

Grace Is Amazing

We have been looking at the major doctrines of our faith for a while. We have examined doctrines concerning the Bible and, lately, on God, Himself. The last couple of sermons laid the groundwork for today's message about God's amazing grace. We considered God's holiness and sovereignty. In His holiness, all of His characteristics transcend anything we can imagine. His power and righteousness are holy and beyond our finite power and self-righteousness. We ought to revere and stand in awe of Him in His excellence. In God's sovereignty, He is morally supreme and we owe Him our duty and obedience. Because we are responsible for the choices made with our free will, those two attributes put God in a relationship that is *against* us. Because we are sinners, God will judge us by *His* holy standard.

There is a great contrast between God's terrible holy sovereignty and His grace. God's sovereignty is considered terrible because you don't want to get caught in the judgment of a holy righteous God. When we think of God's grace, we consider God's attitude *toward* us. His grace puts us in a relationship that is *for* us. Grace is at the extreme opposite end of the spectrum. It is like an explosion of God's goodness *available* to all mankind.

1. What grace is not -

First, here is what grace is not. Some use the word grace to speak of being well mannered, gracious, or about gracious living-which all too easily looks like living a life of genteel luxury. But although these are legitimate uses of the word, it does not capture the amazing nature of God's grace.

We sing about *Amazing Grace* so much that I wanted to call this sermon *What's So Amazing About Grace?* But, that title was taken by a popular Christian author who doesn't really get what God's grace even is. A reviewer of the book had pretty quickly identified

that there was a problem because grace could look more like just being nice and not making people feel uncomfortable in their sin and learning to live harmoniously. Grace *will* bring harmony, but not just by telling people to play nice together. Grace does not simply *overlook* sin.

One chorus that sounds repeatedly through [the] book is the story of a prostitute whom he invited to church. Her response was, "Church! Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They'd just make me feel worse." [The author] heralds that pronouncement as an indictment of the church's judgmental and negative attitude. I agree whole-heartedly that the church is to love sinners and tell them the gospel of Christ, but did [he] never stop to think that maybe the church is *supposed* to make that prostitute feel bad? Perhaps conviction of sin is not categorically a bad thing, and perhaps it is actually loving to make someone feel uncomfortable about their sin. Paul didn't have any problem at all telling the whole world that they were "worthless," "deceitful," and had the poison of vipers on their lips." (Rom.. 3: 12-13) He has no problem telling them that they are sinners and that they will therefore die. (Rom. 6:23) Jesus Himself says that it is the very work of the Holy Spirit to "convict the world of guilt in regard to sin." (John 16:8) Imagine that! "The Holy Spirit! Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. He'd just make me feel worse!"

— <http://9marks.org/review/whats-so-amazing-about-grace-philip-yancey/>

Grace does not ignore sin: it deals

with it.

Another mistake is that for others, grace is thought of as a piece of righteousness added to your soul.

Grace is not a luxurious lifestyle, living in harmony, or a commodity to be bought with your good works. It is an attitude that God has, a disposition towards us, that makes it possible for us to be saved and to enjoy eternity with Him.

2. What grace is -

So what is God's attitude of grace?

Through grace, Jesus took our suffering upon Him.

Heb 2:9-10 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

10 For it became him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Grace is free *to us*. It is not paid for, *by us*.

Eph 2:8-9 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Rom 3:24-25 Being justified **freely by his grace** through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

25 Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

Rom 4:1-5 What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?

2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to glory; but not before God.

3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

4 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

Grace, simply put, is God's unmerited, or unearned, favor. It is His favor that we don't deserve. There is always pressure in the workforce for merit pay. This is for people to get paid not because of their tenure or longevity on the job, but for their pay to be based on what they produce. We do not get forgiveness based on our merit. It is not based on how our work, but on the fact that God has extended His favor toward us for no reason at all other than His loving character. A popular acronym based on GRACE is God's Riches At Christ's Expense. The grace of God is free to us. God's grace is not absolutely free. It comes to us at great expense to Christ. That is what is different about God's offer of grace and man receiving that grace. Man's blessing grace does not involve a cost to man. To God, it comes at great cost: the blood of Christ.

3. What is so amazing about grace -

The sovereignty and holiness of God make grace amazing. Consider water. You can well imagine a planet being formed from some molten mass spewed off from the sun - but can you imagine water being part of that mass? Materialistic scientists are desperate to find water on places like Mars. They know the importance of water for the existence of life. They count on the

existence of water so they can claim that life evolved. We know that the abundance of water *sustains* life - look at how much we have and how much they are not finding out in the universe! Just to have life God has spoken this world into existence with water everywhere! That is amazing, but not as amazing as grace.

Jumping in orders of complexity exponentially, look at how God has shaped history.

For twenty-five hundred years the great majority of Israel, and for the past nineteen hundred years almost all of Israel, has been scattered to the four corners of the earth. The Israelites have been hated and persecuted, maligned and oppressed. Attempts at their complete extermination were tried over and over and over again, from the days of Haman [in reality, even earlier] to the present time. In spite of all these efforts, they have never perished. They are not lost among the nations, they retained their identity as a people, imperishable and eternal as the promises of God. Now [since 1948] this people, scattered among the Gentiles, has been suddenly reborn and established in their ancient homeland as an independent nation ... For thousands of years men said, "God is all through with Israel, the Jews will never return as a nation again to the land of Palestine." All of them have been proved wrong, because only God can be right. All of this had already been foretold centuries and millenniums before by the prophets of the Old Testament
— M. R. DeHaan, M.D., *"The Sign of the Jew,"* in Signs of the Times

God has sustained Israel by His power, but that is not as amazing as His grace.

Consider the miraculous nature of

God's Word, Its structure, the purity of its theme and message, Its preservation, all over the course of over a thousand years in Its writing and a couple of thousand years of its use.

When we consider the lengths that God went to to provide this universe and this world, the provision and execution of His perfect plans, we have to marvel at His sovereignty. Who would be so foolish to stand against Him?

When we add to that His purity in holiness we have every reason in the world to quake before Him.

And then, we look to Him and realize that He is not looking down at us in anger ... but in love.
Now that is amazing.

Jas 3:17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, *and* easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

Matt 11:28-30 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

30 For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.

Heb 4:14-16 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* profession.

15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin.

16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Many of us are familiar with the story of John Newton, the author of Amazing Grace. It is ironic that of all the hymns he

wrote, he did not think this to be the greatest of them and yet this hymn speaks so simply and elegantly of what he, and we, need so much - God's grace. John Newton originally titled the hymn, *Faith's Review and Expectation*. Over time, the first words resonated with people so much that it came to be known by Amazing Grace. God's amazing grace was so much more powerful for the title. Stereo pictures were quite a rage for a while - the ones that look like paint sprinkled on a page, but if you shifted your eyes to look beyond the picture a 3D image would begin to stand out. You could see it if you knew how to look at it. Similarly, God's grace *is* amazing - if you know how to look at it.

The Scriptures are filled with people who came to the realization of God's grace: Adam, Noah, Lot, Abraham, Jacob, Ruth, David, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Isaiah, Nebuchadnezzar, Peter, Zacchaeus, Thomas, Paul...sprinkled across just about every page of the Bible are people finding God's grace and mercy.

Luke 7:40-47 And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.

41 There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.

42 And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?

43 Simon answered and said, I suppose that *he*, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

44 And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped *them* with the hairs of her head.

45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came

in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loveth little.

Grace becomes more amazing when we realize how sinful we are before God.

God does not have to be your terrifying judge, He wants to be your loving Savior. He *will* be terrifying to those who never come to His saving grace by faith.

2Cor 5:11 Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.

Heb 10:31 *It is* a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

He will be a terrifying to some, but that is what makes His grace so amazing now. People go through life trying to keep their eyes closed and avoiding thinking about what it would mean to be caught in the hands of the living God as the judge. But for those who see the grace of God, to the degree that God is terrifying, He is infinitely grace is infinitely greater.

Rom 2:4-5 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?
5 But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;

Heb 2:3 How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation;

which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard *him*;

I was visiting a philosophy class of a professor friend of mine. He had gone through a discussion of how God could be so loving and good in the face all the evil in the world. I was invited to share any comment I might have at the end of the class. I put up on the board the phrase God is love. I explained that is not the only characteristic of God to consider. I next wrote that God is holy. I described that in His holiness He cannot tolerate sin. Then I put a cross in between them and explained that in His grace the holiness of God and the love of God meet at the cross and we find redemption.

Rom 5:6-8,17-21 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.
7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

...

17 For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

18 Therefore as by the offence of one *judgment came* upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one *the free gift came* upon all men unto justification of life.

19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

20 Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

21 That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Consider the Apostle Paul. Under the name Saul, he murdered Christians before He became Apostle Paul. Paul wrote three-quarter of the New Testament, brought the Gospel to the Gentiles, and started churches that grew throughout the world.

1Tim 1:12-17 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;

13 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief.

14 And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

15 This *is* a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

16 Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

17 Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, *be* honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

I trust that each of us have considered our sinfulness before the holiness of God. I am so happy to report that by His grace we can be saved. By His grace, Jesus has come down at no expense to us and all expense to Him to die on the cross and be resurrected for our salvation. We get saved forever by His grace and we are kept by His grace. Our goal is not to take advantage of that grace and spite God with continual sin. If that were the case, you would have to

strongly suspect that such a person was never actually saved. By God's grace we may keep on the path of sanctifying our life for His glory. If you have struggled with sin, you need to know that God will receive you if you repent. His grace will guarantee that.

1Joh 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1. What grace is not -
2. What grace is - Heb 2:9-10, Eph 2:8-9, Rom 3:24-25, 4:1-5
3. What is so amazing about grace - Jas 3:17, Matt 11:28-30, Heb 4:14-16, Luke 7:40-47, 2Cor 5:11, Heb 10:31, Rom 2:4-5, Heb 2:3, Rom 5:6-8, 17-21, 1Tim 1:12-17, 1Joh 1:9