

Justified Through Jesus

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Preacher: Archie Winnington-Ingram

[0 : 00] Thanks so much, Graham. Let me add my welcome to Graham's. My name's Archie, if that's not obvious to you already. I'm the pastor in training here. And it's really my job this morning to just open the Bible for us. Graham said, get that Bible open in front of you. And if you don't already, I'd love you to do that. In the Pew Bibles, it's on page 1090. And it'd be really helpful for you to have that open in front of you. It's the Olympics this year.

I love the Olympics. I know some of you, when I say that, just switch off immediately because you hate sports. But bear with me. The Olympics are in Paris this summer. A hundred years ago in 1924, the Olympics were also in Paris. And it was there that Eric Liddell famously refused to run on a Sunday in his preferred 100-meter distance. Liddell was a Scotsman.

He played international rugby, but his real athletic gift was running. He was known as the fastest man in Scotland. But like I say, when he went to the Paris Olympics, the heats for the 100-meter race was on a Sunday. And so he ran and unbelievably ended up winning the 400 meters instead, which he'd never run before. We'll return to Liddell's story later.

But I wanted to start here because in that film, Chariots of Fire, the film that immortalized the kind of events around the 1924 Olympics, one of Liddell's competitors, Harold Abrahams, said this, And now, in one hour's time, I will be out there again. I will raise my eyes and look down that corridor four feet wide with ten lonely seconds to justify my existence.

Ten lonely seconds to justify my existence. Strikes me that in so many ways, life feels a bit like that for me.

[1 : 55] Like I'm just constantly striving to prove myself. And maybe you're a bit like that, trying to justify our existence. And maybe it's a bit like that at work. Your value at work is really defined by your output, isn't it? With our parents always striving to make them proud, with our friends and our partners, in so many ways, just constantly seeking to please people. And it's exhausting, isn't it?

That performance mentality. So much of our culture is set up in ways that really reinforce that performance mentality. I remember joining a new school. I think I was about nine years old, so it was probably primary six. And my first day at school, instead of being in a classroom with all the other primary sixes, I was taken off into a room on my own. I was made to do all these tests, like a spelling test, a basic numeracy test. Why were they doing that? They were measuring my performance. They wanted to see where I'd fit in at this school. We live in a very performance-driven culture. So much of our value is based on it. So much of how we view ourselves and how we view each other. It's not always a bad thing. Of course, it's not. When I go to the doctor, I do need to know that they've been tested and proved that they know what they're doing. But, and this is really where we're going this morning, that performance-based mentality that's baked into everything in our culture, when we apply it existentially, when we echo with Abraham's that we're trying to justify our existence by our performance in any way, that is only ever going to be exhausting. And actually, even more specifically than that, when we apply that performance metric to our faith, not only exhausting, but crippling, really. Because most of us in this room know the simple truth, don't we? It's at the heart of the Christian faith. It's not about what we've done. It's not about what we've failed to do.

The Christian faith is all about Jesus and what he's done in our place. It's not about our performance, but his. I hope we know that this morning. And yet, if you're anything like me, I really struggle to live as though that were true.

Maybe especially in moments where I know how spiritually bankrupt I am. As I take stock of my life and look at patterns of thinking and behavior, when I apply that performance metric to my life as a Christian, it's crippling.

Because I know that I just will never measure up. I don't know. Maybe that's true of your life too. Well, as Graham said, and what he's just read for us, that passage of Scripture contains the wonderful promise that however much we've drifted, whatever we've done, however far we've strayed from following Jesus, no matter how poor our performance here, Jesus is in the business of restoring people, of calling them home, and recommissioning them to live a life lived for him.

[5 : 04] So that's what we're aiming at this morning. Why don't I pray for God's help one more time before we get stuck in. Heavenly Father, I pray that as we open your word this morning, you would indeed speak to us, that you would challenge us where we need to be challenged, that you would offer us comfort where we need comfort.

In Jesus' name, amen. And as we've been on this journey through John's gospel together, we've consistently returned to chapter 20, verses 30 and 31.

This is really a kind of a purpose statement, and the conclusion of the main part of John's book says this, Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Ian helped us see last week, really tracing some of the key themes through John, and Ian helped us see how so much of this book drives towards that purpose, towards belief that leads to life and life eternal.

[6 : 15] And so that would have been a very natural end to the book, I think. But then we get this epilogue in chapter one. So why did John keep writing? Well, I think Ian said something similar to this last week.

I think John wants us to finish on this note of restoration. Really, he wants to guard against that performance mindset in faith. And we see that with this big character, Peter.

Peter is one of the main characters, really, in the book of John. He's one of Jesus' closest disciples. And if you remember back a couple of months, I guess it was a few chapters ago, the last time we really encountered Peter, he denied Jesus.

Three times he said, no, I am not one of his disciples. And here, despite Peter's catastrophic performance, despite his really failing as a disciple of Jesus, we'll see that Jesus does everything to restore Peter, to restore his relationship with Jesus, and to restore his commission from Jesus.

John wants us to know this morning, he wants us to know this morning, that even if we have denied him like that, if we've denied him explicitly in what we've said, what me, a Christian, or if we simply deny him in the way that we live, he is, Jesus is in the restoration business.

[7 : 35] And so as we walk through this chapter of God's word together, three invitations that we're going to see from Jesus on that path to restoration. He says, come to me, in verses 1 to 14.

He says, love me, in verses 15 to 17. And then he says, follow me, in verses 18 to 25. Come to me, love me, follow me.

So let's start with that first invitation, come to me. The action takes place back up in Galilee, that's the disciples' hometown. You've probably realized by now that I'm not very good at finding historically or geographically accurate pictures for my slides.

That is not Galilee, but it is at least, I guess, a beach and a fire by the beach. But we find the disciples anyway in verse 3. Have a look at verse 3. And Peter says that he's going out to fish and the other disciples, they join him.

On the surface, that's a pretty normal thing to do, right? They're fishermen. This is what their whole lives had revolved around. But of course, for this particular group of men, that is actually a very strange thing to be doing.

[8 : 38] Maybe especially for Peter. Back in chapter 13, if you remember, Peter boldly claimed that he would lay down his life for Jesus. Peter said that he was prepared to follow Jesus even to death.

And what we've seen in the final chapters of John's Gospel, Jesus, he's been arrested and he's been beaten. And Peter was standing there in the courtyard as that was happening. He was warming himself around a charcoal fire.

Just log that charcoal fire for later. And three times around the charcoal fire, he's asked if he's a follower of Jesus. Three times he answers, I'm not. Peter fails Jesus at the final hurdle.

Then of course, Jesus rises from the dead. He appears to his disciples. Peter was there when Jesus did that and he gives them this incredible commission. We saw it last week to go and preach

the forgiveness of sins.

He promised them the Holy Spirit that they wouldn't do that in their own power. I mean, just imagine, just imagine for a second having met the risen Jesus and having been given that commission directly from him and then deciding to go back to the day job.

[9 : 49] They've gone fishing with Peter. It's a strange decision. And then have a look at verse four with me. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

It's strange, isn't it, that they don't recognize him? Why don't they recognize him? I guess we're about to see in a few verses time. The boat's about 100 meters from the shore. That's quite a long way. It's the morning.

We might imagine it's a bit misty. But this isn't the only place that Jesus' followers don't recognize him post-resurrection. And I think it has to be at least in part because he's risen in a perfect and glorious resurrection body.

In some ways, like himself before and in some ways, unrecognizable. And let me just say that there is a wonderful promise in that for us. I don't know what sort of relationship you have with your body. For me, as I try and keep the rugby dream alive, I was playing rugby sevens yesterday, and as we warmed up, some 20-year-old in his prime just sort of effortlessly glided past me. There was no way I was catching him.

[10 : 51] And I'm just constantly reminded that my body is basically slowly dying. And it's a wonderful promise to know that if we trust Jesus, we too will walk that path through death to life eternal.

And that life eternal contains for us a perfect and glorious and in some ways unrecognizable resurrection body. No more aches or pains or dodgy hamstrings.

Then in verse 5, have a look at verse 5, Jesus calls to them, haven't you any fish? A full night of fishing and not a single catch. And so he says to them, verse 6, throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.

And so they do. In fact, they catch so many fish that they can't even bring the net into the boat. It's utterly miraculous. And that might just remind you of a very similar story earlier in Jesus' ministry recorded for us in Luke's Gospel.

It's right at the start of Jesus' ministry. In fact, it's the very first time that Simon Peter encounters Jesus. Again, these fishermen catch nothing on their own.

[12 : 01] Might make you wonder slightly how good they were actually at fishing. But there, Jesus also instructs them and they again catch a miraculous haul. And here's the key for us. Listen to what Jesus says to them there.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus says this, from now on, you will be fishers of men. In other words, just as we saw Jesus' commission from them in John last week to go and preach the good news of the forgiveness of sins, when he first meets them, he says, you don't need to fish for fish anymore. You have a new job to fish for men, to bring men into the kingdom. There's no doubt in my mind that Jesus appears to them again here and performs the same sort of miracle so that they would remember that commission.

More than that, actually, John, he writes after Luke, this is the last gospel to be written and I think he expects his readers to know that story so that we too would see Jesus' reminder here that they didn't need to go back to their fishing.

They'd been given a new and much better commission from him. And the disciple whom Jesus loves, we'll see that's just John, he realizes, see in verse 7, he says, it is the Lord.

[13 : 15] Maybe he had his suspicions already, maybe that's why they listened to his fishing advice, but now they know it is Jesus. And Peter, he just jumps straight into the water.

He's so desperate to be with his friend Jesus again. The others in verse 8, they follow along in the boat, towing the net full of fish. But then in verse 9, we get another reminder for Peter and another reminder for us.

Jesus has prepared a charcoal fire and I am sure that we're supposed to have in mind the charcoal fire around which Peter warmed himself as he denied Jesus in the courtyard.

Do you see how John writes this narrative to emphasize the fact that Peter had abandoned Jesus, that he'd failed him? And despite the way that John writes, Jesus doesn't rebuke Peter here, does he?

He doesn't rebuke any of them. He simply invites them to add some of their fish in verse 10 to the barbecue. We're reminded in verse 11 that they'd caught a huge amount of fish.

[14:18] It's even numbered for us at 153. Just to say, I don't think we gain anything from reading into numbers like that. Some have tried. I've read some seriously bizarre ideas about why it's 153.

But the Bible isn't meant to be read like that. It's not a secret or a puzzle to be unlocked. The plainest meaning is almost always right with the Bible. And I think here John tells us it's 153 simply because that's a lot of fish.

You know, when I was a boy we used to go mackerel fishing in our little boat up off the west coast. And I remember one summer I must have been 10 or 11 years old and we went out in the early evening we were pottering around in this little boat mackerel lines out when suddenly we hit a school of fish, right?

And the lines that we were fishing on these mackerel lines they had five or six hooks each and I think we had three or four lines out. And I promise you when we hit this school of fish we'd literally pull a line up it would have five or six fish on it we'd take the fish off put it back in the water pull it back up less than 10 seconds later and it would be full of fish again.

We caught 56 fish that day and that was I guess nearly 20 years ago and I still remember that number because I would proudly tell anyone for weeks afterwards how many fish we had caught.

[15:31] It seems likely to me that these disciples simply counted the fish because it was a huge number of fish. John wants to say that these men as they encounter Jesus again he transforms their fortunes again and then he stands on the shore with this wonderful invitation in verse 12.

Do you see what he says? He says come and have breakfast. He says come to me come and enjoy my presence. He doesn't say why did you deny me?

He doesn't say why did you abandon me? He doesn't say what are you doing? Why have you returned to your life of fishing? The whole thing is clearly set up so that they would be reminded that those things are true.

The fishing miracle the charcoal fire but in the midst of all of that even as they're reminded of how they've failed him and how they've drifted Jesus simply says come. Would you come to me?

And he says the same thing to you and to me this morning. Jesus isn't like our boss at work making sure that we hit all our KPI. He's not like our parents making sure that we've done enough revision for the upcoming exams.

[16:45] He's not even like the voice in your own head constantly evaluating your own performance. Jesus knows that we don't measure up. He knows that we've not always shown up that we've denied him and abandoned him that we've launched our boats onto the lake and that we're drifting.

but he also knows that we haven't found what we were looking for there and he stands on the shore and he invites us to come. He says would you come and have breakfast?

Would you come and enjoy my presence? Jesus says come come to me but he doesn't just leave it there. He doesn't simply say come to me he also says do you love me?

Here's our second invitation love me. You see that question in verse 15 Simon son of John do you love me more than these?

Two things to notice in that short question. First Jesus uses the name Simon when we first met Simon back in chapter 1 Jesus sort of renamed him gave him the name Cephas or Peter it's a name that means rock.

[17:54] Throughout this book then he's known as Peter or Simon Peter here though Jesus just calls him Simon as if to say you've hardly been a rock have you?

Where's your steadfastness? Where's your promise to stand by me? Do you really love me?

Second Jesus challenges him by saying do you love me more than these?

And he could be referring to the fish he might be saying do you love me more than your fishing because you did deny me and then return to your life on the lake it doesn't look like you love me more than your love for that big catch of fish he might be referring to that he could be referring to the other disciples in other words he'd be saying do you love me more than the others love me?

Remember Peter you're boasting that you said even if the others leave me you never will either way we need to see that Jesus' question comes with a sort of do you really love me?

It doesn't much look like it does it? And Peter answers you know that I love you I think he's done making big claims he just simply says you know you know that I love you Jesus Jesus' response

feed my lambs this is how you'll show that you love me then from verse 16 read with me from verse 16 again Jesus said Simon son of John do you love me?

[19:19] He answered yes Lord you know that I love you Jesus said take care of my sheep and again verse 17 a third time Simon son of John do you love me?

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time do you love me? He said Lord you know all things you know that I love you Jesus said feed my sheep do you see the wonderful grace that Jesus shows Peter here because three times Peter denied Jesus as he stood around the charcoal fire he's a three times spiritual failure and yet three times Peter has the opportunity to affirm his love for Jesus around this charcoal fire on the beach as Jesus forgives him again how important for us here and hear me again loud and clear if you feel yourself to be a spiritual failure this morning as you assess your own performance if you've denied him and drifted away and this is all of us in some ways isn't it if you're not a Christian then you've turned your back on the God who created you but if you are a Christian this morning you continue to know your sin don't you and so he says to each one of us this morning and I need to hear this you need to hear this he says come to me he says will you love me

I died for your sins I rose again to rule my performance not your performance and I'm willing to forgive so come to me would you let your failure be absorbed by the grace of Jesus this morning but then more than that do you see how Jesus restores Peter as he recommissions him in his love that's what he's doing when he says take care of my sheep feed my sheep he's giving him the job just as he has done in the previous chapters of preaching the good news of the forgiveness of sins of caring for and feeding the church in that way and again there's an important takeaway here for us as he asks that question do you love me because if you're a Christian this morning as we come to Jesus and as we declare our love for him even as he forgives us and he restores us he has given us a job to do and it's not about us but it's about each other all of us have been wired in our own way by the God who created us uniquely gifted to serve him in one way or another and he says go shepherd care for my people feed them with the truth of God's word with the wonderful good news of the forgiveness of sins now we're all going to have different roles in that that's the beauty of church I think Peter would later himself write especially to the elders to be shepherds of God's flock there is a special responsibility there for the elders of a local church if you're an elder in the room today listen up but we all can shepherd one another as we bring God's word to bear on one another's lives we do that really simply as we sing with and to one another we'll do that in our growth groups midweek we do that by disciplining our young people parents you all do this as you bring up your children we do it as we catch up after the service or if we meet for coffee through the week to encourage and to challenge we can all do this in one way or another and can I just say if you're not especially interested in doing that or if you think that that's an impossible task and you're a

Christian here this morning then maybe you need to encounter Jesus again maybe you need to admit your spiritual bankruptcy maybe you need to experience the freedom of his forgiveness as Jesus says come to me as he says love me and as he gives us a commission to care for one another finally he says follow me notice Jesus doesn't tell Peter that the sheep will become Peter's sheep they're always Jesus's sheep Peter has a job to do in caring for them but Jesus is the true shepherd in fact back in chapter 10 Jesus describes himself if you remember as the good shepherd he says the good shepherd will lay down his life for the sheep and of course that's exactly what Jesus has done dying in the place of his people dying for sin so that we don't have to rising again promising that new life that's what the good shepherd has done he calls Peter to feed his sheep but he then says verse 18 very truly I tell you when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted but when you are old you will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go apparently that phrase stretch out your hands was a common term for crucifixion at the time so John then confirms for us in verse 19

Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God Jesus is warning Peter that he's going to be crucified just like Jesus was and then he says follow me you know that's exactly what he said when he first met Simon Peter back in chapter one he said follow me but in chapter one it was so exciting for Simon Peter right Jesus was this charismatic preacher and miracle worker he and the other disciples they were excited to follow him but now the risen Jesus as he talks with Peter by the lake he's got marks in his hands and his feet where the nails were he's got a wound or scar down his side where he was pierced and follow me is suddenly much less

exciting isn't it because he says follow me to the cross you see coming to Jesus and loving him that's not an easy or a passive thing to do it's a wonderful promise of course forgiveness and of restoration but it's not a promise that all our problems will be solved in fact it's very costly we began this morning with

[25 : 38] Eric Liddell and Eric Liddell knew that very well he was a phenomenal sportsman as we've seen he made that costly decision not to run the 100 meters on a Sunday but actually for Eric Liddell it got a lot more costly than that because shortly after the Paris Olympics Liddell set out for China really to go and shepherd Jesus' people there to share the wonderful good news of the forgiveness of sins but then in 1941 things got so dangerous in China that the British government advised that all British nationals should leave the country Liddell's wife and his kids moved to Canada but he was determined to stay and to continue the commission that he'd been given by Jesus and he never saw his family again and not long after they left he was moved by the Japanese into an internment camp where he eventually died Liddell's story is remarkable there are some brilliant books about him actually I'd encourage you to read about him but his following

Jesus was clearly incredibly costly it cost him everything but you know the cost for me and the cost for you it might not be the same sort of cost most of us aren't gifted or called to go somewhere like China most of us won't die like that in our following of Jesus and so we've just we've got to avoid the comparison game do you see the question that Peter asks as soon as Jesus calls Peter to follow him in such a drastic and costly way in verse 20 Peter looks over his shoulder he sees the disciple whom Jesus loved again that's John the author and then in verse 21 when Peter saw him he asked Lord what about him do you see it's the comparison game you say it's going to cost me my life what about him what's it going to cost him and Jesus replies if I want him to remain alive until I return what is that to you you must follow me in other words don't play the comparison game follow me it's going to cost you what it's going to cost you and it will cost you but my call on John's life isn't the same as the call on yours notice Jesus isn't actually saying that John will live until he returns in fact John clears that up for us in verse 23 some people seem to think that's what Jesus meant and there's been a rumor that's been spreading but instead the meaning is clear

Jesus is saying to Peter don't worry what it's going to cost other people you follow me and he says the same thing to us this morning to you and to me he says follow me it's going to cost you do you know I wonder if you've been putting this off because you know the pain that it's going to involve admitting your spiritual bankruptcy knowing that life might need to change for you in painful ways knowing that as Jesus says follow me he isn't calling you to stay where you are but to grow he says come to me I will forgive you and I will restore you whatever your life has looked like however you have performed I have performed perfectly in your place love me I have a wonderful job for you and then he says follow me and that is hard the cost for you might be very different to the person next to you you might need to leave one thing behind and they may need to leave another your service of Jesus might look one way theirs might look another but Jesus says to each of us in the room this morning who would come to him each of us who love him he says you've got to follow me and you've got to count the cost but just briefly before we finish John reminds us why this is all worth it see in verse 24 John tells us that he testifies to these things and he wrote them down we know his testimony is true John's saying it's worth following Jesus it's worth counting the cost because Jesus really did die and he really did rise again to rule as Lord it's worth it because it's true we can trust John's account of it and verse 25 I love this verse it's got to be one of the best verses in the Bible Jesus did many other things as well if every one of them were written down I suppose that even the whole world would not have enough room for the books that would be written it's mind-blowing isn't it as we've journeyed through John together we've encountered

Jesus and just some of the things that he's done he turned water into wine he healed the sick he fed crowds of people he gave sight to the blind he's even raised the dead we've seen a Jesus who is gracious and merciful and compassionate who is just and good and powerful we've met a Jesus who is alive and who is at work today and it is so worth following him whatever it might cost our culture says that you will be judged according to your performance Jesus says I know that you haven't performed all that well I know that you are spiritually bankrupt but I have done everything necessary to restore you I have performed in your place and so he invites us today will you come to him he says will you love me will you follow me thy four will you may be with all him