

Our Great Example - Christ

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[0 : 00] And I wanted to do that by taking a journey through John's Gospel. So I'm going to ask you to turn up various passages in John's Gospel as we taste a little bit of his grace in action as the Savior.

We read in 1 John chapter 4 this great testimony of who God is. God is love.

Twice in the passage we read that God is love. In the nature of his being, we know he's consuming fire. We know he's light, but we also know he is love.

All of that comes into the totality of his being, that he is love, that he is holiness, that he is light, and he is consuming fire and justice.

So we bring all these things into his character and recognize that because of them, even his love for us will be something that is challenging and different, not soft and sentimental as we so often want it to be, not just love like ours, it's love greater than, unique from and different to ours.

[1 : 13] But nonetheless, what we receive in Christ in our own lives. So God is love, that's the great theological reality for us.

And in John chapter 1, and I'm going to look at John chapter 1 on Christmas morning when we're in church, that Jesus became flesh.

We see that the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word being Jesus becomes flesh. So in Jesus, we see God in the flesh.

What does God look like? What does he look like? We all want to know what God looks like. What God would look like? He looks like Jesus. So we're going to look at God in Jesus out working grace so that we can live that grace as Christians, because we've been given grace, been saved by grace, it's God's love and merited love for us.

But He also empowers us with grace to live as believers, to live as Christians. So we're going to reflect, I hope, I'm not going to apply very much today, I'm just going to reflect, and maybe on Wednesday evening in the city groups, you can reflect more and apply more of this truth in your life and in our lives glimpse through John and reflect one or two, just pick out one or two instances in Jesus' life which remind us of His grace, what grace looks like and how it should look like for us.

[2 : 49] So I'm not going to read round the whole stories, I'm just going to pick a couple of verses and I hope that you'll plug into the story. If you don't know the story, then I hope you'll take time maybe at some point today to read that story, the notes that you have, the bulletin sheet will give you different references for them.

But in looking at this, what the love of Jesus is like, what the love of God is like, what grace looks like to us and also in us.

As we conclude this series of grace, we see in the first place is a love for the outsider, isn't it? A love for the outsider, a love of God, grace of God.

John chapter 4 in verse 9, early on in Jesus' public ministry, he speaks to the woman, the Samaritan woman.

And her incredulity of that is highlighted by her response to him, you are a Jew, I am a Samaritan.

[3 : 52] In verse 9, I am a Samaritan woman, how can you ask me for a drink? Now that goes over our heads, doesn't it?

We don't think much about that, do we? We just kind of read through that as if it's just part of the story. But it's the incredulity that this Samaritan woman is being asked for help by a Jew who is a man and more than that a religious leader of his day who would culturally never do such a thing.

Not only was she of a different race that were enemies of the Jews and were looked down on by the Jews, but she also was a Samaritan woman and the Jewish men would not speak to Jewish women.

In fact, they wouldn't even speak to their own women in public. How can you ask me for a drink? It is love for the outsider.

Jesus reaches beyond his cultural comfort zone and he reaches out with the gospel. He broke down the cultural barriers of his day because he was seeing a person.

[5 : 16] He was seeing a soul. He was seeing a person who needed grace and who needed God in her life.

His care for her, his love for her, engaged with her and was willing to break down the opposition and the questions and the dissatisfaction even of his disciples when they came back and saw him speaking to her.

It reached out. And what's more, it's not even so much about Jesus here, but it's about the woman. She had her perceptions of what a Jewish man would or wouldn't do in relation to her and he shatters that perception of how a believer or how someone who follows God should act towards her.

And Jesus breaks down these perceptions and breaks down these barriers and reaches out to her. And I just want to leave the question with you this morning as we seek to live our lives of grace in our society.

Who is our perceived enemy? Or who perceives us as the enemy? And that's an important question culturally, isn't it?

[6 : 45] In your life and in my life and in the thinking of those around us in the society, who is it in our society that would think that Christians would have no time for them and wouldn't speak to them and wouldn't be interested in them?

And who do we need to break down the barriers with? Not only from our side, but also from their side. I would argue very strongly the homosexual, the LGBT community.

I would argue the prison community. I would argue the atheist community who see us as the enemy. And who wouldn't expect us to be interested?

Who wouldn't expect us to care? Who wouldn't expect us to show grace? Whose perception of us is that we are disinterested, far away, unconcerned, morally separate, morally disengaged from them.

It is love for the outsider, the outsider in society, the outsider in our own perception and even in the perceptions of others towards us breaking down that.

[7 : 54] That is grace. It's love for the outsider. It's also love for the helpless in John chapter 4, just moving on a little bit more. And in verses, sorry, it's John chapter 5, in verses, I've got that wrong on the bulletin sheet, John chapter 5, verses 6 and 7, Jesus comes to the healing of the paralysed man at the pool, that amazing pool of water near Bethesda, where people once a year, when the waters was moved, would get help down to the pool and would be healed as they went into the water.

Jesus speaks to the man. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he'd been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, do you want to get well?

Sir, the invalid replied, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I'm trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.

See this is the outworking of grace in the life of this man, for Jesus is outworking of compassion. I don't know why Jesus doesn't heal everyone there that day.

That's a mystery. But he heals the one who had no one to help him. He had no one. He helps the helpless.

[9 : 18] He reaches out to the one that had nobody to lift him into the pool at that point. That's who Jesus focuses in on at this point in the outworking of grace, love for the helpless, who recognize their helplessness, who recognize their need.

Now that also as we outwork our lives of grace is a consideration and a thought process that we go through, that we have, grace gives us kindness and compassion.

We saw that last week, it gives us compassion in our personal lives and in the society we live in, that we are to be a people and you're to be an individual who has a concern and a voice for the marginalized and for the powerless and for the ignored and for those with no voice and for those with no influence who nobody cares about, who no one's interested in.

It's not just enough for us to luxuriate in our grace and give thanks to God for this condition of the life that we have and ignore all those around us saying, well, it's really their own fault anyway.

Because that's not the message and it's not the attitude of grace if we understand ourselves and our spiritual need.

[10 : 48] We can only say that if we think, God owes me salvation and God chose me because I'm so special and better than others.

That's the subtext. I've been very challenged by Mez McConnell who works in Nidry, who spoke to our young people a few weeks ago, who's been doing some informal statistical analysis of the society in which we live.

And he has examined through statistics that he got from Tier Fund that the lowest 5% of socially deprived housing in Scotland, he's been analysing these particular housing schemes throughout our cities and towns.

And as far as he can make out, 50% of them have no gospel witness whatsoever. 50% of them, the lowest 5% of socially deprived housing in Scotland.

And the other 50% have underfunded, under-supported and under-resourced struggling work.

[11 : 58] Some of it gospel focus, some of it not. And it's a challenge to us. We are, whether we like it or not, a middle class institution.

Why is it that we have no desire to reach out to these areas, to reach out to these places of need?

Because grace is grace for the helpless. But it's also love and grace through tears moving on to John chapter 11.

You see Jesus at the death of Lazarus. Jesus in John chapter 11 and verse 35, very famous words. Or maybe from verse 33, when Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

But if you laid to him, he asked, come and see, Lord, they replied. Jesus wept. And the Jews said, see how he loved him. But some of them said, could not he, you open the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man from dying.

[13 : 09] Christ in his grace and in his love recognised with compassion and with desire for people it is love through tears. He has moved to you.

I know he's going on to heal Lazarus. Maybe they didn't recognise that when he was going to do that. Maybe they wonder why he didn't come earlier. I'm not going to go into the theology at the moment of that particular event.

Why was he crying? If he knew, why was he in tears? If he knew that he was about to heal Lazarus, well, I also knew that Lazarus was going to die again. But surely he's moved, he's deeply moved in spirit.

Remember we saw that word last week about his bowels of compassion, having bowels being moved from the very insides out, just moved his whole being.

Because he could see there and then with spiritual eyes he could see the effects and the brokenness of sin, the degradation it causes, the suffering, the illness, the pain, the separation.

[14 : 11] That moved him and he was moved to tears by that. Jesus wept along with those that he loved. Surely he also wept because he knew that there was cynics watching him, who even after the resurrection of Lazarus, who saw the resurrection of Lazarus, raised from the dead, who saw that and who said, right, we really need to get rid of this guy.

We need to get rid of him. Because he's going to take away our power and our influence. Isn't that unbelievable? Did he not weep for these Pharisees who were so concerned about their position among the Romans and their authority that they would rather kill him, get rid of him, who raised from the dead, than acknowledge him as who he was, tears for their blindness and for their unbelief, tears as he considered possibly even his own, a redemptive work that lay ahead shortly in the future.

Grace. But he weeps with those who are weeping, taking it as most shallow and its most basic reading. He weeps with those who are weeping.

And it's what grace does, is it not? Grace weeps with those who weep. We weep with those who are mourning. We're not cynical about their mourning. We're not callous and cold.

We don't say to people, wow, things will be fine. They'll be raised on the last day of their Christians. Death is in the end. Death has removed this thing. There may be a time for all of these things, but there's also a time for weeping with those who weep and not plowing platitudes into their experience, but just weeping with them.

[15 : 56] That's what grace does. But grace also and love is a love which is revealed to its full extent. Jesus reveals that in John 13.

When he washes his disciples' feet, John washes his disciples' feet. John 13. It was just before the Passover feast.

Jesus knew the time had come for him to leave this world, to go to the Father, having loved his only one in the world. He now showed them. It's not an amazing statement. He showed them the full extent of his love.

Spin forward to one, John one. God is love. God is love. And now here on earth, he shows what a full extent of that love.

And he does it. Revealing the essence of God. How would you describe the essence of God? How would you describe, if you were asked to describe, the most amazing extent of the love of God?

[16 : 56] How would you? Would it ever have been, oh, well, he washed his disciples' feet? No, no. We think it's something much grander, something much more glorious. But here he shows the full extent of his love because it's pointing towards not just that sacrificial act, that menial act in and of itself, but it points towards the cross.

And Matthew 20:28, the Son of Man came to not to be served, but to serve, to give his life a ransom for many. So service is linked with giving his life.

So here he's doing the most menial of all acts of service. And it points towards him giving his life on the cross. So it's an act of service. His love at the full extent is giving himself.

That's what it is. That's the full extent of grace. It's not giving a bit of himself. It's not giving his teaching. It's not just giving this or that. It's giving himself and his very essence.

He's giving, sacrificing himself, both in menial service washing the disciples' feet. There couldn't have been a more menial task to do.

[18 : 09] It was given to the lowest of the lowest of all slaves to do. It's embarrassing. It's humiliating. Disciples are embarrassed by it. No, please, don't do the master.

Don't do these things. Please, you're humiliating me. What would you be like? What would we be like? We've just become so familiarized with his teaching.

Yeah, Jesus washes the disciples. No problem. Absolutely humiliating is what he does in giving of himself. There's nothing that he could do to express his love more tangibly at this point than washing his disciples' feet, pointing towards his crucifixion and the giving of his own life.

That defines God. How would you define God? This defines God, giving himself for his people.

If you can't see that, if you can't see that, and if you can't see your need to respond to that, that's a spiritual blindness that you need to pray about.

[19 : 21] What do you think is a good Christian? How do you define a good Christian? Someone who understands everything that's happening. Someone who has great faith and strong Christian walk.

Someone who's successful in their Christian life, whatever that means. Someone who has lots of gifts. Do you ever define the great Christian as the one who cleans the toilets?

The one who serves doing the rubbish tasks? The one who goes to help someone that nobody else sees who cleans someone's bedsores?

Christ's name. That's the great Christian. That is blessing. That is the big one from heaven. That is what it is to be a great Christian.

It's straight from the throne room. You'll never be more like Jesus Christ when you're serving and giving of yourself to others wholeheartedly with all your body, mind and soul.

[20 : 29] Giving of yourself, loving to the full extent, is when you, I'll go on just to say that in another way just before we finish, but it's loving to the full extent.

But grace in Christ's life and love is also revealed in his prayer life. There'll be another hundred sermons that you could do on the prayer life of Jesus Christ, but it reveals his grace, it reveals his compassion, it reveals his concern.

John 17, some great, great, great bits in this prayer. It's all great. But he prays in grace for his people to be united.

That's what he prays for in verse 23, I and them and you and me, or verse 22, I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one. I and them and you and me, may they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Love and prayer, he's praying for the unity in grace. He prays for your unity, our unity as a congregation, our unity as Christians with other believers because it's the great sign of the Trinity.

[21 : 47] It's a great sign of God among us that we are united with him. It's a great sign of grace. What do we think is orthodox?

Again, I ask, what is orthodoxy? Dividing, splitting, becoming ever more pure and tiny and insignificant and unimportant.

No, orthodoxy is unity like the unity of the Trinity. Now that is for us, that's hard, that's humbling, that's self-denying.

It's easy to want uniformity where we're all the same, where everyone thinks like me and acts like me and believes like me. That's uniformity.

But you will find ever decreasing circles that end up just with yourself. Nobody was like me. There are not many and they're all dying.

[22 : 47] But grace is unity with all the dirtiness and difficulty and tension that that brings into our lives, all the forgiveness, all the patience, all the compassion.

All of that is involved, all the sacrifice and all the time and all the energy that's involved. He prays for that unity. But he also prays wonderfully here.

He prays for company, for the company of his own children, for the company of his own people in verse 24. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me, where I am.

That's his prayer. He loves the people that he is coming to die for and he wants their company. That's the ultimate will of God. That's the ultimate end of salvation, is that we as Christians will be with God.

We will be in his company. He has come to be among us, Emmanuel, but we will be with him. Jesus says, Father, that's what I want. That is grace at work in my life. I want them.

[23 : 58] I want them. I just want to be in their company. I want them because you've given them to me and that is why I'm dying. That is the goal of our lives.

The reality of our lives is to be in Christ's company and to know that company eternally in heaven. It's love and prayer. It's a great prayer and I hope that in grace we pray that also, not just for our relationship with Jesus, but for one another as well.

That's what we're going to do. I always find it just amazing in my own heart and I guess in maybe in others too, that we spend so much time being divided from one another and being angry and separate and judgmental.

I'm just not sure how it's going to work out in heaven. How are we going to enjoy each other's company if we can't stand each other's company here? Where everyone we think is so unorthodox and different and unsound and crazy and wacky.

Christ encourages us to have grace. But it is also a love that is wholly selfless and I guess it's falling on from the love to it full extent but again in a very practical way in John chapter 19 and we've just been going through John's Gospel tonight.

[25 : 12] We want to look at John himself and how grace transformed him. But John 19 and verses 25 to 27, the crucifixion of Jesus near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister Mary, the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene.

Jesus saw his mother there and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby. He said to his mother, dear woman, here is your son and to the disciple here is your mother.

And that time on this disciple took her to his home, this disciple being John. Utterly, totally selfless moment in Scripture.

The author of life, the perfect and holy God, God who is consuming fire, God who is light, God who is love.

In his humanity facing death and grave and the power of hell and Satan. This is the real holocaust. This is absolute Armageddon.

[26 : 19] This is real judgment day. God is in the dock here. In the person of his son, Jesus Christ, as he faces the grave and the power of Satan and the wrath of God and does it in our behalf.

God in the dock yet. In this moment of darkness, we have the most surely the most tender moment in all of history.

Dear woman, here is your son. Passing his earthly mother into the care of his best friend. Not leaving her alone, making sure she's looked after in a human way when he's gone.

Isn't that amazing? I've said this before here often. The moment where he had every right in his pure and perfect being to be selfish, to be absolutely focused on the point, the battle in hand, what he lay before him, it would do.

Have taken all even his divine energies to be dealing with that. He considers and thinks about on the cross, not even just with a physical torment, but with the spiritual much greater battle going on that we know nothing really about.

[27 : 44] He considers his mother. Grace, it's the great antidote today to self-absorption, to being absorbed with our own lives and our own needs and our own issues and our own battles and our own beauty and our own ambitions and all the things that our own, our own, that can sometimes just completely absorb us and take up our lives.

Our lives are so, so significantly important and I'm not saying they're not, but it takes us out of that self-absorption grace and enables us in the midst of all the struggles and difficulties we face to serve and think about others because there's great blessing in that.

It takes away this massive ego that we have, this massive self-importance that really we genuinely think, I know, I know I do.

I'm not condemning anybody else. I'm speaking from my own heart. I genuinely think the world revolves around me.

I know we don't, you know, scientifically and I know we don't socially and in reality and politically we know it doesn't, but in the very depths of our being, we just, we internalize things so much that we just think the whole world, our whole world, our self-consciousness is so great that everything revolves around us.

[29 : 18] Grace begins to change that and puts God in the throne. It says it all revolves around Him, not around us.

And that's where we find freedom. It's a desperate enslavement to think the world revolves around us, but there's a glorious freedom to know the world revolves around God and that He is love and that He has given His Son.

It's utterly, wholly selfless and as we understand grace and receive grace in our hearts, it begins to change us from being selfish, self-centered people, or I hope to, as we struggle and battle with that all our lives, from being selfish, self-centered people to being grace-filled people who are selfless because of what God has done.

I think there's a lot, I think there's selfless people who are not Christians, but I don't know what their motive is for being selfless.

And the motive God looks for and only can give is the motive for His glory because He is at the center of the throne.

[30 : 40] He is the center of the universe. Love is most selfless. And then lastly, and we finish with this, it's a love that is also most honest.

It's absolutely honest and Jesus' love for humanity is completely honest. And John 3, going right back to the beginning again, John 3, sorry for jumping around a little bit.

Verse 3, I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless He is born again. And then in chapter 6, Jesus is speaking as the bread of life.

And in verse 37, He says, All the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me, I will never drive away. And 44, He says, no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

And in 65, He says, this is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him. So we have absolute truth, grace telling us as it is Jesus Christ as the way the truth in the life is saying to humanity and saying to all who will listen, you will never come to me on your own.

[32 : 09] The Father must draw you. You must be drawn by Him to come to me. You will never come on your own. You need to be born and you, born again, sorted.

You can't do it. What He's saying? In all the mystery and complexity of that truth, He's saying you will not come unless the Father draws you.

Sin is resistance and sin is rebellion against God and God the Father needs to change your heart in order for you to accept and choose Jesus Christ.

Being born again is a great image, isn't it? It's a great image. It's kind of unpopular today because it's been kind of scandalized or tinsel townized or whatever it is, you must be born again.

But it's a biblical, born in you. Born from above. However you want to translate these words, born, and it's a great message though because in your own natural birth, or the image is there, isn't it?

[33 : 14] You didn't choose that birth. You had nothing to do with it. It's not about your character, your genes or your nature. You're just born.

Just born. You've no input whatsoever in your own birth. You're born. Then you live and you make your choices.

And in Christ, same is true, you need the Father to take you to the Son so that you will choose the Son.

You need God to change your nature. And yet in that great paradox of being chosen and being drawn by the Father, Jesus also says, whoever comes to me, I will never be driven away.

The paradox of His irresponsibility and His sovereignty come today. You're not a Christian.

[34 : 09] To get a new nature from God. Know that you're being led by the Father to know and to love and to serve Jesus Christ.

We've spent a number of weeks. I really hope that it hasn't been wasted time. I hope that you don't just forget what we've been speaking about in grace if you're not a Christian.

I hope you'll not just let it slip by for some other time. I hope that today and in the days that have been passed and in the experiences we've gone through together that it will speak to you.

It will speak to somebody today. And that you will today ask for prayer if you don't know Christ. Don't reject the person of Jesus Christ and the offer of relationship with God.

That is what we have in Christ. And the Father must draw you to the Son. It is not about getting everything clear and right in your own mind.

[35 : 12] It's not ultimately simply about your choice and your decision. It's about a sense of helplessness like the man who had known to help him and a sense of need, recognizing you need God to change you, to bring you to him.

It's an utterly counter-intuitive message. You will not hear that anywhere else in the world unless it's been preached from God's word.

And yet it's the truth we believe has transformed us and will continue to transform us and continue to change the lives of those around us. And that's why we're going to pray today when we're down the hall.

And if you can stay and pray all the way because we need God the Father to change the lives and hearts of people so that they will accept God the Son as a redeemer.

Let's bow our heads and pray. Father, God help us to understand your grace and your glory. We pray that we would not be cynical Christians.

[36 : 21] We pray that we would not be content to live within our own comfort zone, which the older we get, the harder we find not to do.

Pray for the young people here that they would be flexible and fluid in their understanding of truth that will enable them to grow and to develop and learn and be disciplined in holiness as they are transformed in their young lives, that they would be willing to allow the Spirit of God mold them into the likeness of Jesus.

And as we get older, Lord, forgive the stiffness and hardness of our hearts, the inflexibility that comes into our thinking that makes us cling on to graceless lives and graceless behavior because we've found a place where it's acceptable or where it's justified or because we've become tired and weary or because we've lost sight of your glory and of our dependence on you.

So Lord God, we ask and pray that you would teach us to be gentle and compassionate and loving towards the outsider and the helpless, to be sensitive to the needs of those who are broken and bereaved, to love in sacrificial service, in a prayerful concern for others and not putting ourselves first, but with honesty, sharing our lives and the gospel with all those that we come into contact with.

So transform as we pray in your grace and in your favor free in Christ. Amen.