

Thanksgiving: that we have been given the gift of Jesus, **Eph 3:8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.**

Please do not forget to pray for all the shut-ins and isolated brothers and sisters in our congregations C. Campbell (Fredericton) and J. Steffes (Caribou, Me), Mr. Ross Bathurst, P. Ward (Saint John) and others.

ACTIVITIES FOR THE MONTH OF FEBRUARY 2020

Times of worship services: Moncton – 10:30 AM every Sunday

- Time of worship services in **Saint John** – Sunday, **February 9** and **23** at 2:30 PM.
- **Communion**- On 1st and 3rd Sunday – **Moncton**
and 2nd and 4th Sunday - **Saint John**
- **Address:**
 - Moncton— 70 King St. —Sage building, second floor;
 - Saint John—50 Newport Cres., Portland United church.

The next Discipleship groups: Thursday February 13 @ 7:30 home of Mr. and Mrs. Vautour

Local Website: Should you have forgotten the password to enter “**For members only**” on the www.worshipim.ca website, please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Vautour.

www.facebook.com/GCIMoncton - Please note the following: As the bulletin is not done weekly anymore but done on the 2nd and 4th Sunday of every month, articles in the continuing series posted in the bulletin are uploaded to this website every week. It is hoped this will be a help in your personal Bible Studies.

Prayer Request from Mr. Bill Hall (Feb. 8, 2020). . “I was speaking to one of our retired pastors, D. Smith, the other day and he told me that he will be going in for surgery on Thursday Feb 27th. He was having some problems with his right eye, and doctors discovered a mass in that area. He will be having surgery to have that mass removed. He would appreciate your prayers concerning his surgery.

Please pray for all the Christian churches in Canada, that we may all grow in the grace and knowledge of our Saviour Jesus.

Prayers for GCI across the world: that we will walk in God’s will for us and that we will see, understand and participate in his work as He guides the leadership, Mr. Williams, GCI Director, Mr. Bill Hall, Canadian Director and all the others in leadership wherever they may be.

Please pray for God’s will to be done on earth as in heaven (Matt 6). There are so many troubled spots in this world, too many to enumerate.

**GCI WEB STORE OPEN NOW (FROM <https://update.gci.org/2020/02/gci-web-store-open-now/>)
GCI GEAR IS HERE!**

AS PART OF OUR DENOMINATIONAL CELEBRATION, WE ARE EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE GCI CLOTHING AND ACCESSORIES FOR YOU! REPRESENT OUR FELLOWSHIP AND REFLECT YOUR PERSONAL STYLE. SHOP NOW BY CLICKING ON THE IMAGE BELOW.



FOR ALL CUSTOMER SERVICE REQUESTS FOR YOUR PURCHASES PLEASE CONTACT: 1.888.934.6909 OR EMAIL US AT CUSTOMERSERVICE@SMARTPRESS.COM

THE MESSAGE OF JESUS: TAKE THE LEAP
(from <https://www.gci.org/articles/take-the-leap/>)

Jesus once told a story about two kinds of people who went to the temple to pray. One of them was a Pharisee, and the other was a tax collector (**Luke 18:9-14**). Now, these days, 2,000 years after Jesus told the story, we might be tempted to nod knowingly and say, "Yes, of course, the Pharisees were the self-righteous hypocrites, right?" Well, maybe, but let's put that assessment aside for the moment and consider what Jesus' listeners would have been thinking.

First, Pharisees were not thought of as hypocritical bad guys, as we 2,000-years-down-the-road-Christians tend to think of them. Pharisees were, as a matter of fact, the devoted, careful, faithful religious minority of the Jews who were standing heartily in the breach against the growing tide of liberalism, compromise and syncretism with the Roman world with its pagan Greek culture. They called the people back to the law and committed themselves to faithfulness in obedience.

When the Pharisee in the story prayed, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people," he was not just whistling Dixie. It was true. His respect for the law was impeccable, and he and the Pharisee minority devoted themselves to keeping it in a world where its importance had become seriously eroded. He was not like other men, and he was not even taking the credit for that—he was thanking God that it was so.

Tax collectors, on the other hand, were notorious crooks—Jews who worked for the Roman occupation forces collecting tax revenues from their own people, and worse, men of few scruples who routinely inflated the bills for their own profit (compare **Matthew 5:46**). Those listening to Jesus' story would have instantly pegged the Pharisee as a man of God—the white hat—and the tax collector as the archetypal wicked man—the black hat.

But Jesus, as usual, was making an entirely unexpected point: God isn't helped or hampered by who you are or what you've been up to; he forgives everybody, even the worst sinners. All we have to do is trust him. And equally as shocking, people who think they are more righteous than others (even with ample physical evidence of it) are still in their sins, not because God hasn't forgiven them, but because they won't receive what they don't believe they need.

Good news for sinners

The gospel is for sinners, not for righteous people. Righteous people just don't get into the gospel as it really is, because they have the notion that they don't need that kind of gospel. To righteous people, the gospel is the good news that God is on their side. They feel confident in God because they know they are behaving in a godlier manner than the overt sinners in the world around them. They give a good deal of attention to the terribleness of the sins of others, and they are glad that they are close to God and not living like the adulterers, murderers and thieves who they see on the streets and in the news. To righteous people, the

gospel is a trumpet of condemnation toward the sinners of the world, a warning message that sinners should stop sinning and begin living like they, the righteous people, do.

But that is not the gospel. The gospel is good news for sinners. It declares that God has already forgiven their sins and given them a new life in Jesus Christ. It's a message that causes sinners who are sick of sin's cruel tyranny over them to sit up and take notice. It means that God, the God of righteousness, who they thought was against them (since he has every reason to be), is really for them and in fact loves them. It means that God is not holding their sins against them, but has already in Jesus Christ paid for their sins and broken sin's death grip on them. It means they don't have to live another day in fear, doubt or guilt. It means they can trust God to be for them in Jesus Christ everything he says he is—forgiver, redeemer, savior, advocate, provider, friend.

No mere religion

Jesus Christ is not just another religious figure. He is not a cow-eyed weakling with a nice, but in the end unrealistic, idea about the power of human kindheartedness. Nor is he just another great moral teacher who stirred human hearts to rise to a higher level of social responsibility.

No, when we talk about Jesus Christ we are talking about the eternal source of all things (**Hebrews 1:2-3**), and more than that, he is also the redeemer, the purifier, the fixer of all things, who by dying and rising reconciled the whole out-of-kilter universe to God (**Colossians 1:20**). Jesus Christ is the one who made everything that is, who keeps it all in existence every moment, and who takes all its sin on himself to completely redeem it—including you and me. He came to us as one of us to make us into what he created us to be. Jesus is not just another religious figure, and the gospel is not just another religion. The gospel is not a new and improved set of rules, formulas and guidelines to get us in good with an otherwise bilious, ill-tempered Supreme Being; it is the end of religion. Religion is bad news; it tells us that the gods (or God) are hopping mad and if we do this, that and the other thing just right, then they (or he) will change their minds and smile on us. But the gospel is not religion: it is God's own good news to humanity. It declares all sin forgiven and every man, woman and child God's friend. It is a golden invitation on a silver platter to anybody and everybody who has sense enough to believe it and accept it (**1 John 2:2**).

"But there's no such thing as a free lunch," you say. Well, actually, there is, and this is it. It's not only a free lunch, it's a free banquet, and it lasts forever. You don't need anything to get in but trust in the One who is throwing the party.

God hates sin—not us

God hates sin for one reason only—because it destroys us and everything around us. You see, God is not out to destroy us because we're sinners; he's out to save us from the sin that destroys us. And the good news is—he's done it. He did it in Jesus Christ. Sin is evil because it cuts us off from God. It makes us afraid of him. It keeps us from seeing reality as it really is. It saps our joy, scrambles our priorities and turns what ought to be serenity, peace and satisfaction into chaos, anxiety and fear. It makes us despair of life, and never more thoroughly than when we actually achieve and possess everything we think we want and need.

God hates sin because it destroys us—but he doesn't hate us. He loves us. That's why he has done something about sin. And what God has done about sin is forgive it—he has taken away the sins of the world (**John 1:29**)—and he has done it through Jesus Christ (**1 Timothy 2:6**).

The fact that we are sinners doesn't mean God turns up his nose at us, contrary to what you may have heard; it means that as sinners, we don't want to be around him. Yet without him, we are nothing—our very being, all that we are, depends on him. The treacherous blade of sin cuts both ways: On one side, it compels us out of fear or mistrust or both to turn our backs on God and his love for us, and on the other side it leaves us starving for that very love. (Parents of teens understand this very well.)

Sin removed in Christ

Maybe during your childhood you got the idea from the grownups around you that God is a sort of stern judge, holding your every action in the balances, ready to blast you with a curse if you blow it, or to let you into heaven if you measure up. But the gospel gives us the good news that God is not a stern judge at all; he is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, the Bible tells us, is the perfect representation to us humans of exactly what God is like (**Hebrews 1:3**). In other words, when God stoops low to come to us as one of us to show us exactly what he is like—how he thinks, how he acts, who he hangs out with and why—he is Jesus Christ. Yes, God made Jesus judge of the whole world, but he is anything but a stern judge. He forgives sinners; he doesn't condemn them (**John 3:17**). Sinners get condemned only if they refuse to come to him for forgiveness (v. 18). This is a judge who pays everybody's penalties out of his own pocket (**1 John 2:1-2**), declares all charges dropped against everybody forever (**Colossians 1:19-20**) and then invites the whole world to the greatest celebration in history. We can sit on our duffs and debate all we want about who will or who won't believe him and accept his mercy and come to his party, or we can leave all that to him (he can handle it), jump to our feet and scramble on down to the party ourselves, spreading the good word to and praying for whoever crosses our paths along the way.

Righteousness from God

The gospel, the good news, tells us: You already belong to Christ—receive it. Enjoy it. Trust him with your life. Enjoy his peace. Open your eyes to the beauty, the love, the peace, the joy in the world that can be seen only by those who are at rest in Christ's love. In Christ, we are free to face and admit our sinfulness. Because we trust him, we are not afraid to confess our sins and unload them on his shoulders. He is on our side. "Come to me," Jesus said, "all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (**Matthew 11:28-30**). When we rest in Christ, we get out of the business of measuring righteousness; now we can be completely honest and uninhibited in freely confessing to him our sins. In Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (**Luke 18:9-14**), it was the sinning tax collector, who freely admitted his sinfulness and wanted God's mercy, who was made righteous. The Pharisee, who was devoted to righteous living and kept track of his holy successes, had no clear view of his sinfulness and his correspondingly acute need for forgiveness and mercy, so he would not reach out and receive the righteousness that comes only from God (**Romans 1:17; 3:21; Philippians 3:9**). His very success in "holy living" became the blinding fog that prevented him from seeing how badly he needed God's mercy.

Honest assessment

Christ meets us with grace in the very midst of our deepest sinfulness and ungodliness (**Romans 5:6, 8**). It is precisely there, in our blackest unrighteousness, that he, the Sun of righteousness, arises for us with healing in his wings (**Malachi 4:2**). Only when we can see ourselves as we really are in our real need, as did that extortionist tax collector in the parable, only when our daily prayer can be, "God, have mercy on me, the sinner," are we able to allow ourselves to rest peacefully in the warmth of his healing embrace. We don't have anything to prove to God. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows our sinfulness and he knows our need for mercy. He has already done for us everything that needed to be done to secure our everlasting friendship with him. We can rest in his love. We can trust in his word of forgiveness. We don't have to measure up; we only have to believe him and trust him. God wants us to be his friends, not his electronic toys or his tin soldiers. He is looking for love, not cowering or preprogrammed servitude.

Faith, not works

Good relationships are based on trust, faithful commitment, allegiance, and above all, love. They are not based on mere obedience (**Romans 3:28; 4:1-8**). Obedience has its place, but it is, we ought to understand, a side effect of the relationship, not the cause of it. If you allow obedience to be the ground of your relationship with God, you will sink either into sticky

pride, like the Pharisee in the parable, or into fear and frustration, depending on how honest you are with yourself about your true reading on the perfection scale. As C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*, "There would be no sense in saying you trusted a person if you would not take his advice." When you trust Christ, you will listen to his advice and do your very best to live by it. But when you are in Christ, when you trust him, you will do your best without fear of rejection when you fail, as we all so often do. Fail, that is. When we rest in Christ, our striving to overcome our sinful habits and thoughts becomes a commitment rooted in the faithfulness of God in forgiving us and saving us. He has not thrown us into the middle of some never-ending battle to measure up (**Galatians 2:16**). Quite the contrary, he is bringing us with him on a journey of faith in which we learn to stop dragging around the chains of slavery and pain from which he has already freed us (**Romans 6:5-7**). We are not doomed to an impossible uphill struggle to prove ourselves worthy; instead, we are given the grace of a new life in which the Holy Spirit teaches us how to enjoy the new us created in righteousness and hidden with Christ in God (**Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:2-3**). Christ already did the hard part—dying for us; how much more will he do the easy part—bringing us home (**Romans 5:8-10**)?

Leap of faith

Faith, we are told in **Hebrews 11:1**, is our assurance of the things that we, the beloved of Christ, hope for. Faith is the only reality we currently sense of those good things God has promised—things that remain, as yet, quite invisible to our five senses. In other words, we see with the eyes of faith, as though it were already here, that wonderful new world in which voices are kind, hands are gentle, there is plenty to eat, and no one is an outsider. Things for which we have in this present evil world no tangible, physical evidence. But the faith generated by the Holy Spirit, who enflames in us this hope of salvation and the redemption of the whole creation (**Romans 8:23-25**), is the gift of God (**Ephesians 2:8-9**), and in it we are swaddled in his peace, his rest and his joy by the incomprehensible assurance of his overflowing love.

Have you taken the leap of faith? In a culture of acid stomachs and high blood pressure, the Holy Spirit urges us toward the path of serenity and peace in the arms of Jesus Christ. More than that, in a world of shocking poverty, disease, starvation and brutal injustice and war, God bids us (and enables us) to open our eyes of faith to the light of his word, which promises the end of pain, tears, tyranny and death, and the creation of a new world in which righteousness will be at home (**2 Peter 3:13**).

"Trust me," Jesus tells us. "Despite what you see, I am making everything new—even you. Quit worrying, and trust me to be for you, for your loved ones and for the whole world exactly who I told you I am. Quit worrying, and trust me to do for you, for your loved ones and for the whole world everything I have told you I will."

We can trust him. We can give him our burdens—our burdens of sin, our burdens of fear, our burdens of pain, disappointment, confusion and even doubt. He will carry them, just as he carries us, even before we ever knew it.

Author: J. Michael Feazell

GCI principle website and Moncton Websites—www.gci.org, www.worshipim.ca, www.facebook.com/GCIMoncton; For a wealth of helpful articles about God, grace and his plan for salvation, who we are, etc., please see the GCI.org website.

Contact Information: Pastor's contact information: email— evatour47@outlook.com