

Toxic Faith (Part I: Mixed-Up Theology)
“Nice People Go to Heaven”
February 6, 2011

As Ladell said, we’re looking at another element of toxic faith this morning – the belief that “nice people go to Heaven”; the belief that the standard by which God judges human beings is “were you a good person? Were you compassionate and caring? Did people say of you at your funeral ‘he really was a nice guy’ or ‘she really was a good gal?’”

And we’re looking at that belief this morning because ... well ... a lot of people believe it. A lot of people *in churches all over the world* this morning believe that. Do you believe it?

I remember the very first time I met someone who did – although, at the time, I didn’t

realize exactly what she was saying. I've told you before about the kid who would regularly beat me up after school when I was in 5th and 6th grade. One day, when he was ready to start pounding on me again, for some reason, his sister (who was probably in her late teens) saw what was about to happen. But instead of grabbing him by the neck and pulling him away she said, "Joby, remember what the Good Book says. God is watching you, and there's going to be a Judgement Day someday."

Unfortunately for me, he was not moved by that thought and he continued on his previously-determined course of action.

But what she was saying was exactly what we're talking about this morning: "there's a day coming when God is going to judge all human beings and you'd better be good if you want to pass. God's kind of like Santa

Claus in that respect. He's making a list and checking it twice and one day he's going to separate the naughty and the nice. The nice get to go to Heaven and the naughty get to go where it's not so nice."

A lot of people believe that's how it works.

In fact, to demonstrate just how pervasive this idea is, I'm going to put some pictures of famous people up on the video screen and I want you to think of what most people would say as to whether or not the person is going to wind up in Heaven.

Here's the first person. <Mother Teresa>

Next. <Saddam Hussein>

Here's another famous woman. <Oprah>

And this guy. <Tiger Woods>

Next <George W. Bush>

One more <Martin Luther King, Jr.>

Now, I've seen surveys on this kind of thing – I'm sure you have, too – and I feel comfortable saying that most people would probably respond to the question I asked like this:

“For sure Mother Teresa and Martin Luther King, Jr. are in ...

... because, in their own way, both of them were world-changers. They were way more concerned about other people than themselves. King, for example, seemed to know what was going to happen to him (if you read the story and listen to some of the things he said before he was assassinated) and yet he continued to push for the just cause of Civil Rights.”

I think a lot of people would say it's pretty likely that Oprah would end up in Heaven.

Now, it's true that she's kind of flaky sometimes and maybe even a little bit stuck on herself, but there's no doubt she's helped a lot of people. And she gives a lot of money to some really good causes.

Then there's Tiger Woods.

I think most people would say that, unless something dramatic happens and he really changes his ways, it's pretty doubtful that he'll make it. If there really is a hell, you hate to say it, but guys like that are probably going to go there *unless*, again, they really turn their lives around and get on the straight and narrow.

And, of course, I think almost everyone would say "there's no way Saddam Hussein gets in."

People who abuse their power by committing mass-murders and torture of their own people surely must be denied entry into heaven.

So ...

Oh, wait a minute, I almost forgot one.

George W. Bush ... what about him?

I think where most people put his chances depends on whether or not they believe Jesus is a Democrat or a Republican. So, let's just put "Dub-yah" in the "questionable" category.

Now, obviously, there's no way of knowing if this "ranking" (so to speak) is correct. But I'm pretty confident that most people would lay it out that way because most people

believe that “nice people, really nice people, really good people go to Heaven – and not-so-nice people do not.”

Why We Believe It

Of course, the question is ... where do people get the idea that it works this way? Why do *some of us* believe that?

As I was preparing for this message, I thought of four reasons. As I go through them, see if any of these describe your thinking.

1. First of all, most people think that what God wants from humans is “niceness.”

And they think that because the most prevalent form of spirituality in America today isn't Christianity or Judaism or Islam. It's something called “Moralistic Therapeutic

Deism.”

Now, most people wouldn't identify themselves with that label, but that's what most people are, spiritually speaking.

- By “deism” I mean the belief that there *is* a God out there somewhere, but no one can really be sure just who he (or she or it) is.
- By “therapeutic” I mean the belief that what this god wants most is for us to be happy. And he/she/it is there primarily to assist whenever we're in trouble – kind of like a therapist, only better because it's god.
- And by “moralistic” I mean the belief that the only way to be happy is to be a good, moral person; to be nice, kind, pleasant, respectful, responsible, working on self-improvement, taking care of our health, and doing our best

to be successful.ⁱ

That's Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Whoever god is, he/she/it mostly just wants all of us to be happy by being nice and doing good.

And since God mostly just wants us to be nice and to do good, we think ...

2. It's only fair that whatever judgment there is be based on that standard.

It's only fair that the people who do good are in and the people who do bad are out.

It's only fair that someone like Bono gets in because he's done all these great things in the world, but, that guy who killed all those people in AZ a couple weekends ago – he should be out.

Plus, this is how real life works, isn't it? Do

good and you'll be rewarded; do evil and you'll be punished. That's why we hang people like Saddam and canonize people like Mother Teresa. Surely God works the same way.

In fact, there is some biblical backing for this belief. Jesus once said:

When the Son of Man [referring to himself] comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Matthew 31:32-33 (NIV)

And I'll just say that when you read the rest

of that passage, it's obvious that the good guys and good gals are on the right and you don't want to be on the left.

I think another reason why we believe that nice people go to Heaven – and this one is so much more painful and personal than the first two that I almost didn't even put this one in here – I think we believe that nice people go to Heaven because ...

3. It's too hard to believe the opposite: that some of the nice people we know might actually end up in Hell ...

... especially if some of those people are deceased friends or family – a spouse; a parent; a child. It's almost impossible, emotionally, to comprehend such a thing.

Over the years, I've done more funerals than I can count, many of them for people who really had nothing at all to do with God

during their entire life. At almost every one of those particular kinds of funerals, at least one person – most often a family member – will stand up and say something like, “well, I know old Joe wasn’t a religious person. He didn’t go to church or talk about God much. But he was a good dad; he was a good husband; he was a good employee. It’s true that he was a little rough around the edges but, he meant well, so I’m sure he’s looking down on us right now from a better place.”

Have you ever heard that? Have you ever told yourself that? *You almost have to* because it’s too painful to think that a good and loving God would qualify or disqualify a friend or family member on some other basis. “He or she was nice – well, maybe not that nice, but they had a hard life, that’s why they weren’t so nice; besides they weren’t evil like Adolf Hitler was evil, so they’ve got to be ‘in’ ... right?”

But there's one more reason that a lot of folks believe that "nice people go to Heaven." And this is probably the biggest reason of all.

4. "It's too hard to believe that a nice moral person *like me* is in some kind of eternal danger."

"I mean, seriously ...

- I pay my taxes. I obey the laws (although sometimes I do drive too fast). I work hard and do my job mostly without complaining.
- I try to contribute to society instead of taking from it.
- I'm not a deadbeat. I don't beat my kids or run around on my spouse.
- I coach a Little League team. I volunteer at the local elementary school.

- I try to be a good neighbor. Heck, I shoveled three driveways this week other than my own!
- I'm active in my church. I've been baptized.
- I give money to the United Way. Sometimes, I even give money to the homeless person on the street corner.
- I try to take care of the planet. I drive a hybrid. I recycle. I put solar panels on my roof."

"There's no way that a person like me isn't good and nice enough to make it. Not when there are so many other people in this world who are – gosh, I hate to sound judgmental on this but – so much worse than me. It's just too hard to believe that someone like me might not get past the pearly gates."

(And by the way, just to be clear – and I know I've said this many times – the ultimate

Heaven that God has in mind for those who *do* get there isn't some spiritual existence behind some imaginary set of pearly gates. It's a full-fledged resurrection from the dead – when Jesus returns – into a completely restored body that will never get sick or die; into a world that's been remade without the curse of sin that has so messed up this world.

That's *not* to say that some people don't wait in a spiritual Heaven after death for Jesus to return but, according to the Bible, that place is not what God ultimately has in mind for us. So don't be confused when I talk about "getting past the pearly gates." (It's just a metaphor.)

In any case, the biggest reason that a lot of people believe that "nice people go to Heaven" is that they think of *themselves* as good and nice – not necessarily perfect, but

better than average (if not far above) when it comes to the rest of the human race – and there's no way they should be excluded.

Logical Problems

Now, since this is a series about toxic faith ... and I already said at the beginning that this particular belief is an element of toxic faith ... obviously, the next thing I'm supposed to say is that "this is not what the Bible teaches" and then tell you what it does teach. But I'm not going to go there just yet because I think it would be more helpful to consider some of the logical problems of this belief if it really *was* true.

For instance, if it really is true that you have to be good in order to get into Heaven ...

Problem #1. Just exactly *how good* do you have to be to be considered "good enough"?

Is there a defined cutoff line on the scale of best to worst in terms of human goodness?

I mean, if you look at all the people we put up there from before ...

... from Mother Teresa down to Saddam Hussein (and other terrible people like him)

...

... where do you draw the line? Do you draw it somewhere between Oprah and George Bush? A little lower than George (depending on your political persuasion)? What level of "good" gets a person in? It seems pretty arbitrary.

Problem #2. Once you figure out where "the line" goes, how do you determine your own "goodness quotient" so you can know if you're measuring up to it?

How do you know where to rank yourself on

the scale? There's no formula anywhere.

For example, what I know about myself is that I am a mixture of good and not-so-good in my attitudes and in my actions. I'm sure you are, too. So, where do we go to figure out how to relatively weight those good and bad attitudes and behaviors to come up with the number that ranks us on the scale?

For instance, let's take what Kenny Chesney sang about in that video – he said I'm going to put \$20 in the offering this morning to pay for everything I did last night. How does he know it's not \$200? Or \$2,000? What's it going to take to push us up on the scale?

That's the second problem. How do we weigh out the good and bad in our lives so we can determine where we are on the scale?

But there's one more problem, and it's the biggest, I think.

Problem #3. The best people on our scale have said *they themselves* aren't good enough!

If you've ever heard the details of Mother Teresa's story, you know that there were times in her life where she doubted the existence of God. And I'm not talking about when she was a young woman. I'm talking about when she had been in the ministry for awhile. For years, she said, she was angry at God because of the poverty she saw in the world, because of what she was having to work in and so for years she just went through the motions of being a nun. Her heart wasn't really in it. She repeatedly said that she was a sinner – maybe not in the way some of us are – but she knew that she was not measuring up to what she should be. And that's amazing to think about because

she's so much better than the rest of us.

And if you've ever listened to or read any of MLK Jr.'s sermons (remember, the man was a pastor before he was a civil rights leader) you know that he talked quite often about sin – which is another way of describing “not measuring up” or “falling short of the standard.” But he wasn't just talking about the sin of the discriminatory white culture of his day; he was talking about his own sin and the sin of the people who followed him.

So, really, when you factor in what the best representatives of the human race have to say, the scale that most of us look at and judge ourselves by probably isn't anywhere near accurate.

We think of it like this with ourselves kind of in the middle, maybe just barely over the “good enough” line, but kind of in the middle.

But when you factor in what Mother Teresa and MLK Jr said about themselves, in reality it should look a lot more like this ...

**... with all of us much further down,
nowhere near the “good enough” line.**

And again, remember the “good enough” line is really just speculation on our part. It could be that the line is much, much higher ...

**... like this, where we aren’t anywhere
close to it.**

So, you see the problems here, right? It *sounds* good to say that “nice people go to Heaven,” but ...

- We’re not really sure how nice and good is “good enough”.
- And it’s hard to determine where we

are in relation to that imaginary line.

- And it's pretty likely that we're much further from that line than we would ever believe.

What Jesus Said

Now, we could spend a lot of time hypothesizing about all those things, trying to figure it all out, but now that you see the problem, I think it's time to hear what Jesus had to say about this. And, for that, we turn to the Gospel of Matthew Chapter 5 – the passage of scripture known as *The Sermon on the Mount*.

Near the beginning of that sermon, after Jesus gives some introductory remarks, he says ...

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or

the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them [I'm not trying to give you a new law] but [I'm going] to fulfill them.

For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." Matthew 5:17-18 (NIV)

Now, the Law to which Jesus was referring to here is the Law of Moses – the Ten Commandments and all the other things Moses told the People of God that they were to do – all the special feasts they were to have during the year, all the special offerings and tithes they were to give to take care of the poor in their community, all the regulations they were to observe, right down to how they were supposed to worship. That was the standard of “good enough” and

everyone listening to Jesus knew it.

But, *what's fascinating* is that there was a group of men in those days who kept that Law perfectly – and then some. They were known as the Pharisees. They had developed an additional set of rules (hundreds of them!) that were just a little bit more stringent than what Moses prescribed, so that they would never be in danger of not being good enough. If I don't step this far, then I'm certainly not going to step off the cliff – that was how their thinking was.

And they upheld that standard ... perfectly. In fact, you could say that these guys were the ultimate nice guys. In terms of being good, they were the Mother Teresas and MLK Jr. of their day and everyone knew it ... including Jesus.

So, imagine the shock when the people who

were listening (most of whom were *not* Pharisees) heard Jesus say ...

*"I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."
Matthew 5:20 (NIV)*

Wow! I think it had to blow their minds because they knew who the Pharisees were and knew what the Pharisees were doing.

So, let's try and translate that so we can understand it. Let's go back to that "good enough" scale, OK? I think Jesus is saying, "Take the very best people you know and put them near the top of your scale."

It would look something like this ... with the Pharisees far above everyone else.

And everyone in that crowd would have agreed that's how it is.

"But if you want to know how good is good enough," I think Jesus would say ...

**"You have to draw the line *above them*.
That's how good you have to be if you
want to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."**

... which, by the way, is not the exact same thing as "going to Heaven when you die" or when Jesus comes back. According to the Bible, you're either part of the Kingdom of Heaven now, here on Earth, or you're not. And if you're part of the Kingdom now, you get to live in the Kingdom later. But, that's a minor point in this discussion. The main point is "you must be this good to get in – better than the best Pharisee you know."

And just to make sure there was no doubt about what that looked like; just so everyone could evaluate where they were with respect

to that line, Jesus went on to describe in very clear terms what it meant for a person's goodness to surpass that of the Pharisees.

First he said ...

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'"

And anybody who had heard Jesus saying that would've recognized that. It's from the Ten Commandments.

But remember, you have to exceed that, Jesus was saying ...

... and here's what it looks like.

"I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister without cause will be subject

to judgment. Anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell."
Matthew 5:21-23 (NIV)

That's incredible!

"Even if you never murdered anyone (which I guess makes you a nice person) that's not good enough" Jesus is saying. "If you ever get mad at someone when they don't deserve it, you're not good enough. If you call them names in anger, you're not good enough. And if you're not good enough, you're not getting in."

Now, I don't know about you but, according to that, I'm toast because I *have* been angry without cause. I *have* been ugly to people when I'm mad. And I'm pretty sure that most of the people listening to Jesus would have thought the same thing: "uh-oh, I'm in trouble."

But just in case there were a few who could legitimately say, "I've never been mad without a good reason and I've never been verbally abusive to anyone when I am mad" Jesus says ...

Ok ...

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'"

And, again, everyone would recognize that. It's from the Ten Commandments. And in that crowd, almost everyone there would have been able to say, "never done that."

But remember, it's not enough to just avoid doing the deed. "You have to go beyond it," Jesus said.

And here's what it looks like.

"I tell you that anyone who even looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Matthew 5:27-28 (NIV)

And, at that point, I think every guy in the crowd of listeners – and maybe a lot of the women – is going, "well, I'm out." And I would bet big money that every person in this room would say the same thing ... because I know I would.

But just in case there might be *one person* who had never gotten angry without cause, never berated another person, never looked at someone who was not their spouse with an inappropriate sexual desire ...

Jesus said ...

"You have heard that it was

*said, 'Love your neighbor
and hate your enemy.'"*

And people would recognize that as coming not from the Ten Commandments but from another part of the Old Testament along with a popular rabbinic interpretation that said it was OK to hate those who hate you.

But remember, Jesus has already said that's not good enough. You have to exceed that.

And here's what that looks like:

*"But I tell you, [you have to]
love your enemies and pray
for those who persecute you."*

Matthew 5:43-44

(NIV)

And, at that point, I think every person listening to Jesus would have known for sure that they were on the wrong side of the "good enough" line because there is no one

who has ever done *that* perfectly, 100% of the time, for their entire life. It's totally unnatural for a human being to love and pray for their enemies as their first response.

But just in case anyone thought, "Man, this is ridiculous. No one can be like this perfectly, 100% of the time, for your whole life. Maybe I'm just not understanding what he's saying" ... just in case anyone thought that, Jesus ended this part of his sermon ...

... with this statement:

*"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."
Matthew 5:50 (NIV)*

That's the standard. That's what good enough is.

And that, friends, is why the nicest person you know, the most morally upright person

you could name ... isn't good enough. It's why the Bible says things like "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" and "there is no one righteous; no, not even one person." It's why we say all the time around here that "you're far worse than you would ever believe."

And it's why this belief that "nice people go to Heaven" is so toxic. It gives us a false assurance about a matter from which it is impossible to "detox" if you get it wrong. It's why good and nice and moral people like us ought to be extremely concerned about our eternal destiny.

How to Respond

So, what should we do with this information?

One option, after you heard what Jesus said, would be to say, "OK, if that's the standard,

how do I just buckle down and do better? Maybe I could ask all the women around me to wear a burka and that would solve the lust problem. Maybe I should never watch TV again. Maybe I should put my eyes out. Maybe if I did those things, I would at least close the gap a little on that issue." And you can think of other things for other issues.

And there are a lot of people, a lot of Christians, who try to do life that way. In fact, a lot of people think that was Jesus' goal in giving this sermon – to press everyone to raise the bar. "It's not enough to avoid killing someone – you'd better not even speak a word in anger! You'd better duct tape your mouth shut if you need to." That's what Jesus was saying, get really, really rigid and don't ever get out.

The problem with that is that they're taking what Jesus said as being *prescriptive* when,

actually, he was being *descriptive*. He wasn't trying to prescribe a new course of action. He was describing a particular condition.

Remember, this part of his sermon began with the issue of "what will it take to get into the kingdom of Heaven? What's good enough?"

- Is it keeping the Law of Moses? Not many people can do that.
- Is it keeping the even more difficult laws of the Pharisees, that ensure you don't break *The Law*? The only ones who can do that are the Pharisees and there are only a few of them.

"No," Jesus says. "You have to do even better" and then he lays out a standard that is so impossibly high that no human being – as hard as they might try – could ever reach

it 100% of the time.

The question is, why would he do such a thing?

I think Jesus was trying to illustrate the absolute hopelessness of the human condition before God. I think he was trying to illustrate to us that we don't need a self-improvement program – we need a savior.

We don't need to figure out how to make ourselves better so that we enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. That's impossible. It's so *not* the issue. In fact, sometimes when people think about this they say, "well, that's just one place where Jesus taught that. Give me another example." Well, there was one day, the scripture says, when this very wealthy guy came to Jesus, he was a very good man, and he said to Jesus, "what do I need to do to inherit eternal life? (How good do I need to be?)" Jesus said, "Well, you know. You've read the law. You know the

commandments, honor your parents, do this, do that ...” The man said, “all those things I have done since I was a young boy.” And the bible says that Jesus looked at him with compassion, and he said, “That is so cool - but you lack one thing. Here’s what you need to do – you need to sell everything you have. You need to cash out, take *all* of that and give it to the poor. Then, come follow me. And when you do that, you will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. You’ll be good enough at that point.” The bible says that the guy walked away very sad because he was very rich.

Now, what was Jesus doing? Was he just trying to say there is a rule and you’ve got to keep it? Do you know what Jesus was doing - he was illustrating to him *the hopelessness of his human condition*. He was saying, “you are not anywhere near what you need to be. Not only that, you don’t even want to be. It’s

not even in you. It's not in your heart to be where you need to be." And that's why he gave him that little test. See, the issue is not how good we can be; it's the hopelessness of the human condition.

Well, Rick, what do you mean by that - the hopelessness of the human condition.

Here's how the Apostle Paul described it to a group of people who, years later, were following Christ.

He wrote:

*As for you, [before you became a follower of Jesus] you were dead in your transgressions and sins ...
Ephesians 5:1 (NIV)*

That's how bad off, Paul says, you were in

the sight of God. God said at the very beginning that sin would lead to death. He told that to Adam and Eve. Paul wrote in another one of his letters “the wages of sin is death. This is the payoff.” But, not just physical death but spiritual death. We’re dead spiritually. And just like dead people can’t improve their physical condition, spiritually dead people cannot improve their condition with a self-improvement program.

You need a savior when you’re spiritually dead. You need a resurrection. And that’s why Jesus came.

Paul continues:

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

Ephesians 5:4-6 (NIV)

What Paul is saying is, something happened in Jesus. When Jesus died and then rose from the grave, God did something for you in that. Because of his great mercy, because of his great love. Even though you were worse than you could ever imagine, you are more loved in Christ than you could ever believe.

So Paul is saying, this is what Jesus did, this is what you need. He said,

For it is by grace (favor that you don't deserve; favor that you cannot earn) you have been saved, through faith (by believing in Jesus) —and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works (not by trying to measure up to The Law or the Pharisees or something Jesus was saying), so that no one can boast. Ephesians 5:8-9 (NIV)

This illustrates how far you really are off. Not by trying to measure up to that, but it's by faith.

See, eternal life, heaven, is not a reward for good people...it is a gift for bad people!ⁱⁱⁱ And the sooner we get that in our heads, the better off we're going to be.

Conclusion

I know at this point a lot of people have heard this before and think, "yeah, yeah, I've heard this schtick before and I'm still not sure I buy it. The thing is, Rick, it sounds really cool but what about all the billions of people in the world who have never heard about Jesus, never heard what you're talking about?" Well, here is where I come down on it - I don't know. I mean, I read the scriptures and I have an opinion on that and I'd be happy to tell you my opinion if you want to

know. But lots of people have different opinions on that. Some people read that and they say, "They're lost. There is no hope for them." Other people read that and they say, "Well, maybe there is another way that God brings Christ to them." *I don't know.* But one thing that cannot be seriously debated is "what about people who have heard this Gospel, this good news?" The bible says that when you hear this you are responsible for this. For some reason, God, in His divine providence, has made it possible for you to hear. It's not about being good enough. It's not about trying to measure up. It's about having a savior who gave his life for you. And now you're responsible for that, and you have to do something with that.

So, what do you do? If you've never been to the place in your life before where you've said, "I get it. I'm not trying to measure up. I'm not trying to self-improve. I'm dead. I

need a savior. I need a resurrection.” What you do is what Jesus said over and over. He said the Kingdom of God is near:

- Repent and believe this good news – repent, change your mind; stop believing that nice people go to Heaven and you’re one of them. Stop believing that. Instead, start believing that what you really need is a savior and that’s what Jesus did on the cross for you and in his resurrection. Somehow, in a way I don’t completely understand, your sin and mine was paid for and new life comes out of that as we believe.
- The second thing you do is you follow Christ in baptism. Jesus said when people come to the point of saying “yes, I can’t make myself better. I need Jesus as a savior,” they follow him in baptism. They go in the water and they go under

the water. It's a sign that "I'm dead spiritually," and they come back up as a sign that "I'm alive in Christ." We do that a couple of times a year and there's a time coming up this spring that we're going to do it, and if this is where you are today, if you're saying, "I need to repent and believe" then you can be baptized this spring.

- Another thing you do is become part of the body of Christ, his church. You've got to become part of a church somewhere. "Well, wait, wait...so you're telling me now I've got to be part of a church, to get this new life?" No, not at all, but here's the deal, why would you want to be part of the Kingdom of Heaven if you don't want to have anything to do with the Kingdom of God now? Doesn't make any sense.

- The last thing you do is to keep believing. Keep believing this over and over. Keep coming back to this gospel. What happens with a lot of Christian people is they hear this and the light comes on and they say, "oh yeah, it's not about me trying to measure up. I can't be good enough; Jesus did that for me." So, they accept Jesus, they get baptized and become part of the church. They start living their life and they go, "you know, it's not changing as fast as I thought. I still have these struggles with this particular sin. In fact, the more I know God, the further I see myself from that line. It's even worse than I thought!" And they get discouraged and go, "Oh, God is mad now. I've got to ..." - No, you come back to the same thing. You come back to the grace of Jesus that saved you. You repent and you believe all over again.

And then you rejoice in what God has done for you in your life. And then out of that, you live your life. And little by little your life begins to change and you become more like Christ.

Now, this morning, I've covered a lot of ground. I think I've talked about every person on the spectrum here in this room this morning. So, what I want to do is to pray for you as we close, and then our band is going to come and lead us in a little celebration of grace.

Let's pray together.

Endnotes

ⁱ <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20050418/moralistic-therapeutic-deism-the-new-american-religion/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.gracebeliever.com/articles/articles/niceandnasty.htm>