

The Right Oil in Your Spiritual Engine

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[0 : 0 0] For me, it's an incredible honor that I may be in Scotland, that I may be in Edinburgh, that I may be in that place where John Knox used to call out to the people that a new church was needed.

And so I would like to give thanks for your faithfulness and give thanks that right here in the middle of Edinburgh, you're carrying on the great work of the Gospel of Jesus.

For reasons we didn't quite understand, God called Susan and me to Germany and took us out of our Toronto, Canada, a safe home for us.

And actually I grew up in Germany and I have to say that for me, as one who grew up in Germany as one who also spent six years in Austria in my childhood as one who felt more European than he did Canadian when he was young, it was great to come back to Germany.

It's great to come back to Germany because I have to admit there were two reasons why it was just great to come back to Germany. One is football.

[1 : 1 9] Finally, to be able to leave Canada behind where they don't know how to play that good, and precious game. And to come back to the place where Franz Beckenbauer and Gattmuller and all those great guys used to play when I was a kid, that for me was a dream come true.

The second thing is the cars. I love German engineering. I love particularly German engineering when applied to cars.

And when I drive down the Autobahn, 190 kilometres an hour, I give praise to God. But not only we have unlimited or no speed limit in Germany and great sections of the Autobahn, but that we also have cars that can drive that fast.

My car is just a VW. There Derek, don't get excited now. This is actually part of my sermon. I'm not going to stand here for a half hour and talk about VWs.

But my VW is just a simple VW. There are a lot of VWs like my VW. And it's silver if you need to know.

[2 : 2 8] But the thing can really move. It's just a Volkswagen, just a car of the common people. It's not a BMW. It's not an Audi.

And it's not a Mercedes. It's just a VW. But it has a duze pompe in it. And the duze pompe is something special for diesel VWs because the duze pompe is what actually allows there to be this turbo effect.

And so when I first bought this car in 2005, the guy who sold it to me, who's been my mechanic ever since and who's helped me keep this car running now over 300,000 kilometres, keeps telling me and told me then it takes a very special oil because of the duze pompe, this pump that allows for the turbo.

And I have great pickup on the Autobahn. I can zoom past, I even zoom past BMWs because they drive, because people are driving a BMW that don't know how to.

And so my VW is going past them. But the thing with this oil, I need to get to this oil, that he says is the important thing about the oil is it's an oil that is made for the duze pompe.

[3 : 54] And it costs twice as much as all the other car oils. And it drives me crazy because every time I have to go buy this oil, it just costs so much.

But it allows that engine with the duze pompe and the turbo effect to function nice and smoothly and I really get on well on the Autobahn.

And every time I buy that costly oil, I'm reminded of the fact that our spiritual lives are no different than my VW. Because it takes actually a very special oil, if you will, a spiritual oil to keep your and my spiritual life running.

And if we don't get the right spiritual oil into our lives, I don't care if your background is Asian or Caucasian or Buddhist or Muslim or Christian or Jewish or whatever.

We're all made the same. And we all have the same kind of soul that desires and actually demands a specific kind of spiritual life.

[5 : 09] And what I've discovered over the years and what I'm discovering more and more in the Scriptures of God is that God has made available for us a certain spiritual oil that keeps the spiritual engines of our souls running well.

And if you get the wrong oil into your soul, your soul will be like my VW with the wrong oil. It will come to a grinding halt.

It will not have the ability in it to speed up when it needs to speed up and to maneuver through all of the challenges that lie before us and beside us and the things that are behind us that wish to come up and ruin us.

You need the right spiritual oil in your life. And that's what I want to talk about with you this morning. And that's why I want to come to you to this passage Romans 117, that the gospel, the gospel is the oil that enables your spiritual life to run effectively.

It's just that simple and yet it's not simple at all. When we come to Romans 117, we come to that verse in the Bible that was actually the catalyst for a complete revolution in Europe.

[6 : 38] Because in 1517, a Catholic monk was studying this verse. And when Martin Luther realized what this verse was saying, the lights went on in his head and in his heart and the Reformation began.

And so we're coming to this verse today to bathe ourselves in its meaning and the message from God and try to understand what it means to have the right spiritual oil in your life that will make the engine of your spiritual life run effectively.

Because here Paul writes, for in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, the righteous will live by faith.

The gospel is the oil that enables your spiritual life to run effectively. So the first thing that I want us to take out of this passage is the understanding, if you would follow with me, regardless of whether you would describe yourself today as a Christian or as someone who's perhaps still seeking and not quite there, I want you to understand that what is being said here first of all is that the gospel communicates to you the perfect righteousness you so desperately need.

Paul has repeatedly already spoken of the gospel in the first 16 verses here. You might notice that he begins in verse one by saying that he has been set apart for the gospel of God.

[8 : 30] That in verse two he says it's regarding his son and then repeats later on that it is about the gospel verse nine, the gospel of his son, the son of God.

And then in verse 15, that is why I am so eager to preach the gospel. And then in verse 16, I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

And now he explains why. Why is the gospel, this little word with so much packed inside of it, why is it the central thing of the Christian life, of any spiritual life for that matter?

Why is it in the gospel? He says in verse 17, for in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed.

Perhaps the question we would like to ask ourselves at this point and perhaps that you would like to ask the author is so what is so important about the righteousness of God being in the gospel?

[9 : 43] Why do we even need a righteousness from God? The answer is, as a friend of mine has taught me to say, that the problem with every one of us is, quote, that in and of myself I am more sinful than I ever dared to believe.

And being more sinful than I ever dared to believe means that I am actually in a hopeless situation before a holy God.

The hopeless situation was as the prophet Isaiah once wrote in Isaiah 64, verse 6, hundreds of years before Christ.

The gospel, according to Isaiah, already said, all of us have become like one who is unclean. And all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.

Filthy rags. Luther understood it like this. He said, if I who am one with a sinful nature, if I do good works, my good works, my good deeds come out of a sinful nature.

[11 : 14] That means that my good deeds are actually sinfully done. They're not perfectly done. There's no perfect righteousness in my deeds.

Somewhere in my heart it's off. Perhaps it's my pride. Perhaps it's some selfish motivation.

Perhaps it's the desire for personal gain. Whatever it is, I cannot do a good deed without it coming from a sinful heart. And what that means is that every good deed is a sinful good deed.

If every good deed is a sinful good deed, then that actually means that everything that I do and even do well, that is a sinfully well done deed, is therefore in the eyes of the perfect righteousness of God, just one more sinful deed added to another sinful deed.

And what every deed and good work therefore means is that instead of making the distance between God and His righteousness and holiness and myself in my unrighteousness and sinfulness smaller with every good deed, because it's a sinful good deed, I'm actually making the distance even greater.

[12 : 34] And so Luther once cried out, and the more I tried, the worse it got. And that's our hopelessness.

But in and of myself I am more sinful than I ever dared to believe. And no matter how good I try to look, it's always going to be before a holy and righteous and perfect God no more than a filthy rag.

And this is where the Gospel of Isaiah then shouts out to us this grand news where in Isaiah 61 verse 10 he says, I delight greatly in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God, for He has clothed me, and we're thinking, oh, we are wearing filthy rags.

And it says, for He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness. As a bride groom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

So what happens is, as theologians like to refer to it as the great exchange, is that when Jesus Christ died on the cross, this is what was going on.

[13 : 54] In that, if you will, allow me to say it like this existential moment, in that moment where it was a historic thing, He actually died on the cross, but in the moment that I entrust myself with all of my unrighteousness to Him, something happens at the cross.

All of my unrighteousness and sin go over on Christ, and all of His perfect righteousness goes over on me.

Luther called it the alien righteousness, because it is not my own, because it comes from way out there, because it comes from the perfect God Himself, who in His mercy says, I'll take all your sin and unrighteousness, I'll take your filthy rags, I'll wear them at the cross, I'll put them on myself, I'll be judged and condemned by a holy God for them and in your place. Here, wear the perfect righteousness, my garment, the prince and the pauper.

The prince becomes the pauper, and the pauper's become like the prince, and we become the righteousness of His perfection.

It becomes our garment. And now when God the Father looks upon us, having gone through this great exchange in that moment of faith, He looks upon us and says, my goodness, you are wearing the perfect righteousness of my son.

[15 : 39] You are wearing my own glory that I so love, and I love you. I love you with the full passion of the love with which I love the Son of God Himself.

And so suddenly you and I can say, yes, while it is true, that in and of myself I am more sinful than I ever dared to believe, in Christ I am more loved than I ever dared to hope.

And some of you are saying, oh, let me write that down. Okay, I'll say it again. Here it is. In and of myself I am more sinful than I ever dared to believe, but in Christ I am more loved than I ever dared to hope.

And if you still don't have it, you can buy it in my book that I brought along on spiritual life called Smart Builder, and I repeat it in there many times.

But this is what happens. The gospel communicates the perfect righteousness that you so desperately need, and when it does, you are now suddenly free, free to not have to prove what actually every religion in this world is all about, trying to prove that you're good enough for God's approval.

[17 : 05] And now through the gospel you're suddenly free of this. You don't have to prove ever anything. Christ proved it all. You don't have to do anything to gain the Father's approval. Christ gained it all. You don't have to try harder. You don't have to make your Christian life one of trying harder to please God because Christ tried and succeeded in gaining the pleasure of God for you and for me.

And so that's why Paul writes in verse 17, for in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed. The gospel communicates the perfect righteousness you desperately need. And if you're sitting here today and you're saying, you know, I have sensed that actually my rebellion or my anti-God thinking has been all about trying to keep him at arm's length because I'm scared of what it might look like if a great holy God suddenly appears before me who has some things in his life that aren't quite so nice, then the good news for you today is you can open your heart and faith to Jesus Christ. He's the only one in all the history of mankind, the only one in all the history of godly thinking. He's the only one who has done anything about your situation and he's the only one who's able to do anything about your situation and mine. And the situation now is because he's done it, because he's taken care of it. The gospel says to you, open your heart, trust and entrust yourself to Christ and you will have a standing before God the Father dressed in perfect righteousness. Even though you can still and must still say within yourself, I am more sinful than ever, dare to believe that God the Father completely accepts you the way you are and passionately loves you on the basis of the righteousness of Christ. Open your heart to him today. And then the second thing that the text tells us, not only that the gospel communicates the perfect righteousness you desperately need, but that the gospel empowers you to live out the righteousness you graciously received. The gospel empowers you to live out the righteousness you graciously received. Now one of the Bible translations that I brought along with me today is, says in verse 17, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last. The more literal translation is the righteousness that is from faith to faith, from faith to faith, or from one moment of trusting Christ to the very next moment of trusting Christ. And what Paul here is saying is that this is now what the Christian life becomes. It's not a matter of trying harder, trying harder, trying harder, but it's a matter of trusting in Christ. And in the next moment, trusting in Christ again, in the next moment, trusting in Christ and

His work again. What does that mean? What does it mean that the whole Christian life now becomes one of trusting in the righteousness of Christ to cover you before God? It means that you now go from moment to moment in your spiritual walk, not trusting in your own righteousness, but trusting in the righteousness that God has in His grace, dressed you in the righteousness of Christ. See, there are two kinds of Christianity, if you will. There is moralistic Christianity and actually in every one of our hearts there is this drive towards moralistic Christianity, because in the pride of our nature, we're all like the Pharisees. We all want to prove that our own righteousness is good enough for God to look upon us and say, you're good enough. I love you this way. And so moralistic Christianity is trying to keep my own righteousness intact. In a moralistic Christianity or in a moralistic church that is driven by a moralistic

Christianity, what is really important is what others think of me, how others perceive the way I am living my Christian life. Image is everything. I want others to be able to approve of me and the way I live. And of course, what that results in is, because I want others to approve of me, when I see someone who isn't doing quite as well as I'm doing, then it's easy for me to sort of look down on that person, because that way I can feel good about myself.

When I criticize that person, I can feel good about myself, and I can say, you know what? In the end, my righteousness is actually better than his righteousness. So I'm a step closer to God's approval than they are. That's moralistic Christianity. And what we end up doing in this moralistic Christianity is we try harder. We do more good works because we want to prove that we're good working Christians. We want to perform better. We want to prove our own righteousness. But the other kind of Christianity, the real kind of Christianity, the costly oil, the oil that costs God everything that makes our spiritual engines run effectively is a gospel driven Christianity. In the gospel driven Christianity, we are trusting moment by moment in Christ's righteousness to give me full acceptance with God. And so I don't need to prove myself because I know that every time the evidence speaks loud and clear in and of myself, I am more sinful than ever dared to believe. I can say, but oh, praise God, in Christ I am more loved than ever dared to hope. And there's nothing that I can do that God would love me less. And there's nothing I can do that God would love me more. His love is always perfectly and passionately poured out upon me. It is not disrupted one single moment. It doesn't become less in one second than it was the second before. It's always 100 percent because I have the 100 percent perfect righteousness of Christ covering me like a bridal garment. And so now I am free. I am free to honestly face the fact.

[24 : 40] I'm free in this identity that I have that never leaves me, not for even one second, that in Christ I am more loved than ever dared to hope. I am free to face the ugly stuff in my life, the stuff that makes me say every day if I'm honest, in and of myself I'm more sinful than ever dared to believe. I'm now free to face the sins of my life because I know when I say to myself, you know what Beck? You really blew it. Or you did it again.

That when I say that it doesn't mean that I've lost my value, that I've lost my identity, that I've lost the pleasure of God in me. It means that all the while that I'm confessing my sin in Christ I am more loved than ever dared to hope. And now for the first time in my life I am really free to go at the sins in my life that do not conform to the righteousness of Christ with which I've been dressed. And I can ask God to come into my life and to change that part of me, to change those sins and I can do it in the full confidence that the more that I say in and of myself I am more sinful than ever dared to believe. I am actually confessing that Christ's love must be stupendously great because the more sins there are in me for which he had to die, the greater his love must have been to take him to the cross. And so every time I'm confessing my sin I'm actually praising and glorifying the love of Christ that went to the cross for me. You see how free we are? How free we are to get rid of the stuff in our lives that keeps us from becoming the kind of human beings that God intended us originally to be perfectly conformed to the image of Jesus

Christ. And now in this freedom I just honestly face the fact that what really matters is not first of all what my external actions look like, but what's going on in my heart.

That what really matters is not first and foremost the sin that everyone has seen out here that I've committed. But what's the sin behind the sin that has driven me to commit this sin? What was the wrong thinking in my heart? What was the wrong motive in my heart?

And this becomes very practical then for us as this costly oil, the oil that cost God everything is poured into our lives day by day. Let me give you an example. Then I'll give you a second example and then I'm done in case people are starting to worry about the clock. Let's take two Christians who are giving their best. Now what I mean is it might be two Christians who are in university studies and they both have the same homework, the same project to do and they're both going to give it their best. Or let's take two Christians who are at work, both have the same project to do at work, both give their best. Or let's take two Christians who want to give their best and they both agreed to do a particular ministry within the church and both give their best. Now the one Christian who gives his best is driven by moralism. He gives his best because he really wants to look good. He wants to look good to his boss or he wants to look good to his professor or he wants to look good to his pastor or especially those people in the church who keep criticizing him. He wants to look good and so he gives his best and he does well and the end result is a very good deed that many people can praise. The other Christian is driven by the gospel. He feels no need to have to prove himself. He's giving his best because he's just so grateful that day by day by day God approves of him completely the way he is and out of gratitude to God for approving of him due to the perfect righteousness of Christ whether it's in his studies or it's at work or it's in a project in the church. He is going to give his best just to say thank you because you deserve the best from me for giving me such freedom in the righteousness of Christ. And his project ends up looking just as good as the Christians project who was moralistically driven. What you have now is in the end result two things that look exactly the same practiced by two Christians, praised by many, but as far as

[30 : 14] God is concerned this one here that was driven by moralism means absolutely nothing. And this one here God esteems as a good work because it was done from the right heart. It was done from the heart that is not trying to prove its own righteousness but glories in the righteousness of Christ. You see the difference? Let me give you a second example and then I'm done.

This one will really hit home. Two Christians are criticized. Now look, I'm no different than you are. I know we all hate it when somebody comes up to our face and criticizes us for something we've done or not done. Every one of us hates to be criticized. You know why?

Well if you're moralistically driven when someone stands in front of you and criticizes you or somebody like your husband walks into the kitchen and just throws something of a barb or a word at you that has you go like this, we all know what's happening in that moment. Your righteousness is being threatened. When someone walks up to you and says you did not do that well or you really could have done that better, what they're basically saying if a person, if a Christian is basing his own self-concept on how righteous he can look, that criticism becomes a major threat. Because the reaction is, wait a second, you just actually attacked my own righteousness. And my righteousness is all I have. It's what I base my value on.

How well I can perform. And so when we react out of a moralistic Christianity that wants to base its own identity and value on how well I can perform, it becomes, the criticism becomes a shock to my system. And so now I am going to defend myself. I have to defend my righteousness. It's the only righteousness I have. At least I'm thinking un-gospel-like.

It's the only righteousness that I have. So what are the ways in which we defend our own righteousness? Well one of the great ways that we do it is we pity ourselves. It's a great reaction. You know, it's like, all you have to say is, if you really knew what I went through, that way you can make the other person feel guilty. It's awesome, it works.

[33 : 16] Or another way that you can respond and defend your own righteousness is to give them the cold shoulder. You know, you don't have to say it because you're not going to be saying anything for three days. You just don't talk to them anymore. You just sort of like, do as if they did not exist anymore. It's also a great strategy. I can look back on 36 years of marriage and there are a lot of days that before the gospel really got through to me, that was my reaction towards my wife. I can confess that to you because it doesn't make any difference. I'm still in Christ more loved than I ever dared to believe. So you can also defend your righteousness by just throwing the attack right back at the person. That's also a great way to do it. When they say to you, yeah, you could have done that better than what you say is, you know what? You do the same thing wrong all the time and then you bob your head like this and that really helps. So what happens is when we have nothing to defend, at least we're thinking on gospel like, nothing to defend other than our own righteousness, what we end up doing is we get so threatened by the criticism that our reaction actually breaks down the relationship. If you're going to respond out of the gospel, here's what you do when you're criticized. The first thing you do when you hear the criticism is you do not let it become a shock to your system. You are not surprised at all because when you hear the criticism, the first thing that goes off in your brain is, right, in and of myself I am more sinful than I ever dared to believe. And when people who are more sinful than they ever dared to believe live, they live sinfully, which means that they commit sins and others are going to criticize them for it. So why should this be a surprise that somebody is criticizing me? Of course I'm going to do things wrong. And so you can then say to yourself, but if I say to the person, you might have a point. I'm not changing the truth that while I may be confessing that in and of myself I am more sinful than ever dared to believe. I'm also saying, you know what, it's okay. I can handle it because in Christ I'm more loved than ever dared to hope. And so you might respond like this. Well, that's interesting. You know, I'll just say to you, I'm not surprised at all that you would criticize me at that point. And it's not the only thing I do wrong in my life.

So here's what I'm going to do. Because I recognize that in and of myself I am more sinful than ever dared to believe. And because I still have this backbone in my life that says yes, but in Christ I'm more loved than ever dared to hope. Here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to go home and I'm going to sit down. I'm going to pray to God. God so and so just criticized me, helped me because I am more sinful than ever dared to believe.

Helped me please to understand what is the truth in that criticism. Because if there is any truth in that criticism, I want to grow from it. And I'm going to actually allow that criticism to become the instrument that you use to weed out the sins in my life.

And if there is no truth in that, then help me to see that as well. But thank you for the person who criticized me. And I want to grow from that because it's not a threat to my system because in Christ I'm more loved than I ever dared to hope. And that's what you say to the person. And just as blankly as most of you are looking at me right now, that's probably how that person is going to look at you. Because they're not going to believe that they just heard what they heard and experience what they experienced. See, but you walk away standing tall because it wasn't a matter of your righteousness. You're standing in the righteousness of Christ. It's your bridal gown. And it protects you. It also frees you to actually get to the stuff that others see and don't like. The stuff that is contrary to the righteousness of Christ in which you've been covered. And you can go about really dealing with it. If I had time and I don't, I would tell you how this has revolutionized my marriage. I would tell you how it has revolutionized my wife. I would tell you how it has revolutionized me. I've stopped shaming my wife. I've stopped manipulating my wife. She has stopped nagging me all because the gospel has just put us onto a whole different level of existence where our own personal righteousness is not to be all and end all of our existence, but the righteousness of Christ has freed us to be in and of ourselves more sinful than we ever dared to believe, but in Christ more loved than we ever dared to hope. And now we're actually all free to succeed in life without becoming proud and to fail in life without falling apart because your own righteousness is not what defines you. The righteousness of Christ is what defines you. This is what caused the Reformation. And I pray this is what causes a Reformation in your life as it is causing a Reformation in mine right now because it is indeed in the gospel that we find a righteousness from God revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, from one moment to the next, because just as is written, the righteous shall live by faith. Let's pray. Our Father, we thank You for the grace of the Lord Jesus that You have seen us in our unrighteous condition and have given us Christ, the perfectly righteous one who said to John the Baptist, baptize me for righteousness' sake, who wanted to be identified with our unrighteousness so that we might be identified with His righteousness.

[39 : 34] We thank You for Jesus. And as we come to the Lord's Supper, we thank You that at the cross He gave us what was His and took from us what was ours so that in fact in Christ we might be able to say we are more loved every day than we ever dared to hope. Praise God for the gospel. Lord Jesus, we honor You and live for You and Your righteousness. In Your name we pray. Amen.