

Grace: The End of Earning

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[0:00] Verses 1-19. Acts chapter 9, verses 1-19.

You've seen the film, now hear the book. Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.

! He went to the high priest and asked him, for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

As he knew Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?

Who are you, Lord? Saul asked. I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, he replied. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.

[1:05] The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless. They heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing.

So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus, there was a disciple named Ananias.

The Lord called to him in a vision, Ananias. Yes, Lord, he answered. The Lord told him, Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.

In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight. Lord, Ananias answered, I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem.

And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name. But the Lord said to Ananias, Go, this man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.

[2:16] I will show him how much he must suffer for my name. Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Immediately something like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again. He got up and was baptized and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Amen. Amen. Our next hymn is Behold Our God. Behold Our God.

Behold Our God. Seated on his adornment. Behold Our King.

Come let us adore Him. Behold Our King.

[3:54] Who has a Lord? Who can question many of His words? Who can teach the one who knows all things?

Who can fathom all His wondrous deeds? Behold Our King. Behold Our King. Behold Our King.

Come let us adore Him. Come let us adore Him. Come let us adore Him. Behold Our King. Come let us adore Him. Come let us adore Him. Come let us adore Him.

Who has stepped their nails upon his hands Hearing all the guilt of sinful man God eternal, humble to the grave Jesus, Saviour, risen now to reign Behold our God, seated on his throne Come let us adore him Behold our King, nothing can compare Come let us adore him You will reign at your birth You will reign at your birth

You will reign at your birth You will reign at your birth Behold our God, seated on his throne Come let us adore him Behold our King Nothing can compare Come let us adore him Thank you all Thank you for your prayers Richard And so on that note Let's think about the Lord's Word And as we think

about that Let me begin with this mystery Who here loves a good mystery?

[6:34] In a movie? Yeah there we go In a game show A book, a board game Many of us enjoy Trying to solve a good mystery Though Beyond Beyond the game show Or the book There is lots and lots of real And present day And historical Events And situations Which are Truly mysterious And are a mystery To understand Whilst I was Once again Reading with interest

Through the account Of Paul Coming To believe in Jesus I was filled with Fascination Excitement Happiness But I was also Intrigued By the whole Mysterious side Of the whole event The grace Side of it For it is indeed A bit of a mystery In fact Paul Himself Later calls it A mystery A few times Throughout his letters His little books Written In the Bible He uses The expression Grace Forgiveness Is a mystery Paul tells us

That he Has been Charged By God To take God's Message Of grace To the Gentiles And then He says And the Message Of grace The message Of forgiveness The message Of Jesus Is a real Mystery And there Is no One Single Verse To describe It But if you Want to When you Go home Read all Of Ephesians Chapters 2 And 3 And see How he Describes Christ And God's Gift of Grace As a mystery As a mystery Paul says The good news Of Jesus Is for Every Single Person Doesn't Matter How much Or how Little You know Doesn't Matter What you Have done Or haven't Done Doesn't Matter how Good Doesn't Matter how Bad Doesn't Matter Who you Are What you've Done You Get the Same Offer You Get the Same Help You Get the Same Promises You Get the Same Undeserved Gift Of Forgiveness Yep That's Grace That's Grace And Paul Paul's Point Of using The word Mystery Is that As Humans We Cannot Get our Minds Around That We Just Can't Our Society Our Culture Is all About Punish Punish It's Make People Pay For Their Roams It's You've Got to Reach Certain Levels To Be Accepted To Be Accredited To Be Acknowledged And In A World That Thinks Like That But You've Got to Reach Certain Levels To Be Accepted But You've Got to Be Punished When You do Wrong When You're In A World That Works And Circles Like That The Very Idea Of A Forgiving Graceful God Is Simply Bonkers It's An Absolute Mystery That If We Live Like This Punish Punish Punish Work To Achieve Work To Achieve The Idea That There's A God Who Doesn't Do Any Of That Is A Complete And Utter Mystery And

[11:40] Jesus Knew It Would Be Jesus Knew It Would Be And So To Really Describe It To Us Jesus Give Us This Parable Phil Thank You The Gift of Forgiveness Would Be So Out of Line With The World That We Just Wouldn't Be A To Understand It So It Gives Us This Parable Now If We Had A More Contemporary Take On This Story The Workers Hired Late In The Day Must Have Worked So Hard Impressing The Employer So Much That In Spite Of One Hour's Work He Pays Them For A Full Day

But But That's Not What Happens In Jesus Story That's Not What Happens Because Jesus Is King He's Very King To Really Point Out That Those Last Few Workers To Arrive Have Been Idly Standing Around In The Market Place All Day Doing Nothing Something Only Useless Lazy Good For Nothing So Called Workers Would Be Doing During The Harvest Season What's More When Finally Hired These These Laggards They They Do Nothing They Do Nothing To Distinguish Themselves To Work Hard And

The Other Workers Are Shocked Completely Shocked By The Pay They Receive I Mean Like What Employer In Their Right Mind Would Pay The Same Amount For One Hour's Work As Twelve Jesus Story Makes Zero Economic Sense And That Was His Intent That Was His Intent He Was Giving A Parable An Earthly Story With A Heavenly Meaning About Grace Which Cannot Be Calculated Like A Day's Wages My Friends Grace Is Not About Finishing Last Or First It's

Not About Keeping Score It's Not About Tallying Up The Points Gaining Or Losing Credits Weighing Up How Good Or How Bad One Is It's Not About Any Of It On The Reverse It's About Not Counting Up It's About Not Keeping Score It's About Not Tallying Up It's About Not Weighing Up It is Very Very Simply And Only A Gift A Fully Free A Fully Freely Totally Undeserved Gift We Cannot Earn Or Achieve Grace A Point Jesus Makes Very Very Clear When He Includes The Employer Saying To The Workers Friends I'm Not Being Unfair

I'm Just Giving Everyone The Same Wage I There Is No Level Of Good Work You Can Do To Be Paid A Bigger Wage And We All Too Easily Like To Believe That We That We Are Responsible Hard Working Hard Deserving Disciples And So The Employer's Strange Behaviour Can Also Baffle Us Here Today As It Did Those Original Hearers But When We Think Like That We Really Risk

Missing The Story's Vital Point That God Dispenses Gifts And Not Wages None Of Us Gets Paid According To Merit For None Of Us Absolutely None

[16:43] Of Us Comes Anywhere Near Even Close To Satisfying God's Requirements For Heaven Philip Yancey Points Out If If We Did If We Did Gain Entrance Based On Our Effort Then Every Single Human Would End Up In Hell Every One Of Us Would Be Lost But There Is Salvation There Is Salvation From Hell Available Because The Supreme Force In Salvation Is God's Grace Not Our Works Not Our Talents Not Our Feelings Not Our Strength Let's Be Very Very Clear Faith Is Not Born At The Negotiating Table Where We Barter Our Talents And Our Gifts And Our Skills In Exchange For God Or

His Greatness Faith Is Not An Award Given To The Most Learned It's Not A Prize Given To The Most Disciplined For Sure As We've Already Pointed Out In Ephesians Paul Wrote For It Is By Grace You Have Been Saved Through Faith And This Is Not From Yourself Nothing To Do With You Or I Or Anything Else The Emphasis There Of Course Being Not On Yourself Nothing To Do With Yourself It's Nothing To Do What So With What You Have Done Or Become It Is A Gift From God And Not By Works And It Is Particularly A Gift Rather Than Works So That No One Can Boast Look What I Have Achieved You Didn't Achieve Anything Because You Can't And It Is Particularly A Gift Rather Than Works So That No One Can Play Others Off Look What I Earned More Than You Did You Didn't Because As In The Story You Will Get The Exact Same Wage Paul

Paul who was a religious mafia styled gangster was en route to carry out more attacks of mayhem falsely done in the name of God and as he goes he is here let's call it like it is here this is the same mindset as Hitler and then bang the blaze the light it's blinding Jesus clearly speaks Saul Saul incredible isn't it for us who are used to it but did you know that when folk who are completely unfamiliar with the Bible but often when they read this at this point they're thinking here we go God has just struck his enemy let's now see how he punishes him gets rid of him so it's a light and then they read on through the chapter in complete shock that God lovingly takes this same guy and not only restores his sight and forgives him but also appoints him as the Christian worker to the nations as we were saying earlier it's baffling mind baffling that God would go to such lengths to forgive and restore a self proclaimed enemy of his church but that's gross and that's what God does and God's story is cram packed of many accounts of God showing this type of grace from the beginning when he remains committed to Adam and Eve even when they choose to move on and leave the garden

[21:53] God chose to be committed to them with the great fathers of the faith Abraham and all his lies God forgives him blesses him and uses him for heavenly work Jacob the great patriarch well what an evil mess he was tricked his brother deceived his father completely divided his family apart yet there was God like with Paul going to him forgiving him blessing him and putting him into the service of his church Moses and all his temper God continuously forgiving and using him for kingdom work and as we said recently at the 6pm King David the disciple Peter the criminal on the cross sins of lust anger murder all shown grace all appointed heavenly jobs and so

Paul's encounter was not a one off it wasn't a one off at all but it was one more in a long string of godly actions of grace and love to people and god is still doing this today god is still reaching out to the most troubled today but let's not get away from Jesus parable and learn from it that we are no better we are no better than those ones that society likes to describe as the most troubled for all have sinned and all have fallen short of the glory of god and so the big conclusion to the whole thing is that we like Paul are aware of two things we are aware that one we are great sinners we are great sinners and we are aware too we need a great saviour we are great sinners and we need a great saviour if anything this has made clear very clear that when

God looks upon us his 2026 disciples he absolutely does not see us in categories in any categories or see us on particular levels the parable is clear he sees us all in the exact same place yep every brand new Christian is seen the same as every lifelong Christian every Christian who never did any more than tell a simple white lie is given the very same gift as the Christian who committed an

offence that landed them in prison every Christian fully free from addictions and temptations is given the same gift as the Christian dependent on alcohol or addicted to gambling every hardworking serving

Christian worker receives the same grace as the useless lazy good for nothing Christian worker and yep it seems crackers even as I say it I'm thinking really really but yep that's the parable because it is grace and it is grace alone and so whatever you do do not let this be a discourager let this be the very point when you truly truly finally accept that just like Jesus like all these failed biblical heroes you're also a failed sinner in a desperate need of a great saviour and a desperate need of Jesus just like all these biblical heroes just like myself we all need

Jesus and his grace filled help and here's what happens when you really really really finally accept this and I mean when you really truly really accept it you fall so madly deeply in love with this amazing graceful God that you start really really going bananas for him you start fighting your sin and your temptation even more you start telling others all about Jesus even more you really start doing good works for no other reason than love and you worship and you pray and you read your word and finally it's not because you need to or you have to or to earn anything but categorically only because you really now finally understand him you now get him you get his love for you you get his grace for you and so for nothing in return you just enjoy

[27:50] God heaven Jesus Holy Spirit kingdom stuff that's where Paul got to Paul worked and served God harder than any other disciple at the time yet he was the same one saying we are only saved by God's grace and I can't do anything to get closer to God and it's not by works and it's not by the law it's only by grace so why was he working and worshipping so hummered and so much because he fully understood and knew God and he knew God's beautiful graceful attitude and he knew that he was forgiven he knew that he was saved he knew what he was forgiven for he knew what he was saved from and so this massive amount of work and service was all thanks to God it was all worship to God and he didn't see it as work he didn't see it as efforts or anything else at all he just saw it as humble thankful service to the one who had saved him and forgiven him later Paul says no one will ever be saved by obeying the law we become right with

God not by doing what the law commands but by trusting in Jesus Christ there it is the law the works the efforts do zilch for us absolutely nothing only Jesus does by us simply believing I'll add this in as one last little bit of proof for us to live by the Christian faith is impossible it really is impossible I mean like consider the truly mammoth sized sermon on the mount level whoever is angry with his brother without cause is in danger of judgment whoever looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart whoever slaps you on the right cheek turns the other also love your enemies bless those who curse you pray for them how can any of us fulfill! those commands what hope do you and I really have of fulfilling those commands absolutely no hope not one centimeter of a bit of hope to reaching that standard but what we do have is the very same hope Paul had hope though sin is definitely wide and definitely deep thank God that his grace goes so much deeper so much wider so much beyond it isn't that the great discovery Paul discovered this and many of us today have discovered this and so as we approach the communion table keep this in mind where sin runs deep his grace runs even deeper still we're saved by grace and graceful let's sing these very words let's sing them now let me pray and if you're able to stand please do

Lord Jesus we worship and praise and glorify you for the beautiful wondrous fact that where sin goes deep the lowest most horrific sin there's your grace and love going underneath it still there's your forgiveness still there ready to capture anyone who ends up there that is bonkers Lord it's beyond our understanding and thinking but it is the truth and we thank you for that so may everyone here this day accept it know it love it and enjoy it in the name of you Jesus Amen Amen if you're able to stand please do round and tell them now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal

God so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith to the only wise God be glory power forever through Jesus Christ Amen God Thank you.

[33:55] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.