

Amazing Grace II: Live It!
“Simul Iustus et Peccator”
October 20, 2013

PRELUDE – Christ is Risen

Worship Songs – All Because of Jesus / Remind Me of Who I Am

Feature – Soldier

Good morning everyone.

Today, as Shannon said, we are continuing in our *Amazing Grace* series. And, yes, the title of the message *is* in a language no one speaks anymore – Latin. But I decided to use that language anyway because of the significance of where the phrase comes from.

The title is “Simul Iustus et Peccator” ...

... a phrase that repeatedly occurs in the writings of the great reformer Martin Luther – a Catholic priest who, five centuries ago, rocked the world of Christianity with his

attempt to reform (among other things) the Catholic Church's understanding of *grace* – specifically, how people receive the grace of God and even more specifically, how people are made right with God.

As we saw earlier in this series, every world religion or spiritual pathway including Christianity recognizes that something is wrong with this world. Something is fundamentally flawed with human beings. We fall short – in big ways and small – of what we're supposed to be. The Bible calls that flaw, that shortfall, "sin." And every religion or pathway *except for Christianity* tells its followers what they must do in order to make up for their failures. Christianity says (and this is what makes it unique among all religions and pathways) that it's impossible for humans to do anything at all to atone for sin so God did it for us. He came into the world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, lived a perfect life and then was executed on a Roman cross.

And on that cross something incredible happened.

Paul writes:

God made Him who had no sin to become sin for us that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV)

God took our sin, laid it on Jesus and judged him instead of us. He paid the price that we should pay so that we can be made right; so that we can be justified – declared innocent – of every sin big or small we’ve ever committed or will commit ... which is really, really good news.

And God does this because God is a God of *grace*. Though we do not deserve it and cannot earn it God freely offers this salvation to us – that’s what grace is. And all we need to do to

receive that salvation is ... well, that's where Luther comes in (and eventually this fancy Latin phrase).

Martin Luther never intended to be a priest. He was training to be a lawyer. But one day, he was caught in a thunderstorm and almost killed by lightning. He took that as a sign of God's impending judgment on him, so he decided to become a monk in order to become holier and more acceptable to God.

Now, what's fascinating about that is that Luther was already a Christian. Luther already believed that Jesus had died on the cross to forgive his sin. But he had a big problem that many Christians today also have: even though he knew that Jesus had graciously given his life to procure salvation, even though he was a believer, *he was still a sinner*. He did not live a life of moral perfection. And he was terrified by that. He was demoralized by that.

Years later, when he reflected back on this experience in his life, he wrote that, at the time, he *did not* love God and *could not* love God because he saw God as a totally righteous being demanding totally righteous living of humans who, even though they believed in Jesus, *were not* totally righteous in reality. They still sinned. And because of that, God's justice and vengeance awaited even those who believed.

When I was in my late 20s I had a similar experience. I don't mean that I was almost killed by lightning and decided to go into full-time vocational ministry. What I mean is that I came to a point where I became very conscious of the fact that, even though I had accepted Christ as my savior when I was 15 and had lived a very moral life in comparison to the people around me, I was falling far short of what I was supposed to be. And I saw it daily – and sometimes hourly – primarily because I had become ... the father of two little girls.

There's nothing like little children to reveal to you just how self-centered you really are. Before having kids, I was a fairly pleasant guy. My wife actually liked me. But after we had kids, I was frustrated and angry all the time. I was jealous of the time Jetta spent with the girls instead of me and I became critical and demanding of her, especially when it came to sex. I lost interest in going to church. Oh, I still volunteered (a lot) but I would cut out at the beginning of the service and go buy a newspaper and come back and pick them up after it was over.

What made it even worse was that, in the middle of all that, I came to believe that God was telling me to quit my job as a software engineer and go into the ministry! But when I looked in the mirror and saw the ugliness that was still in my soul, like Martin Luther I was totally demoralized. I thought "forget ministry - I can't even be a good Christian! I can't even love my wife and kids like I'm supposed to!" It

seemed like the more I knew of God and *His* perfection, the more I realized just how messed up *I* was. And I was angry about that. It felt like a no-win situation.

Maybe some of you have had that experience. Maybe some of you are having that experience right now. If you haven't or you're not, you *will* ... which reminds me of something I've been needing to say.

I suspect that some of some of you may be thinking all of this talk about grace really isn't that relevant because it isn't as "practical" as some of the other things we've talked about. But I want to tell you something: we can talk about the practical stuff – how to do this or what God wants us to do about that – but it will always, by necessity, lead back to this point *because you won't be able to do it*. You will fail just like we all fail. I mean, I had been taught a lot about how to be a good husband and father but I just couldn't do it. I was a failure.

And if you don't know how to deal with that – and more importantly, if you don't know how God deals with it in His grace – *you will* become discouraged and demoralized. *You will* start to see God as a demanding righteous judge who is always watching to see when you screw up. And that will begin to destroy your love for God and your faith.

That's what was happening with me. I had the same problem Luther did. *I didn't understand grace*. Specifically, I didn't understand “simul iustus et peccator.” (And we're getting to that, I promise). Even though I wasn't Catholic and Luther was, my concept of how God's grace towards sinners worked was very similar to his.

I'm grossly oversimplifying this but Luther had been taught that God's grace – his acceptance and forgiveness for sin – had been made available to humans through what Jesus did on

the cross and in His resurrection. That's basic Christianity. That's what we've been talking about for the last four weeks. However, he had also been taught that this grace was stored in Heaven as an infinite "treasury of merit" which was able to be periodically infused into the souls of believers through the sacraments and indulgences (or special dispensations authorized by a priest).

There's a lot that could be said about this but I want to give you just four characteristics of this understanding of grace which I will call "sacramental" because that's how, in this line of thinking, grace comes to us.ⁱ

- In the sacramental view, grace is received through participating in sacraments (communion, penance, mass, fasting, marriage, last rites) and through special dispensations (like visiting a spiritual shrine).

- In this view, righteousness is “infused” into your soul as you freely receive sacraments and indulgences. Through this infusion, you are enabled to *be* righteous in reality.
- The more you do works of righteousness, the more you cooperate with grace, the more your justification – your righteous standing – before God increases. Correspondingly, if you don’t cooperate – if you do works of evil – your justification decreases. Your standing before God at any moment in time is dependent on your behavior.
- Obviously, since no one reaches perfection in this life, further purging of whatever sin is left on your soul (assuming it is not a mortal sin) is required after death. Therefore, even

though it's not directly stated in the Bible, there must be a place called Purgatory where this happens.

I was talking about this with Shannon one day – and Shannon, as many of you know, was raised Catholic – and she said growing up she never expected that she would go directly to Heaven when she died. No one in the Catholic Church believes that, she said. The best you can hope for is a short stay in Purgatory.

Now, as I've said in other messages, I'm not interested in slamming Catholic theology. I'm only presenting this because I want you to understand the system under which Luther was raised and under which he became a priest and why he was so terrified and demoralized. No matter how often he received communion or confessed his sins and did penance (and later he wrote that if any monk could have attained perfection through his dedication and practice, it was him) it was still not enough. He

still did not measure up.

In fact, one of his superiors at the monastery was so worn out by Luther's marathon confessions that he finally told him, "If you expect Christ to forgive you, come in with something to forgive like blasphemy or adultery instead of all these peccadilloes (or minor sins)."ii

Defining the Phrase

So, what happened to Luther? What changed his life? Why, instead of leaving the priesthood in anger and hostility towards God, did he become, quite unexpectedly, the Father of the Reformation?

"Simul iustus et peccator."

**"Simul" from which we get the word
"simultaneous."**

“iustus” which means “just” or “righteous.”

“et peccator” which means “and sinner.”

“Simul iustus et peccator” ...

“Simultaneously righteous and sinful.”

Luther rediscovered a biblical truth that, for many reasons, had long been lost: that we who believe in Jesus are not *becoming* more and more acceptable to God as we cooperate with grace and live more and more righteously. Instead, we are *declared* completely righteous and acceptable at the moment we put our faith and trust in Jesus as our savior; at the moment we admit that we are a lost and hopeless sinner in need of a savior and believe that Jesus died and rose again to pay for our sin. In that moment, we are born again – we become a new creation and the righteousness of God is imputed to us (or “credited to our account”) once and for all.

And that is what we are in His sight –

completely righteous ... even though we still continue to sin intentionally or unintentionally.

We are “simul iustus et peccator.” We are not an either/or (not a sinner *or* a saint). We are not a mixture of the two (half-sinner and half-saint). We are 100% sinner and 100% saint at the exact same time ... which by the way, is exactly how the Apostle Paul – one of the greatest Christians to ever live – described *himself* when he wrote to the first century believers in Rome.

He told them ...

I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For I want to do the good, but I cannot do it. And [not only do] I do not do the good I want, but I do the very evil I do not want!

Romans 7:18-19 (NET)

Ever feel like that? Ever have that experience?

You know what's right but you don't do it. You know what's wrong and you do it anyway?

Paul explains why that happens.

Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer me doing it but sin that lives in me. When I want to do good, evil is present with me. Romans 7:20-21 (NET)

For I delight in the law of God in my inner being. But I see a different law in my members [my flesh] waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that is in my members.

Romans 7:22-23 (NET)

Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! Romans 7:24-25 (NET-NIV)

There are two equal and opposite natures at work in Paul's life and in the life of anyone who belongs to Christ. In his "inner being" Paul is 100% saint, delighting in loving and obeying God. In his members – in his flesh, in his "body of death" – he is 100% sinner. And so are you if you have come to the point of believing in Jesus.

"Simul iustus et peccator."

Now, as to *how* Martin Luther came to see this truth, that's a longer story than we have time for. Let's just say that with the New Testament having recently become available in the original Greek language, he was in the right place at the right time. For almost a thousand years before his time, the church was using a Latin translation and scriptural interpretation was more allegorical and not based on what the author originally intended to say.

More important than that was the change that Luther's discovery brought about in the way that many people in his day (and countless more since) came to understand grace; *that it is not temporarily infused through the sacraments but is freely and completely given through faith.*

It's hard to overstate how radical this shift was. In fact, I want to make a comparison chart to the one we saw earlier to illustrate that and also because I think this summarizes very nicely what we've been learning in this series.

Let's call this view "Free Grace."ⁱⁱⁱ

- Unlike the sacramental view, where grace is received through sacraments and special dispensations, in the Free Grace view grace is received through faith – when we come to believe that Jesus is Lord and God raised him from the dead.

- Instead of righteousness being “infused” into your soul, the perfect righteousness of Jesus is imputed – or credited – to your account. You are legally declared “not guilty” for all sin past, present and future.
- Instead of an increasing or decreasing justification which is dependent on your cooperation with God, your justification is complete. Your standing before God at any moment in time is never dependent on your “goodness.” It is always dependent on the goodness of Jesus.
- Instead of sin having to be purged from your soul in a place the Bible never mentions, sin is simply gone when your flesh (your physical body) dies. All that is left of you is the 100% righteous, holy, justified saint ... until the day when Jesus returns and raises up your flesh and renews, restores and regenerates it to

sinless perfection!

What a radical difference in understanding!

It was so radical that it got Luther excommunicated ... and so radical that it freed up and continues to free up so many believers who beat themselves up over their failures and shortcomings. I've seen that happen here in this series. So many people have told me personally or through email of the burden they have felt lifted from them once they saw the truth of what Jesus has truly accomplished for them. Words can't adequately express how happy I am about that – that people are seeing that the Good News really *is* good news.

A Confused Hybrid

Unfortunately, my little chart wouldn't be complete if I didn't also point out a third view. After Luther staked out this radically biblical

view on grace, other well meaning Christians – *non-Catholic* Christians – felt like he had gone too far.

And they opted for a position that I'll call “*conditional grace*” – a confused hybrid of the sacramental and free grace positions.

And this position has many variations (which is one reason why there are so many Protestant denominations). But regardless of the flavor, the one common characteristic of all of them is that if you sin badly enough or you don't hold tightly enough to your faith or you don't confess and turn away from every sin (and hopefully you know all of them), the penalty isn't *Purgatory* – it's Hell. You lose your salvation. This is what I believed at the point when I had my crisis as a young father and husband.

From what we've talked about so far in this series I think you're aware that we do not teach this view here at NHCC and I've explained why

in several of the messages. But let me take another swing at it because I am so burdened at what happens to people who believe this.

Besides the fact that the free grace position is *by far* the most supported position in the New Testament, the idea of conditional grace is totally illogical. If I can't do anything to *earn* forgiveness *before* I come to Jesus as my savior, how is it possible for me to do anything that *keeps* that forgiveness *afterwards*? If faith in Jesus is what *gets* me "in" then faith has to be what *keeps* me "in."

... which is exactly what the Apostle Paul told the Galatians.

*Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?
Galatians 3:3 (NLT)*

It's impossible, Paul is saying. You can't do it. If

God starts the process, God finishes it.

More importantly, the problem with conditional grace is that it doesn't take seriously the fact that, if you are a born again believer in Jesus, there are two natures at work in your life. You really are "simul iustus et peccator" because when you were born from above, the Holy Spirit made your dead-in-sin spirit alive which made you 100% righteous. And yet, because you are still in your flesh, your old sinful nature – the part of you that is opposed to God in every way - you are still 100% sinner. And these two natures are going to do battle and sometimes the old sinful nature is going to win ... and win big.

That's what Paul was getting at in Romans 7 and it's something he repeated in almost every letter he wrote.

The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite

of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. Galatians 5:17 (NLT)

You are not always free to do what your new nature wants. Sometimes, the sinful nature wins.

And yet, in spite of this, Paul – immediately after describing this struggle in Romans 7 ...

... writes this:

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1 (NIV)

There is no condemnation for those who are in

Christ who lose the battle against their sinful nature. The war has already been won by Jesus. Your flesh will die someday and your sinful nature will die with it.

*I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.
Philippians 1:6 (NLT)*

What Now?

Now, at this point, I'm sure that some of you are thinking, "thank you very much, Rick, for the history and theology lesson this morning. But what does this have to do with real life? How is this knowledge going to make any difference for me when I walk out of here this morning?"

Let me give you two thoughts.

1. Stop focusing on your sin. Start focusing on who God has empowered you to be.

Every letter Paul wrote followed the same format.

- Here's what Christ did to save you and make you completely righteous in God's sight.
- Because of that, your old sinful nature is done for.
- Therefore, concentrate on the new nature God has given you.

Your old sinful flesh going to pass away when you die, so consider yourself dead to it right now. Stop listening to it, stop obsessing over how bad it wants to behave and sometimes does behave. Instead, clothe yourself with Christ.

Throw off your old sinful

nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.
Ephesians 4:22-24 (NLT)

Sometimes we just become too obsessed with what not to do or how we're failing that we lose sight of the incredible new nature that God has given us. We need to focus more on that instead of sin. "You will not find victory probing around the garbage dump of your sinful nature." We find it by renewing our minds; by building up the new nature in ways that Ladell talked about in last week's message.

Yet, sin is still with us and will continue to be. There are sinful patterns in your life and mine that we will never fully overcome until the day we die or the day Jesus comes back. What should we do?

2. When you do sin (or when you become conscious of your sinful nature) confess, repent and rejoice in what you have already received in Christ.

Agree with God that it is sinful. That's what confessing and repenting is.

And then thank Him for the fact that in Christ and because of Christ you are “simul iustus et peccator” – 100% forgiven, holy, righteous, blessed, heaven-bound saint at the same time as you are 100% sinner. Thank you, God, for the salvation that makes that reality possible, for without it, we are all lost. Confess, repent rejoice.

And then move on. Focus on your new nature in Christ.

Responding to Grace

Now, what I want to do as we close this service is to give you an opportunity to do just that. I'm going to ask the band to get into place because they are going to help us with this.

And when you came in this morning, if you got a program, inside that program you will find a white index card. If you didn't get a program, our ushers are coming through right now and you can get a white card from them.

I'm going to ask everybody to do this, and I know some of you are not going to want to do this because that's just your nature, and that's fine. But, what I want you to do is to write something down (even if it's your grocery list), because, the person sitting next to you who wants to do this is going to feel embarrassed if not everyone does this. Here's what I want you to do: there are two sides to this card, on one side I want you to write down a list of sin in your life, things you struggle with, where you go, "I just cannot get past this. I always fall into

this same sinful ditch,” or maybe it’s an attitude or a habit. And you’ve been thinking about and worrying about this the whole time we’ve been doing this series. Just write it down. We’re not going to show this to anybody. Then, when you’re done writing your list, on the same side of that card I want you to write “100% sinner,” because that’s the illustration that you’re 100% sinner. Just like the bible says, that’s your old sinful nature.

Then, when you get done with that, I want you to fold the card, kind of cover it up, and on the outside of the card I want you to write “100% saint,” because that is who you are in Jesus.

Then, when the band starts playing the song, which is very appropriate for this whole exercise, I want you to bring the card up front here and just lay it on the stage and then go back to your seat. No one will read your card. We’ll shred them after the service this morning. This is just a way for you to say,

“Jesus, this is the truth about me. I believe this and I want to live out of this truth. I want my life to be rooted in this kind of grace.”

So, we’ll do that, and then have a seat and we’ll do one other thing. Let me pray for you first.

<Pray>

Feature – Not Guilty Anymore

In his letter to the Christ-followers at Rome, Paul wrote:

Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God’s glory. Romans

5:1-2 (NLT)

What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?

Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself.

Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.

Romans 8:31-34 (NLT)

Video – “Identity”

CLOSING COMMENTS

1. Books in bookstore and library.

Endnotes

ⁱ See <http://theresurgence.com/2010/11/22/infusion-vs-imputation-a-nasty-case-of-spiritual-avel-gazing>, <http://www.thevillagechurch.net/the-village-blog/imparted-or-imputed-righteousness/>, http://www.reformationtheology.com/2009/11/roman_catholics_the_gospel_and.php, http://www.understandingthebible.org/Augustine's_Mistake_and_Luther's_Rediscovevery.htm

ⁱⁱ <http://www.uncommon-travel-germany.com/martin-luther-biography.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ For a comparison of infused vs. imputed, see <http://neopuritan.wordpress.com/2009/12/09/imputed-righteousness-vs-infused-righteousness/>