

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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Be Ye Perfect

Matthew 5:48

Before we start this morning I was just wondering if we could just have some prayer. My son Ben has been trying to get in touch with me. As you probably all know, his daughter had surgery, open heart surgery yesterday, and they just called in from the hospital said he needs to go kind of rushing back because she's having trouble breathing and so they're obviously very, very concerned and so he's been trying to get in touch with me and I said that we would have all of us pray, so can we do that right now.

Prayer: *Father, I just want to lift up Ben and Carissa and I just especially pray for Sofia. Lord, I pray for your touch, I pray for your hand upon her, I pray that whatever issues that she has having just come off open heart surgery, that there's all kind of things that can go wrong and I know there's a great deal of concern for that, so we just pray for Sofia, we pray for healing, we pray that this entire event would be a minor issue and not something major, we just pray for Ben and for Carissa that they would sense your presence, that they would sense your power and that they would have*

the ability to handle the great fear that I'm sure descends on all of us. Be with the doctor, be with the staff, be with all those at the hospital and especially be with Sofia this morning, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Okay. Well, this is my final message on the Sermon on the Mount, and I wanted to focus this morning on the very last verse in chapter 5 because I think it's one of the most important verses in the entire Bible. It's *Matthew 5:48* which says: "*You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*" Now if you've read through all of the different commentaries on this verse, you're going to find that there's a great deal of discussion about whether Jesus meant these words to apply to a previous discussion that he was having about loving your enemies or whether he meant it in a larger sense to apply to everything that the Sermon on the Mount stood for. And furthermore, you can understand perfection in many, many different ways not the least of which is completion, so we're wondering about -- lots of people wonder about what it is that Jesus was specifically getting at with this passage. Well, I prefer to look at Jesus's words as meaning exactly what he meant them to say. After all, the entire Sermon on the Mount has Jesus comparing the Pharisees' way of looking at what it takes to please God and Jesus's understanding of that very same thing. And Jesus insists against everything we've ever known that

perfection is an absolute requirement.

I mean by now I think we understand Jesus's methodology. Jesus used the phrase, "You have heard it said" to describe how the Pharisees understood what living a life pleasing to God was all about, and then he compared it to his understanding by simply saying, "But I say". And we pointed out this extraordinary advantage that Jesus had in comparing himself to the Pharisees and that advantage was he happened to be God. The Pharisees could talk all they wanted about how they imagined God would be pleased but they were guessing, and he was not. And Jesus repeatedly took them to task for frequently and consistently getting it wrong. Time and again Jesus took on the Pharisees and whether it was a discussion about murder or adultery or divorce or oath taking or loving your neighbor, in each case he demonstrated how badly they had misrepresented God's will in their teaching. The Pharisees loved to reduce pleasing God to a series of rules, regulations, commands and ordinances that you had to follow to the letter, and the emphasis was always on some kind of literal fulfillment by your hands and your feet with almost no involvement whatsoever of your heart. Jesus summed up their teaching by saying in *Mark 7*: *"Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments*

of men."

You know, the whole Sermon on the Mount really consists of Jesus deconstructing the Pharisees' teaching. And the way that he went about it was to take the demands of the Pharisees and make them even more difficult. I've used this example over and over again. It's as if Jesus had the commands on a smart phone and he just kind of touched it with his fingers and as he touched each commandment, you know how you can expand it, he just made it bigger and badder and harder and more and more difficult until it became impossible. And if the Pharisees claimed that the act of adultery was forbidden, then Jesus would expand on that, he said no, the thought of adultery is forbidden. If they said murder was wrong, Jesus would expand on that and say calling someone a fool makes you equally guilty. You know, over and over again Jesus made the "difficult" of the Pharisees into the "impossible" of Jesus. And understood this way, Jesus' final statement can be considered a summation of everything that God's law demanded, it's: *"You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."* Now, our reaction to that kind of statement is, "You are kidding, of course." I mean, we say that because on the surface, this command is absurd. I mean, who in the world would ever demand perfection of anyone for anything? I mean if there's anything that this world understands, it's that perfection on any level

whatsoever is simply not attainable. I mean, there may be some platinum iridium bar that's sitting in the Bureau of Standards that represents as close as you can come to to the perfect ounce or inch or pound or meter, but even those standards can't claim to be perfect because nothing is perfect either in the physical or metaphysical world.

And so this morning I want to look at the heart of this command for perfection because it really is at the heart of the gospel. There are four ways that we Christians can look at this idea of perfection in the Bible. Four ways to see how perfection profoundly affects every one of us. And first off, perfection is foreign. It's also futile, fatal, and by the grace of God, finished. Let's first look at foreign, the idea of perfection as foreign. You know, you can look far and wide, high and low and any other way and you will never in any way, shape, manner or form find anything in the whole of human existence that has the quality of perfection. It is absolutely foreign to human existence. I mean just try to imagine anything in all of creation as flawless. I mean, you may be able to come close to perfection with regard to something but how close you come is really a matter of what standard you choose to measure it by. You know, a platinum iridium bar that measures exactly one meter on the metric scale would be hopelessly off if you then decided to measure it on a nanoscale. I

mean, you may think that you're close to perfection if you're dealing in millimeters but you'll be nowhere near perfect when you start measuring in terms of atoms. And any physical scientist will tell you that perfection in the physical world is completely foreign. And those are just physical attributes. We have nothing in this universe that represents perfection. The same is true in the metaphysical universe. I mean, we say nobody's perfect and we accept that as being absolutely normal. But what if it isn't or should I say what if it wasn't? What if there was a time when perfection was absolutely normal? I mean, the very idea is so foreign to us that we have a hard time imagining what that would be like. But God says that perfection is exactly what he is like, and he further says that his creation was originally like him, perfect. *Genesis 1:31*, it says: *And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.* Now I submit to you that we have no idea what "very good" was even remotely like. Very good is God's way of saying that all creation was perfect and that is perfectly foreign to us. I mean, very good is as foreign to us as it was natural to God. Every ounce, every pound, every inch, every meter of God's creation was a flawless reflection of a flawless creator. We can't even begin to imagine what that was like. What does a perfect garden look like? I mean, what is it like to see, taste, touch and feel absolute perfection in absolutely everything? What does a perfect melon taste like? We can only imagine. I'm

reminded of a passage by C.S. Lewis in one of his science fiction trilogies -- in his science fiction trilogy and he's describing a fellow who's on an imaginary planet and he's on this planet in their garden of Eden time during their time of absolute perfection and he's starving and he looks and he sees a fruit that's hanging on one of the bushes there and because he's starving he decides to take a risk and he grabs it and he starts to eat it and he says instantly it's as if his head almost exploded and he nearly fainted with the depth of pleasure he experienced that he had never even begun to imagine, and the pleasure was in eating. I mean he could not imagine that so much pleasure could be associated with the simple act of eating something and it turned out it was just one of the plants that grew wild in that garden and that's what routine perfection tasted like.

Now I know I'm pretty hard on Adam, I mean, after all he's the one who traded in all of our perfection for a taste of forbidden fruit, but I have no doubt whatsoever that if you or I ever ran into the original Adam, we would have thought of him either as an angel or at the very, very least as Superman. I mean for all practical purposes he was Superman. I mean he was a perfect human being, perfect in mind, body, soul and intellect. You know, it's said that we only use a very small fraction of our intellectual ability. Well, Adam had access to a hundred percent and every single thing

that Einstein, Da Vinci and even what Michael Jordan had was a pittance compared to what Adam was freely given. We simply have no way of even gauging what a flawless man would be like. I mean there's only been two: Adam and Jesus. Adam I've never met, Jesus emptied himself of his fully revealed perfection so that it wouldn't kill us. So I'll never fully comprehend at least in this life how truly foreign perfection is. And like the song says, we can only imagine.

Now we do have some factual information and the scripture is very clear, it says that we live in a world today that is only a pale shadow of what it once was. *Romans 8:20* says this, it says: *The creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.* This world that we live in now is the new normal, but it's a normal that was created by Adam's fall. It's a world of corruption, of futility, of groaning. For every glorious sunset there's droughts, there's sun struck, there's skin diseases. For every ocean view there's hurricanes and tsunamis. For every mountain vista there's earthquakes and sink holes and that's just in the physical world.

C.S. Lewis summed up perfectly the horrors of the metaphysical world in his introduction to the problem of pain. This is Lewis speaking of life on planet earth. This is what he says. He says: "And what is it like while it lasts? It is so arranged that all the forms of it can live only by preying upon one another. In the lower forms this process entails only death, but in the higher there appears a new quality called consciousness which enables it to be attended with pain. The creatures cause pain by being born and live by inflicting pain, and in pain they mostly die. In the most complex of all the creatures, Man, yet another quality appears, which we call reason, whereby he is enabled to foresee his own pain which henceforth is preceded with acute mental suffering, and to foresee his own death while keenly desiring permanence. It also enables men by a hundred ingenious contrivances to inflict a great deal more pain than they otherwise could have done on one another and on the irrational creatures. This power they have exploited to the full. Their history is largely a record of crime, war, disease, and terror, with just sufficient happiness interposed to give them, while it lasts, an agonized apprehension of losing it, and, when it is lost, the poignant misery of remembering."

He goes on and on in that passage, I mean, by the time you're finished you just want to close up and die. I mean, this is not the way life is supposed to be. I mean have you ever wondered why

in the world nothing in this world can ever satisfy? And I don't mean this in some lofty theological way. I mean it doesn't matter if you are a millionaire or a pauper, it doesn't matter if you're looking for your next meal or a bigger or better yacht, what marks our human existence is this deep-rooted sense of futility and a longing for something else. It was Solomon who said in *Ecclesiastes 1: Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises. The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north; around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again. All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.*

You know, these words were uttered by the richest, wisest and most powerful man of his day, who denied himself nothing in his pursuit of pleasure. You know, God takes a guy and he gives him absolutely every single thing this world could ever hope to give him and then he allows him to freely express how utterly futile the very best of human experience is. Most of us spend much of our lives reaching

out for a brass ring that we're never going to get. And what drives most of us is the thought that if we only somehow were able to get that brass ring, oh, if we only had it, life would then become worthwhile. And whether it's riches or fame or power or respect, what the whole world really amounts to this long carrot on the end of an incredibly long stick and we're all simply different donkeys trotting along wondering why it's always out of reach. And all you have to do is read those stories about those who have made it, those who actually grabbed for that brass ring and found it. You find out that that small group of people are just like what Solomon said, they're disillusioned and they're ultimately unsatisfied. But don't expect them to be telling that to us. You see, those who have already really arrived are too busy finding something else to pursue in order to make up for that loss, for that deep-seated inability to ever, ever feel satisfied. And once again, C.S. Lewis defined why that is as well as anyone. He said this, he said: "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world." That's the point. We are so far removed from this world of perfection, it is so altogether foreign that Jesus demanding of us that we be perfect as his heavenly Father is perfect just strikes us not just as foreign but also as absolutely futile. I mean to demand perfection of creatures who have never even remotely experienced it seems hopeless at best and

certainly unfair. I mean why not demand that we fly or that we walk on water, I mean, they're all equally impossible. But not being a water walker or an Icarus is not a capital offense, but according to Jesus, not being perfect is. So how is that fair? I mean, after all nobody is perfect. To err is human. We all make mistakes.

How is it that God can seriously demand perfection? Well the answer to that question is simple. It is how is it that God couldn't? You see, as creatures born into this world of imperfection, we think it's only reasonable that God would judge us by a standard that takes our imperfection into an account. I mean, after all, how can my creator demand perfection that's never even remotely been a part of my experience? I mean, I've never known a perfect anything, how in the world can he demand perfection in everything? Make no mistake about it, God does not use hyperbole here. He fully intends us to understand that perfection is a non-negotiable demand for all who would enter heaven. *James 2:10: For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.* That's a demand for perfection. *Galatians 3:10: For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them."* See, what God is saying here is that his law is one unified, perfect, whole

and you can't violate any single part of it without violating the whole of it. You can't find any little part of a balloon that you can stick a pin in without blowing the whole balloon up and it doesn't really matter how big of a pin you use. I've often put it this way: Whether you commit capital murder or steal a paper clip is hugely important in terms of the crime that you've committed but in terms of perfection, it's absolutely immaterial. I mean one sin may be this huge pin and the other one may be a really tiny one but they're both going to blow up the balloon. See, God's law is God's law. I mean it says, "Do not murder" but you know what else? It says, "Do not covet." I mean one may seem much less devastating than the other but they're both parts of God's law. And to violate either is to render us imperfect and unfit for heaven. You talk about futility? *"You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"* is Jesus driving a stake into the Pharisees' idea that God's law was something that could ever make you good enough by trying. You know they taught that this law could be negotiated, abrogated or ignored as long as you paid lip service to their rules. And Jesus destroyed that notion by raising the bar that he had set low up so high that no human was ever going to ever attain it. They said you can't murder. Jesus said you can't even be angry with your brother. They said you have to be very careful about your oath. Jesus said don't even swear by the hair on your head. They said you must not commit adultery. Jesus said don't

even think about committing adultery. On and on it went, whenever the Pharisees attempted to make man worthy by keeping a set of rules, Jesus would take those rules and make adhering to them absolutely futile, and that was always the point. See, rule keeping will never make us acceptable to God because rule keeping can never make us perfect. And perfect is the only standard that a perfect God can accept. That is utter futility.

You know, most folks hold to the view that God's going to judge us by some kind of sliding scale that adapts itself to our fallenness, but Jesus doesn't buy that for a second. Remember, this world that we live in, this world of imperfection is completely foreign to who God is. I mean he has lived in this broken world for the express purpose of expressing the fact that not only was perfection foreign and futile but it was also fatal to approach God without it. I mean what made Jesus so adamantly opposed to the Pharisees was that their teaching wasn't just misplaced or misinformed, it was fatally flawed. He said in *Matthew 23*: "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.*" See, understanding what Jesus meant by: "*You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*" can mean the difference literally between heaven and hell. It is heaven for those who grasp it, it

is hell for those who refuse.

Let me give you an example of why understanding this distinction is so critically important. I think it will become self-evident. I read the other day an article about an interview with Donald Trump. I was attracted to the article by the questions that the interviewer was asking. The *Daily Caller* described it this way: "In a recently released excerpt from his October interview with *GQ*, Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump revealed that he does believe in heaven and is working hard to get there. 'I've done a fabulous job and made the lives of many, many people much better.' Trump told *GQ*'s Chris Heath. "Do you believe in heaven?" Heath asked in response? "Yes," answered the real estate mogul. "I hope [I'll be going]. That's what I strive for." Trump also noted that his quest to enter the Pearly Gates is going "pretty good."

Okay. Now regardless of what you think of Mr. Trump politically, I would have to say that spiritually based on what he said in that interview, he is in very serious trouble. There is a critical difference between striving for perfection and actually attaining it. There's also a critical difference between thinking that striving for perfection is the same as attaining it. Now it may be going pretty good in your own mind but perfection is an

all-or-nothing proposition. The very thing that Jesus was getting at in the Sermon on the Mount was the absolute impossibility, the futility, if you will, of attaining perfection by striving for it. You know, the Pharisees specialized in devising ways to make you think that you had somehow made yourself worthy enough for God, but it seems they never considered the problem of perfection. Nobody ever does. I mean over the years I've come to the conclusion that without the intervention directly by the Holy Spirit, this is a truth that may seem obvious to believers but it's absolutely invisible to unbelievers. For years I thought how hard is this to understand? God's perfect, we're not perfect, if we want to be with God, you got to find away to be perfect. That's not rocket science. Well, Jesus in *Matthew 5:48* is stating the obvious, "*You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*" And what I find mind-boggling when it comes from the mouth of the Pharisees or even from the mouth of Donald Trump is the idea that I can get there by just trying hard. I mean, you can achieve a level of relative goodness by working hard at it but that's not what Jesus was saying. Nowhere in the entire Bible will you ever hear God say, "Just try your best." What you'll find over and over again is God insisting that your best and my best will never begin to approach the level of perfection that he demands. It's a truth that God goes out of his way to communicate to us. You know, we've all heard *Isaiah 64:6* or at least most of us have: *But we are all*

like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; and I've stated this as many times and as uncomfortable as this passage is, it bears repeating. Isaiah is writing to his fellow Jews and as we've seen with the Pharisees, they are sticklers for certain things. One of the things that they're known for is personal cleanliness and hygiene particularly when it comes to the issues of blood. Well, the terms "filthy rags," the term is translated in the ESV and other translations as a "polluted garment" it's as close as anyone wants to get to what it truly means. The term is used to describe a used menstrual rag. Why in the world would he say that? Well, you see Isaiah was reaching as far as he could to paint a picture of what our goodness compared to perfection actually looks like to God, and he's speaking to a group of people who would have been absolutely appalled at his imagery. I mean, his intention is to shock them into seeing something they had become blind to. And they, like the Pharisees, like Donald Trump, thought goodness was something that you just worked at, something that you strive for by personal effort, and God says in no uncertain terms, you can't get there from here. As I pointed out, Isaiah in this vividly awful description is not just pointing to our sins. If you look at what he's saying, he's pointing to the best we could ever do. He's not saying your sins are as filthy rags, he says all our righteousness are like filthy rags.

Now there's a distinction that I need to make here 'cause I think there's a conclusion that people leap to that's not really accurate. And I'm saying we are not incapable of doing good things. You know, the Red Cross does good, the Salvation Army does good and the army of folks who are volunteering right now to help Sonya and Aedan, they're doing very good things and God delights in seeing that good. It's just when that particular goodness is offered up as a means of claiming our right to heaven and God's presence, then that goodness has got to be flawless perfection. And God knows we don't do perfection. There's another scatological reference to our righteousness in the book of Zechariah. It's at *Zechariah 3*. It's describing a high priest standing before God. Let me just read it to you. It says: *Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him. And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from a fire?" Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel. Then he answered and spoke to those who stood before him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes."*

Just a little background. The high priest was required to bathe

repeatedly and to wear scrupulously clean linen garments before he ever offered up the sacrifice and Joshua the high priest like any high priest would have done that. But in this passage, God is describing Joshua as standing before him clothed in excrementally filthy rags. I mean to us he would have looked fine. To God he was standing on the altar smeared in excrement. I know that's an awful image but this is what God is trying to communicate. And what he's saying is that is what our righteousness compared to perfection looks like to God. Now I know these are not at all pleasant images and you can take them either of two ways, either God is standing there repulsed, revolted and rejecting our best efforts as absolute filth, or he's simply acknowledging how our very best looks to him and how willing he is to scoop us up out of that filth and make us clean. Again he says: *Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes."*

Now I have to tell you something. I pray this prayer every week before I go to preach and I acknowledge every single week that I have two different possibilities as I enter into this pulpit. I can choose to stand before you in my own excremental filth and if I'm clever enough, I can make it look like an Armani suit, or I can by faith clothe myself in Christ's righteousness. *Romans 13* says:

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. So I choose Christ's righteousness. But the question is why -- why doesn't the Pharisee see that? Why does it appear that Donald Trump can't see that? I mean, how about -- how about your friends, how about your neighbors, how about all of those people that you try to share the gospel with and they don't want to hear it, they push you away? You know, it seems so abundantly clear and yet so often the ones that we desperately want to understand it, they can't see it. They can't see it even though it's staring them right in the face. God tells us why in 1 Corinthians 2:14, it says: The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. See, the idea of perfection is foreign to us right from the day that we were born, it is futile to us to even begin to approach perfection knowing we have no means to achieve it, and yet that imperfection is absolutely fatal when it comes to being made worthy of heaven. That's why "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" is one of the most important verses in all of scripture. The natural man can't begin to imagine a God who would hold us accountable for a perfection we could never come close to. I mean after all, we're talking about a God who would condemn us for not achieving what he's already told us is utterly futile, who considers our imperfection a fatal flaw that

precludes our ever entering into heaven, what kind of God is that? Well, it's a God whose perfection extends to his justice and whose justice can never allow imperfection, and if it all ended with all of us banished from his presence, the universe would still be shouting, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord GOD Almighty." But you know what? It didn't end there. *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."* You see, God's justice found a way to punish imperfection and his mercy found a way to pay the price of that punishment. God will condemn all of those who fell short of his glorious perfection and then he would stand in the place of his sheep and absorb that condemnation. God found a way to restore our perfection not by keeping elaborate sets of rules but by simply believing in the God who would die for them. God says there's only one way to reclaim perfection and to achieve righteousness in this world and it is through faith. Using the example of Abraham, God says this in *Romans 4*, he says: *What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. Oh, Donald Trump, if you would only listen to this. For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."* Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. To the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his

faith is counted as righteousness. Donald Trump is striving for something you can only achieve by believing, because *whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.* I mean, this is the season that we celebrate God's decision to enter into this imperfect world in a manger, in a barn in Bethlehem, God himself became a human being born as a baby to the Virgin Mary and her husband Joseph. But you know, he wasn't born to be a political leader or a religious leader or a philosopher or even a good example. He was born to be a sacrifice for sins. You know, he came to this earth to live out the exact same life you and I have to live with one critical exception, he lived his perfectly. And once again we're back stuck trying to imagine something that our minds can't really comprehend and that is in this world of imperfection for a period of 33 years, perfection itself lived among us. Jesus was the perfect light of the world come into the world's darkness, but as the scripture says in *John 3:19: "This is the judgment: the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil."* See, the darkness so deeply resented the light that eventually it succeeded in crucifying the only perfect thing this world has ever known, but even that horror was by design. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit used the cross as a public staging area where God himself would prove to the universe that both his justice and his mercy could remain perfectly intact if he would be

willing to condemn all sin in the flesh and then in his own flesh absorb that condemnation. It took six earth hours for an eternity of hell for every one of God's people to be poured out on the head of his Son. And at the end, Jesus had the answer to a perfection that was foreign, futile and fatal. Having paid the full price of our imperfection, he now could see us as fully justified, made perfect by our own debt now being paid in full, and so he said as his final words on the cross: *"It is finished."* That's Jesus' answer to *Matthew 5:48*: *"You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."* At the cross, a perfection that was foreign, futile and absolutely fatal was now through his sacrifice finished and delivered once and for all. God found a way through faith in his Son's sacrifice to give us his flawless perfection, and I can only conclude by saying along with Paul: *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. Let's pray.*

Father God, I just stand amazed at what you've done for us. I stand not just amazed but down hearted and often times depressed by the inability of all those around me to see what seems so

incredibly obvious. We are imperfect creatures living in an imperfect world and you offer us perfection if we would simply believe. Father, I pray that you would give each and every one of us who don't believe the grace and the power to do that simple thing, to believe in what you've done, and that you would give us the means and the ability and the drive to share that gospel, knowing that it is your grace and your power alone that can make it make sense. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.