

Fixed on Jesus Together

January 10, 2021

TicketMaster sells millions of tickets for thousands of theatre productions like Hamilton, Phantom of the Opera, and Jim Gaffigan. There is a type of ticket that they list as “obstructed view seats.” The website describes them as follows, “It means you’ll be unable to see the entire stage from those seats. You’ll have either an incomplete view because of the position of the seats, or something will be in your line of sight – like a pole, speakers, or the sound board.”

An obstructed view is okay at a play, but I don’t want anyone here to have an obstructed view of Jesus in 2021. Our passage directs us to look to Jesus and I want to make sure that we don’t have anything obstructing our view in 2021.

We cannot be fixed on Jesus if we cannot see Jesus.

Affixed to our sing outside is the three-word phrase, “Fixed on Jesus.” That simple phrase is meant to be more than jargon but a genuine statement of who we are and what we believe. Our goal at Center Church is that one and all are fixed on Christ. Fixed on Jesus—

- In times of blessing
- In seasons of suffering
- When things make sense

- When you are confused
- When you know what to do next
- When you feel totally lost

Today, we are going to begin a new tradition at Center Church, one that I hope to continue for years to come. At the beginning of each year, we are going to contemplate how we can be fixed on Jesus together. Today we are going to consider together how to be fixed on Jesus together in 2021.

If I were to express it in a sentence it is,

PROP: Build your life, your future, your hope, your everything on Jesus.

No one should have an obstructed view of him this year.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:1–2

The writer to the Hebrews here commands us to cast aside any weight or sin that serve to obstruct our view of Jesus Christ. Today, we are going to consider two possible obstructions to our view of Jesus. Two things that I know apply to me, and I would assume some of you as well.

1. *Hold fast to the Scandal of Grace—*

We use the word Grace regularly.

We sing about Grace.

We talk about Grace.

We hear sermons on Grace.

We read books on Grace.

I fear that we have domesticated grace.

Something I am going to work on this year is recapturing the scandal that is grace. I am using the world scandal on purpose. The Grace we Christians have received from God through Jesus is scandalous.

A scandal according to Merriam-Webster is, “a circumstance that offends propriety or established moral conceptions or disgraces those associated with it.” A scandal is something that burns ears and causes people to shake their heads. A scandal taints everyone involved.

Make no mistake we have received scandalous grace through Christ.

It is worthwhile to remind ourselves that the scandal is not that we have chosen to associate with God but that he has chosen to associate with us. He who is high and lifted up without the taint of

sin has sought out sinners have given them grace. The danger we all face is that grace becomes... pedestrian. Over time, Grace can cease to be scandalous and morph into something we deserve.

Scandalous.

God sent Jesus to redeem ungodly rebels from their sins by grace.

We have received a gift that we do not deserve. Friends, this we must NOT forget. This we must not just remember but hold fast to.

What does this mean?

Those who have received grace have received a gift and have not received a wage. This makes perfect sense but stick with me. If we have truly been saved by God through grace then we are laid bare and have no rights of our own.

If our salvation was a payment, then we could point to something we have done to earn. But that is not what grace is. Rather, it is a gift from God.

Do you see the difference between a gift and a payment?

Those who receive a gift are given something because the giver chose to—those who receive a payment are given something because they earned it.

We rightly exult when we read this in Ephesians 2,

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Ephesians 2:8–9

And we should.

Salvation as a gift.

Salvation completely undeserved.

Salvation all from him.

Salvation not by works.

Amen.

But let's take this scandal a step further.

I remember reading an account of a woman who heard a sermon on the grace of God to rebellious sinners. The preacher extolled the virtues of grace from God. He said everything that you have heard from this pulpit today and other Sundays—grace is amazing and grace is free.

After the sermon a woman came up to this man and said, following Jesus seems great, but that saved by grace bit is dangerous. Kinda reckless.

What?

And she said, if salvation is really only by grace before God, and the Christian brings nothing but sin needing forgiveness then—the forgiven Christian is in a precarious situation. Those who receive salvation by grace have received a wonderful gift BUT ALSO, they are completely owned by God.

And that is exactly right.

We have no rights.

Do you see why?

Because salvation from God is a gift to us—because we did not broker a deal, or negotiate a contract, or offer our services for payment, but because God in his grace has saved us—grace comes with a condition.

Do you know what it is?

That we have no conditions before God.

Why does this matter?

When you follow Jesus for years, and grace becomes stale you can think that the Lord owes you a great many things.

- Happy relations with your family.
- The marriage of your dreams.
- A fulfilling career.

- A good reputation with everyone.
- The constant companionship of good friends.
- Minimal number of heartbreaks.

Let me tell you something frightening—God does not owe us any of those things.

Why?

Because he has given us his son completely and without condition. He offered up his son as a sin offering so that we might be able to have eternal life—and yes there are other promises that he gives us—but salvation by grace means he owns us completely.

We have no rights before God.

When we forget the scandal of grace—we live with an obstructed view of Jesus. We will not be able to be fixed on Jesus.

While we have no rights before God—we have a myriad of promises. In the normal course of our world, we consider promises inferior to rights.

Why?

Promises are only as good as the one giving the promise. And this is why you must be more familiar with the promises of God to you as a Christian than the Bill of Rights to you as an American. His promises will never change.

Who knows what will happen to our rights as Americans?

Do you want an unobstructed view of Jesus in 2021?

Pick a promise from God and own it.

Have it.

Hold it.

Keep it.

Live by it.

Let that promise from God be a light in the darkness.

For me—I am apt to worry. So I carry Psalm 55:22 with me,

[22] Cast your burden on the LORD,
and he will sustain you;
Psalm 55:22

I don't do this very well.

Yesterday, I was trying to get ready to preach this sermon and I could feel an accumulation of burdens that were weighing down my soul. I cannot carry those around. I must cast them upon him.

And he will sustain me.

I don't want to have an obstructed view of Jesus this year—I don't want any of you to have an obstructed view this year either.

PROP: Build your life, your future, your hope, your everything on Jesus.

Not only must we hold fast to the Scandal of Grace we must also,

2. Be More Wary of Sin than Suffering—

An author I read recently said it this way, “An ounce of sin is more serious than a ton of suffering.”

That was a zinger to my insides.

Because I think exactly the opposite.

I'm not trying to make a false dichotomy or minimize suffering, I just realized I'm generally more wary of potential suffering I might experience than sins I commit.

I can tell you—I get this exactly opposite. I am more frightened of suffering than I am of sin. I can live with sins and excuse my own sins and have no time for any suffering of any kind.

Please understand, I am not saying we should enjoy suffering. OR that we should pretend that real suffering is not hard. No. We should/must respond with empathy and love to any who are

suffering. We should. We Christians should constantly move in compassion toward those who are heartbroken.

Nor I am saying that we should be consumed by our sin. That is a mistake in a different direction.

I'm talking about those seemingly little sins that we excuse.

I realize in saying this point I run the risk of trampling over those who have sensitive consciences. I do not want to do that.

I am speaking to others—like me—we are apt to be more wary of future suffering than current sins. We might look to the future of our country and our nation and be struck to the core with fear and say—what is going to happen? And be frightened.

And

I am more wary of things I've suffered than sins I commit.

And that is exactly backwards.

You see, it is so easy for me to think that sin is a small thing that I can easily manage, and I hope and pray that I won't have to suffer too much. There is a temptation for us to think that the sins that we have struggled against for years and attach themselves to our lives are a small thing.

They are not.

I am not saying that we need to discover new, unknown sins deep inside our souls. I'm saying those sins that we excuse and come to some kind of cease-fire with. We must not make deals with our sin. I'm talking about normal, daily life.

Why is this a big deal?

Let's take a small sin that we are apt to excuse and consider not that big of a deal.

Jealousy.

It starts out as comparison.

Why isn't my life like theirs?

Why do they have a good relationship with their kids and I don't?

Do they realize how hard I have it?

I wish my husband treated me that way.

I wish my wife looked like that.

It starts out as comparison and sinks into jealousy.

Jealousy might not seem like that big of a deal—but do you know what happens when comparison and jealousy go unchecked?

James tells us,

“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. James 3:16

Jealousy opens the door of your life to destruction and ruin. What starts out as manageable becomes ruinous.

When we try and manage remaining sin instead of confessing and repenting we take a step toward potential spiritual ruin. The slide to ruin does not happen quickly, but slowly, imperceptibly. But forcefully.

“Be killing sin or it will be killing you.” John Owen

When we manage sins we will have an obstructed view of Jesus in 2021.

I don't want to have an obstructed view of Jesus this year—I don't want any of you to have an obstructed view this year either.

Are there any sins obstructing your view?

Confess, repent.

Rinse, repeat.

Fight.

Fight.

Fight.

Fight.

Do not give in.

Remember, we do not fight alone he is on our side (probably better to say—we are on his side), he will forgive, we know this. But ALSO he will strengthen you in your fight. The scandalous grace we have received does not excuse sin but empowers us to fight sin.

PROP: Build your life, your future, your hope, your everything on Jesus.

Center Church—let us fix ourselves on Jesus this year and follow wherever he takes us.

The reason I want an unobstructed view of Jesus for you and me is because there is NO ONE like him.

There is no one who loves you like him.

There is no one who is committed to you like him.

There is no one who has a heart for you like him.

There is no one as trustworthy as him.

PROP: Build your life, your future, your hope, your everything on Jesus.