

Grace is Grace

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[0 : 00] Well, for a few minutes this evening, we're going to turn back to the passage that we read in Ephesians chapter 2. In our evening services, we are doing a short study called Doctrine for Mission. The idea behind this series is that we're thinking about some of the key truths that you have in scripture, what we call doctrine, and we're thinking about how all that applies to sharing our faith, to mission. The whole reason the church exists is because God has revealed himself in scripture. He's taught us amazing things, what we call doctrine. That's the whole reason the church exists. But the only way the church can survive is if we engage in mission. That's God's great goal, that we would go and tell people the good news of Jesus and that we would see more and more people come to faith.

We want everybody in our community on our island to know that Jesus is calling them to a new life, to eternal life. And God's given that job to us. We are the ones who are here. We are the ones with this message to share. But I think every single Christian here will agree that that's something that we find hard. We want to share our faith.

We want to talk about Jesus at work, at school, in the community tomorrow and all week. But it's difficult. We don't find it easy and so often we don't really know where to start.

And so this series that we're doing in the evenings is aimed at helping us with exactly that. We are learning some key truths from scripture that I hope will help us all be better equipped to share our faith. We started off by saying that God is God. We've got to remember that. He is God and he's able to do great things. We then said we've got to remember that the truth is the truth. What God reveals in scripture is the truth that people long for and people desperately need. We said last week that the good news is good news. The message of Christianity is not dull or boring or depressing or miserable if I am. It's good news. Tonight we're going to learn a fourth lesson from Ephesians 2. We're going to learn that grace is grace. But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God.

We're going to start tonight by asking a big question. Is your theology reformed? So some of you might say, well, yes. And for many of us that's the tradition that the church setting that we've grown up with. Reform theology is what we've heard for as long as we can remember. Other people may have not grown up in that tradition. Some of us might have come to reform theology from a different background. So some of us might say yes. Others might say no. And there are many, many committed followers of Jesus who don't agree with everything that reform theology teaches and that's okay. But I think that the most likely answer to the question is this. Well, I think so, but I'm not completely sure what reformed theology actually is. And if that's your answer, if you think, well, I don't really know what reformed theology is, then a good follow up question to ask is this. Are you saved by your own good works? And it's very easy to think that the answer to that question is yes. Many people think that if you do a survey of world religions, you'll find a frequently repeated pattern that if you want to be saved or accepted or enlightened, then there's certain good works that you have to do. And many people think that Christianity says the same thing.

[4 : 51] When Tom, my son was in first year in high school, his Ari teacher was talking about Christianity and told the class that Christianity states that if you do good works, you'll go to heaven. And it's true that in the history of the Christian church, many people have said that the answer to this question, are you saved by your good works, that the answer is yes, that we're saved by doing good stuff. Reform theology says no. In fact, reformed theology shouts no as loud as it possibly

can. Prior to the Reformation in the 16th century, many, many people across Europe understood Christianity to be saying that certain works, certain rituals, certain ecclesiastical requirements, many of which involved money, were all necessary for salvation. And people thought that because that was what many of the churches taught.

But Martin Luther, John Calvin, and their fellow reformers all argued that a theology based on works is a false gospel. And they did that because they rediscovered that Christians are never saved by good works. No one is saved by good works. We are only ever saved by God's amazing grace. So reformed theology is grounded on the principle that Christianity is not a works based religion. It's never about us working our way up to God by performing certain duties or by impressing him or proving to him that we're good enough. Instead, reformed theology teaches us that salvation is entirely and only the result of God's grace. That grace is received by faith, faith alone without any works added. That faith is centered on

Jesus, on Christ alone, who he is and what he's done. All of that is what Scripture teaches and Scripture alone is where we discover what we're to believe and what God expects of us in response. And because it's entirely reliant on the grace of God through faith in Jesus as he is revealed in the Bible's unique revelation, all the glory goes to God alone. At the heart of the Reformation, at the heart of reformed theology is the astonishing truth that we are saved not by works but by grace. But now let me ask you another question. Is your understanding of evangelism reformed? And you might say, well, yes, especially if your answer to the first question was yes, but are you sure? Is it really? And I ask that because this is something that I have got wrong again and again. So if somebody came up to me and said,

I can't become a Christian because I'm not good enough, then I would instantly reply, that's not true. That's never true. We're saved by grace alone. Being good enough has nothing to do with it. And that's absolutely true. But if someone else then came up to me and said to me, you can help many people come to faith in Jesus, my instinctive reply would be, no, I don't think so. Why not? asks my friend. My reply. Because I'm not good enough. And that right there is a description of a reformed view of theology coupled to a totally unreformed view of evangelism. If I think like that, and if you think like that, we need to remember that when it comes to salvation, and when it comes to evangelism, grace is grace. So what is grace? What are we talking about when we mention that word?

Well, grace is central to the Christian gospel. That's made clear in many passages of the Bible. Here are just a few examples. Romans 3, 23 to 24, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God were justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Ephesians one, which we read in love, he predestined us for adoption of sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespass, according to the riches of his grace again. And then the passage we read at the beginning is emphasizing grace. By grace you have been saved through faith. It's not your own doing. It's the gift of God. There's many more passages like this. Grace is at the heart of the gospel. But what exactly does grace mean? Well, when you hear that word grace, one of the first things that should come into your mind is that grace is referring to a gift. In fact, the Greek word for grace, *keras*, is almost identical to the Greek word for a gift, *charisma*. And this emphasis on a gift lies at the heart of what grace means. And it highlights two crucial things. Grace involves a giver and a receiver. So in terms of our salvation, the giver is God, the receiver is you and every other Christian in history. From our side, that grace is freely received.

[11 : 07] Now by freely, we mean that it's not earned, it's not prompted, it's not paid for by us. We don't initiate the giving, we don't and we cannot do anything to deserve it. It costs us nothing. It's placed in our empty hands. It's a gift freely received. From God's side, the gift is freely given. But here freely means something different. It doesn't mean free as in no cost. It means free as in of his own initiative. In other words, God's not prompted or pestered or persuaded by us to give us grace. He does it freely. It all comes from him. But what's even more remarkable is that the cost to him is immense. For us, grace is free. For God the Father, grace comes at the price of his own beloved Son.

Sometimes in the news, we hear of corporate acquisitions that come at astronomical cost. I did a quick search. The most expensive one I could find was in 1999 when Manesman was purchased by Vodafone for \$183 billion, which is the equivalent of \$284 billion today when adjusted for inflation.

Massive sums of money, but never forget that the most expensive transaction in history was the price that God the Father paid so that you could freely receive his saving grace. Our redemption is through his blood. That's how much it cost.

But grace becomes even more amazing when we think about its antecedent and its consequence. What comes before it, what comes as a result of it. Grace's antecedent, the thing that makes it happen, is not our prompting. The antecedent is God's determination to show us favour. In other words, it's a gift given because God wants to give it. If you read Ephesians 1, again, you'll see that we are repeatedly told about God's choice, God's will, God's wisdom, God's purpose, God's plan. It's his idea, his initiative, his choice.

And the consequence of that is that we receive undeserved enrichment. And that's a key aspect of what grace means. It's a gift that's totally undeserved. It's never, ever earned. If it's earned, then it's not grace. But not only is it undeserved, it is also astounding in its generosity. The gift isn't a little bonus like a free meal or a free holiday. The gift is astonishing. As Paul says in Ephesians 2, it's a gift of immeasurable riches. So grace is a gift, a gift that we could never demand but which God is determined to give. A gift that God has deliberately planned but which results in far more than we could have ever dreamt. But there's even more. Why is it that God is so determined to show us favour? It's because behind his determination to show us favour lies his eternal love. Ephesians 1 spoke about this so powerfully that in love he predestined us for adoptions as sons through Jesus Christ. That's ultimately where grace takes us back to, to the eternal love of God. And the ultimate consequence of it all is that God's love is lavished upon us. We receive in joy and marvel in God's everlasting kindness. It's all so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. We can summarise all of this in a diagram. Grace is a gift. That means, as you can see, it's a giver and there's a receiver. It's freely received by us, freely given by God. But as we said, the freely means two different things. Free for us in terms of no cost. Free for God in the sense that it's of his own initiative. What prompts it is the giver's determined favour. God wants to do this. The result for us is that we have undeserved enrichment.

[16:16] And that enrichment comes ultimately from the eternal love of the giver, meaning that we are the recipients of everlasting kindness. For us, no cost. I don't know if you can see that, the writing's quite small. It says no cost under the line. Above the line, the greatest cost to God. For us, no prompting. We can't persuade God to do it. From God, there's the greatest prompting. It's his desire to do this. From God's point of view, this is what he has always planned. From our point of view, it gives us what we never dreamt possible.

Grace is such an incredible gift. From God to us, for the receiver no payment, for the giver the greatest payment. For the receiver, we offer no prompting. For the giver, it's initiated by the greatest prompting. God's determination to show us favour results in our undeserved enrichment. His eternal love makes us the recipients of his everlasting kindness, our endless neediness met by his amazing grace. Grace is never earned. Grace is never bought. Grace is never deserved. Grace is grace. And that's why for anybody who maybe thinks, I am not good enough to be a Christian, or God wouldn't want me, or whatever. Anyone who thinks like that, you only need to learn one word. You need to learn the word grace. God wants to give everything to you. And he doesn't ask for anything in return. All he wants you to do is trust him. So grace lies at the heart of understanding the Gospel. It's at the core of our salvation. It's central to reformed theology. But what we must also remember is that grace doesn't just lie at the heart of understanding the Gospel. It also lies at the heart of sharing the Gospel. One of the things that Paul makes very clear from Ephesians 1 and 2 is that grace runs right through our salvation from as far back as we can look to as far forward as we can see into the future. Looking back, the believer's predestination for adoption is to the praise of his glorious grace. Looking forward, in the coming ages, the promised inheritance will reveal the immeasurable riches of his grace. That tells us that every link in the chain of your salvation is all a matter of grace. And that has a crucial implication for us as we seek to reach out with the Gospel around us. It means that in terms of your conversion, for everyone here who is a Christian, in terms of your conversion, the person or the people who are used to share the Gospel with you were all an aspect of God's grace in action. And that also means that if you now go on to share your faith with others, then that is also simply an outworking of God's grace as well. And that means that your strength, your courage, your abilities, your confidence and your good enoughness are irrelevant. Totally irrelevant. Because evangelism is all

about grace and grace is grace. And that has three crucial lessons for all of us. The first is that grace equips us to share the Gospel. We evangelise by grace. When we think of Paul who wrote Ephesians, we think of one of the greatest, if not the greatest evangelist in the history of the Church. Paul travelled from place to place, city to city, preaching the Gospel, planting churches, sharing his faith in synagogues, markets, streets and houses. He saw an astonishing number of people come to faith from all sorts of different backgrounds. And as we think of all that, we think of Paul and all the success he had, we think towards us, how did he do it? How was he able to speak and to discuss, to reason and to persuade? How on earth did Paul do that? Wouldn't it be amazing if we could be like him? How did he do it? Well, Paul actually tells us how he did it and his answer is beautiful.

He says, of this Gospel, I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I'm the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unsurachable riches of Christ.

[21 : 30] How did he do it? He did it by God's grace. He says the same thing in 2 Corinthians. This is our boast, the testimony of our conscience that we behaved in the world with simplicity and Godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom, but by the grace of God and supremely so toward you. Paul is absolutely explicit that any success in his evangelistic work did not come from his own wisdom, his own power or his own confidence. In fact, if anything, Paul makes it clear that he was lacking all of these things. Instead, Paul tells us that his evangelism was by God's grace. That means that his achievements were not earned. They were not deserved. They were not prompted. They were all a result of what God did by his grace. But you might think, ah, yeah, but that's Paul. He was different. He had a special gift. He had grace to a level that we don't have. And that's true in one sense. There are people with a particular gift in evangelism, but that's not the only truth that the New

Testament gives us about grace. Later in 2 Corinthians, Paul makes it clear that God's equipping grace is not confined to the select few. He says God is able to make all grace abound to you so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. Now, I love the way this verse is so broad. It's magnificently wide in its scope. Every good work includes many different things other than evangelism, but God forbid that we forget that it still includes evangelism. God is able to make grace abound to you in order to do that wonderful work. And this is where our understanding of evangelism has got to be in line with the rest of our reformed theology. So are you going to be used by God to help someone come to faith in Jesus because you have done good works that qualify for you for the task, qualify you for the task, or because you have these kind of better skills that make you one of these super Christians that are more impressive to God, or because somehow you've earned the right to share the gospel with someone and see them come to faith? Is that how it works? Or are you going to share your faith in the full knowledge that from start to finish anything that leads to the salvation of your friend is entirely and forever dependent on God's grace? And this is where it's crucial to remember that if I say, I can't share my faith, if I say that, I'm not actually saying something about myself. I'm actually saying something about God. And I'm not complimenting Him.

I'm saying that He can't do it. That's never true because grace is grace. So we are equipped to share our faith by grace. The second lesson is that grace doesn't just equip us, grace also instructs us for how we should share our faith. Colossians chapter four verses two to six in many ways is like the handbook for sharing our faith. It gives a beautiful balance between recognizing both our utter dependence on prayer and also the vital task that we have been given to speak. Look at what Paul says. He says, continuously steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time pray for us also that God may open to us a door for the word to declare the mystery of Christ on account of which I'm in prison, that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak, walk in wisdom towards outsider, making the best use of time, let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. This is the handbook for evangelism. And one of the key things that it tells us is that when we speak to people about Jesus, our speech has got to be gracious. In other words, we must evangelize with grace. So go back in your minds to that picture we had of everything that grace means. Grace means giving a gift to the recipient. It's a gift that isn't paid for, a gift that isn't earned, it's a gift that's totally undeserved, a gift that is immeasurably kind. If our speech is going to be gracious, then that means that everything we say, both in terms of what we say and how we say it, must reflect the astonishing beauty of God's grace. In other words, the message of grace must be communicated with grace. Or

to put it another way, if you want to evangelize badly, then do it without grace. And that's very easily done. So someone doesn't want to listen to what we're saying. So we respond by losing patience. That's what they deserve. Someone's life is a bigger mess than you ever thought. So we kind of take a bit of a step back and keep our distance because that's probably what they deserve, really. Someone responds well initially but then slips back. So we move on because that's what they deserve. Someone believes in a whole host of things that go against scripture. So we wait until they've put their house in order and moved away from all this stuff that we disagree with because that's really what they deserve. People like that don't deserve grace.

[27 : 41] It's so easy to think like that. But if we do, then our theology is drastically unreformed and it's catastrophically wrong because what they deserve has got absolutely nothing to do with it. Deserved grace is not grace. Grace is never deserved. And if we evangelize without grace, then we'll quickly become frustrated, impatient and disillusioned. But if we share our faith with grace, then we will keep on gently talking to the person who doesn't want to listen. We will stand by the people who've made a complete mess of their lives. We will go after the person who slipped back and we will build up a genuine friendship with the person whose worldview is totally different to ours. Why? Because grace is grace and they desperately, desperately need it. An asset test for all of us in sharing our faith is whether or not the immeasurable kindness of God's grace can be heard in what we say and how we say it. So grace equips us for evangelism, grace instructs us in how to do it. Finally, the whole reason we evangelize is because of grace. We evangelize by grace, with grace, because of grace. And that's true no matter where you look. If you look up to God, you see the inventor, the source, the giver of grace, the one who gave his only son so that we might all be saved by his grace. If you look at the people around you that you work with or in your family so that live next door to you in the community, you see people totally undeserving of grace, people in desperate need of grace, people who deep down are longing for everything that only grace can give them. And if you look in the mirror, you are not seeing a rubbish evangelist exempt from grace. You're seeing exactly the kind of person through whom God in his grace can do amazing things. Through whom he can do amazing things this week. So let me ask you again, is your understanding of evangelism reformed? An unreformed view of evangelism will say things like this. There's no way I can share the Gospel with someone this week. Grace says you can. I've tried inviting them a hundred times. They keep saying no. Grace says the one hundred and first try is worth it. I've tried speaking to someone and it didn't go well. Grace says don't give up. That kind of person doesn't come to your church. Grace says no matter what mess they are in. This is exactly where they belong.

When it comes to evangelism, we must remember that grace is grace. Or as Paul might say, when it comes to sharing your faith this week, it is by grace that they will be saved. It's not your own doing. It is the gift of God. Grace is at the heart of Christianity. And for anyone who's not sure of where they stand before God, the question is not have I done enough for God? The question is actually have you received enough from God? It's not about coming to God with stuff to show him. It's about coming to God with empty hands and receiving everything that he can give you. It's all you've got to do is just hold out your hands.

That's what faith is. Faith is empty hands before God. And for all of us who are Christians, we struggle to share our faith. We feel like we're rubbish at it. We wish that we were better at it. We don't deserve for God to use our poor efforts. That's exactly where grace abounds. Amen. Let us pray.

Father, we thank you for your grace. We pray for every one of us that we would understand what that means in terms of our salvation and also in terms of all that we want to do in terms of sharing our faith. Help us all to receive your grace. Help us all to display your grace in the way that we live our lives. Help us all to share the wonderful news of your grace in the week ahead. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.