Greetings once again in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and join me, if you would, in prayer. Let us pray. Eternal God, as we come to look at the life of this remarkable individual in the early part of the church’s life, we ask that You would open up our eyes to see afresh, and help us to come to understand particularly the power and message of Your grace, for it’s in Christ’s name that we pray. Amen.

We come today to the life of perhaps the most influential of all the church theologians. Some have said that all of philosophy is a kind of footnote to Plato. I think it would be as easily said and as correct to affirm that all of theology is a kind of footnote to Augustine for so much of our thought has been shaped and formed, [and] so many of our questions have been posed by Augustine and his work. And yet Augustine remains for us one, I think, of the most accessible of all the early Christian thinkers. And I would like to present him to you in a way that hopefully can take hold of your life and can bring you some new insights for Christian living and for faith.

We’re fortunate to have some wonderful material available to us on the life and work of Saint Augustine. The most important of the biographies written about Augustine was written by Peter Brown. It is titled Augustine of Hippo, put out in London and Boston by Faber and Faber. This is the classic and standard biography, and I would encourage any who would like to read a biography of Augustine or who get interested in Augustine following the lecture to pick up that volume and to read it. A shorter work which is equally interesting is by Henry Chadwick. His little book is [called] Augustine, by Oxford University Press, and you’ll find this in paperback and in very readable form.

One of the most interesting companion studies to Augustine is Roy Battenhouse’s [book] A Companion to the Study of Saint Augustine, which was put out in New York by Oxford University Press. It’s a little more difficult to get hold of now for purchase, but you can find it in most good libraries.
Norman Geisler has put together a very interesting collection of statements by Augustine in his book, *What Augustine Says*, by Baker Publishing. And he picks up a variety of different theological and practical categories and quotes Augustine within those categories.

Those of you who are familiar with *Christian History*, that marvelous set of magazine historical works, will want to pull out the copy of *Christian History* on Saint Augustine. It’s issue number 15, volume 6, number 3. And that is a fascinating and very readable account of Augustine’s life and work.

The best thing to do of all, however, is to read Augustine himself, and the two most important books are his *City of God* and his *Confessions*. The issues which I am going to be using are both published by Image Book (It is a division of Doubleday Company) from Garden City, New York. The one, *City of God*, is a nice little paperback which is easily read with an introduction by Etienne Gilson. And the Image Book edition of the *Confessions of Saint Augustine* is an excellent translation by John K. Ryan. And it’s from that that I want to quote as we look at his life and look occasionally at some of the things that he wrote, particularly in his *Confessions*. The best place to start in studying Augustine is in his *Confessions*, because they give us the fullest account of his own spiritual pilgrimage and they open up the door for us to much of his work. A more recent book by Jaroslav Pelikan is one that some of you may want to pick up as well, called *The Mystery of Continuity*. It was put out by the University Press of Virginia.

Let’s look at the life of Augustine and then talk a little bit about his meaning and importance for us in church history. Augustine was born in Tagaste (that’s in modern Algeria) in AD 354. Tagaste had, of course, existed for a good many years (some 300) by the time Augustine was born. It was an area of agriculture. It was on the frontier of the Roman Empire, so a chain of forts protected the area from the Sahara Desert and those that might attack from the south. The area had actually gone through an economic boom during the first of the third century. But by the time Augustine was born in the fourth century, a halt to that economic prosperity had come. And in fact, fourth century North Africa was a kind of stagnant backwater of Rome. It was one of the colonies that was largely ignored, though of course, it was also heavily taxed.

Rome, at this time, had its own concerns: inflation, wars on its frontiers, governmental unrest, all of the problems which we’ll have occasion to look at more in detail later on. Tagaste was
administered from Carthage (which was the large central city of that part of the world). And Carthage was, of course, heavily influenced by Roman architecture and style. Tagaste itself was some 200 miles from Carthage on a little higher level, some 2,000 feet above the Mediterranean, and cut off from the sea by pine forests and olive groves. Most of the folk in Tagaste were farmers, but there were a small group of professionals including Augustine’s own family.

His father, Patricius, was a poor man but one who very much valued classical education. He probably spoke some Latin. His mother, Monica, is one of the truly interesting people of all church history, and she becomes the central character in the *Confessions*. Patricius was not a Christian. Monica was a fervent Christian and Monica had a deep influence throughout Augustine’s life.

The *Confessions* themselves cover the first 33 years of his life, and as you dip into those you’re going to find him reflecting very candidly on his own early upbringing and his life and his eventual coming to faith in Christ.

We know that he had at least one brother, two sisters, and his parents I’ve mentioned already. Monica herself was deeply pious and deeply committed to the kind of unique African Christian religious life. Augustine seemed to maintain a kind of coldness to his father and, in fact, only mentions his death in passing. This contrasts with this enormous warmth that he feels for his mother (and this, of course, has given psychoanalysts a field day. And like many figures of church history that are notable, he has gotten his share of attention by those who try to analyze that family relation).

We do know that both the father and mother, however, deeply valued education. And in fact, education was the way out. It was the way to success for the young men of North Africa at that period of time. The very core of education for people in the Roman world at this time was what was called rhetoric, or the art of eloquence. And this is what Augustine ultimately mastered. The crowning achievement of education was to become a great orator, one who could move people by word of mouth.

Augustine began his education in Tagaste and then very shortly went to Madaura about the age of 15. It was a university town, [and] there they had a number of fine educators (including some of the early Platonists like Apuleius). His teachers there were pagan, though they interested him from those early years in classical
learning. Augustine was forced, however, to quit for a year when his father needed to earn enough money to send him back. And this year of inactivity was miserable for Augustine—it was a kind of belated adolescence, here he was in his mid-teens. Monica warned him about women, but for Augustine women continued to be a difficulty in his life until his later years.

After these troubling months together back home, Augustine was enabled through sufficient money and through some help to go to Carthage, the big city, to study. And there he went at age 17. Life was exciting there, students were rowdy in that town. Boys from all over the little villages in North Africa came to the big city of Carthage wanting to feel their oats, wanting to exercise their freedom, perhaps for the first time. And Augustine fell into a kind of fraternity group called *euersores*. They were the rowdies of the area in which there was great activity of many kinds—upsetting things, involving themselves in pleasures and enjoyments of all sorts.

Augustine describes all of this in his *Confessions*, and let me read a section of that to get a little of the flavor of what he found in Carthage. And I’m reading here from this Image edition from the John Ryan translation of the *Confessions*, page 77:

I came to Carthage where a cauldron of shameful love seethed and sounded about me on every side [You remember, some of you, who know T. S. Eliot’s poems, his “Waste Places” pick up exactly this section from Augustine’s *Confessions* and he talks about “To Carthage I came, burning, burning.” You may remember that phrase. And that’s relating back to this 17-year-old student who now comes to the big city]. I was not yet in love, but I was in love with love. And by a more hidden want, I hated myself for wanting little. I sought for something to love, for I was in love with love. I hated security and a path free from snares, for there was a hunger within me from a lack of that inner food which is Yourself, my God. Yet, by that hunger I did not hunger, but was without desire for incorruptible food. Not because I was already filled with it, but because the more empty I was, the more distaste I had for it. Therefore, my soul did not grow healthy, but it was ulcered over and it cast outside itself and in its misery was avid to be scathed by the things of sense, things that would not be loved if they lacked all soul. To love and to be
loved was sweet to me and all the more if I enjoyed my loved one's body. Therefore, I defiled the very source of friendship by the filth of concupiscence. And in its clear waters I befouled with the lust of hell. Yet foul and vicious as I was with overflowing vanity, I took pride at being refined and cultured. I plunged headlong into love whose captive I desired to be. But my God, my mercy, with how much gall did you sprinkle all that sweetness of mine and how good you were to do it for I was loved and I had gained love's bond of joy. But in my joy I was bound about with painful chains of iron so that I might be scourged by burning rods of jealousy and suspicion and fear and anger and quarreling.

Then he goes on to describe his experience there in Carthage as a young man wanting to feel his oats, very much drawn to relationships with women. He even entered into a relationship with a mistress. He lived with her for almost a decade. And in fact, had a son out of wedlock with her, a young man named Adeodatus (he'll come back into our story in just a bit). We don't even know the name of his mistress. He never tells us. And in not telling us we learn a great deal about him and how he felt about that early period of his life.

So here we have in Carthage not only a young teenager feeling his oats, trying to fill his life with every kind of pleasure that he could find in that city; but he also had a deep love for learning and these two warred with one anther. He discovered in Cicero a great thirst to seek wisdom. He went to church occasionally in Carthage, as a matter of fact, primarily to find a girlfriend. And this, of course, has great precedent across the history of the church—many have and continue to go to church for that purpose.

But Augustine was turned off by his reading of the Bible. He found it cluttered, uneven, contradictory, filled with immoral stories. It was distasteful to him in contrast to the work in Virgil and Cicero and the others whom he was reading. He was drawn, however, to a new form of Christianity which had emerged in Carthage at this time—a group called the Manichaeans. It was founded by Mani, the apostle of Jesus Christ. Mani had received an inspired message in Mesopotamia, was executed in 276 by the Persian government, but his movement spread rapidly. And missionaries had arrived in Carthage around 297 (a century before the time of Augustine). They stressed fasting, elaborate taboos, gathering together in these secret groups of hearers. The worship was complicated
with mysterious rites and prayers and procedures. It was actually illegal in Carthage at this time. And thus, these folk were severely persecuted. They existed almost like a secret society, a kind of underground church.

What attracted Augustine to the Manichaean philosophy was the solution that it offered to him for this enormous dualistic struggle in his life. On the one side, he was drawn to the pleasures of the senses that he discovered in town. On the other side, he was deeply interested in learning and the pursuit of truth and wisdom. And he asked himself the question, as hundreds of Christians have, “From what cause to we get evil?” “Why do we do what we do?” And Manichaeism’s answer was dualism, pure and simple: The kingdom of light as opposed to the kingdom of darkness. Light comes from God, darkness comes from the devil. Good and evil are eternally co-existent, equal in power, good tending to be passive, evil is aggressive. You can see how this might help Augustine in his struggle, because his love of learning he felt came from God. Whereas, his love of women and pleasure came from the devil. Manichaeism then helped Augustine to salvage his faith without being done in by his old guilts.

It’s interesting that, as Augustine looks back at this period of his life and his own activities, he is ruthlessly honest in how he assesses the lure of evil within his own life. One of the most fascinating accounts of this came out of that unsettling year in which he had to return from Madaura and his studies there to Tagaste. And he talks about falling in with a group of rowdy kids in that little town. And he says on one occasion this group was together and he describes coming to a vineyard where there was a pear tree, and let me read that description for you, on page 70 of his Confessions:

In a garden nearby to our vineyard there was a pear tree loaded with fruit that was desirable neither in appearance nor in taste. Late one night, to which hour, according to our pestilential custom we had kept up our street games, a group of very bad youngsters, set out to shake down and rob this tree. We took great loads of fruit from it not for our own eating, but rather to throw to the pigs. Even if we did eat a little of it, we did this not because it pleased us by taste, but for the reason that it was forbidden. Foul was the evil and I loved it. I loved my fault, not that for which I did the fault, but I loved the fault itself. Base in soul was I and I leapt down from your firm clasp even towards complete destruction and I
sought nothing from the shameless deed but shame itself.

Now that fascinating little account of the pear tree episode is an indication, as Augustine looks back on these early years of his experience, of the enormous struggle with evil. [It was] an evil which he didn’t wink at, but which he gave deep and new meaning. It’s not so much the benefits of sin that he longed for, but the very sin itself. And in that, he came to discover his deeply perplexing problem of sin and evil. Manichaeism gave him a solution to that for a number of years. But increasingly, he found that insufficient—that kind of eternal dualism for solving the paradox of evil which he found within himself.

In 375, Augustine returned from Carthage after four years to teach literature in Tagaste, his own hometown. He brought with him this Manichaean philosophy. In fact, he converted some of the leading citizens of the town to that position. Monica, of course, was appalled. And she, in fact, shut Augustine out of the house and wouldn’t allow him to come in. Later, only relenting because a dream taught her, she felt that Augustine would eventually return to the faith.

Now Manichaean philosophy is really a kind of form of Gnosticism, a salvation through knowledge and through this kind of mysterious knowledge which is known only to the initiates. Augustine is deeply shaken, however, when one of his Manichaean friends, just before his death, accepts Catholic baptism, renounces his Manichaean beliefs, and returns to orthodox Christianity. Augustine is not only shaken by that, but he is internally shaken by some of his own reflections on Manichaeism. His colleagues, of course, said, “If you really understand Manichaean philosophy then you would have an answer to your problems. And in fact, the great teacher of that day in Manichaean circles was Faustus of Milevus. And Faustus eventually came to Carthage, and Augustine met with him hoping now that all of these deeply troubling inner struggles would be resolved. But he came away discouraged and he wrote: “I found at once that Faustus was not learned in any of the liberal studies save literature and he wasn’t especially learned in that either.” In other words, he had questions which the leading Manichaean teacher could not answer. And ultimately, this disquiet within is going to lead him to a new faith.

Augustine moves to Rome in AD 384. It was a difficult time for him. Rome was a disappointment. He got sick. He worried deeply about his mother, Monica, who didn’t want him to go and had
begged him not to. The students that he took there to teach wouldn’t pay him (remember, in those days students and teachers worked out their arrangements on an individual basis). And his students were rowdy, just as he had been in his slightly earlier years. And the only thing that held him together at this time was a circle of friends which he had gathered. And from Augustine, I think we can learn some important things about relationships and friendships; for Augustine was the kind of gregarious person who formed cores of friends, wanted them around him, and drew from them great strength. As he wrote in his *Confessions*, “I rejoiced in their company, to talk and to laugh, to do each other kindnesses, to read pleasant books together, to pass from lightest jesting to talk of deepest things and back again. To differ without rancor, to be impatient for the return of the absents, kindling a flame which fuses our very souls together and makes us one.”

Augustine himself then drew strength from his friends, but the rest of his life seemed to be in shambles. It was at that point that he came to the attention of Simicus, a senator and literary figure, a prefect in Rome. Simicus had the task of selecting a professor of rhetoric for the school in Milan, and he turned to Augustine and asked him if he would do it. Augustine accepted, and from 386 on he not only arrives in Milan to pick up that task as a disillusioned and somewhat broken person, but in Milan he meets Ambrose. Now Ambrose is that remarkable preacher of Milan, some 14 years older than Augustine. He had been bishop there for a number of years, a magnificent educated preacher, one who could defend the Old Testament against the Manichaean charges. And it was under Ambrose and his teaching that Augustine came to see the Christian faith in a whole new way. And he was drawn once again back to the church as a seeker having found his Manichaean philosophy bankrupt. He turned once again to his mother’s faith to see if he could find their help. And Ambrose was the one who was the mediator to open that door for him. I think it’s important to point out the enormous importance of powerful, intellectual, able preaching in our day, just as it was in Augustine’s day.

Along with Ambrose and his preaching, however, was the marvelous personal counseling which he got from Simplicianus. Simplicianus, who was no mean scholar himself, befriended Augustine and actually began talking with Augustine about his own spiritual struggles. Now the interesting thing about Simplicianus is that he would not fall into the easy trap of simply talking theology with Augustine. He came very early on to see that Augustine’s struggle was a struggle with his own sensuous appetites. And he wouldn’t let Augustine free from recognizing
those passions and dealing with them as the core of his own sinfulness.

Furthermore, he helped to introduce Augustine to Platonism which was very popular in Milan at that time. The difficulty, however, with Platonism (as taught by Plotinus and others) was that it focused upon education as a means of discovering the divine or the holy within oneself. Whereas Simplicianus and Ambrose were teaching the classic biblical faith that one needed to be liberated by God—one needs redemption, not simply education. And that as far as Platonism takes one, is not sufficient if one does not ultimately come to the place of redemption of sorrow for sins and of restoration through the cross.

It was in that context then, in Milan, as Augustine is listening to the powerful preaching of Ambrose, is being counseled by his friend, Simplicianus, that he ultimately enters the garden in that famous portion of the *Confessions* where Christ meets him and makes him His own. And I’d like to read to you just a section of that important account of his conversion. We’ll begin on page 199 of the Image edition of the *Confessions*, and I’ll read just a few sections and then come to the very famous passage where he is actually converted.

Thus, I was sick and tormented. I was abraded. I felt bitterly and more so than ever before. I twisted and turned in my chain until it might be completely broken, although now I was scarcely held by it. Within myself, I said, “Behold let it be done now, now let it be done.” And by those words I was already moving to a decision... My lovers of old, trifles of trifles and vanities of vanities held me back. They plucked at my fleshly garment and they whispered softly, “Do you cast us off? And from that moment we shall no longer be with you forever and ever? And again from that moment no longer will this thing and that thing be allowed to you forever and ever?”

Remember in another portion of the *Confessions*, Augustine prays for continence. But he says, “Don’t bring it too quickly to me.”

Then picking up on the bottom of page 200: “For an overpowering habit kept saying to me, ‘Do you think that you can live without these sins?’” And then, as he’s struggling with this:
From a nearby house a voice, like that of a boy or girl, I know not which, chanted and repeated over and over, “Take up and read. Take up and read” \[tolle lege, tolle lege\]. I interpreted this solely as a command given to me by God, to open the book and read the first chapter I came upon. So I hurried back to the spot where Olympius was sitting, for I had put there the volume of the apostle when I got up and left him. I snatched it up, opened it up and read in silence the chapter on which my eyes first fell.

Now normally I don’t encourage the kind of hunt and peck method of picking up the Scripture and simply pointing to whatever your eyes first land upon. But here, clearly, God’s providential care was in effect because what he read first were these words:

“Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering or impurities, not in strife and envying. But put you on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh and its concupiscences” \[Romans 13:14-15\]. No further wish I had to read nor was there need to do so. Instantly in truth at the end of this sentence, as if before a peaceful light streamed into my heart and all the dark shadows of doubt fled away.

Just what Simplicianus had been pressing on him now was pressed on him from this fascinating passage that his eyes fell upon. The very problem that he had been struggling with is the one that he had to contend with and it was out of that then that came this experience of faith and conversion.

Then this interesting conclusion of that section: “Whereupon, I went to my mother, Monica, and I told her the whole story and she rejoiced. She saw that through me You had given her far more than she had long begged for, through her piteous tears and groans.” Remember all the years she had struggled think that this son ought to come to faith, but seeming to be beyond it. “For you had converted me to yourself,” Augustine writes, “so that I would seek neither wife nor ambition in this world, for I would stand on that rule of faith where so many years before you had showed me to her. You turned her mourning into joy, far richer than she had desired, far dearer and purer than she had sought, even in grandchildren born of my flesh.”

What a delightful thing it was that before her death, Monica who
had prayed so many hours for her son would see him return. And I think that should be an encouragement to all of us as well who pray for those who are outside the faith and it seems like they may never come to faith. And yet, here we have an example, after years of tears and struggle, she had the joy of finding her own son not only in faith, but one who would ultimately enter the ministry of the church.

It was following this time that Augustine, along with a number—Monica, his mother; his son; his eldest brother, Navigius; his cousins; Olympius, his friend, who was later the Bishop of Tagaste; Licentianus, Romanus’ son; Trigantius, a young nobleman, and others—all went up to a villa around 386 in the foothills of the Alps to recover. Now Augustine had been ill, as you know, he had lost his voice and, as a matter of fact, went there to try to recover all of this. It was there that he began to write. And we have a number of his early writings, The Soliloquies, The Happy Life, and so on. And there he had a wonderful time of fellowship and friendship with friends. And now [he was] completely at peace again with his mother. It was a marvelous occasion for him.

He returned to Milan in March of AD 387, was baptized there by Ambrose, his great teacher, [and] he did some additional reading. Unfortunately, it was soon after that that his mother died. And Augustine then returned to Carthage. From Carthage, he went back to his hometown in Tagaste. And he became a part of a group there called Servants of God—it was an early Monastic movement. And he began to settle in, giving some part of his own estate to the community of which he was now a part. And it was there in that community that he continued to write and seek to understand the faith in a fuller and more fruitful way.

In AD 391, he made a trip to Hippo Regius. This was to visit a friend who was a candidate for the monastery there at Tagaste of which Augustine was a part. The bishop there was Valerius. He recognized Augustine at the worship and took for his sermon the need for an assistant minister in that church. And Augustine was caught in the web. And he had nowhere to go. He had very little recourse but to agree to this rather unusual subscription. Very soon he was not only leading in many areas of worship in that part of the world but also preaching regularly. And it’s there that he began his famous writings against the three great foes of his time.

First, against the Manichaeans, the movement out of which he had come. And you can imaging that in his 33 book reply to Faustus the Manichaean, that he would have had an inside track
not only on the critique of that movement, but also pointing to its inadequacies.

Second, he also fought against the Donatists. This was a schismatic group in the church in North Africa. And as a matter of fact, some of his most important writings grow out of that debate and struggle with the Donatists.

Third, he also wrote against the Pelagians. The Pelagians were teaching on the basis of the British born Pelagius, who visited North Africa and set off Augustine’s pen in this area of writing. Pelagius taught that the basic notions of original sin, of human insufficiency, of complete pre-destination, prevenient grace and regenerative baptism (which Augustine had come to believe and was teaching), that these needed to be modified and seen in different form.

So that you have, growing out of this period, not only this remarkable ministry of Augustine, ultimately as Bishop of Hippo, but the focused writing against the Manichaens, the Donatists and Pelagians. In all, Augustine during this period of his life wrote some 97 separate works consisting of 232 books, 220 letters that have been preserved, and many others that have been lost to history. We have some 396 sermons of his. He was quite a powerful preacher as well, but it’s in the development of his theology that we find the greatest impact of Augustine’s life and work. And out of all of that early experience of his, struggling with sin and ultimately being discovered by God’s grace and restored in that wonderful action of God’s mercy, to true faith and ultimately to service in the church; it’s in the spelling out of that, in his writings and teachings and his theological treatises, that we have the greatest impact of this remarkable individual.

Part of that floated around the issue of freedom and necessity. The apostle Paul, of course, in Romans had stressed corporate corruption an inability. We see this in Romans 7. But virtually all of the early church writers, from Clement of Rome right down to the time of Augustine, stressed freedom. Irenaeus commented, “All men are of the same nature, able both to hold fast and do what is good on one hand, and on the other having the power to cast it from them and not to do it.” Justin Martyr, in this little collection of Cyril Richardson that we’ve been using on page 269 in his First Apology wrote:

So that none may infer from what we have said, that the events we speak of because they were
foreknown and predicted took place according to inevitable destiny, I can explain this too. We have learned from the prophets and declare as the truth that penalties and punishments and good rewards are given according to the quality of each man’s actions. If this were not so, but all things happen in accordance with destiny, nothing at all would be left up to us. For if it is destined that one man should be good and another wicked, then neither is the one acceptable nor the other blameworthy. And if the human race does not have the power by free choice to avoid what is shameful and to choose what is right, then there is no responsibility for actions of any kind.

You have the same basic notion coming in Clement of Alexandria. He writes, “Although flesh involves sin, corruption and death, man is capable of following God’s command. By disobeying God, each man becomes the cause of his own corruption and death. So as far as we can, let us try to sin as little as possible.”

The question obviously is: Why did Christ have to die if this is true? The answer, increasingly in those early centuries, came to be: to overcome death rather than to overcome sin. It was the universality of death rather than the inevitability of sin that was central. And why did they stress this freedom? Perhaps because: the Greek and Romans tended to stress the faiths—this kind of necessitarian destiny. There was great popularity in that time of horoscopes and the like. And so the tendency was to counterbalance that with a greater emphasis upon freedom. Augustine, however, recaptures that old Pauline stress upon original sin. “Adam’s sin,” he wrote, “was itself so great that by it in one man the whole human race was originally, and so to say, radically condemned. It cannot be pardoned and washed away except through one man, Jesus Christ.”

For Augustine, the starting place of theology was God and his sovereign grace. He wrote:

Grace draws and raises the soul to repentance, faith, and praise. It transforms a human will so that it is capable of doing good. In short, grace frees us from sin’s bondage and allows us in that freedom to respond in repentance and faith. God’s grace initiates action. To reach down where a person himself or herself cannot move, they are in bondage
to sin. And releases that person from the prison house of sin and allows that person then to respond in faith.

This was, of course, Augustine's own experience, which we see in his *Confessions*. We see his own inability to solve his sin problem by himself. And the only solution then came to be God’s grace, brought to him by God’s sovereign and gracious act. How does salvation then take place? How is grace dispensed? Well Augustine argued that it was through the church and the sacraments. Baptism for Augustine is the washing away of absolutely all sins, whether of deeds, words, thoughts, whether original or added, whether committed unconsciously or permitted consciously. And the Eucharist is life itself. Baptism, then, is essentially equivalent with salvation and the Eucharist with the life food that one eats as a newborn child of God.

He concluded then: “There is no other valid means of making Christians or remitting sins except by causing men to become believers by the institution of Christ in the church and through its sacraments. No one can hope for either salvation or eternal life without baptism and the Lord’s body and blood.”

Now we are going to see that particular theological emphasis picked up both positively and negatively throughout the history of the church. In Augustine’s own day, Pelagius, the British monk, opposed this position maintaining that all have the same choice as Adam, going back to some of the writings of the early fathers. Later on we’re going to see the battle enacted between the Calvinists and the Armenians. And in our day, we see that same struggle going on. And we’ll pick up those themes as we come to them.

There’s no question, however, that for Augustine the real problem of life was the problem of one’s own sinfulness and the inability to escape from the bondage that that created. His great discovery, which is an enormous discovery for all of us today as well, is God’s grace purchased for us in the blood of Jesus Christ and provided to us by God’s own sovereign purposes. So that for Augustine, caught in this “prison-house” of his own passions and lusts, God’s gracious reaching down and freeing him from that “prison-house” and allowing him to respond in faith, became the very central focus of his theology and of his life and of his ministry as a bishop in the little town of Hippo.

Well we’re going to pick up those themes later on as we trace the
theological streams through the Middle Ages and then into the modern church. But Augustine sets the scale for us. He begins by asking those kinds of questions and giving those kinds of answers. And those are going to continue to exercise the greatest minds of the church throughout its history. And we’ll turn to that later on.