

# ***Justified by Grace through Faith in Jesus Christ***

Funeral Address for Les Weiss

Text: Romans 3:19-28

Dear Friends in Christ, and especially on this day, Delrae, Justin, Laine, and the rest of Les's family:

Since the fall into sin, life on earth has always been a mixed up affair. One minute we find ourselves blissfully content, the next we are so filled with emptiness and sorrow and that we cannot imagine ever feeling whole and happy again. As children of God, we know that our course of action is the same in good times and hard, happy days and sad – we turn daily to God's Word for guidance and comfort. Interestingly enough, while opening our Bibles seems good and natural during the difficult times, that is not always the case during the good days. Perhaps this is one reason our God allows difficulties to interrupt our lives on this earth. How easy to get caught up in "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" and to lose sight of Judgment Day and eternity.

So on this solemn occasion we naturally turn to our God and to his Word. That bit of Scripture that will guide and comfort us this morning is found in Paul's Letter to the Romans, the Third Chapter:

***Romans 3:19-28*** ***Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. <sup>20</sup> Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. <sup>21</sup> ¶ But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup> even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, <sup>26</sup> to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. <sup>27</sup> ¶ Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. <sup>28</sup> Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.***

So far the very words of our God. Confident that these are God's Words and trusting in his promise to speak to us and bless us through the study of these words, so we pray: ***“Sanctify us through your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.”*** Amen.

Dear Fellow Redeemed in Jesus Christ:

There was a change this past week, wasn't there? Many of us don't do "change" very well. For the most part we like the basic elements of our lives to stay pretty much the way they are. Change conjures up images of uncertainty, and uncertainty, fear. We tend to walk about with the conviction that change could well usher in more difficult and unpleasant circumstances, so we are most often perfectly content with the way things are – especially during the good times.

And yet change is an inevitable part of life. Almost nothing stays the same – and isn't that a great thing for Les Weiss? We who are still living are not the only ones affected by this dramatic change. Les was also affected, profoundly so, obviously. The point is that as far as he is concerned, the change was not only all good, it was altogether necessary. The saying, "No one lives forever" (on earth) is more than just a cliché. It gives perspective to the human existence. All human death is simply a matter of timing. Unless the Lord returns soon, every single one of us here this morning will die. It is not a matter of "if," but "when and how." Earlier this week the Lord, employing a wisdom that is infinitely greater than our own, decided the "when and how" for Les's transfer from this life to the next. I trust that no one here will take offense when I say that as far as Les is concerned, his was a change for the better – dramatically so. No matter how good life on earth can be, it cannot begin to compare with the existence that our God has planned for his children – the existence that God has also planned therefore for Les.

This is more than just wishful thinking on the part of those of us who grasp for comfort at times like this. These are sure and certain facts which God has revealed to us in his Word. In our text we heard this simple, beautiful explanation of true Christianity: ***"But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup> even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."***

In preparing for this service I spent a good bit of time trying to think of what Les would have wanted me to say. He did write down one thing that he wanted to make sure you heard, which I'll get to in a minute. Yet it finally dawned on me that I didn't have to try to figure out what Les would have wanted me to say. You may not know this about Les, but he could, at times, tend to be a bit stubborn... The point is that he would have stubbornly refused to have this service be about him or from him. This service is not about him; it's about you, the living. Les is sleeping peacefully in his Savior's arms, patiently (at least from our human, time-bound perspective) awaiting his Lord's return and the Resurrection. This service – as Les would have insisted (stubbornly) is supposed to be about how you the living can follow after him and one day join him where he is.

The simple truth is that the change that took place on Monday was a great occasion for Les, *but only because of the change that took place in him many years ago.* You may have even missed that simple little line in the obituary that read, *"He was born again of water and the Spirit..."* Simple, yet profound. God the Holy Spirit works an amazing miracle through the waters of Holy Baptism in that he brings dead souls to spiritual life. That is, in part, why this service is not about Les. He's already home safely. He's won, and no one can ever take that victory away from him. So it is that we have not gathered to mourn a death; we gather to celebrate life – and to be reminded of the one hope each one of us has to join our God in paradise.

Les Weiss, like all human beings, was born sinful and needed to be rescued. The Bible makes clear that whatever is born of sinful flesh is sinful flesh. Nor could he either save himself or make things right with his God through his actions. Again the Bible is clear on this. Our text tells us that ***"by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin."*** That means that far from saving us, the law makes demands upon us and condemns all who fail to live up to its demands perfectly. Les also needed this rescue – which is why we read with such joy and relief God's solution in the next verses from our text: ***"But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup> even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."***

So too we could spend many hours telling Les stories, talking about his unique gifts and how our God blessed every single one of us here through this dear man. Yet not one of Les's many positive attributes could make up for even one of his sins, for the law of God demands nothing short of perfect obedience. Therefore as a human being Les was lost and condemned, but that all-important change that we mentioned earlier, brought about by God the Holy Spirit, made Les Weiss an heir of heaven. How so?

In Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians we read: ***"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing (charging) their trespasses to them."*** The entire world had to be reconciled to God because of sin, which had destroyed our relationship with him. No sin can go unpunished; therefore sin can and should strike terror into the hearts of every human being. Every single one of us has sin – loads of sin – and we have nothing to offer to God in payment, other than our souls in hell for all eternity. These are truths that our "feel good" society doesn't want to hear, but concerning which God's Word is crystal clear.

If, therefore, you and I have sin and yet cannot pay for that sin, we obviously need outside help – and it is that "outside help" that lies at the very heart of the Christian faith. Jesus Christ is that one and only source of help and rescue. Sinful mankind cannot pay for sin, but the holy, sinless Son of God can... and *has*. That is exactly why Paul went on in Second Corinthians to say, "**For He (God the Father) made Him (Jesus Christ) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**" That great and profound change that averted tragedy for Les, and which is freely offered to every single human being here this morning, is the fact that God directed the sum total of the punishment for sin upon his own dear Son, Jesus Christ. God made a trade – a great and glorious trade: He took our sin and punished his Son for it, and he took his Son's perfection and credited that to us. It is ours through faith. Believing that it is so, that gift becomes your own personal possession.

Our sin was like an incomprehensively mammoth credit card bill – a bill we had to pay, but for which we had no spiritual assets. God the Father took that bill and applied it to Jesus' account. That is also how and why this is a day of celebration, rather than mourning. Les believed in his Savior Jesus, and that faith – created in his heart not by force of will but by the Holy Spirit himself – brought him instantly from eternal death to eternal life. In that moment of conversion or change, Les Weiss became a sinless child of God. Our text teaches us this as clearly as humanly possible when it describes God the Father as "**the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.**" And then, just to make sure that no one can possibly imagine that he or she could ever earn heaven through good works, our text continues: "**Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.**"<sup>28</sup> **Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law."**

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That is also why Les insisted that I stress to every single one of you here "**the importance of attending a church body that teaches and confesses the whole truth of God's Word**" – adding nothing to that Word and taking nothing away. Why would he stress such a thing? Of all the messages he could have left with you, why this one? Because he wants you with him in heaven, and he knows that salvation is only given to those who believe in Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Every false teaching diminishes Christ. Jesus himself knew this, which is why he told his followers to make disciples of all the nations by teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever he has commanded us.

Some – perhaps many here – are confused by the dizzying variety of religious nonsense that you hear every day. Some have become enamored with the world's idea that there are many paths to the same God. God never taught us such things. These are the fabrications of man. God's gospel is simple and direct – unambiguous in the extreme: "**He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. He that believes not shall be damned.**" Again, Jesus himself once said, "**No one comes to the Father, but by Me.**"

What a monster God would be if he sent his own dear Son to be tortured and abused unnecessarily – which would indeed be the case if there were and are many paths to God and heaven. On the contrary, God sent his Son because there was no other way, no other path. This was Les's simple hope and conviction, and the result is that he now rests in perfect peace with his Lord. In the end, this is what life on earth is really all about. In the end, nothing else matters.

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So too we could spend many hours telling Les stories, talking about his unique gifts and how our God blessed every single one of us here through this dear man. Yet not one of Les's many positive attributes could make up for even one of his sins, for the law of God demands nothing short of perfect obedience. Therefore as a human being Les was lost and condemned, but that all-important change that we mentioned earlier, brought about by God the Holy Spirit, made Les Weiss an heir of heaven. How so?

In Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians we read: ***"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing (charging) their trespasses to them."*** The entire world had to be reconciled to God because of sin, which had destroyed our relationship with him. No sin can go unpunished; therefore sin can and should strike terror into the hearts of every human being. Every single one of us has sin – loads of sin – and we have nothing to offer to God in payment, other than our souls in hell for all eternity. These are truths that our "feel good" society doesn't want to hear, but concerning which God's Word is crystal clear.

If, therefore, you and I have sin and yet cannot pay for that sin, we obviously need outside help – and it is that "outside help" that lies at the very heart of the Christian faith. Jesus Christ is that one and only source of help and rescue. Sinful mankind cannot pay for sin, but the holy, sinless Son of God can... and *has*. That is exactly why Paul went on in Second Corinthians to say, **"For He (God the Father) made Him (Jesus Christ) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."** That great and profound change that averted tragedy for Les, and which is freely offered to every single human being here this morning, is the fact that God directed the sum total of the punishment for sin upon his own dear Son, Jesus Christ. God made a trade – a great and glorious trade: He took our sin and punished his Son for it, and he took his Son's perfection and credited that to us. It is ours through faith. Believing that it is so, that gift becomes your own personal possession.

Our sin was like an incomprehensively mammoth credit card bill – a bill we had to pay, but for which we had no spiritual assets. God the Father took that bill and applied it to Jesus' account. That is also how and why this is a day of celebration, rather than mourning. Les believed in his Savior Jesus, and that faith – created in his heart not by force of will but by the Holy Spirit himself – brought him instantly from eternal death to eternal life. In that moment of conversion or change, Les Weiss became a sinless child of God. Our text teaches us this as clearly as humanly possible when it describes God the Father as **"the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."** And then, just to make sure that no one can possibly imagine that he or she could ever earn heaven through good works, our text continues: **"Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. <sup>28</sup> Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law."**

This truly is the great joy and confidence of the Christian faith. Tragically, it is not shared by all, for many look to their own goodness, or to a different savior, and thereby reject what God's Word consistently refers to as the only path to heaven – faith in Jesus Christ. This is the simple faith that, in the end, saved Les Weiss, for he clung ever and always to this simple truth.

That is also why Les insisted that I stress to every single one of you here *"the importance of attending a church body that teaches and confesses the whole truth of God's Word"* – adding nothing to that Word and taking nothing away. Why would he stress such a thing? Of all the messages he could have left with you, why this one? Because he wants you with him in heaven, and he knows that salvation is only given to those who believe in Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Every false teaching diminishes Christ. Jesus himself knew this, which is why he told his followers to make disciples of all the nations by teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever he has commanded us.

Some – perhaps many here – are confused by the dizzying variety of religious nonsense that you hear every day. Some have become enamored with the world's idea that there are many paths to the same God. God never taught us such things. These are the fabrications of man. God's gospel is simple and direct – unambiguous in the extreme: **"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. He that believes not shall be damned."** Again, Jesus himself once said, **"No one comes to the Father, but by Me."**

What a monster God would be if he sent his own dear Son to be tortured and abused unnecessarily – which would indeed be the case if there were and are many paths to God and heaven. On the contrary, God sent his Son because there was no other way, no other path. This was Les's simple hope and conviction, and the result is that he now rests in perfect peace with his Lord. In the end, this is what life on earth is really all about. In the end, nothing else matters.

On this day we rejoice in change, the kind of change that assures us that Les has died in this one true faith and will therefore exist with his Lord for all eternity. God grant that each one of us here will one day join him there. Amen.