

What's so confusing about Grace?

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Preacher: Mike Fitton

[0 : 0 0] It's been great to have Otterly sat at the front going, yeah, yeah, opa, opa. Always blesses us, doesn't it, when our kids want to be in church.

Although she said today, are we going to a party? Yes, we are going to a party. But she thinks there's presents every time she goes to a party, but there are presents every time you come to a party with God.

Okay, I'm just going to read this passage here. Well, actually, we're going to read this passage here. It's a while since I've done this, but anything in capital letters, you read out loud, okay?

This helps you to take it in. So here we go. For it is by grace, God's remarkable compassion and favor, drawing you to Christ, that you've been saved.

Actually, delivered from judgment and given eternal life through faith. Next page. And this salvation is not of yourself, not through your own effort, but it is the undeserved and gracious gift of God, not as a result of your works, nor your attempts to keep the law, so that no one will be able to boast or take credit in any way for his or her salvation.

[1 : 3 3] Isn't it great when we eventually get to heaven, if we put our trust in God, that we cannot go into heaven and say, look at me, aren't I great? I'm in heaven because of something I've done. Nothing will be like that at all.

The focus will be on Jesus and all he's done. Otherwise, we wouldn't be in heaven. By the way, anybody who doesn't know me, we're involved in outreach to motorcyclists, so all my PowerPoints tend to have a motorcycle connection with it.

It's a great passage, this. I read it from the Amplified Bible, which just gives a little bit more sort of oomph to some of the explanations of it. We're here today because of God's remarkable compassion to us.

And today, I'm going to be speaking to you about grace. There's so many words in the Bible like grace, mercy, redemption, salvation, all these and his love, of course, that we could spend a lifetime investigating and preaching about.

But today, I really feel that we should focus on grace. Because everything in that passage focuses on the grace of God.

[2 : 4 2] And because of that grace, as it said in that passage, it's completely and utterly undeserved that we can know him and that we can be assured that not only do we have this fellowship with believers, but also that that day we breathe our last on this earth, we will go to be with him in glory.

It's an absolute and utter gift. And I want to explore this just a little bit. So this slide talks about the book, So What's So Amazing About Grace? by Philip Yancey.

Now, please let me say, if you've never read that book, go straight home, get onto Amazon, get a second-hand copy, and just get it because I promise you when you read it, you'll want to read it again, and then you'll want to give it to somebody else who needs to know.

What's So Amazing About Grace? I've probably said this before, but I'll just add it again, that in the early part of the book, Philip Yancey speaks to a woman who has really been mistreated on the streets by men.

I think she was a sex worker, if I remember correctly. But Philip Yancey found her in such a mess in her life, he said to her, I beg your pardon, why don't you go down to the local church and get the support and care that they can give you?

[4 : 07] To which she replied, why would I go to church? My life is bad enough already. Because her perception of God was that God would be down on her, and therefore the church would be down on her as well.

And we must never, ever give anybody the impression that that is a godly biblical basis for how a church should act, or how God feels about the broken in this world.

As we'll see later on, it was because God loved us. He sent his son. Somebody said of Philip Yancey's book, that he explores grace at street level.

I think we should do everything at street level. The bare bones of dealing with real people who need to know that God loves them. And if grace is God's love for the undeserving, and it is, there is no alternative, he asks them what does it look like in action.

And that's what I'm going to try, and not completely cover, but touch on today. As you know, I always like to kind of have a title or a theme for what I'm going to speak about.

[5 : 22] It keeps me in focus, but hopefully you as well. And I've said, his book is What's So Amazing About Grace, but I want to ask what's so confusing about grace. That people reject the grace of God, ignore the grace of God, and disregard the grace of God.

Sometimes that's because Christians have portrayed the grace of God in the wrong way. And let's look at some ways in which we can hopefully rectify that. Next slide, please.

See, those of us who have experienced the grace of God in our lives, and that's not because of anything good in us, it's simply that we've put our trust in God. I know there are people in this church that have, in some cases, come to put their trust in God quite recently, and others way back.

And each one of us can proclaim that the grace of God is so real, so true. And we wonder now how we possibly missed it in the days gone by.

It's a treasure that is beyond all comprehension. God's grace is simply, yet profoundly, the undeserved favor of God.

[6 : 34] Now, let's just explain that a little bit. We haven't done anything ever that God should love us. Nothing whatsoever would count towards us being loved by God.

We don't deserve anything from God, yet grace means, grace means there's nothing we can do to make God love us more, and there's nothing we can do to make God love us less.

Just take that thought into your heart. Because so often, don't we, where our parents are concerned, or our wives and husbands, or whatever it is, we kind of think, if I do this, I'm going to be loved more.

When I was a kid, I did more things wrong where my parents were concerned. So occasionally, I tried to do something good for them. Something that would kind of make good the mistakes I'd made.

But where God's concerned, he cannot love you more than he does. And it may be today that you're either listening online, or you're thinking of this in the church now, and you're wondering what it is that God is prompted to do that.

[7 : 47] It's because God is love. God is grace. There is no alternative in the world where you can find anything like, even vaguely like, the grace of God.

Just to refer to one or two other religious opinions on certain things, and this isn't to put down what they believe. I want them to know the love of God as well.

But the Buddhist eightfold path, the Hindu doctrine of karma, the Jewish covenant and the Muslim code of law, offer a way to earn approval. But only Christianity, by grace, dares to make God's love unconditional.

And we want everyone to know that God loves them unconditionally. You know, in that book, I mentioned about the woman who was the sex worker on the street. I would imagine that she didn't come into church because she never thought God could possibly love her.

And yet, she needed to know that more than anyone else. And we can only receive grace as a gift from God. It's not something we can earn.

[9 : 02] You cannot do anything to earn the grace and the love of God. Absolutely nothing. And Romans 6.23 makes it clear that it's like we earn or our wages of our sin is death, death, which isn't great.

In other words, we get what we deserve. But, thankfully, there's a but in this verse. The gift of God by grace is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Many times when I've been in the motorcycle world, I've maybe taken a pound out of my pocket nowadays.

I think I should take a tenner out because that's going to be worth so much more. But I've taken a pound out and I've said to somebody, I want to give you a pound. And it's so interesting that just there in the midst of all that's going on, I offer them a pound and they think, ah, something wrong there.

Something tricky. You're not going to give me that. You're going to grab it back or whatever. I actually once borrowed a tenner off a friend. I forgot to give him it back.

But anyway, don't worry about that. But I took a tenner off a friend because this guy didn't respond to the pound. So I asked my friend for a tenner and I put that. And I said, look, I want to give you a tenner. And there's no underhand method about this.

[10 : 17] It's a gift and I want to give it to you. And you can do with it as you will. And he kind of went like this and his mates were saying, go on, go on. But he didn't.

And I said, you are thinking in terms of God's grace and love in the same way. It looks great. But there must be a catch. And there isn't.

And people miss the grace and love of God so much because they think there's a catch. Next slide, please. But there isn't a catch. God's gift to you and I, but we have to receive it by grace and by faith, is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And grace is a gift that costs everything for the giver, God, Jesus, but nothing for the recipient, us. Isn't that incredible? It's the most incredible treasure we will ever have.

Nothing could ever compare with it. Winning the lottery or having a big house or whatever it is, it's nothing compared to the quality and blessing of the gifts of God.

[11 : 25] And it costs God everything to give his son and his son Jesus to die on the cross and bear our sins. And it costs nothing for us except for us to say to God, forgive me.

I love this photograph of this guy who does off-road riding. He's covered in mud. But maybe like you, I have had times in my life before I was just, I can't put it any other way, washed clean because God forgive me.

I felt like that. I felt filthy because of the sin of my life. Now, John 3.16 is a verse that many of us know, and I've also added some capitals.

So dig in here. For God so loved the world. By the way, that's you. So do this again, but where the world is, put your name.

For God so loved Mike. No, you're not Mike. You put your name. That he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

[12 : 44] Isn't that amazing that that verse also says whoever believes in him? Do you realize that includes terrorists, serial killers, child sex offenders, people who are greedy, people who have thieved, people who have taken other people's wives.

There are just so many mess of the world that we live in. Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. Eternal life.

And not only, you know, the gospel message isn't about what happens after we die and we go to heaven. But wow, that's good enough. But it's also here on this earth. Not one of us who has begun a relationship with Jesus on this earth, the risen Savior, would ever say we're giving up on this.

God is love and his love is unconditional, constant and complete. His grace and power in our lives enables us to live a life beyond anything we could ever do in our own strength.

I'm sure many of us who have put our trust in God can say that years ago we just had a problem with a particular sin and we couldn't break that.

[14 : 04] like chains that held us. We just want to be released from that. I support men and women who are going through addiction and they want to get rid of it and we say just ask God to come into your life to forgive you of your sin and as he fills us with his love that sin desire seems to disappear because we want to spend that presence, that place, that intimacy with God.

But when we do sin the Bible says that God will forgive us because he's faithful and it's his grace and his love toward us. God will change our capability to work in ways we could not imagine and enable us to withstand suffering in the face of persecution.

Now we don't really get persecuted in this country compared to others. I've had the privilege of meeting and John and others have as well. We think how could we possibly bear that persecution?

But God enables us by his grace to live lives that will make Jesus known. Even to those who abuse us.

Even to those who persecute us. Ephesians 2 says for you and I listen to this I love this phrase you and I are God's handiwork.

[15 : 28] Actually another translation says you and I are God's masterpiece. You know when the great masters paint people the colours and so on and the way they construct the picture it's so lifelike isn't it?

But it's almost they always seem to make people look so much better than they really were. But God has or is working upon us and we're his handiwork we are his masterpiece created the Bible says in Christ Jesus to do good works.

Not to make us shine in the world but for God to get the glory. And it's works that God prepared in advance for us to do and that's all about grace as well.

Only God's grace can enable us to love the unlovable. Have you ever known that in your life? Faced with somebody you think I just don't know how to cope with this.

God give me the ability by grace to love that unlovable person. But he does. To care for the unworthy isn't it so easy for us to say this person does not this just person does not deserve anything no mercy nothing.

[16 : 46] God says care for the unworthy because we are unworthy as well. Show compassion to your enemies. Now if you were faced with a war torn zone like Ukraine at the minute the human mind says how could I possibly forgive people who are doing such horrendous things but God can give us the ability to forgive the unforgivable and to show compassion to those who are apparently our enemies.

And don't worry about how you'll go on with this because even grace has got that covered. In 2 Corinthians 12:9 God says Jesus says my grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in your weakness.

That's grace. His grace is sufficient for you. And then Ephesians 2:4 to 5 says but God who is so rich in mercy and the love that he has for us is so great that even though we were dead because of our sins he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead and it's only by God's grace that you and I have been saved.

You know epitaphs is it that you put on the gravestone and all that kind of thing. At Christmas I walked round our local graveyard up Dambydale with our neighbour who Annie she's wonderful 95 years old we take her up every year to put wreaths on her parents and her brother's graves and while we're there we go see who else has been buried since last year.

And it's great because we tend to know well certainly Annie knows much more of the names but I've been there 37 years and there's so many of the people so many of the people that have lived. And sometimes people put quite strange things on gravestones.

[18 : 51] I'm not going to list any of those now but it occurs to me that if we have put our trust in God that the only thing that should be on a gravestone for a Christian is by grace and by grace alone.

Where would we be today without God's grace? grace has justified us through God's undeserved love and mercy.

But where would we be today without God's grace? By grace God sees those who put their trust in him as seated with Jesus in the heavenly realms because we're united with Christ.

What an incredible place of honour that grace permits those who are so totally undeserving. And grace is a quality in the mind of God, in the heart of God and in the nature of God.

And God will never change. He's the yesterday, sorry he's the same yesterday, today and forever. The grace of God is what is like the whole breath of God that comes in and goes out in the mind of God.

[20 : 04] It's for you by grace. His heart beats grace for you. And in the nature of God that will never change, he cannot change, he has to love you by grace.

And do all the things that he does that we miss by grace. And like I say, it cannot be found anywhere else in the world. Because the world does not work on the same basis of God's undeserved grace.

The nature of the world is quite the reverse of grace. grace. And even by grace, God has promised to provide our needs through grace.

Every last thing that we need, 2 Corinthians 9:8, and God will generously provide all we need. Then we will have everything we need and plenty left over to share with others.

Isn't that so true? And I love this verse that I go back to time and time again, particularly when I'm counselling people who are Christians who have just fallen on the road a bit and they're just not sure where to go and they're thinking they've done something terrible and God will never love them again.

[21 : 18] Oh, how wrong could they be? It's not that God will love them again, God still consistently loves them then. And they need to get back up and realise that God will forgive and has forgiven but his love will never change.

Hebrews 4:16 is the one I keep going back to. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

At Christmas every year, I don't know why it's on, every year there's that over the rainbow thing, what's it called again? Sorry? Wizard of Oz, thank you.

I've always loved that old, the old black and white one until it gets to the bit where they get to see the Wizard of Oz because he's such a disappointment. He's not real.

There he is with a big hooter thing or whatever it is, speaker to speak through to sound like a big mighty powerful man and yet he's an old bloke who probably has drunk too much coffee, grumpy with everybody and he's not a good guy.

[22 : 35] Isn't it sad that that is the perception so many people have of God? That they're going to go down this road and when they get there, they're just going to find a God who wants to knock them down as opposed to the God of grace who wants to lift them up.

John Piper, a great theologian, said that grace is the enabling gift of God not to sin and grace is power not just pardon.

Isn't that important? That when God forgives us, he enables us by his power not to sin again if we focus on him and walk in his way and walk not quenching the spirit, walking in harmony with God.

And of course the great hymn which we're not singing today but we've sort of sung a different strain of it, that amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

What was the name of the guy that wrote that? I've forgotten. John Newton, thank you, my mind went blank there. John Newton was a slave trader yet God enabled him to give up his slave trading by his grace and love and become a man who could say that saved a wretch like me.

[23 : 49] I once was lost, but now I'm found. I was blind but now I see and I'm no longer slave trading. I'm going to work to actually care for those who I was involved in with slavery and try and change the world.

And Titus 2.12 God's grace teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions and live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.

And if you think for one minute that means a boring life, you are 100% wrong. Because any one of us who ever lived our life in the mess of sin and shame and guilt and lacking self-control, not living a godly life in the slightest, quite the reverse, we never had any fun doing that, did we?

Not at all. It wasn't a happy place to be. It was a place where you didn't sleep because the mess you'd made in someone's life was still continuing in your mind.

But God's grace teaches us to say no to that. It's the phraseology of the Bible that some people get hung up on, of ungodliness. It sounds like some Victorian statement, but it means to live godly lives like God would have us.

[25 : 10] And what a place of blessing and honour that can be. The worldly passions, the way the world chooses, as we lived, I'm not judging everybody out there, I was just the same.

And I don't want to be that way anymore, and I don't want others to live like that because God loves them and he wants them to change and be forgiven. Next slide, please.

Billy Graham said this wonderful brief statement, God's mercy and grace give me hope for myself and for our world.

And in a very minor way today, I declare, you wonder what the problems of this or how the problems of this world will be sorted out? People put their trust in their life, put their trust in Jesus, that their sins may be forgiven and they may live life to the full, full of love.

You see on the news every day about these terrorists, the Houthi, and all these different terrorists are doing what they're doing. What would change them to not do what they do?

[26 : 19] Christ's love. Nothing else. So pray. On Wednesday, I have a great privilege of going to the houses of parliament. Oh yes, I've got to wear a suit and a tie.

That's going to go down well. Sandy's been worried for the last three or four weeks. Got to stop eating mic to get the suit on. It's not a happy place for me, a suit, but I'll get there.

But on Wednesday I'm going, because Open Doors, one of our mission partners, has invited me along because I've been to Sudan and Nigeria with Sandy in the past, to be able to share with 150, hopefully 150 MPs.

Because every year, I won't be speaking to them, I'll be doing it over coffee and so on, but the guys from Open Doors will be declaring the 50 worst countries in the world where it is to be a Christian because of persecution.

And it's so important that our, even our non-Christian MPs, because there will be some amongst them who know the Lord, they need to know this so when they're doing business with other countries, they're consciously aware of what life is for some people who put their trust in God.

[27 : 31] I just wanted to draw your attention to this, about churches that are grace filled. A lot of churches have the name Grace Church, don't they?

And similar sort of phrases to that, but we've said in the past many a time, whatever you call your church, make sure it's actually a reality of what goes on inside and in the hearts of those who come out and engage with the community.

It'd be appalling, wouldn't it, to say we're a church filled with grace, but we're not very gracious to the world at large. But a grace filled church will take sin seriously.

Now I've only got four here, believe me, there are so many more. Don't attend a church, we should not attend a church to feel good about ourselves or to learn some tips on how to live a better life.

That's not what Christianity is about, it's not what the Bible is about. The Bible is about the human problem in this broken world, it's not psychology or a lack of understanding, but it's sin.

[28 : 40] And sin is the problem and sin needs to be dealt with. I'm so grateful we have a pastor in John and Lisa that John will constantly preach the need for sin to be dealt with, not overlooked.

so many people in the new age world and all this kind of stuff will say the way to deal with sin is not to think about it.

No, it's not. Because the more you don't think about it, the more it kind of stacks up. When I was a young policeman, I used to always have an old hold all at the end of my bed in my digs where I lived.

I wasn't a Christian, my world was a mess. But I always lived with a bag at the end of the bed and in the bag was my passport because I knew if I was going to take off when things got bad, my passport would get me away from the UK and away from the problem and I would go off and I'd do crazy things and then I'd come back to work and find that the problem I left was worse than it was when I'd set off.

And it will be like that. The human problem in this world is sin and it needs to be dealt with. No grace-filled church will be unclear about the problem of sin because grace addresses that and forgives if people ask God to forgive them.

[30 : 11] Number two, a grace-filled church takes Jesus seriously. You know, I have had instances of going to churches where I've seen sort of after the service come out and thought there didn't seem to be much if any mention of Jesus.

It's almost like going to a conference for sales or something like that. It's not going to get people excited and it's certainly not going to change them. A grace-filled church will always talk, preach, teach and proclaim Jesus is the saviour of the world.

We've just spoken about Christmas and how Jesus came to save sinners. grace is inextricably the heartbeat of Jesus and his mission on earth to save sinners because God loved the world so much he sent him for that purpose and there's no other way, no other way, no other way, no other way by which man can be saved.

And I don't care what your argument is, there is no other way by which man can be saved. I'm on page four and I should be on page five, excuse me a minute.

So glad I put numbers on. Number three, a grace-filled church takes salvation seriously. Because if we don't take salvation seriously, there's going to be a lot of people very surprised on the day of judgment when they stand before God and that is a fact of scripture.

[31 : 44] And the worst thing that we could ever hear when you stand before the Lord is that when he says to you, I never knew you, depart from me.

But for those who he does know by grace, not because of any good that we've done, he will say, well done my good and faithful servant. A grace-filled church will always take salvation seriously and always preach that we're saved by God's undeserved grace, not by any good works or any goodness in us.

I remember speaking to a traffic warden many years ago. Actually, this traffic warden was a friend. She wasn't putting a ticket on my car. But I said to her, you know, how would you get to heaven?

By what means? And I remember Barbara, she was a lovely person, said, because I live a good life. And I had the joy in one sense, but the difficulty in the other of saying, but your good is not good enough.

And the only good that you need is the goodness of God, as we said earlier. You know, we were lost before we knew Christ.

[33 : 04] Some people don't get the impression they're lost because they don't think they're bad enough to be lost. But believe me, if you don't know Christ, you're lost. And without Christ, we live in darkness, but you may not be conscious of the darkness you live within.

But we've been brought out into his glorious light. When we're forgiven that day, when we first come to know Christ, it's incredible how suddenly the light of Christ in our lives seems to be so apparent and we're suddenly aware of the darkness we once walked in.

Would you agree with that? And a grace-filled church takes preaching seriously. It will always preach the word of God, not the opinion of the pastor.

And it will reveal the foundational truth that grace is the relentless message of the gospel. Without grace, the gospel would not be good news, would it?

It would be legalism. It would be boring. It would be stuffy. It would be rules and regulations. And if you don't adhere to those rules and regulations, you'll get bashed down or even kicked out.

[34 : 20] Legalism, without going into it too deeply, is DIY Christianity. Or an attempt at that, it's not even Christianity. It's a set of rules that you have to obey. But it sets you up, I believe, to fail.

Because you're never going to be able to live the perfect life that the rules require. But by grace, we have the righteousness of God through faith in Christ.

You know, I spoke about at Christmas, I love preaching at Christmas. There's so much you can share about the gospel. But the angels proclaimed the Christmas message to the shepherds on the hillsides, didn't they?

And they said, don't be afraid. We bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. And that's grace in all its splendor.

The heavenly hosts were there, glorifying God and all this great thing. But it did occur to me, a legalistic message from the angels would have sounded much different to that. Something like, if you're scared, so you should be.

[35 : 21] My news is less than ideal, the angel would say, and probably less than you hoped for. It's all down to you, so try hard to be perfect. You're good, though, won't be good enough.

I'd like to say God bless, but I think it would be unfair to raise your hoax. And usually on occasions like this, I would be accompanied by the heavenly host, praising God, but they're off sick, suffering from everlasting apathy of legalism.

You know, there are churches like that. Don't bother going to a church like that. But please remember this, the grace of God loves the people who are in legalistic churches, who are in that place of walking in cement by faith, not walking in the way of God, to pray for them.

Legalism puts the responsibility of right living on our shoulders and it's too heavy a burden. And the only righteousness we can muster if we do it that way is self-righteousness, not God's righteousness.

And self-righteousness won't get us into heaven. So to finish, grace puts the responsibility of salvation and righteousness literally on the shoulders of Jesus on Calvary.

[36 : 38] And he paid that price and he said, it is finished. Say it with more enthusiasm. It is finished. Preaching the word of God brings grace to confront our sin.

We either will harden our hearts today or fall on our knees in repentance to Almighty God and thank Him for His grace and then we'll see that change.

See, Almighty God is supremely holy but humanity is desperately sinful and wicked. Grace thereby connects the two of the supremacy of the holiness of God and the desperate sin.

It kind of connects the two by the all-sufficient powerful work of the Holy Spirit and of God's grace and the death and resurrection of Christ at Calvary.

And grace is hope with a capital hope. Not just a capital H. Hope. I want to offer hope to the world and there is nothing else I can offer to broken people other than Jesus because that's the greatest hope there is.

[37 : 51] So to finish, last slide please. Church should be a dispensary of grace. A dispensary like a pharmacy for the ill and the broken. We are to be dispensing grace to our communities bringing the broken to their saviour.

And note that carefully chosen phrase their saviour. They may not know it but Jesus died for them. Not just those who have so far believed.

Jesus came as saviour of the world and we need to put our trust in him. And don't be confused about the grace of God. It's truly awesome.

It's truly amazing as the other book made mention of. receive this totally undeserved gift of grace today.

It's offered to you for free. And as the old hymn says there is a green hill far away. And then it goes on to say in one verse there was no other good enough to pay the price of sin.

[39 : 00] He only could unlock the gate of heaven for me for you and let us in. grace says God loves us because of who he is.

Thankfully not because of who we are. Amen. Thank you. Let's pray shall we?