

The Grace of Endurance – Did Jesus Ever Discriminate?

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A Savior of Grace

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Bible Text: John 19:1-15

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One of the challenges of contemporary life is how the meanings of some words change over time. Did you ever notice that? I'm not suggesting there's anything sinister about that. That's just the way it is. In fact, one of the branches of linguistics is actually devoted to the study of etymology which is the origin of a word and then the historical development of its meaning. However, what happens is you're trying to have a conversation with somebody and you end up talking past your friend because you're using a word thinking it means definition A and he or she is interpreting what you're saying through the lens of their definition B and you're left asking, "Who changed the meaning of this word?" And "Why?" And, "Was this change helpful to genuine, authentic conversation?"

One example is the word "tolerance" which traditionally meant your willingness to endure a position or action with which you clearly and personally disagree and the degree to which you were viewed as being a tolerant person in a particular situation actually increased based on the depth of your disagreement. It was the intolerant person who was the individual not who strongly disagreed but who would not endure that person with whom he differed. Well, you probably know that the word "tolerance" has been completely redefined by at least a segment of our culture who would now label any person who does not assume the position that all truth claims are equally valid as being intolerant or its linguistic cousin, bigoted. You are left scratching your head. Who changed the meaning of that word? And was that a helpful change? Or was something very important lost in that transaction, namely the ability to think carefully and antithetically about what you believe is right and wrong without the fear of being demonized or labeled? By the way, in case you're wondering, "What is his concern here?" here is a lot of it: for some people, even followers of Christ, the fear of being called intolerant is more than enough pressure to cause you to close your mouth about anything that really matters.

Now, a second word that fits into this category is the word "discriminate." Some well meaning men and women, at least in my opinion, have been very careless in the use of that word. For example, when we were developing Faith West, you may know that that project generated a little bit of community heat. I don't know if you ever noticed that. It's

back in the newspaper this morning. It's a gift that just keeps on giving, baby. So one dear public official told the media, "Well, they can develop 1920 Northwestern Avenue if they want to but they just can't discriminate." He called me a couple of hours later and said, "You know, I thought I'd better give you a heads up. I just said something to a reporter earlier today that I may not have thought through very well." Really? Sure enough, that reporter did exactly what she should have done and she contacted me later and said, "You know, So-and-so just told me you can't discriminate. Well, I went to the internet and I printed off the code of conduct that every Faith West resident has to sign. It appears pretty discriminatory to me." Perfect question and it also gave us then a great opportunity to help her understand the issue and that is that we never intended to do market rate student housing over there, in fact, now think about this: if we were, we would be risking our nonprofit status which, in our case, is provided because we are a what kind of organization? A religious organization. That covenant has to be tightly tethered to our nonprofit religious purpose or a lot of bad things could potentially happen. So, do we practice discrimination at Faith West? Absolutely and we have to. Only those who are willing to sign the housing covenant can live there. But do we practice wrongful discrimination? Absolutely not because anyone who wants to sign the covenant will be accepted. What I'm saying is: let's be more careful about the way we use words like "tolerance" and "discrimination."

You're probably aware I've taken a public stand for the passage of SB101, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act or the Hobby Lobby bill. And I also decided to publicly criticize groups who say they are for freedom, who say they are for civil rights yet have come out in a strong and highly organized fashion to kill the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. So many times in the last few weeks, I and others have been accused of simply promoting religious discrimination as if to say, think about this logically, as if to say they don't ever discriminate and B. discrimination is always bad. Again, for some followers of Jesus Christ, that's all it takes to shut them up because the worst thing they can imagine is being called intolerant or bigoted or discriminatory which is an action, by the way, that immediately causes the person making the accusation to be intolerant and bigoted and discriminatory but I don't want to get anything started here this morning.

Now, why has the legislation been called the Hobby Lobby bill? Everybody here knows about Hobby Lobby, right? I would assume the ladies spend a lot of time in Hobby Lobby. Guys, if you spend too much time there, I worry about you but anyway, I don't want to discriminate. But everybody knows, I need to stay on my notes. Everybody knows Hobby Lobby, right? It's a great story of a family owned business that has been incredibly successful. What you may not know is that the Green family, the owners of Hobby Lobby, are committed followers of Jesus Christ. They've been extremely philanthropic over the years with the wealth that God has given them. Well, some new health care legislation came out. I don't know if you've heard anything about that and it put them in a position where the federal government, and understand right now I'm talking about a federal issue, that's important to know, where the federal government was trying to force them to offer healthcare benefits that included providing drugs that would induce abortion and Hobby Lobby respectfully refused to do that. They took the position that just because they own a business, that does not mean they have to surrender their

religious freedom, especially beliefs that are so important to them like the sanctity of life and they communicated clearly that they would close their business before they would ever participate in the wicked murder of innocent babies at any stage of life. In other words, if necessary they were willing to dump the religious tea in the community harbor over that issue.

Now, think this through carefully: they weren't saying they would not serve people in their stores who had had abortions. Or they wouldn't serve people in their stores who had a different view of abortion than they did. They weren't saying that if a person had an abortion they could not work for them or if a person had a different view of abortion, they could not work for them. They were saying, "Our religious beliefs preclude us from participating in that action in any way, shape or form, period." Although it had to go all the way to the US Supreme Court which is amazing when you think about it, that it had to go that far, the federal, remember that word, the federal religious freedom restoration act was part of the Supreme Court's rationale in ruling in favor of Hobby Lobby. Now, that federal statute was enacted in 1993. It was strongly supported at the time by a lot of groups like the ACLU. It was actually carried by Charles Schumer, the Democratic senator of New York. It passed the House unanimously. I'm talking about the U.S. House. It passed the Senate with only 3 dissenting votes. It was then signed into law by then president Bill Clinton.

The challenge is subsequent courts have ruled that that federal statute doesn't apply to states. That's the issue. So 19 states have enacted their own Religious Freedom Restoration Acts including our neighbors Illinois, that bastion of conservative thought and, I'm sorry, I'm going to try, I'm praying. Illinois. Kentucky. By the way, here is my concern in case you're wondering why I get wound up about things like this: my concern goes far beyond this particular law. It's really the foundational issues that this entire conversation raises because we need to think through those 2 presuppositions very carefully: is it true that progressives or anybody else never discriminate?; and is it also true that all discrimination is always wrong?

Now, there's one more piece of this puzzle that totally ups the ante for a follower of Christ, if I can use that metaphor. I learned that from some of the other pastoral staff members. But it makes it a whole lot more important and that is that the accusation that Jesus never discriminated. People have said online recently that Jesus just accepted everybody. Jesus never practiced discrimination. In fact, one woman suggested that you could summarize the message of the entire Bible with the words, "Just be nice to everybody." Just be nice to everybody. Well, that accusation matters a lot to followers of Christ, did you know that? Why? Because the goal of our entire sanctification process, the goal of our growth process, is that we would become more and more conformed to the image of Christ. It's like Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and," here it is, "glorify your Father who is in heaven." The word "glorify" means in part to give the right opinion of. So we want the way that we function in every aspect of life to be illustrative of, representative of the character of our God so I'm saying to you if it is true that liberals or whomever never discriminate and secondly that it's always wrong to discriminate and

most importantly that Jesus never discriminated, then some of us have some serious changing to do. However, if any of those presuppositions are false, we need to know that and we need to know why and we need to know how that should impact the way that we live each and every day.

With that in mind, let me invite you now to open your Bible to the Gospel of John, chapter 19. We're not in the epistles way at the back of the Bible, we're in the 4th book of the New Testament, the Gospel of John, chapter 19. That's on page 89 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you want to follow along using that today.

Our church's theme this year is "Finding Grace," taken from that marvelous passage of Scripture in the book of Hebrews. If you were with us last week, I explained that between now and Easter Sunday in just a few weeks, we're going to find ourselves studying the Gospel of John and we're thinking about our Savior of grace. Last week we talked about chapter 1 and we saw that John was still amazed by the fact that he along with others had had the thrill, the privilege, of being an actual eyewitness of Jesus' words and works and he summarized that experienced by saying, "The Word," speaking of Christ, "became flesh and dwelt among us." That amazed him. "And we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father," here it is, "full of grace and full of truth." Then John later said, "For of his fullness, we have all received and grace on top of grace, on top of grace." So, for the next several weeks, we're trying to find out from the word of God what it would mean for Jesus to be full of grace, to be full of truth and for those of you who have chosen to place your faith and trust in Christ, what does it mean for us to worship and to live for a Savior who is full of grace?

Now, this morning we're advancing the ball to Passion Week in John 19. Jesus is now on trial before a man named Pilate and we want to think about the grace of endurance. Did Jesus ever discriminate? That's the question. It's not hard to answer that one. Look at John 19, beginning in verse 1, "Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him." Do you understand what scourging means? For a guy who went around just being nice to everybody, why in the world would somebody want to scourge him?

1 Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him. 2 And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him; 3 and they began to come up to Him and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and to give Him slaps in the face. 4 Pilate came out again and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him." 5 Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold, the Man!" 6 So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, "Crucify, crucify!" Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him." 7 The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God." 8 Therefore when Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid; 9 and he entered into the Praetorium again and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. 10 So Pilate said

to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" 11 Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin." 12 As a result of this Pilate made efforts to release Him, but the Jews cried out saying, "If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar." 13 Therefore when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. 14 Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold, your King!" 15 So they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."

We're talking about the grace of endurance. Did Jesus ever discriminate? With the time that we have remaining, let's think about 3 lessons from the discrimination of Christ. First of all, friends, Jesus' discrimination is what led to his crucifixion. Anybody who believes that Jesus never discriminated against anybody in any way simply needs to answer this question: then why did so many people want to kill him? Was it because he went around being nice? Was it because he went around accepting everybody exactly the way they were on their own terms? Now, let me throw out a couple of caveats here. I understand that the word "discrimination" is laden with negative connotations. In fact, we're commemorating the events that occurred in Selma, Alabama this weekend. One of the blights in our nation's history was and continues to be wrongful discrimination and we would not want to be connected with that in any way, shape or form. What's been going on in Ferguson, Missouri, people sending what appears to be discriminatory emails ought to be fired. If anybody practiced wrongful discrimination, they should lose their jobs. So I understand that this word is emotionally charged and it should be. By the way, one of the pastors who was involved in Selma said the church ought to be the social conscience of the nation so I understand there are times when something I might say rubs the media the wrong way or rubs the progressives the wrong way or even rubs people from our government the wrong way. I agree with that pastor who said that the church is to be the social conscience of the nation. Do you know who that pastor was? Martin Luther King.

Also I want say this: right now I'm not asking you if you like the fact that Jesus behaved this way but if you're going to take the position that Jesus did this or Jesus didn't do that or it would be like Jesus, you have to do this or not do that, you ought to be required to base your position on what Scripture affirms about the words and works of Christ and the plain truth is, Jesus practiced discrimination at practically every turn. I mean, pick a chapter in the Gospel of John and you're going to find him discriminating. You say, "Really?" Absolutely. Go back to, for example, chapter 2. You'll find him discriminating against hypocrisy. You may know that Jesus' first miracle was performed at a wedding which has rather interesting ramifications for some of these contemporary issues but at that wedding, Jesus performed his first public miracle which was what? Have you ever been to Meyer? It's commemorated in aisle 5. I mean, turning water into wine. Am I the

only one who finds that funny every time I go to that place? And if you notice the way the items are displayed, he's continuing to perform that miracle. But anyway...

So Jesus graciously met a need for what otherwise would have been a terrible embarrassment for these families who were hosting the wedding. In other words, full of grace. Full of grace. But what happened in that exact same chapter later on? Well, here's what happens, John 2, the same chapter, verse 14, "And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. And He made a scourge of cords," here's some full of truth part, "a scourge of cords and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, 'Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business.' His disciples remembered that it was written," in the Old Testament, "Zeal for Your house will consume Me." That sounds decidedly intolerant to me, how about you? Can you imagine asking the people who were there whether or not Jesus ever discriminated. I imagine their answer would have been something like, "I can't answer that question right now until I get away from this man's whip."

Again, I'm not asking you whether you like Jesus' choices in this text or not but I am asking you to put events like these into your understanding of the life and ministry of Christ. These are the very kinds of discriminatory acts that led him to the cross. By the way, since I'm notorious for starting stories and not finishing them, you realize the issue here was not that they were selling things in the temple. Out of town people needed to buy animals for their sacrifices. The parallel passages suggest that the problem here was that they were gouging people with unfair prices and exorbitant exchange rates which is why Christ said on a similar occasion at the end of his ministry that they had made his Father's house a den of thieves. He discriminated against their hypocrisy and he should have and for anybody who walks with a, "I bet he was doing it nicely," John says that at that moment they remembered the Old Testament about how Christ was consumed with zeal. Consumed with zeal for the purity and the integrity and the holiness of his Father's house.

Now, once that line of reasoning is established, making the point throughout the rest of the book is like shooting fish in a barrel and I'm not going to look at all of the examples but let me lay out some others lest somebody would say, "Well, you're just cherry picking." No, go to the next chapter then. He's discriminating again, in this case against self-righteousness. A Pharisee named Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night, probably out of fear that he would be labeled something. So Jesus tells him about his need for a Savior and the importance of what Christ called experiencing the new birth and Nicodemus isn't getting it because Nicodemus thought he earned his way to heaven on his own merit. So Christ said, "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?'" Friends, that sounds rather judgmental. It sounds rather exclusivist. It sounds rather intolerant. Not all roads lead to God. Not you can come to the Lord on any terms you want. By the way, this

is literally a few stanzas before we read one of the favorite and best-known verses in all of the Bible, "For God so," what? "Loved the world." In the same context, full of grace and truth, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." But you see, nobody would believe in Christ as Savior and Lord unless he or she acknowledges that they cannot save themselves on their own effort.

So Jesus speaks strongly to Nicodemus. He discriminates against his wrong theology. He discriminates against his self-righteousness for the goal, not just of fighting, for the goal of bringing about repentance. In fact, everybody loves John 3:16. Have you ever read the verses right after that? You see, I love the, "God so loved the world," part. Keep reading. Keep reading, "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged." We say, "Okay, I like all that." But "he who does not believe has been judged already," by God the Father, "because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." You see, apparently there is a difference between judging wrongly which is why in Matthew 7 we read "judge not lest you be judged." There's a difference between judging wrongly and making appropriate judgments which is why in that same text, "judge not lest ye be judged," then Jesus said "first take the log out of your own eye so that you are prepared to be able to," do what? "To make an appropriate judgment." When Jesus did that for Nicodemus, it was one of the most loving things that could possibly have been done for him at that moment in time.

Christ discriminated against immoral behavior. In the very next chapter he meets who? The Samaritan woman at the well which is a fascinating text for so many reasons we just can't go into this morning but she wants to engage Jesus in some sort of a theological argument as if she's already right with God on the basis of her own moral standard, her own ethical standard, her own theological belief. So Jesus just cuts to the chase by saying, what? "Go and get your husband." I didn't ask you if you liked it but if you're going to say Jesus did this or that, include that. "Jesus said to her, 'Go and get your husband.'" To which she responds, "I don't have a husband." Was that the end of the story? No, here's what Jesus said next, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly.'" Remember, at that point, that was a private conversation between them. He wasn't trying to shame her but nor was he going to affirm her lifestyle and it's because he was willing, lovingly, to have that conversation with her in the light of day. He wasn't just full of grace, he was full of truth and because he was willing to discriminate against her immoral lifestyle for the purpose of bringing her to an understanding that she needed a Savior, she in turn trusted in him and before that chapter is over has had such a transformed life that she's turning her entire city upside down.

People love in John 8 a few chapters later to quote the woman taken in adultery as if to say that Jesus never discriminated against anyone. That's an outrageous interpretation of that text. Jesus discriminated against everybody in the scene, right? You've got a woman taken in adultery which generally, the last time I checked, also involves a man. I'm not going to get into it. Don't get me there. But they didn't bring the man, they brought the

woman and they've got stones. They are getting ready to stone her. So what does Jesus say in a very intolerant, very discriminatory fashion? "He who is without sin cast the first stone." He discriminated against every guy on the scene. What did they do while Jesus is writing in the sand? They disappeared, having been properly discriminated against. Then he says, "Where are your accusers?" Then he says, "Therefore I no longer condemn you but," what? But what? This is the part that is often lacking in that conversation, "Go sin no more."

You see, he discriminated against hypocrisy. He discriminated against self-righteousness. He discriminated against immoral behavior. He discriminated against unbelief. What happened after the feeding of the 5,000? Boy, everybody loved the meal, huh? Man, did they love the bread. Jesus could make great bread, do you realize that? Great bread. He was full of grace in feeding them for what reason? So that he could proclaim his truth and he began explaining that he was the bread of life and it was only through his death, burial and resurrection that their sin could be forgiven. They had to admit there was something wrong with them and how did the crowds respond to his discrimination of their unwillingness to acknowledge their need? The Scripture says that as a result of this, many of his disciples withdrew and were not walking with him anymore. Do you understand that Jesus did not change his message in order to raise his numbers in the opinion polls which is why of all of the things that are being said in our culture right now regarding moral conversations, one of the ones that I just do not understand especially is, "Well, be careful, you might not find yourself on the right side of history," as if that's a strong argument. You might not find yourself on the right side of history. I don't know what you think but I don't think our culture is going in a particularly positive direction morally which means about the last place I want to find myself is on the right side of history. I'd rather find myself on the side of the truth of the word of God.

Jesus discriminated against legalism. Here is the marvelous passage about Christ healing the man born blind. He was full of grace but the rest of the story demonstrates that he performed that miracle of the body in order to teach a lesson of the heart, namely what? That we are all born blind spiritually and in need of a Savior. Here's how that passage ends, "For judgment I came into this world so that those who do not see may see and that those who see may become blind. Those of the Pharisees who were with him heard these things and said, 'We're not blind too, are we?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind,'" in other words, if you recognized your need, "you would have no sin because you would come to me in repentance but since you say we see, your sin remains."

So friends, if the question is: did Jesus practice discrimination? The answer is: all the time. We could put a lot more examples on the table if our schedule allowed us this morning. Now, think this through logically: why did he do that? Was it just to make people mad? Was it just to start another controversy? No, the answer in a nutshell is: it was to reveal the holiness of God and our need of a Savior. He was trying to point men and women to the power of the Gospel and I would suggest to you that's exactly what the owners of Hobby Lobby were doing. You realize, they were skewered by the progressives in the press and in the blogosphere. They were accused of participating in the war on women. They were accused of being bigoted. Of being intolerant. Of

practicing discrimination. And you understand, the reason some people want to silence people like the Greens is because the exercise of their religious freedom makes them feel guilty because if God is really the holy giver of life, you understand that's the foundation of our belief in the sanctity of life? If God is really the holy giver of life, someday we're all going to stand before him and the truth is the Green family reviewed their options and they chose to practice discrimination saying, "We are going to discriminate against our participation in any activity that murders a child in a womb because that is an offense against our holy God and if the government wants to fight about that, they might as well put up their dukes and bring a lunch because we're not planning on changing that position anytime soon."

Here's something you're not going to hear me say from this pulpit very often: thank God for Charles Schumer and Bill Clinton along with all of the other legislators back in 1993 and even the support of the ACLU in 1993 who passed the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act and I believe you ought to contact your state legislators now and respectfully encourage them to do exactly the same thing here in our state. That legislation doesn't even mention the word gay. It doesn't mention the word homosexuality. It doesn't mention gay marriage. It is a framework which prioritizes the importance of religious expression on the part of every person in this state. Long live religious freedom and if somebody wants to call that discrimination, we'll wear that label like a badge of honor. Why? Because it is obviously the way our Lord and Savior chose to live.

Now, here's my question for you, you say, "You who?" You. You. Everybody likes to talk about what they believe, why they believe it regarding all sorts of things. They do that in the break room. They do that on the sport's field. They do that all over the place in the neighborhood, etc. etc. etc. Honestly now, are you willing to live out your faith and when it's appropriate to explain why you believe what you believe and why you do what you do even if there is the risk of being given one of these labels that we're talking about this morning? Proverbs says the fear of man brings a snare and the message of the Scripture is sometimes to be like Jesus, you have to practice discrimination.

Now, what's another lesson we can learn here? Jesus' discrimination is what motivated his endurance. You think about all that Christ had to endure in this text: the scourging of verse 1; the crown of thorns in verse 2; the slaps in the face; the mocking; the cries from the crowd, "Away with him and crucify him." Think about this: did Jesus stay in that position and endure it because he had no other choice? Of course not. In fact, he said as much in Matthew 26, "Or do you think that I can't appeal to my Father and he will at once put at my disposal more than 12 legions of angels?" Do you know who that was said to? That was said to Peter during the ear surgery incident that I alluded to last Sunday. Well, think about this now, think about this: why did Jesus allow himself to be treated in that fashion? Well, 2 answers. One is actually right there in the text if you note it, he went on to say, "How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled which say it has to happen this way?" You see, the same Bible that some people in our community have publicly mocked this week, it has to happen this way because "not one jot or tittle will pass away from God's

word until it is all fulfilled," and mark this down: that includes the jot or the tittle that you might not like.

So to fulfill the Scripture, he allowed himself to be treated this way. He allowed himself to be treated this way as an act of discrimination against you. You say, "What in the world do you mean that Jesus discriminated against me?" It's his discrimination regarding your ability to save yourself. Do you realize, friends, a judgment had to be made about whether human beings like you and me could possibly meet God's standard of perfect holiness on our own and guess what? Now, I love you. Are you feeling it? Guess what? You failed and so did I. Welcome to you were just discriminated against in a decidedly intolerant fashion. Scripture says it like this, "For all have sinned. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God for the wages of sin is death," which is why Jesus chose to pay that price for you because that was the only way. You might say, "I don't like that either." Well then here's what Christ said about that very issue, "I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life. No one comes to the Father but through me."

By the way, if you're saying, "Do you know what? I'm really getting upset with you right now." It took this long? "I don't like the fact that you're saying that God discriminated against me and found me incapable of earning my way to heaven on my own." Listen. Listen: do you know what the greatest act of discrimination in all of human history was? And do you know who was discriminated against at that moment? And do you know who it was that was doing the discriminating? It was when Jesus was hanging on the cross and the weight and the penalty, the guilt, the shame was placed on him and then the purest, most righteous judgment, the purest, most righteous discrimination ever occurred when God the Father turned his back, turned his back on his own Son while his Son bore the weight and the penalty of our sin which is why one of the 7 sayings from the cross was, "My God, My God, why have You discriminated against Me? Why have You forsaken Me?"

Praise the Lord, it was also a matter of his discrimination regarding the depth of his love for you. You see, another determination had to be made: did he love you enough to do that? It was a yes/no decision; a black and white decision. Was his love sufficient enough to take him to the cross? Paul said, "For while we were still helpless," at the right time, "Christ died for the ungodly for one will hardly die for a righteous man though perhaps for a good man someone would but God demonstrates His own love toward us," a judgment was made. Yes, he loves you that much. "In that while we were sinners, Christ died for us."

I would suggest that that paves the way for God's people to endure hardship as we seek to live for him. I want to be clear about this: I'm not whining. I'm really happy. I'm not a person who believes the word of God and I'm mad about it. I'm happy. Do you want me to break out into some sort of happy dance? I'm a happy guy. I slept well last night. Not very long, I had a last load flight out of Seattle last night so it wasn't very long but it was nice and restful. I'm not mad. I'm not grumpy. I'm not upset. But I'll tell you this: these are not necessarily easy days to be part of a Bible believing church. For example, the front page of our local paper this week proclaimed that the reason people favor this

legislation or have conservative views on other related social issues is because we're spiteful. We're filled with animus. You see, Jesus endured hardship so the Gospel of grace could be proclaimed.

Now, let's try to lay out several assertions here. I want to be sure that we're carefully thinking about what are the takeaways here then? You understand our concern is not primarily the way other people live. Do you get that? It's the freedom to exercise our religious beliefs. In fact, this may surprise you but the issue of whether people of various classes outside our church family can be married or not has never been my focus ever because I don't think the church exists to tell other people how to live. So then what is it that we want? We want the freedom to live out our beliefs in every sphere of life. We reject the notion that citizens of our state must abandon their religious beliefs in order to own a business or participate in other aspects of public life. Why? Not just because we're fighters, that's because of theology. Paul said, "Whether then you eat or drink or whatever you do," 7 days a week, "do all to the glory of God." That was one of the major emphases of the Protestant Reformation. There is no dichotomy between sacred and secular so we're not trying to impose our beliefs on somebody else but nor are we going to allow other people to impose their beliefs on us.

Now, you might say, "Why did you say that it's not primarily our purpose to do that? Why wouldn't you have said it's not exclusively our purpose not to be involved in what other people do?" Here's why: because God by his grace and because of the sacrifice of a lot of men and women who went before you, we now have the freedom to live in a participatory democracy and that means at times you need to find your voice. And in that sense, I understand logically, you are actually then imposing your view on other people in these senses: one is during an election. You're deciding what candidates you believe are right and they are then going to make decisions on your behalf that in some ways are going to impose that standard on others. For example, I made a decision long ago, feel free to disagree with me on this or call me names. If you're going to call me names, you're going to stand in line. But feel free to do that but I made a decision long ago, personally I will never vote for a pro-abortion candidate and although I understand that it is the law of the land, I will impose my belief about the sanctity of life in any way I can because I think it is my moral obligation to stand up for the rights of the unborn. So call me a one issue voter, call me bigoted, intolerant, I've heard all the names, okay? You might want to make up some new ones. But that's why.

Also, during a referendum when a decision is made about a community standard. You understand the Supreme Court is about to hear a case this spring that will likely decide this issue and will likely strike down gay marriage bans across our nation and that will be the end of that part of the discussion. You can decide what you think about that. I'm not going to wring my hands about that. That's what's likely to happen. But what our community, what our state was discussing before the Supreme Court got involved was would it be best to have a statewide referendum? My answer actually to that question was yes and I'll tell you why and some people are going to be howling mad about this: I don't think gay marriage is first and foremost an issue of civil rights. I think gay rights is first and foremost an issue of definition and that goes back to the very beginning of what I

said to you. Marriage has always meant a particular thing in this culture and if you want to change the definition that's fine but you need to come to the table with your ideas. And for those who would say I am a proponent of gay marriage, that's fine. You have the right to do that. You have the right to that belief but I would at least challenge you on this point and the progressives used to say I was baiting them, I'm not baiting them. My question would be: do you believe in polygamy? Because if you say gay marriage is okay but polygamy is wrong, do you realize what you just did? Because in my view even on the basis of natural law, the design of a man goes together with the design of a woman. Do I need to explain that? Do I need to draw pictures? I'm not trying to be harsh to anybody but I am going to say this: you take biology out of the equation and you no longer have any justification for the math. Why in the world would you say marriage is just between 2 people? Why can't it be between 3? You say, "Well, you're baiting." Have you ever heard of polyamory? And if you would say, "I believe that marriage is okay for 2 of any sex but not more than that," do you realize you just became intolerant? And bigoted? And discriminatory? You just chose to draw your line in a different place. Can you at least acknowledge the logic of that point?

Now, I also want to affirm there are areas of life that are especially sacred to followers of Christ. I understand the world doesn't get us. Okay, I get the fact that they don't get us. Well, listen, there are some things that are sacred to us. One is our love for and commitment to the word. Always, we agree with the psalmist, "Establish my foot steps in Your word, teach me your statutes." And we have no interest in imposing that on anybody but nor are we going to allow others to force us to be involved in actions we believe are a violation of the Scripture. And I would encourage you if you want to study this particular issue more, there's actually a link on our website today by a letter that was prepared and signed by a group of attorneys from around the US. I would also, if you say, "I want to study this some more," here's a voice I would strongly encourage you to listen to. He's very logical and I almost hate to say this next part, he teaches at IU. I don't like to put all that together in the same sentence but his name is Daniel Kunkel and what's interesting about that professor is he's actually in favor of gay marriage but he's a strong advocate of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. It's a fascinating conversation. You ought to listen to what he has to say.

Things that are especially sacred. Our commitment to the right to the unborn. Now, I've said a lot about abortion this morning, probably more than I have in years but I and I think most of us are unapologetically pro-life and lest somebody would want to say, "Well, you're just participating in the war on women," the last time I checked, half the fetuses murdered in our country since Roe v. Wade were female. That's the real war on women.

We also believe in the sanctity of marriage. This topic matters to us for lots of reasons. Why? Well, the family was God's first institution. It matters. He created human beings male and female. That matters. He designed their bodies to match their purposes. It matters. Strong families are the foundation of Western culture. I hope I don't have to make that argument to anybody. It was also marriage chosen as the picture of Christ's love for the church.

So, does this church discriminate when it comes to the topic of marriage? Absolutely. Absolutely we do. You say, "What do you mean by that?" Well, it starts with our own church family. Do you realize if you said to me this afternoon, "Listen, my honey and I, we want to get married here on Friday or on Saturday next week," and we do have people who call us that week and want us to marry them that weekend. Here's the answer: no. You say, "I'm a member of this church." No. "I gave a ton of money last year." No. There's nothing you can put on the table that's going to change the no to yes. Why? Because we insist that every couple that is married in this church first goes through an entire series of premarital counseling sessions and if you're not willing to do that, you can't be married here. You might say, "Well, that's discriminatory." Yes it is, on purpose because we care more about the quality of the marriage than we do about the particular event, the wedding, and the reason for that is 50% of the weddings that will be conducted in Indiana this year are eventually going to end up in divorce and 90% of them were conducted by pastors which is why I believe pastors ought to do a better job of preparing people for marriage and if a person will not do that, it doesn't matter how long they've been a member here, we discriminate against them.

But it goes beyond that. I've been in this business a long time. When I started here my hair was jet black. Look what you have done to me. I used to be nice, too. But I'll tell you this, I've learned this: weddings can be a marvelous time of godly celebration and worship like the one that was here yesterday. Many times it's marvelous but in a few cases, some people wishing to be married can make some outrageous requests and if you think that's true even inside a church, it's far truer in our culture. Note, just like Hobby Lobby did not have to surrender their religious beliefs in order to have a public company, neither should any other person seeking to live out their faith 24/7. There are all sorts of shapes of cakes that people want bakers to prepare these days that a Christian baker might find lewd and offensive. Do you want to see pictures? I'm not showing them. But a Christian baker ought to be able to say, "I'm not baking that." There are all sorts of music that a DJ may simply not wish to play and, "If you want me to take the equipment that I purchased with my own money and come to your wedding and play music that demeans women and in front of the whole crowd calls women hoes, I'm not playing that. I'm just not playing that. You can lock me up and throw away the key. I'll start a jail ministry from the inside at the government's expense but I am not doing that." There's all sorts of activities a caterer simply may not want his family and his employees around and if that's discriminatory, then fine but it is not wrongful discrimination and this is the perfect time to ask our legislators to provide that clear layer of protection for citizens in our state. By the way, if you're not willing to find your voice on that, don't grump about the fact that your kids and your grandkids don't have the freedom.

Now, one more point, the final piece of this, friends, is a whole lot more important than anything I've talked about and that is: Jesus' discrimination is what you and I will someday face. You see, the goal here is not to fight about the latest dustup on a social issue, ultimately it's about the freedom and the conviction to speak out for Christ. Paul said it like this, "We are ambassadors for Christ," as though God were making an appeal through us and what I'm saying to you this morning: look for opportunities to exercise

your religious freedom. Look for opportunities to find your voice, not because you're imposing it on somebody else but because you have as much freedom to live for Christ and to speak for Christ as anybody else has to live for or speak of what they want to. Find your voice and if you get called a few names along the way, take it from me, it doesn't hurt that bad. It doesn't hurt that bad.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

Father in heaven, we know that this is a challenging discussion. We don't like to be involved in controversy. We prefer the full of grace side of this equation. But Lord, you've called us also to be as a church the pillar and the support of the truth and so, Lord, I pray that you would help us to speak the truth in love but, Father, I pray that you would help us to never miss the opportunity to speak. Father, I pray that in our conversations it wouldn't be just to have an argument, it would be for the purpose of drawing men and women to you. Help us never to miss that kind of an opportunity because of the fear of man. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.