

If you have a copy of the Scripture, I invite you to open to the book of Acts. We're going to pick up our Acts sermon series. We're going to be reading in just a little bit from Acts Chapter 4 and to 11 verses of Acts Chapter 5.

You know last week was the celebration of Easter, where the church commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. But we don't celebrate that just one day a year as has been mentioned. We celebrate and rejoice that Christ has risen from the dead every week. Every Lord's Day we signify that the tomb outside Jerusalem was empty. But we don't even celebrate an empty tomb. We celebrate the fact that Jesus Christ---the historical figure Jesus Christ of Nazareth---died, was buried, rose from the grave after three days, and then after some time with his disciples he ascended to heaven. With a transformed body, a body fit for a heavenly dwelling, he ascended to heaven where even now at this very moment Christ is seated at the right hand of the throne of God where he intercedes by his shed blood for your sins and for mine. That's what we celebrate every single Sunday when we corporately celebrate, and we celebrate it throughout the days of our Christian walk.

So we come to a place where it's just a few months since all of those events transpired. Just a few months since the Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost, that Jewish festival day, a day of thanksgiving. And the Lord added three thousand souls to the church after Peter preached and then many more were added as the sermons went on, as the meetings from house to house occurred, and as the evidence of the resurrection power that is received by faith and lived out by faith becomes evident in this new fledgling church---these groups of mostly Jews in this context of Acts 4, who have converted to see Jesus as Messiah.

We pick up the reading of the book of Acts to see that they are all of one heart and soul. And Luke records that with great power the apostles are testifying to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. So what follows is, this is what it means to live in the resurrection. This is what it means to live by faith in Jesus Christ, who is now, as we've heard, at this moment, at this very moment in time, for us interceding with his shed blood. That's the experience that we undergo when we come to worship. We think about him, we focus on him, and we worship him. Let me read from Luke's recording of the Acts of the Apostles beginning in verse 32 of Acts Chapter 4.

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas, (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." But Peter

said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

Let me pray for us. Our gracious God, we come before you now---you who have revealed your character through this passage of Scripture---and we submit ourselves to you, to your Holy Spirit, that same Holy Spirit that was just described in the verses we read. Lord for you, Holy Spirit, to be at work in us to make our hearts aware, fully aware, more fully aware of our need for Jesus Christ to be our every and all-sufficient Savior. Lord, please bless this time in your Word. We ask for these things for your glory and for our good. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray, amen? Amen.

I probably don't need to describe the fictional character Pinocchio to you. It's a little wooden puppet who dreamed one day of being a real boy. And probably if I'm not describing Pinocchio, no doubt, then, you're still familiar with the trademark physical change that occurred to Pinocchio's anatomy if he were to attempt to fabricate the truth. [Growing sound] Right? His nose would grow long, to where even the blue fairy pointed out that this is just in keeping with the adage that a lie will keep growing and growing until it's as plain as the nose on your face. The lie conceived in Pinocchio's heart, the lie which Pinocchio proclaimed with his lips, was as obvious as the nose on his face, clearly evident to all around him.

And I often shudder at the possibility of that eventuality. I can't think of any more of a terrifying plot device than a physical attribution that reveals the heart. To be completely uncovered, to be laid bare before a watching world, to have the secret thoughts of my heart revealed to everyone in an instant. That causes me to shudder at the prospect. Yet I believe that the real danger that you and I face, the real threat before us is not that somehow our ears will grow huge like flapping Dumbo ears, or our noses will be extended a foot and a half off our face---the real danger is that because those things don't happen, we will slip into this lulled, false sense of comfort that somehow we are getting away with something. I think that's the real threat for us, who don't have noses that grow when we lie. But somehow it's not really affecting anybody and it's going to be okay in the end.

However in the Scriptures God himself describes who he is, the same God that we've worshiped and sung about, that we've prayed to, that we've gathered to know more about. He describes himself this way in Luke 8. Nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be made known and come to light. Nothing can be hidden from the sight of God. There is no place in my heart or yours where we can keep back something secret from the living God. Rick read from Hebrews 4. No creature is hidden from his sight. All are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account of our lives. The Psalms are rife with these types of references Psalm 44:21. He knows the secrets of the heart. Psalm 139. Where can I go to flee from your spirit, where can I be from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there, if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. And on and on. Jeremiah 16, Jeremiah 23. God knows all things. Nothing can be hid from God.

It's a chilling thought, and it's a challenging text that we have before us today, because God is not ashamed of that quality about himself. God exalts in God's character, and so the all-knowing God is revealed to us today, and then we can contend with him. What is there for us here. This is a holy God who will not tolerate sin in our lives. Because of justice and because of his righteousness he must punish sin. You see, I believe that God wants us to be as aware of his holiness as we are of his amazing grace. We can't really understand how amazing it is that Christ would lay his life down in our place unless we understand how absolutely perfect in righteousness God is. That's the picture of God we have in this text. The text before us is essentially, Luke

presents, the tale of two gifts, if you will, borrowing from English literature. We have the tale of two gifts with valuable insight about God's character and our own.

The setting for the tale occurs in Chapter 4, verse 32. The full member of those who have believed. This is the church, the church of Jesus Christ. It's growing in number. It's growing in intensity. It's growing in fervor. These who have publicly professed faith in Jesus Christ, like these before us today---I want to follow Christ all the days of my life. I want to be acknowledged with the crucified one, the buried one, the risen one. I want to be called Christian. I want you to examine my life so that if it doesn't match up to that name, I want to be corrected. That's what they're saying. That's what this church was about.

They were of one heart, Luke says. One heart, one soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. It was truly a community of faith. John Piper says of the effects of believing in Jesus that the "heart is loosened in relationship to things and it's tightened in relationship to people." In another place Piper goes on to say, "Faith in Christ creates a bond of love to people and cuts a bond of love to things." That's what we see here. There were many who had properties, many who had homes, and they sold them and they brought the proceeds of those sales and they laid them at the apostles' feet. And they said please, take it, distribute it as you see fit, as the Lord guides and directs you. It wasn't a mandate to sell everything. We know that some didn't sell their houses, because the early church met from house to house. If they had sold all their houses, they wouldn't have had houses to meet in from house to house. But as they were led. These were people who understood that God's lavish love had been demonstrated on the cross, and they wanted, with whatever wherewithal they had, to be able to allow that blessing to flow. And that's what this picture is at the end of Chapter 4 of the book of Acts. Many were doing this. They were bringing their firstfruits, as Robbie prayed when we gathered the offering today.

This is a little bit different than what we sometimes experience in the church. I pastored a couple of churches, I served in a couple of churches in Georgia. And it always seemed, sometimes, in this one little church that I served in Covington, that sometimes it seemed like the people would clean out the garage, and they were on the road, and they got to that fork in the road, and they could easily have gone to the landfill---and sometimes came to the church with their gifts, their donations. We recall one time we had a microwave that somebody donated to the church, and as soon as we plugged it in and turned it on it sparked. It's a fire hazard. That is not the picture of what we see here. It's not the dregs. It's not the leftovers. It's not the afterthoughts. It's the firstfruits. It's those who are worshiping God with everything they have. Before I get to sounding too judgmental on those people, you know...give....they were giving.

So Luke gives us the tale of two gifts, two particular gifts, two particular givers---sets of givers. One very positive example and one very, very negative example. The first is Barnabas. Luke describes a Levite named Joseph from Cyprus who receives the nickname from the apostles, 'son of encouragement.' Barnabas. This is a man who we will read more about as we work through the sermon series on Acts. This is Barnabas who in Acts Chapter 9 is the one who---this guy Saul of Tarsus, who was a Rabbi who was persecuting the church. He gets converted to Christ and Barnabas says this guy needs a friend. He needs to have someone show him the new faith. And Barnabas is a friend of Paul. He becomes a pillar of the church in Antioch. Barnabas administers their mercy ministry in Chapter 11. He serves as a missionary in Chapter 13. He's remembered for sticking up for John Mark when Paul, in fact, says that John is not worthy to go on the missionary journey. And Barnabas says, you know what, I'll go with John Mark, and we'll do this. We'll take the gospel this way. And it's good stuff.

We've got this man, Barnabas, and Luke simply records he sold a piece of property that belonged to him. He brought the money from the sale. He laid it at the apostles' feet. There's no indication that Barnabas donated and then dictated here's my proceeds, and this is where I want you to put it. He just laid it at the apostles'

feet. That was the practice. It seemed to be a very regular and usual practice. It was understood in the church that people were doing this.

And then we see this husband and wife pair, givers named Ananias and Sapphira. Luke records that they also sold a piece of property, and they also laid a gift at the apostles' feet. But Luke records that in between those two steps they added a step. And this step was a concocted scheme whereby, with his wife's knowledge, Ananias kept back for himself some of the proceeds from the sale. And, Luke says---it's so precise, Luke's language---he not only kept back a portion, but he only laid a part of it at the apostles' feet. Later in the story we see Sapphira. She stayed with the story concocted. And when Peter talks to her about three hours after Ananias has come, Sapphira stays exactly on story.

Two different givers. Ananias and Sapphira. This phrase, 'kept back for himself' is a phrase, a word translated only one other time in the New Testament. It's found in Titus 2:10. It's of the slaves when they're working in the master's house. It's translated *pilfering* when Paul wrote to Titus. It's where you knowingly and deceptively take what's not yours and keep it for yourself.

We see it one other time in the Scriptures. It's in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, the same word is found in Joshua 7:2. Maybe you're familiar with the story of Achan. The people of Israel were to go to Jericho and Ai, and they were to do what God commanded them to do. But Achan in his confession---we see this in Chapter 7 of Joshua---Achan coveted the silver and the gold and the ornamental robes that were used for the occultic devotion. And he desired them for himself and he *pilfered* them, took them. He knowingly, deceptively took them for himself and then plotted to cover up that theft---buried them in his tent. And the Lord withdrew his blessing from the nation of Israel. And the sin of Achan---we talk about the sin of Achan---the results were severe and swift. Achan came as a result of the inquiries to the various groups and confessed before Joshua: I coveted, I took. I knew that the Lord would not have me to do this. And Achan and his sons and his daughters and his oxen and his sheep were taken to a field in the Valley of Achor, and they were stoned to death, because the Lord is serious about sin. And after they were stoned their bodies, the remains, were burned. Over those burned bodies were laid stones, and the Valley of Achor is known as the Troubling Valley, because Achan's sin was a troubling to the Lord.

We see these glimpses of the holiness of God throughout Scripture. On occasion God will let us catch an idea of what his wrath is truly like and how he cannot tolerate sin. So back to the tale of two gifts in Acts 5. You see, Ananias was never obligated to sell his property. There's no obligation to give. It was truly a love offering. Truly. And Ananias in his scheme did not realize that. Peter says, however, as much to him in verse 4. The property, when it was unsold, it was Ananias's to do with as he saw fit. You weren't obligated to bring it here. And then after it was sold, the proceeds were at Ananias's disposal. You had the sale of the property in your hand, and you didn't have to bring it in here and do what you've done. Perhaps Ananias saw an opportunity to make a name for himself. There was a lot of people laying their gifts at the apostles' feet. Maybe he thought in his mind---we're speculating here---why not? He may have rationalized: Who's going to know anyway? Isn't that the way that sin is usually conceived? It's a little mental gymnastics we play, a little rationalization. We kind of drift away from who we know God to really be, so that we can appreciate what we're trying to construct in our minds. That's perhaps what Ananias was doing. Who could it hurt? Maybe just this once. Or maybe when he got the proceeds in hand, he is marching them to the church and he's realizing.... Peter says that it was a plot that was conceived. It was premeditated.

What's the difference between Barnabas and Ananias? Why one and not the other? We see that recorded there in Acts 4:33. The great grace of God was upon them all. The grace of God was at work in the heart of Barnabas, who also sold a field, who also received a proceed, who also had his hands on the proceeds from that sale as he made his way to where the apostles were gathered. The difference was the grace of God was

evident in Barnabas, and Barnabas was cooperating with God's Spirit. The focus was not about Barnabas. It was about the living, lavishing God to be blessed, to be praised. Peter adds another layer when he describes Ananias' heart. Luke records this phrase: that Satan had filled Ananias' heart. And Luke is the writer of the gospel of Luke, we also know. In Luke 22:3, when Judas is described as preparing for the betrayal of Christ, it's the same phrase. "Why has Satan filled your heart?" It's full-blown corruption. It's full-blown 'I'm in this for myself' sin trajectory.

So the contrast of the two different types of givers again. Barnabas, cooperating with the Spirit of God, receiving by faith the grace of God, resting in that, believing that, and acting accordingly. Ananias and Sapphira, not. Not believing it. In fact quite the opposite: allowing the enemy within and the enemy without to take hold and to drive their actions.

So we contrasted two types the givers, but also we can see in this passage---and we have to see it---the contrast between the holy, righteous Creator and the corruption of the human heart. It's clearly in view again. You know we have this Creator/creature distinction all throughout Scripture. Every so often God reminds us that he is the other. He is the holy. He is the self-existent one. We are the creature. We are the one who is absolutely dependent on him for all things. And that Creator/creature distinction is clearly presented in Acts 5, as well.

Dissect the motives and the results of Ananias and Sapphira's gift giving. Their greed fabricated a series of schemes. We might be tempted to think it was a spur of the moment thing, but it's not. Peter says, filled with discernment by the Holy Spirit, "Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart?" It's premeditated. And then we see that their pride had produced a layer of lies. These are our observations. The pride of Ananias and Sapphira is they can't come clean at any point in this process as Peter is quizzing them. There is opportunity to come clean. Their pride refused to let them acknowledge the reality of what they were doing. That's why they held onto it. They wouldn't tell the truth. Peter presses Ananias, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?" Sapphira, three hours after Ananias' encounter with Peter, she maintains the exact same lie. "Yes, it was for that much." Maybe their vanity caused them to not back down from the deception. They've already put themselves out there. Man, they've already gone and they've laid it at the apostles' feet. It's been possibly a public thing now. How are they going to ever back off of that and say we did something really vile here. At every point there's a possibility, but at every point they refused.

John Wooden has a quote that I came across this week. He says, "Be more concerned with your character than your reputation. Because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are." Shannon Alder adds a nuance to that same kind of thought. "Reputation is what others think of us. Character is what God knows us to be." So we contrast the corruption of the heart of Ananias and Sapphira. We see the clear, pure, righteous character of our Creator God.

The followers of Jesus Christ in this first couple of months of the church are the same type of followers that God calls to himself today. They're followers who testify about the resurrected Savior, the Savior who was crucified for their sins. They testify about the God who takes sin so seriously that he makes his own Son accursed so that you and I can be received as sons and daughters. The purity of Christ's church, then, is a priority for God always. Because sin is so serious he had to crush his only begotten Son. He doesn't want sin running rampant in and through us, we who call ourselves Christ's followers. Paul says to the church in Galatia, "Do not be deceived. God is not mocked." I remember as a young teenager I memorized this set of verses, but I don't think I fully understood the ramifications of that truth until I got to about thirty years old. "Do not be deceived. God is not mocked. Whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own

flesh will from the flesh reap corruption. But the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life." That's the good news of the gospel right there in a nutshell.

This is very sobering. It's a real presentation of the character of the living God. This is how real it is. Ananias, knowingly and willingly attempts to deceive, and after a quick word from Peter he drops dead on the spot of his deception. And great fear came over all who heard of it. Maybe Ananias didn't think about the Holy Spirit. Maybe he didn't think that the church was constructed by God and for God. Maybe he just thought he was pulling one over on Peter. Peter says very clearly, in support of the deity of the Holy Spirit, Ananias is lying to the Holy Spirit. Immediately repeating his rebuke, he says Ananias is lying not to man, but to God. Perhaps Ananias lost sight of the supernatural quality of Christ's church. He may have made the mistake of thinking that the church is just a bunch of people who've organized themselves in order to accomplish a corporate goal, a joint venture, caring for the widows and the village.

No. Rather the church is comprised of all those that God's Holy Spirit has drawn out from the world, has called from the world---*ecclesia*---come out from the world. So that, as Scripture records, who we are to be, that we walk now in newness of life, no longer offering our bodies as instruments of unrighteousness, but as those who been brought from death to life and now made instruments of righteousness. Whatever our hands do, do to the glory of God. Whatever our mouth speaks, speak to the glory of God. Whatever our thoughts think, think of the glory of God. We're called not to be conformed any longer to the ways of the world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

A last thing that I want to highlight today is that the same God who gives great grace is the same God who incites great fear. The same God that knows your heart and my heart is that God. He already knows how corrupt your heart is. It's not a surprise to him those errant thoughts that many of you just had. It's not surprising to him! He knows you fully. That's what the Scriptures are teaching us. And he's the same God who incites great fear. He gives great grace. He doesn't look to you to live the Christ-life by yourself, in your own strength, according to your own wisdom. That's why he gave Jesus Christ in your place.

When is the last time---this is a note I wrote to myself. I offer the question to you, if you want it---when is the last time that I thought about the fear of God? When is the last time I experienced the fear of God? It's a severe picture before us. This is a God who withdrew the restraining grace, and Ananias dropped dead and so did his wife. We have to contend with this God. It's the only choice we have. It's the God of the Scriptures. It's his revelation of himself to us. Great fear came upon all those who heard of Ananias' death. And then again, Sapphira breathed her last. The young men carried her out and buried her beside her husband. "And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all those who heard these things."

And my dearly beloved, today, April 27, 2014, at some time of the day, we are hearing these things as well. We've just heard the encounter of the living God with Ananias and Sapphira, and great fear can grip our hearts. I want to suggest respectfully, it should. To knowledge that God is that kind of God---we don't have to shrink back from that. You know why? Because God doesn't shrink back from that. That's who he describes himself to be. But we don't leave it there because he doesn't either. He's the God who cannot tolerate sin. He's the God who will punish sin completely, eternally. And he is the God that offers his Son for your sin. Right? That's why we don't shrink back from preaching who God tells us he is. Because the great and wonderful, marvelous, matchless news that Jesus Christ died in the place of sinners only makes sense if sin is serious to that God of wrath. The same God. The same God.

We don't like to think about this. I know I don't like to think about this. Do you like to think about this aspect of God? Some people do. They get all out of balance and that's all you hear, and nobody wants to go talk to them. That's horrible. But the drift, I think, the fear, the danger is that we drift easily away from the biblical

view. Many of you know we use this little children's bulletin, and Mary Erickson in our office, she diligently every week goes in, she sees what the sermon text is, she goes and looks at the files of the children's bulletin, and she pulls them up and she prints those out, and our kids have something to work through if they stay with us, you know, during this time. Guess what's not part of the children's bulletin sermon series: Acts 5:1-11. There's no little colored drawings to fill in, no crossword puzzles---Ananias then D I E D.

It's a corporate way we cause one another to shrink back from that knowledge of God. And there's no reason to. No reason to. In fact I was informed after the first service that our children downstairs today and next week, in the providence of God, because I guarantee we can't plan this---they are studying Acts 5:1-11 in children's church. I think that's a wonderful testimony, and I trust those men and women who are diligently working to present Christ downstairs, that they are going to present the great fear and the great grace of Jesus Christ to our children. We don't think like that because we don't trust that God is who he says he is.

We have a Guinea pig in our house. His name is Spoons. He's the size of an NFL football. Spoons has this little cage that he's in---it's not really little, but it's smaller than I could get inside---right outside our kitchen door. And when any of us walk out the kitchen entrance into the other room, if Spoons is up on his little ledge thing, that Guinea pig can move like that from the ledge, down the ramp, quick U-turn into the little blue igloo where he's safe. He's safe from all of us horrible, oppressive, adult humans who bring him handfuls of carrot sticks and sliced grapes which are his favorite TV time snack and everything else. You can't grasp the miniscule brain inside Spoons, who at the very sight of the one who's bringing him the good, turns and runs the other way. Well, fellow Guinea pigs, that's what we do, is it not? We hit the adversity of this life, we travel in this world, we hit the tribulation of what it means to follow God, and we turn and run from God. It doesn't make sense! Because we have an out of balance view of God. He's the God who incites great fear, yes, but he is the God who gives great grace.

I wrote out three suggestions of maybe what difference this should make for me. I offer them to you, just quickly. In light of this passage I want to honestly live remembering that God is truth, that God commands truth to be spoken in love, remember that he wants us to act in honest ways---that we're to honestly live, called by his name to reflect his character, to be honest in our dealings with him and with one another.

And that leads to the second point: to honestly deal with our sin. In 1 John 1:9, that phrase there, 'confess your sin,' it simply means to agree with God, to say the same thing, to just agree with God, to agree with reality. You did this thing. *Oh no, I didn't, it's got to be something else. It's my upbringing, it's him, it's them, it's them.* Yeah, you know what? I did do it. I did it. I'm ashamed of it. I repent of it. It's covered by Christ. And I ask your forgiveness. That's how you honestly deal with sin. And then we honestly deal with one another. We extend the grace of forgiveness. Agree with reality and then extend it.

The third thing I wrote was then we can honestly worship and proclaim him. We can honestly proclaim the whole him, all of him: the God of wrath, the God who cannot ignore sin, the God who clearly says what sin is. We don't have to join in the marching band or whatever's going on in our country these days redefining sin, because we offer a Savior who has conquered sin. He knows that sin is destructive.

Honestly live, and honestly deal with sin, and honestly then worship and proclaim him. Come to worship with your sin, because you can't leave it at home. Come to worship, then, and rejoice in song: O great God of highest heaven, occupy my lowly heart. Own it all and reign supreme, you know, conquer every rebel part. Let no sin or vice remain that resist your holy war. You have loved---and all the things we just sang that I can't remember right now. Come to worship, and worship him honestly.

We had a worship meeting yesterday. We talked about if you want to raise your hands and worship God, do so. But somebody sitting next to you may be hit with the same exact thought that we're singing or saying or praying or reading, and they don't want to raise their hands. They want to bow their head and meditate quietly. That's worshipping honestly, is it not? That's what we should be doing, allowing one another the freedom to do it. Not *Why didn't you raise your hands? Didn't you see how exciting that song was?* That song hit me right in the heart, man, it's about my sin. I just wanted to quietly reflect. That's honest worship, and it's the way that the family of God does.

A couple of weeks ago at the Good Friday service we sang that old hymn---we hardly ever sing it. [sings] *Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Oh....sometimes... (listen) sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.* We can tremble. We should tremble because Jesus stands ready to receive. His invitation to you, to me, is come to me, you who are weary of trying to live the righteous life apart from my strength. You can't do it. I've given you a righteous record, and I offer it to you. Receive it by faith, believe and receive. Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden from trying to atone for your own sin, trying to be sad enough or depressed enough or put up enough good front so everybody knows you're really sorry for your sin. He says you can't do that. I shed my blood to cover your sin. You are reconciled to God because I have done that, Christ says.

So tremble and rejoice. Rejoice that he is for you. Take him at his word, believe him, believe him. Let's pray. Lord, we do pray that you would cause us to tremble. In your perfect timing for our lives cause us to realize that you're the same God yesterday, today and forever. You're the God that incites great fear and you're the God that gives great grace. All of that is found in Jesus Christ and his expression of love demonstrated to us on the cross. I pray, Lord, for all of us. Please help us to follow you, to live for you. And as we're ready to sing in just a moment this song of response, Lord, that we would glory in the Redeemer, that we would rejoice in the one who has given himself, the Lamb of God who is our righteousness. And that one day, Lord, please make us people that actually do believe and believe more firmly tomorrow than we did yesterday, that one day we'll see your face and it will be a delight for us. We pray all this in Christ's name. Amen.