

Receiving Grace

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[0 : 00] So good morning. Welcome here for this super hot Sunday, August the 14th. Are you staying cool during the summer? Are you enjoying the summer? I hope you are. So, yeah, it's too hot. So welcome to each of you this morning.

We started a new series, or new-ish, last week, and we began exploring the idea of grace. And there was a guy up on the screen. And we puzzled a bit over how to define that word. And we came up with a few different ideas. We considered that the concept of grace pervades our language and our culture, right? It's a common word that we know. It's a common word that we hear.

But the concept of it, in its original form, in its purest form, in its most uncomplicated by humans form, we always overcomplicate things, right, is the grace of God.

And that's what we're talking about. The grace of God to us is a gift. And we recognize that the idea of gift-giving, this happens on your birthday or Christmas time or whenever, the concept of gift-giving involves receiving the gift, right?

[1 : 13] A gift requires someone to give it and then someone else to receive it. It's a transaction of sorts. And so with that in mind, our sermon this morning is titled, Receiving Grace.

And God's grace, as I alluded to a moment ago, is fundamentally different from any concept of human grace that we might consider. We talked a bit about that last week.

And the definition of God's grace that we considered last week told us that grace is about God's uncoerced initiative. No one can force God's grace.

And God's pervasive and extravagant demonstrations of care and favor. And then we also consider that God's grace to us includes a few different aspects.

It includes absolutely the unconditional forgiveness of our sin. It includes the provision of redemption through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

[2 : 20] That's God's grace at work as well. Jesus' sacrifice is the only sacrifice that could restore us into relationship with Jesus. And I'm sure you know that, but it doesn't hurt to be reminded.

God's amazing love and his kindness towards us. God's protection and provision. And as I suggested, I believe we can settle on a simple definition of God's grace.

Grace is God's favor and kindness towards us. Say that with me. Grace is God's favor and kindness towards us.

There's a simple definition. So I have a question for you this morning. What's your perspective on life in terms of what you deserve?

Let's let that sit for a moment. What's your perspective on life in terms of what you believe you deserve? What you believe you've earned?

[3 : 31] What you believe you're, here's the ugly one. What you believe you're owed? Is your perspective maybe one that sounds like this? I'm a good person.

That's a red flag right away, right? I'm a good person. I deserve to be treated well. It's just not wrong. It's fair. I deserve to receive whatever I want.

Ouch. Sounds a little prosperity-ish, doesn't it? God's grace, God's blessing towards me includes whatever I want.

Whatever I feel, I feel, I deserve. Ouch. Do you feel you deserve God's grace, God's blessing, because you have followed the rules somehow?

Do you believe that you have been a good person? Whatever that means. That definition gets murkier and murkier over time.

[4 : 36] That you have gone to, this is not intended to make you feel guilty, it's directed at me as well. That you've gone to church semi-regularly, box checked.

That you prayed when you remember. Or maybe you find yourself in a place right now where you don't think you deserve anything at all.

Are you there? Is that a place that you're at? You feel unlovable. You feel irredeemable. Like perhaps you've done more than God can forgive.

Maybe you feel that you've turned away and you don't deserve the right to come back home to God. Maybe it's the third or fourth time you've turned away, you've walked away.

Or maybe it's even more times than you can count. Friends, if that's you this morning, if you're in that place, do you feel judged?

[5 : 43] Do you feel accused, unworthy, or even perhaps condemned? Well, let's return to this idea of what we deserve or what we think we may deserve.

Do you really want to know what we actually deserve? Are you familiar with the concept of karma? My dad had a good sense of humor, really good sense of humor, which is visited upon me.

My dad used to always say, your karma ran over my dogma. So if you like those terms. So for followers of Buddhism and Hinduism, karma suggests that we get, we receive what we deserve. Talk about karma, bad karma. That over the course of, for Hindus and Buddhists, multiple lives lived through reincarnation, that we accumulate the debt of what we've done.

Does that make sense? So we either accumulate the blessing that we deserve because we've been good over and over, or we accumulate that negative anti-blessing, if you will.

[7 : 12] So if your life is going wrong or you're experiencing diversity, through that view, it's essentially somehow your fault. So you're just continuing to perpetuate your own circumstances, even if they're negative.

See the weight that could cause for you? But I suppose, thankfully, I guess, that karma and reincarnation suggest that you have the opportunity over reincarnated lives, over life after life after life, to do good with the hope that eventually you'll tip your scales.

Your good deeds will eventually outweigh the bad ones, and you'll eventually reach your final reward. Is that appealing?

So reflecting back on your life so far, if you were to pay your bill right now, solely based on your own merit, how would that work out for you?

I don't see anybody looking at the floor, so that's good. Do you imagine that, well, I've probably done okay. I'm pretty sure I've checked enough boxes and God will give me a pass.

[8 : 32] God will let me in, however you view it. Or perhaps, do you even think that, based on the forgiveness you've received when you accepted Jesus as Lord of your life, even if you went on sinning until the day that you die, things will still turn out okay in the end.

See that distorted perspective? I've been forgiven. I have a pass. So I can keep doing the things that I probably should turn away from, and ultimately it won't matter.

I've heard that view. So the Apostle Paul addresses this very idea in his letter to the Romans, and he quotes from Psalm 14, verses 1 to 3, in his comments.

Paul says, There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together been worthless.

There is no one who does good. Now this is implying on their own merit. Not even one, Paul says. He continues, Their throats are open graves.

[9 : 52] Their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood.

Ruin and misery mark their ways. And the way of peace, they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes, Paul says.

What Paul is saying here is that he's emphasizing that none of us are innocent. This idea that we'll get by, it's not realistic.

It's not valid. Because, friends, we all deserve judgment for what we've done. This is not a fire and brimstone sermon. It's a reality sermon.

We deserve the worst punishment possible. Because we make selfish and deceitful choices.

[10 : 51] I don't know about you, but not a week goes by where I don't look back and go, oh, really? You stop and think about our tendency to behave sometimes.

It's not good. And it's not something to be particularly proud of. But, friends, everyone is valuable in God's eyes.

It sounds like a greeting card, but it's absolute truth. Because God created us in his image. God doesn't make mistakes.

And he loves us deeply. But, as Paul alluded to, no one is righteous on their own merit.

Not even close. That is, no one can stand before God on their own. And I don't know about you, but I'm pretty glad I don't have to.

[11 : 50] Because though we're valuable, we have fallen into sin. That's reality. And that's our natural tendency as human beings. But God, through Jesus his son, has redeemed us and offers to forgive us if we return to him in faith.

And there isn't a limit. Continue to return to him in faith. So while we deserve judgment and death for our sin, instead, through God's grace, when we turn or return to him and confess our sin, we receive love.

We receive acceptance. And as I said, we can keep coming back because we can receive eternal forgiveness. forgiveness. We get what we don't deserve through God's amazing grace.

Because, friends, grace, God's grace, is mercy, not merit. See the difference? Grace. It's not earned.

It's not deserved. It is a gift. And grace is the opposite of karma, which, as we said, is about getting what you deserve.

[13 : 19] And you've heard me say this in the past. Grace is getting what you don't deserve and not getting what you do deserve.

Do you remember me saying that in the past? Does that make sense? Grace is getting, grace is getting what you don't deserve and not getting what you do deserve.

Christianity teaches that what we deserve is death with no hope of resurrection. That is what we deserve. And yet, God offers us grace that is, as you've heard in the words to the song, grace that is greater than all our sin to infinity.

Grace is powerfully reflected in one of the names that we learn for God in the Bible. Emmanuel. Which means God is with us.

Our God is not removed. He's not aloof. He's not disinterested. He's not angry and vengeful towards us, even though we might deserve that.

[14 : 34] He is loving. He is forgiving. He is eternally. Read the entire scriptures. Examine your own life. He is eternally patient.

And he is fully engaged. As writer John Stott says, grace is God-loving.

God-stooping. God-coming to the rescue. God-giving himself in, generously, in and through Jesus Christ.

God-loving, God-stooping, God-coming to the rescue. God-giving himself generously in and through Jesus Christ. God's grace and all that it means for us is freely given to us by God.

It is a gift. gift. And true grace is given only by God. And it's manifest most significantly, most dramatically, most finally and eternally in the life, death, resurrection and example that we read throughout the Gospels of Jesus Christ.

[15 : 55] One of the concepts that we began with this morning is the idea of giving and receiving a gift being a transaction. Right? And I want us to recognize a few things as we begin to close this morning.

God wants to give his grace to us. But are we willing? Are we prepared to receive it? You may be thinking, well, but Pastor Kent, didn't you say God's grace is free?

That there's nothing we can do to earn it or even begin to be worthy of it? Well, yes, that's true. But can you also recognize that with a gift it needs to be received with open hands?

And I need to confess something to you this morning. I can be a difficult person to get a gift for.

Over my life I can recognize that that's because I have come with expectations.

There's stuff that I want less and less all the time. Thank you, Lord. Stuff that I want and stuff that I don't want. But the older I get the more I find it even more challenging as a gift e as a gift receiver because I'm more content.

[17 : 21] Really. I'm not striving for things and stuff. More and more I find that relationship and shared experiences are the greatest and most moving gifts I can receive.

Time spent, time invested with people I care about. Can you relate to that? And over time I've been trying to foster in myself an attitude of gratitude.

Being grateful for the things that I receive especially from God. And I believe that's what God is calling each of us to do in our lives particularly as we reflect on the fact that he's called us to be his children.

And through the sacrifice of Jesus our sins are forgiven. So as you reflect this morning and in the days ahead as you reflect on God's grace towards you look for it.

Watch for it at work. Recognize it in the many ways and the often unexpected ways it shows up. And thank him for it.

[18 : 37] My friends, God's grace is truly amazing. So I encourage you, I encourage all of us to step into it. Trust in the God who gives it freely, who wants to shower us with his grace and share the means to that grace, share the way it has changed your life personally with everyone you meet.

Amen.