

Law and Grace
West Valley Presbyterian Church
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Javert - (IMAGE) What Bob just sang...was addressed to God on the part of Javert. Javert firmly believed he was working in the name of God to do what is right which was to follow the law Javert sings "STARS" because stars never move or change their course. STARS represent the law because of their constant uncompromising stance.

*Stars in your multitudes, scarce to be counted, filling the darkness with order and light
You are the sentinels, silent and sure, keeping watch in the night, keeping watch in the night
You know your place in the sky; you hold your course and your aim
And each in your season returns and returns and is always the same.*

The stars don't vary in their course. They illuminate and show us what is right and what is wrong.

So Javert (IMAGE)- the policeman pursues Jean Valjean in the name of the LAW. If you were at movie night you saw him... everywhere Jean Valjean turned ...there was javert...in the name of the law...ready to arrest him.

Javert - (IMAGE) the uncompromising stalwart champion of what is right and what is wrong. He wouldn't give up pursuing Jean Valjean. Jean Valjean was a criminal...even though all he did was steal a loaf of bread ...there was no mercy in Javerts stance against him...

And I want to ask you today...**Are you a LAW Abider (Javert) or a God LOVER (Jean Valjean)?** In order to know this it helps if you understand the dynamics of the law and how it often holds us far from God's heart...even though it tells us right and wrong - which generally we think of as being a good thing. What you got to know about the LAW and which LES MIS makes very clear is...

THE LAW IS UNCOMPROMISING

The Law tells us point blank...this is right...and this is wrong...
as much as this is black...and this is white

You follow a system when you follow the letter of the law...that
does not ask questions...but simply is what it is.

For instance You will never go over 55 mph in a 55 mph speed
zone if you follow the letter of the law.

And if you go over that speed limit, no matter what your
excuse...the officer that pulls you over...and looks at you over
his dark glasses as he approaches the drivers side of the car...
still has the right to give you a ticket.

No matter what excuse you come up with.

You might say "I was on my way to church and I generally am a
good driver"

And he might say "The speed limit is 55 - you were going 75"

You might say "I've been under a lot of stress lately because
the church is making me volunteer too much"

And he would say "The speed limit is 55 - you were going 75"

You might even say "My wife is having a baby to promote
church growth"

And he could say...if he was a Javert..."I don't care. The law is
the law. The speed limit is 55 - you were going 75 - here's
your ticket."

That's the law.

It doesn't change.

It is what it is...no compromise. No excuses.

The Law was given through Moses, scripture tells us. It was a
law to live by that was better than nothing. It gauged our
behavior and was rather severe.....But scripture tells us "grace
and truth came through Jesus Christ."

You see,the Law abider doesn't understand grace...they are
trying so hard to do the right thing they don't have time for
grace.

In the movie, Javert kills himself after Jean Valjean saves
Javert's life...

Why? It wasn't because of the LAW. Javert expected Jean
Valjean to kill him. Instead Jean Valjean sets him free after

Javert has been pursuing Jean Valjean for years to kill *him*. This is grace.

This goes against Javert's grain. He deserved to die at the hands of Jean Valjean, and instead he got Grace and Forgiveness. It doesn't fit his rigid framework. Yet he has lived by this rigid framework called the law for *so long* that he can't stand the ambiguity of thinking that perhaps the Law is not all that there is!

That mercy triumphs over judgment, as the scripture says. In the end he kills himself because he can't reconcile grace with the Law.

For us as Christians it is sometimes hard to completely grasp that it is not about what we do or don't do but rather it is about what God has already done for us in Jesus.

It's hard to give up our own efforts after we have tried so hard to comply and please God...earn his favor...and realize that that's not what our faith is all about.

Christianity is about God...and how wonderful God is. It is not about us...and what we do - right or wrong. It is all about what God has done and who God is.

There is a marvelous story of Abe Lincoln who supposedly went to the slave block to buy a slave. He bid on, and won, a young girl. Upon taking possession of her, he said, "Young lady, you are free."

Confused and incredulous, she fearfully asked him what he meant by the statement. Lincoln reiterated his comment, "It means you are really free."

"Free to do as I please, and to say what I please, and to go where I please?" she asked, hoping for some measure of clarification.

"Yes," he confirmed, "you are free to do, and to say, and to go as you please."

"Then," said the girl with tearful gratitude, "I will go with you!" The price had been paid...and she chose out of gratitude to follow the one who set her free.

See that's grace. That's what being a God lover is as opposed to being just a law abider. I want to go with you God - not because I am so worried about doing the right thing, that I somehow must do to earn your favor (law) but because I am so grateful... I just want to be with you...

The second thing that we have touched on already to know about the LAW is that when I focus on the LAW

THE LAW ENDS UP BEING ALL ABOUT ME

By knowing ...the difference between right and wrong I suddenly have a yardstick by which to measure myself.

Boy, I might say, "Have I ever been spiritually in tune today! I prayed for a full hour".

Look at me, I might declare, I have really been a good Samaritan by helping this or that person and thinking positively about them when I actually don't really like them all that much

Man, I might think, I blew it by not telling the truth. I'll never be a good Christian. I give up.

The Law is a way to measure our goodness and badness. It illuminates to us where we fall short.

The Law sheds light on my sins when I mess up, but the LAW has no power to remove them. It is a yardstick NOT a cure. It illuminates to me the dirt that is in the room, but it doesn't give me a broom to clean up the mess.

As Romans says: "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin" (Romans 3:20).

And the Law's focus is always on me.

How good or bad I am. Often we will talk about those "self-righteous hypocrites" in churches - those people who think they are holier or better than others cause they read their Bible

more and do good works and then go out and criticize others for not doing the same...

The church has been criticized a lot for that - being judgmental

But there's another kind of self centeredness too that the law promotes...

I think sometimes people stay away from church just because when they come here they go on a massive guilt trip.

I've gotten a lot of emails lately saying things like "I don't think I'm worthy"... "I can't commit cause I don't know enough about God"... "My life is so messed up I just can't come to church."

Actually its when your life *is so messed up - that's when you need to come to church.* That's when you need God...and know you need him...its at the moments when we've hit bottom that we know the true state of affairs...that we are weak and need help...not the other way around. I say that all the time - and you are probably sick of hearing it - but its true. You see if our feeling of unworthiness keeps us away from God...this attitude is still very "me" focused...but on the other side.

I am still focused *on myself* by believing not that I am the best there is, but rather that I am the worst there is. Its two sides of the same coin.

And if I am groveling in that and believe somewhere down deep that God's abandoned me a long time ago because of what *I've done*, I am a slave to my own failure. I can't see beyond myself. Its still all about me...and my mess

Now...I want you to know that my youngest son just got his permit two weeks ago...and he is driving me around lately...so stay off the roads

And I was reminiscing and feeling nostalgic because this is my last kid getting his permit, and then his license...

And I remembered when I was first learning to drive how afraid I was to go outside the lines on the road - stay in my lane and not go over that middle line and crash into the car in front of me coming the other direction. And I was focusing on the lines so much that I kept messing up.

And I remember my instructor saying *don't look at the lines*. Don't worry about them. *Look up* If you focus on looking up, you will stay in the lines You are going to be able to pay attention to the things that matter (like little kids potentially running into the street) and by doing that you will stay the course.

It's actually much harder to stay in the lane when you are focusing on the lines.

It's counterintuitive, isn't it? But it's true.

So the point is that if you constantly focus on you keeping the law... or how you have blown it not keeping the law...you become "you" centered and sin conscious – which breeds judgmentalism – of ourselves and others – for better for worse. On one side of the coin we become unwavering in our righteous stance and we don't tolerate another's weakness or failure. Or on the other side of the coin, we become slaves to our own failures... *God could never love me after what I've done....*

Paul says "wretched man that I am"... "I am in a double bind. No matter what I do ...I do what I don't want to do." I am at war within myself... HIS ANSWER TO THIS DILEMMA? Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, thanks be to God that its not about me anymore! Its about how wonderful Jesus...

So the answer to this dilemma is, that instead, of looking at the lines of the law, all the should and should not's of life...look up instead to Jesus. Become a lover of God first, not a law abider first. When I become focused on Jesus and his righteousness, and I recognize his grace to me – I become a lover of God – and a lover of people – and by so doing with that perspective – God's grace works in my heart and I stay on course that way. That's grace. Its not about me. Its about how wonderful God is.

Some of you know what I'm talking about.

I want to remind all of you know that the majority of our New Testament ...that we say is full of grace...was written by a Javert?

Does this sound like something that might describe Javert?

“ a strict and devout adherent to God’s law; a fiery defender of the purity of... religion...a meticulous observer of everything set down in God’s law book.”

Who is this a description of?

That could be a description of Javert, but its not. It’s a quote from St Paul in Philippians 3:4-6. He’s describing himself before he met Jesus. Before he met Jesus, Saul (later called Paul) was a Javert.

He was extremely religious (a Pharisee) so with Javert-like passion, he went around looking to punish anyone who dared to not keep the Jewish laws that he had vowed to protect.

He could say with Javert, **“I am the Law and the Law is not mocked!”**

He was not only meticulous in the keeping of the Law himself, but also set himself up as the one who passed judgment on anyone who dared to cross his path.

Isn’t it amazing that...

The majority of our New Testament of grace, has been written by a man who killed scores of Christians...in the name of the Law of God? Isn’t it something that **the book of Romans** that we read today as our text, the book **that explains grace so well**, was written by a former Javert.... Who then met Jesus Christ and changed?

The only difference between Javert and Paul is that when offered GRACE, Paul changed...but Javert when offered grace was so threatened by the fact that his system called the LAW could not hold up, he killed himself.

Javert is thrown by grace. He can’t receive mercy.

Paul on the other hand who **started out as a Javert law abider... was transformed into a God lover**. He was willing to become small, and of no account, so that God could be glorified in his life

When Paul was a Javert he had his birth name – the name of a great King of Israel – it was the name **Saul**. Conquerer, and

ruler and all powerful one. Good Jewish name for a Pharisee which Saul was of the highest order.

Then Saul met Jesus. And Saul changed his name to **Paul**. Do you know what the word Paul means? It means “***small one***”. Insignificant one. Why small one?

In God’s eyes he suddenly saw that he was small...very small indeed, and that he needed to stop looking at the lines of the law, trying to stay on course by his own efforts...and instead look up to Jesus who would be his righteousness for him.

I came across this great quote from Martin Luther...it really is quite something. It’s all about the work of God’s grace in us...

It is God's nature to make something out of nothing; hence one who is not yet nothing, out of him God cannot make anything. ...Therefore God accepts only the forsaken, cures only the sick, gives sight only to the blind, restores life only to the dead, sanctifies only the sinners, gives wisdom only to the unwise. In short, he has mercy only on those who are wretched, and gives grace only to those who are not in grace. Therefore no proud saint, no wise or righteous person, can become God's material, and God's purpose cannot be fulfilled in him.

And that’s how we change from being simply law abiders to being God-lovers. Recognizing our nothingness and recognizing his grace made sufficient in our weakness. (which by the way is also a quote from Paul) It isn’t up to us anymore.

Yesterday we went to the Stanford Baseball game. It was a fun game to watch. They were playing Oregon State and they lost by the way. But the game was not the point yesterday. What stood out for us was the event after the game where three of the Stanford Baseball athletes shared their faith in Jesus Christ. It was FAITH DAY that afternoon and this was sponsored by the

Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Mark Appel, Stanfords star pitcher was one of the athletes who shared. And the thing about athletes is that it really is so much about them all the time. They are constantly having to perform. They are constantly “on” and need to deliver. And the competition is fierce. A couple of them said quite honestly and to their credit that they struggled with pride and being self centered. They were so honest and open, and told us how their faith in Jesus Christ was all out important to them to keep them humble and not “me” focused.

But what Mark Appel said just stunned me.

He is a senior at Stanford and he started out by saying essentially that everything he does he does for the glory of God. Whether he strikes out or makes a home run he is focused on God as he does that and he does it all for him. He is not focused on himself. And I thought, “Well that’s nice... nice in theory...but what does that really mean?” And then he tells us all...that he was offered a 3.8 million dollar contract last year...to go and play for the Pirates...and he prayed about it. Now if someone offered me a 3.8 million dollar contract... I’m not sure I’d pray about it. I’d say thank you Jesus for blessing me so much, and I’d snatch it up. But Mark told us that in prayer he didn’t feel like it was the Lord’s will, to take that money, and he decided to stay at Stanford one more year. Why? Because he had just led four other students to the Lord that year, the Holy Spirit was moving on Stanfords campus and his Bible study that usually had about 8 people in it, was averaging 20. And he wanted to stay and cooperate with what

the Holy Spirit was doing there. His mantra? Look outside yourself to help someone else. And doing all for the glory of God.

Now that's remarkable isn't it? The LAW would say...you've worked hard. You deserve that money. But when you look up to Jesus...you get your eyes off of those inflexible lines – the rights of our human efforts, what should or should not seem fair – when we get our eyes off of that and look up...to Jesus... suddenly we become God lovers first instead of just law abiders, and we operate from GRACE not from the LAW, and we make decisions on what will glorify God – not ourselves.

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ who is our righteousness for us, – transform us to be God lovers first and foremost beyond all else– that we might be humble people, small enough, to know our need – take our eyes off of ourselves and the rigid lines of the LAW, and look up to receive his Divine grace. Amen
