

## I. Introduction

- A. Every time we gather, I ask you to open your Bible. There is a reason I ask you to open your Bible—actually, there are literally hundreds of reasons I ask you to open your Bible.
- B. But of all the reasons, the main one is this: the whole Bible is the revelation of the grace of God.
- C. If you watch home improvement shows, you know about the big reveal. At the very, very end of the show, the hosts give you a payoff. After all the cost overruns, and after a whole lot of needless drama, they give you a payoff. And the payoff is a big reveal of the whole design coming together.
- D. In the Bible, the payoff is a big reveal. It is a big reveal of the grace of God, which we will talk about in a minute.
- E. But, in the Bible, God does not withhold that big reveal to the end. God reveals his grace at the beginning and at the end and at all times in between.
- F. In other words...
  - 1. *Every page of the Bible is, in some way, a reveal of the grace of God.*
- G. For example, today, we are looking at a book in the Bible called Ezra. In Ezra chapter three, you will find a whole lot of implicit mentions of grace, and one explicit mention of grace.
- H. I hope you don't mind, but I'd like to turn this place into a seminary classroom today. I'd like us go deep. I'd like us grow deep in our understanding of grace so that we can grow strong in our experience of grace so that we can grow invincible in our proclamation of grace to our world.
- I. Think with me today on the topic:
  - 1. *Grace in the Old Testament*
- J. First, grace defined, and then we'll take off from Ezra, though Ezra won't be the main Scripture today.

## II. Grace Defined

- A. *Grace is unmerited favor.*
- B. Grace is the undeserved kindness of God, given to those who deserve the opposite.
- C. Grace is God doing for you what you can't do for yourself.
- D. Grace is all that God is free to do for you on the basis of the Cross.
- E. Grace is salvation because of that Cross, through faith alone in Christ alone.
- F. Grace is a sinner's forgiveness, a criminal's pardon, a corpse's resurrection, and a prodigal's celebration.
- G. Grace is you not earning, not deserving, not meriting, not winning, not working but God giving anyway.
- H. Because in the great equation of Grace, God is entirely giver and you are entirely receiver.
- I. Grace is the perfect marriage of justice and love. God's justice demanded condemnation for sin. God's love desired blessing for sinners. Love and justice kissed at the Cross. Christ's death satisfied God's justice. Christ's death unleashed the love of God for sinners.
- J. Grace is not just the policy of God, it is the power of God and the provision of God in your life every minute of every day.
- K. Grace is the work of God, doing the thing you need, exactly when you need it done, on the basis of the finished work of Christ, not on the basis of what you've earned or deserved.
  - 1. I'm trying to define the grandest, most transcendent reality in the heavens and on the earth.
- L. To give a short definition would be like trying to describe in one sentence a Skyscraper, or Yosemite, or the miracle of a newborn's cry.
- M. Grace is the heart of God. Complex beyond comprehension, and simple beyond compare.

## III. Grace Revealed

- A. I said that the whole Bible is the revelation of grace. It is the big reveal.
- B. And it must be a revelation. It has to be that way.
- C. Grace has to be revealed because grace could never be discovered. It could never be invented. It could never be reasoned out.
  - 1. If you put the smartest scientists in a room, they would never think of grace.
  - 2. If you put the most brilliant religious leaders in a room for a thousand years, they would never come up with grace.
    - a) Grace is counter-intuitive.
    - b) Grace is traumatic.
    - c) Grace is a crisis.
    - d) Grace is a total reversal of everything you thought you knew about about God.
  - 3. Unless it was revealed, there would be no grace in the world.
- D. And when you dig through all the layers of beauty, and uncover all the truth, and go deep into the very core of grace, do you know what you will find?
- E. You will find an Old Rugged Cross, and a Savior who defeated death, and lives to assemble a blood-bought people from every tongue and tribe and nation.
- F. That is the core message of Scripture. And a piece of it is on every page.
  - 1. And the better and stronger those pieces are fitted together into your psyche, the better you will handle the troubles of the pain machine called earth, and the more normal, and blessed, and holy your every day life will feel.

## IV. Ezra

- A. Scripture:
  - 1. *Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brethren, arose and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God. (Ezra 3:2, NKJV).*
  - 2. *When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel. (Ezra 3:10)*

- B. So, this happens 500 years before Christ.
- C. It happens because the Jews have been in exile for 70 years. But now 47,000 Jews have left exile. They have traveled back to Jerusalem (the city) and Judah (the kingdom). They are making new homes and new fields and bringing back a new normal in the Promised Land.
- D. The first verse talks about rebuilding the altar.
  - 1. The second verse talks about rebuilding the temple.
- E. The first verse talks about the Law of Moses, the man of God.
  - 1. The second verse talks about the Ordinance of David, the King of Israel.
- F. These are people in Old Testament days, doing Old Testament things, described in the Old Testament book of the Bible.
- G. And when they do those things, there is an outburst of praise, and that praise is packed into an awesome line in verse 11:
  - 1. *And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD: "For He is good, For His mercy [hesed] endures forever toward Israel." Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. (Ezra 3:11)*
- H. The word translated Mercy is my favorite word in the whole Hebrew Bible. It is the word HESED. This is the Old Testament core word for Grace.
- I. We could translate this, "His grace extends to the limits of forever."
- J. And then they have the boldness to apply that to themselves, by tacking on the words, for Israel.
- K. You can tack on your own name too.
- L. So this raises a question that a lot of Christians, and lot of non-Christians, and a lot of scholars really wrestle over.
  - 1. How is it that people under the law are singing about grace?
- M. So, please think with me about how grace is revealed in the Old Testament.
- V. Grace Revealed in the Old Testament
  - A. *Grace is the bedrock of God's love.*
    - 1. The Old Testament lays a foundation, and the New Testament builds on it.
    - 2. There is an incredible statement of God's love in the Law of Moses:
      - a) *"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. (Deuteronomy 7:6)*
    - 3. These are God's people. These are the Jews. God calls them his special treasure. Why are they his special treasure?
      - a) *"The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; "but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 7:7, 8)*
    - 4. Over and over again, when the authors of the Old Testament dig down through the layers of grace, they only have one answer. Because God.
    - 5. There is nothing that undergirds God's grace.
    - 6. Grace is the bedrock.
    - 7. Grace underlies everything else.
    - 8. The only way to speak about lies beneath God's gracious commitment to his people is by denying there is a conceivable reason outside of God's own heart. Not our size, not our goodness, not our sincerity, not even our faith.
    - 9. God's way of dealing with us is rooted in the sheer mystery of pure grace.
    - 10. All of the reasons for God's love are in his own heart.
    - 11. This is the heart of the gospel, this is the bedrock of salvation. And this is the teaching of the Old Testament.
    - 12. In the fabric of our eternal life, there is not one stitch of our own making, or else the whole thing would come unraveled.
      - a) There would be no security, no assurance, no certainty.
      - b) God has not built a single column on the foundation of you. No.
      - c) You are uncertain. You are changing. You are shifting sand.
    - 13. But God never changes, and his own heart is the bedrock of this own grace, now and forevermore. And this is why 50 times, God's people can say his grace endures forever!
    - 14. If it depended on us, it wouldn't be forever.
    - 15. A second lesson the Old Testament teaches about grace is:
  - B. *Grace is the basis of God's anger.*
    - 1. I know this sounds strange, but think about it.
    - 2. One of the biggest criticisms about the Old Testament is that it sounds so harsh. Some people even say the God of the Old Testament is angry, but the God of the NT is love.
    - 3. So why does God seem so angry sometimes?
    - 4. First, let me point out that both testaments describe God in pretty frightening terms. There are a lot of scary verses in the NT.
      - a) A small sample of scary verses in the NT: Hebrews 10:27, 10:31, Luke 2:5, Matthew 10:28, 24:51.
    - 5. Second, learn this principle: When you read the Bible, and God is angry, always ask why.
    - 6. If you look, you will see that the anger of God is the heart of God manifested for one main reason: because grace is violated.
    - 7. From this we discover one of the central qualities of the grace of God:
      - a) God's love is a jealous love.

8. The jealousy of God is not like human jealousy at all. Human jealousy comes out of insecurity. Human jealousy comes out of pettiness and neediness.
  9. God is not needy. We are needy, and therefore, God watches over you like a bear watches over her cubs.
    - a) *For you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God. (Exodus 34:14)*
  10. And nothing stirs God's jealousy like you or me or his Chosen People or anybody rejecting his offer of grace.
    - a) *For they provoked Him to anger with their high places, And moved Him to jealousy with their carved images. (Psalms 78:58)*
  11. The greatest sin in the Bible is to turn a cold shoulder to Almighty God who has stooped down to love you.
  12. In the Old Testament, the people of God had a terribly short memory.
  13. God would bless them with some incredibly loving gift of grace, and five minutes later, they're turning the backs on his grace, and worshipping idols. They turned their backs on his grace. They started worshipping idols. They started blending in with nations around them. They participated in infant sacrifice, ritual prostitution, demonic influence. They were heirs of the promises of God, and recipients of the grace of God, and they stepped all over it.
  14. When God is mad in the Bible, ask why. Because when you look hard enough, you will see that grace has been offered and grace has been despised.
  15. This is why the Jews went into exile in the first place.
  16. Yet even still, God's grace continues day after day, year after year, generation after generation.
  17. When we turn our back on God, God will never turn his back on us, but it feels like it. God is not a fan of our crutches. Our crutches keep us from a deeper experience of Grace.
    - a) He does not subsidize addictions.
    - b) He does not support distractions.
    - c) He lets his children hit rock bottom, in a far country, till they can come back to their sense and return to a life of grace.
    - d) He jealously longs for you.
  18. And even when you are the very worst, the God of both testaments still says:
    - a) *I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, Who walk in a way that is not good, According to their own thoughts. (Isaiah 65:2)*
  19. God just won't quit on you. His anger is but for a moment, because it is not an anger of judgment and wrath, it is an anger of broken fellowship. Because for those who know the Lord, grace is the basis for God's anger.
- C. *Grace is the point of God's rituals.*
1. Ezra chapter 3 brings together at least a dozen elements the rituals of the Old Testament Jews:
    - a) priesthood, altar, burnt offerings, Feast of Tabernacles, the temple the Levites, priestly apparel, worship music, responsive singing, etc.
  2. Every single element is a brush stroke on a canvas to paint a masterpiece portrait of Jesus Christ and his salvation.
    - a) The priesthood shows us Christ our high priest, to make intercession for us. Grace.
    - b) The sacrifices and the altar show Christ the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. Grace.
    - c) The Feast of Tabernacles shows the power of God to deliver from bondage and every dark force in our lives. Grace.
    - d) The Temple brings together the marvelous intricacy of the plan of salvation.
  3. Those ceremonies, and rituals, and priests meant something.
  4. And when you added it all together, you got a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ.
    - a) *So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. (Colossians 2:16, 17)*
  5. God was insistent that his people keep his laws, because God was lovingly determined that his people never forget his grace.
- D. *Grace is the theme of God's books.*
1. Genesis promises a coming Savior who would destroy the devil and break the curse caused by sin.
  2. Exodus portrays helpless people miraculously delivered by grace.
  3. Leviticus outlines the great Day of Atonement, the perfect picture of the Savior who takes away the sin of the world.
  4. Numbers describes the blessings of grace on God's people when they simply trust his work.
  5. Deuteronomy repeats the covenant of grace.
  6. Joshua leads the people into the promise land where they will experience the riches of grace to the max.
  7. Judges teaches that when we respond to grace, our lives feel blessed; when we neglect God's grace, our lives are unsolvable.
  8. Ruth illustrates God's grace through the sacrificial love of a woman named Ruth.
  9. Samuel details the grace of God to King David, and shows how his realm rose and fell depending on his response to grace.
  10. Kings details the grace of God to Solomon and the other kings, and shows how their fortunes rose and fell depending on their response to grace.
  11. Chronicles reviews the grace of God through the history of Israel.
  12. Ezra shows the grace of God in restoring his people's captivity and building them a temple.
  13. Nehemiah prays to rebuild Jerusalem on the basis of grace.
  14. Esther obtained the grace of God and saved her people from a holocaust.
  15. Job discovered that God granted grace even in life's darkest hours.
  16. The Psalms resound with praise for the amazing grace of God... surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.
  17. Proverbs instruct us how to grab onto grace and never let it go.
  18. Ecclesiastes shows the frustration of a life that neglects the grace of God.
  19. Song of Solomon sings the pleasures and intimacies of a life flowing with grace.

20. Isaiah: 63:7 *I will mention the [hesed] of the LORD And the praises of the LORD, According to all that the LORD has bestowed on us, And the great goodness toward the house of Israel, Which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies, According to the multitude of His [heseds]. (Isaiah 63:7)*
  21. Jeremiah tells us that the greatest thing in life is to know a God who says I am the Lord who exercises [hesed] on the earth (9:22,23).
  22. Lamentations reminds us that it is of the Lord's grace we are not consumed, Great is thy faithfulness, his [heseds] are new every morning.
  23. Daniel shows how the grace of God triumphs over the mightiest of earthly powers.
  24. Hosea depicts God in grace marrying an unfaithful partner, and redeeming and loving her anyway.
  25. Joel implores wayward people to return to the Lord your God for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness (2:13).
  26. Amos describes the high price of turning a cold shoulder toward grace.
  27. Obadiah contains the promise that the captives will once again possess the land because of grace.
  28. Jonah's book points out the hypocrisy of a nation so rich in grace, and yet so unwilling to share it.
  29. Micah declares that God delights in grace.
  30. Nahum announces The Lord is GOOD, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and he knows those who trust in him.
  31. Habbakuk takes his stand that though everything is going wrong, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.
  32. Zephaniah draws a picture of an infinite God of grace leaping for joy over his people.
  33. Haggai ridicules the foolishness of trying to bless yourself when God is always ready to bless you more than you can imagine.
  34. Zechariah promises when you turn to God grace, God turns to you in abundance.
  35. Malachi says even though a spouse might divorce a spouse, God will never, ever divorce you.
    - a) If you don't see the grace in the Old Testament, it's because you're just not looking.
- E. *Grace is the outcome of God's laws.*
1. There is a caricature of God's laws really common among Christians. The caricature says that for centuries, the Jews toiled under the heavy burden of the Law. They were slaves to it. The law was all about rules and curse and hopeless religion. And then Jesus came and wiped out the laws and brought in an age of grace.
  2. I say that is a caricature because it is not true.
  3. The age of grace began the day God sacrificed an animal to cover Adam and Eve after their sin.
  4. If the laws were nothing but a burden...
    - a) How could David write:
      - (1) *Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. (Psalm 119:97)*
      - (2) Of course he loved God's Law. It's how David learned that his horrible crimes and sins could be forgiven.
    - b) And how could Jesus argue that if the Jews read their law, they would have expected the Savior and his death and resurrection.
    - c) And how could Paul have used the Old Testament to prove both the Savior-hood of Jesus and justification by grace through faith?
  5. The fact is that there is a way of reading the Old Testament that makes it a burden, and that way of reading it is a mistake.
  6. Moses said the sum of the law was love: love God, love your neighbor.
  7. Fifteen centuries later, Jesus said the same thing. When you add up all God's laws, they add up to love.
  8. This book of the Old Testament, this law as it is called, points the way to relationships, to strong marriages, to mental health, and to a kind of prosperity that money can't buy. Love.
    - a) *For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. (1 John 5:3)*
  9. The problem isn't the Old Testament. The problem is legalism. The laws of God are spiritual handcuffs to an unbeliever. But to the child of God, they are a vast yard to play in. They are a law of liberty (James 1:25) and a law of love (Romans 13:8).
  10. I am arguing today that the whole Bible is an instruction manual for a life of Grace, and our church is dedicated to helping you live in it.
    - a) *"Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you-- The sure mercies of David. (Isaiah 55:1-3, NKJV).*