

Grace Alone

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] Ephesians 2, that's on page 976. I want for this week to start with by grace alone. We are saved by grace alone, sola gratia, that's the Latin phrase.

And the Reformation, in the Reformation during that time, there was a discovery of the radicalness of God's grace. Grace, that we are saved not just by grace, but we're saved by grace alone.

And what happens if you're new to church during these five weeks is the kids draw and respond behind us, and then I speak to us as adults about this. And so I want to speak straight to adults as well as the teens.

Now, everybody loves grace. It's the key that unlocks the Bible. We can't understand who God is. Cannot be a Christian without understanding what grace is.

But over time, what we do is we manage God's grace. We manipulate it, and we mangle it all up. And it begins to lose its radical saving edge.

[1 : 12] 500 years ago, as Bev mentioned, grace had been distorted into a kind of a spiritual commodity that was controlled and channeled by the church through sacraments and good works and those sorts of things.

We are in a very different context 500 years later. But we trivialize and devalue grace in three ways. We make grace a foodie thing.

A food thing. We call the very polite hostess of a meal or a host of a meal gracious. We refer to a really classy restaurant meal as having grace to it.

It's a kind of a special form of niceness when people gather around food. That's not what grace is. Secondly, we make grace into a force.

A kind of impersonal spiritual energy. A battery charge from God when I'm feeling low or grumpy. You know, a cloud of power that I plug into when I'm praying or when I'm being extra good.

[2 : 15] And sometimes God gives me a little bit to help get me through. That's not Bible grace. So we either make it something foodie or some kind of force or we make it a fuel.

Some kind of spiritual Red Bull. You know, a shot of caffeine, of spiritual blessing. Because I'm facing a very difficult situation, I need a dollop of goodness of God when I'm down.

That is not the Bible understanding of grace. No matter how nice those things are. In the Bible, grace is disruptive and it destroys and overturns the way we normally think things are.

It says that the way we sensibly put our lives and our world together is upside down. So I've got two points about grace. The first is the madness of grace. And the second is the meaning of grace.

And the second point has two sub-points. I was told recently I don't make my points properly. So firstly, let's look at the madness of grace.

[3 : 18] I read to you from Ephesians 2, the same Saul who met Jesus on the road to Damascus. And I'm reading from verse 4. But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

By grace you have been saved. And raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. So that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. This is not your own doing. It is the gift of God. Not a result of works so that no one may boast. This is very difficult to hear.

I mean, I am a narcissist and I live amongst narcissists in our culture today. And we are almost drowning in the message, you are special, you trust yourself, be true to yourself, focused on our rights and our freedoms and our dignity and our own pride.

And along comes the Bible with the madness of grace. And it says that, apart from grace, I'm spiritually dead. I can't do anything to prepare myself to receive grace.

[4 : 36] I'm a slave, says Paul. I'm self-deceived. I'm under his righteous wrath, it says. I have no ability to choose God.

And God doesn't owe me anything. And deep down, I'm not really just a nice person. So grace turns life upside down. And it says the problem is far more serious than you imagine.

But what God has done is far more wonderful. Do you know, there's a difference between mercy and grace. Mercy is free compassion to someone, no matter whether they deserve it or not.

But grace is gift and compassion to someone who deserves the opposite. Let me give you an illustration. Someone knocks at your door, asks for \$1,000.

Mercy listens to that person. You listen to their story, even give it to them, though they don't deserve it, that's mercy. But if someone comes to your door, demands \$1,000, sets your house on fire, damages everything you have, hurts one of your children, and then you give them \$1,000.

[5 : 51] That's grace. And our God is rich in mercy and grace. See? God does not help those who help themselves, but those who've turned against him.

He doesn't save those who try hard with good works. He saved those who trust his gift apart from good works. We cannot move toward God. He moves toward us.

We can't prepare ourselves. It's all of grace. That is the madness of God's grace, and it is God's glory to save the unworthy, to love the unlovely.

Secondly, what is the meaning of God's grace? And there are two things the New Testament says, the whole Bible says, grace means. If it's not a force or a fuel, what is grace?

And the first answer the Bible gives is that grace is in God. The basic meaning of grace is happiness, pleasure, joy, merriment.

[6 : 49] It's a spontaneous good pleasure in something. When we talk about grace, it is a quality in God. It is his spontaneous favor to us.

It's his undeserving, unearned love and kindness. Grace is always from a great person to a smaller person, and it's free. And it's free because that, the lesser person, does not deserve it.

In fact, deserves the opposite. God is not moved to love us because of our value, or because of our loveliness, or because of our trying hard.

He doesn't withhold his love from us because of our hostility or disobedience, or lack of care from him. So this is what grace means. It's God loving the unlovely.

It's not a thing that floats around separate from God. It is God's own personal, heartbreaking, loving kindness. It's not in me. It's in him. It only extends to me from him, but he never lets go of it.

[7 : 59] Which means it's outside of us fundamentally. It's alien to us. And unless God had acted or spoken, we wouldn't know anything about grace. So how do we receive it?

And I said there are two meanings to grace. One is it's in God. The second is God's grace comes to us through Jesus Christ. Through Jesus Christ.

The New Testament always connect the grace of God to the person of Jesus Christ. Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Do you notice when we read through these words that God made us alive, together with Christ, by grace you have been saved.

Raised us up with him, with Jesus. Seated us with him, verse six, in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus. So that in the coming ages, verse seven, he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

So grace is God's spontaneous, specific kindness, shown in Jesus Christ, in his coming and his death and his resurrection.

[9 : 10] And Jesus Christ is the ultimate gift of grace. And in his death and resurrection, God binds himself to us freely and binds us to him and forgives our sins and purges us from evil and makes us new by assuming responsibility for all that we have done that's wrong.

He is our substitute. We are unrighteous. He is righteous. He gives us his righteousness and we give him our unrighteousness. And when we receive Christ, we find all the riches of grace in him.

By faith we are united to him. By faith we die in him. By faith we are raised in him, with him. By faith we are seated with him.

It's amazing. It's very radical. It means our salvation and our righteousness are not inside us here. They're in Jesus Christ. They're not in our good doings.

They're in Jesus Christ, which means that we can be confident and joyful and that we're saved not just by grace, but by grace alone. Now before I finish, I'll just give a warning to the mums and dads and the boys and girls.

[10 : 24] About two minutes and then we'll see some of what you've done. Can we do that? Probably more like one minute, but I thought...

Let me point out two things. The first is that grace, the Christian view of grace makes Christianity different from every other religion. In every other religion, the followers are constantly trying to build a bridge to the other side, but you're never sure that you can really make it or not.

In Christianity, salvation comes to us entirely from God's side. It's complete and finished in Jesus Christ. You can't add anything to what Jesus has done. So those who say, and if you're saying, I'm trying to be a Christian, it means you haven't understood God's grace in Jesus Christ.

The happy thing is that assurance is not arrogant, but it's humble. If my saving depended on me, then anything about me, I could never really be sure.

I go up and down. But if it's in God, it means I live a life of no condemnation. That's the first thing.

And the second thing is that it's only this radical view of grace that can change our behavior.

[11 : 38] So I left out the last verse of the passage, verse 10. Here is how Paul ends this passage on grace. We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Good works don't save us, but they demonstrate the new birth, the grace, the grace of God that we stand in. And I think this is a very important word to us as Christians.

You see, if you try to fill your hearts, you know, if you're trying to live a good life and do good works and the way you do is try to fill your hearts with the dangers of evil and sin, it might work short term, but it won't soften your heart.

But if you look at God's grace in Christ Jesus and the radical cost and the depths that he's willing to go and that sin is against him and his heart, it can begin to melt your heart and long term change your behaviour.

By grace, we are saved through faith. Grace alone, faith alone, in Christ alone. Thank you.