

If you have your Bibles, why don't you go ahead and grab them. We're going to be back in Ephesians again this week, so go ahead and open up to Ephesians. So far we've answered some pretty big questions. We've looked at the holiness of God, who he is, how different he is, what really his holiness is, and then last week we looked at God's ferocious commitment to making us holy.

We've left some pretty big questions unanswered, and the primary question is how he goes about making us holy. You have the commands in Scripture for us to be a holy people, you have God's commitment *to* our holiness, but the thing we haven't talked about yet, and a thing I think people get really confused on, is how we become holy people.

I know you're going to think I'm going to overstate this, but I promise you I'm not overstating this. How you understand the process by which you become more and more like Jesus, more and more holy... The more you understand that process correctly, the greater life, freedom, and love for God you'll have, and the more you *misunderstand* how that takes place, the more wearying and difficult the Christian life will be to you.

The more you get away from how God makes you holy and get into how *you* make you holy, the more you make that mistake, the more you get away from what God brings to the table and get into what *you* bring to the table, the more you enslave yourself to very long days and very long years and very long decades and a walking with God that's absent of the joy we should be walking in as believers in Jesus Christ.

I have a friend who makes this statement all the time. I just want to make this statement. In this great exchange between God and you, the *only* thing you bring to the table is the sin that makes your salvation necessary. You don't have the tools or the materials with which to build a house that's holy. You don't have them. So if you get away from the One who *can* build that holy house and try to build it yourself... What the Bible is going to repeatedly tell us is you can't even make a *shack* of your own abilities and own efforts. So it's very important for us to understand *how* we become holy, so we might walk in the fullness of joy that God has brought for us in our adoption as sons and daughters as he makes us a holy people.

So let's look at the primary text we were in last week: Ephesians, chapter 1. We're going to pick it up again in verse 3. Here's what it says: **"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places..."** Verse 4 was key: **"...even as**

**he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us...** Again, I say this all the time. Don't get nervous about that word *predestined*. It just means to determine beforehand. So don't panic.

**"...he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved."** That *Beloved* is capitalized, as in Jesus Christ. So what we see from last week is that God is so ferociously committed to our holiness that he has declared, or decreed, us as holy people because he chose us and predetermined we would be that way. We remember from week 1 that God cannot fail. It is impossible for God to fail. So this is very good news with some hard edges.

The very good news is that God has decreed, chosen, predetermined we would become holy and blameless in his sight. We are going to have a positional holiness before God. We are going to be seen and viewed by God as a holy people. But he still doesn't say really *how* he goes about that except that he accomplishes it in Jesus somehow. Ephesians 2:1-10 is going to unpack it more fully.

So in Ephesians 2 now, starting in verse 1: **"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all..."** Now if you have a tendency to get a bit self-righteous, you just need to circle that word. If you got saved when you were 4 years old... When you came out of the womb they spanked your bottom and your first word was "Jesus." If that's you, you need to circle this word so you'll understand the Bible, even at your young conversion, does not consider your early conversion to be something that made you escape the evils of this world.

Even as someone who is small, **"...we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature..."** By our birth. By our existence. **"...children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."** I don't need to do a ton of work here. I know a lot of you, if you're not a believer you don't like that, you think that whole thing is probably ridiculous, and you probably wouldn't agree, but here's the real point to pull out of this text: *You have no shot at being holy on your own*. None. According to the Scriptures, you are dead in your trespasses.

I don't know if you've been around a lot of dead bodies or not. I took a thanatology class (the study of death) when I was a senior in high school and got to go to a mortuary and see what they do there. It was a really dark class, but it was that or pottery. *Ghost* had come out. It was just a bit... I couldn't do it. I can tell you this about dead people: They don't move around a lot. They don't make good decisions. They're *dead*.

So he's saying you're dead in your trespasses and sins, so even if you're making a decision, if you're making a move, that move is tainted by or really ruined by the fact that you're dead. You're making decisions as a dead man. You kind of have this apocalyptic, zombie-like... Your decisions are erroneous even when they seem right. You were dead in your trespasses and sins, and you were following the spirit of this age. He's saying you're being demonically influenced and the fallenness of this world and the sinfulness of your heart is really dictating behavioral patterns for you that are, in the end, not leading you towards the fullness of life, and not making you holy.

So really if we could take these first four verses in this discussion of what it means to be holy and how God makes you holy, what you have to look at in these first four verses is the articulated, clear truth that holiness, in and of yourself, is an impossibility. It doesn't matter how hard you try. It doesn't matter how hard you work. It doesn't matter how disciplined you are. What we could find in the Scriptures... We don't have a ton of time to do it today. I might hint at it here in a little while. But even good deeds done with the wrong motive are considered by God to be unholy.

So you can't look at your behavior and go, *Well I'm acting in a way that according to the Scriptures is holy.* I would say maybe your *behavioris*, but without Jesus Christ your heart most certainly is not. You're trying to leverage your behavior to get God to do what you want him to do rather than being in glad submission to a holy God who you are walking in glad obedience to. What we find in these first four verses is that you do not have any power in and of yourself to make yourself holy. You are a dead man, dead woman, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is still at work in those who are walking in disobedience.

Now look at verse 4. "**But...**" Again, if you write in your Bible, that's a beautiful word to circle, underline, highlight, put an exclamation point, draw a little bubble out to your margin and put "Wow," whatever you do. All right? "**But God, being rich in mercy...**" God is wealthy in mercy. He has an abundance of mercy. Watch this: "**...because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses...**"

You have to hear that. I just can't imagine the difference that's going to make in your life if you could actually fathom, believe, and grab hold of that line, that God "**...being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses...**" You have to get out of your head that God loves you and his love *for* you is predicated upon your goodness. His *great* love, his *abundance* of mercy by which he loves you is present even when you were dead in your trespasses and sins.

Now let's keep going to see how this holiness happens. Verse 5: "**...even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up**

**with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."** If you'll really let this settle in on you, if you'll not play church here today, if you'll not kind of check out but you'll really ask the Holy Spirit to really drive these things down deep into your soul... This is profoundly beautiful stuff. That you *are* guilty, you *are* dead in your trespasses... He's acknowledging your rebellion.

So if you're one of those people who are like, *I just can't believe God would love me, God would show mercy to me, God would adopt me, God would forgive me, because I've done this, because this is my background, because of this*, then I'm telling you, you're having to believe at this moment that God's revealed will, the Bible, is lying when the Bible says that ultimately *in your trespasses, in your rebellion*, God has adopted you as a son, as a daughter, called you his own, and in the coming ages plans on pouring out the immeasurable grace and mercy of his heart upon you.

In the coming ages, God's goodness is so vast, so deep, so profoundly infinite that it takes ages and ages and ages and ages and ages-plus for him to lavish upon you what he has purchased for you in Jesus Christ. Let's keep going. Verse 8: **"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing..."** There it is again. Why? Why is it not your own doing? Because you were dead.

Again, dead people don't make godly decisions. They're dead. Dead people don't decide to be alive. They're dead. Dead people don't decide to do what's good and right. They're dead. But God, being rich in mercy, made you alive and seated you next to God. So your salvation, your belief in Jesus, you being a believer in Jesus Christ, you being a Christian is not owing to you in any way, but rather it is a gift of God, a free gift of grace that you believe in by faith.

Now look at this: **"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this..."** This what? This faith. **"...is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."** Again, you have the Scriptures just hammering away at what Christ has accomplished for us, what Christ has done for us. The gift of faith to believe in that grace was also given to you by God. You don't even get to muster the faith, but rather the faith is given to you by God so you would have nothing to boast in.

Look at God's Word. This is where we're going to get into holiness. Look at verse 10: **"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."** So now in verse 10 we're getting into being God's workmanship. He's chiseling. He's shaping. He's doing a work in us. What is that work? You can see it there in the text: that he creates us in Christ Jesus.

What does that mean? How are we made alive? Through Jesus Christ, who brings grace to the table in his life, death, and resurrection. There's the grace. We're given faith by the Holy Spirit to believe in that grace. The workmanship of God, how we are made holy and prepared to do the works God has prepared in advance for us to do (this goes back to Ephesians 1) occurs because of faith in grace in Jesus Christ. So we are made holy positionally by Jesus Christ alone.

Now there are some verses and some ideas in the Bible that seem to strain this idea. They put a lot of strain on it. Let me give you an example of just one. I never want to hide from these kind of verses. I actually want to show you how they would work into the gospel. Hebrews 12, verse 14 simply says, "**Strive [struggle, work] for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.**"

Here's what you have to start to do with texts like this. There are a lot like this, even like, "**...train yourself for godliness...**" You can get into all these texts that seem to put a lot of effort on *you* in order to become the holiness the Bible just clearly said is actually gifted to you by God alone in Christ. So how do you strive toward the holiness without which no one is going to see the Lord if holiness is a gift of grace through faith? How do you strive for something that's a free gift?

I think here's how you answer that question in light of the gospel. Let me tell you how you strive for holiness, how you train yourself for godliness, how you pursue righteousness and avoid sinfulness under the banner of the gospel. Here's how you strive: You strive by faith through grace. If that's confusing to you let me make it simpler: Fix your eyes on Jesus.

Let me show you how the Bible explains our transformation as we believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. Second Corinthians 3:18 says, "**And we all, with unveiled face...**" That means we're believers. Before we come to know Jesus Christ our faces are veiled. We don't see well. We can't make out truth from lie. We're kind of stuck. But we all now, as believers in Christ, with unveiled faces are "**...beholding the glory of the Lord...**"

So with unveiled faces, you and I now have our eyes fixed on Jesus. We are beholding the glory of the Lord Jesus, and in our beholding of the Lord Jesus we "**...are being transformed into the same image...**" What's the image? The image of Jesus, the holiness of God, so that by beholding Jesus we are being transformed into the likeness of Jesus. Look at how this works so we can be patient. "**...from one degree of glory to another.**" I love that the Bible is so honest about this. As we fix our eyes on Jesus Christ, as we see and savor Jesus, we are transformed from one degree of glory to the next.

Now let me tell you why this is good news. Because no one is as hard on me as I am on me. I critique myself more aggressively and more critically than anyone else does. The Bible just says, "Hey, man.

Positionally you are holy and blameless right now before God Almighty in Jesus Christ, but where you are right now is in the transition of becoming more and more and more and more like him." Which requires me to continue to behold who?

I'd better not (and we covered this some in Galatians) get my eyes on me and begin to think about me and getting me holy. I'd better get my eyes on Jesus, because that's how I'm transformed. I'm transformed by beholding Jesus. Not by beholding me but by beholding him. So not keeping the scorecard down here, but keeping the scorecard up there, transforms how I live down here.

Let me give you another one. Hebrews 12:1-2. Listen to the "do's" here. **"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us..."** So here is what we are doing. **"...let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us..."** That's a lot of us doing to get holy, isn't it? Let *us* lay aside. Let *us* get rid of the sin that clings so closely. Let *us* lay aside any kind of encumbrances or weights. These are morally neutral things that are robbing us of affections for Jesus Christ. Let *us* run with endurance is what we're supposed to do, the race set out for *us*.

How does the author of Hebrews go on to say we are to accomplish that? Look at it. **"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us..."** Look at the next three words. **"...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith..."** Now what are we supposed to be looking at in Jesus? Well he's going to start giving us stuff.

He's the founder of our faith. We read about this. He chose us. He saved us. He delivered us. You didn't choose him; he chose you. He started this. Again, Philippians 1: "He who began this good work in you will be faithful to complete this work in you." He is the *founder* of your faith. What else is he? He is the *perfecter* of your faith. It's not just that Jesus saves you and now it's on you and the Holy Spirit to get things done. He saves you and he perfects you, and he's committed to it, and God cannot fail. He is the author and the perfecter of our faith.

So how should we fix our eyes on Jesus? Not only is he the founder of my faith, not only is he going to perfect my faith, but look at what in particular we are to look at. **"...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."** Where are our eyes focused? Our eyes are focused on the founder and perfecter of our faith who, filled with joy, died our death and rose from the grave, showing that all of our sin has been paid for. Therefore, to fix our eyes on Jesus Christ is to pursue holiness and to avoid sin.

But what ends up happening to many of us is we take our eyes *off* of Jesus Christ and go, *Okay, let me pursue Jesus Christ... I have my eyes off of him, but let me try to pursue him, and then let me try to avoid sin*, and honestly, nine times out of ten we reverse those. *Let me avoid sin and try to pursue him*. But the Bible continually teaches it a completely different way. "Get your eyes on Jesus. Pursue Jesus. Chase after Jesus." It's the same thing over and over.

I don't know if you've picked up on this yet. I have one sermon. That's it. One. We just come out of a different text every weekend to preach it. Because this is what we need to be reminded of over and over and over and over and over again, always. You don't become holy by *trying* to become holy. You become holy by fixing your eyes on Jesus Christ, and his decree declared holiness over us because of his life, death, and resurrection. He is the founder and he is the perfecter of our faith who died our death and has risen from the grave to prove that he paid the bill in full and has victory over sin and death.

Now the primary tool God uses to chisel us into holy people via the gospel is blessing. I think some of you might be going to places I'm not going with that. Biblically speaking, God blesses in two ways. He blesses with things we would consider good and beautiful and right and lovely. He gives those things graciously, and that will actually, in a lot of cases, make us pursue Jesus Christ all the more, chase after the Father even more, especially when we are aware of what we covered in the first part of Ephesians.

Nothing stirs the affections of men and women more than knowing they're guilty and being lavished upon by God anyway. To really understand the rebellion you've walked in against God Almighty, and then to look around and look at all he has given you and all he has blessed you with, is a humbling thing that should stir your affections for Jesus Christ in profound, profound ways. Sometimes he uses blessing to really push you to him. I'll give you a couple of examples of this.

I know a man in our church who's extremely wealthy. His wealth has always made him a bit nervous. It has made him a bit nervous. He doesn't want to get swept away by it. He doesn't want it to rule him. He wants it to serve the kingdom. So by God allowing this man to become as wealthy as he is, this man is desperately dependent upon God to give him wisdom and insight on how to manage what God has entrusted to him for the good of God's kingdom.

I'll even use... Being the pastor of this church and managing what God has asked me to manage is at times a crushing weight for me. I know some people, maybe on the podcast, some other pastor, will be like, *Oh give me a break. Yeah, large church, big staff. I just feel so sorry for you. I should just pray for you*. I can tell you this: I get so nervous about not preaching the whole counsel of God, not leading the church the way I should, not preaching in such a way that people who aren't saved could understand and be drawn by the Holy Spirit of God, not managing staff well, not taking the platform God has given me seriously.

So really, the success at The Village Church has pushed me to the throne room of God in an excited nervousness of how God has decided and chosen to use me. Sometimes he binds us to him with good and right blessing. But he also, at times, blesses us with pain. You probably didn't see that coming. You probably were loving that blessing. "Yes, bind me to your side with riches and success." But sometimes God binds you to himself, and sometimes God gives you what you need most, via the tool of the blessing of suffering.

All suffering is a result of a fallen world, sinful choices by you and sinful choices by others, but any suffering in your life was allowed by God. God *could have* stopped it. God *could have* said, "No!" I know for so many of you that sounds ghastly. That sounds like, *How could a loving God allow that, do that? Do you know what kind of pain was inflicted on me? Do you know the repercussions of that in the rest of my life from this event or this moment or God allowing this thing to happen? You will not get God off the hook by simply saying he allowed it to happen versus he caused it to happen, Matt.*

Okay. Well, let me ask some questions to help us ferret through this, because I know it is difficult, and I am not a man who has not experienced horrific loss in my own life. So here's my question: If we exist in some form or another 50 trillion years from now, that matters, doesn't it? So if you and I exist, if we *are*, 50 trillion years from now, that matters. In fact, it's profoundly more important than anything that occurs in our little 30-, 40-, 50-, 80- or 90-year run.

So if you and I exist in some way or another 50 trillion years from now, and we exist from now until then and beyond, then this 50-trillion-year mark is far more important than what happens to you at 8, at 16, at 42, at 61, or at *any* point in this little dew-in-the-morning, gone-in-the-afternoon life of yours and mine. So really and honestly, the cruelty of God would be to protect you here and now in such a way that would rob you of eternal life into the 50-trillion-year mark and beyond.

The mercy of God would be to wound you in such a way that your heart was bound to him, so that in 50 trillion years with an imperishable body when all things have been made new, you might be singing the praises of the King with those who loved him alongside of you. So try to think about it this way. If I told you a man knocked me unconscious, cracked open my skull, and cut out my right frontal lobe and then afterwards pumped my brain full of radiation and poisoned me for 18 months, you would probably ask the question, "Why?"

What if I didn't *know* why? What if I said, "You know, I have no idea. I was walking down the street and next thing I know I woke up in a ditch and I was poisoned for 18 months with radiation in my brain and a big hunk of my brain gone. I have no idea why he did it." You'd be like, "Hunt that dude down. Let's handle that



dude." But it all changes if I say, "You know what? I found out why. There was a malignant form of cancer in my right frontal lobe, and the only way to save my life, to extend my days, was to knock me unconscious, and at great risk (it could have gone either way) cut out my right frontal lobe and pump me full of radiation and poison for 18 months." You would go, "Man, who's your doctor? Who is he?"

See when God wounds, he wounds like a surgeon. He doesn't wound like a criminal. He doesn't bash your world with a bat. That's not what he does. But God will lovingly take the scalpel to you. Now here's why it can be difficult: It can be difficult because I know in that scenario there was something cancerous in me, something that was going to kill me that needed to be taken out. What makes things difficult here and now is that we can't *see* that. We can't see that.

So when suffering, difficulty, and pain occurs, if we don't have our eyes fixed on Jesus, we will very quickly begin to doubt that God, in allowing difficulty in our lives, is actually being merciful and is actually working towards the 50-trillion-year mark and not the year 10, or year 36, or year 42. I mean how trite and sad is year 42 in light of 50 trillion? Who in their right mind would say, "No, no, no. You give me 42 and you keep 50 trillion"? No one would. No one who is thinking correctly would.

God chisels and shapes us into holy people. He has already decreed and declared us as holy people, which is why we can fix our eyes to him and run to him without shame, and then God chisels by blessing us with good things and then blessing us with the good thing of suffering and difficulty. In fact, here's one of my favorite quotes. Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages."

Our primary motivation for holiness is that we want to be who God has declared we are, and our motivation for holiness is as we see and behold the beauty of Christ in light of our sin we are drawn *to* him, transformed into the image *of* him, and are avoiding sin and pursuing righteousness because our eyes are fixed on Jesus. So when joy comes we're humbled by it and are filled with gratitude, and when suffering comes we cling to "**...the rock that is higher than I.**" Psalm 61.

Let's talk about secondary motivations for holiness. Even in the secondary motivations for holiness, there is mercy of God present. Let's walk through it, because I think a bulk of us are not going to find ourselves with our eyes fixed on Jesus, becoming more and more like Jesus because our eyes are fixed on Jesus. We're going to find ourselves more in these secondary motivators.

Here's a secondary motivation for holiness: Fear. When we read that Hebrews 12:14 text, "Strive for peace and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord," we're reading Hebrews 12:14 in light of Hebrews 12. Hebrews 12 is a chapter on God's discipline. It clearly says God disciplines those he loves and

he chastises or scourges all those he calls sons. So in the midst of Hebrews 12 he's saying, "Behave or I'll whip your bottom. Behave or I'll break your hand. Behave or I'll break your legs." He scourges those he calls sons. He disciplines those who are his children, who are his beloved.

Some people's motivation for holiness is, *I'd better do what God says or he's going to get me. He's going to discipline me. He's going to spank me. He's going to break my hand. He's going to crack my leg. I need to do what God says in order to not be disciplined by God.* Now let me explain to you why this is secondary and why even this is God's mercy.

God's desire is not that he would ever have to pull out the belt. We see this in Jesus Christ and him absorbing all God's wrath towards us. The discipline of God should be a future version of us, that "I'm going to shape you into this future picture I have of you, namely, holy and blameless in my sight." But because of our flesh and the sinfulness of our flesh, we are prone to not fixing our eyes on Jesus, so he has this secondary motivation that "If necessary, because I love you, I will punish you." Not in a type of punitive, damnable way, but more as a course-correction way, that we might walk towards holiness and see that even in the Lord's discipline he loves us.

I think the way it helps me understand this, because I *want* to understand desperately how God's discipline works once we're justified fully, as I have to. I know for single people you might get tired of me talking about family dynamics, but in our home I want the primary motivation for obedience to be the fact that Mom and Dad are loved and seen as generous and seen as gracious and seen as loving and patient and kind. We fall short of that hourly (I wouldn't even say daily). Hourly we're falling short in one of those arenas, but I want our children to see, *They delight in us. They love us. They are for us. They long to protect us and guide us.* But that's not always the motivation.

Sometimes the motivation, a secondary motivation is, "You'd better do what I'm telling you to do. You'd better do what I'm telling you to do." Then that's when the scourging, that's when the spanking, that's when the reminder of who is ultimate in authority and who is not comes out. But it's never my heart's desire. Never. I have *never* thought, *I sure wish someone would not do what I'm telling them to do so I can hand out some whippings.* Okay, maybe once. No. I really have never done it. I've never thought, *I wish they wouldn't obey me out of joy so that I might use my greater strength and greater knowledge to punish them.* I have never thought that.

But I will at times show them I love them by not allowing them to get too far outside the lines of obedience with discipline. So fear can be a motivation, but I believe it's a motivation you need to repent of because it's not how God wants you following him. If you're here today and your motivation for trying to be good is fear-based (*I don't want God to get me*), you need to repent. I think God can *use* that, but it's not what God

wants to use. I think God wants your eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith, as your motivation for obedience and walking in holiness.

Now another motivation I see often is... I'll just call it what it is. It's really a weird form of idolatry. I'll explain it like this: I run across a ton of people who are not interested in serving, loving, following God at all. They just want God to do some stuff for them. So what they do then, at this point, is they'll do what they believe God has commanded in order that God might give them something in return.

Romans 11 is going to blow this idea out of the water. It says you cannot give to God *anything* that he might have to give back to you. Everything you have, all that you are, is already God's. To give to God something God has commanded you to do does not put God in your debt. You can't put God in your debt. He doesn't owe you anything, and anything you give back to him you already owed him.

I have found so many people who honestly come to God in crisis. What they want is not really God but for God to give them something else. *My marriage is in crisis, my children are in crisis, I want a big promotion at work, so let me be good, let me do the things God has commanded me to do in order that I might get these things.* Can I press just for a second? I mean, you can leave but you can't really stop me from pressing. What you really want is that *thing*. You don't want God. You're using God to get that thing.

What I've found occurs is that if you don't get that thing, you tend to get angry and embittered towards God, who never promised you that thing. Do you see why these have to be secondary motivations? You cannot look at "Here are the three motivations." They have to be looked at straight. Our first motivation, our first level, God's desire, the way it works best, the way for my joy, my life, and God's glory, is that my motivation is my eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, as being worked on by God for what God has for me. I'm fixing my eyes on Jesus. I'm pursuing righteousness. I'm avoiding sin because he's so lovely that sin isn't as attractive to me, and we're being transformed into a more and more and more holy person as we fix our eyes and behold Jesus our Lord and Savior.

But God in his mercy goes, "I know some of you aren't going to do that so I'm going to discipline others of you, and hopefully that will lead up to this. Then others of you, you're going to want your marriage fixed, you're going to want your children to come home, you're going to want that promotion at work, and you're going to seek me that you might get those things. In that seeking, that third-tier motivation, which is really idolatry, you might just find in my mercy that I'm better than what you were seeking to begin with."

What I've found is that some people come to God to fix their marriage. Their marriage doesn't get fixed but their soul gets fixed, which enables them to walk in a greater healing the rest of their life. I've seen people who have come to God because they wanted a promotion and they didn't get that promotion and they

wrestled with the Lord and then found the Lord to be better and even more merciful and kind for *not* giving them that promotion.

I've seen people who have sick kids or wayward kids, and they've come to God so that their kid might get fixed, and the kid doesn't get fixed but they find out that God is better than the kid getting fixed, and they're healed and they're able to actually minister to their kid in a way that's not *using* God but as a heart that has been filled with the forgiveness and love of God that's able to engage their son or daughter in a more loving, kind, and gracious manner.

If we're looking at our lives today, and we're asking the question of whether we're walking in holiness, the answer to that can't be, *I need to add a bunch of stuff to my life in order to be holy*, but rather, *Why am I not motivated for holiness? Or What is the motivation that's a false motivation, a cheap motivation of following Jesus Christ?* We'll talk more and more about this. We talked about it last week. We're talking about it now. I'll hit on it just a bit next week as we close out this series out of 1 Peter.

You have to wonder if you *are* pursuing holiness, can you look back at the last three or four years, can you look back at the last five years and see (again 2 Corinthians 3) how you're being transformed from one degree of glory to the next? Can you see progressive sanctification occurring in your life? If you can't, I think we have a motivation issue, or we have a regeneration issue. What I mean by that is you either have the wrong motivation or you're not saved. You're not believing the gospel. To believe in the gospel leads to a transformed life. Why? Because Jesus is the author of our faith, but he's also the perfecter of our faith.

Maybe you're a guest with us today. Maybe this is the first time you've heard anything like this. My earnest desire for you is that you would put your hope in Jesus Christ alone, that you would stop putting your hope in you. For you church folk who have been in church your whole life but feel wearied and tired and exhausted and are on that edge of giving up because it's not working for you, I want to press that maybe you haven't even tried yet. Maybe what you've been trying is what Jesus came to save you *from* and not Jesus.

*Well how do I fix my eyes on Jesus, Matt? How do I fix my eyes on him? How do I look, how do I gaze, how do I behold his glory?* Well God has given you all sorts of things to help this. He has given you the Word of God. The Bible is there so you might see who Jesus is, what he's like, the nature and character of God. He has given you Christian community. He has given you a place like this where we can just come together and we can make much of Jesus. We can talk about him. We can rally. We can celebrate with one another who Jesus is and what he has done. We get to sing to him and sing *about* him.

This gathering is a profound boost to the soul for the rest of your week, and you have the Word of God there in the morning, in the afternoon, and in the evening. You have other believers in Christ to get together with. I was at dinner two nights ago with a group of friends, and one of them, who honestly is a bit of a troublemaker, was like, "Let's talk theology. What's the hardest point of doctrine you've ever come across?"

Now all of a sudden we're all talking, and all of us are a bit bold so everyone is talking over one another, and it's kind of getting louder, and we're just talking about how God works in this and how God moves in this. There were degrees at the table that are far beyond how I'm educated, and the whole evening was robust and encouraging to my soul, because I sat around with other brothers, good food, good wine, and just talked about Jesus. That's a gift, and that helps me fix my eyes on Jesus Christ.

I want to, as best I can, strive by grace through faith to fix my eyes on Jesus Christ. So there are implications of what I watch and what I listen to, because what I'm striving to do by grace through faith is to get my eyes on Jesus Christ. I want to be around people who talk about Jesus. I want to read about Jesus. I want to think about Jesus. I want to watch things that remind me of Jesus. I want to listen to things that point to Jesus. The grace of God that he hands out to those who would submit their lives to him is available to you today.

I'm going to pray for us and then we're going to sing a few songs. We're going to do Communion on a couple of our campuses, and then there will be men and women up front or in the back, depending on which campus you're at, who would love to pray with you, love to serve you, love to answer any of your questions. Maybe you've identified by the Holy Spirit's power today that your motivation is wrong and you want to repent and get to that primary one.

Maybe you're not a believer, and today for the first time the Holy Spirit has opened your heart and you believe now. That's something you need to come and share with one of these men and women so they might encourage you, so we might wire you into the life of this community so you might grow in a depth of knowledge of Jesus Christ, so you might be transformed from one degree of glory to the next. Let's pray.

Jesus, thank you for your life, death, and resurrection. Holy Spirit, I pray in these next few moments that we wouldn't be quick to run out of here, that we wouldn't skip out and try to beat traffic or get to wherever we're going next, but that we might just rest in this place in this time, fixing our eyes on Jesus via song, via Communion in Denton and Dallas, via just being in the presence of others who love you and are seeking after you.

I pray that you would grant, Holy Spirit, freedom from secondary motivators that in the end, God, are not your heart for us, not the primary means by which you want us to grow in holiness, but by your mercy you give to us to lead us to that primary motivation. So I pray for repentance today. I pray for salvation today. I pray that you might be merciful and mighty in our midst. It's through your beautiful name I pray, amen.

Love you guys deeply.

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