

Christmas Grace

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Preacher: Kevin Smith, Senior Pastor

[0 : 00] Amen. Titus chapter 2, verses 11 through 14. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness, and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Amen. That is truly the word of the Lord. Please be seated. Thank you. Thank you. Praise the inquire. That was magnificent. Thank you so much. God bless you.

You know, it's funny.

Often when we hear the word grace, if you're not raised in the church or understand Christian theology, when you hear the word grace, what comes to mind is what we do before meals.

We don't use it any other time, really. I mean, think about it. The word grace doesn't really find itself in our vocabulary unless you are a Christian and know the word of God.

[1 : 44] But normally we talk about grace, meaning giving thanks to God as we see him for the food that we are about to eat. It makes me think of an old movie starring somebody who used to be called Jimmy Stewart.

It was a movie called Shenandoah. Shenandoah. Now, Shenandoah. Thank you. Shenandoah is a movie that sat in the time of the Civil War.

It's worth your watching, but I can only watch it just once. I mean, it's just, it's heartbreaking to me. But there's light in it. It takes me to the Civil War.

Jimmy Stewart's wife was a devout Christian and she's died and left him with the children, some of whom now are young adults. Now, Stewart wasn't a very devout Christian man.

And I'm afraid his saying of grace reflects what many people really mean by grace. Here's his prayer at grace. Lord, we cleared this land.

[2 : 55] We plowed it, sowed it, and harvested it. We cooked the harvest. It wouldn't be here and we wouldn't be eating it if we hadn't done it all ourselves.

We work dog bone hard for every crumb and morsel. But we thank you just the same anyway. Lord, thank you for the food we're about to eat.

Amen. I love that prayer. In other words, we are not truly thankful, but just going through the motions. Because to be honest, here's the thing.

Because to be honest, we all believe in our own ability to get things done. Christmas says that's not true.

Christmas says you are more helpless, flawed, self-destructive, and doomed than you believe. But Christmas grace comes and says, God has sent hope, help, and eternal happiness so that we can be different now and into the future.

[4 : 09] Do you know anything about Christmas grace? Now, Titus is a wonderful book. I've got to set the stage a little bit. Paul is writing to his protegee, Titus, whom he left on the Greek island of Crete.

He left him there to get the church in order. It was a church there, and evidently there were some issues that he needed to go there and set it up and get the order going. But what happens, false Jewish teachers had infiltrated that church and caused some chaos.

Now, it's funny, my wife and I went to Crete some years ago, and it's very mountainous. It's a beautiful place, but very mountainous. And they're really steeped in their marketing and Greek mythology.

It's really funny to watch how they promote that. But Titus also had another problem in reference to the people he was trying to serve for Christ.

Paul is not PC, okay? He don't care about that kind of stuff. He's not very PC at all. So he says, if you have your Bible, just turn, it might be on the screen, I don't know.

[5 : 18] In chapter 1, verses 12 through 14, here's what is said of the Cretans. He says this, one of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.

Now, Paul then says, this testimony is true. He got canceled right there. Therefore, Paul says, rebuke them, because that's true, he says, rebuke them sharply, that they may be, listen, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoted themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.

Now, he wants them to be sound in the faith. Healthy, stable in the faith. But in order for that to happen, Titus must do something day in and day out.

Chapter 2, verse 1, Paul says, But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. In order for the church to be sound, in order for the people of God to be sound in their faith, not living the old life, but living the new life in Christ, they have to be continually taught sound doctrine.

Now, why does Paul emphasize that? Because he knows the temptation is not to teach sound doctrine. It's easy to give people what they want to hear.

[6 : 52] So he's trying to encourage this preacher to understand, I sent you there and every preacher after you to teach sound doctrine, which is doctrine that is healthy, free of disease, and stable.

That's what it means by sound. And here's the thing. One of the key elements of sound doctrine that is able to change lives, probably the key, but very important, is simply grace.

You got to teach and preach grace. Christmas grace. First of all, grace showed up at Christmas. That's the big deal.

Verse 11, For the grace of God has appeared. Appeared. Bringing salvation for all people. Now let's back up for a minute.

That does not mean there was no grace in the Old Testament. Too many Christians get tripped up and believe this. We say in the Old Testament, we were saved by law, but in the New Testament, saved by grace.

[7 : 58] Not even close to being true. God has always saved his people by grace because no one has ever kept the law perfectly.

Hello. Thank you very much. Amen to that. Just in case some of you thought you did. Paul tells us this. In Romans chapter 4, he says in verse 1, What then shall we say?

Was gained by Abraham, Abraham, the progenitor of the Jewish people, Abraham our forefather, according to the flesh. For if Abraham was justified by works, by what he did to please God, he had something to boast about, but not before God.

For what does the scripture say? Abraham believed God. That's faith. And it was counted to him as righteousness. He trusted in God. He believed God's word. Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due.

And to the one who does not work, but believes, has faith in him, who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. Just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from, counts righteousness apart from works, blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered.

[9 : 27] Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin. the old covenant saints, Abraham and David, he holds them up as examples of those who were saved by faith, who trusted in God.

Grace has always been the way people are brought to faith in the living God. Now, when our Lord Jesus was born and Mary and Joseph gazed upon his beautiful face, what they were viewing was the grace of God in human flesh.

In human flesh, right there. Think about it. the word appearing in our text is where we get our word epiphany from. When we say, I had an epiphany, we mean that which was unclear has now become clear to us.

An idea maybe, or a decision I have to make. You say, I got it. I got it now. That's an epiphany. It's become clear.

What Paul is telling us is that grace became clear. Its meaning became visible. In the form of this baby that these dear folks held in their arms, grace became visible to all humanity.

[11:07] What is grace? Grace is how God, who is holy, is able to welcome sinners into his family. He does it by granting his favor, his grace.

He grants his favor to those who've not earned it or deserved it. He gives us what we don't deserve. He gives us what we could never earn.

We're not saved by works, by the good things we do for God. We're not saved by the good things we do for people. We're not saved by any good things that we do.

Because you're not consistent. And my motives are wrong. It's because God is kind.

It is the grace of God that leads us to repentance. He is kind. He is generous. He is mercy. He is love. And he overflows.

[12:16] And he reaches down to those who can't save themselves, don't even know they need saving. And he shows them this great and powerful welcome into his family.

The way that God appeared in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. And because Christmas grace appeared, salvation is available for all kinds of people from all nations and all cultures.

But someone might quip, okay, Ravcath, okay, preacher, you're talking about this salvation.

Salvation from what? That's a really good question, actually.

Because salvation, the word implies deliverance from some danger. What is the danger that humanity needs salvation from? Well, it's the opposite of grace, which is meaning where we need salvation from the righteous judgment of a holy and just God.

In other words, we need salvation from God's divine justice because the soul that sins it shall die. And that's not just for a moment, that's for all eternity.

[13:40] We're all guilty of sin against God, our judge, and thought, word, and deed. And let's be honest, we're all just messed up. I know we all have a family member or two, I got a few, who we look at them and we say, they messed up.

Come on, son, you know it's true, you got somebody in your family and you look at them and you go, man, they just toe up from the flow up. They never seem to get it right.

They always trip over their own feet. They always got some game they're running, some scam.

They always need money. They always into something that's self-destructive and you look at them, come on, you look at them and you say, that guy is messed up, but here's what God says, you're messed up.

You may not have their messed up, but you got your own. And that's all of us, no one leaves unscathed. I'm an equal opportunity offender.

You're all guilty. We're all selfish and proud to the core. Our morality and ethics depend on the situation.

[14:59] If I don't get caught, if I can't get caught, I'm going to do it. If it works for me, here's the real test. If I'm going to lose something that I value, will I still do the right thing?

We're more concerned with pleasing ourselves than anybody else, especially God. And Paul's going to talk more about this in a minute. Suffice to say, this is the bad news of Christmas.

You didn't know Christmas had bad news, did you? This is the bad news of Christmas. A counselor and pastor that I have met and I love this man, Paul Tripp. He has a wonderful devotional on Christmas.

He says this on December 5th, only when you accept the very, very bad news of Jesus' birth will you then be excited about the very, very good news.

You see, if you can't accept the bad news, why was it necessary? Why was grace necessary in a manger?

[16:08] Why did he have to come? And in that way, in particular, I would have sent him, man, in that culture, I would have sent him on a white horse with an army behind him with robes and, you know, crowns on it and sent him in like that.

But that's not what God did. Christmas grace is God doing something about our hopeless, helpless condition because we couldn't do anything to help or save ourselves.

We need, here's a gun, we needed someone like us but at the same time, unlike us to come to our rescue. He had to be like us so he could understand, he could sympathize with our issues.

He had to be like us so that he could do something in our place as one of us that none of us could do and that is keep the law of God perfectly.

So he had to be like us. But here's the thing, as just a human being, his death would only count for himself. But so he had to be deity.

[17 : 20] He had to be God in human flesh because now his death had immeasurable worth because his life has immeasurable worth. Come on y'all.

Like us but unlike us. Christmas grace is Jesus to the rescue. God to the rescue.

We call this his first advent, his first coming or arrival or the word of the text. His first appearance.

Now here's the thing about that appearance, the grace appeared, right? That's actually the first word in the sentence in the original language. It begins, appeared for the grace of God.

That's literally what's read there. Why is that important? It's being emphasized. Appeared. Paul is overcome by the idea that grace appeared.

[18 : 23] It's surprising. It's stunning. It's amazing. It's not something you would have thought of. Appeared. Does it still surprise you?

Does it even, does it, has it ever surprised you? that God's grace appeared. It became visible.

I should say, he became visible. Here's the thing, that God's solution to humanity's greatest problem, our rebellion against God, sin and death, we who are enslaved to the world, the flesh, and the devil, our own internal destruction.

Talking about our greatest problem. Our own internal destruction. Isn't it surprising that God handles that by sending a baby? it's like Israel sending two-year-olds to fight Hamas.

That would be stupid. That would be a crime against humanity. That would be the most, you, why would you do that? It doesn't make it, there's no chance.

[19 : 49] God don't care what we think. It doesn't make sense to our limited understanding, but for God, he flexed his muscles, he revealed his most powerful, unstoppable weapon against sin and death when his grace appeared living in a manger.

It's like God just went, I'm going to show you how I'm going to do this thing. I'm going to take the weakest of you, the most helpless of you, the most dependent of you, and my grace will appear in that form.

Now, he didn't stay that way, don't get me wrong, he didn't stay that way, he grew up, but do you think the devil was impressed? He probably thought, this is crazy, I'm going to kill him right now.

And what did he do? Right? He got Herod to try to kill all the babies. I'm going to take care of this right now. Done. He thought, I got this.

If that's your best shot, God, ha, ha, ha, ha. And yet, God was just flexing his muscles, revealing his most powerful, unstoppable weapon, his grace in human form.

[21 : 20] Now, listen now, Christmas grace does something. When Christmas grace shows up, he trains us to change us. Christmas grace trains us to change us.

No, let's look at verse 12. I mean, it's really beautiful. Training. Grace appeared, right? Bringing salvation. Now, watch this. Training us to renounce ungodliness and gruelly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.

This grace comes and puts us in training. It doesn't come to help us fulfill our dreams. He comes to train us for God's presence and work.

He comes to train us how to live as citizens of an eternal kingdom, his kingdom. You see, when people immigrate to this country, you know, they're not used to living here.

For many, they will find greater freedoms and greater opportunities here, for many. So they have to learn how to be citizens of the U.S. They must understand their new freedoms and, but also their new responsibilities to live by the rule of law in this country.

[22 : 36] Christmas grace is God training us to live in new freedoms and new responsibilities with new privileges. He's training us, but he's also transforming us from the inside out.

That's what grace does. This training involves instruction and discipline. That's what training means, instruction and discipline. By discipline, we're talking about exercises, activities, or a regimen that develops or improves our skills.

We have a dear young man in this church, Jonathan Griggs, and Jonathan is a firefighter. Now, Jonathan couldn't just show up to fight fires. He didn't just go, hey, that looks cool.

I want to help put out fires. He didn't just walk up to the fire truck and say, okay, give me a hose, give me an axe, point me in the right direction toward the fire. He didn't do it.

That didn't happen that way. What Jonathan had to do was go to school. He had to go through rigorous training which involved education and discipline. He had to learn to do things he was not

accustomed to even doing.

[23 : 47] He had to learn things he was unable to do before, but now, with the training and discipline, he's able to do them. Oh, my goodness. Our training is to help us fight the fires of sin that burn within us.

first of all, training gets rid of bad habits. We all have them. I only got one, but I know y'all got many. Okay.

What are the bad habits? Ungodliness and worldly passions. He says you are to renounce them, disown them, deny them. Ungodliness means impiety.

Otherwise, we're going to turn away from a life of idolatry, a life of wicked practices, irreligious life. We are a life that says I don't need God and I'm totally separated from God.

We got to turn away from that life, the life of unbelief that says I don't need, does God even exist? I don't care. Then we turn away from worldly passion.

[24 : 58] It's training, he's training. Listen, grace is doing the training. God's unmerited love and kindness and presence in our lives is doing the training.

Renounce worldly passions, which are strong desires or sinful impulses that we see in our culture. It's the value system of the world in opposition to God.

Listen, listen, our strong desires for out-of-control sexuality, extreme pursuit of pleasures.

See, that's what our culture is steeped in. That's where we lived before this grace began its training and appeared in our lives. And that grace now is saying, no, no, no, no, that's the old you.

Uh-uh. You're not going back there. I got something better for you now. And that grace, we have to get in training because I'm used to living this way. I'm used to thinking this way.

[26 : 00] I'm used to loving this way. And now grace comes and says, it's all wrong. That's not good news. But the good news, but there's good news.

Because the grace that saves is the grace that trains. That same presence of God, now he gives us this word and spirit to help us in the training, get us in the spiritual gym of the church.

We should be that. A place where surrounded by trainers and fellow athletes, we are working out together.

As grace, as God's grace continues to shower us, we know that even if, even the good that we still, that we will do, doesn't save us. It's because we've been accepted that we're able to go into this training.

Paul even describes the life that we once lived in chapter 3, verse 3. He says, for we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.

[27 : 17] That's how he describes himself and everyone else. Now we say no to that. It's not just saying no, it's also saying yes.

We say yes to what that grace implies too. Yes to self-control, uprightness, and godliness. We don't just, listen, Christians, brothers, we don't just say, I'm not going to do that anymore.

I'm not going to believe that anymore. I'm not going to want that anymore. Good luck with that. And I do mean luck. It won't work. We have to say yes to something.

We're saying yes to grace. We're saying yes to Jesus. We're saying yes to his training program.

We're saying yes to his transformation. I surrender all is the story of our lives because grace appeared.

Grace appeared in our hearts and lives and now we give ourselves to him who is grace. Self-control involves being reasonable, sensible, sober, disciplined.

[28 : 27] So now I look at God's good gifts of sexuality and God's good gifts of pleasures and now because I have self-control, I'm able to enjoy these things the way he wants me to.

Before, I was out of control. It's just my preference. What I want is my prerogative. That's old, I know, but that's enough. Y'all didn't even get that.

My goodness. That's Bobby Brown, just so you know. Now grace has come and I can say yes to the right things and in the right manner and in the right timing.

He gifts us with his spirit so that we have self-control and we have a sound mind. He makes us upright. Upright speaks of being fair or just. We live in, we treat people right according to God's standard.

We follow the golden rule. We do treat people the way we ourselves want to be treated. We honor people. We can be counted on. There's ethics here.

[29 : 33] There's truth here. There's justice here. Godliness. And we live godly lives. Godliness. The idea of God has set you apart for himself.

You are holy. And now as you begin to work out what it means to belong to Jesus, what it means to belong to God now, you begin to work that out by his grace and power and word working in you so that now you are devoted to him.

Godliness is devotion to God. I am his. He is my God. And I am his people. I am his son and his daughter.

We're devoted. This devotion is real. It's a gracious gift to us that we are living out now. This is what 1 Timothy 4, 7 and 8 reminds us.

Train yourself for godliness. For while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way. Not some value. Godliness is of value in every way.

[30 : 42] As it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. Godliness is everything. You lived ungodly before.

Now. You were devoted to yourself and your own kingdom. Now. Because you've met the grace of God in Jesus.

And you're surprised and amazed that he would show grace to you, a sinner, a messed up person, self-righteous person who thinks everybody is worse than you.

He's shown you much less grace and now they use Paul's other language. You present your body a living sacrifice to him. Devotion. Well, let me just wrap this up real quick.

Christmas grace also lives in anticipation. Look waiting for the blessed hope. The appearing of our great God and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[31 : 45] Watch this. He appeared once. And grace says, I want him. I want to be with him. I want to serve him. But grace also says, he's coming again.

And I can't wait. I live. Do you live each day in anticipation of the coming of Jesus? Christmas grace is the first advent.

it implies a second advent, a second coming, a second appearing. And if you understand the first, you should be living in hope of the second.

You should be waiting on tiptoe like the kids at Christmas running downstairs at five o'clock in the morning to see what's under the tree. Christmas grace says, that's us.

We're those kids. We can't, we get up in the morning, come Lord Jesus. And until you come, help me to live as if today is that day. Help me to live as if today is my last day.

[32 : 54] Help me to live for you. Help me to live because I see your glory. I'm waiting for your glory.

I see it now, but I'm waiting for your glorious coming. The glory will come again. The angels sang of the glory at Christmas. Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men upon whom his favor rests.

They sang of the glory, but it's coming again. Visible glory when he cracks the sky. And lastly, Christmas grace prepares us for mission.

For mission. That's verse 14. He who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify from himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

You're being purified. That's the whole bad habits, good habits, getting rid of the bad, being godly, growing in grace, the good habits. But that leads then to good works.

[34 : 08] He actually says a people who are zealous for good works. You know what zeal means, right? I mean, it's like when you were, guys, the girl you're dating or guys, the woman you married.

You couldn't wait and you can't wait to get in her presence. You are excited. When you hear her voice on the phone, you're like, yes! When you know you're going to get together, you can't wait to, there's a zeal, there's a passion.

And he says that same passion, even better passion, is to do good. He didn't even specify what good works are. You know why he doesn't specify? Because he knows we're not stupid.

We all know what good works are. We all know what good, treating people well and doing nice things. We know what good works are. But now we're doing it because of the grace of God.

We're doing good. And it's so important that he keeps repeating it. Chapter 3, verse 1, be ready for every good work. Chapter 2, verse 8, those who believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

[35 : 20] Chapter 3, verse 14, let our people learn to devote themselves to good works so as to help cases of urgent need and not be unfruitful. good works.

That's what grace produces. That's what it should produce. People who are passionate to turn away from ungodliness and the walk in godliness, to walk before the Lord because of what he's done for us, because of who he is, because we celebrate Christmas.

We say we celebrate Christmas, but this isn't like us. Are we these people? As Tripp says, Christmas is both the worst and the best news ever.

And understanding both will change your life forever. Bad news, but really, really, really, really good news. Have you met that grace?

What do you want for Christmas? Someone would ask you, what do you want for Christmas? I want to challenge you. You may want many things for Christmas. You may not even care, but I'm just saying. But here's one thing you should want for Christmas.

[36 : 36] A greater heartfelt grasp of Christmas grace at the very top of your list. To know Jesus. To know him more deeply.

To have your life turned upside down more for him. To put away those ungodly passions and things that tie you up and trample you.

You know, I like to play disc golf. And me and Daniel Rakes were playing up in Lynchburg just over the weekend. And you know, I have a problem.

You know, when you throw a disc, I have a problem. I throw nose up. Nose up. That means that the tip, the front of the disc is tilted up a little bit more than it should be.

You want it flat. You want it level. But I tend to throw nose up. You know what happens when you throw nose up? You can throw hard as you can. You can whip it, but it's going to go up and the air will just knock it down because it's nose up.

[37 : 35] Boom! It will crack. It goes up and it crashes. It's going to be that's what sin does to us. We're living nose, if we're living nose up, if you're living nose up, the wind of sin will hit you and ungodliness will cause you to crash.

It will cause you to stall. The disc stalls out and your life will stall out in the middle of flight, in the middle of giving it all you got.

You'll stall out if you're not living under the grace of God. If you're not living each day amazed and hungering for more of Jesus and his grace.

That's Christmas. So Merry Christmas. May God help us all. Help us all to deny ungodliness and worldly passions and live each day under his godliness upright lives that honor Jesus because of who he is and what he's done for us.

Father, forgive us, Lord, for allowing the world to sneak in. we know you saved us.

[39 : 02] We know you. But Lord, sometimes we just allow ourselves to get so off track, so caught up in the goods and glamour of this world and so burdened by our own issues and problems and we try to handle things our way and Lord, forgive us for all of that and put us on the right track again.

Get us out of the ditch. Lord, we've gone nose up and we've crashed. Now help us. Pick us up because we didn't earn your grace to begin with.

Pick us up, please. Set us on our feet. Dust us off, please. And set us on that right path of true devotion to Jesus. Watching, rejoicing in that Christmas grace that you've caused to appear not just in history but you caused that Christmas grace to appear in our hearts, in our lives.

Even today. Even today.