

Reflecting Grace

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

- [0 : 0 0] Well, good morning and welcome here for this Sunday, August 21st. Time is flying by. Michelle's talking about, well, when I go back to work next week, I'm thinking, what?
- She said, well, the school year starts next week, genius. And I'm thinking, what? So, wow. So that's now, to be fair, that's for staff. So there is still some time to adjust to buy school supplies and things like that.
- I don't miss having to go and buy school supplies. Getting the list is kind of fun. I remember doing it as a kid with my mom and it was fun. But I don't mind not having to do that now. So that's good.
- So my name is Kent Dixon, as most of you know, and I'm the lead pastor here. Welcome to each of you this morning. As I said, as we're together in person, many of us, some people will be tuning in later in different ways.
- So just a quick pastoral announcement. The attractive-looking gentleman in the back corner of the sanctuary wearing a purple dress shirt, Pastor Luwam, will be preaching the next two Sundays.
- [1 : 0 3] So you may be thinking, wait a minute, haven't you been off the entire summer, Pastor Kent? Well, two of those Sundays were this, post-surgery and then operation, post-injury, then post-surgery.
- And then the few weeks that we were away visiting family in southern Alberta, every hour doing all the exercises on this thing, yeah, not the best vacation in the world.
- So I've been recognizing that my spirit is drained. My energy is drained. And so I promise to focus on myself more and actually taking time.
- So I can't ditch the exercises, unfortunately, but I will be looking to kind of quiet the pace of my life and refill my spirit again. So, just quickly, before we get into the sermon, raise your hand if you've completed the survey that I need completed that's mentioned in the newsletter.
- And, oh, oh dear. So look around and then guilt one another afterwards. So, honestly, I'm begging you. So there's a link in the newsletter.
- [2 : 1 5] There's a link that went out directly. So the last two newsletters have had it. And then we sent a message about it. But the point, there is method to my madness. The point of me collecting information is so that I can make a decision with leadership that kind of includes what people are looking for, what includes what people are interested in studying and the direction they'd like to kind of go together.
- Because we can, I can develop something in a vacuum and then no one will come. Or, and I've said this to Dr. Shepard, people have said, you know, we'd love to have him come and lead a study.
- He would love to come. I would love to come, have him come. But he and I have talked and said, why create something in a vacuum that people aren't necessarily interested in, that won't be meaningful for them.

So there is method to this survey. So very short. I really appreciate, and Dr. Shepard would appreciate, and leadership would appreciate, if you can just fill that out.

And I know the deadline I said was today, but I'm willing to wait. So it really does take almost no time at all, and it is anonymous. So please do fill that out.

[3 : 28] It would be very helpful for me. So this morning, as we continue and actually conclude our short series on grace this morning, our sermon is titled Reflecting Grace.

And we're going to be literally reflecting a bit more on how God's grace changes our lives. As well as some practical ways that, having received God's grace ourselves, we can then reflect it to other people.

So we've recognized God's grace is most evident in the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His example in ministry, the way Jesus lived and taught and spoke and cared for other people.

And God's grace to us is perhaps most powerfully evident in his forgiveness of our sin, in our salvation. That's a powerful demonstration of God's grace to us.

So let's dive right into scripture this morning. I loved how Vern wove scripture into the worship section. And let's just continue chewing, shall we? So in Ephesians 2, verses 4 to 8, Paul begins this chapter by talking about the sinful nature of humanity.

[4 : 47] But he returns, wait for it as I read it, he returns to a message of hope. So Paul says, beginning in Ephesians 2, verse 4, But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

It is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable, or incomparable if you prefer, riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Amen. For it is by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, Paul says.

Not by works, so that no one could boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

So friends, do you think the Apostle Paul believed in the grace of God? Some nodding. It certainly is, and I've read, I mean, I've read Paul's writing, I've read biographies about him.

[6 : 22] It's a prominent theme in his theology. It's a prominent theme, the grace of God is, in his writing. And so if you know Paul's story, you'll really see that that makes sense.

God's grace. Writing in Ephesians, Paul is reminding us to be careful not to become proud of our own salvation. Have you ever encountered that?

Have you ever felt that yourself? That, boy, am I ever glad to be saved. I'm saved, not like them. Pride in our own salvation. It is a gift, my friends.

It is the grace of God. It is nothing that we have done or even deserve. So Paul suggests here instead, humbly thank God for what he has done for you.

Encourage others who may be struggling in their faith. And then share with everyone you meet. Because the foundation of God's grace towards us lies in the forgiveness and salvation that can be found only in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

[7 : 40] There's a perspective on Christianity, and you've probably heard it. Maybe it's been part of your life. Maybe it's part of your context, even your upbringing. But a sense that, a perspective that Christianity is really all about following the rules.

And I know many of you are rule followers, and so am I. So we gauge ourselves, we gauge our Christ-likeness on whether we're following the rules.

Is that grace? So somehow we get the sense that the rules are designed to tie us down.

To drain all the fun and spontaneity out of life. People often say that about Christianity, don't they? I don't want to be part of something, a club, that is all about following the rules and having no fun.

I don't know about you, but I have a lot of fun. And I follow the rules, for the most part, because I'm not perfect. So there's this sense again, continuing in that, that we're a bunch of rule following, Christians are, a bunch of rule following robots who are governed by a God who sets an unachievable standard, sets unrealistic expectations for us, and is rarely, if ever, pleased with us.

[9 : 13] Do you ever feel that way? If you call yourself a Christian this morning, or if you're listening, is that your perspective?

Do you feel like, oh, if only I could have not done that, not said that, I let God down again. That you somehow have to follow God's impossible rules, and really, you're doomed to fail.

Somehow, you're doomed to constantly fall short of what you perceive to be God's standard for you. Did you hear me say that? What you perceive to be God's standard for you.

I've said in the past, and maybe you remember this, I have said, the bar we set for ourselves is very different from the bar that God sets for us, because God sets no bar.

Right? So, even if you've heard that idea, that truth of God's immeasurable love for you, and his desire to be with you, to be in relationship with you, no matter the cost, do you still, at times, feel hopelessly inadequate to meet what you think God expects of you?

[10 : 37] you. That's a Christian struggle in a lot of ways, I believe, right? We struggle with the idea that we are inadequate to meet what we perceive the standard to be.

Do you see that hamster wheel of frustration and angst? It's not grace. So, I'm here to tell you this morning, if you're struggling with those things, that is fantastic news.

Why? And I see some of you going, yeah, I do struggle, and I know you are. So, why is that fantastic news if we struggle? Well, let's consider the Apostle Paul's personal circumstances here, and to some of you this story will be familiar.

Some of you may know this, but in some of Paul's writing in the Bible, he refers to something he calls a thorn in my flesh. We studied that a bit in seminary.

Some scholars have suggested that Paul's thorn may have been malaria. It may have been epilepsy, it may have been an eye disease, it may have literally been some sort of, and likely was, an affliction of some kind, a physical affliction.

[11 : 52] And he speaks of it as an illness, that's the word he uses, when he writes in the book of Galatians chapter 4, he talks about it there. As he talks about it in 2 Corinthians, Paul says he pleaded with God to take it away from him, pleaded.

And Paul's response, he says, but he said to me, this is God speaking back to Paul, my grace is sufficient for you.

My power is made perfect in weakness. And Paul continues, therefore I, Paul speaking of himself, will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

so that inadequacy you may feel, it creates a tendency to need to rely, to need to trust, to need to have hope that God is with you.

Yes, God has given us rules, he's given us direction, and he's given us the example of Jesus' life in the Gospels to guide us, but he never expected us to live the Christian life on our own strength.

[13 : 22] Do you hear that? God never expected us to walk this road, to live this life, committed to him on our own strength, and in isolation.

Look around you, we're on this journey together. So God's grace comes through here again. Are you feeling discouraged in your situation, in your circumstances?

Great! Ask God for his courage. Are you feeling unlovable, unworthy?

Perfect! Ask God to remind you how he feels about you.

Have you ever done that? Do it today. Find some time alone by yourself. Can't get it out.

[14 : 25] when I feel discouraged or frustrated or angry or whatever, I try to spend some time alone with God and just say, what do you think?

How am I doing? How do you feel about me? Get ready to use a box of Kleenex. because God loves you more than you can imagine and he will flood you with that sense when you ask him.

When you're struggling, when you feel like you're not up to the task, when you feel like you've failed perhaps again, confess your sin to God.

ask him to give you strength. I have struggled with things in the past and I've just said, God, I'm just going to continue to fail.

I'm going to continue to try and do this on my own and I'm going to continue to fail and I'm done failing on my own. So I need help. And he shows up.

[15 : 44] I promise he shows up. So confess your sin to God and as we learned in our sermon series on the Lord's prayer, that's a long time ago now, but that's why I wanted to reflect on the prayer this morning at the beginning.

But when we confess our sin to God, it gives, we are tested as I've talked about before, sin tests us, we are tempted. But when we lean into God and trust him to provide, to give us strength, that builds our character and it builds our faith.

And as I've said before, when we pray and ask God for protection, for help, he will help us to keep Satan's temptation from turning into something that we give into.

Does that make sense? It's a difference between being tested and tempted and giving in. So if you're a parent here this morning, and most of you are, lots of you are, I want you to consider a few questions.

And even if you're not, you can relate, I'm sure. has your child, has your niece, has your nephew, someone in your life, a younger person, let you down, disappointed you?

[17 : 17] Have they made bad decisions? Have they hurt you? Have they hurt others? Have they even hurt themselves in making bad choices?

Selfish choices, maybe taking some action that might best be described as rash, or maybe not well thought out? Boy, the older I get, the more I think, I gotta let you make that choice.

I know, now I feel for my own father because he, as I got older, would say to me, I let you make choices that I knew would sting.

I let you grow in ways that I knew would scar you a little as well as shaping you that would build your character, that would build your faith, that would give you perspective.

But it doesn't make it any easier. Because even as parents, we're not perfect. And many people we've talked about before have painful childhood experiences, have painful experiences with their own parents that have left real damage.

[18 : 33] I was talking to a friend the other day who is currently around my age and currently in therapy because he came to recognize the damage certain behaviors by his parents caused in him.

That he just buried and buried and buried years and years and years. And he said, wow, therapy works. And I said, it does. I said, if you let wounds heal, you'll be amazed at what your spirit can do, what God can do at work in you.

So despite bad choices, despite wrong decisions, do we ever stop loving our children? Of course not. I hope is your answer, of course not.

Because I want you to reflect on that. Take that snapshot of your perspective and project it onto your understanding of the grace of God towards you.

Our Heavenly Father who loves us infinitely, more completely, more deeply, more perfectly than any human parent ever could. He supports us and is there for us when we fail.

[19 : 50] He forgives us when we mess up. We come to him and confess our sin. And he always welcomes us back with open arms. Always. God doesn't, my friends, God doesn't expect us to be perfect.

If you take nothing else away this morning, take that. God does not expect you to be perfect. Give yourself a break. He doesn't even expect us to earn his grace.

That's clear in scripture. Because grace is, as we talked about last week, gift. His love, his forgiveness, his grace, earning them, working towards them, that's not what the Christian life is about at all.

At all. Friends, the Christian life is not about judgment. judgment. It is about mercy. It's not about condemnation.

It's about forgiveness and redemption. redemption. It's not about what God has done for you, but what he has done for all humanity, including you.

[21 : 09] And our choice to follow these guidelines that God has set out for us, guidelines in scripture, that Jesus modeled in his own life, following these should flow naturally out of love.

As Vern talked about loving kindness, right? The grace of God. Our obedience, our seeking to follow what God has laid out for us, reflects back the love that God showed for us first.

Do you think the world needs Jesus? There's a rhetorical question, I hope. Do you think other people would benefit from knowing the truth, this truth, and receiving the grace and freedom that you have received through Jesus?

Jesus? Here's the hard question, and I've asked you this before. Do you tell other people about Jesus?

I want you to consider something for a moment. Do you remember when someone first told you about Jesus? Do you remember when you first went, oh, this good news is amazing?

[22 : 23] do you remember what happened in your life? Do you remember the change that came? Do you remember what your life was like before that moment? Do you remember what changed for you afterwards?

words? Is that still fresh in your mind? If it's not, ask God to remind you. So this is something that only you and God know for sure, whether you tell other people about Jesus or not.

I'm not here to judge you about your evangelism skills. We can help learn to improve them together for sure. But if you don't tell people about Jesus, why not?

Maybe you're afraid that people will walk away, will make fun of you, will mock your beliefs. I've been mocked. It doesn't feel great.

Maybe you're afraid of damaging an existing relationship with someone. Someone that's important to you, someone that you care about and have history with. But friends, what is the alternative?

[23 : 33] If someone never hears about Jesus, Scripture is clear. They are lost. Sure, you can maybe argue, not my gift.

Someone else will tell them. But seriously, why not you? In 2 Timothy 1, verse 9, Paul speaks to Timothy about not being ashamed of the gospel of Jesus.

And he says, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God who has saved us and called us to a holy life.

Not because of anything we have done, but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.

But it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to life through the gospel.

[24 : 40] gospel. Friends, we don't deserve, we've talked about it before in this series, we don't deserve to be saved. But God offers us salvation anyway.

And as followers of Jesus who have received God's grace, we are called to share the gospel with others. We're called to reflect this grace in and through our lives.

Paul and Timothy face real persecution. And there's people all around the world who are very real, very seriously persecuted for their faith.

Very real reasons for sharing the gospel. Someone will come knocking on their door and say, come with me. So are you afraid of sharing the gospel?

Are you afraid of sharing the truth of what you believe with the people who matter most in your life who don't know Jesus? We all have different stories, but if we believe in Christ, do you know what we share at the center of our stories, what makes us family in this place and around the world and across time?

[25 : 57] God's grace. This morning we've reflected on what God's grace means in our lives. And hopefully over the course of this short series we've gained a perspective, a little bit more depth in what it means to have an attitude of gratitude about grace.

And how we can reflect that towards others. So as people who are living under God's grace, see it as rain falling down rather than oppression crushing you, I want to suggest just briefly some practical ways we can reflect it through our lives and through our actions.

So as theologian Carl Barth once said, grace must find expression in life, otherwise it's not grace.

Does that make sense? Grace must find expression in life, otherwise it's not grace. In other words, as people who have received God's grace, our lives should be lived as a reflection of that grace.

So most, if not all, of these quick things I'm going to give you may be common sense, may seem like, oh, this is just a moral code, everyone has this. But again, we can see God's grace permeating a sense of human decency, I believe.

[27 : 31] I sold something on Facebook Marketplace and the guy was having trouble, it was a Wi-Fi equipment for his computer. So we went back and forth a few times and he was frustrated and it wasn't working and I said, hey, no problem, if you can't get it working, just bring it back and I'll give you your money back.

And he was shocked. And so he said, no, no, no, he said, I'm going to keep working on it. And I said, ultimately though, if you want to bring it back, no problem.

So he messaged me a couple days ago and said, hey, got it working in a way that'll work for me, so no need to bring it back. Thanks for being so kind and patient to me.

Hopefully it gave him something to think about. I mean, it's not very easy to have a full gospel conversation on Facebook Marketplace, but it plants a seed, right? So as people who are forgiven, we are called to forgive.

We're called to be people of grace. Seek not to hold on to what someone has done to you, but to let go. Forgive other people without conditions, because your forgiveness came with none.

[28 : 47] And the flip side of that forgiveness coin is being willing to ask other people to forgive you. Even if you don't think you did anything wrong, do you feel that stubborn, resisting pridefulness in you at all, maybe?

I didn't do anything wrong, why should I apologize? Who cares if you think you hurt the person or not? If you see evidence of something that you've done that has hurt someone, be the better person.

Be the Christian in that situation and ask for forgiveness. It doesn't cost you anything except your pride.

We also need to be people who watch our mouths. Obvious in some ways, right? We're not people who walk around cursing. So I'm not just talking about that.

That's obviously a perspective, but being critical of other people. Judging other people. Have you ever been near a conversation and heard someone just ripping another person apart?

[29 : 58] And worse, the other person isn't even there. It's gross. So we can't be those people, those people who criticize, who judge others, because we have received God's grace, not as judgment.

And those things, being critical and judgmental, sarcastic even, which is something I have to work on sometimes, they don't reflect well on people who say they follow Jesus.

Right? If you say to someone, yeah, I'm a Christian, and then you're talking about somebody else saying, oh, I can't believe, oh, my, my, my, my, my, my, my, my, my, what does that do to your witness?

Or, worse, you say something, someone experiences your worldly personality, and then you say, oh, want to come with me to church?

Screech! That's where we get the reputation of being judgmental, critical. If you don't feel like you can come to a place without being judged, why would you go there?

[31 : 08] Scripture talks a lot about our words, talks a lot about language, talks about how our words can hurt. So, ultimately, friends, be humble.

Be people who recognize that you've received God's grace. Be people who reflect it back to others, because that's the best witness you can possibly have.

I'm going to jump to a quote from Max Lucado. Everyone likes Max, I think, I hope. So, Max says, and the quote is there on the screen, to live as God's child is to know at this very instant that you are loved by your maker.

Hear this part. Not because you try to please him and succeed, or that you fail to please him and apologize.

Oh, Lord, I'm sorry, I've done it again, I've done it again. But because he wants to be your father, nothing more. I love this part.

[32 : 15] All your efforts to win his affection are unnecessary, and all your fears of losing his affection are needless.

Don't strive for it, it's yours. Don't worry about losing it, you won't. You can no more make God, make him want you, than you can convince him to abandon you.

Does that help you this morning? That adoption, the adoption to God's family through Jesus Christ is irreversible, Lucado says.

you, each one of you, has a place at his table. Amen.