

Defined by Grace

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 00] Welcome to our online service for Sunday, August 16th, 2020. My name is Kent Dixon and I'm the lead pastor of Bramard Baptist Church here in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Welcome this morning to people from our church who are tuning in online and to folks who are tuning in, watching the live stream right now or maybe listening or watching later on.

Welcome to you as you join us this morning as we worship God together. Please check out the summary information as always below this video because it includes some helpful links to help you connect with our church.

And I'd also encourage you if you're watching or listening on Facebook to like Bramard Baptist Church, like our Facebook page or follow us. And then you'll get notified of when we post the information, when we go live with our services and so on.

So make sure you do that. It's a joy to be back with you this morning. It really is. And I want to thank Dr. Shepard from Dr. Jerry Shepard from Taylor Seminary and Pastor Luwam, our associate pastor here at Bramard, for preaching while I was away on vacation with my family.

[1 : 15] I enjoyed their messages as I listened while we were away. And I hope you enjoyed them as well. They're both godly men and they had some great things to say as they dug into scripture for us.

And as always, if you miss those messages, you can find them on our website as audio versions. We also have a podcast called Bramard Cast that is available through Apple Podcasts and Spotify. Or you can find it right here on our Facebook page under the videos section. So anytime we have a live stream that airs, it will be automatically archived in our video section.

So you can go back and watch in that way as well. So let's open in prayer this morning. Father God, you are a good, good father. And we thank you for your kindness, your faithfulness, and your love towards us.

That you show not only during this time in our world, but every day and all of our lives. And so Lord, we thank you for the privilege that it is to gather in your name this morning and in whatever way we're doing now, whether it's online or in person.

[2 : 25] And so Lord, I pray that you'd protect us, that you would care for us as you always do. And that you would meet us right where we're at this morning. That you would have truth for us.

That you would have good words and comfort for us. And that you would bless the words of my mouth as I share from your word this morning. And so Father, we ask you to bless us as we spend our time together this morning, focusing on you and your word.

And we pray these things in the name of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen. Now we're going to join together this morning as part of our worship. We're going to sing this morning.

And as we sing the two songs, turn your eyes upon Jesus and leaning on the everlasting arms. So these are, if they're not familiar to you, the lyrics will be on the screen.

And I just, I hope that these songs are a blessing to you. So let's join our voices in the way that we do that virtually or in person to God this morning.

[3 : 26] Oh soul, are you weary and troubled?

Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

Look full in his wonderful faith. And the things of earth will grow strange.

Return in the light of his glory and grace. Through death into life everlasting.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

[4 : 57] Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful faith.

Look full in his wonderful faith. And the things of earth will grow strangely too. In the light of his glory and grace. In the light of his glory and grace.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful faith. Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful faith. And the things of earth will grow strangely down. In the light of his glory and grace.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

[6 : 13] What a fellowship. What a joy divine. Leaning on the everlasting arms. What a blessedness.

What a peace is mine. Leaning on the everlasting arms. Leaning, leaning.

Safe and secure from all alarms. Leaning, leaning. Leaning on the everlasting arms.

Leaning on the everlasting arms. Oh, how sweet to walk in this pilgrim way.

Leaning on the everlasting arms. Oh, how bright the path grows from day to day. Leaning on the everlasting arms.

[7 : 20] Leaning, leaning. Leaning, leaning. Leaning, leaning. Leaning, leaning. Safe and secure from all alarms. Leaning, leaning.

Leaning on the everlasting arms. Leaning, leaning. Jeans. Leaning, leaning. Leaning. Leaning. Let's see.

What have I to dread? What have I to fear? Leaning on the everlasting arms, I have blessed peace with my Lord so near.

Leaning on the everlasting arms, leaning, leaning. Safe and secure from all alarms, leaning, leaning.

Leaning on the everlasting arms. It's so wonderful to worship our God together through singing, isn't it?

[8 : 49] Even when we're singing to our own screen in our own homes or whether we're singing in a group of people, which is tricky in the COVID time. Um, it's, it's just, just such a blessing to even listen to praise music and, and, uh, just have our hearts reflect on that message of, of worship towards God.

So today's an interesting day. It marks the first Sunday that we're meeting in person again in our church building. And we've been preparing for this day for a long time.

We've been, uh, taking lots of precautions and sanitizing measures and so on to keep people safe. And so we recognize the reality is that people want to gather together in person.

They want to, they're willing to take the steps necessary to make that happen. And they want to meet together again in the church building. And obviously if you're watching our live stream service right now, you're not in the building.

You're not with us where we are in the building. So, um, but in the days ahead, I want you to take comfort in the fact that we're going to continue to connect online in this way.

[10 : 02] We're going to continue to provide a way for folks who are not yet comfortable with the idea of coming back in person to in-person gatherings right now. And some churches have the capability of live streaming.

They have technology and cameras and technical people on a team and so on, um, to be able to do that and to be able to live stream as their service is going on in their building.

But we don't quite have the capacity to do that right now. So I'm creating two services for now. One for Facebook, like the one that you're watching this morning, and then another in our church building.

So as you're watching this right now at home, you can also recognize the fact that I am not cloned, but I am in person live at our church building preaching there as well.

But fear not, because whether you choose to join the service online or in person at the church, you're going to hear the same sermon because I'm crazy, but I'm not that crazy.

[11 : 07] So the sermon that I preach online will be the same as the sermon that I preach in the church building on Sundays. And I want to encourage each of you again, do not feel pressured as you watch online.

Don't feel pressured to return to the church building yet if you're not comfortable. Yes, I'd love to see your masked but smiling faces in person. And I would love to give you a physically distanced greeting.

I'd love to see your faces and greet you. But I also want to respect your boundaries. I want to recognize that each of us have different comfort levels in all of this.

And that's okay. We want to acknowledge that and recognize that. And so recognizing for a moment that we may literally be gathering as Bramard Baptist Church this morning in two different ways this morning, I want to remember that church is, I want us to all remember, church is not simply a building.

We don't just go to church. We are the church. The church is a people, not a place.

[12:17] Can you recognize that this morning? We are the people of God, whether we're meeting in person this morning at the church building or gathering in this online environment.

And the people of God are gathering online in other groups at this time as well. Gathering in other buildings and other places around our city, around the country, all over the world.

The people of God are the people of God in so many different places and so many different ways this morning. And God has built his church.

And he's going to continue to do that. He's going to continue to build his church according to his will and his plans. And nothing, my friends, will overcome that.

Amen? While we were on vacation the past few weeks, we spent time in the mountains enjoying the beauty of nature. We hiked.

[13:21] We waded in streams and lakes. We enjoyed sunshine and thunderstorms. We saw mountain goats and bears and elk and coyotes.

We basked in the glory of creation and vacation. And as we were on our trip, I was reminded several times of the powerful message that Dr. Jerry Shepard reflected for us when he preached at Braemar while I was away.

Yes, creation, or what we often choose to refer to as nature, yes, it exists for our pleasure. God created mountains and lakes and rivers and animals, the world all around us, for our pleasure in some ways.

But we also recognize that God created primarily for his pleasure. He made all of creation to bring pleasure to himself, to draw attention to himself in very real and physical ways.

And some of that is for our benefit. I found that perspective to be very deeply meaningful as we experienced our great and awesome God in the great outdoors.

[14:40] So this morning, for preachers, sometimes you have a clear vision of a message that God has laid on your heart. Other times you know what you'd like to say or have a sense of what you'd like to say or what God is calling you to say, but you can't always find the right words to do justice to it.

That's a real thing. And other times you have a plan in mind and many of you who know me know me to be a planner. Sometimes you have a plan in mind, but God steps in and changes the course. And this, my friends, is one of those times. Because as I've mentioned to a few people, I had been planning for months to begin a series on the book of 1 John this morning.

I was going to begin that series today and continue it through over the next two weeks. And I will still do that at some point. That's still something I feel like I want to do.

But for today and for the next two weeks, I want us to consider the concept of grace. This morning we're starting a new series on grace.

[15:54] And our sermon this morning is titled, Defined by Grace. Grace. It's one of those words that seems at the same time to be so concrete and yet so elusive.

Grace was my mother's first name. Grace is the middle name that we gave to our daughter. It is a name. We say grace before meals. And thankfully that is still a tradition around family dinner tables and at formal events.

Even in places where God is not necessarily a direct focus or a central focus. And I think we can take comfort in that. You may have heard the idea of gracing someone with your presence, perhaps.

Whatever that means. Gracing someone with your presence somehow suggests, in my mind, that you've somehow lowered yourself to their level rather than meeting them where they're at in a way that would suggest true grace.

I'm gracing you with my presence because you don't even deserve to be around me. Perhaps, now this won't be surprising, perhaps Amazing Grace pops into your mind when you hear the word grace.

[17:17] Amazing Grace, the well-known hymn written in 1772 and published in 1779 by English poet and American, sorry, Anglican clergyman, John Newton.

And that hymn provides such a brief, relatively brief, but rich exploration of the idea of grace. Newton's hymn is still one of, if not the most popular hymn, played at funerals and memorial services.

It's powerful and deeply personal words and beautiful music are instantly recognizable around the world, no matter what your native language might be.

And honestly, it's one of my personal, if not my most favorite, hymns. One biographer of James Newton estimates that the hymn is performed approximately 10 million times each year around the world.

Now, I don't know how you gauge that. Is that a formal presentation? I can't imagine it's merely Sunday morning church singings because I'm sure if those were included, it would be significantly higher than 10 million times.

[18:38] But it's performed 10 million times approximately each year. References to Amazing Grace can be found throughout pop culture. It's even referenced in one of the Star Trek movies, which is one of my favorites.

It's often quoted in speeches and, not surprisingly, sermons. In 1990, famous journalist Bill Moyers explored the transformative power of the song.

After he watched a performance of it at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City. During the performance, Moyers was struck by how the audience, consisting of Christians and non-Christians, seemed to be equally impacted by the message and the power of the song.

And it seemed to create a unified response, Moyers noted. Poet James Baker also acknowledged the power of the song when he explained why he chose Amazing Grace to represent a collection of anti-slavery poetry.

Here's James Baker's quote. There's a transformative power that's applicable. Interesting. The transformation of sin and sorrow into grace.

[19:59] Of suffering into beauty. Of alienation into empathy and connection. Of the unspeakable into imaginative literature.

Interesting. So we can recognize that the concept of grace somehow deeply resonates with human beings, regardless of their faith.

But how can we best understand the concept of grace? Particularly the grace of God towards humanity. Towards every single one of us.

Well, while we have seen this morning that everyone seems to recognize the idea of grace and seems to resonate with a fundamental need for it, grace, my friends, is ultimately not about us at all. Is that surprising to you? Grace is fundamentally a word about God. As one definition I read said, grace is about God's uncoerced initiative.

[21:14] In other words, no one can force God's grace. Grace is from God, freely given. And the quote continues, and God's pervasive and extravagant demonstrations of care and favor.

Grace is uncoerced initiative from God and reflects his pervasive and extravagant demonstrations of care and favor.

That's big stuff, right? As Christians, we live day by day by the grace of God. And some people may anchor grace in the idea of the unconditional forgiveness of our sins.

Some people see grace as fitting into that box. Others may see it as the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus, which made it possible for us to be restored into relationship with God.

Still, other people may see it as God's amazing love and kindness towards us. Grace reigns down, we often sing. Others may see it as God's amazing love and kindness towards us.

[22:32] Did I say that already? I think I did. So, I mean, there's some emphasis that God's amazing love and kindness towards us flows down. Or, other people may see it as the ways in which God provides for our needs.

Often, God provides for our needs in ways that we don't even recognize or necessarily acknowledge. Or, perhaps, ways that he protects us from spiritual or physical harm.

Grace, my friends, is all those things. But it's also so much more. So, at the risk of making it more difficult to understand somehow, or to wrap our heads around, simply put, grace is God's favor and kindness towards us.

Take that away with you this morning. Grace is God's favor and kindness towards us, towards you. And not surprisingly, the grace of an eternal and omnipotent Father manifests itself to us in so many ways.

For me, the grace of God is beautifully captured in the words of John 3, 16. Reading from the NIV, For God so loved the world, That he gave his one and only Son, That whoever believes in him should not perish, But have eternal life.

[24 : 06] That's grace. The entire gospel comes to focus in that verse. And at the very center of the gospel, We find God's great love for us.

God's desire for us to be with him, No matter the cost. And that, my friends, Is amazing grace. The best demonstration of God's grace we have is in our opportunity to receive Jesus, As the Lord of our lives, And experience salvation grace, From our sins.

That's one form of grace. We didn't deserve it. There's nothing we can ever do to earn it. We can't strive for it.

We can't make it happen. As the Bible reminds us in Psalm 46, verse 10, We only need to be still. And know that God is as he says he is.

[25 : 17] That he will never change. That he is faithful. And that his love for us will never fail. I don't know about you, But are you grateful that God's grace is numerous?

God's grace manifests itself in our lives over and over. Every day. In new and surprising ways. As well as familiar ones. The idea of God's grace certainly relates to the tendency of humans to turn against God. To ignore God.

To resist him. And these are all just different ways of defining sin. Sometimes our sin nature feels like conjugating a verb, doesn't it?

I have sinned. I sin. I am sinning. I will sin. And yet God will forgive me.

[26 : 23] He will forgive you. He will forgive us. When we repent. When we acknowledge our sins. And seek through the power of the Holy Spirit.

To do differently after. As I've said to you before. As we explored in our series on the Lord's Prayer. God's grace to us.

Also calls us to extend grace to others. And we'll be exploring that together in this series in the coming weeks. Forgiving grace.

Forgiving grace. Definitely requires the strength of God. Because I believe. I don't know about you. But left to our own devices. I believe that.

When we've been hurt by the actions. The words. Of another person. Our tendency may be to seek revenge. Or to retreat into depression or self-pity.

[27 : 23] God also grants us new grace every day. I love the words of Lamentations chapter 3 verses 22 to 24.

Which reminds us that. And I'm reading from the NIV translation here. Because of the Lord's great love. We are not consumed.

For his compassions never fail. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. I say to myself.

The Lord is my portion. Therefore. I will wait for him. Can you recognize God's great love for you today?

Do you feel that great love? My friends. That love is God's grace. As I said before. Raining down on you.

[28 : 26] The beauty of nature. All around us. That's God's grace. On magnificent display. In creation.

The courage to face a new day. When our circumstances seem bleak. That's God's grace. Sustaining you.

The reality of God's presence with us. In every moment. And his provision. And his perfect timing. That's God's grace.

At work. In your life too. We find ourselves. In a time of waiting again. Waiting in our lives.

And waiting in the world. But God has not left us. At this time in our lives. And in world events. He is right here.

[29 : 23] And God. By and through. His amazing grace. God. Is still. Is still. On the throne. He's still. He's still.

In control. And my friends. He still. Desperately. Wants. To have a relationship. With you. I encourage you.

To seek God. If you're struggling. In your life. If you don't know where to turn. Or what to do next. Turn to God. His plan for you.

Is perfect. His desire for you. Is. To walk with him. To seek him. To return to him. That's his plan for you.

Confess your worries to God. If you're struggling. Ask for his protection. Not just for yourself. But for others. And ask for our God.

[30 : 23] To shower our world. In his healing grace. That our world would be transformed. In body. And in spirit.

According to his will. Friends. I encourage you. To talk to God. Ask him. For his. Limitless. And amazing grace. And peace. To take hold of your life. And he will. Answer. That prayer. My friends.

My hope for you. This week. Is that you will. Turn to God. Day by day. And moment. And moment. And moment. And moment. By moment. That you will. Seek him. That you will.

Talk to him. And that you will. Just. Cuddle up. In the warmth. And security. Of his grace. And love for you. Go in peace.

[31 : 23] And have a great week. God bless you.