

## Introduction

Galatians 2:15 is where we are going to be today. If you have your Bible, I want to invite you to go ahead and open it up. Turn there with me to Galatians 2:15. We're walking through the Book of Galatians together as a church. We are talking about Freedom Stories. We are talking about how the Gospel of Jesus Christ gives us freedom and how it sets us free and how it changes us. Now, we're going to talk today about transformation. I mean, you saw Allen there, and clearly God changed him in some way and challenged him in some way and grew him in some way. I want us to think today about how it is that the Gospel of Jesus Christ brings about life transformation. I think that is right here in chapter 2. I think that most of us are tired of living the same old life. So how do you get transformation? Where does that really come from? That's what we're going to look at today.

So let's read Galatians 2, starting in verse 15, together. *"We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose."*

### 1. *I am justified.* (v. 16)

What is that about? Paul uses a word there that we've got to talk about today. We're going to talk about what it means to walk with Christ and how Christ brings about transformation. The first word that I want us to understand today is that with Christ, we are justified. Now, what does it mean, actually, to be justified? You know, some of us we hear the word "justified" and the first thing we think is about a TV show on FX. Others of us, when we hear the word "justified," we think of kind of the more traditional way that we would use it. We would say, "They were justified in using violence in that particular situation because their life was threatened." They would use it more as a way of saying, "It was reasonable behavior." But that is not what "justified" means in this particular passage. Paul uses it four times. Right there in verse 16 is really where we see it, and this, by the way, is the very first time chronologically in the New Testament. Now, page number-wise, Romans was before this, but Paul wrote this before he wrote Romans. It's the first time you ever see "justified." *"We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ."*

"Justified" is a legal term from the ancient world. It is difficult maybe for us to understand what "justified" means exactly, but this "justification by faith" is actually probably one of the most meaning-packed phrases that you will find in all of Christendom. It is filled with meaning. There are pastors... Martin Lloyd Jones, for instance, a great Presbyterian pastor, preached on "Justification by Faith" from Galatians chapter 2... this passage right here... for eight weeks in a row. I mean, you guys would get tired of that, I bet. You think you would, at least. And I'm not going to do that, but you could do it because it is so packed with meaning. Why? For us to understand "justification" as a legal term, it might help us to understand the opposite term. What is the opposite in the legal ancient world of "justification?" It is the word "condemnation." If you stood before a judge and you were guilty, they would pronounce condemnation over you. You are about to go into the punishment phase; you are going to be condemned. "Justified" is the opposite of that.

Many years ago, I read a book by John Grisham. It was called "The Innocent Man." I don't know if you guys ever read "The Innocent Man," but it was about a man named Ron Williamson. Ron Williamson was a minor league baseball player, I think a pitcher and a catcher, and then came back from baseball, had some mental illness issues that he was fighting with. As he came back to a small town in Oklahoma, he got wrongly accused of a crime. There was a woman there, her name was Debra Sue. Debra Sue's body was found, and because of Ron's mental illness and other reasons that aren't particularly clear at this point, Ron Williamson was accused and arrested for the crime. Then he was taken to court and using a lot of kind of false testimony, jailhouse snitches, this kind of thing, he was found guilty in a court of law. For eleven years Ron Williamson was on death row. He kept filing appeal after appeal, saying, "I didn't do it; I'm innocent. I promise. This wasn't me." But it fell on deaf ears. Finally, a group called "The Innocence Project" heard about Ron's case, and they were discovering something new at that time called DNA evidence. They were using DNA evidence to go back and reexamine particular crimes, and DNA evidence demonstrated definitively that it was not Ron who had been at the scene of the crime. It was another man. His name was Glen Gore, by the way. Ron Williamson has a moment where he's in an orange jumpsuit and he's got cuffs on and he is lead into the court. He stands before a judge and the judge apologizes to Ron. He says, "Sorry that this happened to you. We can't give you the time back, but I want you to know that you're innocent of this crime and we're sorry." And then the judge says something really, really interesting. He says, "Mr. Williamson... You are free to go... Free to go." That is justification. That's what it means to be justified.

Condemnation is the idea that you are under guilt and you are about to face a sentence. Justification is you are declared, "Free to go." Now, there's a key difference between your status and that status of Ron Williamson. The key difference is this. You and I are actually guilty. We were born as sinners, born into this world with sinful natures. We have participated in sinful activity, time and time and time again. Hundreds, thousands... I don't know, maybe even millions of different ways that we have rebelled against God and what God has asked for in our lives. We are completely and utterly guilty. There is no doubt about that. We are guilty. Now, because we are guilty, the Judge, God in heaven, now is able to pronounce a sentence over us. The sentence that is proclaimed by Scripture, using the standard of God's holiness alone... using that standard... the judgement, the condemnation is "Guilty" and the penalty is "Death." You were condemned to death. Why is that? Because God is completely just. But... The Bible also says that God is completely loving. So, because God is completely just, He must... He must mete out His punishment. But, because God is also completely loving... we know this truth as well... we know that He can choose how His punishment is handed out. He chooses, in Jesus Christ, to mete out His punishment on His Son. So, this is where the cross comes into play. It is that in Jesus Christ, on the cross, God's justice is satisfied. We sang it, "God the just is satisfied... to look on Him and pardon me." Because God is loving, He takes all of the evil-doing from the past, all of the evil-doing from the future, and according to II Corinthians, "He became sin, who knew no sin... He took all of our sin, your sin, my sin, the world's sin from the past and from the future, and He placed every single bit of it... all of it... on the shoulders of Jesus Christ. Now, once that has happened, what takes place in that moment? When that happens now... when Jesus dies and God's justice is satisfied, you are no longer condemned. You see, that is what Romans 8:1 is all about. This is what Romans 8:1 says: *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* In other words, there is no guilty verdict proclaimed over you any longer. Does it mean that you were not guilty? No. We know that you were guilty. It means now though that you have been brought into the courtroom and God has looked at you and said, "Yes, you were guilty, but now through Jesus Christ that is completely forgiven. You are now free to go." You are justified. You are free to go. I want you to think about this now. You are free to go. You can walk in this. How? This is where it gets crazy.

Verse 16: "...we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ." Justification by faith. Now, listen. Next week we are going to dig into faith as we jump into Galatians 3. We don't have time to unpack all of that today, but let's just say this. Faith is the vehicle through which God delivers His justification to us. So... The cross, that's the delivery method, and then He uses faith. We trust completely in our heart that this is enough, and God uses that to save us. Now. What is the problem with that? We tend to not think that's enough. Right? We think there's got to be more to it than that. I would stand here and I would confess to you, as a pastor, that before God really opened up the concept of grace to me and I understood this, I really preached a false gospel of religion. I really did. I preached that it was through striving toward Christ-likeness that you would experience and be saved. We are going to talk more about that in a second, but this is what I want you to understand. You are saved by the cross through faith. Period. End of story. That is how your position is changed. This is what I want you to hear. Once you know that, then as you stand justified in that, no amount of church attendance or prayer meetings or Bible reading will ever make the judge proclaim that you are free to go. However, one cross for all of time and eternity will be and is enough for you to proclaim, "You are free to go." One sacrifice for all time. Period. End of story. You now hear this that you are not condemned anymore; you're now justified. You are free to go. You are free to walk in the life that God has intended for you. This is a huge, huge key truth.

## 2. I am still able to sin. (v. 18)

The interesting thing is that Paul does not stop with that. He says, "So, you're justified by faith through grace in Christ..." Right? But then this is what he says in verse 17: "*But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not!*" What in the world does that mean?

Every person in this room who has received Jesus Christ as their Lord, as their Savior, you are justified. You stand positionally in a relationship with God that cannot be changed. You are declared to be redeemed, justified, His child. Can't be moved. Period. End of story. However, every person in this room probably has sinned this week. Has anybody sinned this week? Two of you have sinned this week. Alright. (Laughter) This might be a problem. (Laughter) So, yes. If you have sinned this week, you are helping Paul's argument in verse 17. You see, there were people, the Judaizers, who said, "Well, if you can be justified through faith, that is a pretty weak doctrine." John Stott puts it like this. He says that the Judaizers would say this quote: "Your doctrine of justification through faith in Christ only, apart from the works of the law, is a highly dangerous doctrine. It fatally weakens a man's sense of moral responsibility. If he can be accepted through trusting in Christ without any necessity to do good works, you are encouraging him to break the law." In other words, if I have been justified or I am free to go through faith in Christ, why in the world do people keep on sinning? And what some people would say is, "It's because justification by faith is a really bad doctrine." Right? Wrong! Why do people keep on sinning?

A guy by the name of Martin Luther in the 1500's wrote an essay called, "The Bondage of the Will." This was what Luther argued, and I think it is pretty convincing. Luther says this. He says, "Prior to your salvation, you were a slave to sin." Now Luther isn't making that up on his own. That's all through Romans, all through Paul. You were a slave to sin... a 'doulos' – a servant... you can't help but sin. Sin comes your way. You can't stop it. You just sin. That's what happens. But then you're saved. You're justified by faith. Jesus Christ comes into your life. Right? That happens. Once that happens, now you are saved but you still, for some reason, choose to sin from time to time. Why? Because your will has been perfected. You've been perfected in Jesus Christ. You now clearly know that you are sinning. You know and you have a moment where you choose. You choose to sin. Before you were a slave; you couldn't help it. Once you're saved, you're actually choosing to rebel against God. You know it's not right and you embrace it anyway. So that's what Luther was going after. So now, whenever you read in verse 17, some people are saying, "Is Christ then a servant of sin?" They're saying, "So if you're justified by faith and that's enough and now

you're sinning, that means that Jesus Christ makes you sin." And Paul says, "Certainly not!" The translation is literally is, "God forbid!" That is not what is taking place in this moment. So what is happening?

Let's pretend... I like to pretend. Let's pretend that you woke up today and you said, "You know what I'd like to do? I'd like to move into prison." Go with me here. You have a friend who's a warden. You go to him and you say, "Hey could I move into the prison?" And he says, "Why? Why do you want to do that?" "You know, I used to be a prisoner and I'm kinda missing it. I'd like to go back in." He says, "Man, that's weird. Haven't you seen what happened to Brooks in Shawshank Redemption? But alright; I'll bring you back in." So he brings you back in. You get the orange jumpsuit, and you move into the prison. You get there; they give you your own cell. You start to do your exercise in the yard. You go to shiv-making class so you can learn how to defend yourself. (Laughter) You're doing all the things that prisoners do when you're there. There's only one key difference once you move into the prison. You're actually not a prisoner. You are free to go at any time. Why did you move back in? I guess because you're crazy. I mean, there's really no good reason. But here's the funny thing. Spiritually-speaking, people in this room all week long have been moving back into prison. Why? You've chosen it. You were not forced into it. You chose it because your will has been perfected through Jesus Christ.

Thursday morning my wife and I were having a conversation. I kind of felt my frustration bubbling up a little bit; you know? In that moment what you should do is just walk away but I didn't. You know? Maybe you don't know, but I didn't. I'm confessing. I said something that I shouldn't have said. You know, guys... anybody in here? Can I get an "Amen"? You know, you say it and as soon as you say it you're trying to grab it...(Laughter) ...put it back inside you, but it was too late, as soon as I said it. To my wife's credit, she didn't say a thing about it. She just kind of rocked along. I said (in a hushed voice), "Maybe she didn't hear me." (Laughter) So about 30 minutes later, we were walking out the door. Right before she gets in the car, she turned around and she has tears in her eyes... (Ohhh)... because I was an idiot. There was a moment where I chose to say what I said that hurt my wife. Right? Why did I do that? I moved back into prison... just briefly. Right?

Here's the thing. The Bible calls that struggle... moving back into prison... it has a funny name. It's called idolatry. In the Old Testament, it was worshipping other gods; there was Yahweh and then there was all these other gods that were worshipped. In the contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> century setting, in western culture, very few people are out worshipping other false gods. But what they're doing is they are pursuing something that has a misplaced desire. Let me tell you what an idol is, okay? This is what an idol is. An idol is something that is powerless yet you assign it power in your life. Let me say that again. An idol is something that is powerless, yet you assign it power in your own life. Then what you do is when you assign it power, you make it powerful in your life. You begin to believe that it can give you more satisfaction than Jesus. Right? So when you begin to believe that, what do you do? You give this idol power over you when the cross is actually God's finished statement over your life. So what you begin to do is you begin to worship at a different altar. You move back in to prison. For instance, I know right now that I'm free to walk in the reality that Jesus Christ is enough, yet I can choose, of my own free will because I have been saved... I'm now free... I can choose at any moment to go and to worship another god. And this is what Paul was saying. "Does that mean that Christ is the One who did this?" No, no, no. It means that when He set us free, He gave us real freedom. We could choose to continue to pursue Him and embrace Him, or we could choose to put Him at arms' length.

People say this kind of stuff all the time:

"I have to have influence and power over other people." And the Bible says, **"But all power flows from Jesus Christ."**

"I have to have other people that like me and approve of me." **God has already stated His approval and His love for you through the cross.**

"I have to get my life under control; this thing is completely out of control." **Jesus is in control and uses circumstances to turn you into His likeness.**

"I want people to need me; that's how I feel loved and approved." **Jesus loves you no matter how you perform.**

"I need someone to watch over me, to take care of me." **I have never left you nor will I ever forsake you.**  
"I don't want anyone to be tied to me; I want to be completely independent." **John 15: "Apart from Me, you can do nothing."**

"I'm worthy because of all the work that I do; I earned something." No. **All the ability that you have to do work has come and flows through His gracious hand.**

"I need a boyfriend, or a girlfriend, or a spouse... Then I'll know that people really love me; then I'll be accepted." No. **You are accepted as you are in Christ Jesus.**

"I've got to have nice things because that way people will see that I'm a successful individual." No. **Your riches are in Christ; you are a child of the King... a daughter or a son or a princess or a prince.**

"I have to look right for people to love me. I've got to have a certain self-image." **God made you in His image.**

"I have to have a spouse or kids to make me happy. I've got to make them happy." No. **Whoever does not hate his mother or his father or his brother is not able to enter into the kingdom of heaven.**

"I have to do religious things to be accepted so people will think that I'm an upstanding individual." **It is by faith that you are justified.** (Clapping)

We are worshipping false idols and they are powerless, but we give them power. The New Testament word for these misplaced desires is "epithumia." We have "epithumia" for things that are supposed to only be loved by God. We are supposed to give that desire to God, but we give it to something else. So how do I do that? How do I fight against it? Look... I gave a real long list. Maybe yours was in there; maybe it wasn't. Maybe if you're really messed up like me, you've got eight of them. Here's the deal. You have to know what your idol is. You have to know it, and when you are tempted you feel it. It comes after you. Do you know what you have to do? You have to fight it. That's why God gave you His Word. The Scripture is here. So, listen. When I begin to get prideful and I say, "Man, check out how awesome Steve Bezner is!" God reminds me of John chapter 15: *"Apart from Me you can do nothing. I am the vine and you are the branches."* Boom. I have that memorized here; I go back to it. Okay? If I ever begin to believe I am all alone in this; no one cares about me whatsoever. You've never thrown a pity party, I'm sure. But if you ever do find yourself in a pity party, then you remember, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."* You remember Matthew 28, *"Surely, I am with you always, even until the end of the age."* Why does God give you His Word? ...Because the heart of man is deceitful. You trick yourself every day, and you convince yourself to give powerless things power. And that is what Paul is addressing here. He says, "Look. In our endeavor to be justified with Christ, if we are found to be sinners, is Christ also a servant of sin?" Listen. Do not blame your sin on Jesus. Jesus is not the One doing that. Jesus has freed you to the point that you can freely walk into that if you choose to, OR you can freely combat it with the truth of God's Word. So what you do then is when you feel that coming on, you find the passages in this Book that deal with that. You say, "Look... The Bible has said that Jesus Christ, His Gospel, the cross, is God's final statement over me." Period. End of story. Any time that you think that you have a need that cannot be fulfilled by the Gospel... any time that you have a need that you think cannot be fulfilled by God... you remember, "No... Christ Jesus shall supply my every need." You remember that comes from the Word. You go back and you find the Scripture that deals with your specific idol: You put it on your mirror. You memorize it. You record it. You mark it on your iPod. You have it flagged in your Bible. Any time that those temptations come upon you, you flip that open and you say, "Listen, heart. You may be trying to trick me today, but you are deceitful. But this is what I know: I have been perfected and received and accepted and justified. I am free to go because of what Jesus Christ did on the cross. And because of that now, I will combat that with the truth of Scripture, and I will preach the Gospel to myself. I will remind myself that I am free to go because of what Jesus did." And you combat that in your heart. Don't let it beat you... because here's the thing. Lots and lots of people in this room, they hear the truth, they receive the Gospel, and do you know what they do after that? They spend the rest of their life running after other desires because they think that once they've got Jesus... it's just sort of like this extra thing to add on. Right? It's like, "Oh, well He's kind of the appetizer. Now I'm going to get on to life." No, no, no... Jesus is the main course. He's it. The way that it works out is that once you begin to taste and understand this, everything that you think you need from your insecurities, to provision, to power... all that kind of stuff. Guess what? God has already made His statement regarding those things that you believe that you need, and His statement was the cross. So you

need to figure out, "How does the cross provide everything I need and apply that to my life, and memorize the Scripture that tells me that. And every time that battle comes up, I just keep fighting it with it."

### 3. I am transformed. (v. 20)

Now when that happens, what takes place? Then, verse 20. Probably the most famous verse in all of Galatians. *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."* Now here's the crazy part, right? Here's the crazy part: Once you are saved and you learn how to fight against sin using God's Word, and you're letting the Scripture take the place of your thoughts, your iniquity, your brokenness, your sinfulness... all that is starting to happen and God is using that to sanctify you, to purify you to do those things. Once that begins to happen, do you know what happens? You get changed. You get transformed. Okay, are you ready? Mind-blowing statement of the day: The Bible says this. Paul says, "I am crucified with Christ, and I no longer live. It is Christ living in me." Okay. Are you ready? You are now, according to Paul, in unity with Christ. Okay, I don't think you all got that. Let me say that again. (Laughter) You are now in UNITY with Christ. (Clapping) Here's the deal. What the Bible says is that once you receive the Gospel... once you understand God's grace, you receive that... and you trust in faith, you are completely justified... God begins to take up residence. Jesus Christ, His Spirit, lives in you. Okay? You are in unity with Him. Nothing you did this week that was any good was from you. When you were nice to your wife, that wasn't you. Your wife's like, "Well, I knew that!" You know, give him the elbow. Here's the deal. What you did this week, anything good that you did, do you know where it came from? It came from Jesus Christ because you are in unity with Christ. His Spirit has taken up residence inside of you, and because you are now unified with Jesus, your very nature is transformed. You are living out the Spirit of Jesus Christ in your life. You are living out the Spirit of Jesus Christ in your life. Here's the crazy thing. Do you know why some people don't think that being a Christian is good or powerful or exciting? Do you know why? Because they have turned it into, "I've just got to keep these rules." Listen to me. The "rules" that you see in the Bible... that's what the Bible calls the Kingdom of God. That's the reality: Living out the reality of God's commandments. That would be the Kingdom. It's God's presence, God's reality taking up root right here and right now... the Kingdom. The Gospel is the truth that makes living the Kingdom possible. The Gospel is sort of the theory, and the Kingdom is putting it into practice. What Paul is saying, "I have been crucified with Christ. All of my old nature, Jesus Christ took it kicking and screaming and punching and clawing all the way to the cross. He killed it dead. Any time that I am struggling with that, that is me performing CPR on my dead sinful nature. Stop doing that and instead now let Jesus Christ, His Spirit, take up residence in me, live in me, and He's going to carry me to living out the reality of the Kingdom." So when a church like Houston Northwest gets fired up about this and they go, "Ohhh, I get it. I am completely justified by faith. I don't have to worry about religious activity anymore. I am free to come into worship freely. I study God's Word freely. I pray freely. I do all of these things from freedom." Once they understand that they're justified then guess what? Then they walk in that reality: "I'm adopted, I'm a child. It doesn't matter what other people think about me. My Dad's the Lord in heaven. I am completely adopted." Once I have that reality, then guess what? Now I can live it out and demonstrate the Kingdom and I start to walk in that. I am completely a different person. Right? I'm a new creation. It is no longer.... what does he say? He says, "The life I live in the body I do not live, but it is Christ living in me." Jesus Christ is controlling you. He is working in you. The life that you live toward God... anything that you have in your life that points toward Him... that does not start with you. That is God's grace working out in you. Wow! That's incredible!

So what happens if a church gets completely fired up about this? Well think about this. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a pastor in Germany in World War II, said this: "The church is not only the Body of Christ, but it is the presence of Christ in the world." Because every person in here who has received the Gospel, and God's Holy Spirit is living in you, you are an army. Whenever Paul says, "We are more than conquerors, we're super conquerors." Why? Because you have God's Spirit in you. You go out into the world. Nothing's going to take you down. Right? They may take down your body but guess what? You're going to go then and be with Him. You are completely unstoppable because you have God's Holy Spirit in you. That's what he's

saying. Once I understand that, I can't be stopped... Cannot be stopped. The church is now the presence of Christ in the world. We are not the same any longer.

So let's go back to the video that we watched in the beginning... Allen. I mean, Allen's story is incredible. He got shot. He survived. He should have died. I mean, it was pointblank range. He should be dead. There's crazy supernatural circumstances involved in that that preserved his life. Thank God that he's alive. But do you know what? That's not the coolest part of the story, in my mind. The coolest part of the story, I think, is that first he has the thought, "Well, if I die, I'm going to be with Jesus." Who thinks that way? Do you know who thinks that way? People who have let the root of the Gospel just blossom into fullness. "Hey, if I lose my life, I'm with Jesus." But do you know what's even crazier, I think? He's in the ambulance and in the ambulance on his way to the hospital, bleeding from a gunshot wound, what does he pray? "Lord, forgive this person. Lord, have someone proclaim the Gospel to this person so that they can be saved and they can become Your child." He prays that they will come to Christ on his way to the hospital. Some of us show up at work, and we're still mad at the guy who cut us off in traffic. Right? He's praying as he's bleeding, "God, save this person." How does that happen? It happens because once you understand that you completely are free and you're walking, justified by faith... and your heart is clear because all those idols that you're tempted to worship are being battled through Scripture and through those truths, and you're just applying God's Gospel to every single area of your life... then your heart starts to be transformed, and you walk in a new reality. *"It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me."* You walk in that. And so then he says, after that, in verse 21: *"I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose."* In other words, if I could earn God's keeping, if I could earn God's favor, if I could earn God saying "You're free to go," if I was good enough, if I was able to achieve enough... if any of that would happen, then that means that Jesus dying on the cross would be worthless. Do you know what some of us are doing in our lives? We're refusing to walk in the freedom and instead, by attempting to resurrect religious activity, what we're doing is we're saying, "God, You didn't need to send Jesus. I got this." Ooooh. That's wrong! So what instead we need to do is we need to worship and we need to study and we need to love. We do all those things **flowing from** the justification not in order to **obtain** the justification. And once we get those things in the right order, then we can go from Gospel into Kingdom, and it's a beautiful, beautiful thing.

I talked to a guy this week whose wife has an ex-husband, and they're having kind of a custody-child support kind of issue going on. The ex-husband is not a believer. Even though the judge is on their side and all this sort of thing, there came this moment where they were going to have a time where they say, "This is what the new child support agreement is going to be." He said, even though the judge was on their side and they could have really pressed this person and put their thumb on him, God just laid it on their heart to say, "I graced you and I want you to extend grace to this person." They were like, "Man, we can't afford that. We're never going to be able to do that, but okay." So they have a phone call with this guy and they tell him, "Hey, you know, we know that this is the amount that you're supposed to pay, but we want to change that and make it this, a lower amount." He starts to weep on the phone, and he said, "Why would you do that?" And he says, "Because Jesus Christ graced me, so I want to grace you." (Clapping) That's awesome.

A guy named Malcolm Gladwell wrote a book called "The Tipping Point", a New York Times bestseller. He has a newest book out now called "David and Goliath." Gladwell was raised in the church and is a believer, but he walked away from his faith for a long time. But this book "David and Goliath" is all about underdogs. How do underdogs overcome unsurmountable odds or odds that seem to be unsurmountable? And in this book he is talking about it. I saw an interview with him afterwards. He said, "Yeah, the more and more people that I would talk to, I would discover that more and more people who had overcome these crazy, crazy odds... they kept saying, 'These people had oppressed us, they'd hurt us, they'd done these terrible things to us... but we just knew that we had to forgive them in order to move past it.'" He just kept hearing that over and over. He said, "Now, not in every case but tons and tons of times these people kept saying, 'I had to forgive them.'" And finally he was like, "Why?" So he went back to all these people and asked "Why?" They all were saying, "...because we're Christian and God forgave us." Gladwell said writing this book brought him back to the faith. He said, "Look, the world cannot be described by physical

things alone. There is a spiritual element to what is taking place here. People don't forgive people who have hurt them on their own. They do it because something different has taken place inside of them." That's transformation.

If you want this kind of transformation, it will not happen through church attendance. If you want this kind of transformation, it will not happen just because you read the Bible. Do you know what will happen? You will be transformed when you receive, by faith, the grace of Jesus Christ delivered on the cross. Then you were justified. And when you walk in that justification, it changes you. When you apply the cross to every single area of your life, you cannot be the same. I want to invite us as a church to reject any paltry substitute of religion and instead embrace grace and say, "This justification that comes by faith, this is more potent... this is more powerful stuff. This is the thing from which I want to drink deeply. This is the truth that I need to apply. This is the place where my brokenness can be healed. I need grace that comes only through the cross." Once you get that, you will never ever walk the same. You won't judge people the way you used to. You can forgive now. Finally for the first time you will start to walk in generosity. The idea of holiness and purity is not a problem for you because God's righteousness has been imputed... it's been applied... to you. You stand accepted before God. You say, "Hey... Come what may, I walk as a free woman... a free man... in the grace of God." And that's awesome.

So this is my challenge to us today before we leave here. Are you walking in this reality? Are you saying "Yes" to this reality? If the answer is "No,"... why? Why is it "No"? Some of us, we've just never said "Yes" to Jesus Christ. We've never received the Gospel. Others of us, we're too busy applying our energy to idols. And instead of letting the grace of God through the cross take the power away from those idols, we're letting those idols have power over us. And others of us, we just need to walk in the transformed nature that God has proclaimed over us. What is it that you're struggling with today, and how can you walk in it? That's the question that we have to answer. So today, the truth is simple. And this is where we end. The cross is God's vehicle that has supplied every need that you have. Will you, by faith, receive that? That's the question, because once you do... transformed.

Let's pray. "Father, thank you for letting us walk in unity with You. Father, thank you for the fact that Jesus Christ has taken up residence in our spirit. Father, thank you for the fact that we are completely saved. We can do nothing to take away a little bit of that salvation, and we can do nothing to get more of it. God, You have given it completely. Father, thank you for that. God, I pray right now for those who need to say 'Yes' to it, that You would help them to do so. God, I ask this in the name of Your Son Jesus. Amen."