

3 - Grace and Glory
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I want to begin by asking what the following statements have in common:

- God is causing me major problems.
- God took my loved one because heaven needed another angel.
- My marriage fell apart and I blame God because He let it happen.

I'll tell you what these statements have in common. They are all lies people believe about God and they all attack one of God's basic attributes: His goodness.

We're in a series of sermons entitled Christmas With Grace. We defined grace as: God's unmerited favor, God's unconditional love, and God's unlimited power. We see all three of these in the Christmas story.

The Christmas story starts off in Luke 1 with the story of the birth of John the Baptist. John's parents had no children because his mother Elizabeth was barren, which was considered to be a disgrace in those days. But the grace of God was at work in the Christmas story. Luke 1:24-25 says:

Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, "This is what the Lord has done for me at the time when He has been gracious to me, to take away my disgrace among people."

What great news! Grace takes away disgrace! We've all sinned and brought disgrace upon ourselves. But the message of Christmas is that God loved us even though we were sinners and He graciously sent His Son to die on a cross for our sins so that we can be saved from sin and from the shame of sin.

The next place we find grace in the Christmas story is a few verses later. In Luke 1:26-33 an angel came to Mary.

The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High."

Notice that the angel used the word "favor" two times. The word for favor is the same word for grace. This verse is saying that Mary had received grace in the form of God's unmerited favor. Mary was an amazing, faith-filled, godly woman of God! But she was born in sin like all humans are and she needed a Savior like all sinners do.

The Bible never says that Mary was anyone but an ordinary human whom God chose to use in an extraordinary way by His grace.

The next place we find grace in the Christmas story is in Luke 2:8-20.

There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests."

After that, the shepherds went to Bethlehem to see Jesus the Messiah.

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

My message today is entitled "Grace and Glory." We see in these verses that Christmas is all about the glory of God and all about the grace of God. The glory of the Lord shined forth – the angels glorified God and the shepherds returned glorifying God. And when we truly understand grace – we too will glorify God.

Unfortunately, too many people have the wrong view of God.

They think that God is mean and ill-tempered and He hates everyone everywhere. But actually He is kind and gracious and He loves everyone everywhere.

And the purpose of Christmas is to show us God's grace and glory.

We see this in Luke 2:14 where the angels said, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.

God's glory is the outshining of His character.

We saw in this passage when the glory of God shone round about the angels.

The New Testament word for glory is doxa – which means:

Splendor, brightness, magnificence, excellence, preeminence, dignity, majesty and grace.

See how grace and glory go together?

Glory is that which makes God impressive.

Since God is invisible, glory refers to His self-manifestation.

God's glory is His manifested presence where He makes Himself seen or heard in some way.

Strong's Bible Concordance says glory is what makes God very apparent.

The interesting thing is that the root word for glory is dokeo – which means what you think about someone’s reputation.

Actually, it is the honor resulting from a good opinion.

How you view God will determine whether you glorify Him or not!

If you see God as distant or uncaring or harsh or the cause of all your problems – you will not glorify Him.

Our ability to glorify God is directly related to the way we view God.

The ultimate revelation of God’s glory is Jesus Christ!

He is God manifested in the flesh.

He is the exact representation of God.

If your god is not like Jesus, he is not god at all.

When the birth of Jesus was announced – the angels sang, *Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people He favors!*

Favor is another word for God’s grace. The King James says, *Goodwill to men.* So grace and goodwill are basically synonymous. In fact, the glory of God, the grace of God, and the goodness of God are all completely and irreversibly entwined. We see this concept in Exodus 33:15-19

Then Moses said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. And the Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name."

Then Moses said, "Now show me Your glory." And the Lord said, "I will cause all My goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim My name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

Notice that when God revealed His glory, He revealed His goodness. And He also revealed His mercy and compassion, which are expressions of His grace. And Jesus came to earth to bring peace and goodwill to earth.

1- Goodwill means that God’s will for you is Good

Goodwill means to be benevolent, giving, and eager to help others. Someone of goodwill is concerned about you and wants to see you succeed and help you succeed.

In other words, God is for us and If God is for us, who can be against us? God is for you! If you think God is against you, you are wrong. Get that notion out of your head. God is good and His will is good.

There is someone whose will toward you is ill will, but it’s not God. John 10:10 says that Satan comes to steal, kill and destroy but Jesus comes to give abundant life.

Unfortunately, people tend to blame Jesus for all the bad stuff and let the true culprit off the hook.

Say this after me: God is good all the time – Satan is bad all the time.
 We sometimes get those facts messed up.
 Have you ever thought that God is not good?
 Have you ever thought that bad things come from God?

This is one of the greatest ways Satan tries to steal our joy and steal our faith and steal our peace – by getting us to doubt the goodness of God – by blaming God for evil things Satan actually does.

Listen to me closely: the most important thing about you is what you believe about God. And today I want to attack and destroy the lie that God is not good. I want to destroy the lie that God causes evil or bad things to happen. And I want to do that with God's word. James 1:13-14 says:

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

God is not the tempter nor the author of evil. There is an evil one who tempts us to sin, but it is not God. When we give in to sin it sets into motion consequences in our lives that we have brought upon ourselves. Let's not blame God.

Everything bad that happens is a result of sin – either our own or someone else's or the fact that original sin has affected our entire planet and this world is not as God created it to be.

When God created the world, it was all good. But sin has affected everything in our fallen world. That's our fault, not God's. Yet, who do we tend to blame for bad things? God. James 1:16-17 attacks this common misbelief.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

James warns us here to avoid the common deception that God is not good. He points out that every good thing in our lives comes from God. Psalm 84:11 says:

The Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

Christmas is all about grace and glory, and it would be great and glorious this Christmas if you received the revelation of that. We must come to the place of realizing that God is good all the time. No matter what circumstances we are currently in, He does not change!

God's goodness never changes, never ends, never runs out. James warns us not to fall into the deception that God is not good, but instead have faith in a good God who never changes. And one of the greatest things you can count on is that He is good all the time! Acts 10:38 says:

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

And what did Jesus do? He went around doing good.

- He did not go around doing bad – He did good to people.
- He did not go around hurting people – He healed them!
- He did not go around withholding from people – He gave to them!
- He did not go around cursing people – He blessed them!
- He did not go around killing people – He went around raising them from the dead!
- He did not go around causing bad things to happen to people – He went around fixing the problems sin and Satan caused.

He is the same today and we can count on His goodness right now! Psalm 100:5 says:

For the Lord is good and His love endures forever; His faithfulness continues through all generations.

Everything about God is good: His will, His ways, and His character.

2. Goodwill Means that God's Purpose for You is Good

What is God's purpose for you? At the heart of God's eternal purpose is His father's heart. God has a Son – Jesus Christ – that He loves so much that He chose to have a vast family of children just like Him. So God has all His children in the process of being made like Christ. That's the purpose of everything you go through. Romans 8:28-29 says:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

God's purpose for all of His children, including you, is that we become like Jesus. And to do that God works all things work together for good. It doesn't say everything that happens to you is good. Some things that happen are bad. But God is not the cause of those bad things – so don't blame Him. Go beyond that to have faith that God is good and He will take everything that happens – the good,

the bad and the ugly – and use it all for our good – and that good is to make us more like Jesus.

God’s purpose for us is good and He can even bring good out of the bad. Joseph had a good promise from God, but he was sold into slavery by his brothers and endured years of hardship that he did not deserve. God did not do that, but He used it for the good of Joseph and the whole nation. Years later, when God’s promise was fulfilled, Joseph had an opportunity to retaliate against his brothers, but he did not. Instead he said in Genesis 50:20

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

That’s how good our God is. He can take bad things that others do and turn them for good. That’s how awesome our God is – He can even take what the enemy means for harm and bring good out of it! God’s purpose for you is good!

3. Goodwill Means God’s Plans for You are Good

I want to ask you what your future will be like. You’re probably thinking, “How do I know?” I know none of us really know, but what do you believe about your future? Do you think your future is going to be good or bad? Successful or a failure? Happy or sad? What would you say?

But the bigger question is what does God want for your future? Jeremiah 29:11 says:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for evil, plans to give you a future and a hope.”

you hear that? Get it down inside you. God’s plans for you are good, not evil! God wants to prosper you, not harm you! God wants to bless you, not curse you! You need to get into agreement with God about your future. He wants you to have hope for your future. It’s tough to live without hope because hope is faith for the future. If you have no hope for your future, you will have no power in the present. Instead, you will give up, you will quit trying, and you will perish.

There is power in hope. People will continue working, struggling, and trying if they have hope. Hope lifts morale, reenergizes people and raises their expectations.

As someone once said, “There are no hopeless situations: there are only people who have grown hopeless about them.” God wants to give you the gift of hope today. God’s purpose for you is good and God’s plans for you are good. Also-

4. The Presents God Gives you are Good

We already saw in the book of James 1:17 that every good thing in your life is a gift from Father God. Matthew 7:11 says:

If you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask Him.

What are some of the good things He gives us? Psalm 103:1-5 says:

Bless the Lord, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

These are just a few of the wonderful gifts from our Father mentioned in His Word. God wants to give good things to you. Dare to ask Him. God has good plans for your future. Dare to believe it. God's purpose for you is good. Dare to embrace it.

God is good all the time! Yet many doubt God's goodness when the smallest thing goes wrong. A prayer is not answered immediately and some people turn against God. We must come to the place of believing that God is good no matter what. He is not the author of evil. He is totally good all the time. Proverbs 11:27 says:

He who seeks good finds goodwill, but evil comes to him who searches for it.

In other words, you will get what you are looking for and believing for. What are you looking for? If you are looking for good and believing for good and expecting good, you will find goodwill. But if you are believing that bad things will happen and expecting to be harmed, those things will come to you.

This is the season of goodwill. I urge you: Start looking for good and believing for good. Believe that God is good all the time. Believe that even if something bad happens - God is still good! If something bad happens God is so good that He can bring good out of the bad! God is so good that He can even turn what the enemy means for harm into a blessing.

The Children of Israel were trapped between an army and the Red Sea with no way out – but God turned it to good, parted the Sea and took them across on dry land!

Paul and Silas were thrown into prison for preaching about Jesus – but God turned it to good and used that very prison to reach people for Christ.

Jesus was betrayed and crucified on a cross by evil men – but God turned it to good and used it to bring salvation to all who believe!

You might be in some kind of a prison today, but God can turn it to good!
You might be trapped in a tough place today, but God can turn it to good!
Whatever the enemy wants to use to harm you, God can turn it to good!

Can anybody praise God for His grace and glory this morning!

God is so good that He works everything together – not some things or most things or the just the good things – God works every single thing – the good the bad and the ugly – and He works them for your good – for His glory – and by His grace!!!