

## John 1:14-18

### “Grace unmeasured vast and free”

**Preamble:** Give away gentle and lowly...

#### **Sermon introduction:**

Not long ago, Larry King invited a panel of esteemed religious leaders to join him on his famous talk show.

The panel included an Atheist, a Jew, a Muslim, a Roman Catholic priest, a New Age guru, and an Evangelical scholar.

Larry had one main question—what happens when we die?

The atheist insisted that there is nothing after death but rotting corpses. This is consistent with a materialist worldview. Yet, even Larry King, a non-Christian, found this answer hard to believe.

On the other hand, the Jew, Muslim, New Age guru, and the Roman Catholic Priest all agreed that there is life after death. They also agreed bad people will be punished and good people will be rewarded.

The Muslim spoke for all of them when he said, “People will go to heaven if they perform enough good works.”

And this makes sense, doesn't it? Everything in life is based on merit, isn't it? How is one's path to heaven any different?

According to a recent Pew Research poll, 52% of American Protestants believe that good works will get them into heaven. (Recent CT magazine article)

But this raises a critical question, how good do we have to be? Asked another way, how good is good enough?

At this point in the conversation the evangelical scholar had not said much, so Larry called on him. “Pastor so and so, is anyone good enough to get in heaven after they die? The pastor said, “No one is good enough to get into heaven.” Larry King freaked out and said, “Are you serious, no one is good enough to go to heaven? That is horrible news. So, are saying that everyone goes to hell?”

The evangelical said, “No, because of grace, some bad people will get into heaven.”

Grace is shocking. Grace is contrary to merit. Grace is what makes Christianity utterly unique from every other religion on the globe. This brings us to this morning's passage. We are at the very end of John's prologue (v. 1-18), which means that John is almost done introducing Jesus Christ.

It is very fitting for John to end his introduction of Jesus by emphasizing the grace of Jesus Christ, since Jesus Christ is the very embodiment of grace.

We will explore our passage under three headings.

*First, the nature of grace.*

*Second, the history of grace.*

*Third, the giver of grace.*

## **First, the nature of grace.**

### **What is grace?**

**John 1:16 (ESV) — 16** For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

Many people define grace as God's unmerited favor, or God's riches at Christ's expense. These definitions are helpful, but incomplete. It is not just that God lavishes us with unmerited favor, although that is amazing. What makes grace so amazing is who God lavishes with unmerited favor.

The Bible reminds us repeatedly, that God freely bestows his favor, not on righteous people, but on law breakers. We must never forget who we were when God lavished us freely with his unmerited favor.

A better definition of Grace is **God's favor freely given to those who deserve judgment**. There are two important components of this definition. First, grace is God's favor freely given. Which means that it can't be earned. Second, grace is God's favor freely given to those who deserve punishment.

### **Illustration:**

Imagine for a moment that you are walking through river front park. You see a homeless guy. He is in bad shape. He is dirty, hungry, and lonely. He reaches out his hand and says, "hey man, can you spare five dollars?" You are feeling rather magnanimous, so you give him ten dollars. He did not merit this money; therefore, it is unmerited favor. But is this biblical grace? Not exactly.

So, what is grace? Let's say that the following week the same homeless guy breaks into your house, assaults your family, steals your family heir looms, sets your house on fire, and then drives off in your tricked out minivan.

The next day he is caught. But you refuse to press charges. Refusing to press charges is not grace, refusing to press charges is mercy. Instead of pressing charges you decide to give him ten million dollars. That my friends, is grace.

Grace is God's favor freely given to those who deserve judgment.

In our unconverted state, we did not deserve God's favor, rather we deserved God's justice, since we break his laws every day. Instead of giving us justice, God chooses to freely give us his own son.

If we don't understand what we really deserve, we will never be amazed by God's grace.

### **Application:**

Grace is favor freely given to law breakers.

Grace is a gift. Gifts can't be earned. This explains why we don't pay our friends when they give us birthday gifts.

If grace is freely given, we can get off the good day bad day treadmill.

Why is this so hard for us to take hold of?

Because we have to work for everything else in life...  
When we work hard, we get good grades.  
When we work hard, we make more money.  
When we work hard, we get better at sports.  
When we work hard, we can lose the weight.  
When we work hard, we might get that promotion...

Naturally, we think that when we work hard, God will show us favor!!! But grace is God's favor freely given.

This means that we must repent of our bad deeds and good deeds—good deeds done to earn God's favor.

Objection... if I truly believe that I'm saved by grace, won't that tempt me to sin more, so that grace will abound? (Rom. 6:1-3)

Listen to the wise words of the Puritan pastor Thomas Brooks.

“Saving grace makes a man as willing to leave his lusts as a slave is willing to leave his galley, or a prisoner his dungeon, or a thief his bolts, or a beggar his rags.” (Thomas Brooks)

Ok, I understand that grace is free, but will there be enough grace for me???

This brings up the next question...

*What is grace???* Favor freely given to those who deserve judgment.

**How much grace does Jesus give? An unlimited supply!**

**John 1:16 (ESV) — 16** For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

The fullness of Christ refers to the sum-total of Christ's divine attributes. In other words, God has so much divine goodness that it continually overflows to his children. Said another way, out of Christ's inexhaustible supply of divine goodness believers are given everything they need and more.

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

The phrase “grace upon grace” is very interesting. It is translated in a variety of ways, “grace instead of grace,” or “one gracious blessing after another,” or “grace following grace,” or “grace heaped upon grace.”

John is boldly saying that each experience of the grace of God is replaced by another. Therefore, we will never run out of grace. The grace spigot never shuts off; it never stops flowing.

During peak season, six million cubic feet of water flow over Niagara falls every minute.

One scholar writes,

“God's grace is like a mighty Niagara, thundering unendingly out of eternity in our hearts.” (J. Phillips)

**Romans 5:20 (ESV) — 20** Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

### **Illustration:**

During WWII the Japanese launched an attack on the island of Bataan—in the Philippine Islands. The several thousand US Troops that were stationed on Bataan were totally unprepared.

As the Japanese launched attack after attack the brave US soldiers did everything in their power to defend the islands. As they were bombarded with bombs, grenades, and bullets, their supplies ran dangerously low. But they were assured that more supplies were on their way. Unfortunately, the ships bringing those supplies were attacked. Therefore, the supplies did not get to the brave soldiers in time. As a result, the soldiers were massacred. This disaster of epic proportions was the result of insufficient supplies.

Roughly one year later, the US launched an attack in the Solomon Islands, which included the famous battle of Guadalcanal. As you can imagine, people were worried that this would turn into another battle of Bataan.

As a result, our secretary of War published this announcement in the papers,

“There is twice as much food as the soldiers can eat; there is twice as much ammunition as the soldiers can fire; there are twice as many doctors and nurses as ordinarily needed in any military engagement; there are twice as many medical supplies as needed. We have twice as many airplanes as usually needed. We are prepared for every contingency.” (Barnhouse, LMI, 143)

If you are a Christian, you will never experience the battle of Bataan debacle. Like the soldiers at Guadalcanal, you will have twice as much as you need.

Through Jesus Christ, you will always have an overflowing, endless, undiminished supply of grace.

### **Application:**

In our more honest moments, I think we would admit that sometimes it seems like we are going to run out of God’s grace. Some wonder, “is God really going to keep forgiving me? I have been committing this same sin for decades. I still get angry, I still covet, I still complain, and I’m still proud.”

“We feel like we have already used up the truckloads of grace that God has given us! Is there any left???”

I know that God forgives all the little sins, but what about the big sins??? Is there any grace left for those?

**John 1:16 (ESV) — 16** For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

God’s grace is a limitless never-ending flow!!!

*At this point, we must remember that God’s unlimited grace takes many forms.*

Sometimes we need...

Grace for increased faith.

Grace for comfort after severe loss.

Grace to deal with loneliness.  
Grace to forgive.  
Grace for courage.  
Grace for self-discipline.

In these instances, grace takes the form of strength!!!

We need grace to handle prosperity and grace to handle adversity.  
We need grace when we are young and grace when we are old.  
Grace for persecution and grace for freedom.

The bottom line is that Jesus Christ gives us free favor and strength for EVERY situation we face, and we will never ever run out of grace.

*We must also possess a holy discontentment...*

What do I mean? Some of you have plateaued spiritually speaking...  
We must not be satisfied with all the grace we have been given, when God offers us so much more to do so much more...

He expects great things from us.... because he gives great power to us.  
We must not be content with our ordinary lives...  
He gives us grace to do the extraordinary...

*Jesus is very gracious. But has God always been gracious? This brings us to the second point...*

*First, the nature of grace.*

## **Second, the history of grace.**

*In verse 17, John contrasts two eras in the history of grace. Let's start with the first era.*

### **Era one—The preparation of grace!**

**John 1:17 (ESV) — 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.**

The law John refers to is the law of Moses. God gave specific laws to Moses to give to Israel around 1450 BC. There were 613 laws—summarized in the ten commandments. These laws were meant to govern every detail of the life of Israel.

Yet, no matter how hard Israel tried, they could not obey the laws of Moses. The problem was not the law, the law was good and right, the problem was the Israelites. Their sin nature kept them from fulfilling the laws demands.

As a result, they stood guilty and condemned before a holy God. Yet, the law was never designed to be a means of salvation. The law was designed to get the people of Israel to see their great need for a savior.

This brings us to the next era in the history of grace...

*Era one—the preparation for grace.*

### **Era two—the provision of grace.**

**John 1:17 (ESV) — 17** For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

The law was given to Moses to drive the Israelites to the grace and truth of Jesus Christ. In other words, the law was preparatory.

**Galatians 3:24 (NIV84) — 24** So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

How does the law point us to Jesus Christ?

When Israel realized that they could not obey God's laws perfectly, no matter how hard they tried, they realized they needed help. More specifically they needed a savior. They needed someone who could obey the laws perfectly on their behalf and pay the penalty they deserved for breaking God's laws.

The law was meant to drive us to Christ.

### **Illustration:**

According to one scholar, the relationship between law and grace was once taught to baseball fans by the Chicago Cubs. It began when the Cubs acquired Vance Law to play third base. A bit later, they brought up Mark Grace from the minor leagues to play first base. For two seasons, Law and Grace held down opposite corners of the baseball diamond at Wrigley field. Law stood by third base and Grace stood by first base. Whenever a batter smashed a grounder to third base, Law would quickly snatch it off the ground and throw it over to Grace at first base for the out. (P. Ryken, Galatians, 130-131)

This is how law and grace work together. When the ball is hit to Law, it is quickly thrown to Grace as soon as possible.

When you and I look towards law for very long, law quickly turns our gaze to grace.

### **Application:**

Here is the problem...

Most of us don't stop and think about what the law really requires. But think about it for a moment with me. Jesus summarized the law for us. He said that we must "love God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength. And we must love our neighbor as our self." We must do this all the time (24-7). If we don't, we are in deep trouble.

The reason that so many people don't think they need Jesus is because they have not spent much time thinking about the law. When they seriously contemplate the law's demands, they run to Christ as fast as they can.

Consider the words of this great hymn...

"How long beneath the law I lay  
In bondage and distress  
I toiled the precept to obey,  
But toiled without success."

“To see the law by Christ fulfilled,  
To hear his pardoning voice,  
Changes a slave into a child  
And duty into a choice.”

Law is so much better than grace...

One scholar contrasts the two,

“Law demanded righteousness from men: Grace brings righteousness to men. Law sentences a living man to death: grace brings a dead man to life. Law speaks of what men must do for God; grace tells of what Christ has done for men.” (Pink, quoted by R. Phillips, 67)

*But who specifically gives us grace? This brings us to the final point.*

*First, the nature of grace.*

*Second, the history of grace.*

**Third, the giver of grace.**

**Who is the giver of grace? The invisible God made visible!**

**John 1:18 (ESV) — 18** No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.

What is John saying? Here is a paraphrase, “no one has ever seen God, the only God, except Jesus, who is very near to the Father. Jesus has made God known.” The NIV translation is a little easier to understand.

**John 1:18 (NIV) — 18** No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

Here is the point. In the OT, no one could see God face to face and live (Ex. 33:20; Gen. 32:30; Is. 6:1-5). God is far too Holy, righteous, and good. Yes, there were a few times when a few OT saints saw glimpses of God’s glory, but no one ever looked on God’s face with their eyes.

That is, until Jesus. Jesus Christ is fully God. He is a member of the trinity (remember John 1:1-3). Furthermore, John 1:18 tells us that Jesus is very near to God the father (some translations say, “in the bosom of the father” or “close to the father’s heart”). Since Jesus is God (i.e., the same substance as God), near to God the father, and a member of the trinity, he, and he alone, can make God known to us.

The word for make known is the word from which we get the English word “exegete.” To exegete something means to make known something by expounding it. When someone exegetes the Scripture, they make known the meaning of Scripture. Jesus is the one who makes God known. He exegetes God.

Later in John, Jesus very boldly says, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (14:9; cf. 5:37; 6:46; see also Matt. 11:27).

**Application:**

Jesus Christ makes God known!  
Jesus is gracious.

If Jesus abounds with grace, and Jesus reveals God to us, then the triune God abounds with grace.  
God the father abounds in grace- He freely gave us the son.  
God the son abounds in grace- He freely gave us himself.  
God the Spirit abounds in grace- he freely gives us the ability to believe the gospel and obey Christ's commands.

Grace is at the heart of the Christian religion because grace is at the heart of God. That is why it is very fitting for John to end his prologue on this note.

### **Conclusion:**

“During a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world debated what, if any, belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities. Incarnation? Other religions had different versions of gods' appearing in human form. Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of return from death. The debate went on for some time until C. S. Lewis wandered into the room. "What's the rumpus about?" he asked, and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity's unique contribution among world religions. Lewis responded, "Oh, that's easy. It's grace."

After some discussion, the conferees had to agree. The notion of God's love coming to us free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every instinct of humanity. The Buddhist eight-fold path, the Hindu doctrine of karma, the Jewish covenant, and the Muslim code of law -- each of these offers a way to earn approval. Only Christianity dares to give love away free of charge.” (Yancey, What is so Amazing about Grace, p. 45)

Let's pray....