

Be Gracious To Me

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[0 : 00] be seated. This morning we're going to be looking at Psalm 26. So if you have a Bible, please turn with me there, or you can follow along using your bulletin. So we're kind of continuing in this little mini-series in the book of Psalms. We're not going to do all the Psalms. There's quite a few, but Matthew and I are both taking some time to work through some selected Psalms. And this morning we are looking at Psalm 26.

Psalm 26. Vindicate me, O Lord, for I've walked in my integrity. I've trusted in the Lord without wavering. Prove me, O Lord, and try me. Test my heart and my mind, for your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I will walk in your faithfulness. I do not sit with men of falsehood, nor do I consort with hypocrites. I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked. I wash my hands in innocence, and go around your altar, O Lord, proclaiming thanksgiving aloud, and telling all your wondrous deeds. O Lord, I love the habitation of your house, and the place where your glory dwells.

Do not sweep my soul away with sinners, nor my life with bloodthirsty men, in whose hands are evil devices, and whose right hands are full of bribes. But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity. Redeem me, and be gracious to me. My foot stands on level ground. In the great assembly, I will bless the Lord. Let's pray.

Lord, we hear the cry of the psalmist in these words. May they be our cry. May we see Christ through his words. May we see the greatness of you. May you impress that upon our hearts this morning, and may we delight in it. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. I'm fairly certain in a room this size, and especially on a morning like today, when we have snow, and some people are at home, no one has ever heard of the name Adolph Beck. Not Carson Beck, the college football player, or not even the Beck who plays for the Rockies, as I got confused yesterday and tried to convince my kids.

This is Adolph Beck. Now, why is he important? Well, Adolph Beck, like many in our age, he grew up, went to college, got a degree in something that he never used again. So what did he do? He went on a worldwide adventure. He went to sea. He moved abroad. He moved to England, and then to South America.

[3 : 01] He did all kinds of jobs. He was a singer, a ship broker. He even did what many people in Colorado do. He went into real estate. And then he became that ever-elusive, I don't really know what you do for work, but you're an entrepreneur. And in his business ventures, he bought and sold parts of the Galapagos Islands. He even bought and sold a mine. You see, Adolph Beck wasn't around in the year 2024.

He was around at the turn of the century. Not this century, but the 19th century. And as he was living and doing his business, this distinguished gentleman took on all the trappings of the age. He wore a top hat, a frock coat. So think like tuxedo coat. And he sported a fancy mustache. In 1895, he stepped out of his house, and he was immediately confronted by a very angry woman. And the woman accused him of taking all that she had, all her jewelry, all her valuables. Obviously distressed, Mr. Beck went straight to the police and said this woman was harassing him. But instead of taking his statement, they arrested him. And when they did, this woman gave an account of the description of this man named Lord Willoughby, who had defrauded her and numerous other women with stories of the French Riviera,

English Gardens, and high living. Lord Willoughby was guilty and thrown in jail. There's one problem though. Adolph Beck wasn't in England during that time. He was in South America. He couldn't have done it. So Beck pleaded and enlisted the help of people that were more famous than him. The very famous Sherlock Holmes writer, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. But those pleas and those cries for just justice and his innocence fell on deaf ears. Beck went to jail. He did his time, and he

was paroled.

But even with this miscarriage of justice, with his newfound freedom, Beck again was confronted with the reality of a mistaken identity. And he thought, as he was accused for a second time as Lord Willoughby of stealing people's valuables and possessions, this can't be happening again. So what did he do?

He ran. But that confirmed his guilt, or so thought the police. But when it came time for sentencing, the judge was a little more careful this time. He was concerned that maybe there was some truth to these accusations. And while he sat in jail, Lord Willoughby struck again. Because in fact, Adolph Beck was not Lord Willoughby, but a man named Wilhelm Meyer. He's equally as fascinating as Adolph Beck. If we thought that his life was interesting up until this point, Wilhelm Meyer was interesting for these reasons. Not only was he Lord Willoughby, but in all those years where Beck was in jail and Lord Willoughby didn't strike again, he was in fact in America. What was he doing in America? Not posing and stealing valuables off people.

[6 : 26] No, he was the Surgeon General of the Kingdom of Hawaii. He was also a successful coffee entrepreneur and owned many plantations. But then he grew tired of all those exploits, and he moved back to England.

And when he did, he resumed his actions as Lord Willoughby, stealing from unsuspecting women, wooing them with stories of grandeur, and all of these things. But this woman, I deed, Wilhelm Meyer at the request of that judge. And justice was served for him, but not Adolph Beck.

You see, in this story, we have this question of mistaken identities. Adolph Beck went to jail for crimes he didn't commit. Two times, almost. Wilhelm Meyer ultimately paid the price for his crimes. But this case of mistaken identity is not one for the history books, or internet cessations, or murder mystery novels. A mistaken identity is something that we all suffer with, all people, especially Christians. You see, we get confused, and in each and every one of us, we think that we know what it's like to be a Christian. We think we have this picture in our mind of what it must feel like, what it must be, what it must seem like. And oftentimes, we go with those things, either that we've conjured in our mind, or people impose on us, when in fact, we don't go to the words of Scripture to tell us what the Christian life is like. So this morning, we're going to look at Psalm 26, and we're going to see, because of God, that his people cry out to him. And they do so on this sure and certain hope of a Christian identity that's based in confidence, that has characteristics, and ultimately cries out to him when we need help. So this morning, we're going to look at confidence, characteristics, and the cry of the Christian. Now, as I mentioned, all of us suffer from this case of mistaken identity. There's this picture of what a Christian does or doesn't do, and sometimes we listen to those, those questions, those doubts, either from others or inside ourselves.

How often have you heard, I am a Christian because I do X? I am a Christian because I love my wife. I'm a Christian because I don't steal from the grocery store. I am a Christian because I have been baptized. I'm a Christian because I don't do those bad things that my neighbor across the street does.

Or surely I can't be a Christian because I do do those things my neighbor across the street does, and he doesn't trust in Christ. He thinks not about the things of God. That should be all of our experience on some level, but where the rubber meets the road is how do we answer all those doubts, objections, questions that gnaw and eat away at us? Do we have the confidence of the psalmist, or do we let those questions run amok in our mind? First, the confidence of the Christian.

[9 : 55] We of all people should be confident, right? Christians should be confident. Wait, should Christians be confident? I don't know how we should answer that question, right? Are they meek and humble and lowly and the gentle? Or are they arrogant, proud? Is it that kind of confidence?

No, this is a different kind of confidence. But what we see in these first verses is a kind of confidence that makes us a little bit nervous if we're honest, right? It's confidence in speaking back to God, not just asking for things, but speaking very directly to him. Vindicate me, prove, try me, judge me. Judge me. That's really, really bold. Why is it really, really bold? Why can the psalmist do this?

Is it because of himself or something else? Is the molder saying back to the thing that, or the person that molded him? Why have you made me like this? In the words of Paul. No, he's doing something very different. He has confidence before the throne because of something different. Bold move, psalmist.

If you remember, as we're looking at these psalms in Psalm 24, which we skipped because of snow, in Psalm 25 and Psalm 26, there's kind of like a dialogue going on between the person that wrote them and the Lord. They're crying out to the Lord. The interesting thing, though, as they're doing this, Israel use these psalms in worship, and they would sing them back to the Lord. And in doing so, they reveal a lot more about what they thought about God, even though we think it's just about how he approaches the throne and asks these questions. We don't know all the situation that the psalmist is going through, though. We know that he's tried and pressed in, that some kind of evil lurks about, but it's not specific, like we heard from Jim, where David is talking at the end of his day, or even when David walks through some real tough times of his own doing, or at the hands of others.

[12:05] This is more general, but we know this. There's something out there that's eating at him, either internally or some kind of evil that's pressing in upon him. But these words kind of lose some of their boldness, the shock value, and the humility factor starts to rise when we think about why can he have this kind of boldness in talking to the Lord?

It's less about the psalmist and more about God when we start to realize it. Here's a clue, though, to that end. And we don't get it immediately. He says, vindicate me, O Lord, for something.

Or if we rearrange the words and say, not vindicate me, but judge me, O Lord. That seems more in line with these other ideas of prove me, try me, all those kind of things. Not just a little bit, but fully, he says, my heart and mind. Open up all those closet doors where all those dust bunnies live of sin and darkness. Open up those closets that you don't show to those house guests, or your friends, or your neighbors, or even your family. He says, look in all of those. It's completely, it's all-encompassing. Judge me in that way. But these aren't out there floating willy-nilly. This vindicate me, prove, try. We see that linkage with the term for. It gives us the reason for it. And that reason is this. Look at verse one. Integrity and trust in the Lord.

Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in integrity. I've trusted in the Lord without wavering. Prove me, O Lord, and try me. Test my heart and mind, for your steadfast love is before my eyes. And I walk in your faithfulness. For is kind of incomplete. It's kind of like saying this.

Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. Surely, I'm not going to put my child in the car without a seatbelt. Surely, you're not going to do that to your sister while I'm sitting here watching you. Surely, gravity will do the rest. It's a certainty that follows.

[14:28] The basis of him making these claims or asking the Lord to do these things is not based in him, but surely on the goodness and faithfulness of the Lord. The judgment is not of the psalmist.

The judgment is against God and acting in his own character and who he is. And so the question is not about the psalmist, but it's about the nature of God. We see this when we kind of try to pit love and truth against each other. Steadfastness, faithfulness, love. Those are all held in tension, and we can see those intention even in these verses that God is equally loving and equally faithful to his promises, to who he is. He is love. He is faithfulness. He is wisdom. He is truth. He is justice. All of those things at the same time. Moses reminds us of this in places like Exodus. This will sound really familiar.

The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and children's children to the third and fourth generation. He is love. He is truth. He is justice. He is faithfulness. Not that he has them, but he is them.

That is the God by whom the psalmist says, prove me, try me based on who you are, not who I am. That is confidence. What is misplaced confidence, though? When I think of misplaced confidence, I am reminded of a time in the 90s where a certain mean, nasty dictator tried to reassure everyone of how confident he was. Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi dictator who was invaded by a coalition of forces, made a video before selfies were really popular, before YouTube ever existed. He made a video and tried to convince his people, maybe even himself, and the watching world that everything was going okay.

[16:58] He defiantly kind of talked bad about the coalition and how great it was going for him, not giving any acknowledgement to what was going on in the real world, that his soldiers were surrendering by the thousands or hundreds, even to CNN news camera teams. But as he recorded this video, this is the irony, is he was doing it in a bunker. If it was going so well for you, if you were so confident, you wouldn't be recording that video in a bunker, would you? I don't think so. But that

example of misplaced confidence also haunts us as Christians, because oftentimes our confidence is not in the nature of God, the fact that he is steadfastness and faithfulness, but in us, in our ability to follow through on that. And that's not at all what the psalmist is saying. He's saying, my confidence is not in me alone, but my confidence is in the Lord. That's the kind of confidence that we need as God's people, as Christians. But oftentimes we are blind. So let's see. Let's see what Christians look like, right? Those characteristics are listed for us as we work through this psalm.

The characteristics of Christians are not anything new or God's people, right? We see them in places like this. We see them in places like Matthew 5. Blessed are all those people who do all these things.

We'll come back to that in a minute. You see, these are descriptions of God's people. They're not the conditions or even the means or even the mode by which God sees us as righteous, sees us as lovely, or approves of us. The same is true in Psalm 26. Look with me at verses 4 and 5.

I do not sit with men of falsehood, nor do I consort with hypocrites. I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked. These are all nots. These are all bad things, right? These aren't descriptions of Christians. So we have this idea of, hey, the psalmist is saying, we're going to get to what it looks like in a minute, but this is what it doesn't look like, and it doesn't look like this. It doesn't look like God's people sitting with men of falsehood, hanging out with hypocrites, or even being in the larger assembly of evildoers.

It's not sitting with the wicked. If you remember about Scripture, Psalm 1 starts out in a way where it progressively moves. God's people, or those people that say they're God's people, but in fact they're evildoers, they're doing all these things. They're hanging out with all these evildoers, and they're not just doing that, but they're sitting with them, and they're commiserating with them.

They're speaking ill of the Lord. This is an almost identical contrast of God's people and of evil. Don't be like these people. Don't do this. Psalm 1 reads like this, Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates the day and night. He goes on, Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous, for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. That brings it almost into immediate focus. This is not just, hey, in the good Christian sense of, I don't drink, smoke, or chew, or go with girls that do.

[20 : 42] This is real life. This is cosmic treason. This has implications. This is true evil. And a Christian is not supposed to do any of these things, or even be around with them. It's not a mixing of this.

The psalmist isn't pleading his right standing before the Lord because he doesn't do this, as we'll see in a second. They're descriptors of someone who follows after the Lord. They don't do these things. So what do they do? They do something like this. Look in verse 9 and 10.

Do not sweep my soul away with sinners, nor my life with bloodthirsty men, in whose hands are evil devices, whose right hands are full of bribes.

Wait a second. That's not what they do either, right? That's a continuation of all those bad things. It's actually gotten worse. So what do they do? They do things like this in 6 and 8.

I wash my hands in innocence, and I go around your altar, O Lord, proclaiming thanksgiving aloud, and telling all your wondrous deeds. O Lord, I love the habitation of your house, and the place where your glory dwells. He washes his hands in innocence. Not that he is innocent because of what he's done. Yes, he is innocent. He loves the Lord. He loves his house. He loves his worship, the worship of the living God. Moses reminds us again that he loves where his glory dwells. And where is that, as Moses reminds us? In his tabernacle, where the worship of God happens.

[22 : 35] He loves the house of God because that's where worship happens. But where does God's glory, also dwells? In his people. So the psalmist is saying he loves his glory, and so he has to love his people. He loves the worship of God. He's marked by love for his glory, and he loves his people.

He proclaims thanksgiving aloud, and he tells of his wondrous deeds. That's what a Christian looks like. That's descriptive of what a follower after God should be doing, should be marked by.

A few years ago, there was a very popular TV commercial about insurance. And in this insurance commercial, this woman was telling a friend how she had met a new boyfriend. She was going to go on a date with him. She met him on the internet. And in doing so, she told her friend that he was a French model. And right at that split second, the French model walked up, except for he wasn't a

French model at all. He was this big, hulking oaf of a guy, kind of disheveled, a little bit dirty. And when he walked up and he greeted this friend and his date, he says, bonjour, about like that. Now, clearly I'm not French, and neither is this hulking oaf of a date. And the friend says to the woman who's about to go on this date, you can't believe everything that you see on the internet or read on the internet because it doesn't pose as true. The same is true in real life. The same is true in the Christian life.

We might say all these things, but are we marked with the things that we see in Psalm 26? Are we marked by a love for God's word, a love for his glory, and a love for his people? We might say them all the day long, but are we more like the American French model who walks up and says, bonjour, who's not French at all, and is not a model at all? How often do we as Christians say we are Christians and we are not marked by the characteristics that should mark God's people?

That's certainly true of my own heart. Maybe it's true of yours. Jesus goes further with this in Matthew 5, right? He says these contrasts, blessed is the man who does what? Not walks in the counsel of the wicked like Psalm 1. He goes beyond that and says, blessed are these people who look like this, and he goes through a whole list.

[25 : 22] And oftentimes as Christians, we come to that list and we're so discouraged, or we come to Psalm 1 and think, do I really do this? Or we come to sections like Psalm 26 and say, this isn't me at all. What am I going to do? Does that mean that I'm not a Christian if I don't proclaim his wondrous deeds, if I don't enjoy the presence at his altar? What do we do when we're called to be something and we are not? I have the great privilege during the week of leading a Bible study for guys that are Christians and guys that aren't Christians that meet together and study God's word on Fort Carson. And as we do that, this young man has started to come, a young man who I've known for many years. And I thought, surely all my wisdom and insight has finally brought him to the Lord. Or maybe it's the fact that we talk about NBA basketball. It's not that at all. In fact, it's the witness of a man that used to be in our congregation who's moved away. And it wasn't even his words that brought this young man into this Bible study that brought him to faith. It's the fact that this young member of our congregation would do things at work that were wrong and he would acknowledge them.

So it wasn't the fact that he did everything right. It wasn't the fact that he was perfect or he was a great leader or great army officer. No, it was the fact that when he did things that were wrong, he acknowledged them and said, please forgive me. And that witness to the gospel lived out in normal life is what transformed this guy's heart and let him see there's something different about this guy. And in that, I have to know what's going on. It's not the witness of Andy, but in fact, the witness of the gospel at work and a church member at work in the office cubicle on the flight line doing normal stuff and saying, I'm sorry, I am not who God has called me to be. How true is that of us? That even in our own failings, when we are not what we should be, that God uses that to show other people forgiveness that we have experienced as we extend it to others. Christian is marked by confidence, not in themselves. And sometimes it's even marked by these characteristics that we see.

But in spite of all that, that is the ground for the psalmist and for us crying out to the Lord. Starts, Psalm 26 starts in the same way it kind of ends. This crying out to God in the midst of difficulty in the midst of evil that surrounds them. The psalmist, remember, this is the book of Psalms.

This is not Romans where this is nicely laid out theology. Yet we're talking about the character of God, his love and steadfastness, the confidence that Christians have before the Lord. But at the same time, that Christian is crying out to the Lord. Look with me at verses 11 and 12.

[28 : 42] But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity, redeem me and be gracious to me. My foot stands on level ground. In the great assembly, I will bless the Lord. Those are loaded terms. He doesn't appeal to the marks. He doesn't appeal to the characteristics of Christians. In fact, he only appeals to the Lord, asking him to be gracious to him, asking him to redeem him. As you read in Romans, that is the picture of the redeemer that he needs. He appeals to God himself on his own character, not the writer's character, not what he has done, not what he should be, not of the blood of bulls and goats, but in fact, on God himself. Now, many of us this morning have probably slipped and stumbled our way into church, whether it's from the snow or you just rolled in. We're glad that you're here.

Because this truth is what defines a Christian. The fact that we all need a redeemer, that we've sinned, and that we need something outside of ourselves. We need God himself to be gracious to us, to forgive us of our sin. And we need to cry out to the Lord and ask him to be gracious to us.

The psalmist pleads not of his own confidence. He doesn't even plead of his own marks of Christian character, nor should we. But if we cry out to him in faith, based on what Christ has done, then we can be redeemed. That's the identity of a Christian. If that's your identity this morning, rest in that as we live and move and have our being as we do normal life. May it be in the Lord.

But if that's not you this morning, he is inviting you to experience that life, a true identity in Christ alone. Let's pray. Lord, may we join with you this morning in a cry for redemption.

Lord, we need a Savior that bears all the glorious marks, not of ourselves, but of you. That Savior is Christ. We pray that you would cement that truth in our hearts, whether we've walked with you for many years or not at all. Lord, may you do that work in our hearts to convince us of the truth and necessity of depending upon you alone for salvation. And we ask these things in Christ's name.

Amen.