

Lessons from Conference on the Grace of Salvation

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[0 : 00] Several months, we've been on a series in Sunday School class on worldview, the biblical worldview. And it is a subject that is as broad as the world, isn't it? Because it's simply taking any subject that is a real subject in the world and giving the Bible's view of it.

So we're bringing that series to an end in one sense, but we're leaving it open. And we'll probably be returning to it at different points with individual lessons.

Stan has a lesson on work, but he doesn't have the voice yet to give that. So we'll be returning to a biblical view of work. But this morning, we've got Mark Akins coming to share something that the Lord blessed him with.

But several weeks ago, he and Linda were able to attend the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary Conference up in Grand Rapids.

And they sat under God's word for I don't know how many sessions, a dozen or so. And he's going to bring something of the blessing that he and Linda received there and share it with us.

[1 : 13] I think the picture is a beautiful thing, that God blesses us that we might bless others. And I'm thankful that Mark is willing to do that this morning. Well, these messages that Linda and I got to hear at Grand Rapids several weeks ago were very informative, and they were very thrilling as we looked into the theme of the grace of salvation.

And we got to hear nine different messages. I'm not going to sum up all of those in this talk, but I did want to mention the nine and give you the scriptures they were based on in case you wanted to look into them yourself.

The first was the promise of grace, and that was based on Genesis 3. Next, the day of all grace or the day of atonement based on Leviticus 16 and Hebrews 9.

The Christ of grace based on Luke 23, 27 to 34. Saving grace, regeneration and faith based on Ephesians 2.

A miracle of grace, justification based on Romans 3, 19 to 31. The grace of divine dwelling about the tabernacle based on Exodus 25.

[2 : 49] The maturation of grace, sanctification based on Romans 6. The breath of grace, perseverance to the end based on 1 John 2, 17.

And finally, the glory of everlasting grace based on Revelation 22. So those were the nine facets of saving grace that were covered, along with some other sessions that were the divided up portion of the conference.

But this lesson today, I'm going to attempt to cover the first five of these nine subjects in only a brief and cursory way so that you can get a taste of the amazing sweep of God's grace, his unmerited love and favor toward guilty sinners.

And this grace moved God to provide and rescue a chosen people out of this fallen world through the sin-bearing sacrifice of his only beloved son.

Dr. Joel Beakey, president of the seminary, began with the promise of grace based on the proto-evangel, the first gospel promise in the scriptures in Genesis 3, uttered by the creator after his creatures had sinned against him.

[4 : 30] And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed. This is God talking to the serpent now.

Dr. Beakey characterized Genesis 3 in different ways.

He called it, first of all, the Bible's black chapter, in that it records God's judgment on man's sin.

Man's fall into sin, God's curse, the pall of judgment that hangs over all of us because of Adam and Eve's rebellion.

Certainly a black chapter indeed. And it's also the Bible's red chapter because it first mentions the idea of a blood atonement always being necessary to cover and wash away man's sin.

[5 : 37] It's described by the divine act of providing skins from slaughtered animals to clothe his guilty creatures in place of our own faulty act of making aprons out of dead leaves.

And then finally, Genesis 3 is also the white chapter of the Bible giving the gracious hope of salvation in the 15th verse, the proto-evangel.

What surprised me about Dr. Beakey's message was mentioning the fact that it begins with God's promise to the serpent to bring enmity between the serpent and the woman, between the serpent's offspring and the woman's offspring.

How often do we think of God as a being who brings hostility, who brings enmity, who brings animosity between parties?

We usually think of God as somebody who brings peace and joy and love and forgiveness. Well, his first gospel promise was to make enemies out of the serpent and the woman, out of the serpent's children and the woman's children.

[7 : 09] And specifically, the specific seed, capital S, who was promised, who would be Jesus the Messiah. I think it's understandable that we might ask how God was going to do this.

How could we become enemies with Satan when Adam and Eve had just joined Satan's side in this rebellion against God?

And that's just the point. Humanly speaking, we love being part of Satan's army, his team. And we come into this world very willing to do the will of the flesh and the devil and the world.

But God was pledging himself someday, somehow, to break up this happy, sinful family. He was going to bring enmity between these parties.

The seed of the woman would come and crush the serpent's head in the future. And he would be a person the serpent would be unable to destroy in the long run.

[8 : 21] The serpent's ultimate enemy would ensure that his people's hatred against their maker would once again be turned toward their real enemy, the devil and their own sin.

For the new birth gives believers in Christ a hatred and a hostility toward sin and all kinds of unholiness.

And I realize if I fail to feel that holy hatred toward sin, especially the remaining sin in me, then I would have to question whether I might not really be saved.

Even as the serpent's descendants nip at the heels of God's people to try to slow us down in the Christian race, the worst they can do ultimately is to bruise us.

To bruise us. They're merely like Saul of Tarsus, kicking at the goads. They're fighting a losing battle. Beeky goes on to observe that the church's most blessed times in history have always been those times when there has been the fiercest conflict.

[9 : 39] In fact, the Lord is ultimately in control of all of Satan's attacks. He has sovereignty over them, even in orchestrating the death of his son on the cross.

And our God only uses satanic attacks against us to empty us of our confidence in the flesh and our dependence on our fleshly strength and to make room for more of Christ.

So this is truly a gracious God who has done that for us and giving us the promise that the enemy will fail and we will succeed eternally as the seed of the woman defeats our enemy.

Well, next, Dr. Michael Barrett has been teaching Old Testament on the college and seminary level for many, many years. His address at the conference had to do with the Day of Atonement, the Yom Kippur, the Day of All Grace, he called it, and how it points us to the perfect mediator who came in the person of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Barrett's enthusiasm for finding Christ in the Old Testament, in the different figures and object lessons, is very infectious when he talks about it to the extent that I went right out and bought one of his books entitled Beginning with Moses, A Guide to Finding Christ in the Old Testament.

[11 : 27] Well, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, was very important to the Jewish people for many reasons. It was a day of sober reflection, a day of sorrow about their sin, and a day of pursuing God's mercy.

Reflection, sin, and mercy. And the holiness of the priests was very important, as was the Ark of the Covenant, which signified the throne of God past the veil to the Holy of Holies.

That was a very, very important concept when we think about the Day of Atonement. The priest had a set-apartness from the rest of the people and represented the people before God's throne.

And this was paramount in this once-a-year ceremony. Even though the temple and then later, or the tabernacle and later the temple, represented God's presence among the people, those consecrated buildings also represented God's separateness from sin.

And how a special class of people, and them, they alone, were admitted into the temple grounds, or the temple itself, in order to minister before the Lord.

[13 : 04] And only the high priest could go past that veil into that most holy place, and that only once a year. So that was one aspect of the Day of Atonement that people would look forward to as they felt sorrow for their sin, and they knew that they needed God's mercy toward them individually and toward the nation during this Day of Atonement.

Dr. Barrett also emphasized that Aaron's high priestly garments, these beautiful clothes that were made specifically for the priest with the jewels on the breast piece and the turban that he wore and the bells around the bottom of his skirt and all the different magnificent clothes, royal type clothes on the priest were ceremonially taken off of the high priest before he would go into the Holy of Holies.

He was divested, he was stripped of these beautiful garments that remind people of heaven, and they were ritually removed from him, and he only wore a simple linen garment when he would go into that holy place before the Ark of the Covenant.

And this was to symbolize the humiliation of the Messiah who would leave his heavenly garments aside and be born in a human body, clothed in human flesh to represent his people who had strayed from their maker and offended him by their sin.

This was a clear image of the ultimate high priest, the seed of the woman who'd finally do away with sin and free his people from their ultimate enemy.

[15 : 12] Yom Kippur also teaches us that sinners can only approach God on the basis of a sinless sacrifice. And this was the salvation drama of the two goats.

You have the sacrificial goat whose blood was shed and poured into a bowl for the priest to take beyond the veil into the presence of God, and the scapegoat onto whom the sins of the people were transferred symbolically, and then it was sent out into the wilderness to take our sins away from us.

Well, the first goat had to have no defects. There were no faults on it, no markings of any kind.

It had to be perfect, representing the perfect sacrifice of Christ. And the blood of the substitute had to be applied to the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant.

Think about that box in the Holy of Holies with the lid made of gold, with the cherubim looking down onto the top of that golden lid called the mercy seat where the presence of God was concentrated.

[16 : 41] As long as that mercy seat covered that box, the law of God that was inside would not bring about the death that man deserved because it was covered by that mercy seat that came between God's wrath, His rightful wrath toward our sin, and that law that demanded that sinners be put to death.

And so every year, that blood of the sacrifice had to be applied to that mercy seat in order for it to remain between the law and the sinful people.

That mercy seat, of course, symbolizes the mercy of God toward sinners when He sees the blood of the substitute and forgives the sin of the people.

The goat being put to death in the place of the guilty ones represents propitiation for the people, turning away the wrath that the people deserved for sinning against God, and the expiation or the scapegoat being sent out into the wilderness represents how God sends our sins away from us through confession, repentance, and forgiveness being covered by the blood of that sacrifice.

The scapegoat couldn't be released without the sacrificial goat being offered. and its blood being used. This again points us to the Lord Jesus and the dual requirements of the law.

[18 : 33] He bore the guilt of the guilty people, and when He was crucified, they took Him outside the city, away from the assembly of God to be cursed in our place.

these two things, propitiation and expiation, are acts of divine grace granting God's mercy while maintaining His justice.

And because our sinless substitute was raised from the dead, His atoning blood, wherever it is applied by faith, brings salvation and the promise of our sins forgiven forever.

next, Dr. Jonathan Gibson is an associate professor of Old Testament at Westminster Seminary, and his message focused on the Christ of grace.

And this one had to do with the Savior's words from the cross, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Luke 23, 34.

[19 : 45] Dr. Gibson said, without the Christ of grace, there could have been no grace of Christ to apply to us.

John wrote that the Word was made flesh and came among us full of grace and truth. truth. And he quoted a poem by Amy Carmichael, that famous missionary and poetess, who likened Jesus to a cup of sweet water.

Whenever that cup is jolted, nothing but sweet water comes out of it. And certainly, when Jesus went through His humiliation, His sleepless night of prayer, His mistreatment, beating, scourging, dragging the cross to Mount Calvary and finally being nailed to the cross, those were the worst joltings that humans could give to Him.

And yet, what spilled out of the Savior on the cross was forgiveness. Praying to the Lord to forgive those who were trying to destroy Him.

Dr. Gibson refers to Christ's prayer as an inspired prayer because it was based on the Scripture, specifically, Isaiah 53, 12, which says, For He bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.

[21 : 23] Although all that He had experienced was at the hand of mockers and sinners and murderers, Jesus prayed for His enemy that their crime would not be held against them in the final judgment.

And that crime, Dr. Gibson pointed out, was an incalculable crime. Unable to be calculated how sinful it was.

The phrase, They know not what they do was not an excuse for those who were committing this crime. It didn't excuse them from the guilt of what they were doing.

What it meant was they had no idea how bad that crime was. The severity of it was beyond their ability to reason.

They couldn't claim any such thing as invincible ignorance as it's defined by the Catholic Church. For they surely ought to have known and recognized who Jesus was by His words, by His miracles, by His character and His teachings.

[22 : 39] And Peter would preach later on to the Jews, I know that you did it out of ignorance as did also your rulers, but those things which God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.

God used the willful ignorance of men to fulfill His redemption promise. It was an ignorance they ought to have overcome, but God used it for His own purposes.

Jesus' prayer was also based on an indestructible relationship. when Jesus cried out from the cross, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

It was surely Jesus' human nature that was feeling that forsakenness. For Dr. Gibson taught that heaven was at no point deprived of the presence of God the Son.

When the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, the Word could not encompass the entire, or the body could not encompass the entire eternal Word.

[23 : 59] As Athanasius used to teach, the Word was not entirely circumscribed by the physical body of Christ. The Father was never unleashing His righteous anger at the Divine Son.

Otherwise, He never would have heard Christ's prayer from the cross. That prayer would never have been answered. There could never have been any cross purposes between members of the Godhead, even when Jesus was hanging on that cross paying for our sins.

So this was an indestructible relationship upon which that prayer was based. Jesus' prayer was also an indistinct prayer.

Note that He said, forgive them, for they know not what they do. He didn't say, forgive the Romans. He didn't say, forgive the priests, forgive the Pharisees.

He left it open, implying that these pronouns are a universal plea for those who are willfully ignorant, but still guilty and condemn.

[25 : 15] All guilty sinners, I think he quoted Spurgeon here, all guilty sinners who are willing can crawl into that them, forgive them, for they know not what they do, and be forgiven of their sins.

And finally, Jesus was praying an indestructible or an invincible prayer. prayer. It became effectively answered when the Jews cried out in Acts 2, brethren, what are we to do?

What shall we do? For their hearts were cut to the quick by Peter's preaching and by the Holy Spirit's regenerating power. Thousands were added to the church in a direct answer to the Savior's gracious prayer from the cross.

So that was truly the Christ of grace. Dr. Adrian Neely is vice president of Puritan Seminary, and he lectured on the subject of saving grace, faith and repentance, regeneration and faith.

Using the familiar passage in Ephesians 2, Dr. Neely asked us the question, has God's grace changed me?

[26 : 41] Do I accept his grace as a treasure? Do I accept it as God's gift? God's grace, he told us, is both necessary and transformative.

This passage in Ephesians mentions the past, the present, and the future of God's people. It addresses us personally you are saved, it says, and shows us what we were saved from, what we are saved by, and what we are saved for.

Verses 1 to 3 remind believers of what they were before, what we've been saved from, a call for humility in that we in our sin were no different than anyone else when God called us.

We were all children of wrath under the curse. Verses 4 to 6 begin with that wonderful phrase, but God, taking us to the present, the one who had us under his curse, and rightfully so, also was the same one who was rich in mercy, and motivated by a great love to make dead sinners alive together with Christ.

That word together is used three times in this passage. It outlines both our desperate, sin cursed past, and our living present, thanks to the gracious, merciful, loving Savior God.

[28 : 23] So we are even now, it tells us, raised up and seated with our risen Savior in the heavenly places. We are together with Christ, joined in union with him.

Then verse 17 begins with that, a purpose word, points to the reason for what came before. We've been joined savingly to Christ, that God might show the exceeding riches of his grace in the ages to come.

This is our future. God has planned for us, who are joined to Christ, to become prized exhibits of his grace before all lookers in heaven in the kindness he showed to us in Christ.

God will put us on display for his glory, in effect boasting about the exceeding riches of that grace. The passage goes on to show one and all that it's only God who can boast about our salvation.

For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

[29 : 47] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

We were dead in our trespasses and sins. No one had any desire, no one had any power to enter into union with Christ.

It was God who had to perform a miracle of divine creation in us so that we would joyfully believe in Christ.

And through that gift of faith be eternally joined to him. This is what we were saved by, not by our own works. And finally, verse 10 tells us what we're being saved for.

We are his works of art, Dr. Neely said, called to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.

[30 : 50] Micah 6, 8. Through our good works, as we are to be witnesses to the world, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5, 16. This is both an active and a passive ministry. For God planned way beforehand these good works and assigned us to walk in them.

That was the passive part. That we should walk in them is the active part. So the grace that called us and the faith that saves us go on to energize our obedience.

And our transformed lives are to find their source in Christ, all for the Father's eternal glory. God's righteousness.

I'm going to end today with my notes on Dr. David McWilliams' passage for his message, A Miracle of Grace, Justification. His main text was Romans 3, 19-31.

[31 : 58] How can a person, he asked, become right with God if human righteousness is to perfectly line up with God's righteousness?

How is that possible? This passage begins by summing up Paul's argument that the whole world stands guilty before our maker.

Not a man or a woman or a child before the throne of God's justice will even dare to open his mouth on that judgment day.

Do we see this truth as clearly in our own hearts as we see it in the pages of Scripture?

McWilliams asked. This is the problem with much of the Bible's truth. We fail to make it personally apply to ourselves.

[32 : 57] Perfect righteousness is what our king and judge requires from each of us. but what none of us is able to provide. The law of God reveals our sin but it cannot save us.

It can't save those who fail to fully obey it. Well, secondly, Dr. McWilliams taught that God himself provided a righteousness righteousness that we and our sin could not.

God could not merely set his perfect justice aside and just unilaterally forgive us. His holy standard had to be fully met or else no one could ever have been saved.

And praise him. Verse 22 reveals that there is a justifying righteousness given freely to all and on all who trust in Jesus Christ.

This is a righteousness that's apart from the law, a righteousness revealed in the gospel, and a righteousness imputed to believers by grace and through faith.

[34 : 14] this justifying righteousness given to believing sinners is justifying grace given freely through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by his blood, Christ's blood shed on the cross.

Verses 22 to 24 and 25. This gracious, freely given righteousness was provided in a way that was consistent with God's own character.

Amazingly, it was the same principle that condemned guilty sinners that God used to save them. The same principle.

Well, four elements of this miracle of justification were mentioned by Dr. McWilliams. A, the offense, B, the estrangement from God, C, the offender's debt, and D, the substitutionary sacrifice.

God himself created the reality that made substitutionary atonement a possible thing through Jesus Christ.

[35 : 38] Old Testament saints were forgiven on the same basis. On the same basis, the anticipation of Christ's sacrifice, their history and their rituals taught them that God could not unilaterally pardon their sin debt.

He could only redirect the punishment that we deserved to our substitute. And when we see what Jesus suffered, we learn that the claims of justice were never set aside.

Those claims were met through the blood of our substitute. The sins of Jesus Christ's followers had been paid for just as fully as if all of us had spent our eternity in hell paying for those sins.

every bit has been paid. Jesus bore our legal obligations and fully paid our debt so that we would be saved freely by God's grace.

His life was taken. His death was required because our sin was an attack on the God of life, the God who gave us life.

[36 : 54] God's life. There is a poisonous and deceiving doctrine that is going around today about the atonement that substitution and propitiatory sacrifice are not necessary in the atonement of Christ.

Without those truths, we are left without any hope or forgiveness. forgiveness. Jesus, God's Son, died and shed His blood in our place so that God could forgive us.

What an amazing truth that is. What an amazing salvation. As we learned when we discussed the Day of Atonement, God's grace and salvation rests both on propitiation and expiation.

To stand before the Holy One justly clothed in perfect righteousness, our alienation from God and His just wrath had to be turned aside.

That's propitiation. Because our perfect substitute was sinlessly righteous, those who are joined to Him by faith are graciously forgiven by the righteous judge who looks on Him and pardons me.

[38 : 15] God's grace of salvation allowed our sin record to be put to death along with Jesus on that cross. Our record of sin was nailed to that cross so that God would remember it against us no more.

Let's rejoice in that fact. The grace of our salvation is certainly a miraculous exchange, a plan of supernatural genius conceived and agreed upon in eternity past by the eternal three in one.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit made it possible for their people to sing throughout eternity amazing grace. How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

Let's pray. our Father, we thank you for your amazing grace. We thank you for your love and your faithfulness for the mercy that was symbolized by that mercy seat sprinkled with the blood of the substitute.

Lord, how we thank you for the Lord Jesus and for all that he went through for us, for the unbelievable price that he paid and for the miraculous work of your Holy Spirit which brings about new life in all that you have called.

[39 : 49] Thank you, Lord, for this time of worship to come. We pray that you would bless it. You would draw us close to yourself in repentance and faith as we renew our commitment to you.

We thank you for it in Jesus' name. Amen. We're dismissed. We're dismissed. We're dismissed. We're dismissed.