

# 1/1/23 - "The Just, the Justifier, and the Justified" (Justification)

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, everybody. Good morning. My name is David. It is so nice to see all of you for the faces that I've seen already. Wonderful to see you again, and for the faces I haven't seen. I hope to speak with you afterwards. But I wanted to give you all a happy new year. It is wonderful that we get to gather together and celebrate a brand new year with each other in fellowship, and to thank God for yet another year of His provision that He got us through safe and sound. Now, originally we were going to gather together for Christmas, but as you all know, everything froze over last week, and because it's Ohio, we had a couple days of 60 degree and now 40 degree weather because it's Ohio. Thank God. So we love to see that. But I am very glad that today we could meet and gather together again. Speaking of this season of holidays, right, we just had Christmas and now we're here for New Year's. This is a season that's characterized by giving, by gift giving. Whether that be the gift giving we give to others, or for New Year's, the gift giving we often give to ourselves. That is, new goals, new resolutions, new thoughts that somehow after 12 o'clock midnight, we become new people that can get those gym memberships and somehow hold to it this year, even though last year it didn't work out too well, and the year before that, and the year before that.

But we hold on to that hope still. That being said, we will be talking about an important gift from God specifically, a gift which is important and powerful and is not just a part of our statement of faith. That is true and wonderful, but also a very personal reality that we should all hold to closely and tightly because it is a gift, which we'll talk about today. And yet, before we get to that, I wanted to speak about the different types of giving when it comes to gifts and the motivations behind it. With Christmas and New Year's, we all have different motivations, and some of them not exactly the best. For instance, a lot of times, we see gift giving being motivated out of a contract.

That is to say, and this is something which applies to me most personally, contractual gift giving is when you're motivated because you know somebody else got you something. And so you say, well, goodness, I mean, now that they told me that they got me a gift, I have to go out of my way a week before Christmas because they got me something two months in advance, and I didn't really think about it too much beforehand. And I have to go out and find a good gift before it's too late. But the issue here is that my motivation for getting this gift for them is a contract. I think, oh, goodness, they got me something. I didn't plan on it. I really wasn't planning on getting them a gift, but now last minute, I have to. And then I feel as though I'm being motivated out of burden to get someone a gift just to not feel guilty. At the end, I would have almost requested that they didn't get me anything at all, so I wouldn't have felt so burdened to reciprocate. And that is a sad but real factor of some of the motivation in some cases for me. A second type of gift giving is actually on the opposite end of that spectrum. When someone is proactive in their gift giving, not simply to be proactive, but because they want to let the other person know that they got them a gift for the sake of motivating them to get them a gift in return. Because, of course, they know that they're so worth it that they have to let the other person know ahead of time to have enough time to get that ready. This, sadly, is a type of gift giving motivated so that we only give to those who we know will be able to give back to us, because the focus is getting something back in return. Now, thirdly, there's ritualistic gift giving. That's gift giving based out of some tradition. And this happens throughout Christmas and New Year's.

Throughout Christmas, a lot of times, we might let ourselves be filled by this empty notion of tradition. You know, it's the time of year where you give, so you just give. It doesn't really matter how much thought I put into it. I just got to give something. But it's just that time of year, so that's

why I do it. In these cases, people think about the fruits of Christmas, right? You know, you give gifts, but they never really consider the root of it. Why is it that we celebrate Christmas and even New Year's with gift giving and fresh starts? But thank God, there is one fourth motivation for gift giving. And this is the unmerited giving of a gift. You see this most with parents to very young children. For those who are parents, and I'm not a parent, I don't have any kids, so I can't exactly understand what it's like, but I can make some guesses, educated guesses. You know, as a parent, that when you have children, let's say they're one years old, right, one year old, they don't have the ability to do chores really around the house. So they can't really present themselves in a way that could warrant some gift to be given to them by some work that they do. Also, when you give gifts to these wonderful one-year-old children, a lot of times they can't really fully understand the greatness of the gift that you gave them. They just see nice, pretty wrapping, and so they're excited about that, but they can't grasp the depths of the goodness of the gift you gave them. And then afterwards, they don't have a job, or at least I'm pretty sure that's illegal. So one-year-old children don't have a job, and so they can't go out to make the money to try to pay you back with a gift that they could buy. And yet, parents still give their young children gifts without caring about the reciprocity of it. This unmerited gift giving is actually what we see in the way that God relates to us, to His people. Not just now, but in the whole of Scripture, we see this beautiful unfolding and unwrapping of this wonderful gift, which we call justification. Not the only gift the Lord has given us, but for the sake of this being a sprint rather than a marathon that we're not ready to run, we'll focus on one gift from the statement of faith. This justification is a free gift which is offered not in bright wrapping paper and layers of tape, but a simple one that we can come to see together today in the Scripture. Before we do that, though, let us pray. Father God, I thank You so much for Your wonderful mercy and grace in all things. I thank You that You care so dearly for us. You care so dearly for Your creation more than we could ever give back to You, more than we could ever repay. You generously bless us with all that You are. We thank You for our Lord Jesus Christ that He came down in the form of man to live the life that He did, die the death in our place, and live forevermore as our High Priest. We thank You for the Holy Spirit and His work in preserving us, keeping us, and sealing us forever with the gift that You have given us. We thank You, we honor You, and we worship You in Your mighty name. Amen.

[ 7 : 37 ] So, in order to speak on justification, I'll say it simply as this. Justification is a word which should bring about the thought of a courtroom. Think of a judge at a Bema seat. Not exactly like this one, because I don't have a gavel. I'll bring that next time. But think of a judge there, and before them is a criminal, or at least one who stands innocent, one who stands guilty, waiting before the judge for a decree, a judgment. Justification is when a judge declares someone as righteous, or when a judge counts somebody as not guilty of the crimes and charges laid against them. That is what it means to be justified. And while it would be very easy to go straight to the New Testament, because Paul loves the word justification, and for good reason, we'll actually go back to the Old Testament first to see what the Old Covenant says about justification, because God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

So, let's see in the Old Testament, starting at Genesis 15, verses 1 to 6, for our first section, that is a gift dimly lit, which we'll explain as we go forward. But even in the Old Testament, Genesis 15, verses 1 to 6, we see the first instance, or one of the first instances of justification, in which God declares someone righteous. And so, moving to this part in which God speaks with Abram, this is before his name is Abraham. He has not yet had his name changed.

I will read it as follows. After all these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. Fear not, Abram, I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great. But Abram said, O Lord God, what will you give me? For I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus.

And Abram said, Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, This man shall not be your heir, your very son shall be your heir. And he brought him outside and said, Look toward heaven and number the stars if you are able to number them. Then he said to him, So shall your offspring be.

And he believed the Lord, and the Lord counted it to him as righteousness. That is the word of the Lord. The context here is that after a massive battle against four different kings and their armies, the Lord delivered them into Abram's hands. The Lord delivered a victory, which you probably would not have expected given Abram's response and his small set of complaints here that the Lord had just given him a wonderful victory. But that is the truth. And yet, even though Abram was just

given this wonderful victory, where he was able to rescue his family members back, even in his questioning and confusion, God continues to bless him generously, as the Lord always does. But let's focus on that final part again. And he believed the Lord, and the Lord counted it. That says it counted it to him as righteousness, which we can understand to mean the Lord credited righteousness to Abram. The Lord justified Abram, which is incredible because all that Abram did was believe in the word of the Lord that had appeared to him in the vision. And so, if the Lord justified Abram because Abraham believed in

[ 11 : 29 ] God and in the word of the Lord that appeared to him, how can that be? How can it be that a perfect, sinless, holy God who is absolutely just would accept something as simple as an act of faith to count that as righteousness for Abram? It must be a gift, a wonderful gift from a generous God.

However, because God continues to amaze us, it doesn't stop there. Going on to Exodus, the next part of the Old Testament Scripture, we return again reminding ourselves of this courtroom where we stand before a just judge, not just any human judge, but a perfectly just God who, because of his justice, must condemn all things which are against his nature, sin. And so, how can it be that God remains just when pardoning those who sin? Well, we actually see an institution of this in Exodus 12, verse 21 to 23, when we first see the Passover. So, I will read that. And y'all will be flipping around quite a bit.

Don't worry, you don't have to flip to every single page, although I'd love it if you could write it down, because we will be going through quite a bit of the Scripture today. In Exodus 12, verses 21 to 23, it says this, Then Moses called all of the elders of Israel and said to them, Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans and kill the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning, for the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you. Now, as difficult as this passage is to think in our modern context about sacrifice, what's important is to see what's being said. God, being perfectly just, must punish wrongdoing. And what's incredible, and this is an important thing to notice, is that the judgment God gave to the Egyptians was just as rightly able to be applied to the Hebrew slaves. Otherwise, why would God have given this command to the Hebrew slaves in order to protect them? They were under the same condemnation that the Egyptians would have been under before a perfect and just God. But God is not just just, but also merciful. And out of his loving mercy, he provides a way for the Hebrew people to be saved, to be passed over from his judgment, the judgment that they would still deserve. And what the Lord does out of his mercy is he gives a command to offer up this Passover lamb, because without it they would not have life. And so, because God is life, and we know this from multiple scriptures, especially throughout the Gospel of John, it speaks to this reality. Because God is life, then the need for sacrifice is because sin is the opposite of what

God's nature is. So, if God is life, then the wages of sin must be death. God is not arbitrary in his proclamations, and he's not arbitrary in the statutes he puts when he allows for sacrifice here.

[ 15 : 25 ] It is purposeful because it is a reflection of his own nature. And so, God allowed them to stay alive by means of an innocent sacrifice of this Passover lamb. And this allows God to stay just, because there is still condemnation or a judgment of death. But rather than it being on God's people, he has allowed them to lay it on the lamb. But it's not just that they laid their sin on the lamb, all of their guilt on the lamb. But more importantly, notice how God doesn't just say, kill the Passover lamb some distance away and leave it as is. But instead, he says, apply it to your households. God calls them not only to see the sacrifice of a Passover lamb, but to let themselves be covered, them and all their household, by the blood of it, so that when God would pass through, he would not see the sin of his people, though they did have sin, but he would see the innocence of the blood of the lamb who was slain in their place. This is a beautiful truth in that God not only has justification, which is positive in one aspect, that he could declare someone righteous, he could add to their account, but also that there is this external aspect of justification, that it's not the righteousness of God's people that he sees, but the righteousness of the innocent lamb who covers them. That is what he sees on them. And yet, we are amazed yet again, because all we could ask is how? How is it possible that something as simple as as blood, as the blood of an innocent lamb, spotless and without blemish? How could that be recognized by

God to cover the multitude of sins, not just of some people, but of all of God's people? How could that be that he would take something so simple? It must be a gift from a generous and gracious God.

And yet, it still doesn't stop there, because the Lord we serve is so wonderful and perfect. Going on to Leviticus, a book which I know we all love to pieces, and it's because it's an incredible book to read, although I know it can be a bit dense at times. But God's people are often quick to forget the significance of sacrifice. Very quick to. Honestly, so are we. We are quick to forget the amazing significance of the sacrifice, for while the Passover lamb in Egypt covered the sins of God's people and protected them from condemnation for that night, God's people needed to remain justified. Not just one night, but as we all know, all of sin and false were the glory of God.

We need to stay justified. God's people, after they had left Egypt, thought themselves wise enough to say, you know what, let's go out to the fields and let's just offer up sacrifices whenever we feel like it with the works of our hands, because our hands are so pure that, of course, God will accept these sacrifices that we do in our homes and in the field. But God said, no, if you do that without a priest, that is bloodshed, and you will actually be held at further sin to add to your account.

So, in Leviticus 17.5, God makes a way for his people to stay justified by the work of a priest, and later a high priest. Leviticus 17.5 states this, this is so that Israelites will bring to the Lord the sacrifices that they are now making in the open fields. They must bring them to the priest, that is, to the Lord, at the entrance to the tents of meeting and sacrifice them as fellowship offerings. What's incredible here is that the Lord, for his people to stay justified, institutes a mediator between God and man. This mediator, these priests that the Lord has instituted, would stand in the gap between God and man, allowing the sacrifices of God's people to actually stay pure when they offer it up to God. But not only that, for these priests who would come to the outer part of the tabernacle, where God's presence was manifest and dwelled amongst his people, also there was one priest above the rest, the high priest. This one priest who was the only one in all of God's people who was allowed to go beyond just the holy place to the most holy place of the tabernacle, that is, the holy of holies, where his manifest presence dwelled over the ark of the covenant. And so, even this great high priest who was called to be sanctified, ceremonially pure, ritually pure, not morally, because they had their own sin, but God called them to be pure, and even then they only were allowed in the holy of holies once a year. And that was the only person who ever could.

[ 20 : 49 ] Yet, even then, in the one time of year when the high priest would go into the holy of holies to offer up an atonement sacrifice for all of God's people, they had to offer two sacrifices, because these high priests might have been ritually sanctified, but they were not morally pure.

They had to offer one for God's people and one for themselves. And yet, even with these imperfect high priests who were supposed to be sanctified, yet failed to do so, even then, year after year, God would accept it on behalf of his people, so that for that year of the sins they were unaware, they would remain justified. How could God give such a wonderful gift of justification that needs to be mediated, yet he still allows that mediator? How is it possible with these imperfect, impure mediators? Well, the beauty is, is that the only explanation is this.

It must be a gift from a great and generous and gracious God. And finally, for the old covenant, we look to something beautiful. We look to the fourth aspect of justification, not only the positive addition of righteousness, not only the external imputation of innocence, not only the mediation by a priest, a high priest, but finally, and most beautifully here, acquittal.

In the book of Deuteronomy, we see a small description, and this is just one line, so don't worry if you don't want to turn to it right now, it's just one sentence, but we see this beautiful description that explains how people were called to understand justification in a court case, in a court system, God's people. In Deuteronomy, it explains, using the Hebrew word *hiztik*, which means to acquit, or to declare as innocent, a word which also means to justify. It says in Deuteronomy 25.1, when people have a dispute, they are to take it to court, and the judges will decide the case, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty. *Hiztik*, meaning acquitting, is when we have this justification of the one who stands on trial. Now, what's beautiful is that God's people understood understood this justification as having another aspect from the ones we just heard about, also the clearing away, the removal of past guilt, and the removal of the charges laid against them, far better than the New Year's resolutions we have, especially in the secular world, where they assume that the New Year actually somehow clears away the past, and the moment that the ball drops in New York, all of their past mistakes are gone, and they can start again, this is different. This is real.

A true clearing away of the charges laid against them. And far more than these human judges, God is the one who pronounces his people innocence. That is to say that the one who justifies is not the one who stands on trial, but the judge. It is the judge who justifies the person on trial.

[ 24 : 15 ] And so, it is important even in the Old Testament to remember that the one wiping away the charges and the record is not God's people, but God. He is the justifier of his people, and that is an amazing gift. And this all sounds great. Honestly, thinking about the Old Covenant, what we've heard so far, you might think, well, what's the point of adding anything else to that system? But sadly, it was all temporary. It was all incomplete. This gift of justification, of being acquitted and being declared righteous by God, was temporary, and in order for people to stay justified before God, there was this perpetual weight of this cycle of works that they had to maintain. There always had to be another sacrifice by the priest. There always had to be the atonement sacrifice by the high priest, day after day with the priests, and year after year with the high priest. Always, always more.

And so, with sinful high priests and priests who themselves needed forgiveness for their own sins, they made the sacrifices of animals insufficient because they themselves were not pure enough to offer a perfect sacrifice. And so, God's acquittal of his people was always, moment after moment, from one period to the next, constantly waiting for some laborious renewal for people to not just be declared as innocent, but to remain as innocent. What could they do to be free from that weight? The beauty is that the thing that remained was faith in the Word of God, just as we had seen with Abram. That remained. And so, God's people had seen this wonderful gift of justification, but they saw it as a gift dimly lit. They had seen the shape and form of it loosely, but could not really see it clearly. They were in a room lit only by a candle of their own works that could not properly illuminate.

But because God loves to give gifts, He gives them a light which illuminated the gift He had sent. He sent to them the light of the world. And so, turning to section two, the new covenant, the new testament, we see a gift clearly seen. A gift wonderfully and clearly seen because of the light of the world sent to them. And the true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. John 1, verses 9 to 10. And this light was the Word of God, born wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger whose incarnation we had just celebrated a week ago. Praise be to God for that. He was born without the stain or blemish of original sin. Surely, as all the other Passover lambs who were born in Bethlehem, the city where all the Passover lambs were raised up, and they were separated into a manger when they were born to check for blemishes, so too was this Word of God who was born, wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger, showing us that He is the Passover Lamb. And so, reminding ourselves of this courtroom where we stand before a perfect and just Father and perfect Lord who judges us, how is it that Jesus could fulfill and complete all that was incomplete in the Old Covenant? Well, what's beautiful is that the Scripture explained this, and so I don't consider it a cheat sheet. I consider it reading the answers for the test. If we go to Hebrews 9, verses 1 to 15, it says, the following. Honestly, this is a sermon as is, so I could probably have just read this part right here. Now, the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand and the table with its consecrated bread. This was called the holy place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the most holy place, that is the holy of holies, which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant.

[ 28 : 47 ] This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the ark were the cherubim of the glory, overshadowing the atonement cover, but we cannot discuss these things in detail now. When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry, but only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins of the people that the people had committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the most holy place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning. This is an illustration of the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper.

They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings, external regulations applying until the time of the new order. But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that

are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves, but he entered the most holy place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonial unclean. Sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more then will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God? And here it is, for this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant. That those who are called may receive the promised and eternal inheritance, now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. The scripture shows that Jesus is the true and perfect high priest, greater than every high priest that there was before. And amazingly, because he is still living even to this day, he does not need a replacement like the high priest of old did. The high priest of old would get old and die and need a replacement, but not him. He lives forever more as our high priest, mediating between the Father and us on our behalf, not offering the blood of goats and calves, but of his own blood, which is infinite in value, something which is so valuable we could never repay. And yet we thank God that he would be so willing as to come down in the flesh and be a high priest, then, now, and forever for us. And so, before God and before his throne, before judgment, Christ mediates on our behalf, presenting not anything else but himself as the offering, once for all, so that those who are in him would never need another sacrifice, one which nothing can be more perfect than him. And yet that still confuses us because Christians still sin. Before the throne of God, who is perfect and a just judge, Christians still sin. So, if believers still sin, how can God remain just and honest and true as a judge if he sees us in our sin and says,

I see you as righteous and guiltless, how can God remain true and just? What is it that he sees when he sees us? Well, the scripture speaks of this as well. Turning to Galatians chapter 3, verses 26 to 28, it says the following, in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith.

All of you who are baptized into Christ and have clothed yourselves with Christ. When God sees those that are in Christ Jesus, he sees the righteousness of his own Son. This is amazing because we are called righteous, and God is not a liar, so when he declares us righteous, he also makes us righteous in his eyes because he baptizes us into the body of Christ. And Christ is without blemish and without sin. And so, in spite of our sin, God sees the perfect, surpassing, infinite goodness of his Son. This should remind us of what we had just read with the Passover Lamb before, that though the people of God had sinned when they had covered their houses with the blood of the Passover Lamb, God saw the innocence of the Lamb rather than seeing their sin. Yet how much greater is it now when God sees us? Because rather than just one night in Egypt when we are covered with the blood of the perfect Lamb of God, that is Christ, we are not just covered for one night, but we are covered once and for all, perfectly forevermore. Without need for another high priest or a sacrifice, he is more than enough for us. And so, seeing that, I would remind you as well that the Holy Spirit himself seals us into the body of Christ. Do not think that you getting into the body not by works somehow to maintain yourself in the body by works. No, it is, as we will discuss soon, faith, which allows, which the Lord has seen and says, faith is righteous in my eyes because it unites you to my Son. And the Holy Spirit has sealed you until the day of your redemption, either when the Lord comes down first or when we go up, whichever way, the Lord has us sealed. And so, all we could ask now is with such a wonderful justification, a great gift from God, how can we accept such a gift? It's not by works. It could not be by works. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of a perfectly just and holy God. So, how on earth could we be joined to the body of Christ? Well, Romans 4, 1 through 5 speaks to it quite clearly.

In Romans 4, 1 through 5, Paul, thinking about the same passage that we had read with Abram, says this, What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter?

[ 35 : 59 ] If in fact Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about, but not before God. What does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

Now, to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work, but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

The Scripture is clear. While there are no works of our own which are sufficient for us to be made righteous before God because it is only the judge who declares and justifies the one that stands before them, God is so merciful and generous and loving that He will accept faith. Not faith in some random thing, not faith in some other religion or some random false faith or cult, but faith in Christ. For just as Abraham was justified by his faith in the truth of the Word of God that had appeared to him, Jesus is the eternal Word of God that we have faith in, and in Him we have an eternal redemption.

And so, it is not by works that you have been justified. It is not by works that you've been saved from the penalty of sin, but rather by faith in the one who justifies you. And that is a wonderful, wonderful, unmerited gift that we simply accept. And so, for our time drawing to the end today, I wanted us to think more on this matter of gifts. Justification is a gift born out of God's grace and mercy and love because God just enjoys graciously giving to those who could not pay Him back. [ 37 : 58 ] As a matter of fact, Ephesians 2, 8 through 10 says it so wonderfully, and I know a lot of you have this as a favorite verse, but it's for a good reason. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. It is the gift of God. See how freely God gives this gift of justification. And it is not the works that save you, but the works that are natural fruits of the one who has been saved. It is out of this justification, this seed which has been planted in us for those who are in Christ, that this fruit is naturally born. Let us not confuse ourselves with all the other religions on earth, every other one which says that you have to justify yourself by your works. Those are false, and those do not see the truth, the one single truth of Christ, that He is perfect on our behalf, so that we might do the good works which He desires us to do. And so, thinking on gifts, let us see the free gift God has given to us that we could not pay back, and let's be motivated to give as He does. Let us not think of gift giving as I often have as a contract or a burden that you are drawn to do out of some need to fill this social contract with somebody you know, but rather see those opportunities as a way to bless others the way that Christ has wonderfully blessed you.

If you are proactive for the wrong reasons, be proactive for the right ones, for there is no way that you could ever give to God more than what He has given to you. And so, let us simply be motivated to give to others who we know could never pay us back, just because we desire to love and to bless them.

For those who have fallen victim to the empty tradition of giving on Christmas or the empty resolutions that we do on New Year's, instead put your mind on this, that rather than following some empty religious traditionalism, instead be motivated by the truth that Christ was personal. And active and sacrificial in what He did for us, and still is personal and sacrificial and active, not being far off and doing something out of some sort of ritualistic duty, but out of His desire to save His bride. And so, let us be intentional with all that we do, giving because the Lord has given, blessing because the Lord has blessed us more than we could ever repay, and simply saying, hallelujah, for the great God that has given us so much. Let us, those who are in Christ, rejoice, because we stand justified before a perfectly just God for the gift of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our justifier now and forever. And if you are not a Christian, I would ask, what is holding you back? Is it the thought that you would not be forgiven by God? I can guarantee you that His sacrifice is far more than enough for your sin. Is it thinking that it is impossible, that you have too much guilt? [ 41 : 46 ] Is it thinking that no one would ever be willing to forgive you? I guarantee you, with all the sins that all of us have committed, none of us deserve justification. It's not about deserving salvation.

It's about Him giving it freely. Not about us, but about Him. And so, simply rest in the truth that He is the one who offers this free gift. And if you think that you have fear, some sort of anxiety about letting somebody else's good works be in place of yours, thinking, I don't know if I can trust anybody else.

Trust us when we say you can trust Him. He is perfect. His work is complete. And He has already said that it is finished. And so, no matter the reason, no matter the excuse, no matter the fear, do you know what makes a gift a gift? It's that it is freely given. That is a gift.

Let us pray.