



United Methodist Church OF GENEVA

Grace in Country Music - Like Jesus Does

A sermon by Pastor Rob Hamilton

Delivered on August 21, 2022 on James 2:14-26 The Message

14-17 Dear friends, do you think you'll get anywhere in this if you learn all the right words but never do anything? Does merely talking about faith indicate that a person really has it? For instance, you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved and say, "Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the Holy Spirit!" and walk off without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup—where does that get you? Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense? 18 I can already hear one of you agreeing by saying, "Sounds good. You take care of the faith department, I'll handle the works department." Not so fast. You can no more show me your works apart from your faith than I can show you my faith apart from my works. Faith and works, works and faith, fit together hand in glove. 19-20 Do I hear you professing to believe in the one and only God, but then observe you complacently sitting back as if you had done something wonderful? That's just great. Demons do that, but what good does it do them? Use your heads! Do you suppose for a minute that you can cut faith and works in two and not end up with a corpse on your hands? 21-24 Wasn't our ancestor Abraham "made right with God by works" when he placed his son Isaac on the sacrificial altar? Isn't it obvious that faith and works are yoked partners, that faith expresses itself in works? That the works are "works of faith"? The full meaning of "believe" in the Scripture sentence, "Abraham believed God and was set right with God," includes his action. It's that mesh of believing and acting that got Abraham named "God's friend." Is it not evident that a person is made right with God not by a barren faith but by faith fruitful in works? 25-26 The same with Rahab, the Jericho harlot. Wasn't her action in hiding God's spies and helping them escape—that seamless unity of believing and doing—what counted with God? The very moment you separate body and spirit, you end up with a corpse. Separate faith and works and you get the same thing: a corpse.



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Prelude

Hi! I'm Rob Hamilton, Senior Pastor at UMCG and thank you for sharing your time and energy in coming along with me on this exploration of grace found in country music. I hope that not only are you learning about God's grace in your own life, but also learning where to see God's grace active in the world. If you can find grace on the radio, or your playlist, you can find it anywhere. And as we are called to give witness to our faith, we need to be able to see it in order to share it with others. So I hope this series helps to these ends. If you want to see where we've been check out our [UMCGeneva YouTube page](#), but here is a summary:

When we talk about God's grace we're talking about how God loves us - everybody really. And this love God has for us - is unconditional. You can't earn it, you can't lose it, you can reject it, but God is always loving on us. That's because when it comes to grace, God is the one taking the initiative, even if we don't believe in God. God is there seeking to love us, so that we might come to accept God's love for ourselves and enter into a right relationship with God. It's this kind of amazing love that John Wesley, our Methodism's founder, has called:

prevenient grace - God loving us before we know it and we saw how this is true in the song about the little girl who had never been to church or learned about Jesus, but when she went to Sunday school for the first time recognized Jesus as the one who was beside her in some of her darkest times.

It's in Jesus we can see the breadth and depth of God's love. Jesus is willing to suffer and die for us so that sin wouldn't keep us from a relationship with God. We see in Jesus how not even death can separate us from the love of God, because of how Jesus is raised into new, eternal life, we too can share in that new life. This gift of new life makes it so that we can live like its just-as-if-I had never sinned.

Justification or justifying grace is where we accept God's love in Christ so that we can have a real relationship with Jesus. The kind of relationship where you'd be able to sit and have a beer with Jesus. If beer isn't your thing, have an ice cream cone, go for a bike ride, drink a cup of coffee or glass of iced tea and share what's on your heart and mind and let Jesus do that same with you.

So this is where we've been so far in this series. These are also the ways in which or the stages in which we encounter God's grace. **First, God's grace pursues us. Then we accept it. Next, it God's grace transforms us.** The term we use to talk about this transformation God lovingly works in our lives is called



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sanctification or sanctifying grace. Most of the New Testament and much of the Old Testament tells the stories of how God's love transforms the lives of individuals and entire communities. Today, James, the brother of Jesus, is going to tell us how this sanctifying grace works upon our lives and Dave Ramont is going to sing Eric Church's 'Like Jesus Does' as an illustration of sanctification and I hope to tie it all together so that we are open to God's sanctifying work in our lives. - Let's pray for God's help in doing all of that:

Prayer of Illumination

Jesus,

You are our Lord. Thank you for coming into our lives to save us. Save us not just from sin and death. Save us from complacency. Save us from insurance policy theology - that if we simply believe in you that we've arrived and will be ok now and in the life hereafter. By your Spirit, convict me and those who hear this message of how your grace works in our lives beyond making us like we've never sinned. Amen.

Sermon

I said last week that the purpose of life is to live in relationship with God. I say this because it's all throughout the bible. God created the Garden of Eden, put Adam and Eve in there, but that's not the end of the story. God didn't put this whole created world in order and simply ignore it. God spent time with Adam and Eve in the garden. Walking. Talking. Growing together. In a real relationship. King David spoke with God like talking with a friend - read the psalms to see him share his joys, ask God questions, complain to God. David would listen for God; even give thanks to God. James the author of our scripture lesson today talks about Abraham being God's friend because he not only believed in God, but that Abraham's life was lived as one whose life was being transformed or changed because of the relationship with God. Abraham's faith and behavior changed because of the loving relationship between God and Abraham. This is true of Rahab, James says. It's also true to the disciples, of Paul, and of the people in this room. Through these people, we can see it is not enough to just have faith. It's not enough to accept Jesus into your heart as your Lord and Savior and stop there. This is because Jesus is not some amulet you wear around your neck; putting it on when it seems fashionable or taking it off when you don't want to have a relationship with Jesus. Jesus, instead, is your friend who loves you. If you are truly letting Jesus love you, then your life will change.



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That's what our song by Eric Church is about. Dave is going to tune up and play it for us: as I have done each week, you can find the words to the song in your programs/bulletins or screen if you want to follow along. [Click here to listen.](#)

Like Jesus Does as performed by Eric Church

*I'm a long gone Waylon song on vinyl
I'm a back row center at a tent revival
But she believes in me like she believes her Bible
And loves me like Jesus does
I'm a lead foot leaning on a souped up Chevy
I'm a good ol' boy, drinkin' whiskey and rye on the levee
But she carries me when my sins make me heavy
And loves me like Jesus does
All the crazy in my dreams
And both my broken wings
Every single piece of everything I am
And she knows the man I ain't
She forgives me when I can't
The devil, man, no, he don't stand a chance
'Cause she loves me like Jesus does*

*I always thought she'd give up on me one day
Wash her hands of me, leave me staring down some runway
But I thank God each night and twice on Sunday
That she loves me like Jesus does
All the crazy in my dreams
And both my broken wings
Every single piece of who I am
Yeah, she knows the man I ain't
She forgives me when I can't
And the devil, man, no, he don't have a prayer
'Cause she loves me like Jesus does
Yeah, she knows the man I ain't
She forgives me when I can't
That devil, man, he don't stand a chance
She loves me like Jesus does
I'm a long gone Waylon song on vinyl
Songwriters: Casey Beathard / Monty Criswell. Like Jesus Does lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Spirit Music Group.*

Now this song is more about the love of a woman for a man, then it is about Jesus, but don't dismiss the sanctification going on in this song. The woman in the song, is living a sanctified life. I know this because you can't truly love some one like Jesus loves someone if you don't know the love of Jesus for yourself. You can certainly live a good morale life and you can love very deeply - all without Jesus. But you can't love like Jesus does, filled with self-sacrificing grace, because that something only God does through us. Sometimes God will even love others through us preveniently, without our awareness of God doing so. We might think it is our own action, but it is really God at work as an act of prevenient grace.

The man Eric Church describes, notes how his life is changed because of how the woman in the song has loved him. Church uses language of justification speak for himself, but the transformation that happens because of that love is God's sanctifying grace active in the man's life.



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Think of sanctifying grace in terms of the following relationships: 17 years ago last month, Meghan and I celebrated our wedding anniversary. I am not the same person I was 17 years ago. Our relationship is not the same as it was 17 years ago. Because of God's grace, I have -and together we have- grown in our love. If our relationship plateaued at the altar, these rings, our vows, would have little meaning today; it would be a memory fading in the distance. Life and love is so much richer now that we've lived life with all its ups and downs together. I'm excited to see what each and every new day brings because of how our love grows as a couple and as individuals - all in the grace of God.

Maybe you've experienced the same thing. Maybe not in a marriage, but perhaps in a friendship. I have friendships that have transformed me and the friendship has transformed over the years too.

We can think of our experience of grace this way: **Justifying grace is God saving us from sin and death. Sanctifying grace saves us for a life shaped by grace in the world.** Sanctifying grace is what gives the growth in our relationship with God and others through faith and works (service).

So how does sanctification happen? As United Methodists we experience a life shaped by sanctifying grace in four ways - just like James explains as a combination of faith and works.



**MEANS
OF
GRACE**

There are the ways God shapes our personal life by grace God's grace. shapes us I hope I have made it clear that this is God's work in us, not our own doing. Sanctifying grace works in us as: Acts of worship include things like going to church and receiving the sacrament of communion. Acts of devotion are those private times of worship that include activities like private prayer

and Bible study help us love God more deeply and strengthen our personal holiness or as James would say our 'faith'. Then God's sanctifying grace is also shapes our social life together or our "works" as James would say. As United Methodists we see this as acts of compassion like feeding the hungry or building hospitals and acts of justice like working to eliminate racism and advocating for the poor and marginalized.



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So again if **justifying grace saves us from sin and death, sanctifying grace saves us for a life shaped by grace in the world.** This is our very mission as United Methodists: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world - or as I am growing fond of saying: God's in the business of transforming lives and transforming the world and at UMCG.

So consider your life. Look back upon it. Do you see how God's love has changed you? Do you see how God's love in you has been spread to others? If you haven't or can't; don't worry. Jesus loves you. Just ask him in and to start to sanctify your life. You can do so today by praying with me. Let's pray: