

But He Gives More Grace - Kenny Foster

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Preacher: Kenny Foster

- [0 : 00] Good morning. It's good to be with all of you this morning.
- I bring you greetings from your sister church in Dover, Delaware, where God is doing a work similar to this.
- We seek to serve the Lord by gathering as his people from every race, every class, to celebrate and demonstrate the power of the gospel.
- I'm going to pray first, and then I'll read the passages of scripture. You don't mind standing while we pray.
- Let's pray. Lord Jesus, it is because of what you have done for us, as we have just sung, of your great sacrifice and your great love for us, Lord.
- [1 : 11] It is for this reason we are in your presence. We are called your people. And so, Lord, as your people, we ask for your help this morning.
- As we read your word, as your word is spoken, Lord, open our minds and fill our hearts. Encourage us, Lord, in this world as we continue to walk through it for the glory of Christ who loved us and gave himself for us.
- Amen. Amen. Amen. We're reading from the book of Isaiah, chapter 54, verses 4 through 8, and we're also going to read from the book of James, chapter 4, verses 6 through 10.
- Hear the word of the Lord. Fear not, for you will not be ashamed. Be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced.
- For you will forget the shame of your youth and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your maker is your husband. The Lord of hosts is his name.
- [2 : 17] And the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. For the Lord has called you like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God.
- For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing anger, for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer.
- And James, with the spirit of an Old Testament prophet says to us, but he gives more grace.
- Therefore it says, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.
- Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.
- [3 : 29] Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thanks be to God. Indeed. You may be seated.
- Let me put a riddle to you. What is the one thing of which no one is free and everyone loathes when they see it in someone else and hardly anyone ever imagines that they themselves are guilty of?

What's the one thing of which no one is free and everyone loathes when they see it in someone else and hardly anyone ever imagines that they themselves are guilty of? If you said pride, you'd be exactly right.

How many? I'm not going to ask you. Well, the title of today's message is, But He Gives More Grace. Knowing God is not possible apart from the grace of God.

Transformation into the image of Christ, which is the goal of being a Christian, begins with God giving us grace. And as Christians, we seek to devote ourselves to exposing the deep crevices of our hearts to the light of God's grace offered to us through Jesus Christ.

[5 : 03] The grace needs to be worked into the nooks and crannies of our being until we are totally transformed. I can remember back in 1998 when we came here, our hearts were bruised and it was here.

You know, I'm sitting right, sitting right over there thinking, Lord, what am I going to do here? There's so many people and there's, there's so many, there's so many folks who are capable, you know. So what, so what, what am I going to do here?

But I saw, you know, my wife and, and, and the boys were in, were enjoying and their, their, their hearts were, were warming up. And, you know, and it was the message of grace. And God was like, oh, just sit there.

Let it soak it, soak it in. You haven't seen anything yet. And the grace of God warmed my heart. And I fell in love with the gospel again.

So the grace of God, it needs to be worked into the nooks and crannies until we are totally transformed. Do you seek grace from God? He gives, he gives more grace.

[6 : 22] But at what cost? It comes through a cross. It comes through humility. It'll cost you your pride.

You must sacrifice your pride. And suffer the humility of an instrument of death.

He gives more grace. Because after the humiliation comes honor. And after the cross comes the crown.

So as we're going through this, keep in mind, whatever it is we think we are sacrificing in our service to the Lord or, or his people, it's not to be compared to the sacrifice of Christ.

Therefore, humility before honor means learning to love the giver more than the gifts. In the cross before the grace.

[7 : 20] In the cross before the crown, we're beholding the greatness of God's grace more than our efforts at being a good Christian. Because it's quite possible.

It's quite possible. In the attempt to be a better person, to be a good Christian, that we miss the grace of God. Because we can be moral and merciless.

We can be charitable but unloving. And you say, how? Well, it's because we can be caught up in the pride of being religious.

And every Christian, every Christian is tempted with being religiously proud. And religious pride is insidious.

It shows when you click your tongue, when you hear about the sins of other people, but your sins, well, you have your reasons.

[8 : 23] You know, it shows, it rears its head when you feel overlooked. It's lurking when you withhold your participation and fellowship and service, feigning humility and integrity.

But really, you're full of self-glory. But God is calling us to the humility that only grace produces.

The humility that's in our text here. A humility that rides the waves of grace all the way to the heights. So how do we get away?

How do we get away from the pride of being religious? Well, what must happen to have, what is it that, what must happen to have the humility that grace produces?

And how can we get it in a culture that encourages pride about everything? See, in the world, pride increases suffering.

[9 : 26] But he gives more grace. The scripture reading today is showing us the way to being delightfully humble. It's in knowing that he, God, gives more grace because of a covenantal faithfulness that inspires a cleansing focus that has a crowning future.

Hey, there's the outline right there. A covenant faithfulness inspiring a cleansing focus that has a crowning future.

Let's look at this in verses 4 through 6. You adulterous people, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the scripture says he yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us, but he gives more grace.

Therefore, it says God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. So over and over again in the pages of the Bible, this picture of God being the spouse of his people emerges.

[10 : 36] And you might ask, well, where is that in the text? Well, we read it in Isaiah 54 or 5, for your maker is your husband. And the fact that James refers to him as adulterous brings up the image of marital infidelity.

And now he's talking about spiritual adultery for sure, but he has the idea that James has in mind is it's much like the prophets of the Old Testament. He's calling the Christians to be faithful to God, faithful like a devoted wife to her spouse.

James is saying, you can't be torn between two lovers feeling like a fool. Loving both of them is breaking all the rules.

Some of you might have to look that up on YouTube to find that song. But he's saying, you can't be lovers of the world and lovers of God.

The world and God don't mix. So the world is the cosmos, the system that leaves God out. The world system is by design enticing to our sinful natures.

[11 : 52] The system of the world feels right, doesn't it? So it isn't just sinful acts. Because sinful acts are just the fruit.

The root of our sinful fruit is what resonates with the world. It sounds right to say, I believe in God in my own way.

It sounds right to say, if it doesn't hurt anyone, why shouldn't I do it?

But that's the world system talking. It sounds right to say, I can choose whatever I want to be. And no one can judge me on this.

But that's the world system talking. It sounds right to say, I don't need to believe in God. I believe in myself. That's the world system talking.

[12 : 58] See, the world and God, they don't mix. The world encourages pride, then it exploits it. Leaving you broken and humiliated.

C.S. Lewis in Mere Christianity, he wrote this about pride. He says, pride leads to every other vice. It is the complete anti-God state of mind. It is pride, which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began.

But God, the text tells us, yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us. Sounds like another marriage talk, doesn't it?

Yeah, because lovers in an exclusive relationship, they get jealous, right? James wants us to think deeply about a theme that runs through the scripture and the implications of it.

And that theme is that God is a jealous God. God will have no other gods before him. And in the ESV, when you're reading this, it adds these quotation marks on verse 5, and it makes it look like what James is doing, that he's quoting.

[14 : 13] He's quoting some verse, but you can search the scripture for this verse, and you'll not find it, because he's not quoting a verse. And other translations don't have those quotation marks. But it's more likely that James is employing a method of teaching that focuses on a scriptural theme.

But also, he's talking about the spirit. Is he talking about the spirit of man, or is he talking about the Holy Spirit? And you could be in good company seeing it either way, but I think that he's talking about the Holy Spirit.

And that what he's saying is that it is saying that the Holy Spirit that Christ has placed in us longs for us to love God. That's why the grief and the mourning over the sin of being seduced by the world.

The Spirit is pursuing you even when you sin, seeking to have your needs met by some other lovers. God is calling you away.

He's calling you and I away from idolatry. See, the text is telling us that God loves his people jealously, not sinfully, but passionately.

[15 : 26] He pursues us to love him. But it isn't. It isn't because he's not fulfilled, but because he needs nothing from us.

He doesn't need. We can't add anything to God. But it's for our good. God passionately pursues us to love him because loving the world will kill you.

Literally. And his love, his love is life-giving. One writer said this, To realize that the awesomely holy God who transcends the universe and is wholly other and self-contained is at the same time personally and passionately and lovingly jealous for our affection, this realization ought to stop any of our affairs with the world and cause us to prostrate our souls adoringly before him.

How we are loved. And how we ought to love. He gives more grace. It's evident in the realization that the covenantal faithfulness is all from God.

Not from us. Because as the song says, we are prone to wander. Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.

[16 : 52] And here's the prayer. Here's my heart. Lord, take and seal it. Seal it for thy courts above. See, this covenantal, this covenantal faithfulness inspires a cleansing focus.

Look at verses 7 and 8. Submit yourselves, therefore, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

He gives more grace because of a covenanted faithfulness that showcases God's passionate pursuit of us to love him exclusively, inspiring a cleansing focus.

You see the focus here? It's in submitting to God and drawing near to God. Submit yourselves to God, the text says. It means to arrange yourself to be put under.

The control of God. To arrange yourself to be put under the control of God. Can you think of any biblical examples where that took place?

[17 : 57] How about Job? You know, when he lost everything. And what does he do? He bows down and he worships and he says, The Lord gives.

The Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. What is he doing? He's arranging himself to be put under the control of God.

But you see, when you hear that, see, right away, pride bristles at the idea of a subjection to someone or to someone controlling you.

And what's the issue? What's the issue behind the idea of control? You think that the person doesn't have your best interest at heart. That's why you struggle on your job.

Your boss asks you to do something and in his mind it's not that much. But what? Yeah, he's because he's, you think that he doesn't have your best interest at heart.

[19 : 02] You think that if you submit, more pain will be inflicted upon you than you can bear. You think that the control and submission, it's going to be your undoing.

It's going to be your end and you will suffer in the relationship. And sometimes in human relationships, that's exactly what happens. But when you know that the person who is calling for the submission, who's calling for the control, has sacrificed themselves for you, that they're bearing more pain than they're inflicting, you have no problem giving them control.

They're worthy of it. And there's only one person, brothers and sisters, there's only one person who is worthy of your complete surrender. That's Jesus Christ.

You see, this is a sharpening of focus away from yourself and towards God. It's not a focus on what you are giving up, but what God has through Christ's sacrifice given to you.

Paul Tripp in his book, *The Journey to the Cross*, it's a Lenten devotional, but in it he talks about this very idea of our willing sacrifice.

[20 : 26] And he says, Lent is about willing self-sacrifice. As you pursue the one who made the ultimate sacrifice for you. It's not about what you are doing or are committing yourself to do for God, but about what he has done and is now doing for you.

Think of it this way. Focus on being clean because you've been cleansed. God has in Christ provided you with a cleansing that cannot be paralleled and nothing can be added to it.

It can only be realized. Isaiah 54 illustrates the cleansing and that awakens us to pursue being clean. And hear the cleansing in Isaiah 54.

Fear not, for you will not be ashamed. Be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced. For you will forget the shame of your youth and the reproach of your widowhood.

You will remember no more. Do you see the cleansing? You're cleansed from fear. Cleansed from shame. Cleansed from confusion.

[21 : 35] Cleansed from disgrace. Cleansed from scorning. And you see, if you are a Jewish widow and you're hearing this, yeah, and you know how Isaiah 54 starts.

The barren woman sings. So yeah, if you're a widow and you've been barren in those times, yeah, the widow, it made you the object of scorn because every Jewish woman thought that, you know, that she might become, she might become the mother of the Messiah.

So, so, so if you, and you have no children, yeah, and you see that in Genesis, right, with, with Leah and Rachel. You know, you, you, you see, you see this played out through, through the scripture.

Yeah, and so you fear, you fear, you're, you're subjected to, to fear and of having nothing and shame because you have no son, no husband to provide for you.

But all of these, all of these are, are the result of the fear, the shame, the, the scorn, all the result of this, of sin and pride. But he gives more grace.

[22 : 51] The text says, your maker is your husband. The Lord is your redeemer. He comes to cleanse his people from these.

Now, go out and realize it. Realize you've been cleansed. See, Jesus has done this for you. He's the servant of Isaiah 52 and 53 who knew what it meant to be shamed on the cross.

He knows what it is to be disgraced since he died the death of a criminal. In Isaiah 54, 7 and 8, it describes what Jesus suffered for us.

The brief moment of being deserted by God, Jesus suffered that on the cross for us. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

See, the overflowing anger of God wherein he hid his face fell on the Son of God so that with great compassion he might gather us.

[24 : 00] He was scorned and mocked about being the Son of God who couldn't save himself. Remember what they said? You're the Son of God. Save yourself. Come down. Yeah, but he couldn't save himself because he was saving you and I.

Do you seek grace from God? He gives more grace. Hallelujah. But at what cost?

The life of his Son. It was his cross. It was his humility. He gave up his honor to give you and I honor in the Father's presence.

But see, his death isn't the end though because he rose from the dead and now he causes the barren woman to sing.

He's your maker. He's your husband. He who loves you even though you were abandoned, even though you were destitute like a widow woman, now realizing this cleansing.

[25 : 10] This cleansing. You say, how is that? How do you do that? Well, obey the instructions here in James 4 because the way to bring this realization into a cleansing focus is to resist the devil.

Resisting the devil is to submit to the Lord. And the way to cleanse your hand and purify your heart and focus your mind is by drawing near to God and he will draw near to you is that what the promise is.

In other words, recognize, recognize the intensity of the relationship we have with God. Being his spouse.

For he's our husband. He is our redeemer. And submit to it and submit to it with everything that we've got. Since humbling ourselves, we receive a crowning future.

Look at verses 4, verses 9 and 10 of James 4. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.

[26 : 19] See, these verses, this verse is teaching us to cast ourselves down in order to be crowned. To be wretched, to mourn and weep, to turn your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom are ways to humble yourselves.

As you turn from the world to God, you humble yourselves and God will exalt y'all. See, I've been in the South for, I was in the South for 25 years and actually Delaware, it's a little mixed up.

They don't know whether they're in the South or the North, but, you know, they have Southern ways, they just lack the accent. See, so the word, the word exalt, it means to raise to the very summit of opulence and prosperity.

To raise to dignity, to honor and happiness. Sounds like a crowning, doesn't it? And we are, after all, inheriting a kingdom.

Amen. Amen. We are, we are ruling and reigning with Christ, right? Yes. See, grace seeks to lift.

[27 : 40] Grace, grace goes from the greater to the lesser and grace always has this downward flow that, that carries its recipient upwards. We cast ourselves down in order to be crowned.

This is how grace works in the kingdom of God for the people of God. See, this is the grace that saves us. This is the grace that teaches you. It's the grace that enables us.

It's the grace that preserves us. He gives more grace. The text literally says he gives greater grace. Do you want greater grace?

Do you want to crush your pride? God has covenanted his faithful love to us. And the assurance of such love is seen in Jesus Christ.

The love, this love calls us to a cleansing focus. Not to get cleaner, but because he has brought cleansing into your life with his love.

[28 : 47] Christ has made you clean. And the realization of this, of this cleansing happens as we humble ourselves. We cast ourselves down in order to be crowned.

Understanding that whatever we think we are sacrificing here, it's not to be compared with Jesus' sacrifice, which has secured for us this future crowning.

And that he gives us more grace, that crushes religious pride. God. Ira Stanfield, singer, songwriter, preacher, evangelist of yesteryear, he, after his wife left him, she said she no longer wanted to be married to a preacher.

Two years after she left him, he was at this mission conference and he heard these missionaries, Charles and Mary Greenberg, tell their story about being heartbroken in their ministry. Can you relate?

Yes, not everybody likes the gospel. Not everybody loves that you're trying to love them or even it's hard for you sometimes to love the fact that God loves you.

[30 : 03] So as they're telling their story and how they prayed and they sought God to send them somewhere else, but they sense that they should stay, they sense that the Lord was telling them to stay because the Lord reminded them that he felt the sting of rejection.

He felt apathy, the pain of apathy and he was saying to them, stay and leave the rest to me. So Stanfield, two years after the divorce, he was moved in his heart and hearing the story about his own plight and he wrote this song, Follow Me, wherein he demonstrates how coming back to the cross again and again, we find that God gives greater grace to transform us from prideful to delightedly humble.

He penned these words, I traveled down a lonely road and no one seemed to care. The burden on my weary back had bowed me to despair.

I oft complained to Jesus how folks were treating me and then I heard him say so tenderly, my feet were also weary upon the Calvary road.

The cross became so heavy, I fell beneath the load. Be faithful, weary pilgrim, the morning I can see. Just lift your cross and follow close to me.

[31 : 39] I worked so hard for Jesus, I often boast and say, I sacrificed a lot of things to walk the narrow way. I gave up fame and fortune. I'm worth a lot to thee.

And then I hear him gently say to me, I left the throne of glory and counted but lost. My hands were nailed in anger upon a cruel cross.

cross. But now we'll make the journey with your hand safe in mine. So lift your cross and follow close to me.

Oh, Jesus, if I die upon a foreign field someday, it would be no more than love demands, no less could I repay.

No greater love hath mortal man than for a friend to die. These are the words he gently spoke to me.

[32 : 56] If just a cup of water I place within your hands, then just a cup of water is all that I demand.

But if by death through living they can thy glory see, I'll take my cross and follow close to thee.

You see, brothers and sisters, there isn't a sacrifice that you and I can make that will equal the sacrifice of Christ.

And if God who gives more grace is at work on our behalf in such a way, then shouldn't this make us delightedly humble?

Grace should make us glad. Grace replaces grumpiness with gladness. The one commentator exhorts, the test of a church's faith is not only the wording in its creed, but also the gladness in its worship.

[34 : 17] The gospel demands a carefree spirit. If we aren't going to hell anymore, if we stand to inherit every blessing almighty God can think of, if nothing can stand in the way of our restored humanness, because it's all ours through the merit of Christ, the friend of sinners, if that can't make us smile, what can?

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, indeed, your grace does make us smile.

To every heart, Lord, that is open, that you have opened, and by faith you have entered in by your Holy Spirit residing in us, Lord.

You're pursuing us, making us, calling us to love you alone, Lord, and our hearts cry out, we only want to love you, Lord. Father, fulfill your word in us and your work in us, Lord, here in this church, in New City, in Glenwood, Lord, and in Eastlake, in this city, that the name of Christ might continue to be exalted, for it's in his name we pray.

Amen.