

**Christmas with Grace**  
**Pastor Joe Oakley**  
**GFC – 12/6/2020**

Welcome to the Christmas season! We've all had a tough year, but we've made it through by the grace of God! By the way, we need His grace to get through every single day!

That's why I'm beginning a new sermon series today called Christmas with Grace. Christmas is all about grace. It was because of grace that God sent His only Son to earth! It was because of grace that Jesus was born in a manger so He could die on a cross for our sins!

Jesus didn't send Jesus to earth because we are so great or loveable. He sent His Son because we are sinners headed for Hell apart from salvation. And salvation is all of grace. Ephesians 2:4-5 says:

*Because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.*

We're going on a journey to find the grace of God in the Christmas story. But first – I want to be sure you understand what grace is. It's kind of confusing because there are different meanings of the word grace.

- Grace can mean to be kind and polite to someone – like “He is a very gracious host.”
- Grace can mean elegance or beauty of movement – like, “She is such a graceful dancer.”
- We think grace is a short prayer of thanks you say before a meal. If it's a really good prayer – it's an amazing grace. Like - “Wow – Uncle Phil – that grace before dinner was pretty amazing.”

Grace is much more than this and I want to expand your understanding of grace today so that you can experience the power of God's grace. The most common definition of grace is God's unmerited favor. Unmerited means undeserved. Grace means you get something good you do not deserve.

What an awesome thought – that we don't have to earn anything from God. In fact we can't. Ephesians 2:8-9 says:

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Grace is a gift. Many people never understand this. They keep saying, “But I don't deserve it.” Of course you don't deserve it. That's why it's called grace.

Once you start talking about what you deserve you are out of the realm of grace and into the realm of works. Romans 11:6 says:

*And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.*

In other words - works and grace are mutually exclusive. Salvation is either by grace or by works. We just saw that the Bible says we're saved by grace. None of us can earn our way into heaven. Thank God for grace – God's unmerited favor!

Grace is also God's unconditional love. God loves without condition – there is nothing we do to earn it. God loves us without limit – there is no end to His love. We cannot earn the love of God, nor can we unearn it. Romans 8:31-32 says:

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*

Freely means graciously, without cost, unconditional. That means that you can do nothing to make God love you any more than He already does. Also, you can do nothing to make God stop loving you.

This kind of grace is truly amazing. You won't find it anywhere else. Grace makes Christianity different from every other religion because all other religions are based on people earning salvation. Christianity says you will never be good enough on your own. You are saved by grace and grace alone!

Grace is God's unmerited favor, God's unconditional love, and grace is God's unlimited power.

In 2 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul tells about how he was caught up to heaven where God gave Him visions and revelations so great he could not even speak them. In verses 7-9 he says:

*To keep me from becoming exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me. I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

Three times Paul prayed and asked God to take the thorn away. And God answered His prayer. And God's answer was, "No." I've had people tell me that God doesn't answer their prayers. To that I say, "God answers every prayer. You just might not like His answer." We think that God's only possible answer is "Yes." But sometimes God says no. Sometimes God says not yet. But He always answers!

The main thing I want you to see is what God told Paul –

*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*

Notice that God equates His grace with His strength. According to Strong's Bible Concordance, one of the meanings of grace is "divine influence upon the heart and life." There are many Bible verses teaching us that grace is the power of God. One of my favorites is 1 Corinthians 15:10

*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.*

In other words, anything good we accomplish is by the grace of God. The main thing I want you to understand is this: Not only is grace God's unconditional love and unmerited favor; it is also God's unlimited power. And 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. I've preached a lot of Christmas messages, but I don't believe I've preached one on the birth of John the Baptist.

John was the cousin of Jesus and he became the prophetic voice crying in the wilderness to prepare the way for the Messiah. John's parents had no children because his mother Elizabeth was barren, which was considered to be a disgrace in those days. John's father was a priest named Zachariah. whose turn came to Luke 1:5-17 says:

*There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years. So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."*

God's promise came true and Elizabeth became pregnant. That was the grace of God at work in the Christmas story. God's grace was the unmerited favor that chose Zachariah and Elizabeth to be John's parents. God's grace was the unlimited power that miraculously caused a barren woman to conceive a child.

As I said earlier – barrenness was considered to be a shameful disgrace in those days. There are many stories in the Bible about barren women like Rachel and Hannah who experienced great pain because they could not have a child.

They also experienced the pain and humiliation of people shaming them with their words. Listen to what Elizabeth teaches us about grace in Luke 1:24-25:

*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 been shamed by other people. And we've all sinned and brought disgrace upon ourselves.

But the message of Christmas is that God loved us when we were yet sinners and He graciously sent His Son to die on a cross so that we can be saved from sin. Not only are we saved from sin, but we are saved from the shame of sin.

There are about 20 Hebrew and Greek words for shame. Biblical definitions of shame are –

- Pain – physical and/or spiritual from a wound, hurt or insult
- Confusion
- To blush – to look down
- Disgrace – reproach – contempt – dishonor – condemnation
- One Greek word for shame is entropē – which means to turn inward – to turn on one's self.

Put it all together for my definition of shame – Shame is a painful feeling of confusion, condemnation, worthlessness and despair which causes you to turn on yourself and to hide from God and others.

That's what Adam and Eve did when they sinned in the garden. Shame caused them to cover up and hide from God. And many of us live lives of cover ups and hiding.

Let me differentiate between healthy shame and unhealthy shame. Healthy shame is a feeling of guilt due to sin. It is convicting and constructive because it shows us where we need to change.

Many people do not have a healthy sense of shame.

Jeremiah wrote about this in Jeremiah 6:15

*Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush.*

Healthy shame that is a result of conviction of sin drives us to God. On the other hand - unhealthy shame is false guilt or condemnation that is destructive – it drives us away from God.

Unhealthy shame says: I am worthless    I am a mistake    I am nothing  
I don't belong    I deserve to be abandoned

What are the sources of unhealthy shame? Shame always involves others. If there were no one else around, there would be no reason for shame.

There are only four possible sources of shame: God, others, self or Satan. God will never shame you. That leaves only three options, others, self or Satan. Ultimately it is Satan. But he usually shames us through relationships – family and friends. He can also shame us through our culture – that's what happened to Elizabeth who was disgraced because of barrenness.

How have you responded to the voices that have shamed you? Incorrect responses include to believe them, to accept them as truth, to hide or cover up. Instead you need to resist the lies of the enemy that shame you and believe the truth of God that will set you free!

The most important thing is knowing that everything we have done or will ever do is under the blood of Christ! He bore our sin and our shame on the cross. Isaiah 53:3 says:

*He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like someone people turned away from; He was despised, and we did not value Him.*

Even though Jesus had nothing to be ashamed of, he faced the humiliation and shame that we deserved. Why? So that he could take our shame from us! Hebrews 12:2 says:

*For the joy set before Him Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame.*

That means that he even though Jesus endured our shame on the cross, He despised the shame.

He didn't deserve to be humiliated in that way.

He deserved honor and yet received dishonor.

He deserved praise and adoration and yet received cursing and shame. Why?

Because He was not dying for anything He did wrong.

He was dying for our sin and shame.

He died so what we can be free from condemnation and shame! All it takes to receive that is faith because Romans 9:33 says:

*And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.*

God will never shame you! 2 Timothy 1:9 says:

*I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.*

Shame comes when you believe other voices rather than God's voice! So when you hear a voice saying you can't do anything right – you believe God's voice that says you can do all things through Christ!

When you hear a voice saying, "You're no good" - you believe God's voice that says you are the righteousness of God in Christ.

When you hear a voice saying you are not loveable - you believe God's voice that says nothing will separate you from the love of God.

When you hear a voice saying you don't belong or fit in anywhere - you believe God's voice that says you belong to the family of God and you are a perfect fit for the body of Christ.

When you hear a voice saying, "You should've never been born" - you believe God's voice that says He knit you together in your mother's womb.

And when you hear a voice saying, "You'll never amount to anything" – you believe God's voice that says He has plans for you that are good and not evil, plans to bless you not harm you, plans to give you a future and a hope!

When you hear a voice condemning and shaming you – you believe God's voice that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!

And God says, "My grace is sufficient." According to Thayer's Greek Lexicon, the word sufficient has 2 main meanings: "to be possessed of unfailing strength; and to be enough."

So, God's grace is God's power and God's power is always enough. Grace is the power of God to save us. And grace is the power of God to get us through what God wants us to go through.

No matter what difficulties you may be facing right now, God grace will always be enough.

If you need financial help, His grace is enough.

If you need healing, His grace is enough.

If you need help in a relationship, His grace is enough.

It doesn't matter what the devil or the world throws at you, because God's grace will always be enough.

His grace is enough when you're on a mountain top and His grace is enough when you're in a valley!

His grace is enough when you're flowing in the river of God and His grace is enough when you're in a barren desert.

His grace is enough whether His answer is yes or no or wait!  
No matter what, His grace is always enough!

So, hang on the God's promise in Isaiah 61:7:

*Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs.*

God promised to give you His blessing instead of shame and disgrace! And God's grace will bring you through whatever you face in life! Romans 5:1-2 says:

*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.*

God's grace is not going to let you fall.  
God's grace empowers you to stand and fight and overcome!  
God's grace gives you the strength to go through whatever you go through!  
Romans 5:17 tells us that:

*Those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.*

God's grace gives you the power to reign in life!  
God's grace brought the Children of Israel through the Red Sea.  
God's grace brought Daniel through the lion's den.  
God's grace brought David through the fight with Goliath.  
God's grace brought Elizabeth through the shame of barrenness.  
God's grace brought the disciples through the storm on the sea.

And God's grace will bring you through whatever you will go through.

I ask you today – Have you experienced the power of God's grace?

Has His grace saved you?

This Christmas make sure you've received these gifts from God:

The gift of His unconditional love that sent His Son to die for your sins.

The gift of His unmerited favor that saves you from your sins.

And the gift of His unlimited power that sets you free from shame!