



United Methodist Church OF GENEVA

Grace in Country Music - Beer with Jesus

A sermon by Pastor Rob Hamilton

Delivered on August 14, 2022 on Ephesians 2:1-9 NIRV

You were living in your sins and lawless ways. But in fact you were dead. 2 You used to live as sinners when you followed the ways of this world. You served the one who rules over the spiritual forces of evil. He is the spirit who is now at work in those who don't obey God. 3 At one time we all lived among them. Our desires were controlled by sin. We tried to satisfy what they wanted us to do. We followed our desires and thoughts. God was angry with us like he was with everyone else. That's because of the kind of people we all were. 4 But God loves us deeply. He is full of mercy. 5 So he gave us new life because of what Christ has done. He gave us life even when we were dead in sin. God's grace has saved you. 6 God raised us up with Christ. He has seated us with him in his heavenly kingdom. That's because we belong to Christ Jesus. 7 He has done it to show the riches of his grace for all time to come. His grace can't be compared with anything else. He has shown it by being kind to us. He was kind to us because of what Christ Jesus has done. 8 God's grace has saved you because of your faith in Christ. Your salvation doesn't come from anything you do. It is God's gift. 9 It is not based on anything you have done. No one can brag about earning it.

Prelude

Hi! I'm Rob Hamilton, Senior Pastor at UMCG and I am glad you've taken time out of our day to share in worship together. We're in a series on our Wesleyan understanding of God's grace and how we can see God's grace in country music.

A few definitions: When I talk about grace I am speaking about God's unconditional, never-ending, unmerited love for all humankind. As United Methodists we believe God loves everyone period. There is no qualification, nothing you have to do to earn God's love, and unlike blueberry pie that runs out with that last slice, God's love is so abundant that it never runs out. And yes God's loves everyone, no matter what. Yes, even you and me.

John Wesley the accidental founder of Methodism teaches how the scriptures demonstrate God's prevent grace. **Prevenient grace is God's grace that pursues**



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us even before we know, recognize or accept it. Last week's sermon and song The Little Girl helped us better understand the first stage or experience of God's grace.

Today's message is on the second or next experience of God's grace called justifying grace and we have a Thomas Rhett song, Beer with Jesus, to help us bring home the next stage of our Wesleyan understanding of grace.

I'm eager to get to it, so let's pray together.

Prayer of Illumination

Jesus,

Sometimes it doesn't seem right that we can call you friend. After all we have done, all that we fail to do, you still want to be our friend even when we're not the best of friends to you. In this time of engaging scripture come along side us and help us to see and know that which would help us be the kind of friend you are to us.

Amen.

Sermon

I want to begin by talking more about God's love. I've already said that God loves without us needing to earn it, ask for it, or even wanting to be loved by God. That's because **God is love**. God created out of love. God loves us enough to allow us to reject God's love, rebel against God's love, live in ignorance of God's love; but also God's love transforms, empowers, propels, comforts, convicts us to act - or love- more like God.

All of this is God's action. God taking the initiative. When John Wesley realized this he began to see a pattern. First, there is prevenient grace. This first stage or way of experiencing God's grace. Prevenient grace is God loving us before we know it or accept it. This is God pursuing us. It's really only in hindsight that we can look back on our lives and see how God has been at work in our lives, trying to love us into relationship with God.

Why does God do this? Why does God love like this? Why won't God give up or take a hint for those who don't want to be loved by God. Well, I already said it's God's very nature to love. But there is something more. God created us as an act of love. God wants to be in relationship with us and that's the purpose of life: To be in relationship with God. Think of it like this: when a parent or parents are estranged from their children, be it by death, rejection, separation, illness that estrangement hurts. There is a wound there; sometimes only one is wounded. Sometimes its both or many. The only thing that can really heal that wound or fill that hole in our lives is being with that parent or child again in a healthy way in



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having the estrangement end. Sometimes that isn't possible and so it hurts indefinitely. But in many circumstances doesn't mean you stop loving the person from which you are estranged. That's how it is with God and us.

Sin estranges us from God. Sin is the stuff we think, say or do that separates us from a relationship with God. Sin can be systems and powers in society too that seek to make us strangers with God or other human beings. Sin is active even if we've already come to love to accept God's love and live in relationship with God. Many times we don't even see the sin in our lives. As Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians which Carol read for us today: *"You were living in your sins and lawless ways. But in fact you were dead. 2 You used to live as sinners when you followed the ways of this world. You served the one who rules over the spiritual forces of evil. He is the spirit who is now at work in those who don't obey God. 3 At one time we all lived among them. Our desires were controlled by sin. We tried to satisfy what they wanted us to do. We followed our desires and thoughts. God was angry with us like he was with everyone else. That's because of the kind of people we all were."* Paul makes it clear that all of us sin. All of us have been -or are- estranged from God.

But because of how great and deep God's love is for us, God won't let sin keep us estranged from God. Paul says we can be physically alive, but so estranged from God that we miss the whole point of living; it's like we're dead while still living. Now God doesn't want us to be the walking dead, so God's pursues us in love. As Paul continues in verse 4 of this letter to Ephesians, he says: *"But God loves us deeply. He is full of mercy. 5 So he gave us new life because of what Christ has done. He gave us life even when we were dead in sin. God's grace has saved you. 6 God raised us up with Christ. He has seated us with him in his heavenly kingdom. That's because we belong to Christ Jesus. 7 He has done it to show the riches of his grace for all time to come. His grace can't be compared with anything else. He has shown it by being kind to us. He was kind to us because of what Christ Jesus has done. 8 God's grace has saved you because of your faith in Christ. Your salvation doesn't come from anything you do. It is God's gift. 9 It is not based on anything you have done. No one can brag about earning it."*

When we accept God's relentless and unmerited love. When we wake up and realize that God loves us no matter what we've done or what we have failed to do. When we finally accept this love- this amazing grace- in our lives, we enter a new stage of grace (or we experience grace in a new way) called justification.

Justification is when we realize it is because of God's love for us that we can



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be in relationship with God. Being in relationship with God is the purpose of life, so we can be alive and finally experience the life that is truly life... now... long before death. This, again, is God's doing; God's gift for all people. In accepting the gift we can relate to God, **just-as-if -I had never sinned**. That's a good way to remember justification or justifying grace - its just-as-if I have never sinned. -

So what does justification have to do with having a beer with Jesus. Heck some might even consider having a beer to be a sin. Well, I think Thomas Rhett can paint for us one example of what justification looks like - [click here to watch a lyric video of Beer With Jesus.](#)

Did you catch it? Was it painfully obvious or plainly hidden from sight? Justification is being in enough relationship with Jesus that you can sit with him and converse. Hang out with Jesus, like you might consider hanging out with a friend. Go to place that makes you feel comfortable and where you could spend quality time together with little distraction. Justification is being good enough friends with Jesus that you could have a good time listening to your favorite tunes and lose track of time. Justification is being able to share the deepest yearnings of your heart and the questions on your mind with him.... like how'd you turn the other cheek? or save a sorry soul like me? Have you been there from the start? How'd you change a sinner's heart? And is heaven really just beyond the stars? Justification can look like having a beer with Jesus. Because justification is really about accepting the invitation to be in a real relationship with Jesus - a relationship founded on our acceptance of the gift of God's love found in Christ - as Paul says.

Now I don't know about you, but sometimes even after I accepted God's gift of justifying grace in the the fall of my fourth grade year and experienced justification myself by inviting Jesus into my heart, I find that I have taken God's gift of justification for granted, or even neglected it, sometimes even rejecting it. It seems that even despite my best efforts my heart is prone to wander. Leaving the God I love, for a life of sin and death because I've some how estranged myself from God.

If you've been prone to wander like me or if you've never really accepted the gift of God's justifying grace, here's the good news: "God loves us deeply. God is full of mercy." So if you're willing and want to live right with God, to accept the offer to be in the kind of relationship where you can have a beer with Jesus, if you want to once again bind your wandering heart to him - then all you have to do is pray with me now:



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Jesus, I'm sorry for the ways I've lived for myself and have neglected and rejected the love you have offered to me again and again. Lord, I don't want to be estranged from you any longer. If you're still offering the gift of living with you just as if I have never sinned, I'll take you up on it. Come into my heart and life. I can't promise that I'll always be as in love with you as you are with me, but I'm willing to try and I want to be loved by you. So here is my heart Lord Jesus. Take it and seal it and by your grace bind it to your heart forever. Amen.