

It's Amazing: The Generosity of God

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[0 : 0 0] There's a verse I want to draw to your attention right at the outset because it's kind of pivotal to what we're going to think about. So it's verse 32 of Romans 8. We're told this that God did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all. So how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things? He did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all. How will he not also along with him graciously give us all things? And there's a great logic in those words that we're going to come and look at in a minute. The logic is this, if God is willing to crucify his son for you, then he is willing of course to give you every other kind of blessing that you could ever need. That's the logic that Paul, the writer here, is putting in front of us. So that's the logic of grace that we will sort of come to in a few moments but before we come to look at the logic of grace in a little more detail I want us to think about the lack of grace because often although we say that we put grace at the center of our Christian lives and at the center of our beliefs and the way we live, often the church is actually held in contempt because we seem to lack grace to many onlookers. There was an opinion piece in the New York Times recently by somebody called Nicholas Christoff. He's a Pulitzer Prize-winning American journalist. I'm going to give you a little quote from what he wrote in the

New York Times. He said this, in these polarized times few words conjure as much distaste in liberal circles as evangelical Christian. That's partly because evangelicals came to be associated over the last 25 years with blow hard scolds. His words not mine. When the Reverend Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson discussed in television whether the 9-11 attacks were God's punishment on feminist gays and secularists, God should have sued them for defamation. Partly because of such self-righteousness, the entire evangelical movement often has been pilloried among progressives as reactionary, myopic, anti-intellectual and if anything immoral. So there's somebody writing about how evangelical Christians are portrayed or understood in the wider community.

People see it as a self-righteous, hypocritical, reactionary and even immoral. And it's incredible that the church has gained itself such a reputation when we claim that what we stand for is the grace of the Gospel.

And there are two reasons why we get this kind of reputation, isn't it? One is that often people don't want to acknowledge the good that Christians do. That's true. People don't want to acknowledge the good that is done. But the second reason is one that we need to take much more seriously, which is this.

That grace seems often to have a very shallow impact on our lives personally. We hold to it as an idea, but we fail to embrace it as a lifestyle. And we lack grace in our dealings with each other and in our dealings with those outside the church. Why is it that we're not known for our extreme compassion, for our extreme kindness, our extreme generosity and goodness and the overflowing grace from our lives? And the only reason, surely, or the only explanation that we can find for that is that we're not allowing the grace of God to reach into the depths of our hearts as we ought to. We lack grace. And if we lack grace, it's because we are not allowing the God of grace to shape our character and our lives. So I want to go from looking at the lack of grace, which is pretty clear, to looking at the logic of grace, which I hope will be equally clear as we look at what Paul says here. And our lack of grace is really incredible when we look at these verses and see how amazingly gracious God is. Because evangelical

[5 : 2 1] Bible believing, gospel loving Christianity, is based on extreme grace. If we're thinking about the different angles that we've looked at grace from in this sequence of sermons, then the angle that I want to take today is that God's grace is so extreme. It goes so far beyond anything that we could anticipate or imagine. The gospel, the Christian faith, is based on the extreme grace of God. God goes to incredible extremes of generosity and of kindness and of self-sacrifice and of

love and he does so for us. And the extreme of God's grace is depicted for us in verse 32 of Romans 8. Now the background in the book of Romans is a background where the Apostle Paul wants to establish that all human beings are the same. Whether you're religious or non-religious, whether you're rebellious or not, whether you're respectable or not, underneath the cover, underneath the skin, we're all exactly the same. We've all fallen short of what

God has asked from us. We don't demonstrate or live the love towards God and the love towards others that God has commanded. And so Paul depicts then a background in Romans of human rebellion and antagonism towards God, animosity, enmity towards God. And how does God respond to this? Well, he responds with the extremes of his grace. He takes his son, he does not spare him, he gives him up for us all. So we need to try and understand then the picture that Paul's giving to us here in verse 32. God did not spare his own son. What does that mean?

Well, I want you to think of heaven, first of all. Try and think of heaven, the dwelling place of God from all eternity, and there God dwells as a triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And that eternal life of God is characterized by many wonderful and beautiful things. It's characterized by absolute purity. It's characterized by utter goodness. And it's characterized by the most incredible love, the love that the God the Father has for God the Son, the love that the Son has for the Holy Spirit and for the Father. And so the trinity lives and exists for all eternity in the beauty of divine love shared between the persons of the Godhead. Heaven is a place of glory, of worship, of rejoicing day after day for all eternity. People, the creatures, the angels of heaven rejoicing in the amazing goodness, being love of God. And then a day arrives in heaven that is like no other day. A day that has never been experienced in the whole history of the universe. And on that day heaven begins to tremble and the universe holds its breath in tension and anticipation. Because today the Son stands before his Father, not as a loved Son, but as a sinner bearing the guilt of the world. And the Father doesn't stand in front of the Son as a benevolent, compassionate Father. He stands before the Son as a judge. So the Father-Son relationship has been transformed to a judge and a sinner relationship. And so heaven waits to see how will the judge of all the earth deal with the beloved Son of God. Well, if the judge of all the earth looks down on his beloved Son and he declares him guilty. And because he's declared his son guilty, he has to pass sentence on him. And the question that heaven asks is, what kind of sentence will the divine Father pass upon his own dear son? Surely he'll give him a break, surely he'll go lightly, maybe he'll show him a little bit of mercy, a little bit of compassion. And what does the Bible says? It says he did not spare his son.

That's a judicial term. And it's saying that the judge did not spare the Son one bit. God's punishment was not mitigated in the case of Jesus. God hands him over, we're told in verse 32. He gave him up. The judge gives up the Son to justice.

Not because the Son is sin, but because the Son has taken our sin and made it his. He now bears responsibility for our sin before the throne of God. And as the one responsible for our sin, he must bear God's sentence on sin. So he has spared nothing. The sentence comes from the throne of justice. He must die. And so God the Father hands his Son over to the executioners, hands him over to death, to hell, to everything that sin embraces. This is not a commonplace event. This is unique. And it's unthinkable to those who have lived in the presence of glory in heaven. To see the Son handed over, to see the Son handed over by the Father, to see the Son taken away to death, to see the Son suffering the pains of hell. How can

[12:52] God do this? How can the Father bring himself to such an extreme place only because of grace? Because of his incredible mercy and love towards sinners who don't deserve it. And so we see the logic that Paul wants to argue. That God has done this for us, and if God has done this for us, then he will do everything else. He will graciously give us all things. So this is a greater to a lesser kind of argument. If he does this, then we can be sure that he will do that. If he gives his Son, if he goes to that extreme on our behalf, then we know that if he's willing to give his Son, he's willing to give us absolutely anything else that we ever need. The Father gives the most important and precious thing he has, his own Son. And so if he's giving you Jesus, he's not going to hold back on any other blessing. That's the logic of grace. You may doubt God at times, you may doubt

God's provision for you, you may doubt God's care for you, you may doubt that God is there for you. But Paul says never doubt, never doubt, because he crucified Jesus for you. And if he's crucified Jesus for you, he's going to be there. Of course he's going to be there for you. He's not going to crucify his Son for you and then walk away from you later on. He's not going to let the Son bear the pain of hell, and then at some other point turn us back on you because you've let him down.

Because God knew who you were and what you would do before he crucified the Son. He knew all about you and he still crucified the Son. And so he will give you everything, everything, everything God will give you, every blessing, every joy that you will ever need. God is promising it to you through his Son

Jesus crucified. You will like no good thing, as the Psalm tells us Psalm 23.

All the joys, all the blessings, all the riches of heaven are yours. How can you be sure? Because of the cross. This is what it's like to live as a Christian. It's great to live as a Christian because we have these amazing assurances and promises and guarantees. And these guarantees are reliable and strong because they're written in the blood of the cross. And so as a Christian I enjoy a life of amazing security and blessing. And so do you if you're a believer in Jesus Christ. Because you know this, that God is always going to relate to you through grace. He doesn't treat us as our sins deserve, our pride, our rebellion, our lust, our anger, our lovelessness, our brutality, our cruelty, our selfishness.

He doesn't treat us in the basis of those things. He treats us in the basis of grace. He always relates to you with extreme grace. He always shows you more mercy than you deserve, more love, more kindness than you could ever earn. From the fullness of his grace, John writes in John chapter 1, we have received one blessing after another. You see God doesn't give you a little grace. God doesn't even give you a lot of grace. God gives you more grace than you can ever imagine.

[16:59] Grace upon grace, that's what John is saying in chapter 1 of his gospel. It's like the waves of the ocean rolling in, never ending. Grace following grace.

Sons and daughters who trust in Jesus Christ are never treated according to their sin. You know what he says in Romans? He says, the more you your sin abounds, the more his grace will abound. The more you mess up, the more God will clean up. Isn't that amazing? He's down here in our lives cleaning up our mess, washing up our lives. God's own hands cleansing us, strengthening us, coming after us to tidy up the brokenness that we caused to ourselves and others.

What a great God. He's not stingy, he's not reluctant, he's extremely gracious, extremely gracious, utterly gracious and good. If you're starting off a new life to us now as a student in Edinburgh, you might have some anxieties, you will experience some loneliness, you may struggle spiritually or personally.

God says, I will be here for you. I will give you every blessing that you will need. I've already crucified my son for you, so I'm never going to abandon you.

Nothing will ever separate you from my love shown through Jesus Christ. Others may be struggling in different ways. And to all of us in the darkness and difficulties that we experience of life, there is this great light that just keeps pulsing in all the time. It's the light of grace, it's the light of mercy, it's the light of love, it doesn't ever switch off. It's there in the Word of God illuminating all our circumstances with the beauty of His love and the kindness of His mercy and the greatness of His grace. Now some of you may be listening, thinking well, fine words, sounds good but is it real or is it all flying spaghetti monsters, fairies and mythical nonsense? How can we get any kind of handle on the reality of what I'm talking about here? And we get a handle on it, I think, through the historical reality of Jesus of Nazareth. That's certainly where

[20:17] I go, because we know that Jesus of Nazareth, lived, died, was crucified. And we know that to be true from a number and a variety of sources, Christian sources, Jewish sources, Roman sources, history provides more than ample evidence for the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth. And we know about Jesus of course, most clearly and most certainly from the Bible. And as Christians we've got great confidence in the Bible that the more we read the Bible, the more the Bible authenticates itself and its message. It demonstrates to us its own reliability and its own truth. And so if you're curious about Jesus but skeptical, then you need to start to read the Gospels and find out about Jesus for yourself. And to see that what we teach about Jesus has real historical foundation. He claimed to be the Son of God. He lived, He died and He rose to life and He lives forever. This has been examined again and again and again throughout history and found to be reliable and credible. So I don't want you to dismiss this as an attractive but insubstantial idea. I want you to see not just the beauty of the Christian message but the substance of the Christian message as well. There's a lack of grace often in our lives. There's the logic of grace which says how can there be a lack when God is just pouring out grace upon grace upon grace upon your life? How can you lack grace when God has been so generous and so extreme in His grace? The last thing I want to talk about for a few moments is just the love of grace. Because if grace is really

working in our lives, what it does is it generates love. It uproots us from our selfishness and our self-righteousness and our self-justifying ways of life and it creates within us an incredible love for God because we're bowled over by the mercy of God in the gospel. We're thinking He didn't spare His own Son for me and when we begin to grasp the reality of that, the amazing grace that's been shown to us, then our hearts begin to melt, our hearts begin to soften, we begin to experience an overwhelming thankfulness and gratitude towards God and we want to show Him how grateful we are and we want to express to Him the love that we'll be getting to experience. And so I want to say that we should really, as Christians, show our love to God with great joy. We should rejoice in the grace of God towards us. In Jeremiah 32, God promises this to a bunch of people who had really gone very far away from Him and were very hostile to God and He says this to them, He says, I will never stop doing you good. I will rejoice in doing

you good. And if God rejoices in doing good to us, then surely we should rejoice in God doing good to us as well, sharing the joy of God and in the joy of heaven. But our problem is this, isn't it, that we sometimes refuse to enjoy God's grace because we feel we don't deserve it or have not earned it. I don't deserve to be happy because I'm such a grim, terrible, awful person because I've done this or I've done that because I'm ashamed of who I am. I don't deserve this kindness, this grace, this love, these blessings, these opportunities, these joys.

And so we always have to remember that what grace is saying is, you don't forget, you don't deserve it. You don't deserve God's forgiveness and kindness. If you deserved it, it wouldn't be grace. Grace is a kindness and forgiveness, you don't deserve it. I've told this story lots of times before, probably here and certainly in other churches, but it's the story of John Newton who wrote the hymn, Amazing Grace, and he grew up with a Christian mother, sort of vacillated between trying to be a Christian and not wanting to be a Christian throughout his teenage years. He went to sea when he was 11 years old.

His father was in the merchant marine. So this is in the 1700s and being at sea in the 1700s was a pretty grim lifestyle and a very debauched lifestyle. So as a teenager he's caught up in all of this. When he's 17 he decides he's an atheist.

Atheism is not a new phenomenon or phenomenon and so he renounces his faith and he becomes a real persecutor of Christians that he meets at sea. Hates Christians, hates God. If he meets a Christian he just tries to debunk everything they believe and he says he was the worst guy to be with on the ship. At one point he is a trading slaves of course and he's on an island off the West Coast of Africa, Plantation Island, waiting to take a shipment of slaves to the Caribbean. So he's involved in this incredibly cruel and destructive and inhuman trade. But he doesn't feel any remorse or guilt over that. And while he's on Plantation Island though he becomes extremely ill. He almost dies. He was so ill that he was kind of left on his own and abandoned. And even the slaves would come by and chuck stuff at him and abuse him. And he says on that island I was a wretch, the lowest of the low. Now he recovered from that illness and he took that cargo, if you can call it that, of slaves on a ship to the Caribbean. And the ship was caught in a tremendous storm that lasted for a long time, days and days on end. And at one point during this storm he was down below and he was sent up onto deck to take the helm, to take the wheel of the ship. And as he was going up the ladder, I can't quite remember what happened here, but he slipped or fell as he was going up the ladder and somebody was sent up in his place. The guy who goes up in his place to take the wheel of the ship is swept off the deck of the boat by a wave and drowns. So now Newton has to go up. And he's standing on the deck of the ship. And think of it, you know, the sky again is dark and threatening, the wind is howling, he's standing on the soaking wet timbers of the ship and the waves are crashing over him. And he's thinking, that man, if he's died in my place, I was the one who was supposed to go up the ladder. He's drowned because of me. And he knows at that moment that he's staring down the battle of eternity. And he thinks to himself in that moment, he thinks if I die now, I would justly be condemned forever. And he says to himself, I'm longing to cry out for forgiveness. But he thinks to himself, how can I cry out for forgiveness? Look at my life. I don't deserve to be forgiven for any of it. And you know what he does? He gets in his knees and he prays for a forgiveness he doesn't deserve. And God replied, that's grace, forgiveness that's not deserve. You may think you don't deserve grace and God says amen, you don't. But that's not what this is about. It's about giving you what you don't deserve.

[29 : 40] Giving you love, hope, joy, and a great future. Many of the blessings, if I had more time, I would spell them out for you. But many of the blessings of the Christian life are set out here in

Romans 8. Our adoption as children into the family of God, sons and daughters of the living God by which we cry, Abba Father.

Our hope of the new creation, the promise that all things work for the good of those who love him, the promise that God is for us and so no one could be against us, the promise that no one can condemn us because Christ has justified us, the promise that we are more than conquerors in all the circumstances of life and the promise that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God. So all those promises of grace come to us here along with Jesus Christ. He's accompanied as he's given to us in the gospel, Jesus is accompanied by so many promises, a new identity, sons and daughters of God, a new future in the new creation, a new eternity, living in the unbreakable love of God and that is worth rejoicing in and celebrating. And so please learn to live a life of extreme grace towards others. You see so often we show little bits of grace. We give grace in small doses. We weigh up how much forgiveness does this person deserve? Are they really sorry or not? We coldly calculate what percentage of income the poor deserve. We wallow in the misery of others. We delight in the downfall of our enemies. We are utterly ungracious so much at the time and God wants to change us and say you need to love without condition, give till it hurts and serve to you to your blade. You need to forgive and then forgive and then forgive again and forgive more and keep on forgiving all the time, you graceless creatures. And we so struggle with this. We find it impossible to extend grace consistently and repeatedly. Sometimes we show a little grace joyfully and sometimes we show a little grace through gritted teeth. But we battle against it.

Our anger rears itself up. Our resentments, our grudges, we get tired of showing compassion. We want our money for ourselves. We become selfish. We've come afraid. Whatever it is we find there are so many things that just intrude in our lives and stop us from expressing the extremes of grace to others that God has expressed to us. And so I want to say that the only way that you can become a person who shows grace in great proportion is if you are living in the grace of God. What you need is a great torrent of God's grace running through your life. What I need is a great torrent of God's grace filling me up, taking up more and more of my heart, my mind, my desires, and my emotions so that I'm not governed by my pettiness or my hardness or my selfishness, but I'm governed by the loving grace of God owning my heart. And the amazing grace of God reshaping my character so it's like his character. And God can do that in you because he has freely given us all we need in his Son to live godly, gracious life. So I want to plead with you. Turn your back on a petty Christianity and embrace the glory of grace and let the extremes of God's grace transform how you live, think, and relate to others. What a great thing God has done for us. I went to see Arcade Fire last week. They were playing at Edinburgh Castle and they were saying when they got the tour list for the gigs it said Edinburgh, the castle, and they thought the castle was some kind of arena in the suburbs of

Edinburgh. They didn't realise at the time that it was actually a castle. And so they said it was like the most spectacular venue they'd ever played in. And it is a really spectacular thing, the castle. You walk about Edinburgh, drive about Edinburgh, and you see the castle from so many different angles. And whenever it catches your eye on the skyline you just think it's so impressive.

[34 : 53] It's so grand and powerful and strong and eye-catching and you maybe just stop for a second in your mind and admire it. And I want to say to you too just at this moment stop and admire Jesus Christ. You know when we look at the Bible again and what we see, we're seeing Jesus from so many angles, new perspectives. And every time we get a fresh glimpse of Jesus we have to just stop and let our breath be taken away and look up with awe and love and admiration and say what a saviour.

Jesus Christ, what a saviour. What a Lord, what a God. Worthy, worthy as He. Give Him your praise, give Him your love, give Him your worship. That's what it is to be a Christian, to love and worship Jesus. Are you a Christian? What's keeping you from loving and worshiping Jesus? There's nothing to keep you because God is gracious. He's opened the door to you, He's provided the way of salvation, He's offering you forgiveness. So don't hold back. Let's stop and say a word of prayer and then we'll sing our last song. Lord God Almighty, we pray that we would hear the word of God spoken to us today and we pray that we would respond to the word of God at this moment in our own lives. We pray that we would stop to admire Jesus Christ and if we don't know Jesus, we pray then that those who do not know you would at this moment call out to you for the grace and forgiveness that you provide freely through your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.