

Defined By Grace

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning and welcome here for this Sunday, August the 7th. I hope your summer is going well, has been going well. And it's a joy to be back with you in this way this morning.

And I want to thank my good friend, Dr. Jerry Shepard, for preaching while I was away on vacation with the family. So, Pastor Jerry Shepard preached a series on the first of the 310 commandments over the past three weeks.

And so, I hope you enjoyed those messages. I got lots of feedback from people that was positive. And I enjoy them as well. So, you know, I look forward to having conversations with people about those sermons.

And, you know, if they've sparked something in you, a desire to dig deeper in any area of scripture or to begin thinking more about things, recognize the prompting of the Holy Spirit and do that. Pursue those things. And as always, if you miss those messages, you'll be able to find them later in the week on our website, the church website. So, I was unable to add those messages to our phone line while I was away because I'm the one who does that.

[1 : 14] But we will be updating the phone line again starting this Sunday with this sermon. So, again, Dr. Shepard's sermons will be available on the church website later in the week.

And then also starting this Sunday, we'll have our weekly sermons back on the phone line again as well. So, this morning we're revisiting a short series I preached on grace a few years ago.

And I feel we all need grace. I certainly know that in my hand rehabilitation journey, I am experiencing the grace of God in so many ways.

And I'm also seeking it, craving it. And so, I felt it was timely for us to explore the subject of grace. Not just for my sake, but for everyone's sake.

So, here we go again. So, grace. It's one of those words that at times seems so concrete, so easy to understand.

[2 : 18] And yet, at other times, it seems so elusive, doesn't it? We say grace before meals. Maybe that's a tradition that you have. That's something that you do. And thankfully, it's still a tradition around many family dinner tables and formal events.

Even where God is not necessarily a feature, a fixture recognized, people may still say grace. They recognize that as something that they should do.

Something that they will include. And maybe you've even heard of the expression, gracing someone with your presence. Whatever that means. So, as though somehow you have lowered yourself to their level.

You've graced someone with your presence. Rather than meeting someone where they're at. Meeting someone in a way that would suggest true grace. That you are humbling yourself to be with them in an intentional way.

Or perhaps amazing grace pops into your mind. It should. It probably does. And this is the well-known Christian hymn written in 1772.

[3 : 24] It's a classic, right? It was published in 1779 by English poet and American clergyman John Newton. And maybe you knew that.

And it's such a rich but deep exploration of the concept of grace in that hymn. Newton's hymn is still one of, if not the most popular song, played at funerals and memorial services.

Just a little teaser for my ordination service on September 11th. It will be part of the songs that I've chosen that are meaningful to me that I want to include in that event.

And so the words of amazing grace, it's powerful. The words are deeply personal. The music is beautiful. The melody, the song, the way it's constructed is beautiful.

And that song, amazing grace, is instantly recognizable around the world. And it's probably, as I've said before, one of my personal favorite hymns.

[4 : 30] It has deep meaning for me in many different ways on many different levels. One biographer of James Newton estimates that the hymn is performed, get this, approximately 10 million times each year around the world.

10 million times. And that's an estimate. It can be found throughout pop culture, including one of my favorite Star Trek movies. So amazing grace has pervaded our culture.

It's often quoted in speeches and in sermons, the song is. And in 1990, journalist Bill Moyers, you may be familiar with him, he explored the transformative power of the song after he watched a performance of it, a musical group perform it at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City.

And 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. Because he witnessed what he perceived to be a unified response amongst all people. 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.

[5 : 58] And here's what Baker said. There is a transformative power that is applicable. The transformation of sin and sorrow into grace.

Of suffering into beauty. Of alienation into empathy and connection. Of the unspeakable into imaginative literature.

You can tell James Baker is a poet. Interesting. So we can recognize that the concept of grace somehow deeply resonates with human beings.

Across all cultures. Across all languages. The concept of it is there. It's an anchor. It's a foundational piece. But how can we best understand the concept of grace?

Particularly the grace of God towards humanity. Towards every single one of us. Because that's what we're talking about here.

[6 : 58] Is God's grace is available to each one of us. It's available to all of us. Regardless of where we are in our journey. Regardless of where we are in our lives.

God's grace is available. So while we've seen so far this morning that everyone seems to recognize the idea of grace. Grace is not about us.

And has a fundamental need for it. I think we can all agree. It's interesting my friends to know that really ultimately grace is not about us at all.

Does that surprise you? Does that shock you? Grace is fundamentally a word about God. I'll say that again.

Grace is fundamentally a word about God. As one definition I've read said, grace is about God's uncoerced initiative.

[7 : 57] Meaning that no one can force God's grace. God's uncoerced initiative and God's pervasive and extravagant demonstrations of care and favor.

Grace is about God's uncoerced initiative and God's pervasive and extravagant demonstrations of care and favor. Friends, I hope you can recognize that as Christians we live, we walk, we function day by day by the grace of God.

Does that resonate with you? And some people may anchor grace in the idea of the unconditional forgiveness of our sins. That's absolutely an aspect of God's grace.

Others may see God's grace in the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Which made it possible for us to be restored in relationship with God.

That is also an aspect of God's grace. Others may see it as simply his amazing love and kindness towards us.

[9 : 13] God's grace is his amazing love and kindness. Or other people may see God's grace as the ways in which God provides for our needs.

And often in ways we don't recognize or acknowledge. Perhaps people recognize it as the ways he protects us from physical or spiritual harm.

That is God's grace at work as well. And God's grace is all those things that I just listed. All those things that I suggested to you this morning. But it is also so much more.

At the risk of making it more difficult to understand or to wrap our heads around. Simply put. Here we go. Simply put.

God's grace. Grace is God's favor and kindness towards us. You can say it with me. Grace is God's favor and kindness towards us.

[10:12] Amen to that. And not surprisingly, the grace of an eternal and omnipotent father manifests itself to us in many ways.

Many, many ways. For me, the grace of God is so beautifully captured in the words of John 3.16. And you can say it with me here as well.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son. That whoever believes in him, or whosoever, you might be saying.

That whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. Friends, the entire gospel comes together, coalesces, is anchored in this verse.

In the very center of that gospel, at the very center of it, we find God's great love for us.

[11:15] God's desire for us to be with him no matter the cost. And that, my friends, is truly amazing grace.

I believe the best demonstration of God's grace that we have is our opportunity, in our opportunity, to receive Jesus as the Lord of our lives and experience salvation grace.

Some people say salvific, which is theological terminology, grace. Saving grace from our sins.

That's a huge demonstration of God's grace at work and in our personal lives.

And you've heard me say this before. You've heard others say this before. But we didn't deserve it. We don't deserve it. There's nothing we can ever do to earn it.

We can't strive for it. As the Bible reminds us in Psalm 46, 10, and you know this is one of my favorite passages, we only need to be still and know that God is who he says he is.

[12:28] God tells us in Psalm 46, verse 10, be still and know that I am God. That's it. Be still. Quiet your heart.

Quiet your mind. Quiet your fears and anxiety. Be still. Have confidence in. The knowledge that God is who he says he is.

I am who I am, he says. And my grace is sufficient for you. I don't know about you, but are you grateful that God's grace is numerous, is never ending, is eternal, and is all encompassing?

God's grace, my friends, manifests itself in our lives over and over, every day, in new ways, and maybe surprisingly familiar ones that sneak by you, perhaps.

The idea of God's grace certainly relates to the tendency as well for human beings to turn against God, to turn away from God, to ignore him, to resist him.

[13:51] And these are all ways of defining what? Sin. Sometimes our sin nature feels like, I think, like conjugating a verb, doesn't it?

I have sinned. I am sinning. I will sin. Right? It feels like that. State of perpetual sinfulness in our lives.

And yet God will forgive me. That's God's grace. Right? God will forgive me. 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 repent means, if you remember it, I've said it many times before, repent means to do differently after.

If we seek, if we repent of our sins and seek the Holy Spirit's strength and guidance, to do differently after. That's what it means.

[14:55] And as we explored in our series quite a while ago now on the Lord's Prayer, God's grace to us also causes us, calls us, to extend grace to others.

Right? God's grace is for us, but it's also to be channeled through us to others. We are to be people of grace, gracious people towards other people.

And we'll be exploring that a bit more in the coming weeks as we unpack this series together. So forgiving grace definitely requires the strength of God.

The ability to forgive someone else when they have hurt you, when they have damaged their relationship with you, that requires the strength of God quite often.

Because, I think we can all recognize, left to our own devices, when we've been hurt by the actions of another person, when we've been hurt by something someone else has said or done to us, we may seek revenge.

[16:03] Are you a powder? Sometimes I can be a powder. Someone hurts my feelings, and I think, hmm, well, fine. Right? Are you a powder?

Are you someone who gets angry when someone hurts your feelings? Do you give someone the silent treatment, which we all seem to know how to do quite effectively? Do you seek revenge on that person, to get even, to get back at them, to hurt them as much or more than they hurt you? Or perhaps you retreat into, like I alluded to a moment ago, self-pity. Depression. Do you begin to let that old tape play in your head, that says, see, I knew it.

I didn't deserve this healthy relationship. I didn't deserve these circumstances. And here I am, again, back with what I deserve. Friends, that message playing in your head, if it plays in your head, is nonsense.

It is not God's word for you. It is not God's will for you. It is not God's voice in your life. And God also grants us new grace every day.

[17:14] We talked about that just a moment ago. I love the words of Lamentations 3, verses 22 to 24, which remind 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.

Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father. Another one of my favorite hymns. The words of Lamentations 3, 22, 24.

So, make note of that, and you can always look it up later as well. So, my friends, can you recognize God's great love for you today, in this moment, in these days, right now?

Do you feel that great love? Do you feel God's affirmation, and his love for you, and his care for you? My friends, that is God's grace, raining down on you, penetrating your life.

[18:39] The beauty of nature all around us, perhaps you've been out enjoying, time in the backyard, time in the mountains, as we did a few weeks ago, or, you know, just enjoying the weather, enjoying listening to birds, watching squirrels.

We have squirrel, a family of squirrels that run back and forth, across our fence in our backyard, and that brings us great joy. Those things, in nature, are God's grace, at work, in creation.

Those are God's blessings to us, through his created things, beyond us. The courage to face a new day, when our circumstances are bleak.

That, my friends, is God's grace, sustaining you. For me, personally, right now, on this often painful, and discouraging, journey of rehab, on my hand, I am deeply grateful, for the abiding presence of God, because he tells me, over and over, Kent, I'm right here, with you.

I'm not going anywhere. I created you, and we'll get through this, together. I'm right here with you. And friends, honestly, at the times when it's, a struggle, I need to lean on, lean into that, deeply, heavily, and drink of it, deeply, that truth.

[20:13] And God's grace, I recognize for me, in my life, and hopefully this resonates, with you as well, God's grace flows to me. It flows to me, through, caring words, for prayer, for when I know people, are praying for me.

That's how God's grace, is channeled to me, through other people. Remember I said, we are to be people of grace. That's how we can do it, for one another.

By praying for one another, by expressing words of concern, and care, and comfort. By looking out, for one another. That's what it is, to be family.

That's what it is, to be the family of God, and brothers and sisters, in Christ. And so maybe you can recognize that, in your own life. God's grace coming through, other people to you.

I hope you can. So the reality of God's presence, with us in every moment, and his provision, and perfect timing.

[21:14] I've talked to you before, about how God's timing, is always perfect. That's God's grace, at work in your life as well. God shows up.

God provides. God's timing is perfect. God's timing, doesn't often align with our own. But that's because, it is his will, we want done, not our own.

So friends, we still seem to find ourselves, in a time of waiting. Waiting in our lives, and waiting in the world.

But God has not left us, in this time in our lives. Or in world events. He is right here. And God, by his amazing grace, is still in control.

Fear not. God is still on the throne, and he's still in control, my friends. So, my dear friends, seek him.

[22 : 19] He says, seek him. Confess your worries in the unknown to him. Confess your needs to him.

Confess your sin to him, and repent of it. Ask for his protection, and healing for the world. friends, I encourage you to talk to God. Ask him for his amazing grace, and limitless peace, to take hold of your life.

Ask for that truth, to be real for you. And he will, answer your prayer. Amen.

Amen.