Reach for the Moon

Last week we started a mini-series (3 weeks) on the basics of Christianity. We are looking at three important concepts that have big names, which we won’t use very often, but for those of you who consider yourselves theologians, they are Justification (which we mostly talked about last week we’ll look at it some today), Sanctification (which we will talk about today), and Glorification, where we are headed, which is what we’ll look at next week.

As we explore these topics we find that they are really all about Jesus. He is the “Good News” that is so often referred to in the New Testament. He is what will change our lives. He is what the world needs to see in our lives and hear in our words. It is all about Him!

Prayer/Introduction

The verses that provide us the best summary of last week’s sermon are found in Romans:

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:23-24, NIV)

The payoff for a life of sin is death, but God is offering us a free gift – eternal life through our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, the Liberating King. (Romans 6:23, the Voice)

Notice that there are no exceptions allowed. All of us are terminally infected by sin and will suffer the natural consequences – eternal death – unless we have accepted the free gift offered.

Jumping to the Moon – the Standard!

Jumping Contest: See who can get the highest off the ground – most of the children and a couple of adults came up to volunteer. The range last Sabbath at church was just a few inches to 34 inches off the ground

This was quite amazing wasn’t it? Oh, did I mention that we were really trying to jump to the moon? Did anyone get close? If we focus on the people jumping, we might be impressed. Three feet off the ground is a lot more than six inches, that’s 600% better. It is much better than many of us who didn’t even bother volunteering to jump because we knew we could hardly get off the ground.

But, if we compare this to our real goal of jumping to the moon – which is about 239,000 miles from here – does it really matter if we get five feet off the ground or didn’t leave the ground at all?

You see, our problem is we are so accustomed to looking at each other and comparing ourselves. We see so much of sin and the resulting pain and suffering that it seems almost normal. And as we look around at each other either we notice that we are doing a little better than those around us – and are
filled with pride; or we see that we are worse than those around us and get discouraged, depressed, and hopeless.

But Jesus never asks us how we are doing in relation to those around us. The only point of comparison that we are given is perfection:

> “You have been taught to love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you this: love your enemies. Pray for those who torment you and persecute you – in so doing, you become children of your Father in heaven. He, after all, loves each of us – good and evil, kind and cruel. He causes the sun to rise and shine on evil and good alike. He causes the rain to water the fields of the righteous and the fields of the sinner. It is easy to love those who love you – even a tax collector can love those who love him. And it is easy to greet your friends – even outsiders do that! But you are called to something higher: ‘Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.’” *(Matthew 5:43-48, the Voice)*

This is like jumping to the moon! This is not just doing a little better than those around me, this is perfection! It is not possible for any of us on our own! We have all sinned and fall short; none of us are in any way better, or worse than anyone else. Jesus last command to His disciples sounds just as impossible:

> “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” *(John 13:34-35, NIV)*

**The Gift!**

In commenting on these thoughts, the book Steps to Christ gives us the clearest description I have ever read of how all this works.

*The condition of eternal life is now just what it always has been – just what it was in Paradise before the fall of our first parents – perfect obedience to the law of God, perfect righteousness. If eternal life were granted on any condition short of this, then the happiness of the whole universe would be imperiled. The way would be open for sin, with all its train of woe and misery, to be immortalized.*

The standard is not how we look in comparison to those around us, the standard is perfection – it was the way we were originally designed. It was illustrated in the life of Jesus while He was here on earth. Reading on:

> *It was possible for Adam, before the fall, to form a righteous character by obedience to God’s law. But he failed to do this, and because of his sin our natures are fallen and we cannot make ourselves righteous. Since we are sinful, unholy, we cannot perfectly obey the holy law. We have no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God.*
Here is the dilemma – perfection is demanded and we can’t do it any more than we can jump to the moon!

_But Christ has made a way of escape for us. He lived on earth amid trials and temptations such as we have to meet. He lived a sinless life. He died for us, and now He offers to take our sins and give us His righteousness. If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ’s character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned._

This is God’s solution. This is the good news of the gospel. This will change our lives as we understand it and accept it. This is the way to salvation; to eternity! This is the beginning point of a meaningful life in Jesus. As we begin to understand this it will change the way we think and live. Jesus can jump to the moon, and He offers to take us with Him! Reading on – it keeps getting better!

_More than this, Christ changes the heart. He abides in your heart by faith. You are to maintain this connection with Christ by faith and the continual surrender of your will to Him; and so long as you do this, He will work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure ... Then with Christ working in you, you will manifest the same spirit and do the same good works – works of righteousness, obedience._ (Steps to Christ, pages 62-63)

**Living in the Gift**

Notice that word “abides”. This word means a place of residence – this is saying literally that Jesus takes up residence in our life! And His continual presence remakes our life so that the closer we get to Him; the more His perfection is displayed in our lives. Jesus not only forgives us, He cleans us up! This is spoken of in Hebrews, chapter 10:

_For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy._

Did you catch that? Jesus has made perfect forever those who are being made holy! This is the total package. If we have accepted Jesus into our life we are perfect before God – just as if we had never sinned! This happens because Jesus stands in our place. This, in theological terms is called Justification. Jesus goes beyond that; He then makes us holy – that is He starts making the perfection (or holiness) of His life real in ours. This process is called Sanctification. Let’s keep reading:

_The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: “This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.”_

_Then he adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.” (Hebrews 10:14-17, NIV)"

Notice that this is all God; it starts with God, it is powered by God, and it is completed by God! So, the real question is: How can this happen in my life? What is my part in all of this? How does it work? Jesus
Reach for the Moon

gives us the answer through an image that was very familiar with people in His day. It was an image that God had used throughout the Old Testament; the image of a vineyard: We find it in John 15:

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the keeper of the vineyard. My Father examines every branch in Me and cuts away those who do not bear fruit. He leaves those bearing fruit and carefully prunes them so that they will bear more fruit; already you are clean because you have heard My voice. Abide in Me, and I will abide in you.

There’s that word “abide” again. Here it is used in the context of the connection that a branch has with the vine. It is so closely connected that everything the branch needs flows freely from the vine. If you were to examine it you would have a hard time figuring out where the vine ended and the branch began.

“A branch cannot bear fruit if it is disconnected from the vine, and neither will you if you are not connected to Me.

From Galatians 5 we know that this fruit is a holy life, a life that looks like Jesus. Disconnected from God this is as impossible as jumping to the moon. But, it is the natural result of being connected! Jesus goes on:

“I am the vine, and you are the branches. If you abide in Me and I in you, you will bear great fruit. Without Me, you will accomplish nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is like a branch that is tossed out and shrivels up and is later gathered to be tossed into the fire to burn. If you abide in Me and My voice abides in you, anything you ask will come to pass for you. Your abundant growth and your faithfulness as My followers will bring glory to the Father.” (John 15:1-8, the Voice)

This is the secret of a successful Christian life. It is really very simple – stay connected to Jesus and everything you need will be given you so that you will take on the characteristics of Jesus! Notice that last phrase again:

“Your abundant growth and your faithfulness as My followers will bring glory to the Father.” (John 15:8, the Voice)

This is the “fruit” of being connected. This isn’t something we give to God; it is something He gives to us as a result of being connected. We begin this process by saying yes when God asks us to give Him control over our lives. In the picture of a vineyard, this is like a branch being grafted into the vine. There is very little connection at first, it is just that the two pieces are held very close together. And then as they stay close together, they actually start growing together so that they are firmly connected.

We grow by spending time in God’s presence. As we spend this time close to Him, hearing His voice speak to us through the Bible, His Word, we start growing more connected. As we thoughtfully examine Jesus’ life, as recorded in the Gospels, we continue growing more connected. His life flows into us and
our impurities flow back to Him. This keeps happening throughout our life here so we keep becoming more and more like Jesus in the way we relate to others, in the way we love and live. This process will be completed when Jesus comes and finishes making us holy, perfect in Him.

For a moment, I would like you to picture your favorite dessert. Perhaps it is ice cream, maybe a Red Velvet cake with ice cream. Maybe it your mother’s or grandmother’s cinnamon rolls or flan. Do you have in mind? Can you taste it? Can you imagine the texture, the feel of it? Can you see it approaching your mouth? Are you getting hungry, starting to drool? Ok, now, stop thinking about. Don’t think about how good it tastes? Don’t think about how it melts in your mouth? Have you stopped thinking about it? Have you stopped thinking about your favorite, delicious, scrumptious dessert?

Now, think about your best friend. Picture him or her in your mind. Think about the best thing you ever did together. Think about your conversations, how you feel when they give you a hug, how it makes you feel when they approve of something you did or a gift you gave them. Are you still thinking about dessert?

You see our mind is only capable of holding one picture or thought at a time. Some of us go from thought to apparently unrelated thought very quickly giving the illusion that we are thinking several things at once, but it can only hold one thing at a time. We can choose our focus, where we place our attention. And, what we focus on determines the direction of our life.

If we spend time focusing on Jesus, He will displace those things that we have been focusing on. He will fill our mind more and more. And we will move towards Him, because we always move in the direction we are looking and focusing.

We cannot just quit being bad by focusing on our badness, by working on changing our behaviors. We can only choose to look at Jesus and allow Him to redirect our thinking. Darkness is not dispelled by trying to make the darkness go away. It only works if a light is turned on or a candle is lit or the sun comes up. This is why our personal time with Jesus is so important. It’s not that we are saved by devotional time, it is just that this is the way Jesus shines His light into our lives. And it is only as His light comes in that the darkness of sin is driven away. We will only reach the moon, and beyond as we stay connected with Jesus.

*I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

*(Philippians 1:3-6, NIV)*
Closing Song/Benediction (Great is Thy Faithfulness, #100)

1. Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
   There is no shadow of turning with Thee:
   Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;
   As Thou has been Thou forever wilt be.

   Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness?
   Morning by morning new mercies I see;
   All I have needed Thy hand hath provided,
   Great is Thy faithfulness! Lord unto me!

2. Summer and winter, and spring-time and harvest,
   Sun, moon, and stars in the courses above,
   Join with all nature in manifold witness
   To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

   Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness?
   Morning by morning new mercies I see;
   All I have needed Thy hand hath provided,
   Great is Thy faithfulness! Lord unto me!

3. Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
   Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
   Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
   Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside.

   Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness?
   Morning by morning new mercies I see;
   All I have needed Thy hand hath provided,
   Great is Thy faithfulness! Lord unto me!