

## **Jesus The North Star**

### **Standing on Grace series**

**by Bill Aumack**

How many of you have heard of the North Star? Anybody? Okay, what's the North Star? It's a star in the north, right?

Have you seen these long pictures? They do long exposures at night, and you can see the stars tracking through the sky, and they leave tracks. Well, if you did that all night long, you would get a picture that looks kind of like that. And right there in the middle, which is pretty hard to see, but right there in the middle, there's a dot. That's the North Star. It's Polaris. It's the North Star. It points to geometric north or true north, as opposed to magnetic north.

And remember, the Earth doesn't sit straight in space, right? We're tilted. Anybody remember how much? 23 and a half degrees, right? So we're at 23 and a half degrees, give or take, because it wobbles. Okay, 23 and a half degrees. So if you think about that in space, the North Star is not right above us. It's off to the side a little bit. Okay?

And for hundreds, thousands of years, we've used the North Star to navigate at night. Sailors used it. People on land use it. That's how you know where you're going. Unless you're in the Southern Hemisphere. If you're in the Southern Hemisphere, you can't see the North Star. It's on the other side of the planet. So they use other stars. There's no South Star, but they use other stars. So, but for us in the Northern Hemisphere, we use the North Star.

Now, not only does the Earth sit at an angle, and not only does it wobble a little bit, but it's on about a 26,000 year big wobble. Okay, so that 26,000 years, we think we haven't been around long enough to measure, to make sure, but it looks like it's about 26,000 years. And that means in the past, Polaris wasn't always the North Star because it pointed somewhere else. And in the future, Polaris will not be the North Star. If time goes on long enough, something else will be, most likely Vega. But for our lifetimes and probably

our grandchildren's and our grandchildren's lifetimes, it'll be Polaris, the North Star.

Now, how do you find the North Star other than to stand there all night and wait to see the circle and see where it is? Well, if you can find the Big Dipper and you follow the handle and then you see the two that make the first part of the cup and then the two stars that make the outside of the cup. You draw a line through those, it points right to the handle of the Little Dipper and Polaris. The North Star is the last star in the handle of the Little Dipper. Pretty easy to find. Most of us can find the Big Dipper. It's even bright enough to see in the city most of the time. And then you can find the North Star, and it turns out to be super easy to find and super useful to use.

Now, we're in week two of our series on Standing on Grace, and we're talking about Jesus, the North Star. Now, the Bible never refers to Jesus as the North Star, at least not that I know of. I haven't found it, but a lot of other Christian writers have done this, and we know Jesus is our example, right? We follow Jesus. You've been around church, you've heard this. Jesus is our example. We follow Jesus. We look to Jesus. Even the Bible is our example. It gives us direction. It's our North Star. The star that leads the wise men to the Christ child is another example. Okay, so we have this example of looking to an example, right? Proverbs 3: 5-6. Encourages us to trust in God, right? *Just trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. You know the rest. In all your ways, acknowledge him, and he will what? He will make your path straight.*

It won't make your paths easy. Doesn't say that. That's what I wish it said. But it says, I'll make it known. You will know where to go.

Okay. All right, so we're in the second week. We're in Galatians 2. Everybody open your Bible to Galatians 2. And we're going to be looking at some verses here. And I encourage you to read the whole chapter during the week at least once, maybe twice. Three times. Paul has a way of writing where you need to kind of look forward and look back and consider what's in the front and what's behind. And so reading through it a couple times during the week will be beneficial. At least it is for me. And I assume if it is for me, it is for you, too.

But, because we're not going through the whole thing in detail in the small groups, but it's good to read the whole thing.

So at the top of Galatians 2, about the first ten verses, Paul is describing how he gets accepted by the disciples. Remember, Paul's not one of the 12, right? He's not one of the disciples, but he had an encounter with Jesus. Pastor talked about it last week. And he's been out preaching. But he wants to meet with the disciples and, and have them say, yes, what you're teaching is good, it's valid. It's. You're one of the gang.

Okay? It's good. And sometimes when I read these chapters, I think this stuff happens in close one right after the other because it's chapter one does this, chapter two does this. It must have been like, you know, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. But there's often big time breaks in here. And if you look, I think it's verse one that says, then after how many years? 14 years, the disciples have been preaching. Paul's been preaching for 14 years. You'd think that somebody would have said, you're good in 14 years. Right?

Now, remember, it was a lot different then, right. We didn't get immediate feedback from across Asia. Right. It took a while for the news to get back. By the time the news got back, Paul, you know, Paul's in Galatia. By the time the news got back to the disciples, Paul was in Galatia. He wasn't in Galatia anymore. Right? And so everything's running on this big time delay for word and news to travel. But he has a meeting with the disciples and they all kind of agree. Yeah, what you're teaching is valid. It's true. It's right. And Paul's kind of given the marching orders, if you will, to go reach the Gentiles. That's what you're doing, Paul. Keep doing that. Glory hallelujah. It's working. Okay. And so he goes off and continues to do that.

Now, verse 11, if you have little headers in your Bible, what does it say right there? Paul opposes Cephas. Who's Cephas? Peter? Cephas, as you probably remember, is an Aramaic word. It means rock. It's what Jesus gives the name to Peter. So here's a Hebrew person with an Aramaic name given to him by Jesus. I was looking up the proper way to say this, and I think I counted 12 people that claimed the proper way to say it. And we're all a little bit different. But I noticed one thing. It's really different in Hebrew than it is in

Aramaic. In Hebrew, you would say Cephas. It's got a short C. And that S is kind of an SZ sound. See-fasz . Okay?

If you said it in Aramaic, the C has a hard sound. It's a K. And the as makes an as sound that we would normally have. It's Kay-fas. So you might hear people say See-fasz. You might hear people say Kay-fass. That's the same word. Just one's kind of how they say it in Hebrew and one's how they say it in Aramaic. I'm going to use the term Peter because I know how to say that one, okay?

So, Paul calls out Peter here, and he has this beef with Peter. And the beef is, hey, when you're with the Gentiles, you act like a Gentile. And when you're with that really ultra conservative sect of Jews, and these Jews have been saying for a while, hey, we know how to be Jews. We know how to follow God. We've been doing it for thousands of years. You gotta keep all those festival days and all those Sabbaths and you gotta get circumcised. There's 6,000 rules for keeping the Sabbath. We know how to do it. And if you don't do it this way, you're doing it wrong. And so when Peter is with the Gentiles, he doesn't do those things. But when he's with this group of Jews, he does do these things. And Paul calls him out on it.

And at first it seems like kind of bold of Paul, right? I mean, you're not one of the 12. What are you doing? I mean, Jesus told Peter he's the rock, right? You had a pretty impressive calling from the Lord.

And there's a way of reading Paul's writing sometimes where you can take it like he's a little bit proud of himself, a little bit full of himself. He's a little bit, hey, look at me. See what I have. See what I'm doing? Look up to verse six. That's up above. He says, *as for those who were held in high esteem, whatever they were, makes no difference to me. God doesn't show favoritism. They added nothing to my message.* There's a way of reading that of like, well, who does Paul think he is, right? The people of esteem can't add anything to his message. He's got it all right. He's perfect. There's a way of reading that. I don't think that's how Paul means it, okay? I don't think that's what he means, right, not what he's trying to do.

Look at verse 14. This is where he kind of calls him out. He says, when I saw they were not acting in line with the truth of the Gospel, I said to Cephas in

front of them, you are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not a Jew. How is it then that you force the Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? He's not trying to dominate Peter. He's not trying to make Peter look bad. He's not trying to make himself look better than Peter. Okay, We'll get more on that here in a minute. We'll get more on that in a minute.

All right, then we come to verses 15 to 18. Now, verses 15 to 18, in my opinion, this is me speaking, are amongst the most important verses in the Bible. I don't think they're THE most important, but they're in that top group. If you're going to make a top 10 list, these better be in it. Okay? And I think a lot of Christians get this wrong. We struggle with this because it's hard. We're not going to spend a lot of time talking about it today. That's for the small groups to discuss. So I hope you're all in a small group because I think that's where we're going to discuss this a lot. But there's a lot of things going on here. So let's look at verses 15 to 18. If you really understand this. Well, I think you're doing better than many Christians.

*Verse 15 says, we who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we too have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.*

*But if in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not. If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.*

There's some stuff we need to dive into there. And like I said, we're just going to skim the top and kind of leave that to the small groups. But real quick, what justifies us in verse 16? Faith. I skipped this one. Sorry. **If you're following on your notes, Paul's big on authenticity and authority**, right? Paul's big on authenticity and authority.

But verse 16 says **a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ**. I mean, that's what the Bible says, plain and simple. Now, we get that and we say that and we compare it back, but we often have problems with it. Right. And I've used this example before.

You use it when we're looking at some big topic or something. Some of us head way over to the extreme on this side, and some of us head way over to the extreme on this side. And generally those are bad places to be. Somewhere here in the middle is a better view of it. Okay? And in this case, when we're talking about how we're justified by grace or by the law, right? We go over here, we start abusing the grace. I have God's grace. I can do anything I want. You know, if I cheat on my wife, oh, well, I got grace maybe from God, probably not from your wife. Right. If I do these things, I don't like that part of the law. So I'm not going to keep that. That part's too hard. And God gives me grace. Not a good place to be.

The other place is over here where I've got to somehow show that I'm worth it and I can earn it. And I try to do more and more and more and more. And that's what was happening with these particular Jewish group. We've got to keep those festival days and those Sabbaths, and we got all those rules about the Sabbath to keep. We've got all this stuff we've got to do. Not a good place to be either. We actually have a song about this, Right. Remember the song Holy Water that we sing? I don't want to abuse your grace, God, I need it every day. It's the only thing that ever really makes me want to change. We should have sang that song today. Thought of it too late. All right, so we don't want to be way over there. We don't want to be way over here. We want to be somewhere in the middle.

The last thing I want to say about this real quick is there's. There's room in the middle for some variation. Some of us may lean a little this way, some of us may lean a little that way. That's okay. We don't all have to be in lockstep. Okay. That's okay. That's one of the things I love about the Adventist Church. We have fundamental beliefs, not dogma. And those fundamental beliefs give us a little room for some variation. Some of us may be a little more this, a little more that. It's okay. So have some grace for the person sitting at the end of the pew that's doing it different than you. Quit elbowing your spouse. I saw that.

Okay, let's look at verses 19 to 21. It says, *for through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. What for through the law. I died to the law so that I might live for God. I don't even know what that means. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live.*

*But Christ lives in me the life that I now live in the body. I live in faith in the Son of God who loved me and who gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.*

What right. It's like a tongue twister. And some of this points back to 15 to 18, but I kind of want to focus on verse 20. *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live. But Christ lives in me. The life that I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who. Who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

Now, what does it mean when Paul says, I have been crucified with Christ because he was not physically crucified with Christ? Right. So it's a metaphor for something. The question is what?

Anybody here looking at the King James version? Anybody got King James open? What's King James say there instead of I have been crucified, what's it say? New King James doesn't have it. It's got to be the old King James. Verse 20 in King James, I am crucified.

So that's present tense. I am crucified. NIV, and every other version. I looked through all 4857 versions. That's a real number. No, it's not. But I looked at a lot of versions. They all are past tense. And I looked it up and in the original language, it's past tense.

It's actually past perfect tense for all you. I don't want English teachers get upset at me. I do remember, right? Past tense is 'I ate'. That's past tense. 'I ate pizza' is past perfect tense because it tells you what you ate. So I was crucified with Christ is past perfect tense. Yes, English teachers, I was paying attention, okay? But King James is the only version that has that in present tense.

And I tried to figure out why. And I've come to the conclusion that we don't know why, because there's a lot of opinions out there. The kind of majority kind of says, though, that they're trying to impress upon the reader that you have to make this decision every day to follow Jesus, to be a part of it. It's not something that you do once in the past, it's something you do every day. And I agree and disagree. Okay.

How many of you here are baptized? Let me see your hands. Who's baptized?

Good number of us. Some of you I know are baptized because I was at your baptism. Didn't raise your hands. So when you were baptized, probably before you were baptized, you made a decision to repent, turn away from a certain way of life to go a different way. You repented and you were baptized. Now, every day, do you repent and turn away from your sinful life?

Kinda. But not really. Because if you did that, you'd stay in the same place every day. Every day would be, I repent and I start over. I repent and I start over, and I repent and I And you never grow. Really, what you do is you reaffirm the decision every day, right? So I repented, and every day I say, lord, I'm still good on that, right? It's like you don't get married to your spouse every day, but every day you should tell them, I reaffirm my love for you. I still love you. Right? Because you're growing. You're growing. You're moving on.

Okay, so maybe we're splitting hairs a little bit, but even the new King James switched back to past tense. Past perfect tense. All right, so we've been talking about King James. Let's see how the King James reads. See if that helps us any.

Starting again with verse 19. It says, *for through the law I am dead to the law that I might live unto God. I still don't know what that means. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.* That's one sentence. That one sentence has a colon, multiple commas, a semicolon, and another colon and a period. That may be the most complicated sentence I've ever read my whole life, and I don't know what it means, Right? It's tough. Verse 21, *I do not frustrate the grace of God. I kind of like that. For if righteousness comes by the law, then Christ died in vain.*

Now, that's pretty close to what the NIV says. Not all that different. Just the present tense versus the past tense. And I read a bunch of other versions, and they didn't help a whole lot either. So I switched over to The Message. Now, The Message is a paraphrase. It's one guy's idea of what he thinks they're trying to say here. But we're a little bit stuck, or at least I was a little bit stuck. And so I wanted some another opinion. So we go to the Message to get this guy's opinion.

Listen to what he said. He says *actually what took place was this. I tried keeping the rules and working my head off to please God and it didn't work. So I quit being a lawman so that I could be God's man. Christ's life showed me how and enabled me to do it.*

*I identified myself completely with him. Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion. And I am no longer driven to impress God.*

*God lives in me. The life you see living is not mine, but was lived by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. And I'm not going to go back on that. Is it not clear to you that to go back on that old rule keeping peer pleasing religion would be an abandonment of everything personal and free? In my relationship with God, I refuse to do that to repudiate God's grace. Repudiate means to reject, to turn away from. If a living relationship with God could come by rule keeping, then Christ died unnecessarily.*

All right, I feel like we're making some progress. I was, but I'm starting beginning to understand this. Well, he used a lot more words so that helped some.

Okay, but what do we see here? See what Paul's saying is that there's a penalty for not keeping the law. Perfectly right. That penalty is death. We know that the wages of sin is death. And there's no amount of keeping the law that gets you into heaven. The law cannot justify you. The only thing the law can do is show you where you've messed up. That's all it does, right?

I read a story about a young man who made a mistake, committed a crime and he did it. He robbed a convenience store. And over the years as his case went through court, he kind of had a change of heart and tried to make up for it. He was a good citizen and he was behaving well. *About ready to switch mics here.* He was behaving well and trying to help the community and he donated to charities and he did all these things to try and prove that he was a good citizen.

Eventually he gets to court and the judge declared him guilty even though he had been such a good person all the years. Because why? He did the crime. He held up the store.

See you can't earn goodness. You can't. It's unobtainium. You can't do it. And what Paul is saying here is that the penalty for not keeping the law perfectly is death. And Paul as a Pharisee knew that he hadn't kept the law perfectly. And he knew what was coming to him, what was owed. If you want to be in God's presence, you have to be perfect or you can't withstand God's presence. And all the law does is show you you messed up and you can't go. Well, that seems kind of hopeless, doesn't it? That's it, I'm done. So that seems kind of hopeless.

And so we can't be justified and please God. And so Paul says, I died to that, See, **because when you're dead, you're dead to everything, including the law**, right? When somebody dies, they don't just partially die, you die, right? And so when you die, you die to everything, including the law. And Paul says, I died with Christ. I died to the law through the law. I died to the law. The law says the wages of sin are death. So I died, right? And Paul's not going to nullify. He's not going to ignore or make worthless God's grace, okay? He was condemned by the law.

If you could be made righteous by the law, why did Jesus have to die? Jesus doesn't have to die if I could be made righteous by the law. So Jesus comes to die because you can't get righteousness that way. The law cannot save us. So we die to the law and we put all our faith in Christ's righteousness and his death on the cross, right?

So how many of you play the piano or guitar? Let me see your hands. I'm not recruiting for the band. It's okay. Nobody, couple, couple out there. Play a little bit, okay?

I, you know, I hacked around on the guitar a little bit. I can't do anything on the piano, right? It's. Oh look, pretty white and black keys. I wonder what they do, right? I can make noise, but I can't make music. But what if I had a world class musician there with me and he told me exactly where to put my fingers. Could I make music then? Probably not, right? I could make some nice sounding chords. Oh, that sounded nice. Well, now move all your fingers this way. Well, that sounded nice, but there was five minutes between the last sound and this sound. So we're not getting a lot of music, right? What if that world class

piano pianist could be inside me and could just Control my fingers, then I'd have some chance of making some music, right?

See, and Jesus is our North Star. And when he's our North Star, there's always something between us. There's always a distance between. Always looking for that example. And there's goodness in that. But if the North Star is inside us, I've removed one level of indirection and now it's just coming out. I don't have to look to somebody else, say, what should I do? Okay, go do this. It's inside of me. And see, when I can let Christ in, I can do these things. It's so much better that way. Christ does the work for us. We don't do it. It's not forced. I don't have to get up every morning and say, lord, help me remember not to kill anybody today. Help me remember not to cheat on my wife. Help me remember not to lie. Help me remember not to cuss. Help me remember to keep the Sabbath. I don't have to do that because when Christ is inside, that happens automatically. I keep the law, not because it earns me something, but because there's no other way to behave. There's no other way to behave. There's no other way to do it.

The law condemns me and I couldn't be good enough under the law. But when Christ lives in me, I don't have to worry about that. See, the law is there for our benefit. It helps us be a better person. I'm a better person when I don't murder people. I'm a better person when I don't cheat on my wife. I'm a better person when I keep the Sabbath. You can go through the whole thing. It makes us better. It's not there to constrain us. It's there to help us be better. And when Christ is inside me, that happens automatically. That grace,

**A reflection. Have you died to the law and yourself like Paul did, and invited Christ to live in you?**

Now, some of you may be here for the first time today, like, no, I haven't done that yet. Okay, no worries. Some of you may have been here 10,000 times and said, I haven't done that yet. Yet. I'm starting to get a little worried. Some of you maybe have done that, but kind of wandered away and maybe you need to come back. Some of us maybe are good. It's okay. We should reaffirm that decision.

I'm going to pray here just for a second and give. I'm not going to ask you to stand up or come down or anything. It's not between you and me. It's between you and God. Pray for just a second.

Heavenly Father, help us to die to ourselves. Help us to die for all the things that we think we have to do to be good enough. Help us to die to all the things that just seem to get in the way. And help us to keep our eye on the North Star so much that eventually that North Star is inside of us. And there's almost no other way to behave. Yeah, we'll still make mistakes, we still mess up. But Lord, we're grateful for your grace and we don't want to abuse it, But we're so thankful for it. Help us to accept that and then let it drive everything else out. Everything. We're not going to hold on to anything. My ego doesn't matter anymore. All that matters is what you have planned for us and what you want for us. Be with us now. In Jesus name. Amen.

The **challenge** this week. **So I want you to write down three to five of your goals, dreams, desires, whatever you call it. Put a check next to those things if they keep you pointed to the North Star. Put an X next to those things if it doesn't, or it has the potential to impede you from following the North Star.** All right. That's a tough one. I did it. I didn't like the results. It's a tough one.

All right, thank you.