

Grace Wins Series
The Attraction of Grace
John 1:14
July 29, 2018

There's a war between guilt and grace And they're fighting for a sacred space But I'm living proof Grace wins every time No more lying down in death's defeat Now I'm rising up in victory Singing hallelujah Grace wins every time. We sing about grace... **2 Peter 3:18** — *18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.* We quote verses about grace. But are we a gracious people?

Billy has learned several lessons about grace so far in this series, **Grace Wins**. He's learned that God really is a gracious God and that a relationship with God is completely dependent upon God's grace. He's learned that grace received should be extended to others. But he's still got more to learn about God's grace.

So here's one final story from the life of Billy. He had never been one to frequent the church. Churches scared him and a lot of the people that he knew that went to church made a habit of looking down on him because he worked for the government (IRS to be specific) and had a position that was known for taking advantage of others in a way that always ended up lining his pockets.

But something was happening to Billy on the inside. He was beginning to ask questions he had avoided like the plague for years. And he decided that he'd dip his toe into the pool of religion to see if he could find some answers for the questions he was asking. He knew if he went into a large gathering the likelihood that someone there would recognize him was too great, so he decided to try a smaller get-together. He sat as far back as he could get from the front hoping that no one would notice him. That's when Mr. I'm-good-and-you're-not stood to pray and noticed Billy in the shadows of the back of the room. After making quite the show, he started...God, I am so grateful that I'm not like so many others. I'm not a robber or a crook or an adulterer, and I'm for sure not like this IRS guy who would dare to venture into our sacred gathering. I'm a glutton free

vegan and I calculate my tithe down to the penny (heaven forbid that I should give more than I am required).

While Mr. I'm-good-and-you're-not basked in the glow of the moment, Billy sat quietly in the back of the room, not even able to lift his gaze on the gathering. And all he could manage to whisper was "God, I don't need religion to tell me I'm not good. I need you to be gracious to me or I've got no hope."

This is another one of the stories that Jesus told. You can find it in **Luke 18**. And it highlights what tragically happens way too often in churches when it comes to the message of God's grace. And that's what I want us to look at this morning. My guess is that there are people here today who remember feeling just like Billy. There was a time when walking in a church scared you to death because you knew there were people there who knew what kind of life you had lived and because of what they knew about you, you knew they would look down on you. It's amazing what can happen in churches who are supposed to be the champion of the message of God's grace. **Over time, our gatherings lose sight of the fact that the only reason we have any hope of enjoying the presence of God now and throughout eternity is His amazing grace.** And we start to think that the church is just for church people, for good people. If our message really is grounded and founded in the grace of God, then it at least means that the church is for everybody, not just those who think they somehow deserve to be included because they live a certain way. So here's the big idea for today...

When grace is most APPARENT the Church will be most APPEALING!

Every week for the past month I've asked are we a gracious people because here's what I believe. A gracious people will be attractive to those who recognize they don't have a chance of getting in good with God if it's left up to them. **God's grace is inviting to those who know they need it and intimidating to those who think they are above it.**

I don't usually tell people that I'm a pastor right out of the gate. I find that they tend to act differently when they discover what I do (Golf

Course; Pickle Ball; Book Store). And from what we can read about the life of Jesus, seems that he had a similar approach. **The crazy thing is that people who were nothing like Jesus really liked Jesus.** He was invited into their homes and to their parties. You also get the impression from reading the Gospels that Jesus really liked people who were nothing like Him. He even invited them to follow Him. That sometimes made some of the people around Jesus uncomfortable. The grace that He extended to others was one of the things that made Him so attractive to people who were so very different from Him... **John 1:14** – *14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

I have two goals this morning. First, if you have gotten the impression from the I'm-good-and-you're-not crowd that you'll never be accepted into the family of God, I want you to see that Jesus came for people who knew they were not good. And He gave His life, not to make you good by the world's standards, but to give you His good life. Second, I want to encourage our church to be grace-shaped, grace-filled, grace-extending people because that's what will make the church most appealing in our community. Let's start with one whose life could have been the basis for the story about Billy you heard this morning...

Matthew - Grace attracts the EXCLUDED. Matthew 9:9-13

Matthew was also known by the name Levi and if that was an indication about his extended family then it meant he came from a long line of very religious people, which makes what he chose to do with his life all the more surprising and troubling. Matthew was a tax collector for Rome. To be a tax collector for Rome meant that you would be hated by the people you were authorized to receive taxes from. It also left you open to the tug of corruption because of the office that you held. Whatever the tax collector could squeeze out of the people over what he was required to turn over to Rome, he could keep for himself. He might have even had to sell off his family land in order to buy the office that he held. Tax collectors in Israel were considered to be traitors to their people.

Matthew probably didn't get a lot of invitations to religious gatherings among his people because of his profession. Which makes the invitation that he received from Jesus all the more surprising. **Matthew 9:9** — *9 As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.*

If you were a 1st century Jew, as soon as you read that Matthew was sitting at a tax booth, you tense up and your temperature starts to rise. What would God in the flesh say to a man who had sold his soul to Rome just so he could steal from his own people? Jesus' disciples are right there with him, which included the sons of thunder, James and John (**Luke 9:54**) and Simon the Zealot, who apparently was once associated with a group that would just as soon kill people like Matthew as partner with them.

You can just imagine their response. "You can't mean you want a person like this to join our happy band. We're the good guys, not like this Matthew. "He can't be one of us."

Years later, Matthew would write an account of the life of Jesus from a very Jewish perspective, even though for a while in his life, he would have been rejected by the same Jewish people he was writing to reach. For the Jewish crowd, it was imperative that Jesus be shown to be related to the right people before they would even consider Him to be their Messiah. That's why Matthew starts off his Gospel the way he does. Matthew was going to show that Jesus was concerned about Gentiles as well as Jews (**Matthew 8:28-32**) and that He was not above forgiving the worst sins and sinners. Matthew wants us to know that **the story of Jesus is the story of God drawing near to those separated from Him by sin as well as being pushed away by those who didn't think they needed God's grace.**

So when Jesus invited Matthew, he jumped at the opportunity to follow Him and then he decided that he'd throw a party for all the people like him who felt so condemned by the religious crowd in their community. And to his surprise, Jesus decided He would attend (**Luke 5:29-32**).

Jesus was most at home with people who most recognized their need for the grace of God...people who knew that God's grace can't be earned, it must be received when it is given. The religious crowd wanted to know how a person who claimed to be from God would get so close to those who were nothing like God. If Jesus really was who He claimed to be, how could He like someone like Matthew? They assumed that they didn't need the gift of God's grace. They were more than happy to earn it.

As Matthew followed Jesus, he witnessed Him touch the untouchable and do miraculous things for those who had done nothing to deserve it and could never repay Him. Jesus championed God's Law while at the same time caring for the law breakers.

So when you find yourself bouncing back and forth between condemning others and condemning yourself, remember, there is another path you can take. It's the path of grace! And it really is attractive.

Grace is attractive to people who have been excluded because of their present life. It's also attractive to people who have been excluded because of their past, like...

The Woman of Samaria - Grace engages the DEFEATED. John 4:13-15

Sin created a distance between God and us that has been described as a gnawing ache, a deep longing or an unquenchable thirst. And people have tried all kinds of things to quench that thirst—relationships, work, alcohol, food, pleasure, accomplishments and even religion.

Jesus encounters a woman whose poison of choice was relationships in **John 4**. There was a lot of history between the Jewish people and the group of people known as the Samaritans that created some bad blood by the time that He came on the scene.

This particular woman had been married 5 times to 5 different men. At the time she met Jesus, she was living with a man who was not her husband. John didn't see the need to tell us why she had 5 husbands. Had

they died (she must be cursed) or abandoned her for other women (she must be unworthy of love)? Life had been hard for her and in a small town like Sychar, you can be sure that everybody knew her business.

Jesus sat down at the well while His disciples went into town to scare up some grub. They may have even passed this woman as they made their way into town. I wondered if they tried to ignore her as they passed? The usual time for getting water was early in the morning when it was still cool. Her choice to come in the heat of the day tells us that she feared the scorn of the other women in town more than she did the scorching heat.

She must have thought it was a joke when Jesus asked her if she would get him a drink of water. No self-respecting male Jew would ever accept water from a half-breed Samaritan and a sin-contaminated water jug. If there was anything lower than a Tax Collector in the Jewish mind, it was a female Samaritan.

At some point in the conversation, she understood that Jesus was offering something better than what she had originally come to the well to get. She wanted to quench her physical thirst and Jesus told her that He could quench her spiritual thirst.

John 4:13-14 – *13 Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”*

After a brief excursion into theological practices, Jesus chose to reveal Himself to her. He did that at the strangest times to the most unexpected people. She wasn't even asking Him who He really was. And her crusty dry soul got it's first taste of the living water of God's grace. The disciples returned with lunch and the woman left her water jug at the well because she had a new mission. Can you imagine how much courage it took for a person like her to go to the leaders of her town and tell them that she thinks she just met the long awaited Messiah. They must have laughed in her face. But there was something different about her now and she would

not be deterred. And they followed her out to the well. And a spiritual awakening broke out. **John 4:39 – 39** *Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did."*

Jesus went out of His way to extend grace to an out-of-the-way woman. She received a new life that day. Not a life that would erase her past or justify what she had done in her past, but a new life that would sustain her in spite of her past for the rest of her life.

Life has a way of leaving us thirsty. Grace is God's response to the thirsty soul. **Hebrews 4:16 – 16** *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

This grace is attractive to those who know just how parched they really are in this life. How do you receive it? Acknowledge that Jesus really is God who became a man so that He might take our place and secure our forgiveness. Declare your thirst.

The death and resurrection of Jesus was God's announcement to the world that His kingdom is not reserved for good people, but it's given to forgiven people! And based on the stories that we've looked at these past few weeks, it's clear that the grace of God invites everybody. When it comes to God's family, everybody gets in the same way...by grace through faith. And when it's extended, **even the defeated are engaged!**

Let's wrap up our focus on grace by looking at the struggle to keep this wonderfully attractive message from being distorted in the life of...

The Early Church - Grace simplifies TURNING TO GOD. Acts 15:19

Not long after the church was established and began to grow, it became evident that the message of grace was attracting people who previously had been excluded and defeated when it came to religion. And that created a whole new set of problems. People who were nothing like the first followers of Jesus were turning to Jesus and when the church started

to drift away from the message of grace that was for everybody they called a meeting to discuss the implications of God's grace.

If the church was God's primary vehicle for dispensing the message of His grace, then the local church is clearly not for church people. It's for everybody. If people who were nothing like Jesus liked Jesus, then the church shouldn't make it hard for people to turn to Jesus today. Here's how the early church said it... **Acts 15:19** – *19 Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God.* The church has been assigned the task of engaging our neighborhoods, communities, cities, states, and world to the grace of God. This is our mission. This is our responsibility.

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Max Lucado tells the story about Amy Wells who knew her bridal shop would be busy. Brides-to-be took full advantage of the days right after Thanksgiving. It was common for a cluster of in-laws and siblings to spend the better part of the holiday weekend looking at wedding dresses in her San Antonio, Texas, store. Amy was prepared to give service to the shoppers. She never expected she would be giving grace to a dying man. Across town Jack Autry was in the hospital, struggling to stay alive. He was in the final stages of melanoma. He had collapsed two days before and had been rushed to the emergency room. His extended family was in town not just to celebrate Thanksgiving together but to make preparations for his daughter's wedding. Chrysalis was only months from marriage. The women in the family had planned to spend the day selecting a wedding gown. But now with Jack in the hospital, Chrysalis didn't want to go. Jack insisted. After much persuasion Chrysalis, her mother, her future mother-in-law, and her sisters went to the bridal salon. The shop owner noticed that the women were a bit subdued, but she assumed this was just a quiet family. She helped Chrysalis try on dress after dress until she found an ivory duchess silk and satin gown that everyone loved. Jack was fond of calling Chrysalis his princess, and the dress, Chrysalis commented, made her look just like one. That's when Amy heard about Jack. Because of the cancer, he couldn't come see his daughter in her dress. And because of the medical bills, the family couldn't buy the dress yet. It appeared that Jack

Autry would die without seeing his daughter dressed as a bride. Amy would hear nothing of it. She told Chrysalis to take the gown and veil to the hospital and wear it for her daddy. She says, “I knew it was fine. There was no doubt in my mind to do this. God was talking to me.” No credit card was requested or given. Amy didn’t even make note of a phone number. She urged the family to go directly to the hospital. Chrysalis didn’t have to be told twice. When she arrived at her father’s room, he was heavily medicated and asleep. As family members woke him, the doors to the room slowly opened, and there he saw his daughter, engulfed in fifteen yards of layered, billowing silk. He was able to stay alert for about twenty seconds. “But those twenty seconds were magical,” Chrysalis remembers. “My daddy saw me walk in wearing the most beautiful dress. He was really weak. He smiled and just kept looking at me. I held his hand, and he held mine. I asked him if I looked like a princess . . . He nodded. He looked at me a little more, and it almost looked like he was about to cry. And then he went to sleep.” Three days later he died. Amy’s generosity created a moment of cascading grace. God to Amy to Chrysalis to Jack.

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Let’s talk about the Attraction of Grace...

- 1.What does it mean that Jesus was “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14)?
- 2.What was it about Matthew that would have caused him to feel like he had been excluded from the possibility of becoming right with God (Matthew 9:9-13)?
- 3.Why would the religious crowd be so surprised that people like Matthew were attracted to Jesus?
- 4.What was it about the woman of Samaria that would lead us to the conclusion that she must have felt defeated in life (John 4)?
- 5.What are some of the ways that you’ve tried or you’ve seen others try to quench the spiritual thirst in life?
- 6.How is God’s grace the key to quenching that spiritual thirst?
- 7.Why do you think the early church as well as the church today struggles with the message of God’s grace?
- 8.What do we need to do to make sure that we don’t make it hard for

people to turn to God?