

Flawless

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Preacher: Pastor Scott Johnson

- [0 : 0 0] There are a lot more people here today. Praise God, but I'm very nervous. But take a deep breath, smile, and say right here, right now, I'm okay.
- When I first heard the pastors ask for volunteers for this series, I was moved to participate. And then I doubted. And then I prayed about it, and I said, yes, I'll do it.
- And then I doubted some more. And I prayed, and I prayed, and I prayed. And here I am. Hi, I'm Pam. So, I have my notes, and I'll try to keep with them today, because last night, I have a gift of gab.
- I did actually kiss the Blarney Stone. I'm very sorry about that. So, I just am thinking about the other testimonies that were in the series previously, and they're wonderful, wonderful testimonies.
- And it got me thinking that my story might not be so much different, and why is this so hard? Well, before I go into all that, there's just a little verse or two that I'd like to share with you, and it's in Romans.
- [1 : 3 1] And the one kind of goes like, If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you'll be saved.
- I mean, Jesus died for me. He's my hero. Woo-hoo! Also, it goes on in actually Romans 10, 14, says something like, For we know that the law is good.
- For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am a flesh sold under sin. Let's do that.
- There is a right thing to do, and I hardly do it. And there are wrong things to do, and I seem to do a lot of that, because I am human. But God's fighting for me to do good.
- So I try every day, and I pray. I actually have a mustard seed attached to my Keurig, because that's where I go every day. And it reminds me that my faith is just that big, and that's little.
- [2 : 4 9] But I try. Okay. So I was raised in a country. In a country, I was. It was a small Mayberry-like town.
- If you get that reference, embrace it. It was wonderful. But it was a small town in Pennsylvania. And we, everyone knew everyone.
- Everyone knew what everyone did. Everyone told on everyone. There's one person here that knows a lot of my memories, knows a lot of my friends, shares my faith.
- That's my childhood sweetheart, my husband, Phil. And he married me anyway. Because he was a good part of my shenanigans. He also shared with me a diagnosis in 2010.
- I was told that I had a very rare, fast-growing form of cancer. And so many thoughts and memories and questions flooded through my mind.
- [4 : 0 4] And I realized even then that there were a lot of I questions. Why me? What's going to happen to me? If I survive, will I be able to take care of myself?
- When I should have been focusing on God. He knew what was going to happen. So I think that God actually, I believe that God actually has a great sense of humor.

Because the surgery day was set for Good Friday of that year. Good Friday. Something about Good Friday, right?

All I could think of is where would I spend Easter? Would I spend it in heaven? Hallelujah. Or hallelujah.

Would I spend it on earth with my family? Then I wouldn't spend it with God. But I would. Because he's here. God is good all the time.

[5 : 14] Anyway. Though our lights were bright. They're always bright. You see that on TV. I counted from a hundred. And the next thing I knew. I heard chanting. Chanting.

Singing, maybe. I couldn't understand what they were saying. I kind of opened my eyes a little bit. You know, the blurry. I was tired. The anesthesia. I saw this male figure dressed in white standing over me.

Well, God had made his decision. Is this heaven? Because I don't know what they're talking about. Then I became a little clearer.

And I realized that someone had come into my hospital room and turned on the television. And it was Pope Benedict giving his Easter service. Thank you, God.

You got me good. There's a reason why I'm here. So, God is good all the time.

[6 : 21] That was, what, 13 years ago? Not, my story is 13 years old. John's, yours is new. And praise God.

Thank you for sharing that. So, going back to my Mayberry poem, music played a big part. And, you know, we sang all the time.

I sang with my sisters and my father. And we sang for church. And we sang for private events. And we were not the Von Trapps. But we did our best. And I remember one time my father looked at me and he said, as dads do, Pammy, making a joyful noise unto the Lord does not mean perfect.

Sing it. That's kind of stayed with me. So, if I am ever sitting around you during service and we're singing, I am sorry because I'm not perfect.

But I try to be loud. My sisters and my dad aren't here with me. But my family is. Thank you. So, after I was discharged home, I heard a song on the radio.

[7 : 41] And it struck a chord with me, no pun intended. But it still does to this day. When I hear the song, it lifts me up. And it makes me think.

And it makes me just feel like I'm, that every day is a gift. And that God is there. And I know that he's with me.

And I know that there are times when I cannot hit the high notes. And there are going to be low notes. But I just need to stand there and sing it and get through the day.

Because my God is perfect. And since the day I called his name, he's made me flawless. Good morning. Good morning. We have two scriptures today.

One from Romans, chapter 5, verses 1 through 11. And John, chapter 3, verses 1 through 17. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace which we now stand.

[8 : 59] And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings. Because we know that suffering produces perseverance.

Perseverance, character. And character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame. Because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

Who has been given to us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person.

Though for a good person, someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him? For if while we were still God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life?

[10 : 10] Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. Reconciliation. Now John chapter 3, verses 1 through 17.

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus, who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform the signs you were doing if God were not with him.

Jesus replied, Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. How can someone be born when they are old?

Nicodemus asked. Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born. Jesus answered, Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.

Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to Spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, You must be born again. The wind blows wherever it pleases.

[11 : 24] You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. How can this be? Nicodemus asked. You are Israel's teacher, said Jesus, And you do not understand these things?

Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen. But still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things, and you do not believe.

How then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven, the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thank you, Bill. Let's pray together.

[12 : 41] Loving and gracious God, we give you thanks for the gift it is this time, this moment, this ability to worship you and the ways in which your spirit is already moving among us. And now, Lord, as we come to this time with our hearts open, please plant a new seed in us, a seed that will grow and bear fruit for the honor and the glory of your name.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen. So we've been taking this walk for a while now. And as we come to today, I want to remind everybody of the title we're dealing with.

It's called Flawless. Flawless. So I want you to just ponder this for a minute. Do you see yourself as a person with high standards?

So I see some people working on it out there. It's like it's a trick question. So do you have high standards? Now, the reason why I ask that is because not only do people say they have high standards, because nobody going to sit here and say, yeah, I'm proudly mediocre, Pastor.

Everybody has high standards, whether they want to admit it or not. The challenge that we got to wrestle with is what do we do when those high standards aren't met? Because when you have a standard, you work hard to achieve that standard.

[13 : 58] You expect people around you to live up to that standard. And having a high standard is a good thing. See, I was raised in a house with a mother who was pretty clear. You do not get to aim low. You just don't.

You aim low, you get low. So you don't get to aim low. And that was pretty clear for me, and that's how I've kind of moved through life. You're supposed to expect greatness. You're supposed to expect good things.

But we all know, as we said at the very beginning of worship today, that nobody is perfect. So how do you deal with the fact that people don't live up to your high standard?

Because you can fall into this trap pretty easy. Because some folks, as we say, well, they aim low. They don't really seem to care that much whether people live up to those demands or not.

But then you've got the other side of that coin. And the other side of that coin can sometimes be even worse. Because then we get into this thing that we call perfectionism. I'm sure we've got some people who are perfectionists in the crowd.

[15 : 06] And perfectionism is hard. Perfectionism is not just hard. It's impossible. Because as we just said, nobody is perfect.

Now, the thing about it, though, is when people fail to be perfect and you see yourself not being perfect, where does your heart go?

Where does your brain take you? What happens to your soul? Right? Because there are some folks who the slightest thing wrecks them because people around them aren't perfect.

And when they put their head on their pillow at night, when they look at themselves in the mirror, all they see are the imperfections. And it creates this stressful situation.

Creates this anxious situation. It can perpetuate this kind of depression that is the exact opposite of what we say we're supposed to be and believe in Christ.

[16 : 17] But we already know, and you heard me say, nobody's perfect. So how are we going to deal with that? That's our conundrum today.

Because the truth for this lies somewhere in between those two extremes, right? People who aim low like they don't really care. And then the people who have this standard that's so high and unachievable that they're perpetually miserable.

So the truth has to lie somewhere in the middle. Let me give you a real world example. So one of the things that happens in this particular calling and line of work is you end up writing a lot.

I write a ton of reports. I got to write sermons. At least, you know, y'all may not see me read like I write them, but I actually write them. Okay?

And there's other stuff that has to be done. But the thing I spend the most time writing is emails. There's a ton of emails, and all of you who know me know how often I send emails, right?

[17 : 21] Because that's just the nature of how we communicate when we do this work. Now, there are a few things that will get up under my skin more than if I get like a reply on an email and I see my original message and there's a typo in it.

It just blows my mind because I put so much time into trying to make sure that I don't do that. Right? There's all kinds of checks you can run. And I sit there and I proofread really carefully.

And still, they go out and they come back and I have glaring evidence in my face that nobody's perfect, least of all you.

That's the way the world works. Now, see, the thing is, when I was early in my secular career, that particular problem was something is because I'm not a super great typist, right?

And so that being the case, I fired off an email that went to my department head. And then, I saw it come back and of course, it had like two or three of these in it.

[18 : 33] And it's like, okay. Well, you think, well, people have grace, right? It's okay if you send an email with one or two typos in it. But y'all looking at me like you already know the answer to this question, right?

Because I sent this to my boss. And I was relatively new at the job at the time. So what's the message I'm sending when you put that email out there, right?

Because I don't want people to think poorly of me. I know how to speak. I know how to write. And so if that goes out, what am I saying? That I don't really care about this stuff at all?

What impression am I leaving with these folks that says, well, you know what? Maybe we hired the wrong dude. Because you don't want to be that person. People thinking like, well, he clearly doesn't care.

But then, what happens on the other side? Like I said, I could spend time perpetually beating myself up because I got an email back that says, oh, no, you used from instead of to.

[19 : 38] That could happen. But we don't want to fall into that trap. Now, it's kind of a silly example, but I want you all to wrestle with this question for a minute from a faith perspective.

Is your standard too low or are you still chasing perfection in a way that makes you perpetually out of peace with God?

because what can happen to us if we're not careful is that we stop caring so much about the sin in our life.

Like you get to this place where you think, well, I go to church on Sunday and I have a good time and I put my money in the plate and I sing the songs, so I must be good.

And then when somebody jumps in front of you and when somebody cuts you off in traffic, when a panhandle comes out and asks you for something while you are leaving work, how you doing that?

[20 : 57] Because if you don't care and you're too low, it's real easy to be more yeah, thank you, Andrew.

To be perpetually flawed. Now, see, the reality of this thing is that we know that we're going to be sinners.

Sin is who we are. Right? We are naturally going to fall into the sin trap. It's our nature. Now, here's what you got to hear about the sin thing.

Before you start going, no, not me, yes, you. Okay? Here's why. Because sometimes we let our definition of sin be a little too convenient.

And here's what I mean by that. When you think, well, I don't steal, I don't cheat on my spouse, I'm not out here raping and murdering and that sort of thing, and so, therefore, I must be okay.

[22 : 07] No. See, it's real easy to define sin as whatever you're not doing. And that's real convenient. But sin is bigger than that.

Whenever you decide that I am going to do this thing I want to do as opposed to the thing God said you should do, you are sinning.

So, whenever you choose self over God, you are stepping outside of what God wants for you. Now, see, the thing is the specific behavior will be different on all of us.

but when you say, nope, I'm not doing that thing, God, because I want to do this thing, that's the issue.

And when you realize that the definition of sin comes from that place, then you don't get to run away from it. Because, as I said, that will look different on all of us, but all of us do it.

[23 : 19] And the reason why it's important, as we come to this question today, talking about this notion of being flawless, is that it establishes the need in front of us.

Because, as I said, on the one hand, if your standard is too low, and you stop caring about the fact that you are sinning, that you are a sinner in need of the grace of God, or if you get so tripped out by the standard of holiness that you perceive, it says, wait, I'm still a sinner, and oh no, God's not going to love me anymore, or I'm going straight to hell.

And you have that kind of anxiety, you have that kind of frustration, you have that sense of I'm never good enough. Technically, you're right, but that being said, you forget the point of the story.

Because Jesus did not write your name in the book of life with a pencil. He wrote it in his own blood. And when you remember that truth, that the cross is what saves you, that it is Jesus who makes this possible, and not your own works, then you understand how this thing works.

Because some of us will fall into that trap, like I got to do this, or maybe if I just do this, then it'll be okay. Or maybe if I put more in, or maybe if I do this nice thing, or maybe if I put that dollar in the panhandler's cup, then Jesus will like me better.

[25 : 12] But that's not how it works. See, the thing is, you are already loved more than you can possibly imagine. You have already been saved.

Because the salvation was not your conduct. It was his. and when you remember that truth, you start to understand how this flawless thing works.

So, in order to do this, I want to spend a little time in this passage that we read from Romans. Because the apostle Paul breaks this down in a way that's really helpful.

Now, the way to understand this is that the passage opens up, and Paul has been spending the previous chapters of the book of Romans trying to get the Roman church to understand why everybody needs Jesus.

And he gets to this point, and he says, well, therefore, we cannot have peace with God. Now, I'm paraphrasing because I don't have a free hand. Y'all see that, right? So, therefore, we cannot have peace with God.

[26 : 25] And the thing is, we've got to remember that this whole thing about sin takes us out of our best relationship with God. We're making a choice that fundamentally turns our back on what God wants for us.

But it's because of Jesus we can be at peace with God. We can have peace with God. It is Christ that reconciles and restores that relationship.

And because of that, we get what we are hoping for. Now, our challenge is this. When we are out here living life in the world and stuff starts to get hard and we forget about the sin thing, we start to even turn our backs more frequently.

Because what happens is we go through stuff. Hard stuff. We heard Pam talk about hard stuff. We heard John talk about hard stuff.

There's hard stuff out there. When we talk about the fires in Maui and other things that are happening, right now we got brothers and sisters in Southern California facing the first storm they've had to deal with since I think it was like 1939 I think I heard on the news today.

[27 : 40] So real stuff is out here happening to people's lives. But what you heard read for you, what Bill was able to remind everybody of, is there's this verse in there that kind of messes with people's heads?

Because it talks about suffering produces perseverance. Perseverance produces character and character produces hope. But people hear that and they're like, well, why do I have to suffer?

We get so focused on that piece we forget the point. Because the point of the verse tells us something actually very encouraging. When we talk about suffering, we know that it's inescapable.

It's the nature of life in this world. Bad stuff is going to happen. And if your whole argument is because bad stuff happens, I can't be in relationship with God, then you need a different sermon.

But this idea that the bad stuff happens, if while the bad stuff is going on, you make a conscious choice. And that choice is to trust God in spite of the bad stuff.

[28 : 51] bad stuff is going on. When you make that decision and you press on through the bad thing, that is where we get suffering produces perseverance.

perseverance. In other words, you have to decide that I'm not going to give up, that I'm not going to stop, even though it's hard, even though it hurts.

And yes, you can just say, this flat out sucks. But if you hold on to God despite that, suffering produces perseverance.

And then after you persevere a few times, because we know you don't just get one, right? How many of us have had only one bad thing happen in life?

You don't just get one. So because you don't get one, if you persevere more than once. And you keep persevering when the bad stuff happens.

[29 : 58] What happens then is it becomes who you are. It becomes your default setting. It's how you think. It's how you're wired. My God can be trusted despite my circumstances.

Perseverance produces character. It becomes who you are. then, because you know God can be trusted, because you have seen God work in your life over and over and over again, you don't look at your days just worried about the next bad thing.

You don't just get up in the morning and go, oh God, now what? you understand that you have a reason to smile.

You have a reason to know that my hope is secure, that the promises that God has made to me, I will trust that my God will keep.

Character produces hope, authentic, real hope, so that no matter what comes your way, no matter what happens in your life, you will continue to believe that God is exactly who God said he would be.

[31 : 24] and that is this thing that helps us here. You see, as sinners, it's real easy for the devil to come in and whisper in your ear, you aren't good enough, you aren't perfect, and you screwed up again.

And you know what? That was the last one. That's your third strike. You are now out. Those are all whispers of the enemy.

And the reason why we know they're whispers of the enemy is what we have proclaimed with our very mouths, with our very lives, is that Jesus saved me.

Nobody got amen for that one. Jesus saved me. I didn't save myself, Jesus saved me.

And see, that's the piece you got to remember, is that if you had to save yourself, yeah, you probably be in trouble. But Jesus saved us.

[32 : 42] And because Jesus saved us, I want you to unpack the logic on both sides of this problem, right? So if your standard is low, what you are essentially saying is, well, thank you for that, Jesus.

I don't really care, though. Since you did this thing for me, I'm just going to take it for granted and do whatever I feel like doing. That's just flat out crazy talk.

Because sin still matters to God. And because sin still matters to God, sin should still matter to you. You don't just get a pass because Jesus is who Jesus said he would be.

Now let's look at the other side of that one. Because the other side of that one is we have some folks who believe the ice that they walk on with Christ is just paper thin.

That if I make one mistake, then I'm out. That if I've screwed up, Jesus is just pulling back on me. Now, I want you to go back to what we said before about that piece of suffering producing perseverance and perseverance producing character.

[33 : 58] If you have held on and you have seen God work in your life, if you are here wondering if God does these things and keeps God's promises, if you are able to hear stories like Pam gave you this morning and John gave you this morning.

Yesterday, Nancy gave us a great example as well. If you hear story after story like that, then why do you believe the love of Christ is so fragile?

Friends, I want you to hear this truth. The cross is sufficient. The cross is enough.

And what we mean by that is Jesus has taken care of it. It is done. When he says at the end of his earthly life, it is accomplished, that was not a tease.

That was a fact. It is accomplished. And if you believe that, if that is where you are, if you have known that to be true in your life, then why would you let the whispers of the enemy make you believe that the blood of Christ can just simply be washed off you because you aren't perfect?

[35 : 27] It's the fact that we're not perfect that made the blood of Christ necessary. God has shown us that he gets it.

See, that very question we're struggling with, God understands it. But we act like he doesn't. We don't live lives that suggest we honestly believe it.

the reason why we know we understand it is because God is the one who built the thing. God knows we're going to make choices. And all those choices won't be the one that God wants us to make.

But what did God do? God didn't look at us and say, you know what, I'm done. That's a wrap. This is over. He didn't do that.

And some of you may be thinking about the Noah thing, but the Noah thing is already the answer to your question. Right? Because yes, everything else went, but all of us didn't. So when he says, I understand this, and if you can't do it yourselves, if you won't do it yourselves, I'll do it for you.

[36 : 55] That's what the cross means. I'll take care of it because you can't do it on your own.

I would rather do this than lose you. That's the message of the cross. And when you understand that, when you believe it, that's what sends you into the world making better choices.

the question you've got to wrestle with, folks, is, does the cross mean enough to you to change you? Does the cross mean enough to you to change you, to make you start making some different choices?

choices? Because if Jesus is who he says he is for you, if you have given your heart the way you want to give your heart, yes, you will stumble and fall.

We will not magically be perfect, but what we are is redeemed. what we are is saved.

[38 : 15] What we are is beloved. Let that truth sink in. That you should love Jesus enough to make some of those terms.

That's what this is about. That journey that journey to being more Christ-like is what we are on every single day.

That we may not be perfect, but we should keep going. We should keep pressing.

We should be better than we were. But the good news is even if you're struggling with that, you are still loved, forgiven, and free anyway.

That's who Jesus is. See, this thing, why we read the Nicodemus story again, is because so much is unpacked in that story about how God deals with us that I think we kind of take it for granted.

[39 : 31] We've gotten so used to seeing that verse tattooed on people's arms and on bumper stickers and at football games and all that sort of thing. And that's important because it's the sum of the Bible in that sense.

But you got to remember not only the first part, but what comes immediately after it. Because that has the power to change everything. God so loved the world, that God sent God's only Son, that whoever would believe in Him would not perish, but have everlasting life.

And remember the next part. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world would be saved through Him.

That is what God is doing. That is what the cross means. And when you know God like that, when you have put your life in His hands, God looks at you and sees you through the prism of Christ, and you are in fact flawless in God's eyes, that's the difference.

You know, as we live this life and try to get it right, you know, those of us who have had co-workers and had the supervised folks, or those of us who have been parents, and you've tried to get lessons to track, you've tried to say, no, this has to be better.

[41 : 21] You know, we need to aim a little higher. All of that matters. But see, the thing is, especially with those whom we love, is that we know that there will be times it won't be perfect.

But when you look through that prism of love, when you look at those people around you and you know that this is about how much I love them, you don't just simply let them go.

You don't just simply end relationships. You don't just simply give up on people. And if we get that in our lives, how much more do you think your God feels it about you?

so trust that the cross is enough and you have in fact been freed.

Amen and amen. Loving and gracious God, we thank you for the ways in which you have touched each and every one of us, that the cross is sufficient, that we are in fact forgiven and freed.

[42 : 41] Jesus, you know you did it when we couldn't do it ourselves. And as we are about to confess and hear again that even in our imperfection, even in our failure, even in our willful disobedience, you died for us while we were yet sinners, completely undeserving, completely outside of where you would have us be.

But you did it for us anyway. Let us hold on to that. Let us remember that we have been made flawless by you. Amen.

The cross is sufficient. We know that Jesus' blood is more than enough. And so knowing that, go into the world with your imperfect self, trusting that you are forgiven, loved, and freed.

Before we leave today, make sure that you pay attention to the announcements on the website. I'm not going to do that now. But all those things are there and available for you, so please make sure you check out that resource to know the opportunities to learn, grow, and serve over the course of the week.

What I want to make sure I do today is make sure that we give some special thank yous today, because today would not have been possible without a few people. First, Pastor Jen's leadership in putting this whole thing together.

[44 : 08] We also want to thank Adrian, because how we pull this off technologically would always be on him, so the fact that we were able to do that was no small thing. Also want to thank Louie, Mary, and a couple of others that I'm forgetting folks and I probably shouldn't have named folks.

However, they were the ones who did most of this tent work yesterday, and we wouldn't have gotten it done without them, so we want to make sure we acknowledge them for that hard work as well. Last one is we want to make sure we acknowledge Jared and Beth, who have been kind of supervising the food, so we want to thank them as well.

So all that having been said, don't be the guy that stands between people and lunch. So let us receive this prayer of grace for our food as well as our benediction for the day. Almighty and gracious God, you have blessed us in more ways than we can imagine and we can count, that you have shown yourself to be more than enough to meet our needs and you pour out your generosity among us.

We thank you for this bounty that we get to share this beautiful day and all of those who have prepared it and are sharing things. And now, Lord, let your spirit continue to unite us as we come together as church men and as we go into the world to serve you and all God's children.

Amen. God be with you till we meet again. Thank you to those of you who joined us online. Please continue to check out the website and we will be back in touch with you as soon as possible. God bless.

[45 : 36] God bless.