filled with anxiety and fear and worry.

I feel like I personally have a moment here where I have a degree of credibility that is unique. I doubt there's a single person in the room this morning that would say to me, "Bryan, you don't understand. You don't have anything to worry about." I think I do, and my heart stuff will be part of my story for the rest of my life. But I can't change that; I can't control that. There's no amount of worry or fear and anxiety that changes that, and I absolutely refuse to spend the days that are so precious wasting them on fear and anxiety and worry, rather than investing them in that which is filled with joy and filled with celebration and that which matters forever.

But I'm not unique in that. Probably every single one of us here this morning could make your own list of things you have to worry about. We all have lists. I understand that. But I do understand it's possible for us to covenant together and say no amount of worry or fear and anxiety can change that, can control that, can do anything about that. And it is possible to discipline yourself every day to choose *not* to have a day defined by worry and anxiety and fear, and to say, "*I will trust God with*

that which I cannot control or change so that I am free to focus every day on the things that matter because life is just too precious and short to waste one single day."

Our Father, we're thankful this morning that You love us. God, I'm thankful for these people that love me and interceded on my behalf, and, God, your hand was moved. Lord, help that remind us all there is power in prayer, even though we don't always get it and we don't always understand it. Lord, we all have our lists of things that could bring us anxiety and fear and worry every day, but we can't change it, we can't control it. Lord, give us the courage to trust You with the things we can't change or control that we might be set free every day to seek first Your Kingdom. In Jesus' name we ask. Amen.

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