

# It's a Holy Thing

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[ 0 : 00 ] Today I want to talk about the honest struggle of grace. So I think if you're going to be honest today, and if I'm going to be honest, we recognize that we struggle at one level or another with grace.

Sometimes I feel like Brooks from the Shawshank Redemption, who, having been in prison for maybe 30 or 40 years, was finally given parole and was allowed out, but he couldn't cope with the freedom.

He couldn't cope with not being institutionalized. He took his own life. He couldn't take the freedom now. It's not as extreme as that. For me, I would hope. But there's a sense in which sometimes because of the remaining sin in our lives and our hearts, we struggle with the concept of God's grace and the freedom of God's grace.

And maybe we struggle to understand it. And one area in which we struggle to understand grace is its relationship to holiness, because we often feel that holiness is more about us.

Remember that we've said before that sometimes we're quite happy with grace as the means of our being redeemed. We're redeemed by God's grace. It's His gift. He accepts us in the Vis Kingdom. And then mentally, somehow, we think that we then need to kind of do our bit for the rest of our lives.

[ 1 : 23 ] And we live obedient lives. And somehow, we hope at the end of it, God will accept us. We struggle with our motives for holiness. We struggle with guilt in holiness. We struggle with making holiness something that's self-service and not something that's connected to grace.

But holiness and grace are linked hugely together. And you can't have the one without the other. And it's very significant for us to consider and to think about holiness in relation to grace.

We still want to earn it somewhere down the line to use another quote from a film. I'm saving Private Ryan at the very end of that film, the Gravestone of Captain Jay Miller.

That's where the old James Ryan, who has been saved, remember, physically by this squad of men who went into him, to France to take him out from the war situation, because all his other brothers had been killed in action.

And as Captain Miller, who was leading that group, lay dying at the end of the war, as he led Ryan to freedom, he says, earn this. And at the end of his life, Ryan says, every day I think about what you said to me, that day on the bridge.

[ 2 : 47 ] I tried to live my life the best that I could. I hope that it was enough. I hope that at least in your eyes, I've earned what you've done for me.

Luke says to his wife, he says, tell me I've led a good life. Tell me I'm a good man. Tell me. And isn't that the struggle that we often have between grace and holiness?

We receive grace and we receive the gift of salvation, but we spend our lives trying to be holy, as if we're earning our salvation from God. So at the end of our life, we might say to God, tell me I've done enough.

Tell me I'm good enough. And we think somehow that our efforts will be added to God's grace so that we can enjoy redemption somehow as a cooperative act.

And yet we're reminded in Hebrews chapter 10, while we're reading, in a couple of places, very importantly, about holiness. In verse 10 of Hebrews chapter 6, I'm going to quote from different scriptures today, and not just from this chapter.

[ 3 : 54 ] And by that will, God's will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. We've been made holy as Christians. That is sanctified. That means set apart for God, set apart from our previous life, new creations made holy. That's something that we receive as a gift of grace.

And then he goes on to say in verse 14, since that time, he waits for his enemies to make his food still, because by one sacrifice, he is made perfect for those who are being made holy.

So you see there's a slight difference there. We are made holy through Jesus Christ, and we're still being made holy as well, through what Jesus Christ has done. So I want to look at that a little bit today, and remind ourselves that it's all of grace, and that it's Jesus Christ that is the core, and that is behind everything in our Christian lives.

So Christ, I'm saying, has earned our holiness. He's earned our holiness. We don't go to God in the last day and say, have I earned it? Have I done enough? Have I tried my hardest?

Because Christ has earned our holiness for us. We are always and would ever be too sinful to come near to a holy God. We can't do it. We can't even do it with a smidgen of grace here and a part of our own works there.

[ 5 : 30 ] We're simply unable to be right with God. We're unable to be holy before God. It's a massive blow to our pride that we can't earn our holiness and can't make ourselves holy before God.

Anything else, any other gospel is a joke, is a fabrication, because it's the gospel of Jesus Christ who reminds us that we are made holy through the sacrifice of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ once for all.

If you're hoping to get to heaven through a bit of grace and the rest of your own good works and your own attempts to holiness, then you will be utterly lost.

And it's an empty and imprisoning and enslaving gospel. Christ lived the holy life that we couldn't live and then was sacrificed on the cross for our sins.

And we receive His holiness, the holy life that He'd live. We receive that as it were. We become righteous. There's two kind of aspects to holiness. Sometimes you think, oh, it's a struggle to be holy.

[ 6 : 54 ] I would love to be holy and I try to be holy, but God says you are holy. You're immediately made right with God when you come to faith in Jesus Christ. You're justified before God.

He declares you holy. He declares you righteous because you're covered in the holiness and the righteousness of Jesus Himself. And you accept that by faith. It's a gift. You've become holy. You've been born anew. You're a new creation in Jesus Christ.

You see the facts of the gospel. You're convinced by them. And you trust in the one who is revealed to you in the gospel. That's what faith is. It's faith in Jesus Christ, who you know factually about, who you're convinced of is right, and then you, therefore, put your trust in Him.

And that's a gift. God gives you that gift of faith. It's all of grace. It's a gift from Him, from the gutter to glory.

It's not to do with us. And I'm reiterating some of what we've looked at before. It's not what we can earn. There's no glory whatsoever due to us from God. And yet, we share in His glory. We share in what He is in and of Himself, intrinsically in His being.

[ 8 : 22 ] It's a completely unique message. There's nothing like it in any religion, or in any philosophy, or in any way of thinking. And people hate it.

People hate that message, which says that it's all of God and it's all of grace. People hate the concept of God being on the throne, and God provided the answer, and God loving us absolutely and entirely and unconditionally when we come to Him by faith.

And we struggle with God on the throne, because we, in our sinful natures, which remains in us, battle to be number one. That's the battle we face in our lives. And I want to move from this knowledge of holiness as something we are gifted and something that is a declaration of our standing before God to the ongoing life that we live as Christians, because all of us struggle to a greater or lesser degree with holy living, and even with our motives for holy living.

So can I remind you again that holiness is not a part exchange. It's not that we come to grace, come to faith through grace and what Jesus has done for us, and then we live our Christian lives in our own strength to try and earn ongoing favour with God.

First Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 30 says, it is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, God, who has become for us wisdom from God.

[ 10 : 01 ] That is what Jesus is. He's our righteousness, our holiness, and redemption. Therefore, as it was written, let Him who boasts boast in the Lord. So He is our holiness, not only gifted, not only that we become sanctified, but in our ongoing quest we are dependent on the Lord Jesus Christ to continue to be like Him.

Holiness is something that we will simply seek to live because we are new creations. I'll go on to say a little bit about that in a moment. For we are God's workmanship, Ephesians 2, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared for us in advance to do.

Okay? It's inevitable. Romans 8, 28, for He also predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son. He is God's work in us, and holiness is inevitable for the Christian. It can't be for us today that we say, I love what Christ has done, He's done a great thing for me, but I can't be bothered living His way.

We're not really into holiness. We'll leave that for one or two people, and the higher echelons of the Christian life. It doesn't work that way. It's absolutely inevitable for us, because in Christ we've been made holy, we're sanctified, we're made right, and we are becoming holy.

That is the direction of our life. We're becoming holy in our lives. We are, as the Reformers said, we're both simultaneously sinful and justified.

[ 11 : 44 ] And what does that mean? It means for you, and it certainly means for me, that there's a battle going on, because we have our redeemed new natures in Christ, which are sanctified, set apart.

But we've also got the remaining sinful nature within us, and that, therefore, for us is a battle. So don't tell me that the Christian life's easy. Don't tell me there's no problems, because if we're honest with ourselves, we recognize this great tension and this great battle about holiness, because of the two natures within us that struggle against one another. But it's inevitable that we're becoming holy. We are to live this gift of grace, and when we're living this gift of grace, it means that we will, because God is working in us, we will be becoming more holy.

We live it. It's what we are. It's our natures. Just as a slight kind of a side here, it's not about our faith, because people sometimes say, well, I don't think I've got enough faith to live the holy life. I wish I had more faith. I would love to have more faith in order to do so, as if it's something, again, it's about us. I don't have enough faith to be holy. I would like to have more faith, but I just simply don't have it.

[ 13 : 14 ] The problem with that is that faith isn't a kind of entity of itself, Derek's faith. It's not something that kind of has its own life. Faith is like a conduit. It's like a channel, and it's always got to be, it's always got to have a reference point.

We have faith in somebody. It's not just faith. It's not just a vague kind of concept that, oh, I've got a lot of faith. I've got a little faith. It's faith in Jesus Christ. It's always linked to Jesus Christ.

And so it's not so much about our understanding of how much faith we can or can't have. It's about looking to Jesus Christ. Now, a lot of times, just now in this congregation, because we're generally our demographic is that we're a youngest congregation, I meet up with couples who are getting married, do a marriage course or something.

And sometimes couples go out and they fall in love. But I would find it very strange if a guy came to me and said, man, I'm really in love. It's just incredible.

And it's great to be in love and I love what it does to me and love is a wonderful thing. And love's changed my direction. It's so multifaceted. And if he spent 20 minutes telling me about love without really making any reference to the gal that he's in love with, that would be strange, wouldn't it?

[ 14 : 37 ] Me thinks someone who comes to me like that is more in love with being in love than they are with the person. Because you can be like that. We can be in love with being in love rather than being in love with the person.

And it would seem strange that the person wouldn't be the object or the subject of the conversation. And so it's not really about our faith and about how much faith we think and how it changes us and how much we want.

It's about Christ. And it's about looking to Christ. It's faith in Christ alone. But what I want to go on to say is that faith in Christ alone, in other words, it's looking away from yourself and looking to Christ, it's never alone.

Although it's faith in Christ alone, it never stands alone. In other words, holiness is part of the package.

It's part of the package. Why is that? It is because we become like who we are. We become like who we are as Christians.

[ 15 : 41 ] When we've been touched by grace, when we've been made new creations, then we begin to look like that new creation. You know, however, again, one of the other privileges of being a young congregation, and this is rather sad for me to confess, is that I know quite a lot of the young

people who have come to this church.

I know your parents. And I used to be in university with them many years ago. College and Aberdeen or whatever. But the thing is, I know some of you who you are.

Because you're like your parents. You can't hide your DNA. Much though you would love to, I'm sure, as you come away and make your own identity in life, you can't hide that DNA.

And the older I get, the more I sound like my dad. And the more I become my father in some ways, and my mother. Because that's who we are.

It's our genetic code, and it shapes us whether we like that or not. It doesn't mean that we're bound by that, but it does shape who we are. And if we are in Christ, if we are new creations, if we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, then we become like Him.

[16:54] It's who we are. We've been set apart. We've been changed from the inside. Jesus says, be, or God says, just as He who called you is holy.

So be holy in all you do. It's written be holy because I am holy. That's the genetic code we have. It's not about earning favor. It's not about trying to make ourselves right with God.

It's the appropriation and the outworking of the gift that we have in our lives. It's the beauty of that gift.

I was blinded by the devil, born already ruined. Stone cold dead, I just stepped out of the womb. By His grace I have been touched. By His Word I have been healed. By His hand I have been delivered. By His Spirit I have been sailed.

I've been saved by the blood of the Lamb. I recognise that we become who we are like. What would be one of the greatest evidences of that in your life, in my life, is the battle.

[17:59] Is the battle we struggle with. If you have no interest in Christ or in holiness or in following Him or in obedience, then it probably reveals that there's not much grace.

Because the battle between our old natures and our redeemed natures is, I think someone wants in possibly.

Yeah, they're just flocking. They've heard the preaching. So they're coming in by their droves. And I've lost my track now completely.

Yeah, the evidence is the battle. Is it not? Is that a good thing we struggle? No, we struggle with the Christian battle. We struggle between wanting to do, you know, it's the great Romans 7 one.

I wrestle with what I want to do. But I don't want to do, and there's this battle, there's a struggle going on within us. Well, let's be honest about that. And let's praise God because that's the reality in our lives.

[19:00] And let's stop pretending that everything's sweet and nice and beautiful. But there's a battle and there's a struggle and there's a difficulty. And that is an evidence of holiness. Because it's an evidence of God at work within us.

We delight in God. We delight in His law. We're dependent on God because we so often break His law. And we recognize that because we love Him.

But I do wonder if there's no dependence on Jesus in our lives if we have grace at all. Whatever else we might have, whatever intellectual knowledge or theological insight or whatever ability we have to recite creed.

If we have no sense of dependence, what is it that we have? Is it grace? I'm not sure. We become like who we are.

And at the same time, we therefore become like who we love in Christ. Sola gracia by grace alone, just as it's Sola fide.

[20:10] By faith alone, these great, great doctrines that we believe in and know and understand that it is because of His grace that we seek His holiness.

It's our motivation. It's our new nature. We begin to share His passions. And we begin to follow Him because He is worth it.

Because He is glorious. Because He is God. And I get to go back to that same phrase that I've used before in this series. The problem with us is not that we have made the gospel too good.

It's the fact that we haven't made it good enough. It's the fact that we've made it too insignificant and too small and too unresponsive that we've made God a little God in His grace.

A tiny little tiddly grace that is not really worth being transformed for. It's not worth, He is not worthy.

[21:16] He is not worth worshiping. He is not worth trusting. He's not worth being dependent on. It's not that we make the gospel too good. We make it not good enough.

We have a Peter Pan God. We make believe God. We can take it or leave it. So we become like Him because we love Him.

And I think that means a couple of things. We draw things to a close. It means a couple of things. It means as we are holy because of what He has done, because of who we are, because of His love. It means we submit to His sovereignty over our lives. That's what we do. That is a mark of holiness. It's a mark of being set apart. It's that we recognize that He's sovereign over our lives.

We have the evidence of His love and the cross and what He's done for us. We have His promises that He'll finish His work, that He's begun in our hearts. And we recognize that He is the sovereign power and authority to use whatever we experience in our lives to bring that to pass.

[ 22 : 30 ] He uses that in our lives. We submit to that. Now that's where the rubber hits the road. It's easy to follow this great God when everything's going swimmingly, when life is easy and good.

But He asks us because of who He is and because of His love and commitment to us and because of His grace that we've received. He says, take that light and that grace into your darkness.

Submit to my sovereignty over your purposes and over your life. So we submit to His sovereignty in our lives. That is when bad things happen.

With all the struggles we take that to God. We maybe shake our puny fist heavenwards, but we take it to Him and we submit to Him. If He's not that kind of God, He's just Santa Claus, isn't He?

He's just the God who gives us everything, but we're still sinners. And if we get everything we want, it will just expose our selfishness.

[ 23 : 35 ] So we submit to His sovereignty, but we also submit to His truth for us. So la gracia, so la scripture. We believe in His truth and we live by that.

And that's really in a sense the holiness that is our privilege and is our inner nature, even though it's a battle. It becomes very practical as we recognise in Christ we submit to His truth for us.

Now we all live by a code. All of us live by codes in our lives, whether we're Christians or not. You see, if society's codes, it's our own made up, mixed code of society and a bit of the Bible and a bit of this and a bit of that.

But in Christ we serve God by submitting to His truth for us. Not in order to earn favour with Him, not in order to look better than other people, not in order to lord over other people, but of gratitude.

Out of gratitude. Because He's given us grace in our hearts and we love it. We love His law because it's good and it's perfect. And we see that loving God and loving one another is the best way to live in this world.

[ 24 : 55 ] I'm not saying it's the easiest, but it's the best way because that's the Redeemer's way. That's the Saviour's way. It's God's way. He says I've made ten big commandments, but I've narrowed it down to one.

Two and then one. Or thirteen and then two and then one. And the one is love. And the two is love God and love one another. And the twelve, not thirteen but eleven is the ten plus the new commandment that Jesus gives.

Which is to love one another, which is all part of it, isn't it? That's His commands for us. We submit to His truth. And in so doing we open our lives to His blessing.

We open our lives to His blessing when we live that way. We live in holiness to Him. And that's what we're commanded to do. In Ephesians 4, it puts it in the language of clothing.

In Ephesians chapter 4. And at verse 24, he says, You were taught with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self. Okay? Put off your old self.

[ 26 : 05 ] Which has been corrupted by its deceitful desires. To be made new in the attitude of your minds. And to put on the new self. Created to be like God in true righteousness. And holiness.

That's a great illustration of submitting our lives to Him and living holy. We have to, nobody else can do it. We have to put off our old nature and its desires.

And put on the new nature and its desires. Galatians 5 puts it very radically but very practically. And it's no different. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious. Sexual immorality and purity.

The botany idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, orges. We could add to that list.

Tangible, real, practical things. It's not kind of floating up in the sky kind of things. It's real practical everyday things. Things that you'll be confronted with tomorrow and I will be. I will be in my study.

You'll be wherever you are.

[ 27 : 04 ] Absolutely practical realities about putting off our old nature. And then putting on our new nature. The fruit of the spirit.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self-control. Again such things there. No law. That's not an exhaustive list. It's just a few examples of what it means to be holy. It's not kind of pietistic. It's not that you kind of go into a monastic life. It's tangible, practical rubber hitting the road everyday living.

That you'll be faced with and I'll be faced with tomorrow. We're responsible for that. We work out our own salvation. Why? Because God's working in us.

That's why. Because we have the Holy Spirit. And it's that great mysterious complexity of God's sovereignty and our responsibility, isn't it? But it's where we're looking at it, we do it.

[ 28 : 07 ] You do it tomorrow. I do it tomorrow. Today, even. Even better. Let's start today. Let's not wait till tomorrow. Church, today. How we interact. How we react with one another. How we respond.

How we serve. How we choose the decisions we make. Reflect our understanding of grace and of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Holiness, therefore, isn't for us optional. It's not for the minister, the elders and one or two others. And they kind of represent everyone else.

Holiness is not an option. It's our DNA. It's our DNA as Christians. It's what we are. It's what we're becoming.

It's what Christ has made us holy. And we are becoming holy. It's that dual reality in this life.

[ 29 : 03 ] God is working in us. It's not about earning favour with God. It's not about trying to please God so that He will somehow love us more.

He can't love us anymore. Coming to church isn't going to make Him love you anymore.

But we come to worship because He loves us and because of what He's done. It's an outworking of grace. But if we have a small grace, we have a small holiness.

And if we have no holiness, we have no grace. That's the reality that God reminds us of.

But the great redeeming and freeing truth is that it's not about me. It's not about you in terms of your abilities or your performance to be accepted by Christ.

[ 30 : 09 ] Isn't that redeeming? When you feel as rubbish as I feel sometimes. Isn't that so redeeming and freeing?

That God doesn't accept me on the basis of my performance? It's on the basis of His grace.

And all we can do is keep going back for that never-ending reservoir of grace.

All He requires of us is to be dependent and to keep going to Him. Both for our holiness and for our understanding and our insight into who we are.

So really the summary is that it's not that we're saved by grace, and then we kind of do our bit by living holy lives. We're saved by grace, we're holy by grace, and it's work that is started by God and it's finished by God.

[ 31 : 18 ] And yet in His sovereign will He cooperates with us in our ongoing sanctification. And we have responsibility before Him.

But the motive is not to be pleasing God in order to be accepted, but it is simply gratitude. Let's put our heads in prayer.

Or God we ask in prayer that you would help us to grasp the simplicity and uniqueness of that message and cope with the battle that we face internally to be able to accept something that isn't based on our performance or on our effort. It is so utterly counter-cultural and counter-intuitive.

And we rebel against it because we feel we must. And yet God sees we're dead in our trespasses, and we need Christ and His goodness and His life and His gift and His power and His Holy Spirit in our lives.

Forgive us for the times that we have looked at our own orthodoxy and looked down our noses at other people and have felt, even though we may never express it, we've felt that we have earned God's favour and that we're better than other people.

[ 32 : 49 ] Forgive us for that wrong comparison, recognising that it's simply a different currency altogether and help us to be humble and gracious and dependent on our God in an ongoing way.

So continue with us, we pray in blesses and guide us for we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.