

Taking Grace for Granted

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[0 : 00] Can you hear me? All right. All right.

Isaiah 55, starting with verse 1. Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters. And you who have no money, come buy and eat. Come buy wine and milk without money, without cost. Why spend your money on what is not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me and eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest fare. Give ear and come to me. Hear me that your soul may live.

I will make an everlasting covenant with you. My faithful love promised to David. See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and a commander of peoples.

[1 : 13] Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will listen to you. Because the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, has endowed you with splendor.

Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call on him while he's near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the evil man his thoughts.

Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him. And your God, and on our God, for he will pardon, freely pardon.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my words, my ways higher than yours, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

As the rain and snow come down from heaven, and do not return without watering the earth, making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower, and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth.

[2 : 25] It will not return empty, but will accomplish what I desire. And we'll finish the last two verses at the end of the message. May the Lord add a blessing to the reading of his word.

You may be seated. I struggled with this message for a week, trying to figure out what to call it. And then when I was under pressure to send in a title or else, it popped up. Taking grace for granted. Oh boy.

If your toes hurt this morning, let's understand I almost lost my toes. Okay, so. Nowhere in the Bible is the call to the needy greater than this one, or warmer than this one, or even more welcoming than this one.

And this is considered one of the climaxes of the book of Isaiah. In these latter chapters, Isaiah, of Isaiah, God often speaks judgment upon his people for corruption.

[3 : 43] But here, God reminds us that he is a God of grace and compassion. In those days, it was common in the Middle East for street vendors to cry out and call attention to what they have to sell.

Most of you know that my wife and I were in Cuba the other week, and I might say, the church is doing marvelous things in Cuba. Pray for the church in Cuba.

But it was interesting. I felt like I was in a time warp. I saw all these cars, you know. Oh, there's an 86. That's a 56 Buick. Oh, that's a 20, 52 Chevy.

And my favorite was the 59 Buick. It was wild looking, but I thought I was back in my childhood. Not only that, but it smelled like the 50s.

I had forgotten how much pollution was put into the air. You know, I remember those days. And we stood on the other side of the harbor from Havana and took pictures.

[4 : 51] It was hazy. I remember those days. But the thing that really brought to my attention was throughout the day, and especially at night, you hear people say, come get what I got.

And they would have noisemakers. Bing-a-ling-a-ling-a-ling-a-ling-a-ling-a-ling. All night. All night. And I began to realize that's what God is alluding to. So, it's interesting how Isaiah uses everyday things like that to communicate deep truths.

So, the world needs people like that. The first word in this passage is a Hebrew word pronounced hoy.

It's kind of like, I think we say ahoy sometimes to people. It's hoy. But it is basically just an attention-grabbing device. Today we would say, hey!

So, when you read that, hey! All right. God was showing his deep compassion for his people, even though, are you ready for this?

[6 : 00] They took God's grace for granted. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. As a result, they were without the blessings that God had made available to them.

They were living on a lower level of grace than God, than they should have had, should have been. Because they became complacent about being the kingdom of God, they settled into a routine of being merely the kingdom of Israel.

They were to be an international community of covenant keepers. In other words, a light to the nations.

But they settled into being a mere Hebrew holy huddle. They had forgotten that being God's chosen people was a matter of grace, not what?

Race. But they fell into the thinking that being chosen was a matter of race, not what? Grace.

[7 : 11] That's what you call stinking thinking. God had called Israel to be a global movement.

But instead, they became an establishment that catered to its own agenda. God disturbed their busy complacency by asking, does all this satisfy you?

Is this what you are here for? In this passage, God offers Israel the refreshment of cold water on a hot day. And I can tell you, y'all might have been freezing up here and all the rest of that, but we were hot.

Praise God. So, so, so, so, so what? Just, God doesn't just offer water here.

He offers more sophisticated drink, wine and milk. God not only offered expensive refreshment at a low price, but he offered it at no price.

[8 : 19] That's amazing. That's all right. Throw a little Jesse Jackson in there for you. Now, why did God extend such a generous invitation to Israel?

See, they were his people by what? Grace. grace. But they took grace for granted by assuming that they were self-sufficient and self-righteousness.

And thus, they were out of touch with reality and they were living an illusion. In their delusional state, they were, they thought that they were well off.

but in reality, they were miserable in their thirst and vulnerable in their hunger. Now, it was time for them to come to their senses and stop taking grace for granted.

In other words, it was time for them to remember that they were, they are, they were being sustained by God's grace. Do you realize that? They were sustained by God's grace.

[9 : 34] And they were to seek God as Lord by his grace. And they were to seek to fulfill the purposes to which the Lord had called them by his grace.

Namely, they were to be a global witness to the glory of God by his grace. Verses 1 through 6, God assured Israel that he was utterly findable.

You ever think of that? God is findable. And when you find him, you realize you really didn't find him, but he found you. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Seek the Lord while he may be found, it says. The Lord's findability was an expression of his grace. God assured Israel that he was paying close attention to them.

Verse 6, call on him while he is near. The Lord's close attention to them was an expression of his grace. But because Israel continued to take grace for granted, they lived ho-hum lives of quiet desperation.

[10 : 56] In their ways, eventually, well, let's put it this way, their thoughts eventually became unrighteous and their ways eventually became wicked.

That's an interesting word, wicked. It literally means twisted. So don't get it twisted, okay?

All right. Okay, my, my, my. Okay. Their wickedness left them thirsty. What does God say?

Let the wicked forsake his ways. Their unrighteousness left them hungry. What does the Lord say?

Let the unrighteous forsake their thoughts. In other words, stop taking God's grace for granted.

Verse seven, let them turn to the Lord and he will have mercy on him for our God and to our God for he will freely pardon them. In other words, let those who are hungry and thirsty accept God's lavish refreshment of delicious food and fine wine.

[12:07] Mm-hmm. If I was in another denomination, maybe I couldn't say that last thing, but anyway, that's, but I love my brothers in these other denominations, by the way.

So God reminded Israel that his wisdom was unmatched on earth. Verses eight and nine, for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, declares the Lord.

As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts. Then not only that, but God reminded Israel that nothing can resist his word.

Nothing. As the rain and snow go out from heaven and do not return without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so my word that goes out of my mouth, it will not return empty.

It will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You know what your most positive, your most powerful possession is now?

[13:32] The most powerful possession you have is God's word. Think about that. Sometimes we take that for granted, don't we?

In other words, God is reminding them that he is all-wise, that he is all-powerful, and that his grace is all-sufficient. Now, God had repeatedly warned his people against taking grace for granted. He warned them that if they continued down this path, then they would end up being displaced from their own land. They would become a marginalized minority in a superpower called Babylon where God's grace was not even respected.

God's warning was an expression of his grace. But Israel ignored God's grace and his warning because they were too busy taking grace for granted.

It's an interesting thing when you see what happened to them when they got to Babylon. In Babylonian captivity, God's covenant grace was trivialized by that society.

[14:51] And hence, God's people were belittled as pawns for Babylonian pleasure and reduced to being Jew-faced minstrels. I think you get the picture, right?

If you don't believe me, turn to Psalms 137 verses 1-3. Here they are. By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.

There on the poplar trees we hung our harps. For there our captors asked us for songs. Our tormentors demanded songs of joy.

They said, sing us one of your songs of Zion. You know, these songs of Zion were inspired by God's redeeming grace.

You know that, right? But the Babylonians went beyond taking grace for granted. They didn't give a hoot about God's grace. Therefore, God's inspired music was regarded as nothing but entertainment.

[16:05] Cheap entertainment at that. But a funny thing happened to Israel when they came into captivity. A funny thing. This is probably irrelevant for all of y'all.

But a funny thing happened to Israel. Their covenant consciousness began to reawaken.

they wept as they remembered how they had taken God's grace for granted back home.

Now that they were in a foreign land, they began to appreciate the grace that they had in their own land. They appreciated God's grace as they appreciated God's grace.

they found the courage to resist marginalization with a gutsy display of civil disobedience. You didn't know that was in the Bible, did you?

[17:08] Okay. Verse 4 of Psalm 137. How can we sing the songs of the Lord while we're in a foreign land? they went on strike by hanging their harps on the poplar trees and not playing them.

You remember that? We hung our harps on the poplar trees. They refused to participate in their own marginalization because they were the people of God.

In essence, they were saying to their captives, we are not your Hebrews. Sound familiar? Get the picture? Let me kind of unpack that a little bit.

The term Israelite in the old days, back in the days of, you know, just before the Exodus, I mean, not the Exodus, the captivity in Egypt.

Israelite was a dignified term. You say, I'm an Israelite. Oh, yes. I'm a child of Israel, whatever. But there was a derogatory term people came up with.

[18:20] Israelites were a wonderful people. But people who didn't like them, they had a derogatory term. And you know what that word was?

Hebrew. It's interesting, you see the evidence of that when God's speaking to Moses on top of the mountain. He says, go to Pharaoh and tell him that the God of the Hebrews has sent you.

And he goes before Pharaoh and he says, the God of Israel sent me. Pharaoh says, I don't know who you're talking about. You better straighten up, boy. You know, I don't know that God.

He said, the God of the Hebrews, oh, now I know who you're talking about. As long as you stay in your place. And as they appreciated God's grace, their prayer even reflected the passion to return to covenant faithfulness and covenant grace.

Verses 5-7. If I forget you, oh Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill, may my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I don't consider Jerusalem my highest joy.

[19 : 36] they were not just longing for a place. They were yearning for the grace.

That's what it was all about. And finally in this passage here in Psalms, in prayer, they even found the courage to openly express their contempt for their captors.

This is interesting. verses 8-9. Oh daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us, and seizes your infants and dashes them upon the rocks. Whoa, that's kind of deep. There was a lot of contempt there, but they had courage to express it.

Now let's make some observations here. Why did God, why did Israel, first of all, take God's grace for granted when the times were good and appreciate God's grace in times of trouble?

Seems like it would be the other way around, right? Why do we take God's grace for granted when times are good and appreciate God's grace in times of trouble?

[21 : 01] Now we may remember that we are saved by grace. Everybody agree? We're saved by grace? We call that saving grace.

But too often we forget that we live by grace. We call this common grace. God sustains us by his grace.

Everything we do is by his grace. Imagine that God stopped beating your heart and left it up to you as your responsibility to beat your own heart.

Well, I'm going to go, oh, I forgot. Right? How long would you live? I think God sets that up to remind us that we are totally dependent upon him, whether we do good or evil.

The tragedy of this is not only do we live by grace, but we sin by grace. Oh, think about it. The next time, you know, you've been in this situation, you've done the Adam and Eve trick, right?

[22 : 18] You say, I know I shouldn't do that. But you come up with some reason why to justify it. Well, I've been good for two weeks. Let me reward myself by indulging in this whatever it is.

So you justify it, make it right. The next time you come to a situation like that, remember that what you are about to do is done by God's grace.

I think that might give you a little more courage to say no. But God's invitation was not only made to Israel in their time, but it was also made to us in our time.

If you are not aware of God's grace in all you do, then you are blinded by the illusion of self-sufficiency. And guess what?

That means that you are doing what? Taking God's grace for granted. it. Will it take your own version of Babylonian captivity to realize how much our thoughts are sliding towards unrighteousness and how much our ways are sliding toward wickedness?

[23 : 34] When you lose consciousness of God's grace, all kind of funny things start happening. Oh, God's not looking. You know, remember Adam tried to hide? Here's the tree he was hiding behind.

How crazy are we? So, you know, how much we will, how much, what will it take for us to realize how much we are sliding towards these things?

You know, because we're kind of on a slope here, a slippery slope. And if you do nothing, you'll slide. But by God's grace, you can stay where you are. God's invitation does not end with liquid refreshment.

He also invites us to a lavish banquet of grace. There is enough to eat for all of us, and there's enough to eat for each of us. And who qualifies to be invited?

All who are thirsty for God's findability. all who are hungry for God's close attention. And all who realize the foolishness of thinking that they don't live by God's grace.

[24 : 58] In other words, who's invited? All who no longer want to take God's grace for granted. If you're hungry and thirsty today, then if you're hungry is for the awareness of God's grace, then you will welcome God's grace like you would welcome food and drink when you're hungry and thirsty.

If you welcome God's grace, then you are welcome to God's grace. Isn't that a great thing? All you can eat, right? God gives grace first where he gives hunger.

You feel yourself getting hungry? Thank God for that. God gives grace to the thirsty because he raises your thirst.

So you'll want it. And God knows that all of us live on a most lower level of grace than we should. do it. Cuban government kind of winks at the church today. You know why?

[26 : 13] Because they're living on a higher level of grace. And they're doing such a great job with people. May we be like the church in Cuba.

If you are not hungry or thirsty for God's grace, then you will not welcome God's grace. If you consider yourself self-sufficient, then you will not welcome God's grace.

If you depend on works righteousness to earn God's favor, then you will not welcome God's grace. And if you do not welcome God's grace, then you are not welcome to God's grace.

You know, today's wisdom's call is a sumptuous, is to a sumptuous banquet.

Wisdom's call, that sounds familiar. Where did I hear that from? Oh yeah, there was this great book that was recently written by a lovely young lady named Karen Ellis.

[27 : 18] So I'll just throw that in there, you know. Okay. But listen to this, her call in chapter 9 of Proverbs. Wisdom has built her house, she has set up seven pillars, she has prepared her meat and mixed her wine, she has also set her table.

She has sent out her servants, and she calls from the highest point of the city, let all who lack judgment come to my house. to those who have no sense, she says, come and eat my food and drink my wine that I have mixed, and leave your foolishness, and you will live, walk in the way that is straight.

That's a tremendous sentence. So here we got Isaiah giving you information, and we have Solomon giving you the invitation. And of course, the meat and fine wine she offers are the good teachings of wisdom.

That's what we need to pray for. To resist taking God's grace for granted, you need wisdom. And this wisdom she offers is not only palatable, but it is profitable.

Amen. Now if you have this wisdom, you will recognize that God's grace, you'll recognize God's grace in all circumstances. We cherry pick our circumstances, don't we?

[28 : 50] Oh, yeah, God's grace, over here I'm going through a hard time, oh, God's not giving me grace. It's not like that. From our limited perspective, some circumstances may seem negative, but from God's unlimited perspective, circumstances that seem negative may be positive.

Because God redeems everything. If you have this wisdom, then you will recognize that in all things, this should sound familiar to you, that in all things, all things, some things, all things, God works for the good of those who love him, those who are called according to his purpose.

Sounds like something Paul would say. In a town called Rome, you know, right? Okay. If you have this wisdom, then you will focus on loving God, all you got to do is focus on loving God, seeking his calling according to his purpose.

That's all you got to worry about. If you have this wisdom, you may have concerns, but you will not have worries.

You know, Jesus had concerns, right? The brother of his close friends died, and he is the resurrection and the life, and yet he had such concern that he wept with them.

[30 : 25] That's okay. Don't get into this worry thing. If God could not redeem your circumstances for good, then it would never have happened.

You know, God is telling us that whatever we go through, when we see the outcome that he has already established, we will say, it was more than worth it.

right, right. Job said that even before he got his heavenly reward. And what he got now, what he had on earth was nothing compared to what he has today.

Now, this is not to say that there are no bad circumstances. Don't get me wrong here. Don't get it twisted.

Don't go out here being like a Cheshire cat or something like that. Yes, there are bad circumstances. And yes, there are those who are responsible for bad circumstances.

[31 : 33] And they are guilty. But this is to say, whatever your circumstance, God is not surprised.

If you have this wisdom, you will know that God will vindicate everything in the ultimate outcome. You know that?

The Bible says it. And God is guaranteed that you will rejoice with him as you see the ultimate outcome. And because you know that, you will find peace in present circumstances. I didn't say unconcerned, I said peace. because they had this wisdom, Daniel, Hanani, Mishael, and Ezraiah faced death to be faithful to God in Babylon.

Because he had this wisdom, Joseph recognized God's hand in his circumstance and was able to reconcile with his brothers who conspired against him. If you lack wisdom, ask God.

[32 : 46] On the other hand, if we reject God's wisdom, then we will fall into foolishness, we will continue to take God's grace for granted, we will continue to think that we are self-sufficient, and we will insist that a limited perspective on things is the only perspective.

I don't have to tell you all about King Solomon, right? World famous, superstar, right? Just take one aspect of the greatness, okay?

Solomon's yearly income, it blew my mind when I calculated this, Solomon's yearly income was 666 talents of gold. That's about, a talent is about 75 pounds.

Whoa. And thus the weight of the gold was about 50,000 pounds of gold. At today's price, gold is worth \$2,000 an ounce.

Do the math. His annual income was \$1,598,400,000.

[33 : 57] And that's not to include what he got from taxes collected from international business community, the kings of Arabia, and the Israelite governors.

That was just chump change. And what does Solomon say about life without wisdom? You find it in Ecclesiastes. chapter 1.

Meaningless, meaningless, utter meaningless. Everything is meaningless. What does a man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?

And verse 8, all things are worrisome more than one day. The eye never has enough of seeking, nor the ear has a spill of hearing.

What has been will be again. What has been done will be done again. If we accept God's call and God's invitation and wisdom's invitation, then this is one thing he promises.

[35 : 12] The joy of your salvation will be restored. How many times have you lost the joy of your salvation? The satisfaction with life will be replenished.

And our experience of peace will never diminish. When you think about it, when you pray about something, when something bothers you and you go to God for about it, what are you going for? You're not going for the thing you're praying about. You're going for the thing that you're praying about will produce in you. And that's peace. Peace. Peace. Peace. Peace. Peace. Peace. Peace. Peace. Peace. So, the last two verses in this passage we're in in Isaiah, verses 11 and 13, says this, If you accept this invitation now, you will go out, enjoy, and be led forth in peace.

The mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thorn bush will grow a pine tree.

[36 : 19] Instead of briars, the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord's renown for an everlasting sign which will not be destroyed.

And then finally, go back to our first verse. I hope this means something to you now. Hey! Hey! All you who are thirsty, come to the waters.

And you who have no money, come buy and eat. Come buy milk and wine without money, without cost. Why spend your money on that which is not bread, and your labor on that which does not satisfy?

Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest fare.

Please do not take God's grace for granted. And when you do think about it, think about the words of our president.

[37 : 24] If you're thinking about this, here are his brilliant words, or this brilliant word, don't! Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you so much for your generous invitation, your generous grace. We sometimes focus so much on getting saved that we forget that you are the author of life and peace.

We thank you for the fact that nothing we go through or experience will not be redeemed fully, and you have guaranteed that we will say it was more than worth it.

What can we say but just thank you and praise you? Grab hold of us, Lord. Shake us out of our lives of quiet desperation as we often fall into.

And give us the courage and the grace to be who you called us to be. We'll be careful to give you the praise. In Jesus' name, Amen.