

Resting in Grace
Market Street Fellowship
Julie Guggenbiller
090927

Resting in Grace

Good Morning! I'm really happy to be able to share with you this morning. And I have appreciated what Ben has been teaching on-- walking by faith and letting it have it's perfect work in us. And in a way, I kinda feel like what I'm going to say is stuff I've "stolen" from him and others -- JW, Barbara, Rabon, Jason....Like somehow I'm gonna just take what they've said and roll it into one big ball and throw it back out to you and call it mine. In fact, on the Friday night that we started the study of the book of Hebrews, as soon as Jason started talking, I found myself thinking "Darn it! That's kinda what I wanted to say next Sunday!" Like he was somehow stealing my message! Of course, I'd never admit that in public... :)

But as I continued to listen to him talk and as I looked around the room at the people who were sitting there, intently soaking in and seeing the things Jason was trying to communicate, I saw how wrong it is to think that anything of the Truth belongs to any one person to share.

And suddenly I realized that the beauty of preaching and teaching isn't in coming up with heretofore unheard of cool things to say! No, the beauty in sharing Christ is that 100 different people, with 100 different "styles", and what sounds like 100 different topics can share what they've seen in the Lord, and the moment the words leave their lips, the Holy Spirit begins to interpret what was said to every heart that has ears to hear. And the amazing thing about it is that He does it for one sole purpose and with one sole end in mind-- so we will hear The Living Word Himself speak and then turn and be conformed to what we've heard, so Christ can be revealed in His Body.

I have this feeling that God considers it a very good and pleasing and necessary thing for us to be gathered up into the same view of His Son, over and over again, simply because He doesn't want anyone to fall short of the glory we've come to in Christ. His continual desire is that TOGETHER we'll all come to a full knowledge of the Truth as it is in Christ. And perhaps hearing the same thing over and over again, said in slightly different ways, serves to "flesh out" the body of Christ-- to give it sinew and muscle-- so it can be filled with His Life...

Now you may not have known, but things have been a little "iffy" in my heart for several months now. And looking back over that time, two things stand out to me the most. I can see that thankfully, all the drama and confusion of this past year has turned out for good AND that all the drama and confusion of this past year was pretty much my fault! What I mean by that is though it flies in the face of a lot of what we hear, the Lord DOES NOT give us struggles to help us grow!

I'm going to stop for a minute just to kind of let that thought sink in. He doesn't send difficulties to cause our growth. True spiritual growth is really just another way to say "Christ being revealed in us". In fact, WE can't even "grow", per se....I know it sometimes FEELS like we are doing the growing, but feeling that way only means we still need to come to a greater realization of who He is and what He's done and what it all means. We tend to track our progress using all sorts of spiritual benchmarks but honestly, the only "track" we believers are on is the increase of Him and the decrease of us.

We, as the body of Christ, are DESTINED to grow up into Him who is our head...Period. We have been joined to Him and now we must become the expression of the Life that dwells inside. And if we knowingly or unknowingly resist what God has done or pretend it's not true or think it doesn't apply to us, we are setting ourselves up for trouble! I haven't found a way around that yet! :)

That's kinda what I want to talk about this morning because it seems like the best gift I can give you...I want to try to tell you what's been working in me that's beginning to deepen my understanding of what He's done for us in Christ and what that means for you and me. Because I'm pretty sure you'll have the same reaction! As the Lord reveals the beauty and magnitude of what He's done, we will automatically begin to walk in greater and greater measures of rest and peace. And we'll begin to realize that no matter where we are or what our circumstances are on this earth, we are forever and always at Home in Christ and nothing can change that.

About a month ago I started to read the book of 1Peter and I didn't get very far into the chapter before I had a new understanding come over me of Peter and the people to whom he was writing. Here I was randomly reading an epistle, when all of a sudden, the words I was reading became a "window" and without even trying to make anything happen, a "view" of something just beyond the words on the page opened before the eyes of my heart. In other words, the written word became the Living Word.

And I felt like I could see how it was that the impulsive, proud, fleshy disciple Peter-- the man all Christians love because they can identify with him-- had become a humble, "rock" of a man with an unshakable clear view. I saw some of the defining moments in his life. I saw the spiritual track he'd run on. And I saw that at every defining moment, Peter's heart was given a choice. And I saw that it was his response to the choices before him that made him into the apostle who wrote 1Peter, a book meant to encourage other believers.

And here's the best part. I saw that though the man Peter was probably still far from perfect right up to the day he died, and as frustrating as it may have been for him to see those bad qualities in himself (not to mention for the people around him to deal with), his faults and foibles weren't able to keep him out of what God had done for him in Christ. You see, nothing of Peter could touch or hinder or limit or change ANYTHING of real Life and Truth! And therefore, in this wonderfully freeing way, both Peter's strengths AND weaknesses were totally insignificant to the work God had done and was

doing in his heart!

And that is true of us also. Our strengths and weaknesses belong to a totally different realm and man than where we now live and who we now are in Christ.

And I think Peter saw that reality at some point in his life and seeing it changed him forever. Notice I didn't say it made him perfect, because it didn't, but it changed him none the less. And that's what I want us to see this morning, but not because seeing it will make us perfect-- because it won't! But it WILL change us forever too. Truth always does.

I'm going to recreate a drawing that Colin put on the board at a Friday night meeting a few weeks ago because though it looked like practically every other drawing we do here at church, something about it looked very different to me that night. And I kind of just want you to see it now so you can have it in the back of your mind before we go any further.

For anyone who can't see what I drew, it's your basic The First/The Cross/The Second drawing, only with a semicircle at the top, which represents God's perspective.

And Colin was explaining how way before the beginning of time, before the Creation, before Man, before Israel, before anything of what we've come to call "the First" ever existed, God's heart and eyes were toward His Son. When God said "Let Us make man in our image", He said it to the Son because the glorified Son was right there with Him the whole time.

And as God spoke the Word, creation came forth. And because Jesus is the Word God spoke, it was almost like the "fibers" of creation consisted of the Son! So after creating the natural world and all that filled it, from God's perspective, whenever He saw any element of creation, He saw His Son. I don't mean He was ignorant or blind or didn't know what He'd made on the earth....I mean that from God's perspective-- because He'd created with the Son in mind-- apart from that Son, creation simply had NO purpose for existing!

Now we see according to time, so we tend to think life and purpose began when we did. And from that perspective, it's natural to think creation was made for us, as an end in itself. It's natural to think we are the center of God's heart and gaze. But my friends the reality is, the Son existed long before we ever did and God's gaze is, was, and forever will be on His Son.

I guess what started to become clear to me that night was that from God's perspective, the emphasis has NEVER BEEN on anything found in time or creation. For Him, the joy was never in beholding a bunch of humans in priestly garb or a perfect sunset or a baby being born into the world, because even though God used those things to reach out to us, the whole time His eyes were on the goal He'd had from the beginning-- a New Creation in Christ.

Now I know that strikes a blow to our sense of self importance and our desire to be known and loved by God. We want to matter! And yet I hope we can see how crucial it is to come to see all things from God's perspective. Bowing our hearts to the eternal purpose of God as it's revealed in Christ is the best thing that will ever happen to us.

So anyway, as I looked at the picture Colin drew and as all of this was becoming clear to me, Colin picked up the eraser and did something shocking! He erased everything before the Cross! Gone were the types and shadows of the Son, gone was Israel, the priesthood, the sacrifices, gone was EVERYTHING ever created that served to point to the Son! Why?? Because after He came...and after the Cross, it was no longer necessary. The Reality had come - the shadow had been fulfilled-- time to fold the shadow up and put it away.

You see on the Cross Christ gathered the whole First creation back into Himself and brought it to an end and then He rose from the dead and started a New Creation in Himself. And now THAT is the Creation God sees-- a resurrected Son joined to His body. And what shocked me most that night was that in a deeper way than I'd seen before, I saw that the thing we call "our life" was brought into that exact same death! And there it will stay forever...Gone...Erased...Rolled up and put away.

The Cross was the end to our flesh life and now for those who've been born from above, our souls have Christ as their life. So when Christ rose from the dead, guess what? Those who were joined to Him were raised in Him. And now we share His life and live together with Him in a new creation called Christ..

And something about seeing everything of the First so completely erased and seeing what I call "my life" erased right along with it, made it seem so silly to live as if my heart and my affections belonged to something which is gone forever. In fact, it made it silly to even take myself into account at all. In a real way, my feelings and my thoughts and my beliefs dimmed way down in their importance to the scheme of things because think about it--Why should anything of a dead person's life have any real affect on you at all?

The Cross is God's great End to everything of this life and realm and it's also God's great Doorway and Beginning into a Life and a Love and a Relationship we could never have known apart from finding it in the Son.

And suddenly I knew what I was seeing was Grace. Grace is God making a Way for us to be joined to Christ in His death, so we can live in union with Him and share His Life. Grace isn't supposed make us perfect so we can be like Him one day. Grace exists to bring an end to our life so we can be joined to the One who is now our life..

Forgive me...It's taken me 2 pages to say what the Holy Spirit revealed to my heart in a moment. And I know that it's exactly what everyone else has been saying for years. It's just that it's so important for us to all come to God's perspective of everything. If we don't, we'll have no choice but to live as if there's a glass ceiling between us and

God. You know what I mean by that, don't you? It's being able to see and talk about the reality of "But Now in Christ", but never getting to experience the wonderful freedom and rest that exists there.

That is one of the saddest conditions on the planet-- knowing all of this is true but never really coming to live day after day in the joy of it. Do you know why glass ceilings happen? And this is from personal experience! They happen when we refuse to see the finished work God did at the Cross and when we refuse to let what He did work in us. Because how can we share His life if we won't share His death? And how can everything of the First creation be put out of our hearts if we won't let Him show us that it's gone and that the fullness of everything it pointed to is now found in Christ??

That's exactly what I saw in the life of Peter. I saw how over and over again, God showed Peter His perspective of things and how Peter bowed his heart to what God showed him. Which is why Jesus called him "The Rock on Which I will Build My Church". It wasn't because Peter was a perfect specimen of a man. It was because he was willing to see the Truth, even when it erased everything he called "his life".

Let's take look at the familiar story of the Transfiguration in Mark 9. Peter saw something supernatural-- something true-- happen right before his eyes. He saw Moses and Elijah and Jesus all standing in one place. It was almost like he was able to see true things about God and he knew what he saw was important, but he still missed its true significance because he didn't see it from God's point of view. Still, Peter was excited about what he saw and he immediately told Jesus that it was good that they were there, because they could "capture" what they'd seen by building 3 tabernacles for each of them to dwell in. He was trying to take a spiritual reality and make it earthly, so it could always be accessed.

But God had a different perspective. God practically cut Peter off mid-sentence and said "This is my Beloved Son...Hear Him," and a cloud completely overshadowed Moses and Elijah and only the Son could be seen. Almost as if from God's point of view, the Law and Prophets were only ever there to point to and speak of the Son. The revelation and glorification of the Son was the big deal as far as God was concerned, which shouldn't really surprise us. Why?? Remember Colin's drawing? Simply because when God saw the Law and Prophets, He really only saw the Son that whole time anyway!

And how about in John 13, where Jesus is telling the disciples that He is going to be leaving them soon and that they can't go where He's going. And he gives them a new commandment-- to love one another as He has loved them. And Peter pipes up and asks where He's going because he wants to go there too. And since Jesus is going to the Cross, he tells Peter he can't go there yet, but that he will follow Him afterwards.

And then Peter reveals his perspective of the situation when he says "Why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for your sake!" Peter hasn't yet seen the enormity of what was being gathered up into the death of the Cross. He hadn't yet seen that what Jesus said was totally true-- no matter how much zeal Peter had....No matter how much

love Peter had for God, it was IMPOSSIBLE for Peter to follow Him there, because the death Jesus had to die wasn't just the death of a man. It was the death of the whole First Creation and included every man. Jesus needed to put death to death and that was something only One Who Is Life could do.

But Peter hadn't yet seen himself in the light of Truth, so he believed with all his heart that he could go where Jesus was going. He thought he could do the impossible and die the death of the cross on his own. But Jesus knows everything according to Truth. He knows what is in a man and He knows that apart from the life of God operating in the soul, man is helpless to act out from any other nature than the one he was born with. Jesus knew Peter better than Peter knew himself. Jesus knew Peter was flesh and as flesh, Jesus knew Peter would deny Him. But not because Peter didn't love Jesus or believe He was the Messiah, but simply because flesh was unable to die the death Jesus was walking straight into.

Ok let's move onto that sweet day when Peter finally saw himself according to truth. Let's consider the moment when Peter realized his spiritual inadequacy and the depth of the darkness that dwelt in him. The moment he saw who he really was. It happened when he was given the chance to say that he knew the Lord and was one of His. What I think I'm realizing is that it wasn't that Peter didn't WANT to be known as one of Jesus' followers, it was just that Peter COULDN'T say he knew Him because it wasn't true. I think Peter had begun to see that Jesus was of Another Life altogether. So when push came to shove, it wasn't just fear of dying that caused Peter to deny Jesus not once, but three times. It was because Peter was finally seeing himself in the light of Truth and that light revealed the otherness of Christ to Peter's heart. And Peter knew that no matter how long they'd walked together on the earth, they didn't share the same life. So he was forced to answer the servant girl with the truth as he now knew it to be. No...he didn't know Him.

And while our hearts break for Peter because we can imagine how devastated he was in the days after he denied the Lord, we don't have to stay sad for long once we start to see that it was his realization of the Truth that broke through the glass ceiling that stands between all flesh and God. Accepting the truth that he didn't even POSSESS in himself what it took to die the death of the Cross OR live the life God desired, is what allowed Peter to finally experience the breakthrough into the Reality Jesus had been telling him about for years.

Alright, let's join Peter and Jesus for breakfast on the beach. In John 21 we read where Jesus asks Peter 3 times if he loves Him. And each time Peter answers "Yes, you know I love you" and each time Jesus replies, "Well then, feed my sheep". It seems to me that this is yet another case where Peter's perspective is still different than Jesus' perspective. Peter's perception of love seems to still be centered in himself-- his feelings, his commitment, their history together, his desire to be with the Lord.

I'm pretty sure this is not all there is to see in this passage, but the gist of what I can see right now is that it's after the Resurrection and Jesus is telling Peter that now that

they share One life, he doesn't get to define Love anymore -- Christ does. Because of course, Love isn't what Peter thinks it is. Love is no longer going to be about Peter's individual relationship with the Lord. His concept of Love was going to have to be enlarged until it would encompass not only Jesus, but those who belong to Him. Love was now going to involve the sharing of Life with others.

Now I've always taken the words "feed my sheep" at face value and assumed Jesus meant "Peter, discover true things about Me and then tell those true things to others because it will help them grow," kind of like the emphasis was on HANDING other people true things as food for their souls. And even now I still think that is partly what it means, but I also see something greater in His words.

Remember in John 13 where Jesus tells the disciples to love one another as He has loved them and then he proceeds to march directly to the Cross, to love mankind to the uttermost through His death? Well I can see now that Jesus was telling Peter that the way to truly love the Lord is only found by following Him to the death of the Cross. He is calling Peter to leave his thoughts on loving God behind and to love the Lord in the same way Jesus loved him-- by walking straight into death. The Lord is the True Food His sheep so desperately need. And the increase of the life of the Lord in us comes only when we are willing to bear in our souls the decrease of our own life. Loving and feeding others has little to do with handing someone a nugget of truth and it has everything to do with each of us following the Lord into the death of the Cross, so that His Life in us can be food for others.

Furthermore, right after Jesus tells Peter to love Him by feeding His sheep, Jesus immediately destroys any illusions that might remain in Peter's heart about love and him being the master of his own life, by basically telling him that from here on out, he has no life of his own and the only thing waiting for him in natural life is death anyway. It was like Jesus kind of said, "You are joined to me now and have nothing outside of me. Based on that fact, it's time to let your heart be joined to My purpose as well."

Though those are true words, they are hard to hear and I kinda think it still may have been hard for Peter to embrace the truth he was hearing, because if you'll notice, he turned right around and asked Jesus "What about that guy? You know, the one you love." Almost like he was still trying to keep Love on a natural basis, by comparing John's future with his own. Probably because to Peter's way of thinking, if Jesus loved him, He would preserve his life and not require that it be poured out to feed others.

There's one more portion of scripture I want to bring you this morning-- it's in Acts 10, where Peter is praying and he sees heaven opened and a sheet filled with all sorts of animals is let down from heaven and a voice tells him "Rise, kill and eat!". And being a devout Jew, Peter is horrified by the very idea of eating anything that wasn't kosher! And then the voice tells him he must not call unclean what God has made clean. And that whole vision happened to Peter 3 times.

Though Peter had seen the Lord and though the Lord was being revealed in him,

apparently there was still a lot of old thinking and remnants of religion alive in him-- like there is in all of us. Again I see the Lord seeking to bring Peter up and out of his perspective of things, so he could share God's view. And as usual, the Truth Peter saw was shocking to his soul and at first, it caused him to question and draw back.

And I'm not sure why it happened 3 times-- I'd like to think it was because it was the Lord's gentle way of reminding Peter of all the other three's in his life-- the 3 tabernacles, the 3 denials, the 3 'Do you love me's?'....But I'm not sure. All I know is that I've got to hand it to Peter. He took what God showed him to heart and he let go of his perspective on who was clean and who wasn't and that willingness to die to himself is the very thing that moved him right out of his old covenant thinking, and into God's way of thinking, where the Life of Christ is what defines the body of Christ.

And his change of heart was immediately used by the Lord when he went to a Gentile named Cornelius' house and preached the gospel to him. And I think the words he said to Cornelius speak volumes...In verses 25-26 it says "As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man."

I kinda think there was a time in Peter's life where he wouldn't have said that because in his heart the line still existed between Jews and Gentiles and Jews were "better". But Peter had let the death of the Cross work in him and destroy the line of enmity between Jewish flesh and Gentile flesh. I'm sure it took a lot of courage for a devout Jew like Peter to let God overrule his long-held beliefs on who belongs in the body of Christ.

Now fast forward many years and see Peter as an old man, writing to believers who've been scattered to various foreign countries, who've counted all things loss for the sake of Christ-- their country, their kindred, their father's house.

The word pictures he paints for them about who they are in Christ and of their eternal home and the incorruptible nature of the inheritance that awaits them are so beautiful, they could only be written by someone who presently has those realities working in him-- which makes me so happy for Peter.

I'm not trying to idolize Peter in any way. I just wanted to share with you what I was seeing about how important it is that every time the Lord presents our heart with truth, even if we end up seeing that things aren't like we originally thought, or if we don't feel like the truth is changing us like we thought it would, it's still imperative that we continue to let go of what we think and follow Him to the death of the Cross.

Which brings me back to Colin's drawing. Take another look at it. Look at what's gone and what remains. Try to see it from God's eternal perspective. The reality of a New Creation in the Son is a work that was finished before the foundation of the world. Which means it isn't going to change or move one little bit. It's what God sees and what God knows to be true and it's where we have been brought in Christ. And from here on out it's the only thing the Holy Spirit is going to seek to reveal in you-- the reality that

He is your life and you have no life of your own. Why?? Because it's true. It's that simple.

So... why fight it? :)