

True Righteousness

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Preacher: Jonathan Clark

[0 : 0 0] the pulpit this morning, a true friend of our church over many years. Please welcome Pastor Jonathan Clark. Hey, good morning, friends. As John said, my name is Jonathan Clark. I've been around Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church for a long time. I interned with Cheyenne Mountain Pres when I was in seminary. I actually had a cup of coffee with the wife of the pastor who started Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church. He actually baptized me when I was a baby. So many of you have known my parents for a long time. So yeah, it's good to be with you again. I work currently, as John said, as a college pastor with the college ministry of the church that Cheyenne Mountain is a part of in denomination. It's called the Reformed University Fellowship. And so my call is to preach the faith once delivered to all the saints to college students in Colorado Springs, both at UCCS mainly, but also we're looking at Colorado College and Pikes Peak, other places. And so it's a real, I love my job. And it's been an exciting year to do campus ministry in Colorado Springs.

It's a delight. We've seen the Lord work in some amazingly awesome ways. I just had a girl text me today a couple weeks ago. She said, Jonathan, what's the Trinity? I don't know what this thing is. And I said, well, let's dig into the Word and start learning what it is and how God loves you. And other students, we have a student who's on our servant leadership team who said, hey, I think I want to step back from servant leadership because I want to be able to do more ministry that I can do on my own with RUF than having to do other stuff. And so he said, I want to lead Bible studies and do this. So the Lord's really been blessing RUF. If you're interested in hearing more, I'd love to, I actually have a couple of my end of year newsletters left over. I can share one of those with you or get a cup of coffee, whatever. But this is not why we're here today. We are here to worship the living God. And so if you would, please turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 18. Luke chapter 18, or it's printed in your bulletin. And I'll be reading verse 9, starting in verse 9.

This is God's Word, so pay careful attention to it. This is Jesus speaking. He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt.

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus, God, thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, and even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get.

Verse 13, but the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted. This is God's Word. Would you pray with me? Father in heaven, we have come from so many different places and times and distances and stories to be with you now.

[3 : 1 9] And we pray that you would meet us across all of that with your Spirit through your Word, that you would minister to each of us as we uniquely need, that you would convict, that you exhort, that you would admonish, and that you would shape Christ in all of us, that we would walk out of here more able to glorify you and love our neighbor. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

So, I was recently reading a short story by one of my favorite short story authors, a woman named Flannery O'Connor. Flannery O'Connor is an author who writes in what's called the Southern Gothic style of literature, and she writes during the 1950s. And she's a Southern writer, so she's writing in the American South around Georgia in the 1950s. And so, she's dealing with questions of race and gender and also righteousness. And she writes a story about a woman named Mrs. Turpin.

The story's name is Revelation. And Mrs. Turpin is a good Christian woman. She's a good Christian woman, and she always goes to church. She's polite to strangers, to people who are new or different, that she's very kind. And she's always finding ways to look at another person and just observe.

And maybe in little and small ways compare herself to these other people, right? And so, she begins to write, you know, to have these comparisons with a black person because she's in the American South in the 1950s. She would say, well, I'm white. With the Ritz person, she would say, well, she's just a decent salt of the earth kind of person, right? Which the smart person, she would say she's a simple person. With the foolish person, she'd say, I'm educated. I'm educated, right?

And she's the kind of person, we've all met the person like Mrs. Turpin, who will smile at you, greet your hand, offer you a piece of pie. But you can tell that maybe there's something else going on behind the smile. We get a sense that perhaps silently this person is judging us, right? That they think that there may be a little bit better than us. And Mrs. Turpin, in biblical terms, we would describe Mrs. Turpin as self-righteous, right? Self-righteous person. And one day in the story, Revelation, Mrs. Turpin is sitting in the doctor's office. And she's sitting in the doctor's office, and she's talking with the other patients about how thankful she is for her life, that she's not sick, that her husband is the one who's in the doctor's office. And she's talking and comparing herself to these people. And at one moment, in euphoria, she cries out and she shouts out. She says, when I think of who I could have been besides myself and what I've got, I just feel like shouting, thank you, Jesus. Thank you. Thank you, Jesus. We've probably all had an experience with someone like a Mrs. Turpin. In fact, many of you have probably had an encounter that left you with a bad taste in your mouth or a poisonous feeling, right? And if you've grown up in the church, you've probably had a feeling where you're like, I don't know if I want to go to church again. This person was so full of themselves, so self-righteous. I don't know if I want to be around them, right? And these are painful moments. And what I love about our story today is that the

[6 : 33] Bible speaks precisely to those moments. It speaks precisely to this. In fact, the Bible is very interested in what we experience when we meet a Mrs. Turpin, and it's actually very interested in Mrs. Turpin. And so if I could summarize what I would hope we would come away from today, the main thing is this, that the gospel turns self-righteousness into repentant contentment. The gospel turns self-righteousness into repentant contentment. For those of you who are note-takers, we're going to look at this in three ways. First, the universality of self-righteousness. Second, the danger of self-righteousness.

And lastly, the way of repentance to contentment. So first, the danger, the universality of self-righteousness, the danger of self-righteousness, and the way of repentance to contentment. So first, let's start with the universality of self-righteousness, right? So in our text that I've read for us, Jesus tells a parable. And a parable is a short story that Jesus would often use to make a very specific and powerful spiritual point. He wants to get us, he wants to get at a profound spiritual truth, right?

And sometimes parables are a bit confusing. You know, there's parables that I'm still honestly not sure I understand, old wine and new wineskins and all these, but not this parable. Jesus is very clear about what the point of this parable is, right? He tells us very clearly if you look at verse 9.

Luke says, he told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt. Luke is not subtle about this parable. This parable is a story about and a story for people who think that they are upright, moral, on the right side of history. This parable is for Mrs. Turpin. And he tells us, all right, what's the parable? He says, verse 10, two men went into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other tax collectors. To understand what this parable is doing, we have, this is very challenging for us, particularly those of us who have grown up in the church for a long time. We have to try and strip off our 21st century Christian glasses and hear this story, at least verse 10, the way that the original audience would have heard it. So the Pharisees, back in Jesus' time, were the pinnacle. They were the high point of moral excellence, right?

They were untouchable. They were someone who was respected by all. They knew the Bible backwards and forwards. If there was a rule, they followed it. If there was something that was to be done for a pious, worshipful behavior towards God, they did it in spades, right?

[9 : 23] These are the people who are loved and respected by all. And it's very challenging for us to actually find groups like this, because no matter who you name, somebody doesn't like them in our moment today. The closest I can think of in our moment would be like a Mr. Rogers. Everybody loves Mr. Rogers, right? Everybody, he loves kids. He's gentle. He sings. He's a Presbyterian. Everybody loves Mr. Rogers.

That's what the tax collectors were. I mean, sorry, that's what the Pharisees were. The tax collectors, on the other hand, they're the bad guys, right? They are essentially, for that time, they were government-sponsored thieves. Government-sponsored thieves. They were in collusion with the imperial invading Roman government, and they could tax essentially as much as they wanted, as long as they made the quota that they were supposed to give the Roman government. And so for us, it would be like a corrupt IRS agent who's in cahoots with the Russians. That's what the tax collector is.

Somebody who's charging you far more taxes than they're supposed to, and working with an invading, oppressing enemy. And so this is, we've got Mr. Rogers and a corrupt tax agent.

And what this story then does is it sets up expectations for us. It makes us expect that the Pharisee would be a Mr. Rogers, the good guy. He's the upright one. He's the virtuous one. And this tax collector, clearly, he's the bad guy. He extorts the poor. He's an unpatriotic traitor.

He's the bad guy. And the Pharisee even starts his prayer thanking God. He goes to church, and he prays, and he thanks God even. And it sounds very similar to what Mrs. Turpin would pray, right?

[11 : 12] Verse 11, the Pharisee, standing by himself, stands off, looking at him, says, prays thus, God, I thank you. How are you supposed to start every prayer? Thank you, God. Thanks for this day, right? He is off to a great start. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. I thank God for who I am. I thank God, he says, thank you, God, that I am not like other men.

Extortioners, like that tax collector. Unjust, like that tax collector. Adulterers, or even, like that tax collector, right? Here's a man who stands up and prays and says, thank you, God, for who I am and what I've done. Thank you, God, that I'm good.

This is a man who views himself as good and who society views as good. This is a man who is self-righteous, right? And it's easy, it's really easy to beat up on the Pharisees, right?

It's easy for those of us who have been around the block with the Christian faith to go, I know where this is going. I know where this is going. But Jesus wants us to take a hard look at ourselves here because the first lesson behind this parable is, is frankly, the hardest one. And it's this, that at the heart of the Christian faith is the core conviction that the human heart has the capacity for this self-righteousness, that every person has the seeds of self-righteousness within us, right? And let me try and show you how. So first, there's a religious version of this.

There's a religious version of this, right? And we know this one because if you've been in a church for more than a week, you've seen this. This is the Mrs. Turpin, the Christian goody two-shoes, right? The one who shows up to church, who reads their Bible, who knows their Bible, who votes a certain way, who invites people to church. And we know this person because, frankly, they're probably miserable to be around because we feel like they're constantly looking at us and assessing us and judging us in small ways. And this is the person who, what does our text tell us, trusts in themselves. Verse 9, he told this parable to some who, what, trusted in themselves.

[13 : 26] And at its worst, this kind of self-righteousness leads to at least religiosity, you know, but at worst, it leads to religious extremism, which in any of its form is really bad for society, right? And this is the person who says, we are so right that we are ready to march into society and compel and force everyone to be like us. I thank God that I am not like other men.

And for those of us who are Christians in the room, there are hard words that Jesus might say for us in this, right? Because it's this, that perhaps the greatest threat to your faith is your own religiosity. The greatest threat to your relationship with the Lord is how pious you have been. That it is so possible to make an idol out of your religious behavior.

Now, that's the religious version. Now, some of you here may be exploring or questioning the Christian faith or not sure. Or maybe some of you are saying, I am not a Christian and this is great.

He's hitting Christians hard. I am here for this, right? You think, yeah, pastor, get them. Get those fundamentalists. Get those self-righteous, bigoted Christians, right? Religious extremism, that's what's wrong with our world. And to you, I would say, no, wait a minute. Wait a minute.

Because this is not just a Christian problem. Remember, I would argue that this is actually a human problem. This is something that's beyond just religion. And if you'll excuse me, I want to delve into something that's a little passion of mine. It's been a hobby forever. And it's 20th century philosophy. Stay with me. This will be fun. All right. So there's a 20th century philosopher, a guy named Michel Foucault. He is the father of modern philosophy of the, of the, a modern understanding of the individual, of the individual. And so if you see, if you drive, you know, you go to old Colorado city or Manitou Springs, you go into some of those, those trinket shops and you'll see bumper stickers that say, be true to yourself or be you only you can do it or express yourself today. Something like that. That's Michel Foucault. That's his philosophy at work, right? And Foucault's top priority as a secular non-Christian philosopher was to discern a way for the self to be independent and apart from all other expectations and norms in society, because he thought that those were going to hold the self down. And so he said, what we've got to do is we've got to be free from all the expectations of society and just let the individual express themselves, right? And this process of finding yourself, expressing your individualism, that's what humanity is for. That's the free self, right? And so if you're not a Christian today,

[16 : 11] I would argue that Foucault is sort of the foundation of how you think about the world, right? It's almost how, you know, the idea to be yourself, to be an individual, right? But here's the problem. In his writing, Foucault even admits that this process of expressing yourself demands that you assess yourself in comparison with all the other selves in the universe.

And you look at every other person and say, I'm unique from them, and I'm a better self than them. I'm an individual distinct from all the other masses. And I can only validate myself as superior, valid, by looking at everyone else and saying, I'm not like them, right? So in other words, Foucault, the modern understanding, the father of the modern understanding of self-acceptance, demands that we assess ourselves and others in the same way of self-righteousness.

You can't get away from it, friend. That even if you say, I'm not a religious person, if you are going to say that I'm a unique person, you have to do it in a way that looks at everybody else and says, I'm not like them. And so you may say, well, I'm a secular person, but perhaps you're convinced that the world needs a more inclusive and less bigoted place. But don't you see that you're creating the same performance metric that the religious person has, the same virtue signaling, the same self-righteousness? And so what I'm hoping to show you here is it doesn't matter who we are, Christian, non-Christian, somewhere in between, all of us, the heart posture is the same.

And it's this, that every person has the seeds and the potential and the impulse to self-righteousness, to look at themselves in comparison to others and say, I'm not like them, and to trust ourselves.

And what's most dangerous about this self-righteousness is that it's self-concealing. It hides from us. Most other vices in our world, you know, perhaps New Year's resolutions, you say, I've got this thing I need to work on. You're aware that you need to work on it, right? If any, if you have an addiction to alcohol or, or you get angry with your kids or whatever it is, you know, it's a problem. Self-righteousness is so insidious, it hides from you. You don't think you have a problem.

[18 : 40] In fact, you think you don't have a problem, which is precisely the problem. That's what's so dangerous about self-righteousness. It blinds you. You think you are doing right. You think you are good. It deludes you into saying, I am a good person. And that blindness leads you to have pride in yourself and contempt for others. So our first point is that self-righteousness is a universal human problem. It's a Christian problem. It's a non-Christian problem. It is the human ability, the human propensity to trust in ourselves as righteous, as good, as valuable in contrast to others. And moving to our second point, it's incredibly dangerous. It's incredibly dangerous.

And this point is shorter, but I'll tell you this. Well, what does it do? What does self-righteous do? Well, for starters, it leads to contempt. Look at our text. Those who trusted in themselves, that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt. I take that and as causal. Their trust in themselves leads them to look at other people and say, that person.

It leads them to look at others with contempt. Mrs. Turpin, in her story, in Flannery O'Connor's story, is the picture of contempt. The self-righteous person says, at least I'm not that bad. Thank God, I am not like her. Not like him. At least I'm not liberal. At least I'm not a bigot. At least I'm not blank, fill in the blank. And so wherever we're finding the thing that says, at least I'm not X, at least I am this, that's the place where there's probably self-righteousness positioning itself in my heart, in your heart. And we do this because it's the only way we can support ourselves is to lift ourselves up in comparison to someone else. The Pharisee, thank God that I am not like this sinner. And friends, this is the story of our society today, is it not? If you just spend half a minute on pretty much any media platform of your choice, you will see that the gravitational pull of social media, of news is to compare and contrast my group with that group, my people with that people.

We do this in our society. We do this racially, do this economically. We do this sexually. Pick a thing and we say, at least we're not like them. We're the good guys, right? Why do we do this?

It's because we're all so self-righteous. It can lead to contempt for anyone who's not liked me. Second, it leads to misery. It leads to misery first towards yourself, right? Because the self-righteous person is incredibly lonely because no one wants to be around them at the bare minimum, and we've experienced that before. But second, the self-righteous person is dreadfully afraid that at any moment they could be found out. The self-righteous person has a keen awareness that they have the pressure to keep up the facade, keep up the performance, that any moment if somebody finds out that's what's really them, they're like, they're exposed. Then they are on display. They could be found guilty or canceled or kicked out, and so there's no room for mistakes. There's only perform, perform. And that's miserable.

[22 : 12] That is not a pleasant place to be where you cannot be honest with yourself, with others. And lastly, self-righteousness leads to eternal spiritual destruction.

Look at verse 14. This is Jesus speaking. He says, I tell you, this man, talking about the tax collector whom we'll get to, went down to his house justified rather than the other.

Those last four words are terrifying, rather than the other. Jesus has strong words here because that word justified is a crucial word in the Christian faith because it is a legal declaration that God accepts a person as clean, as legally cleared from guilt. Only one man goes away justified, and it is not the one that we expect. It is not the one that society would say, right? It's a shock to the audience.

It's not the Pharisee. And the point is clear here that self-righteousness does not bring justification from God. And in fact, when we tease it out, when we pull it out to the very end, it leads to condemnation and spiritual death. Self-righteousness pushed out long enough in your life will lead to God not accepting you. And friends, that is a deadly thing. Self-righteousness to the end of your life means death. So it's very dangerous. Well, what are the signs? How do I know if this is me? How do I know if this is in my heart? How do you know if this is in your heart? Well, first, contempt towards others. Where are the places in your life that you feel contempt towards others?

people who are different from me? Where are the people who you say, at least I'm not like them? Second, self-righteousness. And the second sign of it is a coldness towards God.

[24 : 17] One, now hear me say this, not the only reason. There are many reasons why we may feel cold or far from God in our faith. But one of the reasons may be that you feel dry in your faith is that God is far away is because in your heart of hearts, you actually don't think you need God. You think that actually I'm doing pretty good or I can do this on my own. God is, I don't need him in my life.

And so you feel coldness towards him. Third sign is an inability to feel weak or vulnerable with others. That if people really knew you, they wouldn't accept you. That you have to keep up the appearance, keep up the facade of self-righteousness. So here's the question. Is there someone in your life who knows you at your most vulnerable? If the answer is no, there's probably some self-righteousness in you.

Fourth is, if you fail, you can't own it. You have to explain it away. I do this all the time with my daughter. I'll fail my daughter. I'll snap at her and then I'll instantly go to her and say, well, you didn't obey the way daddy asked you to. Or I'll say, well, daddy had a long day. And I go, oh man, can I not just own that I wasn't loving to my daughter? Can I not just admit that I was not as gentle as I should have been to a four-year-old? Self-righteousness is, if when you fail, you can't own it, but you have to excuse it.

That's self-righteousness. It wasn't my fault. Lastly, in your heart of hearts, the last sign is you feel a tremendous amount of vulnerability and insecurity. That one slip, one bad text, one time forgetting to delete your search history will lead to total exposure. So our second point is that self-righteousness leads to misery and lonely in this life and destruction in the next. Now, what do we do with this? What do we do with this? Well, the gospel comes in at this moment and offers us the way of repentance to contentment. And this is our last point. We look at the prayer of this tax collector.

Look at verse 13. But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. There's so much for us to notice in what this tax collector is saying. I'll try to draw out a few of them first. The whole emphasis of the language here is of distance. If the Pharisee is standing in a prominent place by himself so others can look, this tax collector is at the back end of the kitchen by himself. He doesn't want anybody to see him. In fact, if he could find any way to pray not being at the temple, he would do it because he says, I don't belong here. He stands far off. He does not even look up into the presence of God. He beats his chest. The word beats his chest is not once, but it is consistently over a period of time. This man is an emotional, spiritual, and existential puddle. He's at the end of himself.

[27 : 27] And the Greek word here is powerful. He says, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. And that word merciful in the Greek actually says, propitiate me. God, be propitiated to me. And that's a rare, but it is a crucial word in the Bible because what he is saying, he's saying, God, solve the great existential and spiritual gap between you and me. There is a void between you and me that only you can and can span. Clean the great stain on my soul. In the Greek, he does not say, God, be merciful to me, a sinner, but he actually says, God, be merciful to me, the sinner. He says, if there is a sinner out there, I'm him. He brings nothing to the table, but his great need and his spiritual brokenness. This is a man who is deeply aware of his unrighteousness, who knows that he is broken apart from God doing something mysterious and wonderful in his life. And verse 14 is the great shock of the story.

What is it? I tell you, that's Jesus' way of saying, pay attention. I tell you, this man, who doesn't deserve it at all, went down to his house. What is the word? Justified.

Justified. Justified. Accepted by God. Legally absolved of all the guilt that he is so powerfully aware of. Cleaned in the presence of the most piercing eye in the universe. Valued and accepted independent of his performance. That's what justified is. This man is justified in his house.

How is that possible? How does a simple prayer do all that? Well, friends, it's because of Jesus. It's because of who he is and what he has done. And we know from the rest of the gospel, we don't hear it here, but in the rest of the gospel, Paul tells us in Romans 3 that the righteousness comes to us, how? Apart from the law. Distinct. Not connected to our performance, but apart from the law. But how?

Through faith in Christ. Who he is and what he has done on our behalf. And so here's this Pharisee who thinks he is righteous. He thinks he is righteous, but the really, truly righteous one, the really, truly justified one is the tax collector. The one who is, it's an amazing irony, the one who is most aware of his unrighteousness is the one who is declared righteous, and the one who thinks he is the most righteous is dreadfully not righteous.

[30 : 07] It is that faith in Jesus, as we confessed in our catechism, the resting and receiving on Jesus Christ. It is the tax collector, and he cries out, propitiate me. And what does 1 John 2 tell us?

It tells us this, that just, that Jesus is what? The propitiation for our sins. Jesus answers this man's prayer by bridging this great spiritual gap, the void between him and God, and saying, I am your righteousness. And friends, he does that for you today.

That when you feel the great sting of your contempt towards others and realize this is self-righteousness, Christ comes in and says, I am your righteousness. Receive and rest that alone.

This is the man who goes away justified. That's the gospel difference. Because of the Christian gospel, we recognize that we are not accepted or valued by anything in this world based on our performance, but based on who Jesus is and what he has done. And friends, that is so freeing. That is such good news.

That I am a great sinner and Christ is a great savior. That's the Christian. Justification. Justification then is a gift from God, not something that we deserve, not something that we earn. And the tax collector understood that. You read Psalm 130. That's what Psalm 130 is all about. From the depths of woe, I cry to thee. God in his steadfast love hears and receives. And that's the gospel. That's the good news. Now, how do we know if that's striking my heart? How do I know if this is beginning to impact and influence me? Well, for me, I think there's two things that happen at the same time. This is ironic, right? How do you know if the gospel is striking your heart? You will feel both unvaluable and invaluable at the same time.

[32 : 19] The gospel is striking your heart when you feel unvaluable and invaluable at the same time. You will feel unvaluable because you know that you are a sinner. You know that you are unrighteous. You know that you are in desperate need of a Savior, but you feel invaluable because the truth of the gospel of who Jesus is and what he has done and who you are in him says that you are valued, loved, cherished by the most valuing, loving, and cherishing person in our world. And friends, that leads to contentment.

It leads to peace and it leads to joy. Repentance leads to contentment. It leads to justification. And that is the great hope of every person, I would argue, in our world. So what do we do with this? What do we do with this Monday morning, Wednesday afternoon, Friday, 2024? Well, some of us need to be challenged in our self-righteousness. I know I do. I was looking over these notes again this morning and I was like, oh man, I need to be challenged again in my self-righteousness. And most of us, I guarantee most of us have at least one or two places in our lives where we tell the same story as the Pharisee, where we look and say, at least I'm not like so-and-so, where we feel like we can trust ourselves, right? Friends, self-righteousness only leads to misery and contempt. Repent. Give up that rat race.

Recognize that it is fruitless in this life and destructive in the next. And turn in faith to Jesus for the first time, maybe for some of you, or for the thousandth time for some of you.

Some of you, maybe you're at the other end of the spectrum and you are beating yourself up and you wondered how you dragged yourself in here this morning and you are deeply aware of your unrighteousness.

And it is hanging over your heart and your head, that one sin that condemns and hampers you. And to you, Jesus would say, I am your propitiation. Go to your house justified.

[34 : 30] Go receive the grace. Rest in my completed work on the cross. In RUF, we talk about one of our top goals with students is that they grow in grace.

Grow in grace. What does that mean? It is the process. It is a process where each person has an increasing awareness that I'm a sinner, an increasing awareness that I am unrighteous, and an equally growing awareness that God loves and saves sinners.

If there's one thing that I would pray for your heart in 2024, it's a growth in grace. That is a greater awareness that you are a sinner and Christ loves sinners. If that's what you spend 2024, if that's what you spend your life meditating on, you can do no better. God loves you despite your sin.

Grow in that grace. Cycle back to Mrs. Turpin, the end of her story. So right after Mrs. Turpin's self-righteous prayer of, thank you, Jesus, thank you, Jesus, there's this shocking moment in the story, and there's this girl who's been watching Mrs. Turpin in the doctor's office, and she's an ugly girl.

She's very, very ugly. And this girl is just fuming at Mrs. Turpin, and right after Mrs. Turpin's exultant prayer, this girl jumps at Mrs. Turpin and tackles her, grabs her around the throat, and starts throttling her. And she screams at her, go to hell, you warthog. Right? And this sends Mrs.

[36 : 00] Turpin into a furious rage, because this girl has attacked her, has insulted her, has accused her of deserving hell. Everything that she didn't believe about herself. And at the end of the story, Mrs.

Turpin storms home, and she's furious, and she goes out to her pig pen to wash her pigs. And she's so offended, and she's mad at everyone. She's mad at God. She's mad at the girl. She's mad at her husband. And she's furious, and she's washing her pigs. And Flannery O'Connor is a masterful writer. She says, as Mrs. Turpin is washing her pigs in the evening, the sun begins to set, and a blood-red, crimson sunset lights up the sky. And Mrs. Turpin has a vision of the poor of the earth, the poor in spirit, the tax collectors of the world, rushing into heaven, singing, rejoicing, clean, running into the arms of their Savior, into the blood-red sunset for the first time in their lives.

And Mrs. Turpin realizes that actually that girl, that ugly girl who said, you're nothing but a pig, was right. And that all of her righteousness was worthless. And all she has to do is join this throng of ugly, broken, disgusting people running into a blood-red sunset to receive the grace, to receive the righteousness from outside of herself. And that she is only a pig before God, and that her only hope is to admit it, and to run into the mercy of God. And there she finds the secret of contentment and true righteousness. Friends, that's the gospel. That's what's on display.

That's what's on offer for you. Receive it and trust it. Accept the contentment that the gospel offers you. Let me pray. Father in heaven, we are convicted, but also encouraged that we are somehow invaluable and unvaluable at the same time. Lord, I pray that that would move in our hearts as each of us uniquely needs, that the gospel would challenge us, but at the end of the day, it would throw us into the sunset of Christ's righteous propitiation for us, that we would trust and receive that for 2024, for our families, for our marriages, and that we would become people who proclaim the sweet joy of the gospel, that you would be glorified, that we would be content in you. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.