

The Grace of Being Tender-Hearted

Rich Nathan

February 13, 2011

Grace: Amazing Grace Series

Matthew 25: 31 - 46

I want to begin today a little differently than I normally do by showing you a video of a woman, who is an immigrant, and who is a member of Vineyard Columbus.

VIDEO – Anonymous Woman

Let me ask you some questions. How did you feel when you listened to her story? Parents, did it break your heart when she said, “It is really hard for my son. He doesn’t understand why his dad went away.” Were you heartbroken when you heard her say that she doesn’t know what she’s going to do in the future; that life is so hard for her?

Let me share with you a very different response to women like this. I just read the story of a Pennsylvania legislator, who is newly elected to the Pennsylvania legislature. He said that his legislative agenda, what he wants to accomplish in the Pennsylvania legislature, [and I quote] “I want to make it as hard as possible for illegal immigrants to live in our state.” So among other pieces of legislation, he has proposed a law barring someone who is undocumented from attending a state university.

Now, as I read this legislator’s statements and his proposal to keep kids, who are undocumented, from attending any Pennsylvania state university I said to Marlene, “I know that politics is a bare-knuckles, take-no-prisoners kind of profession. I understand that there is a constituency in every state for lets-get-really-tough-on-immigrants. I understand that. But after this man says what he says and does what he does in the legislature, he has to go home and what does he say to his wife at the end of the day?

‘You know, honey, I spent the day making life as hard as possible for some people who are living in our state. In fact, today was a really good day because I got to put my foot on the throats of 17 year-old immigrants and I kept them from being allowed to even pay their own way to go to a state university. And you know what was the best thing of all? They were defenseless. I had a really good day today, honey, because I got to kick a kid around and they couldn’t defend themselves.’”

I’ve been doing a series that I’ve titled Amazing Grace. Over the last month or so, I have been speaking with you about the kindness and goodness of God to us especially as his grace as been revealed through the offering of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, for our sins. But for those of us who have been recipients of the

grace of God, we know that receiving the grace of God should change a person. You can't experience grace for yourself without changing. Here is what the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 4:32- 5:2:

Ephesians 4:32-5:2

32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. 1 Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

I've shared with you before what one of my major goals is as pastor of this church. I want to, through the preaching of God's Word, shape the inclinations of your hearts so that your knee-jerk reaction to whatever you experience is more and more like Jesus'. That as you sit in this church and experience Vineyard's ministry, more and more you would be inclined to be generous and kind like Jesus when you see a need; that you would be inclined like Jesus to forgive people who have hurt you or offended you. And like Jesus, you would be inclined to be tender-hearted, especially to people who are at the bottom rungs of our society. I want to shape the inclinations of your heart so that you could never say what that Pennsylvania legislator said, "I want to make it as hard as possible for this group of people." Instead, that you would say, "I want to be like Jesus, and I want to have Jesus' way of responding and relating to every person I deal with, especially the weak and the vulnerable. I want to have his heart."

I've called today's talk "The Grace of Being Tender-Hearted." Let's pray.

Matthew 25:31-46

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. 34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' 41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty

and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ 44 “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ 45 “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ 46 “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

What shapes our hearts? I mean, how do you have heart inclinations that are like Jesus’ so that you respond to life the way Jesus would, if he was in your body?

Certainly, if you are a follower of Jesus, you pray to be more like him every day. Certainly, you take in the Word of God; you read scripture. That’s why we’ve repeatedly encouraged you over the last couple of months to start a reading plan; to join the rest of us in reading God’s Word. God’s Word changes us.

What else does? How do you have a heart like Jesus? What shapes our heart?

Our Judgment

Here is what we read in Matthew 25:31 – 33:

Matthew 25:31-33

31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

The fact that God judges has always been a great encouragement to Christians. We have a reason why we can forgive. We don’t have to hold on with a death grip to all the horrible things that have been done to us, in order to exact out our pound of flesh. We can let go knowing that one day this other person is going to face God.

Who will be judged?

The identity of the judged

Those who face judgment include all of us – churchgoers, non-churchgoers, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, agnostics, atheists – everyone. Who is going to be judged? Those who believe that there is a judgment, that we are ultimately accountable to someone other than ourselves, and the judged will also include those who feel that the whole idea of judgment and a Judgment Day is ridiculous;

that it is some medieval holdover that churches use as a religious scare-tactic. Everyone according to Jesus, whatever your belief system, whatever your philosophy of life, everyone will be judged.

And the text in Matthew 25 teaches us who the Judge will be.

The identity of the Judge

Matthew 25:31-33

31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

That all of us will appear before Jesus Christ is a huge comfort and encouragement for those who have turned to Jesus and asked him to save them and to forgive their sins. For any who have turned to Jesus in this life as Savior, as friend, as older brother, as shepherd and high priest, we’re going to meet that Savior and friend Jesus on Judgment Day.

For those who have rejected Jesus, who have no time for Christ, who push Jesus away and keep him at arm’s length, they are going to meet that Jesus, who for many people is a curse word; they are going to meet that despised Jesus on Judgment Day.

Now, what is the basis of the judgment?

The basis of judgment

We’re told here that the reason people get to inherit the kingdom is because they did six things:

Matthew 25:35-36

35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.

Now, notice Jesus doesn’t offer eternal relationship with himself based on the things we think he would – church membership, for example. He doesn’t say, “You joined the Vineyard Church of Columbus? Well done! Welcome into my eternal kingdom.” “You were a member in good standing at First Baptist, or Tenth Presbyterian, or you were baptized as an infant in the Roman Catholic church or in the Methodist Church, or the Lutheran Church – welcome to the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” So many folks, if you

ask them why they think everything is OK between them and God, they fall back on church attendance, or church activity. “Well, I guess things are good between me and God is because I go to church; because I take communion; because I’m involved in the church’s small groups; because I go to Sunday Mass as often as I can; I tithe.”

That’s all good. Keep going to church; keep tithing; keep taking communion; go to a small group. But none of these things are the basis on which Jesus separates the sheep and the goats. He says it is because you fed the hungry and gave water to the thirsty, and welcome the stranger, and clothes the naked, and took care of the sick, and visited the prisoner.

Some of you should be saying, “Wait a minute, Rich. I don’t get this. I don’t understand what Jesus is saying. How does this square with the biblical teaching of salvation by grace through faith alone? You’ve been teaching us about grace this past month and a half. I mean Ephesians 2:8-9 says this:

Ephesians 2:8-9

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

But what we’re reading here in Matthew 25:35-36 sounds like salvation by works – we receive heaven because of what we do. Isn’t what Jesus is saying here a direct contradiction of the idea of justification by faith alone; that you and I are right with God only through our faith in Christ and his sacrificial death on the cross and not by our own works, or our own deserving?”

No one earns salvation or eternal life.

How do we reconcile what Jesus is saying here with what we read elsewhere in the Bible?

The great father of the Protestant church put it this way:

Salvation is by faith alone, but true faith never remains alone.

What we have here in Matthew 25, I think, is exactly the same teaching we find many places in the Bible, but I’ll mention just one – the book of James. James says in James 2:14-17:

James 2:14-17

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if people claim to have faith but have no deeds? Can such faith save them? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical

needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Doesn't that sound, by the way, like an echo of what Jesus is teaching? The way we square Matthew 25 and James 2 with the teaching we find everywhere else in scripture about salvation being by grace alone through faith alone is simply to say that our care for the poor and the needy does not *earn* our salvation. Our care for immigrants and the poor and the needy is the *evidence* of our salvation.

See, Jesus taught us in Matthew 7 that you can't get good fruit from a bad tree. What we see on the outside of a person, in other words, welcoming immigrants, feeding hungry people, caring for sick people, visiting folks in prison, is simply the outer evidence that that person has been given a new heart on the inside through God's Spirit. Your compassion demonstrates that your heart has changed because you have received God's grace; you've moved from a life that is centered on your own needs and wants; how much you want to consume to a life that is centered on meeting the needs of others.

Jesus says here that when you find yourself doing something for an immigrant, feeding a hungry person, visiting a sick person, practicing hospitality, you are showing that you belong to him.

Look at how mundane these things are that communicate that we have a new heart. Jesus doesn't ask did you prophesy in church? Jesus doesn't ask did God ever use you to heal a terrible disease? Did you ever work a miracle? Instead of the things that we pay so much attention to, Jesus lists activities that are accessible to virtually everyone in the world.

You don't need special training to feed someone who is hungry. You don't need a seminary degree on your wall, or a year of leadership training to feed a hungry person. All you need to do is give your lunch away. That's pretty simple. You've got a lunch? You see someone who is hungry, and you give them your lunch. No training class in the church is required. You don't need to be a millionaire, or get a government grant, to go into McDonald's and purchase a couple of burgers for a man who is standing on the street corner who is hungry.

You don't need amazing spiritual gifts to sit with someone in a hospital room who is sick. Just about anyone of any age can visit with an elderly sick relative in a nursing home. You can be a 3-year old and visit your great-grandmother. You don't need a Ph.D. to visit a prisoner.

How does a heart change? We recognize that one day we are going to stand before Jesus our Judge and you and I are going to have to give account for the grace that we claim that was at work in our lives. At that time Jesus will ask for evidence of his grace.

What shapes our hearts? What makes us like Jesus?

Our language

Notice what Jesus calls these hungry people, these thirsty people, these strangers that we would call immigrants, these naked people, these sick people, those who are in prison – notice what Jesus calls them.

Matthew 25:40

40 “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

Jesus calls folks in this world, who are hungry and starving, people who are sick and laid up at Riverside Hospital, or lying on a mat dying on the streets of Calcutta, Jesus calls people who are strangers in whatever society they live in, refugees, minority groups, documented, undocumented workers, prisoners – Jesus calls all of these folks *his brothers and sisters*.

You know the language we use when we speak about people who live on the margins of society, the language we use is not only an indication of what is in our hearts, but the language we use actually *changes* our hearts. Do you know your words are not just the fruit of what is in your heart? Jesus does say, “out of the abundance of your heart, your mouth speaks.” But the words you choose to say actually change and steer your heart. That’s what the Apostle James says in James 3.4:

James 3:4

4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.

James says: the tongue is like the rudder of a ship. Just as a rudder steers a ship, so what comes out of your mouth steers you and changes you and shapes your heart.

Think about this with me, brothers and sisters. Think about what come out of yours and my mouth. Think about the language we use for the different groups that Jesus is referring to in this text. What do we call the poor and the homeless in this society? The poor? You hear people talk about “trailer trash.” “That person is no good trailer trash.” A homeless person? “They’re nothing but lazy bums, bag ladies, drunks.” What do we call prisoners? Animals, mad-dogs.

We Christians ought to be extremely sensitive about our language to other people. James 3:9 says this:

James 3:9

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness.

Language is huge in communicating whether we see another person as being made in God's image and in God's likeness. There are few things that are more troubling to me than reading an article, or a forwarded email from a Christian that speaks about an immigrant man or woman or child as a "parasite," or a "pariah," or "wet-back," or simply as an "illegal." One legislator from another state described immigrants as "third world invaders." In one particular legislative debate, immigrants were described as being part of a "hoard" that was "swarming across our borders." Human beings described as bugs.

Jesus calls strangers and immigrants "my brothers and sisters." Is that what you call immigrants, "my brothers and sisters"? If they are in Jesus' family and you are in Jesus' family, then immigrants are in your family. And immigrants literally are part of our church family, people who are sitting right here at Vineyard Columbus in church with us today. God in his providence and in his goodness to Vineyard Columbus has brought individuals to our church that have been born in 96 different countries. Here are the countries that our church members came from:

Rolling slide of the 96 different countries

Hasn't God been good to us? We have half the United Nations worshipping here at our weekend services! Has God not been good to us? How could we possibly speak about Jesus' brothers and sisters, and brothers and sisters sitting right here in this church, using language like "third world invaders?" Or "they're just an illegal." When you hear that you should want to say, "Hey, buddy, you're talking about Jesus' sister. You're talking about my brother."

How does our heart change? By paying attention to our language.

What shapes our hearts?

Our identity

Notice what Jesus says in Matthew 25: 34 – 40:

Matthew 25:34-40

34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit

me.’ 37 “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ 40 “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

Jesus doesn’t see a poor man as the “other,” someone so different from him that he can’t connect with that homeless man at all. Jesus does not see an immigrant as being the “other,” something so radically different from him that they are like another species, invaders from another planet. He says, “I have such close relationship with people living on the margins of society that what you do for them or what you don’t do for them, it’s as if you are doing it or not doing it for me.”

You know, as followers of Jesus, I believe it is not enough that we thank God that Jesus identifies with the least and the last in this world. I believe that if we are followers of Jesus, we need to have his heart and assume his response to the least and to the last. It is not just Jesus who should say, “as you’ve done to the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you’re doing it to me,” we should be saying that.

Let me bring this down for just a moment. I’ve told you on many occasions that I was raised in a Jewish family. But you know the first experience I ever had with anti-Semitic remark was when I was 17 and in college. As far as I can remember, growing up in New York City I never personally heard someone make an anti-Semitic remark. I was raised in a neighborhood that was primarily Jews and Roman Catholics, either Italians or Irish, African Americans and Latinos. And I never heard, so far as I can recall, an anti-Semitic remark.

But when I went to college in Cleveland, the first weeks of school I was sitting in a dorm room with a friend and a couple of guys on the other side of the room were talking with each other. One of the guys said, “Well, you know, he *jewed* me out of some money.” I had never heard that phrase “he *jewed* me out of some money,” and so I turned to my friend and very naively said, “What does he mean ‘he *jewed* me out of some money’?”

My friend lost the color in his face and he said, “I’ll tell you later, Rich.” And so we left and I said to my friend, again very naively, very innocently, “Jewed, is that like J.U.D.E.? What does that mean?”

My friend said, “No, Rich. It’s *jewed*. He’s talking about Jews.”

It was stunning to me. I thought, that guy is saying that because he was cheated out of some money, that it was like what the Jews do?

Now, understand, I was 17 years old. I was not yet a follower of Jesus. I thought, “I’m going to go back into that room and punch that guy in the face. He’s talking about me.” Now, that feeling “he’s talking about me,” “she’s doing it to me,” that’s what Jesus is saying when he said, “As you’ve done to the least of these, you’ve done to me.”

Let me apply this specifically to immigration. In the Bible, God’s people, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, were commanded to see themselves as immigrants no matter where they were born, or where they were living. When we hear about immigrants, we always ought to say, “They’re talking about me.” For example, in the Old Testament on the Day of Pentecost, Jews were required to go up to Jerusalem and go to the Temple. The Jewish people each year were to make this statement as a confession before God in the Temple.

Deuteronomy 26:5

Then you shall declare before the Lord your God: “My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous.

In fact, this confessional statement of Deuteronomy 26.5, “My father was a wandering Aramean,” is said at every Sabbath service in synagogue even to this day. I used to say this week after week in synagogue. “My father was an immigrant. I am an immigrant.” This runs throughout the Old Testament. So we see in Psalms 39:12:

Psalms 39:12

“Hear my prayer, Lord, listen to my cry for help; do not be deaf to my weeping. I dwell with you as a foreigner, a stranger, as all my ancestors were.

Israelite self-identification as immigrants affected the way they were to treat non-Israelites. So, for example, in Exodus 23.9, we read:

Exodus 23:9

“Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt.

And we read in Deuteronomy 10:18 – 19:

Deuteronomy 10:18-19

18 He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigners residing among you, giving them food and clothing. 19 And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.

In the same way, we followers of Jesus are to see ourselves as immigrants and aliens. Consider what Peter says:

1 Peter 1:1

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,

And in 1 Peter 2:11:

1 Peter 2:11

Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

When we look at immigrants we should not see someone essentially different from us. If you are a Christian, you are an immigrant, you are a foreigner. You are exactly like the people who label themselves as immigrants. Our ultimate citizenship is the Kingdom of God, so wherever you are, whatever country we Christians find ourselves in, we are away from our home country.

Now, of course, this is not only biblically, but this is historically true in America. Unless your entire family ancestry was Native American, your family, at some point in history, emigrated to the United States either voluntarily because they chose to come here, or involuntarily because they were taken here as slaves. But 99% of us here at Vineyard Columbus are descendents of immigrants. So this is historically true. But it is also biblically true.

What shapes the heart? When you are talking about one of these groups – the poor, the hungry, the immigrant in Matthew 25 each of us as followers of Jesus should say: “Not only are you talking about my Savior when you are talking about one of these groups, each of us should also say, ‘You’re talking about me.’”

What shapes our hearts? Our coming judgment, our language, our identity, and finally,

Our welcome

You know, there is something that happens to our hearts when we actually get to know someone personally, and not just as a category such as the homeless, or prisoners, or Muslims, or immigrants. There is something that happens to our hearts when we get to know someone personally.

I was recently reading a story by Thabo Mbeki. He said that when Nelson Mandela sat down with the South African Premier F.W. de Klerk to negotiate the end of apartheid, he saw the two men who had been on opposite sides of this

apartheid battle for decades. He saw these two men look at one another and the others in the room. Mbeki said:

It suddenly became clear that none in the room had horns. And try as you did to see, none of them was sitting uncomfortably...on a tail.

It is easy to demonize a homeless person, if you don't know any homeless people, or you aren't friends with anyone who is homeless. You see someone wandering the streets and it is easy to hang a label on them. And it is easy to do the same thing with undocumented immigrants, if you don't know anyone who is undocumented. But when you sit across the table with someone and you have a meal, they're no longer an abstraction. They are a person made in God's image, who God loves and who Jesus died for.

This idea of welcome especially to someone who may have overstayed their visa and is out of status with the government creates tension for many Christians. They say, "Rich, I am a person, who respects the law. I believe in Romans 13 where it says:

Romans 13:1-2

1 Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

...so how can I show welcome or compassion to an illegal immigrant?

The National Council of Churches, the U.S. Conference of Roman Catholic Bishops, the National Association of Evangelicals Eastern Orthodox Bishops which represent s 42 different evangelical denominations, Christian leaders of every stripe and everyone was united around this idea that the American immigration system is broken and needs to be fixed.

We're going to talk a lot more about the immigration system and the law on Monday night at our seminar, *Welcoming the Stranger*.

Welcoming the Stranger with Matt Soerens,
Monday, February 14, 2011, at 7:30 p.m.

I particularly want to invite Small Group leaders, women's group leaders, men's group leaders, children's leaders. If you are somebody who is excited about what God is doing at this church in bringing people from 96 nations and the incredible opportunity for the gospel both in Central Ohio and internationally that that presents, then you have got to come out on Monday night and check out this seminar with one of this country's leading Christian experts on immigration

because the leading edge of what God is doing in our midst is that he's bringing the nations to us over the last five years. And we want to be responsive to the wave that God is building in our midst. So, we'll talk more about law and our immigration system on Monday night.

But for now, this tension people feel between showing compassion to the immigrant and obeying the law, let me just make this as simple as possible. *There is nothing illegal about being kind to someone else.* You are not breaking the law by inviting someone who is undocumented over to your house and eating dinner with them. You are not breaking the law by offering someone who is undocumented a ride in your car. You are not breaking the law by helping someone furnish their apartment, or take care of their kids, or shop for groceries. Compassion in the state of Ohio is still not illegal.

I would just say parenthetically that Christians in Arizona face a very different challenge because the state of Arizona has made it illegal for a church to drive undocumented children to church for Sunday School using a church van. In the state of Arizona right now it is illegal to pick up a group of children and drive them to church in a church van, if you have reason to believe that some of those children are not documented citizens. And my Christian brothers in the state of Arizona have to wrestle before God with whether they're going to obey that particular law and keep kids from church, or whether they're going to practice civil disobedience. (It is hard to imagine a Christian legislator voting for a law that would keep children of whatever stripe from attending church and hearing about Jesus).

But right now, we're not faced with that in Ohio. Being kind, being compassionate, being welcoming is not illegal. And advocating for change in our broken immigration system is also not illegal. But you say, "Rich, maybe I'm not doing anything illegal, but that guy who is here in this country, that woman who is here who is not documented, who has overstayed their visa, the child brought here without proper documents, they're doing something illegal. They're violating the laws of this country. And so if they claim to be Christians, and they are violating the laws of this country, they are disobeying the Word of God."

I can tell you, brothers and sisters, that as I've talked with people who are undocumented and who are in this church, their disobedience to American law weighs on them heavily. They don't want to disobey the law. They want to be obedient. They want to be good Americans. But you see, they also want to obey all of God's Word and they find themselves trapped because God's Word also says in 1 Timothy 5:8:

1 Timothy 5:8

Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

And so they say, “I want to provide for my family and I can’t do that in my home country because there are no jobs. Because my country is racked by war; because the government changed and if I go back, I will be tortured as some of my friends have been. Because I am a woman and will be forced by my family to marry someone who is not a Christian, I want to provide for my children. I want to provide a better life for my spouse. I want to provide a better life for me. So here I am caught between these two scriptures.” And they are saying to me as their pastor and to you as their church, “Will you help us so that we can obey all the scripture. We want to be like you. Will you help us?”

Our church is the most incredibly generous, incredibly welcoming church. Let me show you a video.

VIDEO – Anonymous man’s testimony

Brothers and sisters, as your pastor I believe that it is the will of God for our church to communicate to immigrants in Central Ohio that you are not only welcome here, you are wanted here. Here is what I’d like to do. This is totally spontaneous. I am going to ask if you are someone who was born outside of the United States – the vast, vast majority of you are here legally – but if you were born outside the United States, I’m going to ask you to stand and allow us who were born here in America to honor you and to communicate to you that we not only welcome you, we want you and we want your families and we want your friends here in this church.

Let’s pray.

The Grace of Being Tender-Hearted

Rich Nathan

February 13, 2011

Grace: Amazing Grace Series

Matthew 25: 31 - 46

I. Our Judgment

- A. The identity of the judged
- B. The identity of the Judge
- C. The basis of the judgment

II. Our language

III. Our identity

IV. Our welcome