

“Receive Grace and Love—Give Grace and Love”

Luke 7:36–50; Galatians 2:19–21

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I'd like to start by looking at Luke 7 but if I'd had time we would have read responsively Psalm 136. Psalm 136 is 26 verses and each verse ends with 'His steadfast love endures forever.' I am a duty bound person. I grew up that way in a pretty disciplined household and I have grown up to be fairly disciplined in my life and what I do. So this message that I'm sharing is very much for me as it is for you. You could summarize this message this way; know that you're identity and justification is in Christ, live out who you are in Christ which is our sanctification and show and tell who we are in Christ to others which is evangelism and Kingdom work. So in this study we'll talk about our justification, sanctification and how we live it out to others in evangelism and Kingdom work.

Luke 7:36–50 says [36] *One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. [37] And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, [38] and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. [39] Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."* [40] *And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."*

[41] *"A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. [42] When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" [43] Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." [44] Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. [45] You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. [46] You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. [47] Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." [48] And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." [49] Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" [50] And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." This is the Word of the Lord.*

We won't experience the joy of the Christian life until we learn to receive for ourselves God's abundant love and grace. The definition of gracious is favor from God that one does not deserve or of one human being kindly exposed for another or on the other hand it is the essence of God displayed in and received from Christ. Even pagan philosophers like Plato have said He has equated graciousness the ultimate good, the highest good is to God Himself.

Paul in Ephesians 3:14–19 says [14] *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, [15] from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, [16] that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17] so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, [18] may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, [19] and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,*

*that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.* I'm praying for power and comprehension for you that you would understand the love of Christ and be filled up with that.

Psalm 145:8–9 says [8] *The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.* [9] *The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.* A Scripture that really stands out to me is in Isaiah 30:18. Here Isaiah is prophesying to Judah and during his lifetime Israel, the Northern Kingdom fell. He is warning Judah that the same will happen to them unless they repent. It begins where they rebelled against God and ends the book of where they rebelled against God but here he is entreating them to turn and be restored to God. Isaiah 30:18 says [18] *Therefore the LORD waits (longs) to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait (long) for him.*

It's not that God wants to withhold His grace from us, but He wants to bestow it on us. I was watching the President's Cup this afternoon and Jay Haas' son who was captain of the team won the final match that gave America the win. Do you think he went up to his son and said 'you did great but I'm going to punish you for what you did'? The TV captured how he was overcome with emotion because he had picked his son to be on that team and his team and his son came through. He longed to be gracious and to give him what he had succeeded in doing.

Sometimes our theology is that we think that if things are going well then when is the other shoe going to drop, when is God going to punish me? Yes we will suffer for He promises we will join in His suffering but I think it's bad theology for us to think that God is wanting to hurt us. He doesn't. He wants to bless us but He is committed to glorifying Himself and to make us like Him and whatever it takes for Him to do that He will. Most of us just want to be blessed, blessed, blessed and we get big-headed and then He has to bring us down but He longs to be gracious to us.

I asked my Sunday school class 'what bugs you about people?' I got some great responses like indifference, dishonesty, unappreciative, impatience, judgmental and all these different things. I could relate to those responses. Then I said 'have any of you ever done that?' We tend to, in our effort to please God, minimize the sin in our own life and make ourselves better than we really are so that I am pleasing to God. I have a tendency to do that because I want God to accept me but God does accept me based on the righteousness of Christ. I can't live out that joy until I recognize my sins which are many, have been forgiven. My righteousness is as filthy rags.

Tim Keller in his book, The Gospel for the City, where grace changes everything, says there are three ways to get to God. There is the religious/moral person, where we're trying to do enough to please God. There is the irreligious person who doesn't really care how he does and then there is the Gospel person. He says the religious/moral person repents of his sin. The irreligious person doesn't repent at all because he doesn't need to. The Gospel person repents of his sin and also repents of his self-righteousness. I find myself needing to do that where I need to be filled up with the fullness of God.

Swindoll in his book, Galatians Letter of Liberation says the greater the man's condemnation the sweeter the promise of salvation. You will never fully appreciate the Gospel of grace until you have seen yourself against the backdrop of the law, not until the law has bruised you and you admit your need of the Gospel to bind up our wounds. Not until the law has arrested and imprisoned us will we have time for Christ to set us free. Not until the law has condemned and killed us will we call upon Christ for justification and life. Not until the law has

driven us of despair of ourselves will we ever believe in Jesus. Not until the law has humbled us even unto hell will we turn the Gospel to raise us to heaven.

The law does reveal sin and does show us how we're to live. The law is spiritual. The law is not bad. It is how we relate to it and it should drive us to be joyful. It should drive us to be joyful in the fact for what He has done in our life is so amazing. Paul David Tripp in his devotional book from August 18 said "For a believer nothing in his or her life is unchanged by the Gospel. If you look at life from the vantage point of the present benefits of the person, work, presence and promises of the Lord Jesus Christ, nothing in your life looks the same."

The Apostle Peter encourages people to live in a radical new way because they have been given all things pertaining to life and Godliness. So you and I aren't left to our own maturity, character, ingenuity, righteousness, wisdom or power. Not only that the Gospel redefines how we understand our whole story, how we think about the meaning in life, how we understand the human struggle, how we get our identity, where we look for peace and security, what we consider in life to be dangerous, what we see as successful and so on. It is true when Jesus takes up residence in us everything in life changes. Nothing remains the same.

There is an illustration that I use on being used by God. A lady in an Asian country had two water buckets that she would take down to the river to get water. One bucket was a perfect water bucket and the other was a cracked one. Every morning and every night she would go down to the river to get water and bring it back. As the story goes she apologized to her master for the cracked bucket because every time she got back from drawing water with the cracked bucket and was asked 'do you have a full water bucket' she would only feel disappointed. The lady said 'do you see those flowers along the path where I walk every day to get the water?' Those are there because of the cracked water bucket and those plants have gotten water all along the way. You are beautiful in my sight that you have done this. So God uses broken vessels. Think of it another way. Neither one of the buckets would be useful unless they were filled up each time. So we have to be filled up with the goodness and graciousness of Christ to be able to really minister out of that.

In case you're thinking too much time on grace to be misunderstood, I ask is obedience important? Absolutely. Tim Keller also says "On the other hand we know how supremely important the law of God is since it reveals the nature and heart of God." It reveals the things God loves and hates, things that are good and evil. Jesus took it so seriously that He made Himself completely obedient to it in our place and died to pay its penalty in our place. We can never take God and His revealed will lightly. We can never see obedience only as an option. Instead we love and delight in the law of God. That has been our theme this year, really understanding loving the law of God because it drives us to Christ and to receive His grace.

Titus 2:11-13 says [11] *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, [13] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.* This is why the grace of God appeared, not just for our justification but our sanctification. Paul David Tripp said "Our works are a hymn of faith that Christ achieved on our behalf."

We need to be filled up with God's love and grace so that we can be an instrument of joy and blessing to others as we distribute that love and grace. Colossians 4:6 says [6] *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.* Matthew 22:37-40 says [37] *And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. [38] This is the great and*

*first commandment. [39] And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. [40] On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” It is the idea that we dispense this grace to other people. I Peter 4:10 says [10] As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.*

So how do we do that? I want to give some illustrations on this. Steve Brown is a radio evangelist and book writer. He received this from one of his radio broadcasts from a friend. He said “You have to work hard to offend Christians. By nature Christians are the most forgiving, understanding and thoughtful group of people I’ve ever dealt with. They never assume the worst. They appreciate the importance of having different perspectives. They are slow to anger, quick to forgive and almost never make rash judgments or act in anything but the spirit of love.” No way was I thinking of Labrador retrievers. We laugh at this but it is really true, isn’t it? Many times we accused of really not loving other people and just being against things.

Most of you know I’m a die-hard Georgia bulldog fan and that’s a burden I have to bear. A few years ago while Michael Adams was president of the University of Georgia, Vince Dooley had signed a two year contract as Athletic Director to finish out his term. Vince has been the only one in the last 50 years that has led Georgia to a national championship. He was popular enough in the state of Georgia that they wanted him to run for governor. When Vince came to Michael Adams and told him he would like to extend his contract for at least one more year, Adams had an opportunity to be gracious and do this but he didn’t. Adams basically stuck to his original contract, wouldn’t budge and that didn’t set well with the Georgia nation. Adams made it a power play and alienated about 80 percent of the bulldog fans when he had the opportunity to demonstrate grace. My guess is that he wasn’t secure enough to let Vince stay another year. Wouldn’t it have been great for everyone concerned if he had done that?

I feel like one of the things we need to do for each other is have each other’s back. You hear that from this pulpit many times. We have always been at war but we just see if more visibly than we have in the past. So we need to be there for each other. Here is a situation where it was a success for me. I was in the rest room when someone asked me a question about somebody else. This person had given me a pretty difficult time for years. When he asked me this question I had the opportunity to throw him under the bus so to speak very easily but thankfully I didn’t lie I just brought up the positive things. Unbeknownst to me there was a co-worker in another stall that heard what I said. He told me it was the first time he had ever heard a man stand up to another man when he could have thrown him under the bus. What if I had chosen not to be gracious at that time? Not only would I have alienated the person that worked for me many would have been affected by that.

I have a businessman’s friend that says ‘never burn any bridges.’ I never burn them. The question for many of us that teach is do you want to be recognized as a great teacher or as one who enables people to learn, discover and grow themselves? Which would you choose? One is that we want to be gracious and the other is we want to have ourselves stroked. I had a friend call me the other day and say “I know this is not effective to send a text but I thought I would do something odd and call you.” You get a memo that says will you give us your schedule because you’re the last person to respond or it could have been said we really want your input so would you check your calendar to see if you can make this date. Which sounds better to you as the receiver of that message?

In TobyMac’s song “Speak Life” he says,  
*Some days, life feels perfect.  
Other days it just ain't workin.*

*The good, the bad, the right, the wrong  
And everything in between.*

*Though it's crazy, amazing  
We can turn a heart with the words we say.  
Mountains crumble with every syllable.  
Hope can live or die*

*So speak Life, speak Life.  
To the dearest darkest night.  
Speak life, speak Life.*

*When the sun won't shine and you don't know why.  
Look into the eyes of the brokenhearted;  
Watch them come alive as soon as you speak hope,  
You speak love, you speak...You speak Life,*

*Some days the tongue gets twisted;  
Other days my thoughts just fall apart.  
I do, I don't, I will, I won't,  
It's like I'm drowning in the deep.*

*Raise your thoughts a little higher,  
Use your words to inspire,  
Joy will fall like rain,  
When you speak life with the things you say.*

The third point is to be change agents in our culture we must be firm in our convictions yet gracious in our lifestyle and interaction with others. In Jeremiah 29 God tells His people to go into the city and seek the welfare of the city and as they do that they will be blessed as well. That is the prelude to Jeremiah 29:11 which says [11] *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.* They were to go into that city, pray for that city and be prosperous in that city. They said ‘That is the city of Babylon who just overtook us.’ God said that was the city He wanted them to go into. Galatians 6:9 says [9] *And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.* Do good to all men, especially those of the household of faith.

John Dickson says in his book Humilitas, “Humility applied to convictions does not mean believing things any less but it means treating those who have contrary beliefs with respect and friendship.” Both secular society and the religious version operate in a narrow-minded logic for you can only love those whose lives you approve. There is a third way based on a different logic where we can learn to respect and care for those who profoundly disagree. We maintain our convictions but choose never to allow them to become justification for thinking ourselves better than those with contrary convictions. We move beyond mere tolerance to true humility, the key to harmony at the social level.

I don’t know how we do this. I’m trying to train the men that I work with and foster this myself. How do I maintain my convictions strong yet make the Gospel attractive to others? I feel like society wants a fight with us as Christians and somehow we have to be able to be firm,

to be uncompromising but at the same time appealing the love of Christ to them. You will be asked many times if you haven't already, 'What do you think of gay marriage?' I'm against it. I'm not sure that will get us many responses. I think we need to think through our responses to any issues that may come up in the marketplace or wherever. Perhaps we could say 'let me give you what I believe marriage is first before I answer that question.' Then explain the covenant of marriage, what it means to us and what it represents to us as the body of Christ. Maybe they could hear us a little better.

Years ago when I was at the University of Georgia and I walked into my fraternity house to get lunch and a guy said 'A guy said that the Bible has the answer to every question, do you believe that?' A part of me just wanted to get my lunch but I answered 'I do believe that. I believe that every major issue the Bible addresses but it doesn't address all the specific issues. It doesn't specifically tell you who you will marry, what classes to take etc.' but it was an opportunity not to break down my fraternity brothers but this person wasn't trying to pick a fight. They were just speaking their convictions.

I think sometimes we surprise people with our answers. British journalist and apologist, GK Chesterton, when asked by the London Times, 'if you were stranded on a desert island what book would you take?' One might think he would say the Bible but he said 'I think I might take Brown's book to Ship building.' Diffuse it and then he went on to say 'but the book I would want with me constantly would be the Scriptures.' So we have to think of ways to do this.

One is for us to be filled up with the grace and love that our Savior offers us because of all that He did for us. Two we need to be gracious to others when it's within our power to seek to be gracious to others to point them to the Savior who longs to be gracious to us, who waits to be gracious to us. Thirdly, with humility never back down on our convictions but find a way to find common ground because the world is not going to be solved by politicians or new laws. The world is going to be solved by the Gospel, where people's lives are changed from the inside. That's what we're about and that's what we want to do.

Here are my life goals. I have three life goals. One is to finish well and you are accountable to help me finish that way. Second is to always be a learner. Three is seek to be gracious. I have time to come up with more but this is something that means a lot to me. The application is to find someone to pray for you to do one of these goals, one, two or three. That is pretty basic. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for Your faithfulness to us, Your grace and love that You have portrayed to us. Now help us to live in light of that, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

### Power Point

- I. We will not fully experience the joy of Christian life until we learn to receive God's abundant grace and love.
- II. We will not be an instrument of joy and blessing to others unless we distribute grace and love.
- III. To be change agents in our culture we must be firm in our convictions, yet gracious and loving in our lifestyle and interaction with others. (Jeremiah 29:4-14)