

Victory of the Lamb - Christmas Eve 2018

Isaiah 42:1-8 What if . . . you really were accepted?! - Pastor Bill Limmer

Merry Christmas. Question for you: Has your Christmas tree ever fallen? . . . Asking for a friend. I was so ticked off. That was not going to happen to me. We put the frozen partially snow covered tree in the living room, in the stand that I had to go buy because the trunk was too big for the one we had. Already not happy. While we were letting the tree warm up and spread out, we were eating a nice warm supper when crash. The tree tipped over dropping its water with that tree preserver stuff in it on the carpet along with sticky tree sap. Fail. I don't know if you have ever felt like I did but Troy does. Troy's Christmas Tree fell a week ago smashing the kids ornaments from Walt Disney World and their honeymoon ornament from St. Martens. It could be worse Epic Christmas Fail. Joseph not calling ahead for reservations. Epic fail the innkeeper not opening his home to God. Fail.

Christmas aside, any falls or fails in your life? Tracy, like Mary, was young, unmarried, pregnant and afraid. She wanted to keep the baby but . . . that is where the similarities stopped. Tracy's parents were adamant that keeping the baby was not a good idea. Fearful, weeping, hesitant, in a thick fog, she did what she knew was wrong. And now she is haunted by a skeleton in her closet? Do you have any skeletons? You know what I am talking about right, Books I have read, Lies I have told, Jokes I have laughed at, Things I have muttered under my breath, Lustful thoughts, things I did, things I wanted to do, bad attitudes that I have nurtured and justified. Guilt is tough. We hate not only what we have said, thought and done but who we are. We hate guilt so much that some deny that sins separate and break people.

We don't have the ability to wipe our human heart clean. Our hearts can't be settled by alcohol or drugs. Our hearts' angst can't be managed by comparing ourselves to someone who is "worse," the woman in the office who cheats with her best friend's husband, or the abusive husband. We can't cover up the blotches on our hearts with good works. We are left to think our choice, our mistake, our sin is too great to be accepted. And so we punish ourselves with extra duties, prayers or guilt. Some of you are going really, that works? I haven't tried that! But guilt can never pay for our sins, our guilt doesn't add value to Christ's work. In Ryan's story he felt the increasing grip of guilt and hopelessness, as does anyone who struggles with reoccurring sin and all who have not lived up what they know is right. People sometimes think that God doesn't want anything to do with them because of what they've done and become, what has been done to them, what they look like.

I have great news for you today. Your sin and all your sins put together are not greater than the gift of Jesus. While sin separates and crushes, Jesus unites and comforts. Isaiah 42:1,3 **"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. . . A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.** This is a foretelling of the Savior of the world who would bring grace. Grace is undeserved love, God's riches at Christ's expense. What grace means is that Jesus will not throw away any down and out person.

When it comes to Jesus and grace, the issue isn't whether we feel worthy of the gift. We aren't. Whether we feel guilty or not, we are guilty. The issue isn't the size or the number. Even "so called" good people are separated from God by nature and by choice. Jesus is for you, no matter what you've done, no matter what other people have done to you, no matter what you have thought or what other people have thought about you. Jesus is for you even if your life has come undone. It is ok to not be ok. Jesus accepts you - now, right now. We don't

get cleaned up and then Jesus is for us. In the messiness of our heart's and lives, Jesus is for you no matter how you are broken. physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually or hiding your wounds.

Be clear, Jesus didn't come into the world to put a band-aid on cuts, he came to live and die not only for our childish sins but for our real great, grieving and shocking sins. Christ came to be the real Savior for people who really need to be accepted by God, for real sinners.

The guilt you feel on a day to day basis is not God pushing you away. That is what Satan is trying to get you to feel but it is God pulling you close. It is God wrapping his arms around you. Romans 8:33-34 **Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.** ³⁴ **Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.** This Christmas Eve, know that God is calling you, holding you, praying for you, accepting you even with your doubts. Jesus is exactly what you and I need, what our hearts and minds and souls need.

Let me share with a Christmas passage. It comes from a guy who persecuted the Christian church. He literally thought that Jesus was a liar and a lunatic. But because God doesn't give up on anyone, this man came to believe that Jesus was neither liar nor lunatic but Lord. And he set off to share the truth of Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection with the whole world. And yet this is how describes his life - **the good I want to do, I don't do. The evil that I don't want to do this I keep on doing.** Know anyone else like that who says I am a fake a phony, not enough, I am defective, unworthy, unlovable. So does God accept him and us? Yes. God shows his acceptance of us by joyfully and lovingly forgiving us our sins. Some of you needed to be reminded of this and some of you are so relieved to hear this for the first time.

You see, while our sin may pile up higher than the Christmas trees in Times Square, God will not only match it but surpass it with the tree of the ancient cross outside of Jerusalem. Romans 5:20 **Where sin increased - grace increased all the more.** This is why Jesus came - to be our Savior, to wash our sins away. No matter how often we blow it. After you have blown it, you can turn away from God or you can listen to the Holy Spirit and turn to God and be forgiven again.

Isaiah 42:6,7 **"I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, ⁷ to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.** What this means is there is this gift waiting to be opened. Some of you are shocked to find this gift for you. Some of you have heard about the gift, talked about the gift, maybe even pulled some the paper off the gift, some of you may have even opened the gift but you have it sitting in the background.

I have a gift to open this Christmas. How about you? Go ahead. Open the gift. Yea, it is too costly for the richest person here to afford, yea you don't deserve it, neither do I, yea, it will change you in ways you don't even know. Jesus is for you. Holy Spirit fill I pray that you move everyone here, and everyone watching live or in the archive, to open and receive the gift of Jesus because through Jesus you have love and acceptance right now. Because of Jesus, your victory starts now!

Prayer: Jesus you are the ultimate and permanent expression of God's grace and glory. You are God who came in the flesh. You have gathered us from the remotest, darkest, deepest

place of sin saying, I have chosen you. You call us by name and we are yours. Comfort us and strengthen us all our days through the good news of loving-acceptance. You and your glory are coming again to receive us into heaven as your forgiven children. Ahh, the wonders of your love. Amen.

Create in me prayer