

Lay That Ladder Down

Series: Summer at Grace

Romans 3:23-26; 4:5-6

Dr. Matt Cassidy --- August 15, 2021

Well, good morning, Grace! We're doing this thing called the Summer of Giving this year at Grace, and then the Fall of Serving. I wanted to give you an update on the Summer of Giving and the money we've given. We said that everything that was given to our church above our budget that we'd already planned would be given to other people.

So, the current amount of gift to The Source, the women's health facility that we love so much, is \$156,000. Boom! Yeah ... that's almost three times what we normally do.

Community First, which is a thriving, effective homeless ministry here in Austin—we've given \$50,000 to them. We're buying two houses. That's good.

And Asian Christian Academy—you might not know—is in India. We've been supporting them for at least forty-five years. They have an orphanage, they have a ministry to special needs children, they have a kindergarten through twelfth grade school, they have a college, they have a seminary, they have a beautiful hospital, they have travelling and remote clinics. And it's India. They've been hit hard by the Covid virus and the Delta variant, and they've had a hard time raising funds as well. So, we're giving them \$10,000. Yay!

And then we lost one of our own. An Austin Police Department officer died a couple of weeks ago and we gave to that family out of our mercy fund. So, I wanted you guys to know that as well. It's good to know.

[Applause.]

So today what I thought I'd do—people are coming back, it's back to school, sometimes people are getting back to work—it's the first time you're going to go back to work. And people are coming back to church. So, we thought, *People are coming back to Grace*. That's why we have the ministry fair out there on display. I'd love you to go by and see what we have available for you to enjoy and serve in. And then, I thought, *You know what? Let's do "back to Christianity."*

Today we're going to look at the fundamentals of Christianity, the essence of what it means to be a believer, and what distinguishes Christianity from all other world religions and all other faith claims. And I'm going to do all of that with a single prop. Anyone have any idea what that prop would be? Yeah, you probably know already. It's going to be a ladder. *[A 20-foot tall ladder is set up on stage.]*

I want everyone to have a paper ladder. If you're watching us on TV or the computer and you can't come today, we're going to have leftovers of this little ladder. You'll know why in just a minute. But if you want to come by the office which is across the street from our worship center in the Grace 360 building—first come, first serve—but it will be open Monday and you can come by and get one of those. You might want one of those.

Ladders are a critical invention in the human experience. They may have been invented before the wheel. Because ladders can take you to places that you couldn't get to otherwise. Sometimes if you fall in a pit or intentionally dig a well, the only way out is to climb out using a ladder. Ladders take you to heights you couldn't reach unless you have a way of getting there. They take you to places that you couldn't get to otherwise.

I think sometimes ladders are a display of human intelligence, or maybe a lack of intelligence.









Some people ... [groaning from the congregation] I know, right ... stop it, just please stop [laughter]. These men don't understand or respect gravity, I think, generally speaking.

The prevalence of climbing ladders is so persistent in our culture that we project metaphors of life onto climbing and climbing ladders. Sometimes when we find ourselves in a pit and we're trying to get out of trouble. If you've ever lost a loved one, someone that you dearly love, then grief comes upon you and you feel like you're in a hole and you have to climb out of it. Sometimes depression comes upon you. And if you've ever had prolonged depression, you feel like you're in a pit. And you just need to get out of the pit. You're underground. And listen—people with grief and depression—their hope is not to be happy again. They just want to not be sad for a while. They just want to get to ground-level.

Sometimes you can find yourself in a significant amount of debt and you feel like you're in a hole. And it's going to take discipline and hard work, but sometimes it feels hopeless. But you've got to climb out of that hole of debt. And again, a person who's in significant debt, when they think about climbing out, they're not thinking about savings. I mean, that's for another day, maybe too far away. They just want to get out of the red numbers. They just want to be at zero debt. To have nothing in the way of debt would be great. That's where their hope is.

Sometimes the ladders that we use are for success. We use phrases all the time. In school: "I want to climb to the top of my class." In the working world: "I'm going to climb that corporate ladder." In sports: "I'm going to climb the rankings so that I can be seeded at the top of the rankings ladder." Right?

So, ladders and climbing are almost a world view for us. It's the way we look at a lot of things in life. So, when a person starts thinking about their spiritual life—"I want to get serious about my life with God," or, "I want to be honest with my faith"—it's almost instinctive that we would think, "I need to get climbing. I need to get to work. I've got to get to climbing out of the pits that I've dug—undisciplined life, misbehavior, immorality, some kind of addiction. I've got to get out of this hole by climbing."

Sometimes when we have great ambitions to be saintly, we say, "I'm going to climb my way into becoming more generous or more compassionate towards people that are different than me, more service-driven."

So, we try different ways to climb, climb, climb. And here's our hope in our spiritual lives. If we climb high enough and we get close enough to God, God's going to say to us, *Man,*

that's some good climbing. You've worked hard. That's great! Good for you! Come here, get a hug!

Here's the problem. No matter how much you feel intuitively that that's how the spirit world works, that is not what the Bible says declaratively or what saints have told us. As a matter of fact, they would say that's not how the spiritual life works at all. As a matter of fact, it's not even close. It's far from it. And why is that? I'm going to need a prop. There it is.

So, let's just call this ladder we have here the ladder of righteousness, working our way up to the righteousness of God. What's at the top of the ladder? Well, that would be the Creator of the universe, who is, by definition—His attributes are all-holy, absolute purity, righteousness (which means perfection).

[A large name card saying "God" is attached to the top rung of the ladder.]

And how are we to live in a world where the Creator of the universe is all-holy, absolutely perfect and pure? How are we supposed to live that way, and to experience His presence in our life, in this life, and also to spend eternity with Him? How do we get there?

Here's the thing about God's holiness. The saints have told us that the higher up you go or the greater your understanding of the holiness of God, the more you become aware of your own sinfulness. In other words, the greater a person experiences sainthood, the more vivid their crimes against God become in their lives. In other words, God is like a brilliant light, and the closer you get to it, the more you see your own imperfections. They become obvious to you.

Let me just give a couple of examples. Some of you are old enough to have definitions of modern-day saints. A woman that came to my mind is a woman known for her righteousness and self-sacrifice and her commitment to God. This would be Mother Teresa. *[Pastor Matt displays a name card saying "Mother Teresa."]* Sure, she worked in Calcutta constantly serving and caring for lepers. She started an orphanage. She served the Lord in a sacrificial way most of her entire life. Probably her strongest attribute was courage. She would never quake or quiver before a king or a president when she was pronouncing what was right and real and true and ethical.

But here's the thing. As much as we would like to call her a saint, when you look at interviews with Mother Teresa, when she speaks about herself, it's not kind. And it's not self-deprecating humor or self-deprecation because it's polite to do so. When she talks about herself in biographies and in interviews, she says that she was more than strong-willed; she would bully people and was crass and mostly angry and was domineering. She did not talk about herself; she

knew herself. She didn't talk about herself in the context of holiness, but in the context of sinfulness.

So, as saintly as she is—I'm going to put her name up here. *[Pastor Matt places the "Mother Teresa" name card about two-thirds of the way up the ladder.]* And technically, it's still a long way from God. Let's think of a man, something even closer to home, who would be the most righteous, saintly person that we know from our country. I know most all of us would come up with Billy Graham, of course. *[Pastor Matt displays a name card saying "Billy Graham."]* He gave his entire life to the service of the Lord. He preached on every continent inhabited by human beings. He was selfless, humble, a good husband. He was sacrificial in a lot of ways. I know he lived in some great places, but there were many easier ways to make money that the way Billy Graham did.

So, we would consider him a modern-day saint. In the Protestant faith that's what we would call him. But here's the thing. When you hear interviews with Billy Graham or read his autobiography, whenever he talks about himself, it's not exalting. It's not about how close he is to God. He talks about his sinfulness, his depravity. And he's not talking about going back "when I was in college, I was a bit of a pirate." No, he's talking about that morning at breakfast, and how he's unworthy to be in a relationship with God if it weren't for God himself. So, that's another saint—Billy Graham. *[Pastor Matt places the "Billy Graham" name card just under the "Mother Teresa" name card.]*

Let's see. Here's another one. *[Pastor Matt displays a name card saying "Matt Cassidy."]* Oh, that's me. *[Laughter from the congregation.]* So, for clarity, I'm not saying I'm a saint. It's just somebody I know really well. I mean, some of you don't know me at all. Some of you think you know me on Sunday. And I must tell you that I am never prettier or nicer than the three hours that I'm here on Sunday morning. My family can tell you that we've run into people that go to our church out there in the real world, and it's often like, *Hmm... yeah, you're ugly.* And I'm mean, so just get out of my way.

But I'm only using me for an example because I've spent forty years of my life trying to help people understand who Christ is and how they can become more like Christ. I really enjoy teaching the Bible. I've made major decisions over the years to do whatever I could to serve my King, Jesus, in a selfless and sacrificial way if necessary. I've done that.

But I've got to tell you, if I were to put my name on this ladder, I would put it on the floor. The guys in the media said we wouldn't be able to see that, so I'm just going to put it here for the sake of illustration. *[Pastor Matt places the "Matt Cassidy" name card under the "Billy Graham" name card.]*

Where would you be on this ladder? Think about your own life on this ladder of righteousness, an ascension to holiness and closeness to God. Where would you put your name on that? Just take a minute. You have it?

Okay, now turn to someone next to you and tell them. I'm just kidding—don't do that. That would be a fun little thing to do though, right? *Yeah, but are you lower than me or higher than me?*

Here's the point of this ladder of righteousness, this ladder of getting to God. It's supposed to kind of punch you and say, *We're stuck. I'm stuck. If I can't get above Mother Teresa and Billy Graham--that's beyond my hope--then how can I even get towards God? There's no way. There's absolutely no way!* This takes away any ambition of being in heaven and having an intimate relationship with God now.

Man is not worthy of God ...

---Blaise Pascal

Old saint super genius Blaise Pascal said it succinctly. He said, "Man is not worthy of God."

Romans 3:23

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

And like I said before, the Bible declares quite clearly and repetitiously in Romans chapter 3, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

The Uniqueness of Jesus

So, what are we to do? What can we do to fix this? And this is where Christianity steps in and says, *We're not like any other faith claims. We're different from other religions.* Because Christianity says—what's obvious on this metaphor here, this prop—we can't fix it. We are too

broken. The uniqueness of Jesus Christ, the uniqueness of Christianity, biblical Christianity is when it says this. Yahweh God says it is impossible for man to fix what he has broken. And Yahweh God rolls up His sleeves and says, “I can fix this and I will fix this.” For God so loved every single human soul that He set out to solve the sin problem so that He might have an intimate relationship with anyone that would choose Him.

There’s a psalm—think of it as a poem, a song—in Philippians chapter 2, and it is written so that everyone could remember it, because this is the profound truth about how God fixed the problem. In Philippians 2 it says that Jesus was sent by the Father to come down here and bring us back. Philippians 2 said that, **“Jesus, in the very form of God, the very essence of God”**—He was deity—**“came down”** rung by rung and **“took on the image, the very essence, of man.”** He was born in a stable. He walked on the dirt for thirty years. He loved people, He taught people, He saw how they were trapped and couldn’t fix this. And so, ultimately, He died a violent death so that He might be raised again on the third day and get us back.

That’s what Christianity says. It says that God only could fix this and God chose to fix this.

Two Phrases that Illustrate the Solution

What I’d like to do today, right now, is explain to you the essence of Christianity using just two phrases. Four words—if you’ll memorize those, it will help you understand how God solves the problem, how we can have a relationship with Him here, and how we can have eternity with Him later. Two concepts, that is you grasp them, it will show you that Christianity separates itself from every other faith claim; but more than that, these two concepts will absolutely change your life. And most of life is trying to grasp it and believe it even more, because it is mind-expanding and soul-saving. That’s quite a sell. Wait until you hear the words.

Solution #1: Substitutionary Atonement

First phrase: substitutionary atonement. Say that out loud: substitutionary atonement. Each word, one at a time. This is the easiest word of the four. “Substitute” we know—substitute teachers—yeah, when someone else needs to come in—substitute pitcher—some guy’s throwing balls and can’t throw strikes any more, you substitute the pitcher. Here’s the best one. Do you

guys watch professional wrestling? I love professional wrestling. In the tag team where a guy is reaching for his partner and he's saying, "I need a substitute in here. Can you come here and take this beating here for me, please?" That's what "substitute" means.

Atonement. "Atonement" is a word that means "to pay, to satisfy, justice." So, you're driving down the freeway and you get a ticket for speeding. Say it's a hundred dollars (like there's a hundred-dollar ticket out there. Does anyone have one? I would love to get a hundred-dollar ticket). Anyway, you get a hundred-dollar ticket, you end up going down to the courthouse, you give them a hundred dollars, and what happens is that justice has been satisfied by your atoning payment of that. You paid for it and justice is at peace now.

So, when we apply this to our ladders, think of a substitutionary atonement as the ladder that goes into the pit, into the hole that we've made. And we've realized that our life choices are too expensive for us. They're expensive for our friends, but they're too expensive, certainly, to God. And we can't pay that. And Jesus comes down the ladder from heaven to earth and even into our pit. And He gets down there in the context of substitutionary atonement. And He says, "I'm living in this septic tank that you have made for yourself, this sludge of your decisions. And I want you to do this. I want you to get on my back, I want you to put your arms around me, and I will climb out of this pit, this hole, for you, and pay the debt of sin that you owe." That's your substitutionary atonement.

Romans 3:23-26

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are made righteous freely by His grace through the atonement that came by Christ Jesus.

²⁵ God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood.

Look what it says in Romans chapter 3. Here's the verse I read earlier: "**For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**" But there's more. "**... and are made righteous freely by His grace.**" That's a gift. Through what? "**... the atonement that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Jesus as a sacrifice atonement and through faith in His blood**"—faith in His blood for the payment of your crimes against God. That'll change your life. That's what substitutionary atonement means. And it radically alters people's experience.

Do you remember an old show that was on a few years ago called “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition”? It was on Sunday nights. It was a “feel good” show, I think on ABC. It’s a show where if you’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all. I’m not a fan of very predictable plot lines. Every plot line was exactly the same--I didn’t miss an episode. And here’s why. Here’s how it starts. It starts with a dreadful set of experiences where a family is usually living in a dilapidated house that ought to be condemned, but they’re in debt for it and they can’t afford it, and they have terrible circumstances. And on top of that, they have no hope.

And then this hyperactive guy named Ty shows up with a bullhorn and says, “Good morning, Watkins family!” And they come pouring out and they’re sitting on the curb and Ty says, “Listen, we’ve got a bus waiting for you. Why don’t you guys go to Disney World for seven days. When you come back, we’ll see what happens.”

And when they come back, they literally come back to a dream house. They leave and they come back and then it’s paid for. They paid off the old mortgage, they’re paying for everything needed to rebuild this thing in seven days, and wow!

Now the reason I watch is for the last ten minutes. Because I love to see how different people from different cultures respond to substitutionary atonement. I really do. I love to see some people just bend over laughing, seeing grown men cry. Some people just faint into the asphalt—they just fall down. I mean, think about it. They started their life that week in debt with a terrible, dilapidated house, and then they come back and now they have a brand-new vision house, and it’s completely debt free. I love it. I love that storyline.

As a matter of fact, there’s a house up the street here across from the Domain that was a Extreme Makeover home. And I used to drive by while they were doing it, and I still drive by once or twice a year. Because I just pull in across the street—it’s creepy—but I stare at the house and I just say, *What is it like? What is it like to live there? What it is it like to dine at that table, year after year? Do you think they ever absolutely get over that? I bet every time they turn the doorknob they’re like, “Ahhhh!”* Substitutionary atonement.

And then sometimes I think, *You know what? I wonder if somebody pulls up across the street and stares into my window and says, “What’s it like to be Matt Cassidy? His sins are completely paid for. He’s completely debt free in the eyes of God. Does he ever get over that? Sigh ... all the time ... mind-blowing.”*

If you're new to church and you don't go a lot, sometimes you come in here and you see people during the worship time. The music's fun, but the lyrics—when people sing those lyrics they end up putting their hands up, some people are crying. I've been to churches where people faint and there's a whole group of people who are just catching people. And here's why—because they are victims of Extreme Makeover Soul Edition. That's what substitutionary atonement means. It's the ladder that gets us out of the pit to ground level. We're out of the pit, but we're broke. Being out of debt is great, right?

Solution #2: Imputed Righteousness

That's where our second phrase comes in. It's "imputed righteousness." Let's say that together—"imputed righteousness." These are some big words. "Imputed" is an accounting term. It means "to ascribe or deposit"—or here's a good one—"to credit to your account." If some of you guys do Venmo when you send money to someone, you are accrediting two hundred dollars to that account. Next time you do that you could sent that to a friend and say, "I have imputed two hundred dollars to your Venmo account." They'll probably think you're cussing or something. It means to credit to your account. So, that's that.

And then the second word there is righteousness. Simply put, it just means perfection, moral perfection. Essentially—your essence is perfect and you're morally perfect. So, "imputed righteousness" means perfection has been credited to your account from an outside source. Your soul's moral account is not zero; it's infinity.

Here's an example. I hope you had a good summer. I'll tell you, Darren James from Louisiana had a great summer. It was on June 12 that he looked at his bank account. He had fifty billion dollars accredited to his account. Imputed righteousness. That's an example of imputed righteousness. He thought it was some rich uncle that he didn't know and he had inherited that money. And I've got to tell you, if you have an uncle that can give you fifty billion dollars, you probably know him. Keep sending him Christmas cards.

Well, it was a bank error, but for three days he was the richest guy in all of Louisiana and he was enjoying imputed righteousness. *I'm going to buy an island ...*

So, let me just review. Substitutionary atonement is the concept theologically of Jesus paying the debt for us. Substitutionary atonement comes along and gets us to ground level.

Imputed righteousness is Jesus climbing up the stair with us to bring us to His level of righteousness. He's crediting His righteousness to our account.

Romans 3:3

What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

Look what the Bible says again. Romans 3. “What do the scriptures say? Abraham believed and it was credited to him”—imputed to him—“as righteousness.” It was just given to him.

Romans 4:5-6

However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. ⁵ David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works ...

Look at chapter 4. It says, “However, the man who does not work”—who doesn't climb ladders—“but trusts in God who justifies the wicked”—by one, substitutional atonement— and then “his faith is accredited” or imputed “to him as righteousness.”

Look, David knew this. He said “the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits” or imputes “righteousness apart from works,” apart from climbing ladders. That's the physics of the spirit world, the receiving it as a gift. So, like, boom! Wow! It's not just getting debts paid; it's getting the righteousness of God on top of that.

Man is not worthy of God, but man is capable of being made worthy. It is unworthy of God to unite Himself to wretched man; but it is not unworthy of God to pull him out of his misery.

---- Blaise Pascal

Look what Blaise Pascal, the super genius that was a saint, says: “Man is not worthy of God.” It's a comma. The rest of the sentence goes on like this: “But man is capable of being made worthy.”

“Man is not worthy of God, but man is capable of being made worthy.” Here’s the sentence that follows that. “It is unworthy of God to unite himself to wretched man;” He can’t. “But it is not unworthy for God to pull him out of his misery.”

God cannot, by His holy nature, have fellowship with anything imperfect. But by the love of God, He can make us perfect. And that’s what salvation is all about. That’s what Christianity is all about.

Substitutionary atonement is Jesus climbing all the way down into our pit and paying our debt. Imputed righteousness is Him pulling us all the way up to His level. Substitutionary atonement is paying the debt. Imputed righteousness is Him transferring the balance of His righteousness onto our soul. Substitutionary atonement is Good Friday. *Will someone come in here and take this beating for me?* The Passion of the Christ—Jesus said, “I will. I can and I’ve chosen to.” Imputed righteousness is resurrection. He is resurrected from the dead and gives us His righteousness.

In a one-sentence gospel, it’s this. He made Him who had no sin to become sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God.

So, here’s how Christianity works. This guy Matt Cassidy—far from a saint—when I look at myself, I see this. Nothing but sin. But when God looks down from heaven, He sees this. [*“Jesus Christ” is printed on the back of the Matt Cassidy name card.*] He sees Jesus. He sees the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He sees the blood of His atoning sacrifice—those are big words—the blood of atoning sacrifice paying my debts and pulling me up that ladder to very righteousness of God himself. That’s how God sees us. And most of the Christian life is, one, believing these things to be true; and then trying to live as though they’re true.

We Can Lay Our Ladder Down

So, what are we to do? Here’s what you do. You knock your ladder down. Christian salvation is this: it’s trusting in the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ paying that debt. You believe that by faith in Christ alone. It is believing that the only way you’re going to have a relationship with Him in this life and spend eternity with Him later is to believe His resurrection proved the point. Laying that down is saying, *I’m not going to play that game because that game never worked.* It was never meant to work. There’s no ladder to heaven. It’s a Stairmaster. You

just do all this work and you go nowhere. That's the nature of ladder climbing for spiritual growth. It's a Stairmaster. And it insults God.

But the good side of this is that with this ladder laid down, you rest, because it's all been done. It's more than adequate. Quit trying to please Him, quit trying to express some kind of lifestyle that would win you points.

The Power to Change

Here's the other thing I love about this model of salvation, the uniqueness of this. When this ladder is laid down and you've trusted Christ for your sins and for this righteousness, then you inherit the power of the Holy Spirit in your life. And so, now these pits that you've built for yourself—yeah, it takes discipline to get out of there. The addictions that we have towards pride or vanity or some chemical—look, that feels impossible when you don't have the Spirit of God living inside of you. But now you do. And now, in conjunction with this Spirit, climbing out of pits is not what it used to be.

Here's the other thing. When you ascribe to be saintly and godly and you want to become like Christ in all of life and you're trying to be more generous and loving and selfless, self-forgetful, that's impossible—unless the Spirit of God is living inside of you. And if He is, it's His ambition to make you that way. Sure, there are some disciplines, but the prayer is, "Oh, dear God, change my soul from the inside. Let it express what's already happened in my life. The way You see me is truth. Let me live that truth out."

Lay it down. The reason I want everyone to leave with a ladder, the reason I want everyone to have one of these, is I want you to put it somewhere where you see it regularly. Mine is on my desk. I did this sermon twelve years ago or so. I still have that one. This one's going to join it. Because it is the nature of our stupidity to pick the ladder back up like we can do this. For me, I go three days in a row where I'm kind of doing some good stuff, and I start thinking, *Well, you know what? I'm the new standard.* And what's worse is I project that on everybody else. *Why don't you give as much as I do? Why don't you surrender as much as I do? Why aren't you caring and serving as much as I do?* It's called self-righteousness, and for a reason. I think I can become righteous by myself.

And then you start projecting on everyone, *Why aren't you raising the kids like I do? Why aren't you expressing whatever safety protocol that I do?* This self-righteousness is the

infectious disease that a lot of people are suffering from. *Why don't you do what I'm doing? Why don't you have the standards that I have? Because I'm the standard bearer.*

That's what happens when I go three days in a row where I'm doing pretty good. When I go three days in a row and I'm doing terrible and I'm living by this ladder, the condemnation and discouragement and despair that I live with is crippling. It's just shame. And there is no shame in the kingdom of God. There's regret, but there's no shame. And I can't do anything but loathe and hate myself. So, I want everyone to have one of these ladders so that they put it down and it stays down. And every once in a while when you kind of get puffed up—maybe you act like me and get self-righteous—put it back up and say, “That's a stupid way to live.” *Hey, Stairmaster Matt, how's that going?* You're beating yourself up because you've struck out too many times in a row? Put your ladder back up and see that you're like those clowns in the earlier slides. What are you doing? That's ladder abuse. And then put it back down and remind yourself of these four words and two phrases: substitutionary atonement and imputed righteousness—and live that way.

Two choices today. One, for some of you, your whole spiritual value system was ladder-climbing. And maybe today's the first time you've heard this. Wait a minute, the Bible has said, Old and New, that it's by grace through faith that God provides salvation for us. He pays our debt and then gives us this inheritance that's perfect. And you have to make a choice where you're going to put your faith. And it's all on Jesus. So, you could choose that today.

And some of you, the choice is to leave it down and quit trying to earn God's favor now that you're one of God's children. Just leave it down and enjoy the beauty of being His. How about that? There is so much freedom and joy with the ladder on its side.

Let me close our time in prayer, and I want us to think about how you could apply those. If you wouldn't mind—if this is the first time you're understanding what true Christianity is and you want to have a follow-up conversation, you could go online and fill out the connect card at grace360.org/connect, and we'll have someone talk to you very soon. If you want to come down, I'm going to be here after the song. I'd love to talk to you about that as well. But we want to help you grow in your new relationship as a member of the body of Christ and as a child of God.

Let's pray.

Lord, we are grateful—overwhelmingly grateful—for when we come to this realization that our sins and crimes against Your holiness are so grievous that there would be no hope that we could pay those and earn your affection and Your love. God, I'm grateful that You could be the only one who could fix this, but You chose to fix this. I'm overwhelmed by the motivation that You so loved each and every one of us that You would send Your Son on mission, and that mission would be to climb down all of those rungs into the pit, into the cesspool of our lives, so that we might hold on to His beaten back and His pierced hands as He climbs us back and brings us to the presence of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

God, let that be the way we live our lives—that we don't just enjoy it intellectually or emotionally, but we live it; we show our friends and families and strangers that Grace transforms. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.