

The Gospel... Its Basis and Blessings

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[0 : 0 0] Today's scripture's passages are found in the book of Galatians. Please follow along in your bulletin. We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

So we too have put our faith in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified. Galatians 2, 15-16 In Galatians 3, 1-14, it says, You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?

Before your very eyes, Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you. Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?

Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? Have you experienced so much in vain? If it really was in vain?

So again I ask, Does God give you His Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? So also Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

[1 : 1 4] Understand then that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham.

All nations will be blessed through you. So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse.

As it is written, Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law. Clearly, no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because the righteous will live by faith.

The law is not based on faith. On the contrary, it says, The person who does these things will live by them. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

For it is written, Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole. He redeemed us, and ordered that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

[2 : 1 9] And in Galatians 3, 26-29, So, in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

This is today's reading from God's Word. Some years ago, a very famous preacher was invited by a large church to hold three nights of meeting on a weekend.

So the first night, this preacher asked the question, What is the Gospel? I'd like to see how many of you know what the Gospel is all about. Raise your hands if you know what the Gospel is.

And no hand went up. And then he said, Since I'm here in this big church, you don't know what the Gospel is, I'm going to go home. Good night.

[3 : 26] And he left. Next night, and before that, the church was very concerned. They spent lots of money to get him there. So next night they said, Look, if you ask that same question again, everyone must put up his hand or her hand.

So next night, true to form, he asked, How many of you know what the Gospel is all about? If you do, raise your hand. And every hand went up. And he said, Since you all know about the Gospel, what it is, there's no need for me to preach, so good night, goodbye.

And he left. So there was much concern, consternation in that congregation. And they said, Look, the third time, if you ask, how many of you know what the Gospel is, half of us, one side would just put their hands up, and the other side would keep their hands down.

Alright? So they had this conspiracy. So this man again asked the question, Do you know what the Gospel is? How many of you know what the Gospel is? And half the congregation raised their hands, the other half didn't.

He said, That's wonderful. Those of you who know, tell those who don't. Now I'm tempted to repeat that exercise, because our theme for this morning is the basis and the blessings of the Gospel.

[4 : 36] What is the Gospel? Euangelion, the Greek word, means good news. And this word was usually used for announcing a victory over an enemy, over a hostile force, or it's used when the king ascends a throne, the coronation.

It's good news. And the Christian good news is that God, in Christ, has rescued us. He came down to reach us, to pluck us out from the sins of hell and death, and brought us into his family.

This is the good news that the early church, and we today, want to announce to the whole world. And the word used by the Apostle Paul, and we are looking at his teaching in Galatians, is found in verse 16 of Galatians 2.

So follow with me in the sheet that you were given. Know, know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

So we too have put our faith in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ. So we have this word, justification.

[5 : 47] It's a big word. It's a theological word. But let me unpack for you, because this is a tremendous word. This is, if you like, the very basis, the heart of the gospel.

We, says Paul, are justified by faith in Christ. justification is a legal term. It's used in the courtroom. It's when a guilty offender, who should be punished for his misdeeds, is declared not guilty by the judge, and then acquitted.

So Paul was telling us, God did something like that, when we trusted in Jesus Christ. But you and I can only appreciate good news, when we look at the bad news.

You and I can only appreciate brightness, when there are hues of darkness. In Romans 1, verse 18, we have one of the most frightening verses, that the world can ever read.

In Romans 1, verse 18, the apostle Paul, declares, for the wrath of God, since most of you are trained in North America, the wrath of God, first time ever, pronounce it that way.

[7 : 00] For the wrath of God, is being revealed from heaven, against all godliness, and wickedness of men, who suppress the truth, by their wickedness. Here we have, the stark, and awesome, bad news.

There is something called, the wrath of God. It's not that God loses his temper, like you and I do. The wrath of God, is his holiness, his justice, in coalition, against sin.

And that means judgment. And every one of us, stands under God's judgment, because we rebel against him, we've gone our own ways, we've disregarded him, and his wrath rests on us.

The biggest problem of humankind, is not about global warming, or even infighting, in business, the home, or personal relationships.

The greatest problem is, how can the wrath of God, be averted? How can we have peace with God? How can we reconcile to God? And here, it's a stark contrast, between the good news, the gospel, and also the bad news, that God's judgment, is on every single, human being.

[8 : 16] Now of course, the world says, there's a way to get out of it, and to begin to postulate, to imagine that God is like, a cosmic Santa Claus. He's a nice guy really, and if you've done something wrong, if you have committed, some little sin, it's okay.

Say you are sorry, and God will accept you, then we begin to make God, in our own image. Think of Him, almost like a cosmic Santa Claus. It's just a small piccadillo, a small sin, everybody sins anyway, and God can forgive.

It's His duty, His right to forgive, as some philosophers, even declare. But we are told, that our God is a holy God. Our God is a just God, and sin has to be punished.

The wages, the result of sin, is death, eternal separation from Him. But man, has all kinds of devious ways, to get out of this predicament.

So human beings would say, look, if we appease God, and make Him want to accept us, we can go to the church, or temple, more often.

[9 : 20] We can do good deeds, we can be involved, in charitable acts, and kindness, and we can do this, do that. And so the human religion, is trying to appease God, by doing this, doing that, do, do, do.

But then when we come, to the Christian faith, we have the fantastic news, it's done. It's not our doing, that God will accept us. It's not human achievement, but resting in what God has done for us, in Jesus Christ.

And so, we are introduced, and this is the good news, the gospel, to the cross, to Jesus crucified, on that wicked Roman cross. This is the heart, of the Christian faith, the center, of the gospel.

And in Galatians chapter 3, verse 1, Paul says, you know, when we preach to you, what happened? Before your very eyes, Jesus Christ, was clearly portrayed, as crucified.

So Paul reminded, the readers, of Jesus, Jesus, on the cross. There, on the cross, Jesus was, as it were, placarded, was openly displayed, for all to see.

[10 : 35] And, Paul then reminds us, look, it is Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, that really matters. Now, the Galatian people, were having a struggle.

They thought, by doing good works, by observing the law, God will accept them, love them, draw them back to Himself. But Paul says, no, no, no.

Because, people, have always thought, that the way to come to God, is to do good works, to go to church, to be religious, and so on. But here, the Apostle Paul tells us, that is not the way.

And so, here we have this picture. If you look at the text, in verse 10, it says, all who rely on observing the law, are under a curse, for it is written, curse is everyone, who does not do everything, written in the book of the law.

Clearly, no one is justified, before God, by the law. And then in verse 13, Christ redeemed us, from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse for us.

[11 : 42] For it is written, curse is everyone, who is hung on a tree. And Paul goes on to say, he redeemed us, in order, the blessing given to Abraham, might come to the Gentiles, through Jesus Christ.

So that by faith, we might receive, the promise, of the Holy Spirit. So here we are told, Jesus died on a cruel, Roman cross.

It was the basis, the most horrible form, of torture. But on that cross, something wonderful happened. On that cross, Jesus became a curse, because the Bible tells us, curse is everyone, who hangs on a tree.

That's a judgment, the punishment, reserved for criminals. And there Jesus hung, on that cruel, Roman cross. And then Paul tells us, something else happened.

When he died there, he absorbed, as it were, the curses of humankind. He bore all our sin. And Paul tells us, he who knew no sin, became sin, that we might become, the righteousness of God.

[12 : 48] Christ died for sins, once for all, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us, to God. So here, we see that on the cross, God's righteousness, and love, is displayed.

God wants to remove, the curses of sin, the terrible work, that sin does, to human beings. So, the good news is that, on the cross, Jesus died for us, he took our place, and when we trust him, we, can become, his children, and his beloved followers.

So, Paul goes on to say, look, this also happened, to one of, the very famous, patriarchs, forefathers of the faith, Abraham, himself.

So, if you look at, Galatians chapter 3, in verse, 6, it says, Abraham, he believed God, and it was credited to him, as righteousness.

So, here, Paul is saying, look at the example, of our Jewish ancestor, forefather, Abraham. How, did he get right with God?

[14 : 02] How did he, enjoyed, and received, the blessing, of God? And the answer was, because, he trusted in the Lord Jesus, in God himself, he was justified, and in, verse, 6, it tells us, very clearly, that, he believed God, and, it was, credited to him, as righteousness.

So, Paul is saying, look at, this famous, ancestor, forefather, of the Jews, and of believers, Abraham himself. How did he get right with God? He, he believed God.

Now, we know the story, of Abraham. He had, no, son, from his wife, Sarah, and he thought, someone else, would inherit, all his blessings.

And God said, no, one day, you, will have a child. You, will have a son. And so, one day, God said to him, go out, look at the stars. Count them, if you can.

One day, your descendants, will be like the stars, in the heaven. And I'm going to give you, a son, a child. At that time, Abraham was way, in his 90s, and Sarah, was very, very old.

[15 : 16] How could that happen? Then, by a miracle, something happened. Sarah, had a child, called Isaac. And this was what, God was doing.

He was going to bring blessing, to this child, of his. He says, count the stars. If you can count them, your blessings, will be like that. Your descendants, will be like the numerous, stars, of the heavens, populating the earth, bringing blessing, to people.

So here, we have, if you like, the very basic, of the gospel. Here, we're introduced, to Abraham, who believed God, it was reckoned to him, for righteousness, and God, was going to do something, for him.

And this is known, as the gospel, the good news. But then, there was a problem. These Galatian Christians, were hoodwinked, by the Judaizers.

People who said, okay, it's wonderful, to be Christians, but, you must observe, the law of Moses. God gave, the law to Moses, on Mount Sinai.

[16 : 20] That has to be obeyed. So you must have, trust, faith in Jesus, plus, in other words, Jesus plus, the cross plus.

And this was, an abomination, to the apostle Paul. So he cries out, in the first verse, you foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, who cast his spell, over you, before your very eyes, Jesus Christ, was portrayed, as crucified.

How come, you are leaving, God's way of salvation, and reverting back, to good works, the Jewish way, the law, trying to, get right with God, by that way.

You are hoodwinked, you are deceived, and who has done that to you? Oh you fools, you stupid people. Why, do you ignore, ignore, God's way, of salvation.

And here, we are introduced again, to the very heart, of the Christian message. How, are we justified? How, do we get right, with God?

[17 : 23] Is it, by something we do, by our good works? And, John Calvin, the reformer said, the only contribution, that you, and I make, to him, is our sin.

We can't contribute, to our salvation, by any good works, will never, be accepted. Or, as Martin Luther, puts it, to reestablish, the law, in other words, to practice, all the works, of the law, asking God, to accept us, because of our good works, is to, abolish, the gospel.

That's why, Paul was so strong. You foolish Galatians, you dum-dums, you idiots, think of all the worst descriptions, that you can call somebody. You are so stupid, you are so dumb.

How, can you go back, on the very basis, of your salvation? How, can you make the law, equal, with the gospel? That is, absolute folly.

You will miss out, on your blessings. So, he says, look, think about, your life, the life in the spirit. Was that by works?

[18 : 30] Was that by the law? You have the Holy Spirit, he's directing you, he's dwelling in you. How did that come? And the answer is, through faith, in Jesus Christ.

And, how is your Christian life, lived out? Is it by, obeying, all the legal, precepts, of the Old Testament law? Trying to get justified, by the good acts we do?

And Paul's answer was, no, you received the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, was freely, given to you. Your life, is now, life in the spirit. It is a gift from God.

You can't earn it. And, you have to accept simply, what God has done for you. Or, as a very famous theologian, called Paul Tillich, and most evangelicals, we're afraid of that name.

He says, and I like this quote, he says, what we have to do, is to accept, the acceptance. When we accept, what Jesus Christ, has done for us, God accepts us.

[19 : 30] Accept the acceptance, and then, we would have, true faith in Christ. But these Galatians, were saying, no, we want to go our own way, we need Jesus, the gospel, plus, this is the very dangerous thing, Jesus, the gospel, and, something else.

And for the Galatian Christians, because they were, influenced by the Jewish teachers, it was, Jesus, plus, good works, and then, we're accepted by God. Of course, we believe in Jesus, and then, we will do good works, but, the Judaizers, were putting, both together, in order, that we can be received, and justified by God.

And Paul says, no, just think, of the Holy Spirit. How did you receive, the Holy Spirit? Did you psych yourself up? Did you do, all kinds of good works? Refuse that, reject that, so that the Holy Spirit, can fill you, empower you, and you see miracles, happening in your church?

And Paul's answer was, no, that was not the case. It's like this, that many years ago, a good friend of ours, loaned us her, holiday bungalow, in the fields, on an island, in the fjord, of Norway.

And, we were there, the five of us, in our family, and we were given a boat, a rowing boat. We tried, to row. We didn't realize, that the current, underneath the fjord, was very, very strong.

[20 : 55] So no matter, how we rowed, myself, and three of my sons, who were teenagers then, we tried to row, we couldn't go, very, very far. And we were, just, rowing like, mad.

But, we had to come back, very disappointed. And then, our host came in, in the middle of our holidays, and he introduced us, to, an outboat motor.

He said, put this on the boat, I'll show you how to use it. And then, you will have, a new experience, all together. And we did that. So with that, motor, the engine, we were able to, sail around the fjord, and really enjoyed ourselves.

And all we need to do, was to make sure, we don't hit, any shows of rocks, or the land. Then we would, proceed, and enjoy, our stay, and our cruise, our boat ride. And that's what, the Holy Spirit does.

That when we, depend on him, he's going to give us, power, to live a life, that is pleasing, to God. And Paul is saying, look, you know, you are living, or your life should be, live, in the Holy Spirit.

[22 : 01] That is a blessing. That is a blessing, the blessing, of justification. You're put into, a right relationship, with God. The blessing, the gift of the Holy Spirit, you have him.

And besides, you have many, many other blessings, as well. The basis, of the gospel, the good news, is that God, has accepted you, in Jesus Christ.

Good works, cannot contribute, towards your salvation. In fact, John Calvin, used to say, the only contribution, that we bring to Jesus, is our sin.

You think about it, that's all, that we do. We say, Lord, I'm a sinner. Have mercy. Lord, save me. So, we have the blessing, of justification.

God says, because you believe, in Jesus, he died for your sins, and before me, although you are as guilty, as can be, I forgive you, you are pardoned, you become, no longer my enemy, you become my child.

[23 : 03] And then the other blessing, is the blessing, of the Holy Spirit. When we become Christians, the Holy Spirit, indwells in us, and he gives us power, to live a life, that's pleasing, to God.

And then if you, glance at your text, to verse 26, he says, look, there are further blessings. You are all, children of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus.

Now, many philosophers, in the last century, and currently, talk about, human beings, as orphans. We live in the, vast universe, but we have no, relationship, to a father.

We are lost. We are like orphans, wandering around. We are waves, and strays, not being able, to find our way. But then, the good news come. The gospel comes.

When Christ, died on the cross, for our sin, God accepted us, as he accepted him, and we become, God's children. We are the sons, and daughters, of the living God.

[24 : 04] And so here, in verse 26, Paul says, you are all, sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus. No longer, do we fear God, as a judge.

No longer, do we dread him. But we come to him, and call him, Abba, Papa, or Daddy. No longer, is life, meaningless. We find meaning, when we come, to trust, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, some of you, like to watch, Mr. Bean, Rowan Atkinson. And, he, once, used a very meaningful, sentence, in that series, called, The Black Adder.

And there he said, life, is like a broken pencil, pointless. For many people, it's like that. We are like orphans, cosmic orphans, no meaning, in life.

We search, and search, through riches, through wealth, through philosophy, and somehow, we never find, deep, true satisfaction. But when, we come to receive, Jesus Christ, we become, children of God.

[25 : 11] Because as many, as receive him, to them, God gave the right, to become, the children, of God. So, Paul is saying, the blessing of the gospel, it is, you receive, not only the Holy Spirit, you also enjoy, sonship.

You become, God's, beloved children. No longer, is he hostile, towards you. He welcomes you, into his family. And then he goes on, to say, for all of you, who are baptized, into Christ, have clothed, yourselves, with Christ.

And here, it does not mean, that if you are baptized, and we'll be seeing, some people being baptized today, that automatically, saves you. It doesn't. It has to be faith, trust, in the living Christ, who died for your sin.

And baptism, is simply, an outward confirmation, outward sign, of an inward conviction. He says here, all of you were baptized, into Christ, joined to him. You've clothed yourselves, with Christ.

And here, probably, he's thinking of, the Roman, kind of ritual, when a young boy, suddenly becomes an adult. He's given a white toga, a white robe, to wear, called the toga, vrilis.

[26 : 23] And he's saying, yes, when you become a Christian, you've been baptized, into Christ. And then, you become an adult, in terms of your faith. And God, wants to relate to you, in that way.

So, here is one of the blessings, of gospel. You grow up, and you're accepted, and loved, by God. And not only that, he says, there is neither Jew, nor Greek, slave, nor free, male or female, for you're all one, in Christ Jesus.

And one of the blessings, of the gospel, is that, he, God the Holy Spirit, brings us, into the community, of faith. We don't have to be, isolated.

We don't have to live, lives by ourselves. We live it, in interdependence, with our brothers, and sisters. One of the blessings, that God gives, to us today, who believe in God, is the church, the family of God.

You and I, regardless of our backgrounds, become one, in Christ Jesus, accepted, in him. And we are part, of his new community, of his new, society.

[27 : 27] You're all, one, in Christ Jesus. This again, is the blessing, of the gospel. Now some of you know, that I spend a lot, of my life, traveling, ministering, around the world, engaging with Christians, of different culture.

And whether I'm in Africa, or Asia, or Latin America, or North America, or Europe, I find that when I meet, fellow Christians, whom I hardly knew, there's that bond, there's that oneness, there's a joy, we are part, of one family.

That, is a blessing, of the gospel. That is why here, in Watermark, we stress, the community groups. We want people, to come together, to really, encourage, build up one another, so that we can, grow together, in the Lord.

And here is one, of the great blessings, of the gospel. That, not only do we, become his children, we are part of his family, family, and there is no distinction, no rank, as it were, neither Jew, nor Greek, no slave, nor free, no male, nor female.

Of course, these things are still reality. Some of us are rich, some of us are not so rich, some of us are Chinese, others are Americans, and some of us, some of us are male, some of us are female, but those are not distinctions, that divide.

[28 : 46] Because in Christ, we become one. And this is the blessing, of the gospel. One of the greatest thrills, that I've experienced, when I travel around the world, and minister, is to be able to say, to people, of a different color, culture, background, you, are my brother.

You are my sister. We are part, of God's wonderful family. And then the other blessing, is that if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs, according to the promise.

Now, Abraham is a very important person, in the history, of the Jewish people. He's the father, of faith. And many faiths claim him, the Jews, the Muslims, and also the Christians.

And here, Paul is saying, the important thing is, that God, chose Abraham, for a very particular purpose, in you, God told Abraham, in you, through you, and your seed, all the families of the earth, will be blessed.

God's purpose, of choosing this man, was that his blessing, will flow, and overflow, to masses of people. Now, most of the readers, were not Jews.

[29 : 56] They said, how can I relate, to Abraham then, in terms of flesh, and physical, descent, I'm not part of Abraham, I'm not a Jew. But Paul says, look, in Christ, something wonderful has done, has come.

All the blessings, that Abraham inherited, and are passing on, to his natural heirs, the Jews, are now passed on, to you Gentiles, you non-Jews. You can inherit, God's blessing.

You become an heir. You can inherit, all the glorious blessing, of God Almighty. I want to close, with just a story. Some years ago, in Britain, there was a very famous, Baron, a Lord, called Lord Fitzgerald.

He had a wife, and, this wife died, and then they had, but, he was left, with a baby, and he cared, cared for this baby, and the boy, grew up, to a teenager.

Then sadly, one day, this teenage son, died. And finally, Baron Fitzgerald, also died. But he left, a huge collection, of art, precious art, masterpieces.

[31 : 09] He also, drew up a will, and he wanted, all his paintings, masterpieces, to be sold, after, he died. And then, the day of the sale, came.

It was a huge, crowd of people. There were the museum, curators, and there were, the private collectors, all wanting to buy up, these very precious, masterpieces. The first lot, was a painting.

It was a painting, of the teenage son. And it was entitled, My Beloved Son. It was a very poor picture. A poor oil. It was not painted, by a famous artist, but the title was, My Beloved Son.

And so, the auction began, and the auctioneer said, who would, start, with a bid, for this picture? For a long time, there was no bidding.

And then finally, somebody, put up his hand, and says, for 15 shillings, it was less than a pound. Very little money. And he says, anybody wants to buy it? No?

[32 : 15] Going, going, going, gone. So, the picture, went to that man, the portrait, of the son. And then the auctioneer, stopped and said, excuse me, sir, why are you buying this painting?

Because, artistically, it wasn't great at all. It wasn't worth very much. And then the man said, I used to be the servant, of Lord Fitzgerald, and I used to care, for that child.

I want it. And then, the auctioneer says, the entire sale is over, and everyone is horrified. He says, here is the will. Anyone who buys that picture, my beloved son, inherits all the masterpieces.

That's the same way with Jesus Christ. God is saying, anyone who trusts in Jesus, in Jesus alone, for his or her salvation, inherits everything. All the blessings of Abraham, both spiritual as well as material.

And let's not be saying, only spiritual blessings will be ours. No. God wants to bless us, prosper us as well. And so, I want to close by saying, to each one of us, as we look at Galatians, God wants to pour out his blessing on us.

[33 : 35] The gospel, yes, is very exclusive. There's only one way to God, it's through Jesus, and Jesus alone. And the basis of our salvation, the very basis of our gospel, is the cross.

And the way that we can be accepted by the Lord, is through faith in the Lord Jesus. There's no other way. Good works will not do. Being religious will not do.

But the moment we say, yes, God, I trust in Jesus. As in a few moments, the people who are getting baptized will be declaring, we trust in Jesus. But when we do that, we become beloved sons and daughters of the living God.

And all the blessings that God wants to pour out on his people will be ours as well. So we don't want to be like the Galatians because Paul had to castigate them, scold them.

You're so stupid. You're dumb-dumb. You're nincompoops. Why do you want to go back to the law when everything is free? God's grace is free. Accept it.

[34 : 36] Accept it. And accept the acceptance. The famous words of Paul Tillich. Do it. God has done everything for you. And so today, God is saying to us, will we respond?

And if you have never, never accepted Jesus into your life, you're not a child of God, the answer is not try.

Try to work your way to heaven. It's like trying to lift yourself up with your bootstraps or shoelaces. That will not work because the Christian faith is done. Christ has done everything on the cross for you and all you have to do is say, I trust you.

All you have to say, like the hymn writer, nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. Naked come to thee for dress. Helpless look to thee for grace.

That's it. To look to God, to say, Lord, save me. Bring me into your family. And when you do that, he will love you, he will accept you. So make today a very special day, a day where you can say, Lord, I want you ready to come into my life.

[35 : 42] You've done everything for me. Out of gratitude to you, I place, I give myself wholly to you. And when you say that, you will enjoy the blessings of Abraham, you become a child of faith, and you will know God's kindness and generosity and blessings on you.

Let's pray together. Lord, we marvel at your love, at your grace. You should reach out to us who are sinners, who sinned against you, who offended you, who've hurt so many, many people.

And yet, through the cross of Jesus, through his death, through his dying for our sin, you have accepted us and made us members of your family. And we are truly, truly grateful.

So thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. And give us faith to respond to you, to love you. We may become children of the living God. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Hey, just a couple quick announcements I just want to share with you. I have two slides. Last Friday, my, our community group, if you're not in a community group, you've got to be in a community group. Our community group did our first outreach.

[36 : 56] And so we invited 50 of our friends who aren't part of Watermark or any part of relationship or churches. And we took them to this place in Appalachau, a winery. And it was amazing just to see them make wines and to drink wine and people kind of loosen up after a couple glasses of wine.

And you didn't hear me say that, okay? But anyway, so it was a great experience. I think we got two pictures of there. And so if you're not in a community group, you see what you're missing out on?

Free wine. Cheese and chocolate. I tried to get the Diet Coke in there, but they said it didn't work with the wine and cheese thing and anything like that. Also, we're about to go out to the community, to the baptism right out here.

And so we just ask for you not to run away because we want everybody to partake in this. We're going to have the baptism candidates come up front. And then we will afterwards go eat.

We have a lot of food in a buffet over there, so we'd love for you to do that. In the middle of that time, there's going to be some university students walking around with baked goods. They have been baking for like four days straight. And all of these goods are going to be sold or donated, donations from you, and they're all going towards their mission outreach that they're going to be doing in the Philippines coming up very soon.

[38 : 08] So we want to encourage you to buy some baked goods and be a part of sending a university student to a mission trip in the Philippines. Also, the last Sunday of May, May 27th, write it out on your calendar.

We're going to have a beach trip, beach party. So immediately after the service, there'll be buses outside. We'll just get on the buses. We have a beach. It's our private beach. St. Stephen's Beach is great.

And we'll go there as a church family and just kind of hang out and have fun. Aussies will have plenty of sunscreen lotion so you can soap yourself up. Americans, don't worry about it.

You'll just get dark. But we want you to be a part of that. Okay. And also, I'm going to ask the baptism candidates to come forward. So the baptism candidates.

So in your booklet, you've got a booklet here and it's a story of all these people who are getting baptized today. So Judy and Victoria and Henrika and Ivy, you want to come up here real quickly?

[39 : 14] Okay. Come on. And so to me, this is like one of the amazing things of being a pastor is you get to see God just change people's lives.

And so I'm going to put Victoria on the spot because I asked her and we see your testimony in here, Victoria, and just it's amazing what God's done and brought you to this place. And I thought maybe you could just share for like, this is unrehearsed altogether.

So maybe just share for a minute or two of just the journey you've been on and how God brought you to this point. So I was born into a Christian family so I went to a Christian elementary school, you know, sang all the songs, did the prayers, but I never really took it to heart.

And then in middle school, my family moved because of work and the community was during Sunday so my parents told me that not going to church was just temporary. So I thought, okay, when I start to drive, I can start going to church.

But once I started driving, I didn't go back. I started drifting really far from God and I ended up making excuses to not to go to church, you know, too tired, I didn't feel like it.

[40 : 21] And then when I came to university, actually my priorities in life weren't about Jesus anymore. They were, I had bigger idols in my life, you know, fame, money, school, all that.

And my mom had two criterias for me, one, do well in school and two, join a church. So I actually found a flyer of Watermark ICF, International Christian Fellowship on the ground at HKU.

And then I thought, oh, that's really cool. So I went to it and then I remember the environment was so friendly that I thought it was too good to be true. So I was really intimidated at first.

So I wasn't very into it for a semester because I was feeling guilty that I drifted so away from God. And then second semester, I went on my first retreat and that's when I fully gave my life to Jesus.

And I remember the day after I came back from the retreat, I was just walking through the streets of Hong Kong just with my head lifted higher and just a slight smile on my face.

[41 : 21] And like coming to a new country is really scary. I mean, of course, Hong Kong. I walked around the streets very impatient and very guarded. And I just remember just feeling so much happier after the retreat.

And it doesn't seem like a big deal, but it was a major change for me because it wasn't until then that I realized how angry at myself and others around me that I was. And I just wake up every day just so much happier because back in high school, I would go, like months at a time, go to bed and wish that I wouldn't wake up.

So it was a really depressed time for me. And... Sorry. That's okay. I never cry up here, so don't worry about it. Oh my God. And...

That's okay. I remember after the retreat, sorry. Like, I didn't feel that anymore.

And that was a big change for me, accepting presence into my life. That's okay. That's okay.

[42 : 29] Just relax. Yeah. So... Thank you. It's a thank you. Wow. You are so good. Thank you. So I realized that looking back at my life, I had so much...

I had no peace within my life, so accepting Jesus completely changed my life and my behavior. I mean, I woke up thanking God so much for every single day he has given me, you know, days that I wish I could forever escape from before.

So, yeah. That's my story. Good. That's good. If... If there's someone in here maybe who is where you were, a year or two ago and feeling that tension and that lack of peace or that rowing against the stream, I think like what Pastor Charles said and like, where am I going?

Would you share any... What would you want them to know? What would you share with them? For so many years of my life, I tried to find happiness in a fulfilled life by myself, but it wasn't until I accepted Jesus or when I came here that I realized that I couldn't do that by myself.

I really... I desperately needed Jesus to trust him. You were so sweet. Yeah, so I desperately needed him to save me from my depressed lifestyle. So, I would just say that, just acknowledge that you need Jesus Christ in your life in order to change.

[43 : 54] Amen. Amen. Thank you. Okay, so baptism is not about... Now they get baptized, they are Christians, right? So baptism is an outward symbol of something that's already happened inwardly within all of their hearts as they cry.

I have some more tissue there. I don't normally have this effect on people, but God does. And so, as they come before, they're not becoming Christians right now.

They've become believers. They put their faith in Christ, and so they want to demonstrate what God has done in their life openly to the Watermark family and for everyone here to celebrate God's amazing goodness in their life.

And so that's why we're going to do that. And so I'm going to pray for you guys right now and then we're all going to make our way out to... We spent... We spared no expense in getting an amazing pool out here.

You're going to laugh when you see it. And we're going to do the baptisms out here. So don't leave, please, because you're going to want to be a part of this is what God's doing in our family. This is why you serve.

[44 : 59] This is why you tithe. This is why you do what you do to allow this church to exist. And so we're going to make our way out there and change our clothes, right? And then you'll be able to see...

And we'll sing little songs out there afterwards too as a family affair. So let me pray for us. Father, I just thank you for my dear sisters. I just thank you for Ivy and Judy and Henrica and Victoria and just what you've done in their life.

And I know there are people here right now who've come to know you this year and they still don't know if they have the courage to come up and be baptized. And Lord, I just pray that you would fill them with your peace.

And I thank you for this journey that you have these four women on. And just as they can look back at your amazingness and that you've brought them here. I pray that they would never forget this day, that they would have this put on their heart as a reminder of just how faithful you are.

And we pray for those in Hong Kong and this side of the island who don't know you yet. Father, we just pray for many, many, many more baptisms in the years to come as you allow us as a church to reach out and to share the most important thing in our life.

[46 : 12] So Lord, we love you and we worship you and we praise you for these stories in this booklet. We know that you are the God of stories. And so we pray these things in your son Jesus' name.

Amen. Okay, so we're going to change and we're going to meet everybody out there. And then again, we have a lot of food so we're going to kind of, I think we're locking that door, I don't know, but try to go out this way and we'll kind of go around and we'll meet you out there.