

If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab them. Isaiah, chapter 53, is where we're going to hang out tonight. If you are with us and don't really know how to navigate the Bible or maybe here with a friend and aren't necessarily a believer, there should be a hardback black one somewhere around you. We'll throw the page numbers at you as we move around tonight. We won't honestly move around much.

Let me just say this about the 10-year thing. It has been one of the great privileges of my life just to be here and to walk with you and to cry with you at funerals and to rejoice with you at weddings and baptisms and to just pour out my life for the name and renown of Jesus here with you. I started saying probably about seven years ago that I'd really like about 40 years here. So my plan is to just kind of keep trudging along, being obedient to the Lord. Hopefully he'll give us that 40. If he doesn't that probably means I died and I still win. So ultimately I'm looking forward to just faithfully walking.

I think back to who I was when you hired me: 28 years old, no seminary degree, and no real pastoral experience. You kind of rolled the dice. In the long term there have probably been some good things. In the short term there were probably some really bad things. So I've asked the Lord to give us my 40s and 50s together, because I think I've probably dropped the ball quite a bit in the 20s and 30s. In the end I'm hopeful I get to spend the rest of my days with you. So thank you for letting me be your pastor. I'm grateful to be here. I can't believe it's been 10 years. It's happened very quickly in some ways, and it's kind of trudged along in other ways. So, glad to be here. Glad to be one of your pastors.

Before we get going tonight, one of the things the Lord has done for us as a church over the last decade is really kind of grown our influence as a church and enabled us to really pour into the lives of others and pour into other churches and resource other churches and just to serve the kingdom. One of the things I'm habitually trying to convince you of is when all is said and done, nobody is going to be praising the name of The Village.

In fact, if history rings true we're hardly a generation away from not existing as an organization. So there is one church. There is one name. There is one renown. There is one eternal bride of Christ. We're a part of that, but we're not *it*. So in this time, in this season God has chosen to pour himself out in a pretty special way at The Village Church, but ultimately God is about *his* church (of which we are a part), but we are not the sum total.

So what we want to do with our resources, with our time, and with our energy is to be about the kingdom of God. We want to do what we need to do for us. We always kind of want to be a little ghetto chic. We don't want to ever be too nice. You don't have a cup holder. You can't get yourself a Frappuccino here. You get that trash at Starbucks and bring it in. Say hi to the barista, maybe pray with her or him, maybe build a relationship, share the gospel, something crazy like that. So in the end what we want to do is steward that influence well.

So from time to time we'll have pastors among us and teams that come in. So what I want to do is... Matt Chewing and his wife Beth have four kids and are in the Boston area. He is one of our guys in Acts 29. God is just really doing tremendous things there. His church has grown very quickly up there in the greater Boston area. Just a faithful brother. He is in town, meeting not only with us but Prestonwood and different guys, just trying to learn and grow. For a young guy... I think Matt was 12 or something when he became a pastor. He was pre-pubescent. It was embarrassing really. God has really used his gifts and his abilities in profound ways. So I want to acknowledge him.

I want to pray for him tonight because when you're young and you get success early, that's dangerous, right? When you're young if you're not careful you start to think you got something. You're on to something. It's your fastball that's striking people out. So I want to pray over him, protection for him, protection for Beth, protection for the four babies, that their four children would come to love and know Jesus Christ very early, as they are in an extremely secular environment, and just that God would cover them, protect them, and bless them as a church.

So Matt and Beth, will you stand up? I know you're not shy. So go ahead and stand up. You can't do what you do and be shy. Beth might be, but I know Matt is not. What I want to do is if you're around him and are comfortable with this... It's not voodoo, all right? It's not witchcraft. We're just going to just do as the Bible says. We're going to lay hands on them. We're just going to pray over them. Here is what I want to encourage you to do.

Don't just listen to me pray, but actually pray for Matt and Beth. Do I need to rebuke anyone over here? Are you guys going to get around my brother and pray for him? I can be "Angry Matt" tonight while I preach. My preference is to not. It's Christmastime. Let's get around him, lay hands on him, and let's just ask God to bless Netcast Church (the name of my brother's church) and his marriage with his wife, Beth. They have four babies in the greater Boston area. Just ask that God will pour out his Spirit in profound ways.

It is no simple truth that the gospel of Jesus Christ took its roots in this country in the Northeast then it spread from the Northeast and took root kind of in the South and the West. Now there is a real push in regard to church planting and in regard to God's activity moving it back east to the Northeast. So even on

the video you had Eric Mason in Philly call me an *old head*, which I believe is a drug dealer. Then Vassar in Manhattan and Bland Mason in Boston.

God is doing a profound work in the Northeast, and so we want to pray over Matt and Beth and Netcast and his kids and the city of Boston. So join me in praying for them, which means don't listen to me pray but join in praying. You guys who are around them, just pray out loud. God will hear all of us. I promise. Let's pray for Matt and Beth.

Father, we thank you that you are the author and perfecter of our faith. God, thank you that Matt and Beth's passion for the people in the Greater Boston area really can't be compared to your passion for your name and your renown being made much of in the Boston area. So I thank you for Bland, I thank you for Matt, and I thank you for other men in that city who are ferociously preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So I pray for his time here. I pray it would be restful for him and Beth, that they would get to enjoy one another, reconnect where maybe there has been disconnect. Maybe they would get a chance just to breathe out and be in the days to come. I pray, Father, for their children, all four of them. I pray they would not remember a day where they didn't love you, follow you, serve you, and long to be closer to you.

I thank you, God, for the external visible appearance of success and pray that would humble them more than it did anything else. I pray you would protect him, God, from an abnormal growth curve, that as he grows more quickly (as most churches in Boston do), you would protect his heart and you would protect his mind.

I pray courage for Beth, that she would love Matt strong enough that if he gets to walking with a swagger to call him out, that you would put strong men around him, that he would be reliant upon other strong men and wouldn't believe he is the great Moses, but that you're the great Moses, Jesus, who leads people out of the desert into the Promised Land.

I pray you would give him spiritual power. I pray when he stands up and preaches the Word of God men and women would be saved, people would be set free, that you would do a profoundly spiritual work he can't comprehend or understand, and that as your kingdom moves forward through Netcast Church, you would continue to weave into his soul and weave into that people's soul humility and hunger for more and more of what only you can accomplish. It's through your beautiful name we pray these things, and because we believe your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven that we pray for these things, amen.

Love you, brother. Glad you're here.

Years ago I was in a Bible study that now a buddy of mine was teaching, but he wasn't a buddy of mine at the time. He began to tell a story of how he asked his wife to marry him. So this was his story. He picked up his girlfriend in his car. They drove out to a lake. When they got to the lake, there was a ski boat waiting for them. They got in the ski boat, and they jetted all around the lake.

Then they went to this little island in the lake. There was a little picnic set up for them. So then they sat at this picnic, and they kind of ate a little snack and drank a little drink. I don't know if it was a *drink*. I'm just saying they had a little something to drink. I don't know what it was. Not my story. Then they hung out and they got back in the boat and went toward the shore.

When they got back to the shore, his car was gone and there was a limousine there. So now at that moment bells are going off in her head. At that moment now girlfriend knows, "This is different!" They get in the limousine, and they drive out to an airfield. At the airfield they get in this little airplane. They take off in this airplane. I don't remember where he said it was. It was like Arkansas or Missouri or some place like this. They land the airplane in this little grass strip, just a little death trap puddle-jumper. It lands.

They get out of the airplane, and there is this beat-up, ghetto jalopy truck waiting on them there. They get into this little ghetto thing, and then they drive into this little college area that has a chapel. They walk into the chapel, and it's set up for a wedding. So the candelabras are lit. There are flowers at the end. There are rose petals on the way up. There is a giant card with her name on it. He is like, "Go ahead." She walks forward. He just follows behind. She opens the card. "Will you..." *Bam*. He is on his knee with the ring. She says, "Yes," and then they go out to dinner.

He begins to unpack that each vehicle was symbolic of a stage of their journey. Right? At that point I'm like, "You have sowed into the life of every girl in this room disappointment. You have literally just ruined every young collegiate woman's experience in one sermon illustration. Every girl in this room will now respond, 'Really? Sure,' when her turn comes."

So he sits across dinner with his now fiancée and says, "My car at the beginning stood for just the normalcy of life. Here is what you can expect of me on normal days. I'm going to try to do this. I am going to fall short, but here is my goal and here is my desire. Here is what I want to promise to you in our normal days. The boat is for times that are fun. There is a lot of energy. There is a lot of joy. Everything is going our way. Here is what you can expect of me. Here is my promise to you in those days. The limo is when other people have to drive us, when circumstances, sorrows, when other people are driving the direction of our lives. Here is what you can expect of me, and here is what I promise to you.

The airplane ride is symbolic of our growing spiritually with one another." I'm just like, "Who is this guy?" That's why I was like, "I have to be friend with this dude. I'm so dumb. I'm like, 'Do you want to see a movie?' I'm going to need some help. I'm going to need a brother to disciple me." So he says the airplane ride was their spiritual journey. "Here is what you can expect." Then the beat-up old jalopy? The ghetto little hoopty truck? That's what? Growing old together. Seriously. Seriously. Men, just look at your girl right now and say, "Sorry." Just do it. Just apologize. You didn't know. Just, "I'm sorry, boo. I'm sorry. I didn't know." The old beat-up truck was, "Here is what you can expect of me. Here are what my hopes are. Here is what I promise you as we grow old together."

If you're single, let me help you, young men. When you ask your girl to marry you, she is going to get asked two questions seven billion times before the wedding: *Let me see the ring. How did he do it?* So don't put the ring on your toe and be like, "Will you rub my feet? Oh, what's up?" Don't do that. You're going to make her tell that story, and everyone is going to think you're an idiot. Eye contact, young single guys. God has given you Google. Use it.

Two things. What do you think her heart level is on a scale of 1 to 10 coming out of it and getting to tell that story? What do you think her anticipation is? What do you think her excitement is? You think she thinks she has a keeper? That's lights out, men. Outside of a YouTube clip I saw recently, I don't know anybody who could top that. That is unreal. You don't think she is ecstatic at what has just been promised to her?

Do you know the amount of effort that would take to pull that off? Where do you get a plane? How do you even go about doing that? I'm just trying to think. Who do I know with an airplane? Really his story was when people found out what he was doing, they didn't even charge him. So he is checking out the airplane. "Well what do you want to do?"

"Here is what I'm doing."

"Well if you pay for the gas, we'll fly you." That's a lot of change in the bank. You'd think that would float for like 20 years. "Why don't you clean the kitchen?"

"Because I got you a plane! That's why. We had fun on the boat, girl."

So you have these promises that are being made. Here would be my point. That is a pretty good starting point, right? Let me ask a question. With that as the starting point, an unbelievable rollout of grand promises, if he does not fulfill or even attempt to fulfill any of those promises, doesn't the grandeur turn into a level of bitterness that would be hard to communicate? If you're going to go *that* over the top with the promise, if you're going to do *that* much work in the promise, if you don't strive to deliver some of that

promise, doesn't that create in the human heart a level of bitterness that would overshadow the excitement when the promise is delivered?

Here is what I would tell you, brothers and sisters in Christ. God has lavishly promised us impossible things. Here is what I know about my boy's "Will you marry me?" event. He doesn't know what it's like to be married yet. He doesn't know what joys and sorrows are coming his way. He doesn't know what the beat-up truck is going to look like. Does your sight fail you? Does your mind go away?

He is making a promise and has no idea... He knows the truck is going to be busted up, but he doesn't know how busted up. He is talking about spiritual ascent, but you know how spiritual ascent occurs? With lift and thrust. It occurs violently. He is making that promise, not knowing how much fun time there will be versus how much limo time there will be.

Yet our God makes epic promises, aware of every joy and every sorrow you'll ever experience. Every one of them. He knew them all before he ever made the promises we're about to read. The reason you and I as believers in Jesus Christ should be men and women free of bitterness and resentment is because our God not only made grand promises, but he fulfilled them. In how he has fulfilled them we should be all the more confident he'll fulfill them all in their fullness at the consummation of all things.

So with that said, let's read Isaiah 53. We're going to pick it up in verse 4. **"Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our..."** What is that word? **"...transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned..."**

If you write in your Bible, it is a good idea to circle this next part. **"...every one..."** We have all turned. We have all gone astray. **"...to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?"**

I could stop and talk about all of these, but that is a group that kind of confuses people. He is alluding to the fact that as Christ is crucified people don't quite understand this is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, which is why the Jews are able to cry out, "Give us Barabbas! Crucify him!" Why? Because they can't fathom that this man is absorbing their transgressions on the cross.

"And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors."

Now one of the things I love about the Word of God is it does a perfect job of dissecting the human condition. So at every level of sociology and philosophy there is a set of questions secular men and women are seeking to answer: *What is wrong with us? Why are we never satisfied? What is it in us that creates brokenness? Why are we bent? Why are we prone to addiction? Why are we prone to anger? Why are we prone to lust? Why are we prone to laziness?*

The general consensus around secular philosophy and sociology is it's our environment that creates those bents. How many of you have children? Was it the environment, or did they just kind of come out a certain way? I have three. I'm not an expert. I just have three. I don't have a TLC show. I don't have 30 kids at my house, but I can tell you I have three.

Each one came out unique and distinct. Who they were at 2 or 3 is kind of who they are now. We have raised all of them the same, albeit my oldest got the least sanctified version of us. God bless those firstborns. There is a reason they are that way, because they got the least sanctified version of us. But they all came out in pretty specific ways.

My oldest daughter, Audrey, is a straight up fire-breather. Fearless. We go to Holiday in the Park. She is like, "Where is the Titan? Where is it? Where is the Titan? No, I don't want the merry-go-round. Titan." She has already had stitches in the knee, broken collarbone. Just fearless. Not afraid of anything. My son is a little skittish. A little skittish. I've already talked about my youngest daughter. I am scared of her at times. I don't want to nap on the couch, except with my pistol. That's not environment. They kind of came out with a bent.

So here is how the Bible answers this question that philosophy and sociology have set out to answer. You ready for it? You were brought forth in iniquity. Since you were born with a bent toward error, **"There is a way that seems right to man, but in the end it leads to death."** Can I get an amen? Has anybody

betrayed you more than you have? Has anybody tricked you more than you have? You have time and time again put your hope in something only to have that thing betray you. It seemed right to you. There is a way that seems right to you and a way that seems right to me, and in the end it leads to death.

Iniquity coming out of the womb with a bent leads into transgression. This is where now your environment begins to affect your iniquity. So if you have a bent toward lust, if you have a bent toward laziness, if you have a bent toward anger, then your environment serves to throw logs on that fire in your heart. It doesn't cause the iniquity; iniquity causes transgression.

So if you spin off into any kind of addiction, if you spin off into grotesque lust, if you spin off into violent rages, that started at iniquity and it led to transgression. You were born broken. Broken isn't something that happened to you once you realized right from wrong. You were broken from birth, which is why you have been doing wrong as far back as it goes.

It doesn't matter how old you were. You were about you. The whole world was about you from the second you could breathe air. You, in your mind and in your heart, thought you were God from the second you came out of the womb, and you have forcibly tried to live that way ever since. Then he says, "Because of iniquity and because of transgression, we are all (you, me, all of us) like sheep gone astray. Every one of us." This removes any ability for any of us to sit in judgment on anyone else.

We talk about this a lot, because I always want to try to help you see that all of us need the gospel today. If you grew up in the church and in that societal list of do's and don'ts, you don't have anything major to point to. You never got drunk. Never been high. Never killed anybody. True love waited. Sunday school attendant pins all over your chest. Or maybe you were born in the bar. Maybe you're just coming out of a binge right now, and you're here tonight. Even in this environment all of us have gone astray.

So what the Bible is teaching us here is the state you and I find ourselves in is you and I believe we're smarter than God, and we operate like we are smarter than God. A shepherd's job is to lead the sheep to green pastures, still waters, to a place of vibrancy and health. As the shepherd, as God seeks to do that, we cry out with our lives (most of us not with our mouths), "I'm smarter. I know better. When it comes to relationships I know more than God. When it comes to my money I know more than God. When it comes to children I know more than God." You fill in the gap. I don't know you; you know you.

We think we're smarter than God. Then into this come staggering promises, into you and me being built like this: sheep who have gone astray, bent hearts that lead to broken lives, refusing to be shepherded in to a place of vitality, peace, and fullness of life. We rebel against our Creator, and into this rebellion the

prophet Isaiah, speaking for God the Father, begins to speak. I can't walk through this text for time's sake, but I can point out some things.

Here is what the Bible says almost immediately in this text: *Our transgressions and our iniquities are taken from us*. Now let me tell you why that is such good news. If he just took our transgressions but not our iniquities, it's going to be an exhausting run, right? If God just says, "I forgive you, but I'm not going to give you a new heart in which you won't fall right back into sin," if God doesn't make straight our bents but simply forgives our brokenness, then aren't we going to just return to brokenness over and over and over again?

If all God does in the coming of the Messiah is forgive our sins but doesn't make straight what is crooked in us, life is going to be long. It's going to be exhausting, because we're going to fall right back into brokenness over and over and over and over again. The promise God has given us through the prophet Isaiah concerning the coming of Jesus Christ is that both our iniquity (our bent) and our transgressions will be solved in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It means God is not just going to treat the symptoms; he is going to cure the disease.

Now I don't know how wired in you are to medical stuff, but if they're treating the symptoms and not messing with the disease, you're in a lot of trouble. If they're just managing your pain but have no idea how to cure you, you're going to be prone to depression. You're going to be prone to lose heart. Living long term with pain with no shot at a cure is exhausting. We walk with people here at The Village who are in this.

But God, through the prophet Isaiah, concerning the coming of the Messiah Jesus Christ, concerning Advent, the Christmas season says, "Yeah. I'm going to take care of these external transgressions, but I'm going to straighten your crooked heart so you don't live broken lives anymore. I'm going to change your heart to change your life."

How is he going to do that? Here is where, to me, I never grow weary of preaching this sermon. I don't know if you're paying attention. So I've been here 10 years. I literally have preached one message week in and week out, just a different text. Here we are again. If you're here for another 10, guess what? I really only have one message, and it's the greatest news on earth.

That's why it's called *the gospel, euaggelion, the good news*. It's all we have. It's your only hope. In the end here now you have us having iniquity and transgression torn out of our hands. What the prophet Isaiah concerning Jesus Christ says is, "Not only are iniquity and transgression taken from us, but God's righteousness replaces them. God's righteousness."

So I don't know how well you know your Bible. God, when it comes to righteousness, is batting 1.000. You've never even hit a fly ball off. On your best day you fall woefully short of the glory of God. So if you could ever get out of your head not that it's just you at your worst that is a problem but it's you at your best that is still a problem, the more you'll be able to cling to the gospel, understand it, worship, and walk in the fullness of life and joy that Christ has come to usher you into.

So let me read you some verses about God giving you his righteousness through Christ. Second Corinthians 5:21. If you memorize verses (you should memorize verses), this should be one up at the top for you to just be able to say to yourself over and over and over again. It will help with that bent in your heart. Here is 2 Corinthians 5:21: **"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."**

So in Christ's life, death, and resurrection, for those of us who have put our faith in him, when God looks upon us through Christ, he sees his own perfection. That is unreal. So not only are my crooked places made bent, not only are my transgressions forgiven, but on top of that when God sees me he sees the perfection of himself in Christ. That's stunning.

Let me give you another one. This is where I think you'll see all of it come together. Philippians 3:8-9 says, **"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."** What does he count as loss? If you go read this chapter, it's all his religious accolades. "I count all my religious activity as a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of Christ." So it's not me earning favor with God; it's the righteousness I get from God in Christ. That's what I'm after. All this is rubbish. It's the Greek word for *dumb*. *Dumb* is the English word for... Let's keep going.

"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith."

Gosh, it's so good I just want to shake you to get it in your head, but it doesn't work that way. What just happened in this text is our perfection before God has to do with faith that Christ has granted to us righteousness. Not that you did a certain amount of things, not that you accomplished, not that you're better than you used to be. No, by faith in what Christ has accomplished I am righteous before God. Not just any kind of junior varsity, fourth-string righteousness; the righteousness of God.

Now if you want to see God's hostility toward you and me despite the fact that we still stumble about in our transgressions, you want to see it vanish, watch Jesus pray for you. In Romans 8:34 it says, **"Who is to**

condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."

So let's try to be honest. In regard to your intimacy with Christ, your pursuit of God, your joy in him, how many of you just had a tough week? Just found that bent pretty strong this week, kind of stumbled around, screwed up a bit. Anyone? Okay, a lot of honest people. Thank you. Church should be a place we can be honest.

Now do you see in the end you have Christ in heaven knowing this is who we are and doing what? Interceding. Not asking for lightning bolts. Not asking for a dash of cancer for you. Not asking for the loss of a limb or some sort of torturous device, but interceding. Do you understand *interceding*? Pleading on your behalf.

Let me give you a couple more of these. Hebrews 7:25: **"Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost..."** Praise God. **"...those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."** So Christ's resurrected body doesn't sleep. Jesus doesn't nap; he lives and breathes on the right hand of God Almighty. This isn't ethereal; this is actual. At the right hand of God he lives to make intercession for who? Us. Jesus is praying for us by name, knowing our struggle.

My buddy had no idea what was to come. Christ *did* know what was to come and still goes to the cross, still absorbs God's wrath toward you, knowing all along you would be where you are this week. He is next to the right hand of God saying, "Let's send Holy Spirit power. Let's sustain. Let's hold them." That's why the author of Jude says, **"To him who is able to keep you from falling..."**

Then I love this one. First John, chapter 2, verse 1 says, **"My little children..."** I love being called *a little child* by God. Anytime I'm in a strategy meeting with our staff, if we're on the white board, I always kind of chuckle because I think God is kind of looking at us like I look at my children when they go, "Here is what we're going to do. Here's who is opening their present first." *Well that's cute. Here is what is actually going to happen.* **"My little children..."**

Now if a child is little, there is patience there, isn't there? There is an acknowledgment they're going to need some help. If you're a little child... I don't ask any of my little children to do our taxes. I don't ask any of our little children to get the oil changed in the car. I don't ask any of our little children to do tasks little children can't do. I'm their father. I do that for them. So praise God that God looks upon me and says, **"My little children..."** It means he is on my side. He is going to protect me. He is going to provide. He is going to do what I can't.

"My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin..."

Again, anyone this week? Anyone sin this week? More than once? Sinning right now maybe? Okay. **"...we have an..."** What? **"...advocate..."** So okay we've done medicine. Now let's get into law. Advocate. Arguing on your behalf. That's insane. You're in rebellion, and Christ paying your bill is now at the right hand of God. You have sinned, and he is going, "I paid that bill. I paid for that. I absorbed that."

Look at the rest of the verse. **"...we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."** So when we say when God looks upon us he sees the righteousness of Christ, it's because we have an advocate between us and God who looks through our righteousness now in Christ and sees us as holy, spotless, and blameless. This is unreal.

God likes you. Jesus likes you. He is not tolerating you; he likes you. It's not just love; he is your advocate. He is arguing on your behalf. He is presenting a case by his blood for your perfection, and he wins the case. It's unreal. It's unreal. I love this last promise here in Isaiah 53. Actually we started with it in the first verse there.

For in the coming Messiah, through Jesus Christ, we learn that the Messiah will bear our grief and carry our sorrow. In Hebrews 4:15 we find this verse: **"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."** So this verse has been an anchor text for my soul for 15-16 years. Jesus is empathetic.

Let's maybe walk through the life of Christ a bit. Anyone ever had somebody they loved deeply die? Anybody? Loved them deeply and they died. Mourned, cried your guts out. Felt the bottom drop out underneath you. So did Jesus. Shortest verse in the Bible. Jesus shows up. Lazarus is dead, and the Bible says, **"Jesus..."** What? **"...wept."** He didn't rebuke the crowd for mourning. He literally entered into that mourning and sobbed himself. So on that day when you were sobbing, when it felt like you weren't going to move on, Jesus is like, "I know! I know!"

Been betrayed by someone close to you? Anyone? Yeah. "You betray the Son of Man with a kiss, Judas. Been with me these three years. Have seen me raise the dead. Have heard the promises. You've seen the miracles of the kingdom. You've watched the demons flee. You betray me with a kiss. You, Judas, who have been here with me this whole time?" Crazy family dynamics anyone? Crazy family dynamics? Holiday season, right? It's when they show up. Jesus goes, "Yeah, I know. Yeah, I know." Suffer, anyone? Yeah. Jesus goes, "Yeah, yeah, I know."

Here is why this is so important. When Jesus bears our grief and carries our sorrows, we get a God who is not detached from our losses. He doesn't tell us to get over it; he enters into it and understands. That's huge because it frees you up to rejoice in a God who is present regardless of circumstances.

In the last service there was a group of men and women right over in this area here. Just a couple of years ago my phone rang. It was a Saturday night. It rang and I screened it. I wasn't going to answer it. It rang again and I screened it. Then there was somebody else in that group who called. That's when you know, "Okay."

So I picked up the phone. I kissed my wife and explained to her what was going on, and had to run to my car. I got in my car and drove down to Parkland. Lee Lewis alluded to this in the video, but at a church our size there is almost always someone in a lot of trouble, and for whatever reason, tragedy happens at night. In 10 years I've never been called in the middle of the afternoon. "There has been an accident. Can you come to the hospital?" Ten years. Probably 150-200 times, and never in 10 years has it been right after lunch. Literally it's always just 11:00 at night.

So we headed down to Parkland, and it was an awful, awful ordeal where we had no idea if in the next couple of hours somebody was going to walk through that door and say, "She is gone," or if they were going to walk through that door and say, "She is stable." So there were about 30 or 40 of us in this room. One of the members of our church pulled out his iPhone, he hit play, and he played worship music. All 30 of us, with life and death in the other room, hanging in the balance, a very young, beautiful girl, worshiped Christ, praised his name.

Why? Because he carries our grief, and he carries our sorrow. If we would have lost her that night, we would know God is sovereign and he is good and he has done what is right and good in his own eyes, as hidden as it is for us. He would have sustained us in one of the very darkest moments of that family's life and in the darkest day of some of the lives of our little circle group of friends.

I can tell you as a cancer survivor myself that he carries our sorrow and our grief. He carries it. He makes it lighter. He doesn't make it go away. We can testify there is suffering. It is real. It hangs out. It can wreck shop on our soul, but it will never blow up our soul so much that we cannot by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit be sustained. He carries our burdens, our sorrows, our griefs, and our losses. He empathizes with us.

What a crazy God we serve. You will find this in no other religion, an empathetic, gracious God, a God who enters into sorrow and doesn't command you to get over it. He doesn't flex his power muscles when things

go bad. "Just do what I say." No, he enters in. He can grieve *with*. He prays *for*. He is an advocate *for*. No other religion has a God as mighty as this.

So as I said last week, tinsels and trees, cards and carols, presents and stockings... Those are great things. We're all about it at the Chandler crib. I'm in. But shadows, man. Why would I celebrate winter? It's 80 degrees outside. Is that making anyone else angry? Are you serious? Let's make up our mind here. Cold front. Summer.

What I want to enter into, what I want to get before me right now, what I want to get before my children, what I want to talk about with my wife, what I want to rejoice in with you is the fact that we have an empathetic God who stands as our advocate and has rescued us from the natural bent of our hearts and the damage that bent does to our lives.

So I have two invitations for you. Maybe you're stuck in your iniquity. Maybe you've never come to that place where you've said, "Okay, I trust you, Jesus. I'm going to put my faith in your sacrifice for me. I'm going to put my faith in your way. I want to quit being my own god. I want to quit drifting off and being astray. I want to line myself up." I pray that you might submit your life to Jesus Christ tonight.

Then since I'm able to be honest, let's just do this. There are some of you who have said, "Yes, I give you my life," but you kind of feel like God hasn't lived up to his end of the bargain. That bent in you feels as strong as ever. Your transgressions seem as steep and slippery as they ever have. I could tell just by the little raising of hands we did earlier that some of you had a really crummy week in regard to battling your flesh and striving for holiness. You feel like God has overpromised and under-delivered.

Anybody honest enough? "I feel like God has overpromised." Yeah, a ton of us. A ton of us. That's not an abnormal confession, I've found. As I have cups of coffee and as I've had meetings in my office, I've heard quite a few men and women really say, "I just thought that when I gave my life to Christ this would vanish. This would replace."

Everybody wants the lightning bolt, the silver-bullet-that-kills-the-werewolf experience. Some of us got it. I've heard testimonies before. "I was strung out on heroin for a decade, gave my life to Christ, and never even craved it again." That's a powerful testimony. It's also an abnormal one, right? If you ever say *amen* here, it should have been on that one. That's an abnormal testimony. Thank you.

Here is what I've found. Do you know sometimes stereotypes are true? Okay. Men don't like to go to the doctor. You're like, "Hey man, you're bleeding out of your neck."

"I'm fine. Give me a Band-Aid."

"No, seriously, you're losing color."

"I'll be fine."

"There is like a gallon and a half of blood on the floor. Please go to the doctor."

"I'm telling you, it's nothing."

Then what I've found is then when they go to the doctor, the doctor will be like, "Here's what is wrong. Here's what you need to do." *What does this guy know?* Well, he is a doctor.

What I've found is a large swatch of evangelicals, a large swatch of those who have put their faith in Christ have a lot in common with the man who goes to the doctor and has the doctor say, "This is what you need to do to get better," only to have the man, in his stubbornness and pride go, "I'll get better on my own."

Could it be that Christ hasn't under-delivered? Could it be you haven't tried Christ? Could it be you have started to believe promises for you that God has not made? You have no promise of a life filled with happiness; you have a promise of a life filled with joy. Struggles should not surprise you. The Bible is full of them. Why do you think the Bible is so honest? Bad things happen. There are losses. There are days that require disciplined pursuits.

Not every day is on the mountain. Now we get those days sometimes. So much of our life is a steadfast, day-at-a-time, "I'm going to trust you," minute-at-a-time, "I'm going to trust you are better," minute-at-a-time of saying, "He knew no sin to be sin on my behalf so I might become the righteousness of God in him. Help me, God."

So week in and week out we want to end our service the same way. In 1 Corinthians the apostle Paul, speaking empowered by the Holy Spirit on behalf of God, sets up Communion, the celebration of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ. What he says is as long as you gather and do this, you'll remember the death of Christ. Why is the death of Christ so important? Because it is in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that you and I have transgression and iniquity taken from us and have put into its place, imputed to us, Christ's perfection so we do have an advocate, so we do have an empathetic High Priest.

So here is how we're going to end tonight. Whether your testimony is, "I'm stuck in my iniquity. I am stuck in my transgression," or your testimony is, "I have submitted my life to Christ, but I've been disappointed in what he has delivered. But I need to confess I have not been serious about pursuing him. I have not counted all things as rubbish compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Christ," the invitation to the table goes out to all of us.

So if my friend had this spectacular "Will you marry me?" epic event but then betrays her and doesn't pursue the fulfillment of those promises in any way, it leads to despair. It leads to resentment. It leads to bitterness. But Christ has come. **"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder."** To his reign there will be no end.

Over and over and over again the Bible uses the imagery of the wedding supper of the Lamb. So we were engaged by the promises of the Old Testament. We were married at our faith in Christ. We become children of God. We become bride to the Bridegroom. At the consummation of all things we will partake in the wedding supper of the Lamb, the feast, the consummation of all things. Somebody is with me.

So tonight we're going to celebrate it. I'm about to pray for us. If you're serving Communion I'll ask you to go ahead and get your elements. Grab your trays. Then when I say, "Amen," Bleeker and the crew will play just a little bit. Then I'll come up. We're going to participate in the Lord's Supper in this kind of symbolic practice, not just of what Christ has done, but the consummation of all things. We're going to take together and remember he has made all things new and he will make all things new. So let me pray for us, and then when I say, "Amen," men and women will begin to hand out the elements. You just hold that. I'll come back up, and we'll celebrate together all God has done for us in Christ. Let me pray for us.

Father, I thank you for these men and women just believing with everything in me that you drew them into this place tonight. Some are not believers, and it's no accident they are here. You've come to help bring clarity to their minds and hearts. So I pray where iniquity has led to a lot of transgression and people have walked into this place just tired of the bankruptcy, just tired of trying harder, trying harder, trying harder, I pray you might grant them freedom tonight in your great and glorious gospel. I pray that maybe for the first time they'll grab a little cracker, they'll grab a little glass of juice, and they'll celebrate with us tonight that salvation has come, that rescue has occurred.

For my weary brother or sister tonight, for my brother and sister who has said, "Yes, Lord, I'll follow you," but finds themselves in the desert, finds themselves in an exhausting place, I pray you would encourage their heart tonight by being reminded afresh that you know and you care, that they haven't been abandoned. If they would just cling to you, would just cling to your promises they would find you to be more than faithful. Help us tonight, Father. It's through your beautiful name I pray, amen.

You continue to pray as they pass out the elements. Do business with your heart. I would simply say to you if you're a believer in Christ, please participate with us. You don't have to be a member of the church to do Communion with us. You just have to be a believer. Here is what I would ask. If you're not a believer in Christ, I couldn't be happier that you're here. You will find very few doors closed for you here. Participate in the life of the covenant community all you want.

I want to say to you that these are crackers and juice we bought at a store not far from here. They're not magical. In the back of that store there wasn't a door that led to Narnia. It's just crackers and juice. It is not a means of grace. It will not save you. It will not grant for you forgiveness. It will not make you right before God. It is not a means of grace; it is symbolic of what Christ has done and what Christ will do.

So in that space between we celebrate what is behind us and what is in front of us with this meal. So if you are not a believer, will you just let it pass? There will be no judgment here. We're glad you're here. There will be no judgment here. Just let it pass. It will do nothing for you. It's a cracker and some juice. But for us who are adopted sons and daughters, it's far more. Thank you for being here, but will you abstain? I'll be right back up and I'll lead us all in Communion together.

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