

# amazing grace | sermon series

LUKE TATTERSALL preaches on the doctrine of God's grace ...

## Doctrinal Preaching

I have been involved in preaching full-time for more than 15 years now. During that time I would say that I have been committed to systematic expository preaching. I am convinced that we need to let God's word set the agenda in our churches. It is no good jumping from topic to topic simply because an issue takes my fancy this week. We need to be committed to hearing what God has to say. And I believe the best way to do that is by preaching through books of the Bible.

But having said that I am increasingly becoming convinced of the importance and place of doctrinal preaching. Let me define what I mean. There are some doctrines that span across the bible – doctrines like Grace, the Church, the work of the Holy Spirit, Heaven & Hell, etc. In order to understand what the Bible says about those things we need to do more than look at one passage. I think there is a place for preaching on those doctrines – drawing together what the Bible says in relation to those subjects.

I am sure that most of my preaching will continue to be systematic expository preaching. But I am planning to do a 3 or 4 week series each year on a doctrine like those mentioned above.

## What's So Amazing about Grace?

I was recently asked to do some talks at a conference on Grace. I was asked to do 3 talks and I was told that mine would be the topical/doctrinal talks. The other speaker was doing 3 talks from Genesis.

I wanted to try to focus on one passage for each of the talks and it seemed to me that the parables have a lot to say about grace. They were going to be a good starting point to highlight one facet of grace in each talk. But I was also aware that there were other issues relating to grace that I wanted to cover. I decided to go with the following:

### Talk 1 – Amazed by Grace

**Main Passage** - Workers in the Vineyard (Matt 20)

**Other Ideas** - Understanding Grace means understanding us (Eph 2:1-10). The Lost Doctrine of Grace – what happens when Christians lose grace? Legalism, pride or ungodliness.

**Conclusion** – be amazed by grace ... and continue to be amazed by it.

### Talk 2 – Scandalized by Grace

**Main Passage** - Lost Things (Luke 15)

**Other ideas** - What is it we don't like about grace? Foreign to us, takes it out of our hands and it lets rotten people into the kingdom.

**Conclusion** – If you understand

grace you will see people the way God does and you will be committed to preaching the Gospel.

### Talk 3 – Motivated by Grace

**Main Passage** - Unforgiving Servant (Matt 18)

**Other Ideas** - Getting it ½ right about grace (“saved by grace but then it is my effort” or “saved by grace so it doesn't matter how I live.

**Conclusion** - Our lives should be lived in response to God's grace – not out of debt, obligation, pride or fear. We should be living in gratitude for what God has done.

### Surprise Find

When preaching on the parables it is always crucial to look at the setting for the parable. But I have to confess I was a little surprised when I looked at the setting for the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matt 20).

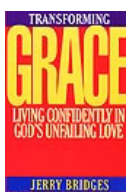
The episode immediately before the parable is Jesus with the rich young ruler. He begins by asking Jesus “What must I DO to inherit eternal life?” (Matt 19:16). Jesus concludes that episode by saying that salvation is not possible for man – it is only possible for God (Matt 19:26).

But then Peter asks this question: “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for

us?” After Jesus has just said “It is not about what you do” Peter says “But haven’t we done enough?” Very merit-based thinking from Peter. The parable is in response to Peter’s question.

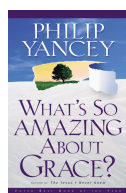
### Useful Resources

I looked at a number of books in preparing these talks (some more thoroughly than others):



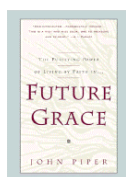
#### **Transforming Grace**

(Bridges) – I think this is still the only book I would confidently recommend. Read it some time ago and skimmed through it again for these talks.



#### **What's So Amazing About Grace**

(Yancey) – lots of nice stories – but in the end I think Phil’s assessment is right: it is not really about grace. It is more about tolerance. I found it a bit frustrating.



#### **Future Grace** (Piper) –

This book made me a bit angry. He wants to say that the Bible NEVER tries to motivate us by God’s past grace or by gratitude to God. He wants to offer the crazy idea that we are only ever motivated by God’s future grace – our hope for heaven.

#### **Parables of Judgement &**

**Parables of Grace** (Capon) – certainly don’t agree with a lot of what he says – but he has a profound understanding of the idea of grace. Some of his insights are helpful and thought provoking.

## Talk 1 – Amazed by Grace

### 1.0 - Grace – What Is It?

- 14 different meanings for the word “grace” in the Oxford Concise Dictionary.
- C S Lewis said that grace was the idea that separated Christianity from all other relations in the world (Yancey p.45)
- Every other religion offers the things that you must do to achieve enlightenment, paradise, nirvana, etc.
- The religions of the world sing with one voice: It is up to you and your effort.
- But the message of Christianity is in complete contrast to that. Salvation comes by grace. You can’t earn it. It is not yours by right. You don’t deserve it. It comes only by God’s grace.
- Grace = God’s unmerited, undeserved favour.

### 2.0 - The First Step in Understanding Grace

- If you go to the doctor you want an accurate diagnosis so you can embark on the right treatment.
- Diagnosis? Ephesians 2:1 – dead in transgressions & sins and deserving of God’s wrath. (cf Rom 3:10-12)
- *Once visited a man with cancer who only had a few weeks left to live – but he refused to admit he was sick. So frustrating for his wife.*
- Left to our own devices we were “dead” in our sins.
- BUT ... Ephesians 2:4-5
- God has shown his grace to us in Jesus.

## 3.0 - A Parable of Grace

### 3.1 - The Setting

- Rich young ruler – “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Merit based thinking.
- Jesus exposes his legalistic mindset. The man thinks he may have done enough.
- He is unwilling to sell everything and follow Jesus.
- Jesus says it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom.
- NB Peter said “Who can be saved?” and Jesus says “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”
- Get the point? Salvation comes from God.
- But look at the next question Peter asks: “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?”
- Very strong whiff of merit based thinking in that question.
- He is asking: Have we done enough to inherit the kingdom.
- Jesus offers a gentle response – but follows it up with this parable.

### 3.2 - The Parable

- Farmer hires men at different times during the day.
- But he pays them all the same. The ones who had worked the hardest grumble.
- This is NOT a parable about industrial relations or how to treat employees.
- It is a parable about God’s grace – his exceeding

generosity.

- In a sense the workers are right – it is not fair what the boss is doing.
- But grace isn't about being fair. It is about giving us what we don't deserve.
- If God gave us what we deserved then we would all be incurring his wrath.
- Think about the parable of the prodigal son: was it fair for the father to welcome back the son? No. It was grace.

#### **4.0 - The Lost Doctrine of Grace**

- There are always tell-tale signs when the doctrine of grace is lost in a congregation.

##### **4.1 - Legalism**

##### **4.2 - Spiritual Pride**

##### **4.3 - Ungodly Freedom**

#### **5.0 - Be Amazed ... Be Very Amazed**

- You sometimes see amazing packages offered to sportsmen.
- I saw the story about Danny Manning – an America basketball player. He injured his knee. They weren't sure he would play again. But they offered him a \$40 000 000 contract over 6 years.
- Let me tell you something even more amazing than that:

*You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:6-8)*

- But GOD has shown incredible to us in his son Jesus. We deserved nothing. We were owed nothing. It is not as if God could see our potential. It is not as if God would be more powerful with us on his side.
- We should never cease to be amazed by God's grace to us in Jesus.

#### **Talk 2 – Scandalized by Grace**

##### **1.0 - How BIG is Your Grace?**

I told 3 stories of dreadful people who had become Christians:

##### **1.1 - Wesley Allen Dodd**

- Murdered 3 children after sexually assaulting 2 of them.
- Became a Christian on death row.

##### **1.2 – Karla Faye Tucker**

- Drug addict and prostitute who murdered 2 people in a drug induced frenzy.
- Became a Christian on death row.

##### **1.3 - Kaing Guek Ieu (Duch)**

- Pol Pot's right-hand man in Cambodia.
- Responsible for the execution of more than 14 000 people.
- Became a Christian through contact with American missionaries on the Cambodian/Thai border.

- What is your first reaction on hearing those stories. Maybe something like this: God couldn't forgive those people. They don't deserve to be forgiven by God.

- If that is your response then it means you don't understand grace.

#### **2.0 - The Lost Things**

- Sometimes the idea of grace can be offensive to us.
- Parable of the lost things point that out.

##### **2.1 - The Setting**

- Clear setting – Luke 15:1 – Pharisees are offended by what Jesus is doing. They don't understand why Jesus would mix with those people.

##### **2.2 - The Parables**

- Lost sheep & Lost Coin have the same point (Luke 15:7 & 10). There is rejoicing in heaven when sinners repent. Lost son is the big story
- The father shows remarkable grace (Luke 15:22-24).
- Huge lesson on grace in there.
- But that is not the point Jesus wants to make.

##### **2.3 - The Older Brother**

- How does the older brother feel? Resentful and angry. He doesn't want his younger brother welcomed back.
- The Pharisees are acting like "older brothers".

#### **What Is It We Don't Like about Grace?**

- But it is not just Pharisees who struggle with grace. I think there is a bit of the "older brother" in all of us.

## 1. It is Foreign to Us

- There is no area of our life where grace is the guiding principle.
- We are encouraged to think that if you want something you have to earn it.
- Free hamburger? Not really. You have to buy something. Free air conditioning in the car? No. you have to buy the car.

## 2. It Takes It Out Of Our Hands

- We like to be in control. We like to have a list of things to do.
- Grace takes it out of my hands.
- NB Parable of the Good Samaritan. Look at the setting (Luke 10:25-29). Expert in the law wants to know what “he has to do”. Jesus won’t give him a simple legal answer.
- The legalist wants a nice clear box to tick. But Jesus won’t give it to him.
- But the message of grace is that our salvation is not up to us: it is not our obedience or law keeping. We don’t earn it or buy it. (Eph 2:8-9)

## 3. It’s Just Too ... Indiscriminate

- But the area where we struggle most with grace is that it is too indiscriminate. It means that rotten sons are welcomed back as sons.
- That is what we saw in the PARABLE of the PRODIGAL SON.
- We like “grace” that will extend far enough to include us. But we think there are some people who have crossed

the line.

- NB Parable of the Pharisee & The Tax Collector - Luke 18:9
- We can be offended that Wesley Dodd or Karla Tucker are forgiven.
- And grace thumbs its nose at really good people.

### If You Understand Grace Then ...

#### You Will See People the way God Sees Them

- Understanding grace changes the way you see people.
- God sees 2 types of people in the world: Those who have accepted his grace in Jesus and those who haven’t.
- We need to make sure we see the world like that.

#### You Will be Committed to Preaching the Gospel

- And if we understand grace we will want others to experience God’s grace.
- The scandal of grace is this: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Rom 10:13)
- But the QUESTION that we have to ask is this:

*How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (Romans 10:14-15)*

- If we understand grace we will

see the world differently.

- If we understand grace we will be committed to preaching the Gospel.

## Talk 3 – Motivated By Grace

### 1.0 - Motivated By...

- What motivates you in your Christian life? Why do you want to grow in godliness?
- Christians can often be motivated by wrong things: fear, pride, guilt, obligation, etc
- We should be motivated by God’s grace.

### 2.0 - Getting it ½ Right About Grace

- We can get it ½ right about grace. We can understand that we are “saved by grace” but we get confused about what comes after that.

### 2.1 - Saved by Grace, But...

- Classic mistake: Saved by grace ... but I will remain right with God by my work.
- We can mistakenly think it is a bit like the football team. We got into the team because the coach was gracious. But I will have to earn my place if I am going to stay in the team.
- THAT IS NOT GRACE. In fact that shows a serious lack of understanding about grace.
- My salvation is all God’s work – from beginning to end. (see Roms 8:28-30 – from predestination to glorification it is all God’s work. See also Eph 2:8-9)
- “...by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those

who are being made holy.” (Heb 10:14)

## 2.2 - Saved by Grace, So...

- The other extreme is: Saved by grace so I can live however I want.
- That also shows a complete lack of understanding of grace.
- Romans 6:15-18 – we have been set free from slavery to sin. Why would we want to go back there? (see also Romans 6:21-22)
- Augustine of Hippo summarized the Christian life in this saying: Love God and do as you please.
- But if I love God, if I understand God’s grace, then what is it that will please me? Do live faithfully in my relationship with God. Not because I have to. Not because of obligation or guilt. But because I know the love and grace God has shown me.

## 3.0 - How Not to Respond to Grace

### 3.1 - The Setting

- Jesus has been talking about how to handle things when someone sins against you (Matthew 18:15-20).
- Peter then asks the question: “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” (Matt 18:21)
- Jesus gives the stunning answer: “...not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” (Matt 18:22)

## 3.2 - The Parable

- This parable gives us a brilliant insight into God’s grace.
- He has forgiven us a debt that we could never repay.
- So we should be ready to forgive others. We should be motivated by God’s grace to us and therefore be gracious with others.
- But the point goes one step further.
- We need to remember that we HAD a debt. God has wiped the slate clean.
- South African Dawie Ackerman went to the Truth and Reconciliation hearing for the man who killed his wife. When the men asked Ackerman to forgive them, he did. He said this: “I forgave them unconditionally because they’ve asked for it. God has forgiven us, all we have to do is ask for it. They’ve asked for forgiveness and so I have given it to them.”

## 4.0 - Responding to Grace

- There are dozens of passages that tell us we should be motivated by God’s grace (Colossians 3:12-13, Read Titus 2:11-13, Read 1 John 4:10, Romans 12:1-2)
- If we understand God’s grace... if we grasp the impact God’s grace has had on our lives...if we know that it is by God’s grace that we are saved...then it will profoundly influence our lives. It will be the motivation for us to live a godly life.

## 5.0 - Grace

- So what motivated you in your Christian life?

### 5.1. Make Sure you live a life that is Motivated by God’s Grace

- Some Christians are motivated by ungodly things:
- Guilt - They are plagued by thoughts that they are not worthy of a relationship with God. The fact is you are NOT. GET OVER IT. We have a relationship with God because of God’s grace in Jesus.
- Fear - that God won’t love you if you are not good enough. God couldn’t love you any more than he has in Jesus. It is not about you being good enough. It is about trusting God’s grace.
- Obligation – Some Christians think that the Christian life is one of paying God back for what he has done – that our good deeds are some kind of repayment scheme. But there is NOTHING to pay back.

### 5.2. Make Sure you Work at Understanding God’s Grace

- We need to continue working at understanding God’s grace to us.
- We will never grasp it completely or fully – but we ought to make sure we keep working at understanding it.

*Luke Tattersall is the minister of Parramatta City Presbyterian Church, Sydney.*