



BelPres Church

Grace Greater Than All My Sin

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So glad to have you here, those of you online, those of you here in the room, the sun is out, the Seahawks won last night. My wife was actually rooting for the 49ers and we're still married. So it's just a good day all the way around. We used to live in the Bay Area, we're attached.

A seminary professor named Mike Graves tells a story of going to one of his students' ordinations. And the student had a lot of people coming and said that they'd all go out to eat before the evening church service where he was going to be ordained. But Mike wondered how they get 19 people in and out of a restaurant in time for that evening church service. So he and a colleague went ahead to the restaurant to put their name on the waiting list.

Well, this restaurant was run by the Amish, you know, that group of people, they're kind of strict, kind of try to live like the Puritans, don't use modern appliances, that sort of thing. And there was this huge crowd at the restaurant. So Mike went to the front, and there was a sign that said, please don't give your name until your whole party is here. So Mike said, name is Graves, party of 19. And the Amish man said, is your whole party here? And Mike said, uh-huh.

And Mike said, I figured it'd take a long time to get a table of 19. By the time they got it, the whole party would be there. In other words, I lied. And Mike went back, and Mike's colleague looked at him and said, you lied to the Amish. You can't do that. Lie to the Presbyterians, fine, but not to the Amish, right?

Two minutes later, the host said, Gray's party of 19. So he had to go say, ah, yeah, our whole party isn't here. And the Amish man said, did you lie? And Mike

said, uh-huh. And the Amish man said, come with me. And Mike said, I couldn't imagine what kind of punishment the Amish give out for lying. I pictured myself being put in the stocks, right?

And then the man took him into this big banquet room, and there was a table full of homemade bread and butter and jam. And the Amish man said, have some bread. You're forgiven.

The theological word for that is grace. We don't get what we deserve. Instead, we get grace, God's grace.

We're doing a sermon series called Unleash Good News about all the different ways that Jesus is good news in our lives. Because the more we're aware of that, the more courage and hope and joy we're going to have, and it gets easier to share the good news of Jesus with others just out of our own experience.

And one of the ways Jesus is good news is he doesn't just give us grace like the Amish man did. He gives us grace that is greater than our sin, that not only forgives us, but it goes one step further and transforms us, which relieves us of guilt and shame and sin and all of that.

Now, different cultures deal with guilt, sin, and shame differently. Our modern western culture basically says, oh, all that stuff is just cultural construct from our repressive religious past. Don't worry about it. Don't think about it. It doesn't really exist. Everyone's good, except for a few people.

Well, that dog don't hunt. Because, as I've said before, for people who say we're good people, we should get awfully upset when someone hints that maybe we're not. Sure seem to need to virtue signal a lot, by having impressive grades or oppressive job title. Look at me. Look how good I am. Show all the good things that we do. Make sure everybody knows we vote in all the right ways, because we're good people who believe the right things. And we seem uniquely unable to admit when we screwed up. We are the mistakes were made generation, right? Instead of, I messed up.

And, but deep down, we know, right? Deep down, we know we do things that hurt others, that hurt ourselves. We know we do these things. Deep down, a psychiatrist named Carl Meninger, who is not a Christian, but nevertheless says, if I could convince my patients they were truly forgiven, 75% of them would never see me again.

So if you have a Bible, turn to Romans chapter 5. You can use the table of contents if you want to find it. And we know it's a little dark in here. We're

working on that. We're going to try to get some solutions. It'll take a while, but we're working on that.

So, and Romans 5 is a complicated chapter. It's a little hard to understand. But one of the main points it's making is God's grace is greater than all of our sin, and it brings not just forgiveness, but transformation. Whatever you have done or have not done cannot overrule God's love for you.

And in chapter 5, the apostle Paul talks about how Jesus' death on the cross pays the price for our sins. Let me define that word, because it gets lost in translation. Sin was originally an archery term that meant to fail to hit the bullseye. Sin is anything we think, do, or say that misses the bullseye of God's intended best, and that goes against God's primary commands to love him and love others as ourselves.

Look over at the next chapter from 5, go over to chapter 6. This is partly why physical Bibles are actually handy, because you can see context easier. Go over to chapter 6, verse 23, and it says, For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Sin always results in the death of something, death of a friendship, death of a marriage, death of trust, death of goodwill between countries, death of entire cultures and entire nations. And Biblically speaking, sin isn't just something I do, it's a condition I have, that deep inside of me, under the right circumstances, I am capable of doing just about anything.

For instance, if I were really convinced that a group of people were coming to kill my kids, which is kind of what happened in Rwanda during the genocide, if I were really convinced a group of people was coming to kill my kids, I'm afraid of what I might do. It's in me, it's in you. I don't think, none of us go to bed every night thinking, yep, another bulls-eye day, man. I am perfection on two legs. We all got our stuff.

And if you look at verse 8 of chapter 5, it says, but God demonstrates his own love for us in this, that when we got our act together and when we cleaned ourselves up, Christ Jesus died for us. No, no, while we were still sinning, right in the middle of it, Jesus died for us to pay the price for those sins. We trespass God's commands, but the gift of God is his grace, and that is greater than all of our sin.

Skip over to verse 15. But the gift is not like the trespass. Now, Paul's gonna go on to say, the gift of God's grace is so much greater than our sin. And what

follows is a series of contrasts illustrating how much greater the gift of God is than our trespass, than our sin. Picture it like old-fashioned scales, right, with two sides, and one side is wavier. One side outweighs the other.

And if you have a Bible, you may want to underline some of the words that I've capitalized here, just so that you can come back to it later on and think about it. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, and by that one man, he's referring to Adam in Genesis, who committed the first sin. But also, in Hebrew, the word Adam means humanity, so he's talking about all of us. If the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many?

So on one side is the trespass, but the wavier side is God's grace. Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin. The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. So on the one side, condemnation, but the wavier side is justification, God's forgiveness.

Verse 17. For if by the trespass of the one man, death reign through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ?

On one side is all the death that we bring through our sin, on the other side is God's life. Skip down to verse 20, which is the one I'm going to focus on. The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. What does that mean?

But where sin increased, grace increased all the more. And where it says grace increased all the more, the word for that in the original Greek is hyperpariseo, which begins with the prefix hyper. And in Greek, that means hyper, like hyper. Not just adequate grace, but super hyper quadruple grace, more grace than you can handle grace.

Jesus' grace outweighs our trespass. Jesus' life outweighs death. Jesus' justification outweighs our condemnation. And when we get that not just in our heads, but bone deep, it begins to change us and make us more like Jesus.

And the key to really getting this, not just in our heads, but in our hearts, is verse 20, where it says the law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. Okay, that does not mean that God gave us his law so that we could sin some more. What it means is to experience how great God's grace is, I first

have to experience how deep my sin is. Not to feel guilt or shame or blame, but to experience his grace that transforms me.

I think in our modern context, the reason and the fact that Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins doesn't set us free, doesn't fill us with joy, doesn't transform us, is I think we kind of think I didn't really need that. Not really. We have this sort of, I'm not that bad of a person. At least I'm not like so and so kind of a thing going on.

But what makes God's love so astounding is that he dies for us while we were sinners. Not because we're good, but because we're bad. The word gospel means good news, but the good news is bad news before it's good news.

And God's law is not meant to cause us to sin more, it's to increase our understanding of how destructive our sin can be. Even little things like gossip destroys a person's reputation that took a lifetime to build. In a way, you're taking that person's life away. It's a little bit kind of like murder, which is why they call it character assassination.

Lying creates a society where nobody can trust anybody. Our sin hurts God, it hurts us, it wrecks our world. And the one who gets to define what is and isn't a sin isn't us, it's God. Because he made us and he knows best how we work, just like the people who made my car know best how it should be taken care of.

And the more I realize that I am more sinful than I would ever dare imagine, but more infinitely loved than I would ever dare to dream, I experience emotionally how powerful God's grace is. I don't deserve it, but he gives it to me anyway. And that, over time, begins to change us, to be more like Jesus.

Twice grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved. That line from Amazing Grace was written by John Newton, who was a slave trader, who encountered God's grace in a powerful way, grace that loved him enough to tell him the truth, grace that loved him enough to say, this way you're going, slave trading, it's not a good way.

Grace that loved him enough to cut through all the ways he rationalized that and minimized it in his head, oh, it's not that bad, everyone's doing it, and taught his heart to fear his sin. And then grace, his fears, relieved by showing God's love for him and his forgiveness. That's why it's amazing. And it changed him.

He became an abolitionist who worked for the end of slavery. Grace says to us, this way you're going, it's gonna hurt you. I've got a better way. Do you want to try it? That's grace. Tells us the truth, but gives us a better life.

And God does that for us as individuals, but he also does it for entire nations and for the whole world. It's the kind of grace that Dr. King showed, calling our nations to leave behind the sins of racism and be true to our best ideals as a country.

There's a lot in the news right now about ice raids. And as we've said before, the Bible talks about two things, both the need for secure borders and caring for immigrants and refugees, and the Bible doesn't see those two things as mutually exclusive.

And yes, there's all kinds of complexity, around those questions, and there's disagreement around those questions, but the Bible is clear about a couple of things. We don't use dehumanizing language, which sadly is happening right now. We treat everyone, including immigrants, as made in the image of God, because they are.

We don't instill fear and terror, which immigrants and refugees in our own church, our fellow BelPresers, are feeling a lot of right now. Grace says God has a better way.

For all of us, grace shows us our sin not to heap blame and shame and condemnation, but to show us God loves us so much, he longs to lead us in his better way. And his grace is greater than all our sin.

Which is what the text is getting at when it says, where sin increased, grace increased all the more. You know, physics says that for every action, there's an equal and opposite reaction. God's law of grace is similar, but a little bit different. For every sin, there's not an equal, but a greater and opposite reaction of grace.

You cannot out-sin God's grace. There is nothing you can do to make God love you less, including that thing you don't want anyone to know. God knows it, and he loves you all the same. Nothing you can do to make him love you less, or just give up on you, or walk away.

I have a friend who, when he was dating his wife, he went on a double date with some of her friends, and he wanted to make a really good impression, so he wore this really nice, starched, white shirt to impress them. But they ended up going to a ribs place, so you can kind of tell where this is going, right?

So he took up the first rib, and he dropped it on his white shirt, and then he tried to clean it off with water, but that just smeared it around and made it worse, right?

Well, then he just took up the second rib, he accidentally dropped that one on his pants. So, as a joke, he took a third rib, and just dipped it in the sauce and started putting it all over his clothes. He said, they only had dinner one other time with that couple. They went to their house for dinner, and when they went into the dining room, this couple had spread newspaper under his chair.

Jesus never spreads newspaper under your chair, metaphorically speaking. He never says, you're hopeless. He never says, I give up on you. He never says, there's nothing I can do with you. He has more grace than you have sins to sin. I don't care how creative you are at sinning. Many of us are very creative at sinning. He has more grace than you have sins to sin, and his grace will always outrun your sin.

Now, the objection is, well, that just sounds like license to sin. Well, keep going. Look at the next chapter. And remember, in the original text, there was no chapter headings, there were no verses. It just all ran together. What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? You know, oh, what a sweet deal. God likes to forgive, so I'll just sin more so he has more to forgive because he likes it. It's for him, really, not for me.

By no means. We are those who have died to sin. How can we live in it any longer? Verse 4. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, where we too may live a new life. And that's the point. Live a new life.

When I really experience God's grace, my desire to sin decreases, and I begin to live a new life. Grace is not permission to sin. It's power to live a new life. Now we have to cooperate with that power, but the Holy Spirit does give us that power to help us live a new life. God's grace not only forgives us, it goes one step further and changes us.

And where sin, suffering, death, and pain increase, God's grace, life, and power increase all the more. That's the physics of grace. So, practically speaking, how do we experience this grace? How do we experience it? Well, I'm gonna give you

the big four that we often talk about, and then I'll give you one other. Big four, how to experience God's grace.

First, the Bible helps us understand what his grace is all about. Second, prayer and listening. This isn't something we can conjure for ourselves, so ask God to supernaturally help you experience his grace. Ask him in prayer, and then leave space for listening for those thoughts he might put into your head or memories he might call to mind.

We experience God's grace through worship, where we sing and focus on God's grace, and through community where someone else can be a mediator of God's grace to us. Tell us God's grace, speak it into our lives.

And then last, focus on God's grace, not ourselves. Whenever I am sort of mired in insecurity or shame or something like that, what am I looking at? I'm looking at myself. I'm looking at me, what I've done, right? Focus on me. I was telling your friend just this week that lately I've had some feelings of insecurity, feeling like a failure in some various ways. And he said, well, Scott, sounds to me like you're just looking at yourself. Thanks, I feel better already.

And then he said, focus on God, and realize he's not judging you by your performance. He just loves you as his son. If you remember that, you'll feel better. And he was right. He was right. If you feel overwhelmed with guilt, shame, or insecurity, remember this, God is not grading you. Okay, God's not grading you. He's not out there going, oh, I don't know, Bill there has kind of a C-minus soul. No, he took care of your sin on the cross. You are forgiven.

He's not judging you by your performance. He loves you because you're his son or his daughter. So action step for this week and really for the whole series. We've created a journal that has short exercises for each week of this series. And they're in the lobby, on our website, they're on our app. Get one and do the exercises each week. It'll maybe take you 10 minutes.

And each week, we're going to ask you to remember a time when Jesus was good news for you in your life in the particular way we talked about on that week's sermon. So this week, we're going to ask you two things to remember. First, where sin increased. Times you've missed the mark and felt burdened by shame. And then second, where grace increased all the more. How Jesus met you with his grace.

And we're going to do an exercise like this for each week so that the end of the week, you'll have an entire journal, or end of the series, you'll have an entire

journal of all the ways that Jesus has been good news in your life, which will be encouraging to read through and also equip you to share the good news with others simply by telling your story. Encouraging to read through and also equip you to share the good news with others simply by telling your story.

Some of you have maybe heard me tell a story a long time ago about a man named Ken Parker, who was part of the Ku Klux Klan. And one day he was at the pool in his apartment complex, and there was an African American man there named William, who was grilling something at the barbecue. And Ken said, as I watched him, there was something about the way he talked to people. He had this love and this joy that was unique, and I was just drawn to him.

So Ken introduced himself to William, and they started talking, and Ken discovered that William was a pastor of an African American church. And over the next few weeks, they kept talking, and Ken kept experiencing William's love for him, in spite of the fact that William is black, and Ken was part of the KKK. And that began to chip away at Ken's anger and hate. And he began to take some steps back away from the Klan.

Well, after a few months of this, William invited Ken to share his story with his church. So Ken stood in front of this mostly African American congregation, and said, I was a leader in the KKK, and then when the Klan wasn't hateful enough for me, I also joined a neo-Nazi group. And he said, their jaws just about hit the floor, but they just kept, they leaned in, and they kept listening.

And Ken said, what really blew him away was that after the service, not a single one of them said anything negative to him. Ken said, they were all hugging me and shaking my hand, building me up, not tearing me down, and out of that experience, Ken decided to make Jesus, who's the author of that kind of grace, his leader and his forgiver.

And so a few weeks later, Ken waded into a lake, and William baptized him. He exchanged his Klan robe for a baptism robe. And in fact, afterwards, he said, well, this feels a lot better than the last time I wore a robe.

And now Ken says, I try to apologize to everyone I can, because I've hurt people. I have spread hate. I have caused little kids to be afraid to sleep in their own bed. So I just try to apologize as often as I can.

Ken also went and had all of his KKK tattoos removed, which is actually kind of a painful process. And he talks with people who are part of hate groups to try to get them out of that.

Ken experienced undeserved grace from William and from that church. Grace that revealed the depth of his sin, but that also didn't heap shame and condemnation on him, and instead offer him a better way. It was grace greater than sin and shame, not just forgiveness, but real transformation. Grace that was greater than his hate. Grace that changed him to be an agent of change in God's world.

And what God did for Ken, he can do for you. Whatever it is that you carry that gives you a sense of shame and guilt. It's different than what Ken had, but we all got something, including that thing you don't ever want anyone to find out about you. And even there, even there, even there, there is nothing, no sin, that will stop God from loving you.

His grace is greater than your biggest failure, greater than your secret shame, bigger than your biggest problem, deeper than your deepest sorrow, where sin increased, where guilt multiplied, where shame whispered your name. Grace outweighs it all.

And His grace has brought you safe thus far. And His grace will lead you home. Jesus, nobody gives it but you. Not this kind of thing. Not this kind of grace. It only comes from you, Jesus.

And so Lord, we bring you all those places of guilt and shame. Lay them at your feet, and Lord, speak the truth to us that teaches our heart to fear, but give us your grace that our fears relieve. Jesus, thank you for this grace. Nobody loves you the way you love us. So thank you, Lord, for that.

And Lord, help us to experience it deep inside so that we become people that look more like you, that act more like you, that are more like you, and bringing your grace in a graceless world. Jesus, thank you so much for this amazing gift. You are good all the time, and we give you our praise. In your name, Lord. Amen.

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following (note: we use the same scripture reflection questions each week so that we can practice using the same tools over time as we examine different scriptures):

- What do we learn about God's story in this passage?
- What do we learn about our story in this passage?

Talk:

- When have you felt like “too much” or “not enough,” and how did Jesus meet you in that moment?
- What changed because of His grace? Your heart, your reactions, or your relationships?
- Who in your life needs grace this week more than correction or advice?

Action Plan:

Review the action prompt below, share any initial ideas of how you might pursue this practice this week.

- Think of a coworker, a sibling, an adult child, a friend, a classmate or a neighbor and offer grace specifically where you’d normally correct, lecture or withdraw (patience instead of eyeroll, listening instead of fixing, encouragement instead of critique, forgiveness instead of replaying wrongs). This is not “be nice.” This is to be more like Jesus because he does the same for you.
- If the moment feels right, say: “I’d love to have you join me...” and offer one clear invitation: for a walk this week, for dinner at my house, Sunday worship, Moms’ Fellowship, student D groups.... No pressure. Just invitation.

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Take the challenging parts of your conversation to Jesus. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement for the week ahead.