

Respecting Customs - Acts 21:17-26

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[0 : 00] Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt, yonder on Calvary's Mount outpoured, there where the blood of the Lamb was spilled.

As we just sang those lyrics a few minutes ago, as a body affirming the truth of God's word through the power of the gospel, I want us to soak ourselves once more in these timeless lines.

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt. The very basis for what we're going to see in this text as a call, a response to loving obedience to God is rooted in these principles.

That there is a Lord who has extended His marvelous grace to you, to I, to us. And that grace exceeds our sin and our guilt.

The deepest part of our sin and our guilt has been exceeded by God's grace. That is gonna lead us into the text today. And I'm grateful for music and the ability to sing together and proclaim these truths as a body.

[1 : 20] So let's pray. God, thank you for this morning. Thank you, Dad. Each and every day, every moment of each day is a testament of your grace and our lives that you allow us to live and to move and to have our being in and through the supplied grace of Jesus Christ.

That we have not been dealt with our sin according to how we deserve, but we have been dealt with great love. And a grace that is not deserved, that we can be here today as the body of Christ, sing these songs, pray together, be in fellowship, and now see your word, fall in love with you as we see your word and in response, extend the same grace that we've been shown.

We thank you for this morning and every prayer. Amen. We're gonna be in Acts chapter 21 today. Now I wanna ask for your grace with me. I have been struggling and dying with allergies this whole summer.

I think it's the rutness, the rain, and many of you probably have the same things going on. So every morning I'm taking allergy medication, I'm blowing my nose, I've sound a little stuffy, now you know why. But I'm excited for this morning because upon first reading of this text, I read it and immediately thought, well this is going to be interesting time of study.

And the more that I read, the more that I came up with ideas of what this text is about and more commentaries that I read, the more those ideas begin to merge and divide.

[2 : 57] And so there's a lot of things going on in the text today, but I think God has shown me through His Spirit at least some measure of a straight line through the text that can anchor us all in the grace of God.

So I want us to understand as we go into Acts 21 verse 17 through 26, there is a context that is present. That in the book of Acts we've seen the church explode through the power of the unstoppable gospel of Jesus Christ.

That even though they've met opposition here and there, it continues to extend, people continue to come to Christ and God continues to expand His kingdom in and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

That's the story of Acts. And in this story, Paul, who we're following at this point, has already been to Jerusalem.

And in Acts 15, we saw that the means of salvation was decidedly grace and was agreed upon by the brothers in Jerusalem. Now Jerusalem, quick context, is the hub of the Jewish world, massive Jewish population.

[4 : 05] And in this hub, there arose some disagreement, some consternation, if you will, about what it looks like to be a Christian.

And in Acts 15, we saw that there were some brothers who were part of the pharisaical line and they came and they tried to impose legalistic salvation and strict adherence to the Mosaic law as a means to salvation.

And in Acts 15, it says that these brothers said it is necessary to circumcise those who come into the faith and order them to keep the law of Moses. So Peter, there's four incredible church leaders in Acts 15 in Jerusalem, Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and James.

And Peter stands up and says a bunch of things to the Jews, but he says this, but we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus just as they will. The Gentiles, all of us are marked by the grace of the gospel.

And then James, another key leader of the Jerusalem church, arguably the leader of the Jerusalem church, agrees with Peter and he affirms salvation by grace alone in Acts 15, but he also affirms, this is important for our text today, he also affirms that all Gentile believers that come into the faith through grace, which he agrees and establishes the salvation in, he also agrees that believers ought to adhere to at least God's moral law, the 10 commandments, following that which is the heart of God as they seek to obey him with their newfound grace-filled salvation.

[5 : 45] And he asks, common sense living as well, abstain from idol worship and from blood rituals. But therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God is what James says.

Salvation is by grace. Salvation is by a man who did fulfill the law and has given us his perfect record.

This is the conclusion in Acts 15 in Jerusalem. So salvation has come to the Gentiles in the legitimacy and the body of Christ is affirmed by the leaders of the early church, specifically the Jerusalem church.

And now we read Acts 21, Paul returns and he comes back to Jerusalem. So let's read verse 17 to 26.

When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. On the following day, Paul went in with us to James and all the elders were present.

[6 : 53] And after greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified God.

And they said to him, you see brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, they're all zealous for the law. And they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to the customs.

What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow.

Take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law.

But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what has been strangled and from sexual immorality.

[8 : 08] Then Paul took the men and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them.

Now there is a main focus of this text this morning that we're gonna jump into. And it's a question and the question is this, what do we do when confronted with a different set of customs in the church?

How do we respond when our brothers or sisters do something that is not ordinary to me? When they exercise a type of practice in the home or in their lifestyle that is foreign to us, what do we do? That's the main question the text is asking and we're gonna answer. But before we even jump into that, we have to along with the passage and along with the brothers in this passage, verse 17, 18, 19 and 20 is a celebration.

And I want you to see the celebration here, okay? Let's remember our grand sweeping meta narrative of the book of Acts that God's gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit is going forward and changing the world.

[9 : 31] That people are being drawn to the grace of Jesus Christ and we see that. Let's not skip over this. They celebrate, we should celebrate. Verse 17, when we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly.

And on the following day, Paul went in with us to James and the elders and they were all present. After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

That is an understatement. Three missionary journeys of Paul and Barnabas and others who have been used by God to spread the gospel.

And here's what it basically summarizes. Paul goes back to Jerusalem with James, the leader of the Jerusalem church and the elders there and he says, let me tell you, all of the cities we visited, all of the people that have come to Christ, all of the churches that have been planted, all of the new found leaders in the church that we have set in place.

Let me tell you about all the miracles, the healings, the thousands upon thousands of new converts. Let me tell you that the Gentile world is now on fire for Jesus.

[10 : 36] Let me tell you about all of this. And here's the beautiful thing. Verse 20, and when they heard it, they glorified God.

Now that is something to celebrate. Because in this book up to this point, we've seen some consternation between the Gentiles and the Jews, specifically the Gentile Christians and the Jewish Christians.

And it's been hard at times for the Jewish nation to see the Gentiles come in. But James, the elders of the church, they hear all of this that God has done and they say, to God be the glory.

And here's what I love, here's a response. Hey Paul, thanks for sharing. Guess what? Since the last time you were here, back in chapter 15, you see brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, which again is another understatement, basically saying this, a bunch of people have been busy in the Jewish hub, Jerusalem, but specifically two leaders, James and Peter, who the Scripture puts forward as, in some sense, the apostles to the Jews.

And James and Peter, by their leadership, and the Jewish church have come together and they've said, we must tell people about the grace of Christ and they do. And here's what he says, thousands have come since you've been here, thousands.

[12 : 15] So let's not miss this. Let's celebrate with what God had done back then and let's celebrate now with what God is doing in the world today, to reach those for the grace of Christ.

Now, after this celebration from one to the other and the other to the other, the mutual time of encouragement and celebration we see now, verse 20, says that they are all zealous for the law, meaning that now that these Jewish brothers and sisters have been saved out of a law legalistic ordinance laden life that tries to earn God's grace, they've received God's grace freely and have trusted in Christ.

But there's still a fervor to love God with all of their heart, soul, mind and strength by following the law. And I'm not gonna say here, I don't think Luke tries to say or even Paul tries to say that this is necessarily an indictment on these believers or a procurement of their goodness towards God.

I would say this, this line added in here is to give us the context of the question today. That these Jewish brothers and sisters in Jerusalem, they want to follow the customs of their culture and their lives to follow God, to obey Him with whatever they can.

So it says in verse 21, and they have been told about you, that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles, every place that you've gone, all of the cities, any Jews that have come to Christ in those cities, here's what they have heard.

[14 : 04] That you are telling them to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs, what then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.

In other words, the Jewish brethren here have heard a rumor, Paul, that you have turned away from the Jewish way of life. That circumcision doesn't matter anymore, bodily circumcision?

Following the law of Moses doesn't matter anymore, Paul, that's what they are hearing. And you're telling people, forget all of the customs, doesn't matter anymore.

So here is James's solution as the leader. Do therefore what we tell you, Paul. We have four men who are under a vow. Take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses so they can shave their heads.

Thus all will know that there's nothing in what they have been told about you that you yourself also live in observance to the law. But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what has been strangled and from sexual morality.

[15 : 18] In other words, Paul, the Jewish believers here have heard rumors. And I'm not sure as their leader, as their shepherd, I'm not sure that your voice is gonna have much weight here in Jerusalem.

I'm not sure they're gonna wanna get behind you in evangelism and allow you to come in as another brother and help share the gospel. I'm not sure that's a proper place right now.

And what I believe James is doing here is he is loving and guiding and helping and directing his brother in Christ, Paul, by saying this. Whether or not Paul has actually taught all these things, which I contend that he has not been telling all of the Jews, all the Christian Jews in the whole known world that the law doesn't matter, just forget it all.

I believe that Paul has a doctrine and a theology of the law that is now in Christ, and he teaches this in Galatians, Romans, and in the book of Hebrews, which we don't know that he wrote, also talks about the law being fulfilled by Jesus.

And now there's a law of Christ that supersedes and holds all of the law together that we would love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and love our neighbors, ourselves, Jesus, summarization of the moral law of the Old Testament, the law of Christ, the freedom that we've received through grace to now live in Christ and fulfill his law of serving him and loving others with our full heart.

[16 : 45] This law of Christ is what Paul is about, and he's been teaching this, but here's the thing. The Jerusalem church either has not received or the books have not been written of Galatians, Romans, or Hebrews.

Paul hasn't been able to write all this out and explain his intersection of his Jewishness and the grace that comes through freedom of the law, through Christ, he's not explained this all fully that they've not read and written and understood, so there's confusion.

Are you a Jewish Christian or are you not? Paul is essentially the question. And what I love, I am convinced I see James here as loving his brother by protecting him from a bad reputation that was either legitimately gained by Paul, which I don't really believe, or illegitimately given.

But here's what James says. Paul, there's four brothers who have decided to take a vow and they want to honor the Lord through it.

They've received the grace of Christ, they're living in the grace of Christ, they have been redeemed by the grace of Christ, but they've taken this vow as an external communication to God of an inward obedience and love of him that they want to love him.

[18 : 08] Paul, would you with these four brothers do the vow, pay their expenses to do this vow, and show the believers, show the Jewish people here who are brothers and sisters in Christ, show them that you're not against them but you're for them.

That's what's happening. And so, what does it say, verse 26? Then Paul took the men and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them.

And that is the end of our text. I want us to notice something. Paul has said no words in this passage.

He has not spoken, he has not opened his mouth, he has not given a defense to the Jewish Christians, he has not explained his theology of the law of Christ, which sets us free.

I think this is really important. Because up to this point next, you guys have heard, we've read together that Paul has spoken a lot to the glory of God, but he's spoken a lot.

[19 : 26] And he has defended with his mouth, faith in Christ. He has preached the gospel to anyone who would be willing to listen, he's defended, he's been reviled, he has fought the good fight with his mouth.

And now here's a chance for Paul for his actions to speak louder than his words. This is his moment in Acts to do this. He has spoken faithfully, but now it's time to demonstrate his faithfulness to Christ and to his brothers.

So Paul participates in the vow. And he does so for two reasons. This is why Paul listens to James and says, I will do this vow with these brothers.

Two reasons. First, to meet his brothers with the grace of the gospel. To meet his brothers with the grace of the gospel. James is concerned for Paul's witness.

And here's the reality. Four men are under a vow. And whether this vow is, I don't believe this, but possibly out of foolishness, they shouldn't be doing it. Or out of reverence for God, which I think is more likely, or out of obligation to God.

[20 : 44] We don't know exactly, but I would say this. We do know that these four brothers have undergone a vow that they must fulfill. And Paul does not judge them for it, but rather loves them through it.

And this is key. Instead of sitting them down and giving them a long theological lecture on why you should not do a vow. Paul lovingly says, I'll do it with you.

I will love you through this. So what is the vow? The vow is likely a Nazarite vow. A lot of signs that point to this being a Nazarite vow.

And Nazarite vow in numbers is laid out to us as a gratitude vow, an act of appreciation of God for something that he's done personally in one's life or collectively as the nation, that are individuals that say, I wanna take a Nazarite vow.

To love God and to show him my appreciation. That was the role of a Nazarite vow. It's probably what they're doing. And here's the reality, but a Nazarite vow, it's highly inconvenient and even awkward for Paul.

[21 : 59] He comes into Jerusalem after planting churches, spreading the gospel. Everyone knows about Paul, Saul turned Paul by the grace of God. And here's what Paul, he comes in and here's what he's asked.

Would you participate in the vow that these four brothers are taking, which also includes by the way, shaving your head, abstaining from wine or great products, alcohol, setting aside multiple weeks to fulfill the vows, make sacrifices of unblemished lambs and rams as a sin offerings is all part of a Nazarite vow.

Also, I love the last part of this. Paul, would you also pay all of their expenses? Now, Paul is an on the go itinerant church, pastor and preacher at this point.

And we know from some of his other letters that a lot of churches were not supporting him like they should be, that he had to be a tent maker to supply for himself, but he counted it all as a grace of God, that he was content in every circumstance, even if he didn't have the necessary things.

But here's the reality for Paul. Hey, Paul, welcome to Jerusalem. Would you please pay these four guys for a month of a vow, which is essentially, think of it as rent, food for a month, the cost to do the rituals, to pay people to do things for them, like cut hair.

[23 : 26] Paul, would you shave your head, abstain from wine, set aside multiple weeks? Some people think it was just, he just did the last part of the vow, which is possible, but still set aside a week, pay their expenses and make sacrifices on blemish lands.

Would you do that, please? To earn the love and respect of the Jewish believers here. There's a lot of questions here.

A lot of people ask, why would Paul do this? Paul's going to participate in a vow that smacks of legalism, that we have to do this in order to show our love of God, or possibly even worse, Paul's going to participate in a vow that requires an unblemished lamb to be sacrificed?

Paul, you know, you know that Jesus is the final sacrifice to end all sacrifices. You know that he is the sacrificial lamb. There's no longer any need.

Paul, why would you do this? And I think just as Paul does not judge his four brothers for taking the vow, we need to be very careful not to judge Paul for taking this.

[24 : 38] Because I strongly believe that Paul in doing this is an act of love and grace to come alongside his brothers and show them the grace of the gospel.

And it's very, very likely that Paul viewed this vow and specifically these sacrifices, an unblemished lamb, part of the Nazarite vow, as a memorial.

Paul knows Jesus is our lamb. Is it possible for Paul to do this vow and possibly even coach up these four brothers that as we offer this unblemished lamb, let's look to Jesus as the death and substitutionary atonement for us.

We do this every month, something like this in communion. When we take the blood and the bread and we remember the sacrificial lamb, is it possible that Paul loves them through this vow and uses this opportunity to remember and memorialize his Savior?

I think it is. And I think that's what Paul's doing here. So Paul partakes in the Nazarite vow and here's the big catch-all idea.

[25 : 56] Meet others with the same grace that met you. Meet others with the same grace that met you.

Paul was a Jew, Pharisee, keeper of the law, leader of Israel. They knew him and he knew them and then he becomes redeemed. Sometimes the people we know best, our actions are more powerful than our words.

For an example, I'm somebody who's out and about a lot and isn't necessarily super, super attentive to time. I'm a little bit of Hawaiian in that sense. And I can be out and about in a lose track of time and I can underestimate the time of time it takes to do pretty much anything I will underestimate it.

And my wife knows this, she's smiling. And she'll say, Eric, what time are you coming home today? Oh, probably around five. And she has told me this and it makes me sad but it's also funny.

Eric, I have learned over seven years of marriage to you to always add 30 minutes on whatever time you say. So I'm really gonna be home at five 30. And you know what? Since she told me that, I've been watching.

[27 : 10] I still make the mistake of telling her the wrong time. And then I guess what? I'm always like 30 minutes late. I'm like, wow. What I mean by sometimes the people that we know best are actions and the most powerful way to reveal what's in the heart is this.

The words, I'll be home on time tonight, fall on deaf ears to somebody that really knows me well. The only way I can show that I care about them and time and being with them and being on time and loving them is to actually show up at five.

And I think this is similar to what's happening here with Paul. They all know Paul. They wanna see what he's gonna do. And here's what Paul does. The only way to speak to them honestly is actually to act for Paul.

And here's what he does. He chooses the sacrificial love of the gospel with these four young men in the greater nation of Israel in Jerusalem.

He shows them that I have grace for you brothers. That even though I wouldn't take this vow which I'm confident in saying, Paul would not have showed up and said, we gotta do it, that's right, vow.

[28 : 23] He shows up and even though he normally would not take this vow, he wouldn't see a need for it. He's free in Christ, all of these things. He sees his brothers and he says this in his heart.

The same gospel that has saved me, the same grace that I've received in the weirdness of who I am and in the strangers who I am, that is the same grace that has saved these four brothers.

And I counsel all joy to extend that same grace to them. This is why Paul pleads in Colossians this phrase, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.

As you have received the grace of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ, what are you to do Colossians? You are to walk in the same way that you received him which is grace.

Meaning for Paul, as you receive grace, you must give grace. And this is the ethic that runs through all of his letters and I would argue even through Jesus' teaching is this, as we receive, so we show.

[29 : 29] I have been forgiven, I must forgive. I have been loved of much, I must love much. I have been comforted in my afflictions by a Savior, I must comfort others in their afflictions. And for Paul here, as I have been met with grace, I must show grace.

Meet others with the same grace that met you. Paul is modeling that for us this morning. So, let's talk about what that looks like.

Meeting one another with grace means we gladly choose awkwardness. If it means strength and fellowship. Meeting one another with grace means that we gladly choose awkwardness if it means strength and fellowship.

No doubt this is an awkward thing for Paul. Again, come in Jerusalem, Paul, the Jews have these theories about you. I'm not sure you're gonna have much weight here. So we'd like you to shave your head and pay the price for these four guys to do a vow that you may or may not consider to be legitimate.

Welcome, hello everybody, this is great. I will gladly shave my head for them out of love and grace for where they're at. I know they're my brother in Christ and that's what leads him into this decision and I wanna show that grace that I've received to them so I will do it.

[30 : 52] That's highly awkward. And sometimes choosing to meet others with grace is awkward. Let's just be honest. Striking up a conversation with someone new in the church that you've not met yet.

Definition of awkward. I don't know that person but they're here and I wanna talk to them and we all know first conversations with people can be hard sometimes. Some of you are really, really good at conversation and I feel really natural when I talk to you the first time.

Good on you. Some of us are less that way and I would be one of them. I can intimidate people, I can ask a question that's way over the line, right? I think we all can experience this but guess what showing grace means that the ability and the opportunity to meet someone new trumps the awkwardness of the moment.

Meeting others with the same grace that met you might look like joining a small group that has different hobbies than you. I need a small group, I wanna be in small group community, I want some brother and sister to walk through life with.

Well here's one over here. Yeah but they play board games. I don't play board games. Join and learn how to play board games and love them and join their wonderful fellowship of board games and Christ as you do it.

[32 : 09] Yeah but this small group, they hike. They're outdoorsy, I don't do that. It might be awkward to learn how to hike or to learn how to be an outdoorsy person but if it means strength and fellowship with that group, is it worth it?

Meeting others with the same grace that met you might look like inviting someone to lunch after church that you no more often would not ask to lunch. I'll leave it at that. Meeting one another with the same grace that met you might look like praying in the moment for someone who shares their hardship with you and I've had to grow in this because I have been the person someone on a Sunday morning or a Wednesday night or a Tuesday night or whenever says I want to share something I'm going through.

I will look at them with compassion in my eyes and grace in my heart and say I will pray for you but not now. Now it's great to pray for people, put them on a list. Many of you do that and you are wonderful and I've been blessed by people who write down my hardships and actually pray for me throughout the week.

If you do that, it's not meant to shame you. Praise God for your faithfulness and for this guy, I say that a lot and I don't write it down and I forget and what an abomination. To tell someone I'll pray for them but I won't.

So I've had to grow in my ability in the moment to say let's pray now. And that can be awkward. Everyone's having a great time around. You've ever been in that scenario on Tuesday night at Young and Old Group, everyone's having a great time.

[33 : 44] They're all laughing, they're having a good time and someone pours their heart out in the midst of laughter and commotion. Let's pray. I've done that. It's awkward but it's beautiful and it's grace.

And just to remind us that meeting one another with grace is worth it even though it's awkward, Jesus himself experienced and encountered awkward scenarios all the time and he always chose grace.

One of the most highly awkward scenarios of Jesus. Inviting himself over to a traitorous Jewish worker of the Romans to collect money and taxes.

Zacchaeus. He climbs a tree and Jesus says hey, go into your house, let's go. Everything about this is awkward. The Jews hate this guy. He works for the Romans. He's making money off of ill profit. Of cheating people. There's no way he would ever ask Jesus to come over because that would be ridiculous. He couldn't do that. So Jesus says I'm coming to your house and this is not an invitation for us to do this to other people.

[34 : 50] Jesus knows the heart. He knows Zacchaeus. And he knows. Zacchaeus is never going to ask me to come over because that would be atrocious in every way for him to do culturally.

So Zacchaeus, I want to come over. Jews and associated with traitors who worked for the enemy. It was unnecessary to invite himself over. Jesus brings salvation to an unclean outcast who's hated. And without this story is awkward. And Jesus embraces it. The second way we can meet those with the same grace that met you is to meet one another with grace.

It means we gladly choose inconvenience if it means strength and fellowship. The first way, Paul, this is highly awkward for him to do this but I'm going to do it to show grace and to have strength and fellowship with my brothers.

Now, the second way is to choose inconvenience willingly. This is deeply inconvenient for Paul to do this. Even if he only did the last week of the vow or he did the full month of the vow.

[35 : 50] It's inconvenient because he has to pay money. That he most surely is short on as a minister traveling. It's inconvenient for Paul to do this because it's going to stop him for multiple weeks to sit down and actually do the purifying vow the right way, which isolates him from normal community rights, customs and practices.

It's deeply inconvenient for Paul to do this and yet he chooses it in order to meet people with grace. How can we choose inconvenient scenarios to meet people with grace?

How about driving a friend across town who needs a ride? Sacrificing finances to bless others.

That's not convenient for anybody to say, here's money that I worked hard for, for you to have but it's grace and it's love.

We just went to camp and I had two youth come up to me and say I'd like to pay my fellow brother youth way to camp. Now I've had adults do that, I've had parents do that, I've had youth leaders do that, which is fantastic, but I've never had youth say, we want to pay \$500 so that these two people go to camp.

Blessed me immensely. Highly inconvenient. Pressing the green answer call button on your phone when someone needy or challenging is calling. Now God convicted me because I wrote that a couple days ago and guess who called me last night at 11pm when I was reviewing my notes.

[37 : 22] My little sister. Eric, I need help with the question, can you call? Pfft. Lord, if I don't pick this up, I should be struck dead. So I picked it up and talked with her for 30 minutes at 11pm.

It wasn't an easy thing, it was very inconvenient because I'm looking to go to bed, I want to review my notes, they're fresh, I want to go to bed and yes, I'll talk to you at 30 minutes at 11pm.

Responding with aid at 1am when a brother or sister is in the middle of a crisis and needs help.

I got a car accident a few years ago, I called Josh, said, Josh, I need you right now. Okay, where do you need me? Here's the address, he comes, he sees me and Brooke just shook over this car wreck, we're all fine by the grace of God, with a baby that's crying and it's freezing out.

Highly inconvenient, Josh, thank you for showing us grace. And here's the story of Jesus. Highly inconvenient. He's teaching, a bunch of Jewish leaders are with him, they're in a house, it's crowded, there's no room in the house, it's basically a sermon inside of a house.

He's in the middle of his teaching, he's in the middle of his sermon, he's in the middle of his lecture, and what happens? The unthinkable! You're a teacher in any way here. A hole is ripped open in the roof, and a man begins to come down, a paralytic, on a board with ropes, in the middle of his teaching.

[38 : 48] Highly inconvenient, okay? Again, this is not an excuse for us to do this to Dr. Freeland when he's teaching at GNU, okay? But, what does Jesus do?

This is a highly inconvenient time, guys, in the middle. I'm about to give my application, my call to the gospel, in his inconvenience, Jesus heals and offers a miracle.

Meeting one another with grace means sometimes we choose inconvenience. And if loving somebody seems like inconvenience to you, or that person may be that you're thinking of right now, think of it as an opportunity to meet them with grace.

Typically speaking, if you're thinking in your mind, should I love this person? Should I give them time? Should I give them energy? It's highly inconvenient, it's going to be awkward, I don't know if I should do this. It's probably a good indication.

The Spirit is giving you an opportunity to show grace. And this is the gospel. Gospel love is costly. God paid the price.

[39 : 58] Gospel love is hard. It's difficult, it's painful, God suffers the hardship. Gospel love is impossible, how could so impossibly come to salvation?

God makes all things possible. So for the first reason, Paul takes the vows to love his brothers with grace. The second reason is he wants to meet the unbelievers in Jerusalem with the grace of the gospel by uniting with the Jerusalem church.

This act is to win over his brothers in Jerusalem so that a unified church with Paul included who's not against them, who's not in opposition to who they are as brothers in Christ, which is what they

kind of are thinking, he does this and he shows by the wisdom of James, I'm with you and I love you and I have grace for you, this is Christ's grace for me.

And in this unity with the church, the gospel goes forward and Paul sees the greater picture. There's a tennis player who just finished the finals of Wimbledon and it was in the fourth set as I was driving to work so I'm sure it's over now and I don't know who won, I won't spoil it for any of you, but his name is Nick Kyrgios and he is quite possibly the most hated man in professional tennis.

[41 : 30] He doesn't obey the customs, he's highly derogatory, he doesn't respect anyone or anything, he treats the game like a piece of garbage. He swears at lying judges, this has all happened in this tournament and other tournaments he's been in, he threatened and mocks court officials, he breaks rackets frequently in anger, he complains about any close call, doesn't compete till the end, gives up, if he's losing, he's constantly in disrespectful comments for the game's greats and at all, Federer, Djokovic, everyone in tennis hates this guy.

Including the officials, even though they won't say it. Why? I played tennis for a long time, it's a very classy sport. You don't do any of these things, otherwise you're immediately branded as irreverent. This guy's reputation is ruined in tennis. No one wants to shake his hand even though they do out of grace, no one wants to listen to him, he has no voice to help change the game and advance it. I think of this story, I think, what a contrast what Paul's doing. He is respecting the customs and out of reverence and humility earning that respect and showing grace that he would have a voice. And this is Paul's mentality, I want you to hear Paul's ethic that guides him in this situation, 1 Corinthians 9.

For I am free from all, listen to this. Listen to how Paul meets others with the same grace that met him. For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant of all that I might win more of them to the Jews that became a Jew in order to win Jews.

[43 : 02] To those under the law I became as one under the law, myself not being under the law. That I might win those under the law, to those outside the law I became as one outside the law, not being outside the law of God, but under the law of Christ, that I might win those outside the law. To the week it became weak, that I might win the week, to all things that become all things all people, that by all means I might save some, and I do it all for the sake of the gospel that I may share with them in its blessings.

What's Paul's ethic? In order to bring people to the gospel, I will become. I will sacrifice. I will embrace the eochronous. I will embrace the inconveniences. And I will plunge forward in grace. Because although God is awesome in power and omnipotent and is never inconvenienced, Jesus taking on the frailty and brokenness of humanity can be inconvenienced.

And the gospel story is a list of inconveniences for Jesus for our benefit. Leaving the right hand of the Father to incarnate as a human being.

Living perfectly while everyone around you is a sinner, highly inconvenient and awkward. Being the source of true light in total darkness.

[44 : 28] Tolerating false accusations and revoking false teachings from self-righteous leaders of God's people. Suffering, agonizing wounds and humiliation and pain although totally innocent.

Shouldering the sin of the world. Pretty inconvenient. Dying. Jesus endured all of this. These are highly inconvenient circumstances and yet Jesus endurance through inconvenience is the definition of God's love for you and I. That's grace.

You have received grace because someone else is inconvenienced on your behalf. And His grace to us is supplied through Jesus' love amidst inconvenience. So our grace to one another and to the world listen is supplied by Jesus' love amidst inconvenience.

Not only is Jesus the Savior, the Offer of Grace of God, He's also the model that we're saved by Him and we're falling in love with Him and out of the love that we have for our Savior we also say I want to be like you and I'm going to go into the world like you went into the world in humility.

Set aside myself, deny myself. Philippians chapter 2 says to become taking a form of a servant.

[45 : 56] That's what it means to meet those the same grace that met you. He had a youth leader named Sean and he always forsook the easy routine conversations with the easygoing individuals in the youth group in order to enter the difficult awkward conversations with more socially outcast individuals in the youth group.

That was his calling. For two years he sought out this one young man who loved death metal, loved being in his room by himself didn't like to talk to others.

For two years he jammed out to metal music in the car with him. Learned how to dirt bike, played video games constantly, met multiple years one-on-one meetings with this young man.

Inconvenienced him terribly.

And then at one summer camp this young man finally responded to the Lord and I got to walk him through the gospel and show him the grace of Christ. And after he received Christ through his own grace and after he received Christ through tears and celebration, you know what he said to me?

Eric, I thank you for being here for me but I want you to know God used Sean as his sacrificial servant leader and he's the reason I came to Christ.

[47 : 12] This young man had encountered the gracious presence in friendship with Jesus through Sean. And for the next year Sean continued to meet with this young man with grace, disciple him, show him Christ and I've always seen Sean as an example.

That young man would never have been met by anyone who didn't want to be inconvenienced.

Highly awkward, highly inconvenienced to meet and talk and be a friend of this young individual.

Yet Sean did it.

And he did it unconfident because he knew the grace that Christ had for him. That God loved me and my awkwardness. God loved me and my strangeness and my alienation to him.

He saw a path to show me grace that would cost him and he did it. So I will do it. I will be the example and I will incarnate Christ on this earth to this young man.

Church, it's our job to meet the world in one another with grace. Meet others with the same grace that met you.

[48 : 24] And I want to read the last verse of that same song, Grace that is greater than all my sin. Listen to this. Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace freely bestowed on all who believe.

Do you believe that every single person himself or brother or sister in Christ has met with the same grace that you have? Do you believe that there is a world hurting right now who desperately needs that grace?

Let's meet others with the same grace that Jesus has met us. Lord, we thank You for today. We thank You for Paul's example, Lord. In this awkward, kind of strange example, Lord, I thank You because in it we see gracious heart, a loving heart.

And in it we see that loving our brothers and sisters in Christ is worth inconvenience. It's worth cost. It's worth awkwardness.

And as we're unified together in this collective grace that we have all received because of Jesus, I pray that that unity would be used to reach the world.

[49 : 39] Those around us, that those in our workplaces, in our schools, in our social circles, we would see their way of life. We'd see their customs and without negating the Word of God by falling into the worldliness of sin, I pray that we would also meet them in the places where we can.

Change us into your image, Lord, and help us to see your grace in all people. Amen.