

Great Themes in Discipleship, #2

It's All of Grace

(Luke 7:36-50)

--CEFC 2/13/22

Philip Yancey tells the story of a British conference on comparative religion.

Experts from around the world were discussing whether

any one belief was unique to the Christian faith.

They began eliminating possibilities.

Was it incarnation?

Well, there were other religions that had stories

of gods appearing in human form.

Was it resurrection?

Again, other religions had accounts of a return from death.

The debate went on for some time,

until the Oxford don C. S. Lewis wandered into the room.

"What's all the rumpus about?" he asked,

and he was told that they were discussing

Christianity's unique contribution among world religions.

Then they asked his opinion on the matter.

In his forthright manner Lewis responded,

"Oh, that's easy," he said. "It's grace."

After some discussion, the conferees had to agree.

The notion of God's favor coming to us without any merit of our own,
and even when we deserved anything but,
seems to go against every instinct of humanity.

The Buddhist eightfold path,
the Hindu doctrine of karma,
the Jewish Mosaic covenant,
and the Muslim code of law--
each of these offers some way to be worthy of God's approval.

Only Christianity dares to make God's love unconditioned and undeserved--
that is, it is a matter of his grace.¹

This morning as we continue looking at great themes in discipleship,
I want to point you to *the glory of God's grace*
in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We need to go there because grace is at the heart of the gospel,
and if you haven't grasped this,
and if this hasn't grasped you,
well then, you've just missed it./

And unfortunately, many people do miss it.
They miss it all time—this message of grace.

And in our culture,
in which some 70% of all Americans claim to be Christian in some sense,

¹Quoted from CT 10/6/97 pp. 53,54. "What's So Amazing about Grace?" by Philip Yancey.

the greatest rival to the Christian gospel is not Islam;
it's not atheism,
it's not even secularism.

The greatest rival to the Christian gospel is a belief system
you've probably never even heard of.

It is described in a book authored by Notre Dame sociologist Christian Smith,
entitled, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*.²
It was published in 2005 by Oxford University Press,
which means it was describing the generation of many of you.

After his team spent hundreds of hours
conducting in-depth interviews with teenagers about their beliefs,
Smith concluded that teenagers from all faith traditions
are united by a common creed he labeled Moralistic Therapeutic Deism,
(sometimes referred to as M.T.D.).

By moralistic, he means that teenagers espouse the belief
that religion is mostly about being a person who is nice, kind,
respectful, and responsible.

One seventeen-year-old boy from Utah put it very clearly:

“I believe in, well, my whole religion is where you try to be good and, ah,
if you’re not good then you should just try to get better, that’s all.”

Being moral in this faith means
being the kind of person who other people will like,
and not being socially disruptive or interpersonally obnoxious.

² published in 2005.

And anyone who exerts at least a modicum of effort to that end
will surely get to heaven.

By therapeutic, Smith means that religion for many American teenagers
is about feeling good about themselves.

What is central for most teenagers, says Smith,
is not repentance from sin, holy living, or God's grace,
but rather "feeling good, happy, secure, at peace."
Religion is to provide help in acquiring that feeling of personal well-being.

And the term Deism in this religion of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism
expresses the belief that
God is "primarily a divine Creator and Lawgiver,"
but also, for most, a somewhat distant God
who is "selectively available for taking care of needs."

The god of M.T.D. isn't one who makes demands,
but who is available on demand.

God is something like a combination Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist—
he is always on call;
he takes care of any problems that arise;
he professionally helps his people to feel better about themselves,
and he does not become too personally involved in the process.

As one fourteen-year-old boy from Colorado said,
"I believe there's a God, so sometimes when I'm in trouble or in danger,
then I'll start thinking about that."

That's what Smith found that American teenagers believed.

But he also suggested that M.T.D. isn't just a teenage phenomenon

but is actively colonizing whole churches and entire denominations.

"It may be the new mainstream American religious faith," he writes,

"for our culturally post-Christian, individualistic, mass-consumer capitalist society."

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism—it's all around us,

and, I'm sure, it has influenced people even in this room,

myself included.

But importantly, this kind of religion has no place for grace.

It has no place for grace because MTD contains

two deeply embedded ways of thinking—

which in some ways are incompatible,

but each in its own way shuts us out from God's grace./

In as much as it is "moralistic," this way of thinking acknowledges the notion of justice.

There is such a thing as right and wrong, good and evil.

We are moral creatures,

and God will assess us, we will be judged,

based on the moral quality of our lives.

But the standard by which we are judged may be quite low.

You no longer have to be as good as Jesus-

no, all it takes to get to heaven is just not being as evil as Adolph Hitler.

But still, the idea that we will get what we deserve is still there.

In the end, this religion is a religion of the scales—

Our lives will be measured on the scales of justice,

in which our good deeds are weighed against our bad deeds,

and we will get what we deserve—one way or the other.

There's no place for grace—

which is getting what we don't deserve

and what we could never earn.

So, in one sense, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is not fundamentally different from Islam.

God will judge you on how well you measure up.

That's one deeply embedded way of thinking, a principle of religion,

that is found everywhere today.

A second is very different, but ends up having the same effect.

Instead of the principle of justice—that God will give me what I deserve;

it is the principle of entitlement—that because of who I am,

I deserve what I desire—

and God must give it to me.

This is the therapeutic dimension of MTD.

God exists to shower me with good things—

he exists to help me achieve my goals,

to enable me to fulfill my dreams,

and to satisfy my desires.

The goal of life is to express my inner self—the real me.

I am at the center of the universe,
so I am entitled to the all the good things life has to offer—
It's God's job to see that that happens.

Again, there's no place for grace—
How could there be?—
There's nothing that God could give me that is undeserved—
simply because, just by being me, I deserve it all.

In practice, these two principles—
that of justice—getting what you deserve
and that of entitlement—deserving all that you get and more—
these two principles can lead to two very different destinations.

On the one hand, a focus on justice can very easily lead to judgmentalism—
judging others harshly becomes essential
to justifying yourself as a good person.

Or it can also lead to despair—
even a superficial look at one's own moral state can reveal a darkness in our hearts
that makes the judgment of God a frightening prospect.
It's not hard to conclude that, surely, God couldn't accept someone like me.

But on the other hand,
the principle of entitlement is an expression of a self-righteous pride,
and it leaves God no option—
He must accept someone like me.

But, as we'll see, God's grace in the gospel gives the lie to both of those views—

God can accept even the worst moral failure,

and God will not accept anyone who is full of themselves with pride.

Now before we see this played out in an episode from the Gospels,

let me say one more word about MTD—

and that concerns the "D"—the deism.

Deism is the view that God as Creator just got things going,

and then, like a distant king in his castle, he stands aloof

and lets things play out on their own.

Only occasionally he might intervene, but that is very rare.

We are left here on our own, to make our own bed,

to chart our own path,

and to determine our own destiny.

The God of deism may wish you "Good luck,"

but he's not going to get personally involved in your day-to-day life./

But that's not the God of the Bible—the God of the gospel.

No, not at all.

The God we worship is not only a holy God—

transcendent and enthroned in heavenly glory,

he is also a loving God—

immanent and present in the nitty-gritty affairs of life in this world.

A sparrow does not fall

apart from his sovereign rule.

In fact, in Jesus Christ, the God of the Bible has entered into this world personally—
as a baby in a manger,
and a man on a cross.

If you want to talk about God's grace, that's really where it begins.

Our God is not a faraway God—the God of deism.

And he does not exist for our benefit—
as a therapeutic butler who owes us a good life.

Nor is the gospel a message of moralism—
just good advice on how to get along well.

No, the message of the gospel is very different—
it's a message of grace from a holy God who draws us to himself
in a way that we can never deserve,
so that we might know him and love him
and reflect back to him his glory in his creation.

Let's turn back to the Gospel of Luke to that story we just read
to see this theme of God's grace revealed in real life.

Luke 7:36-50

Luke first sets the scene—

"When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him,
he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table."

It's interesting to note that Jesus would eat with the Pharisees
and he would eat with the tax collectors and prostitutes—
it didn't matter.

Jesus seemed to go anywhere where he was invited—
and he still does./

The host at this dinner may have been fairly well-to-do.
The houses of the day often were open to the street,
with a central courtyard where, when the weather was nice,
and on special occasions

guests could recline around a low
table.

Coming out of the dusty streets,
guests were customarily met with a kiss of greeting,
their heads were anointed with a fragrant oil—
(much needed, I'm sure, since deodorant had not yet been invented!)—
and as they entered the house, a slave would take off their sandals,
and wash their dirty feet.

Evidently, these hospitalities were omitted in the case of Jesus.
We're not sure why.
The host was respectful toward Jesus, referring to him as a "Teacher" or "Rabbi,"
but at the same time, he seemed a little suspicious.
Maybe he was just curious

and wanted to find out more about this man
who was creating such a stir./

Anyway, at this point in the story we are introduced to a woman.

We don't know much about this woman.

Some try to identify her with the woman caught in adultery
or some other woman we read about in the gospels,
but that is purely speculation.

She is simply described in v. 37

as a woman "who had lived a sinful life in that town."

Her reputation was widespread,

for Jesus' host certainly knew of it;
and he was surprised that Jesus didn't—
or at least Jesus didn't appear to.

When he saw that Jesus didn't reject this woman, he said to himself,

"If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him
and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

"She is a sinner"—this was an expression referring to those

who had no concern for the law of God,
no respect for the religious rituals that identified the Jews as God's people;
and no interest in upholding the rules of respectable behavior in the community.
It was also an expression commonly applied to prostitutes.

"She is a sinner"—

it was shameful even to associate with such people.

They were rejected by all self-respecting members of society.

And here, this sinner comes to Jesus.

But surely this was not the first time this sinner had encountered Jesus.

We can assume that this woman had stood before him

as he was preaching to the crowds about the kingdom of God;

she had seen his compassion in healing people in great need;

she had heard him speak of God as a heavenly Father

full of forgiveness and mercy.

Perhaps she had been at a meal

at which Jesus had sat down with the worst riff-raff of the city

and had received them as his own friends.

Somewhat, through him, she had come to know

the love of a God who knew all about her,

and yet accepted her, a sinner,

despite her sin.

Through Jesus, she had come to believe in a gracious and forgiving God

who could wipe away the ugliness of her sinful past

and make her into a new and beautiful person.

She had discovered an embracing love—

a love that knew all about her,

and yet could still say, “you are special,” “you are valuable,”

“your life matters to me.” “I love you.”

That's what she wanted.

Don't our hearts hunger for that kind of love—

And people will do all sorts of things to earn that kind of love.

Young teenage boys join gangs looking for that love—

looking for a social group who will accept them and show them respect.

Adolescents and young adults engage in illicit sex looking for that love—

looking for someone who will value them and show them affection—

even if only for a few moments.

And people can even drive themselves to achieve great things looking for that love,

climbing over other people, scratching and clawing their way up the ladder

to get to the top in business or law or academics or sports—

all in search of love.

Do you know that kind of love?

This sinful woman found a love like no other in this man Jesus of Nazareth.

Through him, she had tasted the forgiving grace of God./

This woman knew that Jesus was eating in the courtyard of a Pharisee's house,

and though she knew she may not be accepted there,

she dared to come in through the open door—

she had to thank Jesus for this great thing that had happened in her life.

She came to offer him the most precious thing she owned—

which had perhaps been an important symbol of her former vocation.

She brought an alabaster jar of perfume.

But as she came up behind him as he was reclining to eat,

she was overwhelmed by emotion--

she began weeping.

Her tears fell on his feet,

and she let down her hair to wipe them.
That was something no self-respecting Jewish woman would ever do in public,
but this woman wasn't thinking about herself—
she was thinking only of this man who had opened up her life
to the gracious love of God.

As she wiped his feet with her hair, she kissed them and poured perfume on them
as an expression of love and adoration
for this man who had given her a new life.

It's a very touching story--a powerful conversion story—
the story of a notorious sinner
receiving a gracious forgiveness
resulting in a great love.

"I tell you," Jesus said, "her many sins have been forgiven—" literally, "for she loved much."
Or as our NIV puts it, "her many sins have been forgiven—
as her great love has shown."

That makes the point,
for as the parable Jesus tells makes clear, as one writer puts it--
"Her love was not the ground of a pardon she had come to seek,
but the proof of a pardon she had come to acknowledge."³

For Jesus tells her in v. 50, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

She put her trust in the mercy of God—

³Caird, *Luke*, p. 115.

Jesus assures her that that trust is all she needs.
“Your sins are forgiven,” he says.

It reminds me a lot of the story Jesus told of the Prodigal Son—
the young man who rebelled against his father,
took his inheritance and squandered it in sinful living.
And only when he had reached the very end of his rope
and had nowhere else to turn,
when he had tasted the full bitterness of sin,
only then did he return to his father, in an empty humility,
to be filled with the overwhelming sweetness of forgiveness and grace,
as his father raced to embrace him.

This is the gospel—

We must all learn from this sinful woman, and from that prodigal son,
of the inexpressible joy of discovering
the forgiveness and acceptance of the Lord Jesus—
his unmerited and undeserved favor in your life.

This story tells us, there is hope for anyone.

In the light of the gospel,
there is no place for despair.

Deep down, we all have some sense of justice—
the idea that wrong-doing deserves punishment—
and after only a little self-reflection,
we can conclude, “God can never accept me—not after what I’ve done.”

We all have a fear that if people really knew me deep inside,
they wouldn't love us.

But this is where this message of God's grace becomes so precious, so life-giving.

As the Puritan Richard Sibbes put it: "There is more mercy in Christ
than sin in us."

God knows our every thought and intention—inside and out.

yet his favor is unconditioned by anything in us—
there is nothing that makes us worthy of his love.

God loved us when we had turned our backs on him and we were his enemies—
he sent his Son to seek and to save those who were lost.

Grace means we have nothing to offer him but our own sin
our own inexcusable failure.

And in that helpless state, he receives us in his love.

As we sang,

"Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou my God shouldst die for me?"
"How can that be?" we might ask—and rightly so.

There is no reason why God should love us
apart from the mystery of his own grace.

That's why it's said,

"Only when grace is recognized to be incomprehensible is it truly grace."⁴ // /

But again, as in the story of the Prodigal Son,

⁴Karl Barth

there is another character in this story,
and there is another point to consider.

Simon was his name—this Pharisee who invited Jesus to dinner.

And this Simon provides a striking contrast to the sinful woman
in the way he responds to Jesus.

Simon is offended by Jesus' acceptance of the expressions of love
given to him by this sinner.

Surely, if he was a prophet, he would know who she was,
and if he knew, surely he would have immediately turned her away.

Jesus confronts Simon about this--

"Simon, I have something to tell you. . . ."

"Do you see this woman?

I came into your house.

You did not give me any water for my feet,
but she wet my feet with her tears
and wiped them with her hair.

You did not give me a kiss,
but this woman, from the time I entered,
has not stopped kissing my feet.

You did not put oil on my head,
but she has poured perfume on my feet."

"Simon," Jesus says, "you have done nothing to honor me as your dinner guest,
but this woman has done all she could to show her love."

Why this difference?

Jesus tells a story--

"Two people owed money to a certain moneylender.

One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.

Neither of them had the money to pay him back,

so he canceled the debts of both.

Now which of them will love him more?"

Simon responds hesitantly, sensing that the story puts him on the spot--

"I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled."

And he was right.

"Therefore, I tell you," Jesus says to him, "her sins, though they are many,

have been forgiven--as her great love has shown."

Her love had demonstrated her own understanding of the magnitude of her debt of sin

and the graciousness of God's canceling of that debt.

God's grace necessarily comes with a power to transform those who receive it.

And here we see its effect in the life of this woman--

she is a model for us all.

"her sins, though they are many,

have been forgiven--as her great love has shown."

"But," Jesus says, "whoever has been forgiven little loves little."

"whoever has been forgiven little loves little."—

Was Jesus excusing the Pharisee for his lack of love?—

"Sorry, it's too bad you weren't a prostitute,
then you would have had a greater debt,
and then you would have loved more."

That's how we often think—if only I had had a more dramatic conversion—

if only I had been a greater sinner—

drug-dealer maybe,

then I would love more, too.

But that's not the point here at all—

Jesus doesn't excuse the Pharisee,

he rebukes him.

Why?—

not for being a lesser sinner—

but for failing to appreciate the depth of his own sin.

For in Jesus' mind, what was the difference between the Pharisee and the woman?

Was it their sin?—one was a sinner and one was not?

Or wasn't it simply the realization of their sin,

their of their need for forgiveness.

This is what made all the difference.

Jesus said, it is not those who are healthy who need a physician

but those who are sick.

In other words, he can only be the Savior

of those who know that they need to be saved.

God's grace is not about what we deserve,

and even less about what we are entitled to—

It's all about what God has done for us in giving us his Son
to die as an atoning sacrifice for our sin.

God's grace in the gospel can only come to those

who are humble enough to admit that they need it.

All sense of entitlement must vanish.

We must come with empty hands.

We have nothing to commend ourselves to God—

We are bankrupt—every one of us.

God must pay our debt for us—that is grace. /

There's something very humbling about that.

We like to think we earned what we get.

But the reality of God's grace must sink deep into our hearts.

He has done it all.

That is sometimes difficult to accept, even for Christians.

We feel we have to "atone for our sin."

We don't want to face the fact that we do truly owe everything to him.

It's a humbling experience.

The Scottish preacher James Stewart Stewart said,

"No man who is too proud to be infinitely in debt will ever be a Christian."⁵

Or in the words of the Puritan Richard Baxter—

"The very design of the gospel is to abase us;

and the work of grace is begun and carried on in humiliation.

Humility is not a mere ornament of a Christian,

but an essential part of the new creature.

It is a contradiction in terms, to be a Christian, and not be humble."

The question is, How much have you been forgiven?

How do you understand the depth of your sin?

How big was your debt that the blood of Christ paid on your behalf?

This makes all the difference.

The failure to appreciate the depth of his own moral failure,

the failure to grasp the subtlety of his own self-deception--

this is what held this Pharisee back.

This woman was an obvious sinner--

everybody in town knew that.

But in Jesus' mind this Pharisee was every bit as much a sinner, if not more so.

Hers were sins of the flesh—they were visible and public;

his were the much more devious sins of the mind and the heart--

it was self-righteous pride,

which in God's sight is the most vile of all sins.

⁵James Stewart Stewart

"whoever has been forgiven little loves little."

If you are to grow in your love,

you must grow in your appreciation of God's grace in the gospel.

And that will happen only as you grow

in the appreciation of how much you have been forgiven.

But how can we do that?

I mean I'm a pastor,

I'm a pretty nice guy,

a pretty religious guy.

I'm not engaged in any blatant public sins—

most people would think I don't have too much to confess.

How do I, and how should you, come to appreciate

the depth of our sin, and the glory of God's grace,

so that we can love Christ more?

First, don't look at other people--don't compare yourself to others.

Our pride will always be able to pick out someone

who appears far worse than we are.

It's always nice to have some mass murderer around to make us all look good.

Comparing ourselves with other people

will never show us the depths of our sin,
because we are all in the same boat.

We are all corrupted by the same pollution.

It may manifest itself in some people in more obvious ways than in others,
but our lungs are all blackened by the same dirty air.

Comparing ourselves with other people won't reveal much. /

So don't just look at other people--

and don't just look at yourself.

Again, our human pride is a master at justifying our actions
and rationalizing our attitudes.

We are full of self-deceit.

J. C. Ryle, in his book *Holiness*, write this—

"The disease [of sin] may be veiled under a think covering of courtesy, politeness,
good manners, and outward decorum;
but it lies deep down in the constitution." (p. 5)

It is easy to hide, even from ourselves.

If you really want to know just how sinful you are,

and how much you have been forgiven,

don't look at others, don't look at yourself--

Instead, you must grow in your knowledge of the awesome holiness of God.
That's where we began last week, isn't it.

Read the Scriptures and see how the people to whom God revealed himself

fell down as though dead in terror.

He is holy, and we are not.

Who can see God and live?

The entire system of worship in the Old Testament

was meant to impress upon the people of God

the awesome holiness of God—

you dare not come into his presence without the proper purification. /

That's one way to see more of your sinfulness,

but there is another.

Don't just look at the Lord God of the Old Testament,

look at the Lord Jesus in the New--

Jesus shows us what we created to be as human beings—

So look at Jesus and consider his pure and complete self-giving love.

Consider his selfless sacrifice,

consider his life of dependence upon his Father

in perfect faith and obedience.

"My food is to do the will of my Father" he said.

Can I say that?

In the Garden of Gethsemane, he knew the awful fate that lay before him,

yet he could pray, "Not by will but thine be done."

Could I do that?

If you would know the depth of your own sin, look at Jesus Christ,

and, most of all, look **at his cross**.

There we see both the holiness of God and our own sinfulness come into focus.

The cross shows us just how serious our sin really is.

Look at the cross of Christ and there you will see
what it took to deal with our moral failure before a holy God.
That's what it took to pay the debt we owed—
the horrible death of the Son of God.

God's only Son was stripped and beaten,
then he was nailed to a Roman cross.
Worst of all, he bore our sins in that awful moment—
He suffered separation from the love of his Father,
and cried out in those harrowing words—
words that have been recorded in the very language in which Jesus uttered them—
"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—
"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

That's how serious our sin is—
that's the debt we owed.

I want to share a diagram that I've found helpful—I've shown it before.

A person first turns to Christ in faith,
when they see the discrepancy, the distance, between the greatness of God
in all his glory and holiness,
and their own sinfulness—
They turn to Christ, who in his death, bridges that divide—

That's diagram #1. [show slide #1]

But that's not the end of the matter.

As you grow in your knowledge of God,

you will understand more and more of his holiness,

and at the same time, you will appreciate more and more

how far short you fall.

That gap between God's goodness and your own grows wider and wider.

But somethings else happens--

You understand that that gap

only increases your understanding of what God has done in his grace

in the cross of Christ for you.

. [show slide #2]

The cross of Christ—

that ultimate demonstration of God's grace, grows larger and larger, too.

And that grace has a power to change us—

it empowers us to love God and others in new ways.

An appreciation of God's grace in the gospel

becomes the engine that the Spirit uses to transform our lives.

The glory of God's grace—

The one who has been forgiven much, loves much. [take down power point]

That's why we need to grow in our appreciation and our experience,

of the grace of God in the gospel.

I close with the story portrayed in that gripping movie *Saving Private Ryan*.

The plot unfolds when, during WWII, it is discovered that a mother
was to be receiving the death notices of three of her servicemen sons
on the same day.

The Army learns that she has one more son in combat,
and a mission is launched to find Private James Ryan
and bring him home alive
to spare his mother, and the country, still further grief.

Eight men, under the direction of Captain John Miller,
played by Tom Hanks, are given the very dangerous assignment
of saving Private Ryan.

Miller and his men had just survived the D-Day landing on Omaha Beach,
and they must find Ryan
who had parachuted somewhere behind German lines
in the French countryside.

Eight men risk their lives to save one.
In the combat along the way, the eight begin to be picked off,
losing their own lives in their efforts to save Private Ryan.

"He better be worth it," says Capt. Miller.

"He better go home and cure a disease,

or invent a longer-lasting light bulb," he says.

When they finally find Ryan, he is overwhelmed by their sacrifice—
and he asks what he's done to deserve it.

But there is one final battle to be fought before he can go home,
And in that battle, Capt. Miller gets shot,
and as he lies dying, in his final words,
he says to Private Ryan,
"James, earn this. . . . earn it."

These words haunt Ryan the rest of his life,
for the movie shows him as an old man,
visiting the grave of Capt. Miller.
In tears, he says to his wife,
"Tell me I've led a good life. . . .
Tell me I'm a good man."

Saving Private Ryan.
It's like the Christian story in some ways, isn't it.
God the Father sends his Son on a rescue mission.
It wasn't because we were worth it—
the Bible makes that clear.
We'd turned our backs on him
and lived as if he wasn't there.
All of us have gone astray,

each has turned to his own way.

There is none righteous, not even one.

But Jesus gives his life,

he goes to the cross on our behalf,

he gives his life so that we might live.

But as he dies, he doesn't say to us, "Earn this."

We could never earn it,

and to think that we could is an insult to the glory of Christ.

Instead he says, "Receive this—it's gift, a gift of my grace."

And the proper response to that gift is one of gratitude and love.

This gospel of grace—

In his Son Jesus Christ,

God gives us what we don't deserve and what we could never earn.

Friends, have you received that grace of God?

You must---quit thinking that God's favor is something you can earn.

This is at the heart of the gospel.

But this message of grace is not just for beginners in the Christian life—

it's not just the A,B,Cs—

something you learn and then move on to something more.

No, it is the A-Z—the beginning and the end of the Christian life—

We must always hold on to this grace and grow in it.

For your appreciation of the gospel of God's grace
will be the fuel of your love.

Prayer

Closing Song: *Grace Alone*

Benediction:

2Pet. 3:18 "May you grow in the grace and knowledge
of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
To him be glory both now and forever! Amen."

Great Themes in Discipleship, #2

Feb. 13, 2022

"It's All of Grace"

(Luke 7:36-50)

Our God is holy, and in ourselves, we are not. For that reason, our holiness can only come as his gift to us. That is just what the good news of the gospel promises—God's grace in receiving us through the work of his Son. This morning we celebrate that grace of the gospel.

I. Grace—the Core of the Gospel

II. The Message of Grace is Often Missed

A Chief Competitor to the Gospel in our Culture:

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (M.T.D)

III. Two underlying principles that undermine grace—

A. A Dependence on Justice—God will give me what I deserve.

This can lead to despair: "God can't forgive me."

B. A Sense of Entitlement—God must give me what I want.

This exhibits our sinful pride: "God must accept me."

IV. A Story of Grace—Luke 7:36-50

Love and Grace:

"whoever has been forgiven little loves little" (Lk. 7:47)

*An appreciation of God's holiness
and a recognition of our sinfulness
exalts the grace of God in the cross of Christ.*

Sermon Response:

"It's All of Grace"

(Luke 7:36-50)

- Does the description of “moralistic therapeutic deism” sound familiar as a popular form of religion today? Does it in some way describe you?
- What is the connection Jesus makes between experiencing God’s forgiveness and showing love?
- What should we do if we want to love more in light of Jesus’ statement: “**whoever has been forgiven little loves little.**”
- How can we grow in an appreciation of the magnitude of the debt we have been forgiven in Christ? How does that magnify the grace of God in the cross of Christ?
- Pray for a deeper appreciation of grace that will result in a fuller response of love.

