

Grace Alone 2: Through Jesus Christ

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[0 : 00] So this is our second study there in the subject of grace alone. Last week we looked at some of the teaching on grace.

! And I said I'd pick up that question that the Jews asked Jesus, this is Joseph's son, the carpenter, how can he be the bread that comes down from heaven? On the face of it it doesn't really make any sense, does it?

You can see why they were puzzled. And yet really they shouldn't have been because the whole tenor of the scripture points towards this coming king.

Grace, I will remind you, means unmerited favour. And at the beginning of John we read the following verse, and I'd like to take this really as our jumping off point. It says the following, this is John 1, 16 and 17.

From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

[1 : 21] On the face of it that's a somewhat odd statement.

I mean is John suggesting that there was no grace in the law? That there was no grace to be found in the Old Testament? I'm sure that's not what he means at all. That would be an absurd claim to make.

And in fact, there are lots of words that talk about grace in the Old Testament. I'm not going to look at them in detail, but I think it's just worth pointing this out. Actually, if you're doing a search for grace in the NIV, Old Testament, you only actually get about eight matches and not all those refer to God's grace.

But what's used, where they do appear, it usually translates the word *hanan*. I apologize, I don't know how to pronounce Hebrew properly, but according to Strong's that's the right word.

Hanan, which means mercy. And another closely related idea is this idea of *hesed*, which means the steadfast covenant love that God has for his people.

[2 : 35] And other words like *ahab*, which means another word for love in Hebrew, all seem to actually carry this message of grace.

And all the way through, of course, the Old Testament, we find this message that God cares for his people and is present with his people, at least when they don't shut him out.

And so, for instance, in Isaiah chapter 5, verses 3 and 4, we read the following, Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.

What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I look for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? God says that he'd done everything for the people of Israel, and yet they'd actually rejected his grace and despised it.

But there is plenty of grace to be found in the Old Testament. So what is it, perhaps, that John's thinking of here?

[3 : 49] Why does he say grace and truth came through Jesus Christ? Well, one of those verses we read perhaps gives us a clue. It says, Hebrews 7, verse 19 says, For the law made nothing perfect, and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

All through the Old Testament, there is this idea of something to come, something better to come. And I sort of started making a list, as you can see there, of the things that the Old Testament suggests are going to get better.

Some of them quite explicitly, others you need to use a bit of imagination, but I think you can find them there. Let me just read them through briefly. The promise of a better man than Adam, the one who would bruise the serpent's heel.

One whose blood speaks better than Abel's. One who has a faith better even than Abraham's. One who is a better prophet than Moses.

One who is a better king than David. One who is a better priest than Aaron. One, I think, perhaps you could say, is a better friend than Jonathan.

[5 : 12] You perhaps have to use a bit of imagination for that one, but I think you could find that. One who has a better gospel than Jonah's. Even Jonah himself thought his message was rather unsatisfactory.

One who is a better teacher than Solomon. One who is a better husband than Solomon. He certainly had plenty of practice, but wasn't necessarily very good at it. One who is a better father. One who is a better father. One who is a better architect than Solomon. And who would build a new, better Jerusalem. Who would build a better temple.

And one who would introduce a better covenant than the law. And one who would introduce a better sacrifice for sin than sheep.

Now I'm sure if you put your mind to it, you could probably think of some more as well. But I want to focus just on four of these. So being guided as we have been, perhaps by the theology of the Reformation and what succeeded it.

[6 : 26] We'll think of the better prophet than Moses that is promised. The better king than David. I'm not doing them quite in the traditional order, as you can see.

The traditional order is prophet, priest and king. But I want to do them slightly in a different order. The better prophet than Moses. The better king than David. The better priest than Aaron. And the better sacrifice. In the sort of traditional formulation, the priesthood includes the sacrifice. But I think I'd like to separate those two out.

So I'm going to look at those four. But this is, of course, the basic theology, again, of the Reformation of grace and truth in Jesus Christ.

So let's look, first of all, at the prophet.

[7 : 23] And I would like you, I say, if you'd like to exercise your fingers a bit, please, to look up some of these references. So Deuteronomy chapter 18. That, I think, is the one that's on page 197.

That must be why I got that wrong page number from. So Deuteronomy chapter 18, starting at verse 15.

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me. This is Moses speaking, of course. Like me from among your brothers.

You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God, nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.

The Lord said to me, What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.

[8 : 45] If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. Notice it says, not prophets, but a prophet here.

But it is a sign of God's grace that the word of God is proclaimed. And when God's favor is present, it's also listened to.

And yet when God's favor is not there, the word of God is either silent or ignored. God's favor is silent or ignored. So, I'll put it on the screen actually.

I don't think I've got a slide for this. Did I put it on the next? Oh, yes I did. So I put it on the next slide. Yes, Isaiah chapter 30, 9 to 11.

It's just a couple of verses, but if you want to look it up. One of the prophets who of course followed Moses, Isaiah, perhaps in many ways, one of the greatest of the prophets, and yet he was not able to make people hear.

[9 : 56] Isaiah 30, 9 to 11 reads the following. These are rebellious people, deceitful children, children unwilling to listen to the Lord's instruction. They say to the seers, see no more visions, and to the prophets, give us no more visions of what is right.

Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions, leave this way, get off this path, and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel. In fact, Isaiah, when he was commissioned, was actually told that most people wouldn't listen to him.

So, of course, there were Old Testament prophets, prophets, but none fully met the promise, and Isaiah himself looked forward to a greater prophet.

We find in the, in these, the whole lot of songs in the, towards the end of Isaiah, called the servant songs. And in one of them, Isaiah 50, chapter 4, we have this verse, I'll just put it on the screen here, so you don't really need to look it up.

The sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.

[11:17] So, the servant listens to the father, and has an instructed tongue to know the word that sustains the weary. In other words, he will be listened to, his word will be effective.

And it is Jesus, of course, who fulfills this promise of the prophet. He listens to the father, and he gives sound instruction.

Of course, there are many passages in the New Testament, and they'll say just that. But here's one from John. So, let's turn to John, chapter 14. John, as I said last week, is the great apostle of grace. It runs all through his writings. So, John, chapter 14, starting at verse 21.

Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.

[12:30] And then Judas, not Judas Iscariot, said, but Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world? Jesus replied, if anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.

My father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own.

They belong to the father who sent me. All this I have spoken while still with you, but the counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I said to you.

Here, the emphasis is on those who love him, but he says that those who love him will indeed obey his commands. His words will be effective in their lives and the Holy Spirit will remind you of everything I've said.

So Jesus is the prophet promised by Moses and the one who truly reveals the whole counsel of the father. The presence of the word of God amongst his people is a mark of grace and seems to be one that's in danger of being despised at least among some places in the Christian church nowadays want to put something else in its place but the presence of the word of Christ among the people is a sign of Christ's grace and is certainly one that we shouldn't be despising.

[14:09] But not only was a prophet promised but also a king Judges chapter 17 verse 6 and in fact it's repeated in verse 21-25 says the following In those days Israel had no king everyone did as he saw fit and in fact between those two brackets where that phrase is quoted twice in between there's examples of the political and spiritual chaos that result from the lack of having a king of having a leader one who would do things properly and ensure that things were done properly and then of course Israel did have a king was Saul the promised king was it David or was it Solomon well the words to David himself show that that is not the case to Samuel 7 starting at verse 11 which I think is on page 277 now then tell my servant

David this is what the Lord almighty says I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel I have been with you wherever you've gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you now I will make your name great like the names of the greatest men of the earth and I will provide a place for my people Israel and I will plant them so they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed wicked people shall not oppress them anymore as they did at the beginning the Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you when your days are over and you rest with your fathers I will raise up your offspring to succeed you who will come from your own body and I will establish his kingdom he is the one who will build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever

I will be his father and he shall be my son when he does wrong I will punish him with the rod of men with floggings inflicted by men but my love will never be taken away from him as I took it your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me your throne shall be established forever now obviously the immediate target of that prophecy is Solomon of course who succeeded David but he didn't establish the house of David forever in fact immediately after Solomon the kingdom was split and really after that even the southern kingdom went into decline so really by 400 BC or so that was more or less ceased to exist there were kings of Judah after that but they weren't really in the line of David and yet the promise was that the throne shall be established forever so how does this work who was the one who received was the inheritor as it were of this promise well Luke is quite clear on that in Luke chapter 1 verse 30 we read the following so Luke chapter 1 30 to 33 page 1026 so

these are the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary but the angel said to her do not be afraid Mary you have found favor with God you will be with child and give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus he will be great and will be called the son of the most high the lord will give him the throne of his father

David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever his kingdom will never end the angel is obviously referring directly to that promise that was given to David that his kingdom would be established forever the one thing we miss in the modern translations I think in the King James version in verse 30 the word that is translated favour here is of course actually grace charis Mary you have found grace with God and Mary there was the daughter was representing as it were the daughters of Jerusalem the people of God who had found grace because the promise of the king who would be established forever was at last about to be made good Mary was the first to learn that the promise was about to be fulfilled and so the rule of Christ the anointed king over his people is a mark of grace and it promises a time when he will establish justice and peace throughout the universe in the words of

[19:55] James Montgomery's hymn which I haven't put down to sing today but I'll just quote you the first verse hail to the Lord's anointed great David's greater son hail in the time appointed his reign on earth begun he comes to break oppression to set the captive free to take away transgression and rule inequity couldn't put it much better than that but the emphasis as we saw in Hebrews or that passage in Hebrews at least is on the priest and so let's look at the idea of the priest now we won't look at all the establishment of the Aaronic priesthood there's pages and pages of it of course in the law but just to remind you that the job of the Old Testament priest was to intercede with God for the people and to make sacrifices for their sins but they were always hampered by their own sinfulness and mortality so let's turn briefly to that well known passage in

Zechariah I think I preached on it quite recently I'm not sure whether I did here but I certainly have done elsewhere but turn to Zechariah on page 951 Joshua was the high priest at the time this is after the return from exile and yeah well Joshua was the high priest and this is a vision that Zechariah was given it's not an actual event it is a vision that Zechariah was given concerning Joshua the high priest and it reads as follows then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the lord and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him the lord said to Satan the lord rebuke you Satan the lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you is this man not a burning stick snatched from the fire now

Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel the angel said to those who were standing before him take off his filthy clothes then he said to Joshua see I've taken away your sin and I will put rich garments on you and then I said put a clean turban on his head so they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him while the angel of the lord stood by Joshua as high priest was as sinful as every other man and that really precluded him from interceding even with God even for his own sin let alone anybody else's it's only through the grace of God that the priesthood was allowed at all that there was an intercessor but Zechariah makes it clear that this is not really a satisfactory state of affairs that far and so in a few verses later in verse 8 we read this listen oh high priest

Joshua and your associates seated before you who are men symbolic of things to come I'm going to bring my servant the branch see the stone I have set in front of Joshua there are seven eyes on that one stone and I will engrave an inscription on it says the Lord Almighty and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day Joshua was not the true high priest there was still a priest to come and he was the one who wouldn't have to go back every year and be cleansed every year because he would remove the sin of the land in a single day and as that psalm tells us the true priest is not even a descendant of Aaron the Lord has sworn and will not change his mind you are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek David was not a priest the otherwise good king Isaiah was actually judged for making a sacrifice but Melchizedek is both king and priest and therefore he symbolizes the priest the one to come and that passage of course that we read in Hebrews explains this in detail if you'd like to turn

I won't read it again as we've already read it but perhaps you'd like to turn to that passage Hebrews chapter 7 page 1205 particularly looking at verses 11 to 26 the second part of it and it tells us as we noted that the former regulation is set aside because it was weakened uses for the law made nothing perfect but it tells us particularly another priest like Melchizedek has appeared one who has become a priest not on the basis of regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of an

indestructible life and then later on because Jesus lives forever he has a permanent priesthood therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them so those two verses perhaps sum it up he's able to save completely those who come to

[25 : 57] God through him because he doesn't need to go back and be cleansed himself every year and only one sacrifice needs to be made and we'll come to that in a minute but Jesus is our priest and so we have access to the grace of God were it not for that we would not have access otherwise like the priest Joshua our sinfulness would exclude us it's only through the grace of the one who cleansed the land in one day that Joshua at his time or ourselves are able to come to God through Jesus Christ but what was the main job of a priest well the main job of a priest was to kill sheep to offer sacrifices as an atonement for the sins of the people and this pointed backwards to the Passover where the blood of a lamb on the doorpost protected the family inside the house but strange really can the soul of a man or woman really be purchased by the soul of a sheep the death of a sheep not of an equal bargain is it

Jesus is a priest who gave up not the life of an animal but his own life as a sacrifice of atonement and then as a sign that it was accepted he was given that life back so again just turn on a few pages in Hebrews to chapter 9 again this is made very clear in these verses Hebrews 9 11 to 15 when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man made that is to say not a part of this creation he did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves but he entered the most holy place once for all by his own blood having obtained eternal redemption the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so they are outwardly clean how much more then will the blood of

Christ who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God for this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant he entered the most holy place and as the writer makes clear that's not the tabernacle on earth the tabernacle that is not part of this creation the very presence of God himself he entered the most holy place once for all not by the blood of sheep but by his own blood and having obtained redemption not just for a year but eternal redemption so in one day the sacrifice was made so Jesus' death is the precious price of grace for his people so in that sense in fact grace is not free at all a heavy fee was paid for it but because

Jesus paid the price it comes to us as a free gift let's go back to John's gospel I do want to follow this a little bit more John's gospel chapter 10 we'll read from verse 14 to 18 I said John is the great apostle of grace so this is Jesus speaking of course I am the good shepherd I know my sheep and my sheep know me just as the father knows me and I know the father and I lay down my life for the sheep

I have other sheep not of this sheep pen I must bring them also they too will listen to my voice and there shall be one flock and one shepherd the reason my father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again no one takes it from me but I lay it down of my own accord I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again this command I received from my father there is a subtlety here I think that's worth noting who does Jesus lay down his life for not the world doesn't say the world here it says he laid down his life for the sheep who are the sheep those who he knows and those who know him it's not that Jesus died to make salvation possible he died to guarantee the salvation of his people it's the doctrine that theologians call particular redemption if you like to give it a technical term it's true that some sheep are not from the Jewish pen so we do need to compare and be careful what we say by this because in 1 John chapter 2 verse 2 he writes he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world but clearly

[32 : 24] John does not believe the whole world will be saved surely what he's saying there is that the only access to grace for anyone in the world is through Jesus so we can compare that with what Paul writes in Ephesians 1 verses 4 to 7 it's on page 1173 so Ephesians chapter 1 for he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight in love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will to the praise of his glorious grace which he has freely given us in the one he loves in him we have

redemption through his blood the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace so those who have redemption are those who were predestined and adopted

Christ's death is not just sufficient to make salvation possible it's sufficient to make salvation happen we might say it's sufficient and it's efficient so it's all grace grace and truth comes through Jesus Christ through Jesus Christ we obtain the presence of the word of God amongst the people of course he's our prophet we have the rule of God amongst the people because he's our king we have access to God because he's the priest who intercedes for us and that's all made possible by the sacrifice that he made for our sins so grace and truth do indeed come through Jesus Christ it's all of grace so let's finish our meeting by singing of the lamb number 427 7