

Sin Increased, Grace Abounded

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[0 : 0 0] of the psalm and it's on page 382 page 382 psalm 107 and we're going to sing from the beginning down to the verse marked eight first five stanzas and the tune is done firmly and praise god for he is good for still his mercies lasting be let god's redeemed say so whom he from the enemy's hand did free and gathered them out of the lands from north south east and west they strayed in deserts pathless way no city found to rest first five stanzas of psalm 107 as we sing to god's praise we're going to stand to sing oh is good for still his mercies lasting be let god's redeemed say so will he from the enemy's hand did free and gathered them out of the lands from north south east and west they strayed in deserts pathless way no city found to rest for first and hunger in them face their soul when strays and pressed they cry unto the lord indeed them free from their distress them also in a way to war the fright is he did guide but they might to our city go wherein they might abide all that then to the lord could give praise for his goodness then and for his works of wonder done unto the sons of men amen we're going to bow our heads in prayer now let's pray our father in heaven we rejoice this evening that we are able to speak about your rescue operation in which you have reached down into this world no in which you have come down into this world to become one of us and to give your life for sinners like ourselves and we rejoice today that in him and in his death and resurrection there is forgiveness and there is newness of life in which we have been raised with the lord jesus christ and the life we now live we live to god

show us how to live that life we pray putting behind us the past and all the darkness and the guilt and the shame of the past and looking to Jesus as our shepherd and as our savior to lead us in our thoughts and our intentions in our ambitions and in our determination our determination to deny ourselves and to take up our cross daily and to follow you cross daily and to follow you. Our Father, we cannot do that by ourselves. And we thank you that we are not alone, that we have been united with Jesus Christ, and that the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in the life of every believer to show and to reveal the things of Jesus to them, to take the things of Christ and to make them known to us. And we pray for eyes that are willing to see and ears that are willing to hear and hearts that are willing and ready to understand and accept your word and your guidance. Our Father in heaven, we come before you and we know that we are not worthy of your grace or your mercy. We are conscious of our own sinfulness and our own ignorance. We are conscious that no matter how often we try and no matter how often we come back with the same confession asking for forgiveness, we confess that in ourselves that we simply cannot live the Christian life. But we give thanks that in the Lord Jesus that we have someone who is an advocate with the Father, our comforter, the Lord who speaks on our behalf and who is the sacrifice, the atoning sacrifice for our sin. And so, Lord, we can confess our sins knowing that he is faithful and just and will pardon us from all iniquity. And that is why this service is so important to us this evening, because it is an occasion in which we can hear your word calling us back to yourself and encouraging us and in explaining afresh what we are and who we are and our relationship to Jesus Christ. And we pray that this service will be an encouragement to each one of us as we gather in your name this evening. We pray, Lord, for anyone who is amongst us who hasn't yet taken that first step in faith, putting their trust in Jesus as their saviour. And Lord God, we are so conscious that this is a matter between them and you. It is not something that we can persuade them about, although we can simply share the good news that Jesus came into the world to seek and to save those who were lost. And we pray that you will bring that message home to them afresh this evening. We ask that you will bless our service and hear us, for we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to read from the Old Testament and the book of Genesis

Genesis chapter 12. That's on page 10 in the ESV Bible. Genesis chapter 12. Now the Lord said to Abraham, Abraham, go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

And I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonours you, I will curse. And in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. So Abraham went as the Lord had told him and Lot went with them. Abraham was 75 years old when he departed from Haran. And Abraham took Sarai, his wife, and Lot, his brother's son, and all the possessions that they had gathered and the people that they had acquired in Haran. And they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, Abraham passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the Oak of Moreh.

At that time, the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abraham and said, to your offspring, I will give this land. So he built there an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him. From there, he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel in the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. And Abraham journeyed on, still going towards the Negev. And then again in chapter 15, across the page, page 12.

[9 : 37] After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision. Fear not, Abraham, I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great. But Abraham said, O Lord God, what will you give me? For I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus. And Abraham said, Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, This man shall not be your heir. Your very own son shall be your heir. And he brought him outside and said, Look towards heaven, and number the stars, if you're able to number them. Then he said to him, So shall your offspring be. And he, Abraham, believed the Lord.

And he, the Lord, counted it to him as righteousness. Amen. And we ask, as always, that God will bless his own word to us. We're going to praise him once again by singing in Psalm 32. That's on page 38, the Tuneus Orlington. It's the new version, the Sing Psalms version of Psalm 32. We're going to sing from the beginning to verse 7. Psalm 32, the Sing Psalms version, and it's page 38. How blessed the one who has received forgiveness for his sin, whose sins are covered from God's face, whose debt is cancelled in God's grace. There's no deceit in him. When I kept silent, all my bones with groaning were worn out.

beneath your hand I felt entrapped. Both day and night my strength was sapped, as in a summer drought. We're going to sing from the beginning to verse 7. We're going to stand to sing. God bless the one who has received forgiveness for his sin, whose sins are covered from God's face, whose debt is cancelled in God's face, whose debt is cancelled in God's face.

God bless the one who has received forgiveness for his sin, whose sins are covered from God's face.

God bless the one who has received forgiveness for his sin, whose sins are covered from God's face.

[12 : 42] God bless the one who has received forgiveness for his sin, whose sins are covered from God's face.

God bless the one who has gave forgiveness for his sin, whose sins are covered from God's face. So let the Godly pray to you, while you are to be found.

Surely when waves are sweeping past, on mighty waters rising past, you'll keep them safe and sound.

You are my hiding place, O Lord, my true security.

You keep me safe in troubled days.

[14 : 20] You circle me with joyful praise when you have set me free.

Thank you for remembering us last weekend at the Campaigner Camp. It was a truly special event, a very enjoyable weekend, and one in which we believe once again there was an amazing opportunity to share God's word with all the young people who were with us.

As well as, I'm not quite sure who enjoys these camps more, the young ones or the older ones. But for everyone, it was a very, very special experience.

And we believe that it's important that the congregation remembers not only the camp but our ongoing youth work. And I would like to remind you of the enormous effort that goes into organizing both the regular activities in the congregation as well as the special events like last week.

And a big thanks to everyone who is involved. And once again, a reminder of how important these events are. We're going to read together in the New Testament and Paul's letter to the Romans in chapter 4.

[16 : 00] Paul's letter to the Romans in chapter 4. It's on page 1134 in the ESV Bible. 1134. And we're going to read from the beginning.

And then we're going to go to chapter 5. Romans chapter 4. What shall we then say was gained by Abraham our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about.

But not before God. For what does the scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due.

And to the one who does not work, but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. Just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works.

Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is a man against whom the Lord will not count his sin. Is this the blessing then only for the circumcised or also for the uncircumcised?

[17 : 10] We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.

He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised so that righteousness would be counted to them as well.

And to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised, but also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Now, if you'll go to chapter 5 and verse 18. And I hope I'll be able to tie all this in later on. Romans chapter 5 verse 18.

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

[18 : 16] Now, the law came in to increase the trespass. But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more. So that as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means. How can we who died to sin still live in it?

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Amen. And we pray once again that God will bless his own word to us. We're going to join together once again in prayer. Father, we thank you that it's our privilege to pray for ourselves and to pray for others, others who need you and people who we're conscious of, whose lives and whose work and whose existence depends upon our prayer.

Prayer is such a mystery to us because we do not understand why you should expect us to pray. And yet it is such a special moment when we can gather together in oneness of mind and concentrate and focus on particularly on the work of the gospel and the needs of your people.

[19 : 46] We give thanks, O Lord, that we are able to come and to call upon the God of heaven and earth, the God who is eternal without beginning and without end, and who has promised in his covenant love and mercy to listen to the prayers of his people.

So we want to pray for those we know who are sick and suffering and bereaved and troubled and distressed and cast down at this time. We want to pray for ourselves.

We want to bring ourselves before you and ask that you will raise us up, that you will encourage and strengthen us. And we believe that you're hearing and answering our prayer. We give thanks, O Lord, that not only do we worship here in this congregation, but that for the work that goes on week by week amongst the various sections of the congregation.

We pray, Lord, for everything that's taking place this week. We pray for the youth training that's taking place on Friday. We pray for the mission support group and for Alistair Wilson as he shares with them your own work in South Africa.

We pray, Lord, for the senior citizens group. We give thanks, Lord, for the success of that group and for an opportunity when people can come together to be together and to talk to one another and to hear something that will be of interest to them in the context of your church.

[21 : 08] We give thanks for all these privileges and for the work that goes on amongst our young people from week to week. We give thanks, O Lord, for the gifts that you have given to those who lead. And we pray, Lord, that you will inspire others to give of themselves to sharing the gospel and to sharing what Jesus has done in their lives.

We pray, Lord, for the meetings that take place week by week in the Caber Fae where people can find out in an informal atmosphere where by discussion and question and answering that the Bible can be made so clear to them.

We pray that your spirit will move mightily as he has done in the past and make use of these tremendous opportunities. We pray, Lord, worldwide.

We pray for the war in South Sudan. We ask, Lord, for those who are involved in the current peace process. We give thanks, Lord, that there appears to be a measure of willingness to engage in a ceasefire.

But, Lord, we know how fragile that can be and we know how many lives have been lost. And we feel so confused that it appears to give the veneer of Christianity.

[22 : 25] We ask, Lord, that you will turn that situation around, Lord, and bring hatred and bring the animosity that there is in that land to rest.

And we pray that peace may reign. We think also of the Nigerian girls who have been kidnapped. Lord, the world is appalled rightly at what's happened there. And we pray that you will assist those who have gone to search and to rescue them.

And we pray that their rescue may be successful. We ask, Lord, that you will bring to nothing the attempts of violent people to cause mayhem in the world.

And, Lord, we think of the appalling injustice that takes place in so much of this world. Father in heaven, we pray for the work in which our friend here who I preached this morning, John Burney, is involved.

We pray for Slavic Gospel Association. We thank you for the many years of association that has been between us and them. And we pray that you will give them ongoing success and fruit in their labors.

[23 : 35] We remember the baptism next week and the families who are bringing their children to present them to you. And we give thanks, O Lord, for the sign of the covenant that can be placed upon our children.

And we pray that as these children grow up, that not only they will be protected and guided, but that you will draw them to yourself. Lord God, all these things we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. We want to sing now in Psalm 119, four stanzas. It's on page 402 in the Sing Psalms book, Psalm 119 from verse 33 to 37.

The tune is Glencairn. We're going to sing verse 33 to 37. Teach me, O Lord, the perfect way of thy precepts divine, and to observe it to the end I shall my heart incline.

Psalm 119, the traditional version of the psalm on page 402, four stanzas from verse 33. Teach me, O Lord, the perfect way. We'll stand to sing. Teach me, O Lord, the perfect way.

[24 : 46] Of thy precepts divine, and to observe it to the end I shall my heart incline.

Give understanding unto me, so keep thy Lord shall I.

Hear ye, O Lord, the perfect way. Yea, ye, with my old heart I shall observe it carefully.

In my lost path make me too cold, for I delight therein.

My heart unto thy testories, and not to be in kind.

[26 : 05] And thou away my sight and eyes, from you in vanity.

And in thy good and holy way, be pleased to quake me.

Turn with me to Romans chapter 5 and verse 20, page 1135. Romans chapter 5 and verse 20.

Now the law came in to increase the trespass. But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more. So that as sin reigned and death, grace also might reign through righteousness, leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means. How can we who died to sin still live in it?

[27 : 17] Every so often on the news, you come across stories of campaigns for justice.

Yes, one of the most recent ones was the campaign that is currently taking place on behalf of the victims and their families of the Hillsborough disaster, which took place on the 15th of April 1989.

And in which 96 Liverpool fans lost their lives with hundreds of people being injured. And ever since, the families have claimed that there were injustices in the way that things were managed.

Cover up and things that went on that they believed should be exposed. And that justice should be done. And from one extent to another, you have story after story of people who are campaigning for justice.

Many of you will remember the man Simon Wiesenthal, who campaigned his whole life or years of his life in order to bring Nazi war criminals who were responsible for the Holocaust during the Second World War to justice.

[28 : 34] And with some success. There are all kinds of campaigns for justice. If ever there was a miscarriage of justice, it was when Jesus was crucified.

And you would imagine that those who followed Jesus, his friends and his disciples, they might be expected to establish a group, a campaign, justice for Jesus.

You might think that they would make use of whatever legal means or illegal means were possible at that time to lobby and to resist the Roman authorities in order to make people aware of the injustice, the miscarriage of justice, the gross, probably, definitely.

The greatest ever miscarriage of justice that ever took place ever anywhere in the world. You would think that they would be outraged at the Roman authorities.

Sometimes in a campaign for justice, there is the establishment of measures that will ensure that such a thing will never happen again.

[29 : 51] Something like Claire's law after the death of Claire Wood, who died at the hands of her partner. And as a result, a new law came into being in which you can now check up your partner's criminal record in order to, I hope, prevent people from suffering in a similar way.

Of course, it's never going to end suffering and violence. And yet, it's something that can be put into place. You would expect that perhaps the disciples might go to the Jews, the Jewish ruling leaders, and remind them of the awfulness of what they did.

And the Roman authorities are the awfulness of what they did in order to put into effect measures that would ensure that it would never happen again. The disciples did campaign.

But it wasn't against the injustice that Jesus suffered by the Romans. It was first of all to insist that this same Jesus who had died at the hands of the Romans was now risen.

And he was actually God. And God had given his life back to him so that when the disciples had gone to the tomb three days after he had been put to death, they found that the tomb was empty.

[31 : 21] And they met him subsequently. And they said, declared, announced with absolute confidence that he was risen. Not only so, but the message of the risen Jesus was soon to be coupled with the message that his death was the plan of God from all eternity, in which God would make his son a sacrifice, the sacrifice, in order to take away our sins.

So that what was on the one hand, a miscarriage of justice by the Jews and the Romans was actually God's mercy being demonstrated and put into effect.

So that your sin and my sin could be taken away. So what could have been justice for Jesus was actually Jesus is the way to God.

That was the message that the disciples were determined, come what may, even if it meant giving their lives for the gospel. It didn't matter to them.

Jesus was the way to God. And by that they meant that his death was the plan of God by which he laid down his life for our sins as our substitute and as our representative.

[32 : 46] So that because he died, we don't need to die. And by him taking our punishment upon himself for our sin, we can, by coming to faith in Jesus, can discover the new life that God offers every one of us.

Now, when they began to say this openly, it was quite outrageous. I don't think many of us truly appreciate how outrageous this message was.

That the center of their faith was a man who died the most shameful death that it was possible to die at that time.

Crucifixion was the lowest of the law. It was reserved for the lowest criminals. You never went and talked about it. And yet that was precisely what the disciples did do.

And on several occasions they were arrested. There was a huge backlash when they began to say this. The Jewish ruling leaders, they on several occasions arrested them. And eventually one of them, Stephen, was stoned to death.

[33 : 58] But instead of making things better, it made things worse for the Jewish ruling authorities who scattered the disciples and drove them to many parts of the known world at that time.

And one of the most fervent of the Jewish leaders was a man called Saul. Saul was a leader. He was a Pharisee. Nobody who walked the face of the earth had ever been so diligent in trying his best, living his whole life on the belief, on the conviction, that as long as he kept God's law, then he was right with God.

And part of that was making it his business to pursue this new movement, this new Jesus movement, so that wherever he could, he could weed out the disciples of Jesus in an attempt to quash it before things got any worse.

That was, of course, until the day when on his way from Jerusalem to Damascus to put Jesus' followers into prison, he himself became one of Jesus' followers.

You can read the story in Acts chapter 9 of how Saul of Tarsish met with Jesus. The light shone on him. He was driven off his horse and he was made to literally lick the dust as Jesus met with him and as he confronted him for the first time in his life.

[35 : 33] And from that moment onwards, his life was never the same again. From that moment onwards, instead of pursuing Jesus' followers, he was now one of Jesus' followers.

And from that moment in time, instead of trusting in his own faithfulness and diligence and keeping God's law for his own salvation, he now put all that behind him.

And for him, Jesus and his death on the cross was everything to him. Anyone, if you ever have any doubt, all you have to do is read the letters of the Apostle Paul to know what makes him tick and what's at the very center of his life.

Woe is me, he said, if I do not preach the gospel. For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. He said, I am crucified with Christ.

For me, my life is so connected to Jesus Christ and his death on the cross. It wasn't a mistake. It wasn't some kind of tragic accident, something that went wrong.

[36 : 42] It was the deliberate plan and purpose of God by which I am now saved and justified and forgiven and clean and right with God. So therefore, I am right.

I am crucified with Christ. He said, on another occasion, God forbid that I should glory in anything else except the cross of Jesus Christ.

Christ. On the face of it, that was such an absurd thing to say. It's not so absurd for us because a lot of us here tonight have grown up in the Christian faith.

We've grown up to know our Bibles or at least to know something of the Christian faith. And it's very difficult for us to appreciate just exactly what it meant to be crucified at that time.

Now, most of the time, Saul of Tarsus, or rather Paul the Apostle, as he was now called, he shared the message of Jesus with those who weren't Jews.

[37 : 47] His mission was to go beyond the frontiers of Judaism and go to the Gentiles, to the Romans, people who lived in Corinth and in Rome and in Philippi and in all of these places in Asia Minor.

But there were occasions when he did defend the Christian faith amongst his own people. And in order to do that, he had to prove to them that their conviction, that to be right with God meant keeping God's law as best you could, was misguided.

It was wrong. And the reason he knew it was wrong was because he had discovered himself that it was wrong. Despite his best efforts and his best attempts, he was made to discover that actually he was as guilty as anyone else.

And the more he tried to keep God's law, the more condemned he was because the more he failed to keep God's law. And his insistence that somehow or other, in order to be right with God, that you kept God's law, was simply a smoke screen by which he deluded himself into thinking that he was better than he actually was.

When he came to know Jesus Christ, he describes himself as the worst of all sinners. He was made to see himself as he really is. That's what the gospel does to you. It makes you see yourself as you really are, not as you would like to be or as you would wish to be, or even as others might think you are.

[39 : 21] It forces you to see yourself as God sees you. And that's what you really are in the eyes of God. That's the most important mirror you can ever look into. And that was the mirror he looked into when he met with Jesus on the road to Damascus.

And so the whole point of the letter to the Romans is to prove to them that they were wrong in believing that somehow they were capable of keeping God's law.

And somehow God was favored towards them, or God accepted them on the basis of their best efforts, and they're keeping God's law. And this is the argument that is here in front of us this evening.

One of the things the Jews were saying was that Abraham was justified before God. He was right with God because he was circumcised. And from then on, Abraham, by diligently obeying everything that God told him to do, that's what qualified him to be a member of God's kingdom and to be loved by God.

No, says Paul, that's actually not correct. Go back to the story. Read it again. Genesis chapter 12.

[40 : 37] Genesis chapter 15. And he says, what shall we say then? Our forefather according to the flesh, Abraham. Was he justified by his own works? If so, he's got something to boast about.

It must have been his own doing. But you can't. Because you can't boast about anything for what does the scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.

Remember what we read in Genesis chapter 15? Of how on that night in Genesis 15, God took him out into the dark, cloudless sky. And he said, look up into the sky.

And there must have been a whole host, an innumerable, vast array of stars. The kind of picture that we very often see in a clear winter's night in which there's so many of them.

It just looks like a kind of white milk, doesn't it? Just a white mist. It would be utterly impossible to count these stars. And God said, if you can count these stars, then you can count the number of children I'm going to give to you.

[41 : 42] I'm going to bless you and I'm going to make your offspring as many as the stars in the sky. And in your seed, all nations will be blessed. And I will give you this land and your people.

I will be their God and they will be my people. And then we read the key verse. The key verse is this. Abraham believed God.

And at that moment, God accepted the faith of Abraham and counted it as righteousness to him. It was by faith.

And of course, the whole debate as to what that means, of course, I'm certainly not going to go into that. But by faith, through faith, Abraham was justified before God. It was not his circumcision because it was after that vision that God commanded him to make sure that he was circumcised and his children were circumcised afterwards.

He was not saved through circumcision. Circumcision was a sign that he belonged to God's covenant people. And the Jews were now saying to the Apostle Paul that Abraham was saved by his best efforts, by diligently keeping and obeying what God had told him to do.

[42 : 55] No, says Paul, you've got it wrong. You've got it so dangerously wrong. Your eternal security is at stake. You're not saved if you believe in yourself. Nobody has ever believed.

Nobody has ever been saved by believing in themselves. In that case, on what basis did God bring Abraham into his family?

How do we know that Abraham was saved? How can God? After all, Abraham wasn't perfect. If you read through the life of Abraham, you'll find many cracks and blemishes and defects and sinfulness in the life of Abraham.

So how do we know that he was saved? On what basis did God forgive him? On the basis of God's grace.

God's grace. That is the only way in which God has ever saved or rescued anyone. His grace.

[44 : 01] Do you know what that means? I'm not asking, do you understand it? I don't understand God's grace. Do you know what it means? You can only really know what it means in practice when you come to discover it for yourself and experience it for yourself.

It's when a person has made a total mess of their life. And when a person, after having lived as a total waster, like the prodigal son, I guess is one of the most vivid examples of the grace of God.

You remember the prodigal son? As to how the youngest son went to his father and said, give me my possessions. Give me my inheritance. I want it now. I want to make the most of my life.

I want to go ahead and to live my life the way I want it. So off he went, just like you and I have done. Off he went into the unknown. And he squandered his life with what the Bible calls riotous living.

Who knows what that means? Perhaps we do. Until it left him with nothing. Feeding the pigs. There wasn't a penny to his name. He sat in his rags.

[45 : 15] And it was there that he remembered his father and how secure and how warm and how well off he had been. All those years ago in his father's house.

But he couldn't possibly think of going back to his father. Unless, by some chance, his father might just accept him back as a slave, as a servant.

That's the only way in which he could possibly. He might just persuade his father to please, in order to stop me from starving, to let me just be one of your servants.

He didn't even deserve that. But that was the only chance that he had of survival. And off he went. He rose up and went all the way back to his father. But here's grace. Here's where grace comes in.

Because then the story goes that while he was a long way off, his father saw him coming. And his father, it's almost like he doesn't even give it a second thought.

[46 : 14] There's no mention of the father sitting down and working out, trying to get his head around. What is this guy doing here? What right does he have to dare to come back into this house?

And I'm going to tell him, I'm going to remind him of what he's done. And I'm going to tell him to go away again and to live his own life. That's what he wanted in the first place. No, it was the opposite of that. The father saw him coming.

And he ran. And he threw his arms around him. And he said, quick, bring the best robe.

And kill the fatted calf. Because this, my son, was lost and is found. He was dead. And he is alive again. That is grace.

There's no explanation to it. There was no logical reason why the father should accept his son back as a son. The son did not deserve it.

[47 : 14] Neither do you and I. Neither did Abraham. There's only one way in which Abraham was saved. And that is by the grace of God. Well, how does it work? I don't know.

All I know is this. That if you are a Christian tonight, it is by grace you are saved. You have done nothing to warrant or to deserve God's mercy or his kindness towards you.

It is not what you have done for God. It is what God has done for you. And that is what Paul was at pains to try his best to persuade the Jews about.

They were, they were, their minds were so determined not to move from their belief that they could somehow or other work their way into God's kingdom.

Paul is saying stop now while you have the opportunity. Because the more you're in danger of dying, and even if you're dying, trying to get into God's kingdom, you'll lose it.

[48 : 16] Because you haven't been saved. No amount of Abraham's obedience, whatever that amounted to, was going to change the condition in which he was.

Now, says Paul, in order to understand what I'm saying, we have to go all the way back to the beginning of the world. In verse 18 in chapter 5, he says this, Well, the real problem is what took place at the very beginning when Adam and Eve in the garden, when they chose the opposite way from the way that God commanded them.

And instead of listening to God, they did the opposite. The fruit that God commanded them not to eat, that's the very thing that they did. And the moment they did it, sin invaded the world with all its twisted shame and darkness and confusion and carnage that affected every single man, woman and child.

And that has brought all the misery into the world that we see every day. Not only on our TVs and in our newspapers, but in our own homes and in our own relationships and in our own hearts.

And it's a misery that is rooted in being separate from God. That's the problem with you and I tonight. We are separated from God.

[49 : 49] And the only way in which that separation can be reversed is by another Adam standing in the same place as Adam stood at the very beginning of time, except this time obeying God.

And except this time paying the price. For our sin and taking the guilt of our sin upon himself so that he could put into reverse everything that had taken place at the very beginning.

During those first awful moments when Adam and Eve made that fateful decision during the camp, we were talking about the good decisions and bad decisions in the Bible.

It was really quite an interesting exercise to go through the Bible and to locate all the different good decisions, the bad decisions.

And we discovered that of all the good and bad decisions, that there was one which was the very worst and one which was the very best. And the very worst decision that anyone has ever, ever made in the world was Adam and Eve when they chose to disregard God's command to them.

[51 : 12] Because it was a decision that not only affected their own relationship to God, but that brought sin into the world and affected everyone that was to come.

But the very best decision that anyone has ever made in all the world and that ever will be, was the decision that Jesus made when he said, I lay down my life.

And that's the key to the gospel. That's what the gospel is all about. It's not about whether you and I try our best to do God's will, to try and earn our way into his kingdom.

Now, verse 20 in chapter 5, it touches on a really important issue because the Jews, again, the Jewish ruling leaders, they were saying, yes, but what about God's law?

In that case, if what you're saying is right, why in the world did God give the law, and when we talk about the law in the Bible, we're not talking about some kind of civil law the way we have it, he's talking about the law that was given to Moses, the Ten Commandments.

[52 : 26] God's law is summed up in the Ten Commandments. And the question was, well, why did God give his law to Moses if it wasn't as a means to be right with God?

Surely that's the very reason God showed his people when he took them out of Egypt and brought them to Mount Sinai and met with Moses on the top of the mountain and engraved in the two tablets of stone the Ten Commandments.

Surely that was to tell God's people how to live so that by keeping the Ten Commandments, they would be in favor with him and they would be right with God. And Paul says, well, that's what I used to believe.

That's what I grew up believing, and I spent decades of my life believing. But if I was to be really honest with you, I was deceiving myself believing that I could get right with God by keeping God's law because God is perfect.

And if anyone is going to keep God's law, it has to be perfectly, without any blemishes. And even if it was possible for you to keep God's law from now on, then answer me this.

[53 : 41] What about the stuff you've already done that's wrong and bad and evil and dark and shameful? And you know that there's a lot of stuff there, isn't there? Who's going to pay for that?

Who's going to atone for those sins? Even if it was possible. The fact is, it's not possible. What's worse is, look at verse 20 again.

The law came in to increase the trespass. What does that mean? The law came in to increase the trespass. Strange, isn't it?

You would imagine it would be the opposite. You would imagine that if God was going to give his people his directives, then it would be so that they could keep those directives, but it had the opposite effect.

Made things worse. So the more they tried to keep God's law, actually, the further into sin they sank. Here's where an illustration, I guess, has to come in.

[54 : 45] And here's where I run the risk of offending some people in this congregation. I hope not, because maybe you'll take pity on me more than anything else. I haven't done the peats very often, but the two or three times that I've ever done the peats has been the most miserable experience that I have ever had in my life.

Well, not quite the most miserable experience, but it ranks amongst the most miserable experience. I guess it's all to do with being brought up in Glasgow. You never have to do peats in Glasgow. So although you're a Glasgow Highlander, you hear about the peats, but you never really get to do them.

And that was until we came up and we lived in the late 80s in the country and we had to do peats. So I'm not trying to say that, I'm not trying to undermine those of you who love to do the peats, but see, when somebody comes to me and says, I love doing the peats, well, I just say, well, that's up to you.

I'm glad we're all different. But the one or two experiences that I did have, they're quite an eye-opener, because what usually happened was that a tractor would come to take the peats home.

I'm sorry if you're a visitor and you perhaps don't understand what I'm talking about, but there's no time to go into it. You just ask someone, somebody who's local. But a tractor would always come and invariably there would be the same pantomime.

[56 : 14] The tractor would get stuck. And invariably, the guy who was driving the tractor, there was no end of advice being thrown at him.

There was about half a dozen people, of course it was always a communal exercise, and the people around him would be shouting to him, do this or do that, put it into first. No, put it into second.

No, put it into third. No, put it into reverse. And there was a host of different pieces of advice. And you know what happened? It didn't matter what he said, the tractor was going down and down and down.

It didn't matter whatever he tried, the tractor was going down and down and down and down. That's because there's only one way in which the tractor could escape the pole, and that was to be rescued.

Do you know what the law is? The law is the engine of the tractor. Completely, not only useless, made matters worse. Now you say, but that's the engine.

[57 : 23] If you take an engine out of a tractor, you don't have a tractor anymore. An engine is an essential part of the tractor. Of course it is. In normal circumstances, it's the engine that makes the tractor go along the road.

It's what gives it its power. But not when it's stuck in a peat bank. It's the same with the law. God's law in theory, of course it comes from himself.

It is holy, righteous, and good, and ought in other circumstances to have led and guided the people of God in their lives.

But when it comes to a people who are rebellious and sinful and who actually don't want to keep God's law, it makes matters worse and it drags them further and further and further. It reveals their own sinfulness to them and actually it provokes sin within them.

Amen. Our old professor used to talk about the train that he would be on and he would look up at the chain and the old trains, I don't know if they've got them anymore, I haven't looked, but in trains long ago there was a chain and it was painted in red and there was a notice on it for emergency use only.

[58 : 45] Do not pull the chain. If you pull it, there's a 50 pound fine. You know, as soon as you saw that, you wanted to pull it. That's what the law does.

The law that is supposed to keep us on the straight and narrow, actually in a heart of sin, it actually makes us worse. It's not God's fault.

You can't blame God. God's law is perfect. It's our fault. So the law came in to increase the trespass.

That's where sin increases, increased grace abounded all the more. You see, at that point, God could have determined to get rid of the world altogether. He could have given the world the punishment that the world deserved for straying and for disobeying him and for leaving his commands and for being estranged from him.

But he didn't. God, the more God saw his people, his people sinking further into sin. Anyone who knows the Old Testament, you would imagine that after Sinai, when God gave the law to his people, you would imagine, you would hope, you would expect that God's people would come running to him and asking him day by day to forgive them and to show them how to live.

[60 : 04] And you would expect that they would treat God's law as a massive privilege. Here are the words of God. This is what we want to do. We want to live like this. And instead, if you go through the Old Testament, you find that they get worse and worse and worse.

And in the end, they become unrecognizable as the people of God. Where they're killing each other by the thousand. Where they're doing stuff which is so grotesque, you can hardly even mention it.

These are supposed to be God's people. And they're acting like animals. You would expect God to react and say, no more.

Wipe them off the face of the earth. But you know what? It was the opposite. God became all the more determined to complete his plan of salvation.

Because where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. That's God's way of doing things.

[61 : 10] That's the nature of God. And that's why tonight, no one can say here, there's no hope for me. Yes, there is hope for you.

But it's only found in one place. You can't say, God has written me off. He's cast me away. I cannot possibly expect anything but judgment and condemnation.

No. Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. And that means that tonight, whatever you've done, however you've lived your life, whatever mess you're in, whatever shame there is in the past, whatever you can't bring yourself to confess to God, whatever state you're in, Christ died for the ungodly.

That's you. And that's me. And that's the gospel. And that's the gospel that the apostle Paul discovered on the road to Damascus.

And that changed his whole way of thinking. Changed his mind, his heart, his will, his objectives, took away the heart of stone in which he lived day to day trying to do his best to win Tesco points for God.

[62 : 38] That's what we do, isn't it? Something within us that keeps on believing that we can somehow or other win points. It's not going to happen. It's not going to happen.

It's not going to happen. Stop now before you go any further and come to God and ask him to have mercy on you, to change your life, to bring you to know Jesus Christ for yourself, to open your heart.

ask him to open your heart ask him to open your understanding ask him to create within you a new heart because only he can do it it's not something you can do that's the great thing about the gospel that's why i rejoice in the gospel because my salvation is not about myself it's about what god has done for me i couldn't save myself neither can you but god can and he's not willing that any should perish that's not to say that nobody will perish they will but god is not willing that any should perish but that you should come to everlasting life this is a matter between you and god perhaps tonight no tonight i would hope i would ask you to make your peace with the lord by coming to that place where our sins are forgiven in jesus let's bow our heads in prayer the father in heaven we pray tonight that you will work within us and that you will show us your way show us the truth of jesus christ show us what you have done in his death and in his resurrection and open our eyes that we may see how wonderful the life is that you have offered to each one of us and give us hearts that will accept that life by faith in jesus amen psalm 65 to close with we're going to sing but it's on page 82 psalm 65 from the beginning to verse 5 the first four stanzas the tune is huddersfield and it's the sing psalms version it's on page 82 and zion praise awaits you lord to you our vows will pay to you all people will come near to hear you hear us when we pray when we were overwhelmed by sins and guilt upon us lay you pardoned all our trespasses and washed our guilt away psalm 65 from the beginning to the verse mark 5 the first four stanzas in zion praise awaits you lord we'll stand to sing in zion praise in zion praise in zion praise to you our hearts will pay to you all people will come near

To hear us when we pray When we were overwhelmed by sins And guilt upon us may You pardoned all our trespasses And washed our guilt away How blessed are those you choose and bring Within your force of praise With ill, with blessings in your hearts

In your most holy face With awesome deeds of righteousness You answer us, O God Our saviour hope of fireless peace And all the earth abroad Now may the grace of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ The love of God the Father And the communion and fellowship of the Holy Spirit Rest on and abide with each one of us Both now and always Amen Amen

[68 : 18] Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen