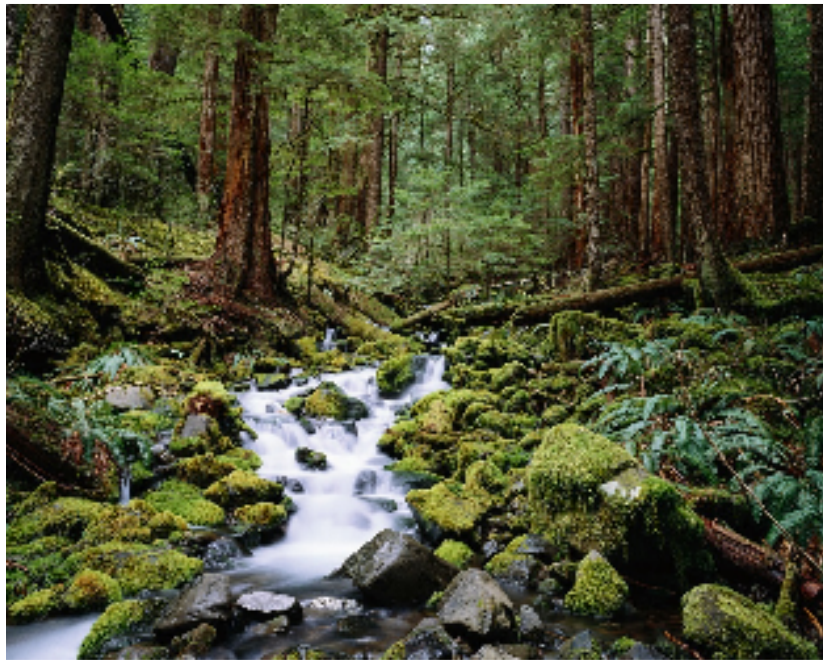


THE
MOSBY
CHRECHKE
CHRONICLES



Rev. Dr. Steven L. Frazier

CHAPTER SEVEN



That's Just Stupid...

Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:11-21

Josh's funeral was over. Matt and his family were headed back to their car when he heard someone call his name. It was Shelby. He stopped and waited for her while his wife and kids went on to the car. When Shelby caught up with him, it was like lightning out of a clear blue sky. She hissed, "I heard what you were saying about me before the funeral." As far as she was concerned, Matt had been making fun of her, and she didn't like it one bit.

Matt hadn't seen that coming. Just about the time he tried to explain himself, Shelby cut him off. She said, "You and Bobby Ray made it sound like I was only dating Josh was so I could marry a football star and get a big house with a circle drive." Matt could see he wasn't going to win this debate, so he just apologized. "Look, Shelby, I'm

sorry. I shoulda found a better way of making my point about what a good guy Josh was.” She glared at Matt and said, “Well, at least you go that right. You would’ve thought I wasn’t a Christian to hear y’all tell it.”

Well, Matt was not going to let that go. “I did not say that. I was just sayin’ Josh made a habit of going on those mission trips.” Shelby sneered, “You might as well have said I was an atheist. You aren’t the only Presbyterian in Mossy Creek that knows a little bit about the Bible. Tell me this: what does John 3:16 say? ‘For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life.’ That’s what it says. And just in case you can’t figure that out for yourself that means believing in Jesus is what gets you to heaven. Works don’t save you; most Christians know that.” Now it was Matt’s turn to be mad. “Shelby, I did not say those mission trips saved Josh. I was just sayin’ he was always lookin’ for ways to put his faith to work. And I didn’t say one thing about what you believed.”

Well, by that time Pastor Marianne had reached the parking lot and saw Matt and Shelby talking. But she could hear them, too. And she wasn’t the only one. People were turning, turning their heads to see what was going on. Raised voices in a church parking lot are never a good thing, so she walked over to Matt and Shelby. Pastor Marianne smiled and asked, “Which one of the world’s problems are y’all solving today?” Shelby replied, “I was just explaining a few things to Matt. He seems to think you have to work your way to heaven.” Matt growled, “I did not say that. You’re puttin’ words in my mouth.” But Shelby didn’t miss a beat. “I was telling him John 3:16 says salvation comes from believing in Jesus, not worshiping work gloves or mission trips.”

Pastor Marianne said, “Well, that’s true. But that world ‘believe’ can be kind of tricky in John. Jesus also says, ‘Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life.’” It sounds like believing and disobeying are complete opposites. And if that’s so, that would make believing and obeying about the same thing. And obeying does take some doing.”

Well, that was not what Shelby wanted to hear. She fumed, "I thought believing Jesus was the Son of God and that He died for my sins was good enough. Doesn't that make a place for us in heaven?" Pastor Marianne said, "It does. But Presbyterians claim it's all that and then some." She could also see she wasn't going to solve Shelby and Matt's argument that afternoon, so she said, "Look, let's talk about this some more after church this Sunday. But do me a favor in the meantime. Think about this: what does Jesus mean when He's talking about eternal life in John 3:16? And then read the second chapter of Ephesians. See what Paul has to say about salvation." Matt and Shelby were tired of fighting, but they weren't ready to quit, not by a long shot. So they agreed to do what Pastor Marianne asked and sullenly went their separate ways.

Well, Sunday afternoon showed up right on time. And so did Shelby and Matt. Pastor Marianne smiled and invited them into her study. She said, "OK, let's do a little theology. Remember my assignment?" They nodded their heads. Pastor Marianne continued, "Matt, what do you think Jesus means when He's talking about eternal life?" He said, "As much as I hate to say it, Shelby's partly right. Believin' in Jesus does get us into heaven. But it isn't exactly what she said. Jesus says whoever believes in Him gets eternal life. Seems to me believin' is doing. So there is something we have to do. We have to decide. Are we going to believe in Jesus or not?" Shelby frowned and said, "That's mostly how I see it, too. But I don't think believing in Jesus is work. It's something we know. It's something we agree with. Isn't that what we have Sunday school for? We learn about Jesus, so we can believe in Him."

Pastor Marianne rocked back in her chair and smiled. "I like what you're saying, but one of my professors told me you have to understand time if you're going to understand eternal life." Shelby looked a little puzzled and said, "What do you mean?" Pastor Marianne went on. "We believe Jesus died to save us from our sins. That's something that happened in the past that affects us right now. But we also believe eternal life is something that's waiting for us in the future. If that's true, how should what we believe about eternal life affect us right now?" Now Matt and Shelby both looked confused, so Pastor Marianne paused and then said, "Look, when God raised Jesus

from the dead, He was giving us a peak at the future. In heaven there's no more dying. That makes Jesus' resurrection our first picture of what heaven looks like. It's eternal life. When people get to see that for the first time, they see it on the first Easter morning. The first time anybody gets a sneak peak of heaven, they get to see it right here in the real world. But remember this: the great thing about Easter is that Jesus is alive, and He's with us now. When we believe in Him now, we obey Him now. And when we're obeying Jesus now, we look and sound more like Him every day. And that's eternal life, too."

Now it was Matt's turn to be confused. "So what are you saying? That we're already gettin' a taste of eternal life?" Pastor Marianne leaned forward in her chair and said, "Uh huh. But we're not seeing the whole thing. That may be what Jesus means when He says, 'This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness more than the light because their actions were evil.' Then He goes on and says, 'But those who are doing what is true come to the light, so that people can see that they're doing what God wants.' Know where our word for 'crisis' comes from? From the Greek word that means judgment. Think of it this way: deciding what we believe is our crisis because we have to make a judgment. And according to John 3:16, it's life and death. We have to decide who Jesus is and what God is doing through Him. And once we decide, we have to make a choice. Will we trust Him or not? And that's a big choice because the things we really believe affect the things we're willing to do. Shelby's right—our future does depend on believing in Jesus. But believing in Jesus means trusting Him enough to imitate Him and continue His ministry right now. Eternal life isn't just something that going to happen in the future."

Shelby sounded annoyed when she asked, "What about that part of Ephesians you wanted us to read? It said we're saved by grace through faith, and we can't take credit for it. It also said salvation isn't a reward for the good things we've done, so we can't boast about it. If believin' in Jesus means trusting Him enough to obey Him, and Paul says salvation is a gift from God, aren't they kind of contradictin' each other?" Pastor Marianne smiled and said, "Not if God is changing our hearts and minds and

making it possible for us to accept salvation as a gift and to trust Jesus by obeying Him. The gift of salvation starts with God making some changes in us.”

Matt wondered out loud, “Is that what Paul is talking about when he says God has made us new people through Jesus so we can do the good things the Lord planned for us to do?” Pastor Marianne nodded her head in agreement and said, “I think so.” Shelby asked, “But what does a gift and working have to do with each other? That just doesn’t make sense.” The room got quiet. All of a sudden Shelby’s eyes got wide and she said, “Maybe heaven is the future we’re headed towards, and eternal life is how we’re living while we’re on the way. Is that what you mean when you’re talking about imitating Jesus and continuing His ministry?” Just about the time Pastor Marianne started nodding her head, Matt quickly added, “If that’s so, Jesus’ life is what eternal life looks like, and that’s why we should be tryin’ to look and sound like Him.”

Pastor Marianne said, “I like that. But it’s not just what eternal life *looks* like. It’s what it *feels* like, too. Look, there are plenty of people who want to know if heaven is real. When we’re living like we really mean what we believe, we’re doing the right things for the right reasons. And what we’re doing is making grace real for everyone who wants to know what God’s kindness feels like.” Shelby cut in and asked, “So you’re saying God didn’t save us just to go to heaven? God also saved us to do things that will help other people see eternal life for themselves? So when we’re obeying Jesus, the things we’re doing give them a little taste of eternal life, too?” Pastor Marianne said, “That’s a great way of putting it. And you’re right. God definitely didn’t save us for nothing. Our job is to spread God’s love and grace around. And that’s never going to change. That’s also one of the good works God has created us for.”

Matt said, “All of this started when I was talking about Josh and the mission trips he went on before he died. I remember something he said all the time. He said he was grateful for what the Lord had done for him. I got the idea he was talking about two things: being forgiven and getting to be a doctor and doing mission work.” Pastor Marianne nodded her head. “That’s it. When somebody gives us a gift, if we really like

it, we thank them for giving it to us. And if we aren't thankful, that pretty much tells you what we think of the gift. If God loved the world so much that He gave us His only Son so we could have eternal life, we ought to love God so much that we look and act like God's only Son. That's the best way I know of showing God how much we appreciate the gift of eternal life. Paul's right; salvation is God's gift, and we don't have a thing to do with it. But nothing is keeping us from remembering what Jesus has done for us. Dying on the cross is something He did for everyone. That's what we believe. Now it all comes down to how what we believe is changing us and the world we live in. That kind of active faith is the gift God most wants from us. Trust me; faith changes things."

There was sadness in Shelby's eyes when she asked, "So what Josh did made him a grateful man, not a great man?" Pastor Marianne's eyes started filling with tears when she exclaimed, "Oh, my goodness. He was both. Josh was a great man. And he was great because he was so grateful for everything God had done for Him. Josh was grateful for Jesus' life, and he was grateful for His death and resurrection. And you were a great young woman for going with him on that mission trip. You were putting what you believed to work. And the people you helped and worked with could see what you really believed. You made Jesus real for a lot of people that summer. And Josh's death made Jesus real for a lot of people, too. When you see someone believe in Jesus enough to die for Him, you can start imagining how His crucifixion changed the people who were following Him."

Matt said, "I can't do anything near as great as what Josh did. I mean, I've fixed a few porches and painted a few roofs, but I haven't died for anyone." Pastor Marianne shook her head in disagreement. "Believing in Jesus is something we do all the time. It's a choice we make every day. That's one way we keep crucifying our old way of life. And trusting and obeying Jesus is a choice you can you can make every day. And there are a million and one ways to do that. But whether it's big or small, it always involves doing things people can see and experience for themselves. Remember, people can't read our minds. Our theology isn't worth a whole lot until we start living it so people can see it."

Shelby mused, “You know, I’ve been thinking. How about this? Marianne, you said believing and obeying go together. OK. Then we said salvation is a gift from God, and that’s grace. OK. If believing in Jesus means trusting Him enough to obey Him, that’s more than just something we do. It’s more than doing. It’s gratitude—that’s what it is. We could call what Jesus and Paul are talking about faith and works. Or we could just rename the whole thing. Call it grace and gratitude. Why does it have to be one or the other? How stupid is that?” Shelby paused and then said with a triumphant smile, “It is ridiculous. It’s all the same thing. It’s all about what Jesus did and how we’re responding.” Pastor Marianne laughed and exclaimed, “Amen!”

