

The Power of Justification

God's Plan of Redemption

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Bible Text: Romans 5:1-11

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A few weeks ago I was in the process of buying some new luggage. I travel quite a bit and most of us have experienced how your luggage just gets beat up in the airports, haven't you? And so it was time to replace what we had. And it is always hard to know in a situation like that, should you just buy the cheapest stuff you can and keep replacing it or maybe buy something more substantial with the hopes that it might last longer. Well, I have tried the former option enough times and I thought it might be wiser to try to buy something better.

Well, that creates two problems for me. The one is I am not a fan of spending money and, secondly, I am certainly not a fan of shopping. In fact, if you ever see me in the mall it is highly likely that it is the latter part of December and I am on my one hour Christmas gift buying spree.

So, anyway, I went to one of the stores in the mall and I found some nice luggage, some higher end luggage and it was actually on sale for 50 percent off. I am not sure that is all that unusual, because luggage seems to be the kind of item where they double the price and then they want you to feel good about the fact that they are giving you 50 percent off. But at least it was 50 percent off. So fine. So I got to the counter. And the lady there told me that they were having a special sale that weekend on top of my 50 percent off and she asked had we received any coupon in the mail about that sale? I said, "Well, my wife usually handles that part of our household. I really have no idea if a coupon came in the mail." And she said, "Well, we have got something for people like you. We have these in store coupons here that will give you and we will scratch off a place on the coupon. There is three little circles there and you tell me which one you want to scratch off," she said, "And I will do that for you and you can get an additional either 15 percent or maybe 20 percent or maybe even 30 percent on top of the 50 that you are already getting."

So I said, "Well, fine." I point to one of the circles and she does the scratch off thing similar to pastor Bolden says the lottery tickets that he buys. And so I wouldn't know anything about that, but I work with him. Anyway, let me get back to this. And so she scratched it off and, sure enough, it was an additional 15 percent off.

Well, that was fine. That was more than I expected and the price of the luggage is

actually getting down to the place where it is a fairly good deal. And then she said, “Now if you get home and you find out that your wife received a coupon that was worth more than the 15 percent I just gave you, bring it back and we will actually make an adjustment.”

Well, sure enough, I got home and Chris said we got one of those coupons from that store and it was for 30 percent off. So I did the math and I said, “Well, that would be another 15 percent here. So next time I am near the mall I will stop in and just get that adjustment.”

So a few nights later I was near the mall and so I went in and I explained to the lady at the check out line what was going on. She said, “Yeah, well, that is fine. No problem. You will just need to go to the customer service counter and talk to our manager about that.”

So, ok, I went over and I explained all this to the manager and she looks at my receipt and it is all right there, the original price of the luggage and then where they had taken off the 50 percent and then when they had taken an additional 15 percent with that coupon they gave me that day. So I hand her my 30 percent coupon and I assumed, let’s do the math together, I assumed she is going to give me another 15 percent off. Well, the manager proceeded to take 30 percent more off. In fact, the price has gotten so low that if they take any more off they are going to be paying me to take the luggage.

So I said to her, “Ma’am, I just want to be sure I am being honest with you here. I mean I am a pastor,” I told her. Kind of serious about the honestly thing. I though you would take an additional 15 off, but this receipt you just gave me back says you gave me an additional 30 percent. She said, “Well, that is right. That will cover your trouble for having to drive all the way back over here.”

Yeah, so they ended up giving me 50 percent off and then 15 percent off and then another 30 percent off. And that was all accounting. I mean, the manager decided that was the way her store wanted to handle that transaction. Now that, my friends, is called getting a really good deal.

Have you ever gotten a good deal like that? Have you where things... my apology to you. But have you ever where things just... they came out a whole lot better than you ever expected and certainly a whole lot better than you ever deserved.

Well, that person has taken that phone call, if you know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, you have. Isn’t that right? It is that vey process that we would like to study this morning. With that in mind open your Bible to Romans chapter five. That is on page 121 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that this morning.

We are in the middle of a study right now entitled God’s plan for redemption. He sends this as a planning year for our church we thought we would be helped by thinking about the doctrine of soteriology or all God’s Word tells us about salvation. And what we have been seeing is that God’s plan is absolutely marvelous. That is also quite different that

what we would have designed on our own, huh? So each week we are just doing an exegetical treatment of a different passage of Scripture. And so far we have seen that God's plan for our salvation is a matter of grace and it is a matter of faith. And it is a matter of adoption. It is a matter of election. It is a matter of regeneration. Each one of those words describes a different facet of what occurs when a person becomes a Christian, when they decide or choose to become a follower of Jesus Christ.

What God's Word has emphasized over and over is that all of this was planned before the foundation of the world. Understand God is the consummate planner. And that is why, for example, the psalmist would marvel when he said:

"You wove me in my mother's womb."¹

And God would say back to that, "Well, that is just a recent aspect of my relationship with you." See, he has made a specific, a detailed, a beautiful plan as we have just sang. For the redemption of each one of his children that precedes the foundation of the world. According to Scripture that is how long he has been thinking about you. And that is how long he has been loving you. And, of course, we don't listen to ideas like that and puff u our chest and think, well, that must make me pretty big stuff, because we have lived with ourselves long enough to have a really good idea of the quality and value of our stuff.

So if God would make a plan like this for our redemption anyway, then our corresponding love for him and our corresponding trust in him, it just goes off the charts, doesn't it? I mean, why would we make aggressive plans as a church or as individuals to serve God? Well, look at the incredible plans he has made to redeem us.

Now Romans five brings us around to the accounting aspect of all of this. And we are talking this morning about the power of justification. Romans chapter five beginning in verse one.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

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 the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies

¹ Psalm 139:13.

we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.²

Talking about the power of justification. And if you were following through the logic of this text you would probably know where this message is going, but I would like us to divide our remaining time around the meaning of the justification and then the results of justification and then I just want to say a word at the end about the history of justification. So the meaning of justification and the results of justification and then the history of justification.

First of all, what does all this mean? This word justify or justification is one of those terms that was apparently very familiar in New Testament times, but maybe not so much so for people like you and me. The Greek word is δικαιοω (dik-ah-yo'-o). So when we read justification it is δικαιοω (dik-ah-yo'-o) and it is was a word that was used in a legal system. It had to do with a person's stand before the law. So when you are in a trial, you are in a court case, the question is: What is going to be the declaration made by the judge? Were you declared to be guilty before the law or were you declared to be righteous before the law? Well, if the word δικαιοω (dik-ah-yo'-o) was used you were being declared righteous before the law of God.

Just like that store manager looked at my receipt and she looked at my coupon and then she made a declaration, 30 percent additional off, not because you deserve it, not even because you argued for it, but just because that is the way this store wants to treat our customers, period, case dismissed.

Paul says it is possible of people like you and me to be justified. Think about that. δικαιοω (dik-ah-yo'-o), to be declared righteous before our God.

Now if you are thinking with me your response might be similar to mine when I was standing at that store counter. I don't deserve that. I mean, here how could people like you and me be justified in light of all of our sins, past, present and future. There has to be some mistake. Well, if you know your Bible you know that is what Paul has been discussion in great detail throughout the beginning of this book. That is why it is so important for us to understand this in its context. We could not possibly have a study of soteriology, a study of the doctrine of salvation without at some point drinking deeply from the book of Romans, because that, along with the book of Hebrews is the two theological tour de force of the New Testament for sure. And if you know the book of Romans—and you should—Paul begins by talking about the sinfulness of man and our utter inability to save ourselves. He actually traces the progression of sin and rebellion in chapter one in ways that are eerily similar to the nature of the culture in which we find ourselves today. And that part of the book is not all that surprising. Paul says, “The unrighteous, they are lost. They stand guilty before a holy God.” And any judge would say that.

² Romans 5:1-11.

What is amazing though is what Paul begins discussion in chapter two, that even people who perform all sorts of religious deeds are lost as well. Really? Because you can't cover your guilt by doing a lot of good things. When compared to the standard, the holiness of God, the law, we are in far too deep a hole to work our way out on our own merit, which is why that part of the argument ends with this stunning pronouncement that all have sinned and therefore all, whether you are immoral, whether you think you are moral, whether you are somewhere in between, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Coupled with what Paul would say a few chapters later, the wages of that sin is death. That is the just declaration because our sin has separated us from a holy God and it ought to separate us from him eternally. That is called paying full price for your luggage.

But then Paul says this. There is a way out. It is justification by faith. It is repenting of your sin and accepting the free gift of salvation through the shed blood of Christ, by believing in him as your Savior and Lord.

Now go back to our verse. You probably knew Romans 3:23, but it is one of those verses that we don't always read in its context. Let's keep going.

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.³

Wayne Grudem summarized all of this in his helpful theology like this. Justification is an instantaneous legal act. Get this. Of God in which he thinks of our sins as forgiven. Now hear this. And Christ's righteousness as belonging to us. You have to understand both of that, both of those, and declares us to be therefore righteous in his sight. So it is crucial to understand that when you came to Christ. And, by the way, this is true for someone who has been saved in this congregation for 60 years and it is true of someone who has been saved in this congregation for six hours. That is part of the beauty of this as well. This isn't like graduated over time. We are talking about this being an instantaneous act by our God. And Scripture teaches us that his plan was that when you choose to come to Christ, a forensic, a legal transaction occurs on the account book of God and it is very much two fold. Understand this. Yeah, your sin is forgiven and that is really great. But also the righteousness of Christ is placed on your account. That is what Paul meant in this critical passage.

“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”⁴

³ Romans 3:23-26.

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:21.

And remember this, friends, it is all free. All of that is free. Yes, it came at an immense cost to our God, but it was offered as a free gift to us if we would repent and believe in him. That, of course, is where my luggage analogy falls so woefully short, because we are not talking about only having to pay a little bit. We are talking about paying absolutely nothing. Nor are we talking about receiving something as insignificant as luggage, which, by the way was damaged on my first trip out of town just like the cheap stuff was. We are talking about a vibrant relationship with God today and the hope of eternal life in days to come. One of the hundreds of things that happens the moment a person places their faith and trust in Christ they accept the gospel is δικαιοω (dik-ah-yo'-o). They are declared righteous before God.

This is probably one of those times where a picture is worth a thousand words and God gives that to us. One of them is in the Old Testament. It was a marvelous foreshadow of what God would eventually do in Christ. This occurs in the book of Zechariah where God calls one of his priests named Joshua, a different Joshua, of course, than the one who led God's people into the Promised Land. This is 1000 years later. But this priest appears before God in filthy robes. And I won't go into all the details of exactly what that metaphor means, but imagine a priest coming before God. He just absolutely filthy. Here is what happens.

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. The LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?" Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel. He spoke and said to those who were standing before him, saying, "Remove the filthy garments from him." Again he said to him, "See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes." Then I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments, while the angel of the LORD was standing by.⁵

That is what happens when a person comes to Christ. Your sin is forgiven and the righteousness of Christ is placed on your account. And, see, there it is. On the basis of your stand in the finished work of Christ, then you are δικαιοω (dik-ah-yo'-o). You are declared righteous. You are justified before your holy God.

Now in Romans five Paul gives some wonderful results of justification. Did you see that? This is good news, my friends, big time. And if you know Christ as Savior and Lord, I hope you are rejoicing in the way he planned your salvation. And if you have never repented of your sin and placed your faith and trust in Christ, I would encourage you to run to the cross, run to the empty tomb and receive the gift that we are talking about this morning, because it is absolutely amazing. The results of justification, one of them is peace with God. It is the Greek word ειρηνη (i-ray'-nay) which means harmony, the

⁵ Zechariah 3:1-5.

opposite of hostility and war and chaos and disorder. Paul says when you place your faith in Christ, now you have laid down your arms. You can have peace with God. See, now you are justified. Now you are declared righteous and now for the first time you can have peace with a holy God. Think about that. Peace ειρηνη (i-ray'-nay). Why? Because you now appear before him clothed in the ... what the best thing you had last week going on? No, clothed in the righteousness of his Son.

That is why C. S. Lewis said, "Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement." That is not the kind of beautiful thing we are talking about. We are talking about new. He makes all things new. Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement. He is a rebel who must lay down his arms. And when you do that, you are justified and you can begin to enjoy ειρηνη (i-ray'-nay), peace with God. And just to be sure we are clear, Paul says that it is through the finished work of Christ. It is one of those places in the Bible where the proposition makes all the difference in the world. We have peace through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you remember he promised that to us? He said:

"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful."⁶

Friends, one of the results of your justification planned by our God before the foundation of the world is that you could have ειρηνη (i-ray'-nay), you could have peace with him. I have seen that peace in action, haven't you? The week before last I flew down to Raleigh to be with a group called Church Initiative. They are a really interesting group. They make video series to be used by small groups and Sunday school classes and sometimes outreach schools and so they fly people in to talk about various topics and generally film about 150 hours of video between all those speakers and then they slice it down to 13 45 minute lessons and then they make that available to local churches. So right now they are doing a series on Greek. It is called Greek Share. And they asked me to come down and be interviewed about that subject and so all Friday morning last week I was discussing that subject on camera and, honestly, it was very heavy. I wasn't expecting it to be that, but you are concentrating because you want to serve God and his people as well as you can on some very important topics. And then just the subject matter. And so I left that interview a little bit after lunch. I was really heavy as a result of all of that. And then they took me back to the airport and we were having a significant weather delay. They had no idea when they were going to get us out of Raleigh and so I try to be prepared for things like that and our staff had given me a notebook, like a fat notebook with 710 plus pages of all of the comments from our surveys for our church family. So all of your comments about what you have been saying we need to improve, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. I had that in small font, 710 pages in a storm in Raleigh. And I just decided to grab a cup of coffee and plow through.

So I spent over four hours in the airport reading all of those comments. And it was good. It was very, very good. But will tell you, honestly, that was a bit heavy, too.

⁶ John 14:27.

Then I received news while I was there in the airport that Helen Hodge's 80 plus year old father and mother had been in a car accident down at Indianapolis and that Helen's father had not survived. So finally I was able to board that plane out of Raleigh to Indianapolis and I had been already in communication with Helen's husband Charlie and was talking to him about what was going on and how we could serve them and all that sort of thing. And we are going to get back to Indy about, I don't know, about 10, 10:30, something like that. And I asked them if it would be ok if I just stopped by the hospital, because Charlie's wife's Helen's mom was in the hospital. She had been injured in the accident but was still there in the hospital where her husband had died earlier that day and I wanted to be with the family if I possibly could.

So they said, "Sure. Come on. We would be delighted if you would be... don't worry about that time."

And so I finally got down there to the hospital. It was 10, 10:30, something like that. Found the room and Helen's mom was able to communicate fairly well and she told me that she and her husband had started the day out just like a regular day. They had gone to their doctor's appointments that morning together and then when they were finished with their doctor's appointments they went out for a great meal at Cracker Barrel and then were leaving Cracker Barrel and right there at one of the intersections her husband had some sort of a medical emergency and kind of slumped over, but his body also stiffened at the same time and his foot hit the accelerator. And so their car lunged forward. And thankfully no other pedestrians were involved in the accident, but they careened off a couple of parked cars and eventually hit a tree and Helen's father passed away as a result of his injuries in the hospital later on that day.

What was amazing about that story and that scene in the hospital was the great amount of peace that was there. It was incredible. As I am talking with Helen's mom, I am talking with Helen and Charlie and their other family members who were gathered there as a result of that incredible tragedy, yet the room was filled with peace. In fact, I don't know if this makes sense or not. I want to be sure I am saying it correctly, but it was an amazingly delightful visit. It really was.

Do you know what made all the difference in the world? It was this. The fact that Helen's father knew Christ, that long ago he had been justified, that long ago he had made peace with God through the shed blood of Jesus Christ and in this case it wasn't just living peace. It was dying peace as well.

I would ask every person here today. Has there ever been a time when you have been justified? You started out kind of a regular day, right? It is raining. That is regular. You came to the church house. Hopefully that is regular. You might even go to Cracker... probably there is going to be no business done at Cracker Barrel today. Just a regular day. Have you trusted Christ as Savior and Lord? Have you allowed the God of heaven and earth, the all righteous judge to make a declaration about you, to declare you righteous because of what you believed Christ could and would do for you?

Friend, if you have never done that, I would invite you to do that right now. Right now in the quietness of this moment while you have the opportunity to do so, why would you not accept the gift that was planned by God like this? And, Christian friend, I would remind you as we are talking about ειρηνη (i-ray'-nay), this is a peace that you have to cultivate every day. At some point you have to develop the kind of peaceful relationship with God that he initiated for you in Christ if you trusted him. The day after I prepared this message Debbie Costa passed away, such a faithful servant at Vision of Hope. Her husband Tony the director of our facilities here, such a delightful couple. And if you know anything about the way that Debbie and Tony have handled that illness, you know they have responded with incredible ειρηνη (i-ray'-nay), incredible peace. If this is God's will for us, we will kiss the hand of his sweet sovereignty. How in the world could you get to that place?

And pastor Gray, who would be Debbie's brother-in-law who was on our staff for a period of time and is now planting a church out in Massachusetts participated in the service yesterday and he gave us one of the hints to that. He said, "I was just looking at Debbie's bedroom and found a basket filled with hundreds and hundreds of memory verse cards where Debbie just had as part of her life memorizing the Word of God."

"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."⁷

See, that is one of the benefits of being a follower of Jesus Christ, one of the benefits of justification is ειρηνη (i-ray'-nay), peace with God. And it is not some wimpy peace that can get you through on a happy day. It is a kind of deep peace with the Lord that can get you through the most severe trial of life and we have had definite proof of that to this church family within the last week.

Now the text also says:

"... into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God."⁸

Instead of doubt and uncertainty. See, try to be justified by law on the basis of your own merit is this endless treadmill of performance and worry about whether or not you have done enough to stay on this positive side of the ledger. But if you have been declared righteous by God himself on the basis of the finished work of his Son, now your stand before him and your stand before others is pure grace. That was the point of the old hymn. Do you remember this? My faith is built, my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the solid rock I stand, not my own works, not the opinions of other people. On Christ the solid rock I stand. All other ground is sinking sand.

It is one of the main reasons, by the way, that we believe in the eternal security of a Christian's salvation. It is because our justification is not based on our own work. Thank

⁷ Psalm 119:11.

⁸ Ibid.

God for that. It is based on his. That means we could knock, off the striving for the approval of man. See, think carefully about that phrase. This grace in which I stand. If that stand is secure and the declaration of righteousness is final, then why let other people judge you by some unbiblical standard? Living for the approval of man is a powerful idol and it is a waste of time. I have to look a certain way. I have to dress a certain way. I have to talk a certain way, blah, blah, blah. And the harder you run on that treadmill of performance, the faster it goes, huh? Where Scripture says when you have been justified by faith now my stand before God and my stand before others is based purely on his grace. The declaration has been made by God himself.

Still living before the approval of people it would be like if I had walked out of the luggage store the other night and there was some clerk standing there and said, "Wait a minute. You can't leave here with that yet. You know, you have got to 50 more push ups and dust the shelves and wax the floors. Then you can leave." I would have just shown her the receipt and said, "The declaration has already been made by somebody higher up the chain than you." I would have said that with a smile, of course. But when you have people in your life who want to tear you down or your adversary the devil who wants to accuse you before the brethren day and night, blah, blah, blah, you are not good enough by all of these unbiblical standards, delight in your justification and delight in the grace in which you stand if you choose to stand in it. You can say to others, at least in your heart and maybe even with your voice. "I am sorry. Somebody higher up the chain has already declared me righteous. I am going to choose to stand in his grace, thank you very much."

Now there is another side of that ledger. And we are going to talk about it in the coming weeks. I am rapidly running out of time here. But there is a willingness to acknowledge ways you need to change. That is what the next section of the book of Romans is all about and we will get to that when we study sanctification a couple of weeks from now, but you may say, "But wait a minute. We have been talking all morning about how God has already declared me righteous. Why would I ever need to change anything?"

It is important not to confuse positional truth who you are in Christ with practical truth, what you are supposed to do as a result. That is parallel to understanding the gospel indicatives, who you are in Christ and the gospel imperatives, what you choose to do. And in Scripture, understanding positional truth like we have been talking about this morning is what frees us and guides us to apply practical truth.

They say, "What does that have to do with this discussion?"

Well the answer is—and hear this—the reason some people will not admit ways they need to change is because they are afraid admitting imperfection will impact their position before God. But when you understand your justification, that you can be honest about the ways you still need to change today because you know you are not going to lose your salvation by doing so. That is what helps so many people around here be honest and be authentic about the ways we need to get better, because we understand my salvation is not in jeopardy. I am standing in grace. Therefore I can be honest about how I need to change.

We actually, I mentioned those survey results, 700 plus pages of small font of all the comments that we have put together of how we need to get better as a church family. We pushed that out electronically. If you are a part of our email system, you would have received a copy of that. And what we are asking you to do is read through it. Fun. But have ea legal pad next to you because the goal isn't just to read comments. Now we are moving into planning initiatives. So as you read the comments, here is how we need to get better. Begin strategizing and we ought to this. We are creating initiatives off of those surveys and we are asking you to help us with that. And some of you have already got the documents. Some of you have started reading it. And you might say, "Hey, did you know that a lo of people whacked on you about something?" Yeah, I did know that. And so what do you think about that? I think that is fine, because I have ways I need to change. I have ways I haven't arrived. Thank you for not screaming amen to that. But I haven't arrived. And as you are reading you might say, "Well, you know, we said bad things about one another." Well, fine. Don't be threatened by criticism. Be instructed by it. But here is the thing. You can relax. Why? Because your justification has been secured by someone other than you. So if you need to face a way that you need to change, your salvation is not in jeopardy.

C. H. Spurgeon said this about criticism. He said, "Brother, if any man thinks ill of you, do not be angry with him. For you are worse than he thinks you to be. You say if he charges you falsely one some point, yet be satisfied for if he knew you better, he might change the accusation and you would be no gainer by the correction. If you have your moral portrait painted and it is ugly, be satisfied. For it only needs a few blacker touches and it would be still nearer the truth." Exactly, exactly. We are standing in grace. So be honest about how we need to change.

Now lastly let's rejoice in hope. We exalt in the hope of the glory of God. Why? Because we know as justified people we are going to want to love and serve God, not to earn something, not to prove something, but as a natural response to what God has done for us. And there is a huge difference between doing something because you have to and doing something because you want to.

We are finishing this serve 13 emphasis where we are recruiting servants for our children's ministries this summer. And then into the academic year next year as well. I am so glad for the man who have already signed up. Thank you for that. That really lightens the load. And if you have not yet gotten around to that, we really want to encourage you to help us get across the finish line today. We want to spend less time recruiting and more time just working on the quality of what it is that we do in children's ministries. But the persons who have already signed up to serve in that way, why did they do it? Not to earn their salvation, not to get something from the Lord and it is a delightful freeing thing when you are standing in grace and you have hope in your heart and now you are serving him because you want to.

Well, let's just conclude by reminding ourselves of the history. How long has God been planning to treat you in this fashion? That is right, before the foundation of the world.

You know, I can imagine the management training program at that store where I bought my luggage. At some point I assume they made a plan to treat their customers better than they expected. And you better believe the next time I need to buy something which is going to be Christmas, where do you think I am going to go to shop? Yeah, right there. No question about that. And what tells you is their plan works, their plan worked.

Well, God made a plan, too, to declare us righteous through the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is the kind of God we choose to love, huh? And that is the kind of God we choose to serve.