

# The Journey of Righteousness

by Ray Greenly

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith in achieving righteousness and the journey of following Jesus, overcoming delays, resistance, and challenges along the way.*

**Duration:** 50:08

**Scripture:** Genesis 12:1, John 8:31, John 8:34, Romans 3:9-18, Romans 3:20, Romans 3:28

**Topics:** "Righteousness"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses how God had a plan to win back the hearts of Adam and Eve after they were deceived by the devil. God not only wanted to restore their relationship, but also deal with the wickedness and guilt in their spirits. The preacher emphasizes the importance of holding onto Jesus' teachings and knowing the truth, which will set us free from the bondage of sin. The battle for our souls is ongoing, with Satan claiming ownership, but Jesus offers freedom, healing, and restoration. The preacher encourages listeners to choose to leave the darkness of this world and follow Jesus to the celestial city, understanding that there is only one path that leads to the kingdom of heaven.

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## Transcript

The journey of righteousness. The journey of righteousness. I've spent so much time in my life reading the scriptures and trying to sort through all of the different things I've been taught, what people have said to me, what I've read, reading and not understanding and going back and rereading and rereading and saying, I just can't get it.

I'm missing something. There has to be something I'm missing because it's not working for me. Part of what I began to discover were the many paths that would lead me in many different directions.

I discovered it's not in the traveling that the victory is found. We can travel down many, many different roads, some very pleasant, some very dark, but it's not the path that is the victory. Some people I'm naturally drawn to because their path is filled with light and they enjoy doing many of the things that I enjoy doing.

Sweet companionship is always welcome in this journey as we make our way toward heaven. But then welling up in my soul has always been, what is this all about? And today I can only share one word that this whole journey is about. And that one word is righteousness.

The Greek is dikasune. It means literally rendered innocent. I have to tell you, even as a little boy, I was very aware of what was right and what was wrong.

And I'm suspecting that all of you also know what is right and wrong. Nobody has to bop you on the head and say, don't do that, that's wrong. No, we know that rage and anger against another person is wrong.

We know that lying and stealing, we know that's wrong. We have that built in conscience that instructs us about what is right and wrong. But if you're anything like I've been, if it seemed to be to my advantage, I was willing to go the wrong direction.

And then I carried this guilt in my soul. And then of course, when I got more sophisticated and went to graduate school and began taking courses in psychotherapy, and they began to talk about real guilt and false guilt. And they began to identify how you should deal with it.

Finally, I just shoved it all away. I said, guilt is guilt, and I don't like it. So how do I deal with it? And I came back to one simple word, innocence.

To be innocent before God, to be innocent before man. It would be very interesting if we had some kind of equipment that I could set up right here and would come and stand in front of it. And it would immediately say, guilty or innocent.

And then it would even begin to speak to you and say, here's your sin. Here's what you did right. What would the machine say to you today? How would you stand? Because you know, of course, there is that person who absolutely knows the inner workings of our soul.

And that person knows whether we're innocent or guilty. Now, when God lost his bride, Adam and Eve, when the devil won their hearts away from him, and they sided with him, God was not happy. But he had a plan in place to win their hearts back.

But it was not enough just to win their hearts back. He had to deal with the wickedness of their spirit. He had to deal with the guilt of their spirit.

He had to deal with the damage that had been inflicted in their hearts by becoming guilty. He had to find a way to restore that relationship with integrity. He had to find a way to reestablish that innocence in the heart of man.

So if you would read carefully from Genesis to Revelation, as I've done many times, you would find that what's on God's heart and what's on his mind is this problem of sin, and how he's going to repair that and establish once more his bride and give to her all of the gifts he desires to give. God's heart is never to take away from us. It's always to give to us.

We don't serve a God who is a thief. I mean, look at any happy marriage and you'll quickly discover that the secret to the happiness in that marriage is that they give to each other. They don't steal from each other.

They're constantly pouring themselves out in love and service to one another. I often say marriage is not 50-50. Marriage is 100-100.

Sometimes I like to say it's 200-200. I mean, innocence and love require giving. So when you go through the scriptures, it's very apparent that what's on God's heart is this sin problem.

And he wants to find a way to heal that problem in our hearts. And unlike much of modern Christianity, God does not want to simply cover over our sin and pretend it didn't happen. Any more than a couple who has one partner committing adultery on the other, the other partner can't simply say, come on home, honey, everything's okay.

Everything is not okay. There was adultery. It has to be dealt with in depth.

It has to be dealt with all the way to the bottom to restore that relationship in innocence. So how's Jesus going to do that? Well, we all know that his radical solution was to himself come and die on Calvary, covering the cost, restoring a bridge between our hearts and God's heart. And we can travel that bridge if we choose.

Now, I've been studying with you in the book of Romans, and I'd encourage you to just open your scriptures there. In Romans, the third chapter, we begin to hear something that is absolutely stunning. And I pray that today you're going to be able to catch the depth of what God wants to share with you.

In Romans, the third chapter, we're told, beginning with verse nine, and then on through the following through verse 18, we're told about the absolute degradation, wickedness of the heart of man, outlining for us the true condition of every man's heart. And then he begins to talk about the miraculous work of healing that heart. He says in verse 20, no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law.

Of course, the word declared is not in the Greek text. It's an added word, and it should rightly be translated, no one will be rendered innocent in his sight by observing the law. In other words, there is no possibility that we can earn our way back into the good graces of God.

The broken relationship cannot be repaired by our doing everything now that we think is right. We can't earn our position with God. Then he says in verse 23, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified, it says in the NIV, in the actual Greek, it's again rendered innocent.

No one, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are rendered innocent freely by his grace. So let's define terms we've usually spoken of in the modern Christian church of grace in a way that the scriptures do not speak of it. In the modern church, we want to talk about grace as a blanket covering.

That's not the biblical sense of grace. Grace is never a covering blanket except in the old covenant. In the old covenant, sins were covered over.

But in the new covenant, it's made righteous. See, part of the problem that I had with guilt was that everyone said to me, look, Jesus died for you. You're saved.

But I knew I was continuing to walk in rebellion and sin against God. And I said, how can I be saved and continue to walk in rebellion against God? That doesn't make sense to me. If I'm continuing to walk in sin, then the scriptures say, the father is the devil, not Jesus.

That Jesus comes and brings honest, real innocence back into our hearts. I said to a young person recently who was weeping over her promiscuous lifestyle. And she said, I wish I could be a virgin again.

And I said, didn't you know you can be? She stopped crying and she looked at me and she said, how? I mean, that's what she wanted, to be innocent again. And I began to explain to her that when she comes to Jesus, she's made into a completely new creature. The old is gone.

The new has come. And with that is a whole new heart and the assurance of a whole new body. That you can be clean before God, that he doesn't wash you and leave you guilty.

He doesn't wash you and leave you in sin. He washes you and you're clean. You're new.

You're a new creature. That's the glorious gospel. Can I just say this? When people told me that the gospel was that I could be saved, but I'd have to walk in sin until I died.

My response was, that's not gospel. Gospel means good news. Good news is that I'm set free by the power of the blood of Jesus and Satan no longer rules over me.

That's good news to my heart. Don't tell me that I have to be a prisoner of the devil until I die and that that's the gospel. And then maybe if I've been made righteous after I die, I'll get to spend eternity.

I don't want that kind of gospel. I want a gospel of power. I want a gospel that cleanses and washes.

I want a gospel that heals my broken heart. I want a gospel that is of Jesus. He didn't come and die to let the devil continue to ravish his bride.

You know, what would you think if a man says to a thief, well, you're welcome to come in and you can beat my bride up and you can steal from her. You can even rape her if you want to. But after we hit the 60-year-old mark, then she's mine.

I don't think so. What woman would marry that kind of a man? That's not who Jesus is. Jesus did not say, you continue being beat up by the devil, you continue being raped, you continue being stolen from.

No, there's a gospel that says in Jesus Christ, it has to end now. We're restored, we're healed. It's not make believe.

Now in the book of Romans in the third chapter, verse 28, for we maintain that a man is, it says justified, but in the Greek it's dikyu, which means literally, for we maintain that a man is made righteous by faith apart from observing the law. This wonderful gospel, Paul says in the first two chapters of the book of Romans, that a righteousness not of the law, but a righteousness that flows directly out of the heart of God was given to us. A righteousness from the heart of God that flows to us.

Then in the fourth chapter, Paul begins a discussion of Abraham, our forefather, asking what did he discover in this matter? And if in fact Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about, but not before God. Now read carefully this fourth chapter and see if you come to the same conclusion that I've come to. And I've read it and re-read it and read it and re-read it, because when I don't quickly grab it, I know there's something very deep that God wants me to get a hold of.

And I want to tell you, men and women were not made righteous in the Old Testament, under the old covenant, by works. Righteousness cannot come by works. You can't work your way into innocence.

You're either made innocent or you are guilty. Okay, you can't, you can't be made righteous by your works. It takes something outside of you that has to come into your heart.

So it says, Abraham, in verse three, believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. This word credited in the Greek is a an arithmetic word. It is literally adding up the reality of what is there.

It is not, as some have translated it, imputed righteousness. The word literally means add up the reality of what is there. Abraham is believing God and it is being credited to him as righteousness because God was granting Abraham righteousness as a gift.

Now this righteousness being spoken of is different than new covenant righteousness in this sense. When Abraham lived, he was looking forward to the crucifixion of Jesus. So sins were not forgiven.

Okay, all of the sin of the Old Testament was not forgiven until Jesus died on Calvary. When he died, then sin was no longer covered. It was forgiven.

That's an important understanding for you to grab a hold of because the issue of Scripture is sin and lack of innocence. So if we are going to be innocent, that innocence is going to have to flow out of the cross of Jesus. But all through the Old Testament, the concern of God was righteousness.

If you go with me to the book of Genesis, Genesis, the 12th chapter, the Lord said to Abraham, leave your country, your people, and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. There is no way to begin a journey toward Jesus without leaving someplace. That sounds so simple, but it's so profound.

See, there are so many paths that wind their way through this world. Somebody this morning texted me early and said, Pastor, I won't be in church today. I just text back a quick text and I said, there are so many paths.

Don't get lost. There are so many paths and each one has its attraction. Bunyan, in his book, Pilgrim's Progress, talks about the city of destruction, where he begins out of reading the Scripture to understand that the world he lives in is going to be burned with fire.

It's going to be destroyed. And he becomes diswrought over this and begins to cry out, how can I escape the city of destruction? How can I find my way to a place of safety? He begins to cry out. He can't sleep.

He's burdened on his back. His sins are mounting up and he's being exhausted from carrying the guilt and the sorrow and the sadness. And he's saying, I've got to get rid of this burden and I've got to get out of this city of destruction.

The Lord said to Abram, leave your country, go to the land I will show you. That is the call of every person who is going to follow Jesus. It's going to mean choosing to leave the city of destruction, to leave the darkness, to leave the bitterness, to leave the anger, to leave the love of this world and the darkness of this world.

To leave all of that. And to choose to go to the land that he will show us. What I'm trying to say to you today is, we need to stop taking our destination for granted.

And we need to stop just traveling down any road that happens to be in front of us. We need to be very clear about where we've come from and where we're going. And understand that there is a journey to be taken.

Now please, I'm going to show you, but I want to say it first. On the journey, there are going to be times when we're going to get beat up. But it is not Jesus doing the beating up.

There are going to be times when we cut our hands. There are going to be times when we have accidents. There are going to be times when the devil steps in and says, I'm taking you.

And in those times, we have to be absolutely clear about where we're going and why we're going. We have to know where we came from and know the path that will take us to the celestial city. Because there's only one path that will take us to the celestial city.

All paths go to the same place. All paths go to the judgment bar of God. And there, everything's going to get sorted out.

But there's only one path that goes to that judgment bar of God that has a pass on through that judgment bar that takes us into the kingdom of heaven, the celestial city, heaven, paradise, eternity with Jesus. There's only one path that takes us there, but it's a very dangerous path. And we will meet Apollyon on that path, and we will fight even physically to make our way past him, calling on the name of Jesus and wearing the armor of God.

I can't tell you of anything more dangerous short term than choosing to leave the place of darkness and sin and travel toward Jesus and the light. It is the most dangerous journey you can take. You better have your crash helmet on, and you better have your seat belt buckled up.

It's a ride. But I want to show you just a couple of things that Abraham went through as he went on this journey. First of all, in the end of chapter 11, Terah, he was the father of Abram.

Terah means in the Hebrew delay. So there are people and circumstances that will do everything they can do to delay us and to confuse us. And to be honest with you, there have been times on this journey when I've taken a turn that was wrong and I've gotten lost and I haven't known which way to go.

And I was raised with the philosophy, God can't steer a parked car, so just keep going. And I'm all man, so I don't ever like to turn around and go back. There's always got to be a way through by going forward until you get to an absolute dead end.

And there is no place to go. I've learned now when I've gotten on a wrong path, just turn around and go back and say, Jesus, I'm sorry. Would you show me your path again and wait on him to make plain what his steps are for you? I know I have, and I know many of you have, been on a path where you hoped it would bring you to a place that you would enjoy.

And so you've just bulldozed your way through. You've just rammed your way through, no matter what you are going to go through. And oh, how you have suffered because of that decision.

How I have suffered because of that decision. Abraham is being delayed by his family and the Lord has said to him, go, I'm calling you out. And he's delaying.

And then beyond that, they live in a very sophisticated city. Ur of the Chaldees at that time, we're told by archaeologists, had running water, had flushable toilets. This was a very sophisticated business center.

It was a business center, but also a cultural center. It was a city of learning and commerce, international commerce. It was the New York, if you please.

And now he's supposed to go and live in tents. Probably they owned much property. They're supposed to give up all of their property.

They're supposed to leave and go to the wicked place of Canaan. And then Sarai can't have children. And God is promising him that if he goes, he's going to bless him.

And he doesn't have a wife that can have children. And in that culture, that's a curse. Well, they finally leave Ur of the Chaldees.

They get as far as Haran. And Haran in the Hebrew means parched, parched, dry. So as he begins to do what God told him to do, the first thing he encounters is total resistance from his family.

And his family says, OK, we're going with you. They get to Haran and dad says, I'm sorry, I can't go any further. Let's stop here.

We're partway to where your God told you you were supposed to go. So let's settle here. And they settled there until dad died.

Chapter 12. They make their way into Canaan land. And in verse 10.

Now there was a famine in the land. And Abram went down to Egypt to live. So God calls you out.

Your family delays you. Friends hold you back. And finally, you get on the road and you get to where God told you to go.

And there's a famine. Your business dries up. You're struggling financially.

And yet he's on the road that God told him to go on. Remember what God is dealing with? God's interest is not money or he'll use money. It takes money and resources to live.

I can't take faith to giant and say, I'd like to buy these groceries on faith. Now, giant says, no, give me the cash. Right.

OK, so you can't go to giant on faith. You have to take the cash with you. God knows you need these things.

But remember what he said, seek first the kingdom of heaven, seek first the authority of God over your life, royal authority, and then seek righteousness. So God's agenda is not any of the world's agenda. His agenda is that we go on the journey that will bring us into righteousness and into the final entrance into the New Jerusalem.

That's God's agenda. So when I bring my agenda into the picture, I'm off course. When my emotions kick up and I say I have to have I'm off course.

I need to know where's God going? What's his agenda? So Abraham travels to Egypt and while he's in Egypt, he has to lie to protect himself and his family or he thinks he does, causes him great consternation, causes trouble. He is shamed by Pharaoh in Egypt and publicly kicked out and told, go back to Canaan. Well, that's where God sent him in the first place.

And now can I tell you if Abraham had remained in Canaan in the midst of the famine and had he prayed and asked God to send the rain, the famine would have been over. God would have granted him food and sustenance where he sent him. God does not starve us out.

God desires to break the starve out and bring to us the gifts he desires to give to us. But what I want to just very quickly bring out of the whole story of the book of Abraham is that God was not interested in righteousness that was not real. Everything in the story of Abraham is about God bringing him into

circumstances, bringing into contact with other people, bringing business possibilities to him.

Everything God did with him in Egypt and afterward in Canaan land was for the purpose of establishing innocence in Abraham's life. God's concern was not the external success or comfort. God's concern was the internal person being transformed into the likeness of Jesus.

So everywhere in the old covenant, in this story of Abraham, you find God moving to bring about circumstances and then you find the devil moving to counter those circumstances, to block God from being able to do a work in Abraham's heart. Now I don't know about you, but at some point, had I been Abraham, I might have said, look, this deal's not working. I'm going back to Mesopotamia.

I'm done with this journey. Have any of you ever felt like, look, I'm done with this journey. I just want to go back and have a normal, happy life.

I didn't ask for all these trials. I didn't ask for all of this difficulty. I didn't ask for this.

What I want is just a comfortable, happy lifestyle with friends, food, and family. I mean, if you've got friends, food, and family, I think you've got it all for this world. But that's not God's agenda for us.

Oh, he'll bring the food. He'll bring the friends. He'll bring the family.

But his goal is, how can I make you innocent? How can I restore you as my bride? So we are faced with this incredible war where the devil says, I'm going to drive you back to my bondage. I'm going to make you so angry. I'm going to make you so sick.

I'm going to strip everything you have. I'm going to destroy you until you come back and you acknowledge that you belong to me and you finally have come to your senses. And Jesus comes and says, no, my power is sufficient.

I'm going to rescue my people. I'm going to restore my people. But he has to walk us through whatever difficulty Satan wants to throw at us until finally we come to a very clear, intellectual, cold-blooded decision.

Jesus, I trust you. And I'm not going to walk away from you. It doesn't matter what the circumstances are.

It doesn't matter what my emotions are. It doesn't matter who loves me and who hates me. I am going to trust you, Jesus.

I am going to love you and I will not turn away from you. Now, I do confess through the process of my life, there have been times when I have been extremely angry. Angry with God, angry with people, angry everywhere.

And with that anger comes a good bit of hostility. My dad used to say, Raymond, I don't suffer fools. Well, I never had the courage to ask what he meant by that.

Now I know. God is attempting to restore his children and he's in the process all through the Old Testament of building true righteousness, not by the law, but by his grace. That may surprise you.

Did you know the Old Testament is full of grace? By his grace, they could never keep the law. They tried. They couldn't keep the law.

But God was building real character into these men like King David, Elijah, Elisha. He tried to build it into Saul. And Saul said, I don't want to have anything to do with this.

I see an opportunity. I can go and become the man. I'm on my way.

And he blew God off. And he finally ended up his life sitting with his feet under the table of a witch, full of darkness, full of despair, undone. Well, King David, Psalm 23, said, Thou preparest for me a table in the presence of my enemies.

Meaning, I'm going to sit down and I'm going to feast with the Lord God of heaven. And my enemies are going to have to sit around on the outside and keep their mouths shut. They're not going to be able to say anything to me.

And he says, my cup will overflow. My cup will overflow. Then you come into the New Testament, and now something incredible has happened.

No longer are our sins covered over. Now our sins are totally removed in reality from our lives. It's very, very clear.

If you look, let's look quickly in John. John, the eighth chapter, verse 31. To the Jews who had believed in him, Jesus said, If you hold to my teachings, you are really my disciples.

Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. What is the truth? Jesus replied in verse 34, I tell you the truth. Everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed. So Jesus is going to do everything in his power to open before you freedom, healing, restoration.

The battle is raging. Satan is saying, no, I claim you. You belong to me.

And if you're not consciously aware of the ebb and of tide and the flow of this battle that's going on for your soul right now, you are much to be pitied because the battle is raging. Because everything in our hearts rises up and says, look, I can go do it myself. I have skills and ability.

I have a tool chest full of tools that are sharp. I can go create for myself my own reality. The Lord Jesus says, no, you can't.

Wait on me. Let me set you free. I was talking to Mark this last week.

He was saying, I need to take this pile of 80 pound bags and I need to move them over here to do a job. Now he said, I cannot sit down beside that pile of bags and say, by faith, those bags are moved over there. No, he's going to have to pick those bags up and move them over there.

That's reality. So the acid test is, does God want those bags moved over there? Or does Mark want those bags moved over there? And we can fill our lives doing everything we desire to do to build our own reality. Or we come to Jesus and we wait upon him and we pray through, what is the path you have for me? My path does not look like what your path will look like.

The question is the path you're on. Is it the path Jesus has assigned you to? And some people say, well, I'm in a job that Jesus did not give me. I went out and got it myself.

Pastor, should I quit my job? I said, no, no, stay right there. Keep doing what you're doing. Repent.

Tell Jesus you went out and created your own reality. Now stay right there and pray and wait for Jesus to take you the next step. And he will open before you the path he wants you on.

And there will be no check in your spirit. Everything will be wide open. You will know you are following the Holy Spirit.

He will confirm it in your heart. And then go the path he's opened before you. See, for me, it's a great comfort to know that I'm not any longer in charge of my life.

I've given total authority to Jesus Christ. He rules my heart and my life now. Does that mean he wants me to go to a monastery? No.

He wants to use the gifts and talents he's put in my heart. He wants to create things. He wants to do things that will bring glory to his kingdom.

But I have to make sure it's for his kingdom and not my kingdom. That's the issue. And sin is what twists us and turns us and causes us to be ruled by our emotions or evil desires.

Now please, I'm not trying to sugarcoat this. The walk to heaven is a bitter battle. But it's also a bitter battle that is waged in the power of the blood of Jesus Christ.

It's a battle that is won by the power of the blood of Jesus Christ. If we are willing to wait upon him, to open our hearts to his direction, he will tell us the way he wants us to go. The concern of Jesus from start to finish is not whether I end up dying a wealthy man or a poor man.

The heart of Jesus is not whether I've had the acclaim of the world. The heart of Jesus is that I've allowed him to pour himself into me in such a manner that he's made me a righteous man or a righteous woman. That God has done that for me.

The scriptures say, Christ in you, the hope of glory. So I know today as I speak to you that some of you have real messes. It's so easy to get a mess.

It's just kind of a natural part of being human to create a mess. But you don't have to live in that mess. You can stand absolutely by faith and say in the name of Jesus, I command this mess to leave my life.

And I'm going to trust Jesus to walk me through this thing step by step. I'm trusting him to tell me what to do and what not to do, where to go and where not to go. I am going to trust him to clean up my mess.

Some of you today are going to be more comfortable just continuing to stir around and make a bigger mess. And you can do that until you're sick and tired of being sick and tired. But at some point, I urge you go to Jesus and declare in the name of Jesus that he is your Lord and your Savior and you are going to follow him.

This following of Jesus is not some sentimental intellectual deal. It's day by day, allowing Jesus to order my steps, giving up my greed, my jealousy, my anger, giving up those things that cut down other people.

It's choosing to walk in peace with Jesus Christ.

So I pray this week if you have a mess, Jesus will get it cleaned up for you. Usually it takes more than a week. It's part of the process.

There's a real difference between camping in a mess and getting it taken care of so we can be on the journey. I want you on the journey. Let's pray.

Lord, thank you. Thank you for your kindness and your mercy. It's just astonishing to me that what you really desire in your heart for me is that I be innocent so that there can be perfect fellowship between us.

Lord, such love, such mercy. Lord, thank you. I ask, Lord, that you would grant to each the strength to leave behind the city of destruction and get on that narrow path toward heaven.

And that any person in this congregation today that is in a mess, Lord, would you give them the courage and the strength and the power to get that mess cleaned up and once more set out on the journey. Lord, thank you. I pray in your holy name.

Amen.

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