

I. Ignite

- A. I am super excited about a new series starting today. You might have already figured out the name of the series. We've hidden a few clues around.
- B. Yes, it is called IGNITE.
 1. The literal definition: to cause something to catch fire.
 2. The non-literal, metaphorical definition: to cause something to catch fire. Or, to create excitement, arouse the passions, and provoke the soul.
 - a) That is my goal for this series. That is my goal for your life.
- C. Let me tell you where I'm coming from for my talk today and all the talks in this season. It's about a problem most Christians face. And it's about a problem most of us face and don't even know we face. It's an underground problem. Subtle and hard to spot.
- D. I have a Bible verse, a big idea, and then a story.
 1. *Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14)*
 2. That I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me...
 - a) On the day God saved you, he had something in mind for you. A plan. A life. A place of maximum blessing and joy and peace. God had something in mind for you. That is God's best for you. That is the plan, the ideal.
 - b) That's the hope at least.
 - c) And when you are moving forward down the Grace Pathway with God, that is exactly where you will find yourself.
 - (1) But you have to press on.
 - (2) You have to forget the things which are behind.
 - (3) You have to reach forward.
 - (4) You have to press toward the goal for the prize.
 - (a) That desire, that drive, that little whisper deep in your heart is what I'm trying to ignite.
 - d) So that's the Bible verse.
 - e) And that's the problem. I scratch my head over this verse. Why aren't we living it? Why are so few followers of Jesus feeling this?
- E. And here's the Big Idea.
 1. *The main reason we aren't experiencing God's best is because we are willing to settle for less.*
 2. Welcome to church. Yeah, it's one of *those* sermons.
 3. So now here's the story.

II. A Tale of Two Righteous People

- A. The Bible tells the story of two righteous people. One was named Abraham, the other was named Lot. Uncle Abraham and nephew Lot.
 1. Both lived four thousand years ago, a very long time ago.
 2. Both were wealthy with huge flocks of cattle and livestock.
 3. Both had big families, a sign of power and prestige back in those days.
 4. Both were said to be righteous men. Good men, saved men, talking with God.
- B. *Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. (Genesis 24:1)*
- C. He walked the Grace Pathway for a very long time — no he wasn't perfect. But the outcome of his life was that he experienced a very blessed life.
- D. What about the nephew named Lot? The Bible says he was righteous too. He was a godly man in many ways... but... there was that time when the pasture lands were too small to fit both the flocks of Abraham and Lot at the same time. So their herdsmen started arguing over the space.
- E. So Uncle Abraham and Nephew Lot stood on a hill overlooking the valley. Abraham said, "There's this land over here, and there's that land over there. You pick."
- F. Lot picked the side that was more fertile, and more productive. It was also a land filled with evil people... a place you might have heard of called Sodom (Gen. 13:13).
- G. The end of the story of Abraham said, "The Lord had blessed him in all things."
- H. The end of the story for Lot the Bible said,
 1. *[God] delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)... (2 Peter 2:7, 8)*
 - a) He had all the money in the world... but he tormented his soul from day to day. Why? Because he settled.
 - b) He had a family, and a house, and servants, and security... but he tormented his soul from day to day... because he settled.
 - c) This guy had, on paper, everything anyone could want. But he lived a tormented life. An oppressed life.
 - d) Why? Because he settled. He flirted with sin. He stood in its shadow and expected nothing to happen.
 - e) He was a righteous man, a saved man, but he was not pressing on, not forgetting the things which are behind, not reaching forth for what God had for him, and not caring for his heavenly prize.
 - (1) He had everything, but he felt tormented.
 - (2) He was rich, but he felt oppressed.
 - (a) And the painful tragedy is it didn't have to be that way.
 2. *The main reason we aren't experiencing God's best is because we are willing to settle for less.*

3. There are four ways that Christians settle, and might not even realize it.

III. Settling

A. 1. *You settle for the IDEA of grace but not the KNOWLEDGE of grace.*

1. I preach grace, love grace, study grace, teach grace. The grace of God has been my theme, and shall be till I die.
2. Everybody talks about grace. Every church preaches it. Every Christian group claims it. Even the world has an idea of grace.
3. But that idea is wimpy and weak and small.
4. The idea of grace is that it makes God nice. It makes God lenient. It makes God too tired to care about sin. It pares the claws of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and silences his roar.
5. I'm saying there a shallow idea of grace in the land, and it falls far short of true biblical knowledge.
6. It's a grace that offers no justice.
7. It's a grace that erases hell.
8. It's a grace that saves everyone with a pulse.
9. But everybody talks about Grace... Ask any person on the street: What's your favorite church song? Oh, that's easy. It's Amazing Grace. Amazing Grace. Amazing Grace.
10. But there's no amazement.
11. Because they've eviscerated grace. They've gutted it.
 - a) It's a Christ-less grace.
 - b) It's a Cross-less grace.
 - c) It's a blood-less grace.
 - d) So it's a meaningless grace.
12. And if all that comes to mind for you when you here the word grace, is THAT GOD IS NICE, then bless your heart.
13. God loves you. God cares for you. God will save you, and if he saves you, he will bring you safely home to heaven one day.
14. BUT... if all you think when you hear the word grace is something about God the Heavenly Grandmother with cookies in the oven, you have settled for much much less than God's best for your life.
15. The exact meaning of the word Grace should be crystal clear to every child of God.
 - a) You need to know it, study it, and go deep with it.
 - (1) You need to trace out grace to its origins in the heart of God before the worlds were made.
 - (2) You need to merge your idea of grace with equal measures of a love that never fails and a holiness that never compromises.
 - (3) And you need to be able to describe the utterly non-negotiable linkages between God's amazing grace, and that horrible, beautiful, majestic Old Rugged Cross.
 - (4) And you need to know the Word of God, the B-I-B-L-E, and be able to construct the doctrine of grace from its pages, and its stories, and its words, and its truths.
 - (a) Please don't settle for the bland idea of a meaningless grace when you can feast at the table of the riches of the knowledge of a grace that will blow your mind.
16. Now you might say, "Bill... I know grace. I've studied it. I've learned it. I've heard you preach it. I've read books about it."
17. Great. But still, beware. Because there's a second way Christians settle, and it's really common and hard to spot.

B. 2. *You settle for the KNOWLEDGE of grace but not the EXPERIENCE of grace.*

1. Like saying, yes, that's my grandma's lasagna... but not eating it.
2. In the circles where I first began to learn about grace, there were many people who studied grace, learned all about it, and could open their Bibles, and make a great case for grace.
3. They didn't like preachers who didn't preach "the gospel of grace." They criticized Billy Graham for that even. Hey, if I can accomplish one tenth of one percent of what he accomplished, I would die a happy man.
4. So they knew the doctrines of grace inside and out. They could give a speech about it. Some could be professors of grace.
5. But their lives were emotional wrecks. Their families lurched from crisis to crisis. And they lived in constant discouragement and defeat.
6. Why?
7. They settled for the knowledge of grace, which is important, but they never moved past knowledge to experience. It was all theory. It was all debate.
8. It was just doctrine... and I love doctrine. It's the building blocks of life.
9. But it's not life.
10. My Italian grandparents made the best food I've ever eaten. Every Sunday afternoon, we went over to Grandma and Grandpa's house for Sunday dinner. Always homemade soup, and roast beef, and pasta with fresh made sauce. Always something wonderful and delicious.
11. Imagine sitting down to a dinner like that and just analyzing it. Yes, I notice the ricotta cheese here in the lasagna. You have made a red sauce, and I believe it was Roma tomatoes. You've gone easy on the garlic, and just right on the salt...
12. And the person next to you argues, no, no, no. There's way too much garlic...
13. You haven't eaten it, you're just analyzing it. Theorizing over it.
 - a) You're a professor but not a possessor.
14. What do you need to do?
 - a) Eat!
 - b) Oh taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the person who puts their trust in him.
 - (1) You know the promises of God, now claim them.

- (2) You know the Word of God, now apply it.
- (3) You know the commandments of God, now obey them.
- (4) You know the names of God, now claim them.
- (5) You know the riches of grace, now use them.
- (6) You know the power of his fiery angels, now rest your anxious heart in his all-protecting hand.
- (7) You know the presence of God, now act like he's here with you.
15. The IDEA of grace has to give way to a DEEP KNOWLEDGE OF GRACE. And the DEEP KNOWLEDGE OF GRACE has to lead you up to the the EXPERIENCE OF GRACE. This is God's pattern and plan for you.
16. And to not follow it is to leave blessings on the table never unwrapped, never claimed, and never experienced in your life.
 - a) The main reason we aren't experiencing all that God has for us is because we are willing to settle for less.
17. But you say, "Bill, I am experiencing grace. I am learning God's promises and trusting them too. I am studying God's names, and claiming them and praying them through. I am experiencing grace. But I'm still not feeling that I'm living in the best place God has for me yet."
18. That's because there's a third way that many Christians settle...
 - a) Grace isn't just water for a thirsty soul, it's FUEL for A FIRE IN YOUR BONES.
- C. 3. You settle for the EXPERIENCE of grace but not the LIFE of grace.
 - a) Grace isn't just water for a thirsty soul, it's FUEL for A FIRE IN YOUR BONES.
2. And I'm praying that God will ignite that fuel.
 - a) There's an EXPERIENCE of grace for rookie Christians.
 - b) There's a LIFE of grace for veteran Christians.
 - (1) The experience of grace is episodic. It's good days and bad days. Answered prayers and unanswered prayers. It's ups and downs. It's to and fro, the Bible says (Eph 4:14). It's sometimes there and sometimes not there.
 - (2) You can go beyond episodic experiences to a steady state, and that's the mature, veteran's life of grace.
3. How does that work?
 - a) *Romans 12:2: "Be transformed [metamorphosis] by the renewing of your mind."*
4. Grace isn't an app. It's an operating system. You can't just install grace alongside the other stuff in your brain. It will make the whole system crash.
 - a) Grace causes the narcissism, selfie app to crash.
 - b) Grace causes the materialism app to crash.
 - c) Grace causes the addiction app to crash.
 - d) Grace causes the dysfunction app to crash.
5. They don't go together. You can't just add an idea of grace to whatever else you have going on in your brain.
6. You have to do something else, something you might resist... or even deny you need.
7. You have to let grace take over. You have to go from PC to Mac. It's not just a system upgrade, it's a whole new operating system.
8. Let me say the same thing a different way.
 - a) *Grace lives at that place in your life where theology intersects with psychology.*
 - b) Here's your proof:
 - (1) *Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:5, NKJV).*
9. This verse gives us to huge truth, one a theological fact, and the other a psychological assurance.
 - a) THEOLOGICAL FACT: Your future good is as certain as the love of God.
 - (1) How do you know tomorrow will be good? Because God loves you.
 - (2) How do you know you can handle whatever comes your way? Because God loves you.
 - (3) How do you know all you need will be provided just in time? Because God loves you.
 - (4) How do you know when you close your eyes for the last time on earth you will open them in heaven forever? Because God loves you.
 - (a) The Cross of Christ is the absolute guarantee of the love of God, right? That is theological fact.
 - (5) But it goes deeper, because this theological fact is to become psychological assurance.
10. THEOLOGICAL FACT: Your future good is as certain as the love of God.
11. PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSURANCE: Your confidence in future good is as certain as your confidence of the love of God.
 - a) Do you know what made Superman weak? Kryptonite.
 - b) Do you know what makes Christians weak? Doubts about the love of God. It's spiritual kryptonite.
 - c) So what does God do? He pours out the love of God in our hearts. In other words, he takes your old operating system... the philosophies of a polluted world system, and pushes it out of your brain by installing a new operating system based on the love of God, through the Cross of Christ, and that new system is called GRACE.
 - d) How? Through time, time, time in the Bible, Bible, Bible. There's no substitute.
 - (1) The Bible is the computer code for the love of God.
 - (a) It explains weakness of the human race.
 - (b) It reveals the sinfulness of the human race.
 - (c) It uncovers the hostility of the human heart against God.
 - e) And into this, God enters. He does not stand distant or aloof. But in comes his precious son. In comes the awfulness of the crucifixion. In comes Calvary's love that cleansed our sins, accepted us in our ungodly state, robed us with robes of righteousness, and did all of this grace before we ever lifted a finger to improve even one molecule in our lives.

- f) In comes the gospel that says believe on him and you will be saved.
- g) In the Bible, God has done everything he possibly can to splash the corridors of your imagination with the bright hues of the love of God... he has countered every objection. He has silenced every critic. He has done all he can to answer the self-defeating self-talk that makes you doubt the love of God.
- h) The Bible is God's Gift of Grace Rehab. God speaks to you in great power. In the Bible,
 - (1) He has proven the love of God.
 - (2) He has clarified the love of God showing God loves you because of who and what he is, and not because of who and what you are.
 - (3) He has magnified the love of God, because it flows to us when we are without strength, without righteousness, and without love for God... and yet God loves you with an everlasting and omnipotent love anyway.
 - (4) He has grounded the love of God, showing forth the sacrificial death of Christ as the all-sufficient ground of a love that reaches far beyond all accusations of wimpiness or sentimentality in God.
 - (5) He has offered the love of God, as a gift of grace, to be received by faith alone in Christ alone.
 - (6) Like a radiant diamond, God, in the Bible, has held up his infinite love, and let it sparkle from every conceivable angle.
- i) So that you know exactly what kind of muscular, profound, self-conditioned, marvelous, infinite, matchless, blood-bought love he is talking about.
- j) And when all that system is uploaded into your spirit, finally, your psychology will match your theology, and you can say that the love of God has shed abroad in your heart and you live with a hope that can never disappoint.
- 12. That is grace as a steady state, rather than grace as episodes and periods in your life. That's what I'm talking about.
- 13. So many settle for an EXPERIENCE of grace, when God is calling you up to a LIFE of grace, and that is when you are beginning to lay hold of all that God had in mind when he laid hold of you.
- D. 4. *You settle for the LIFE of grace but not the DESTINY of grace*
 - 1. I will be short here.
 - 2. I wish I could ignite a fire in your belly for the glories of the world to come. You were made for this world, but not for this world only. Your real home, your truest home, the air you were designed to breathe is celestial air. You were created for heaven.
 - 3. And here is what so many Christians miss.
 - a) The grace of God on earth will save you.
 - b) The grace of God on earth will bless you.
 - c) The grace of God on earth will grow you.
 - d) The grace of God on earth will use you.
 - (1) But it is only as you go on that way with passion, and eagerness, and courage, and grit... it is only as you march through the thorns and thistles of trials on this giant pain machine called earth...
 - (2) It is only as you press into the grace pathway on earth that you will have rewards forever in heaven.
 - e) Heaven is not a reward. Heaven is a gift.
 - f) But in heaven, there will be rewards... and that is your future grace.
 - (1) *I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:14)*
 - g) That's the upward call. That's the heavenly rewards, and treasures, and thrones, and crowns, and riches, that never ever go away.
 - h) Future Grace is the greatest prize of all.
 - i) To the Christian who says, I'm going to heaven, and that's all I need, I say one day you will regret it. You're settling. You're losing out in this life. And you're losing mind-blowing potential in the world to come. These momentary pleasures on earth that you are living for are nothing compared to the eternal glories in heaven that could be yours but aren't.
 - j) IDEA OF GRACE < KNOWLEDGE OF GRACE < EXPERIENCE OF GRACE < LIFE OF GRACE < DESTINY OF GRACE
 - 4. Wake up. Quit sleepwalking. Take responsibility. Quit whining. Man up. Woman up. And step into your birthright. Quit limping beneath your dignity. Quit settling. Shake off the lethargy. Kill the complacency. Shed the self-satisfied smugness that substitutes for holiness.
 - 5. Call on God to light the fire that once burned bright in you...
 - 6. God, ignite us all.

IV. Wake Up Call

- A. *And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. (Romans 13:11, 12, NKJV).*