



The Joy of Salvation - Part 5

Astonished at God's Amazing Grace

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Luke 15:20-24

Well have you ever thought about how bizarre it is that people use the Lord's name in vain? Do you ever think about that? Oh, I know it's bad but have you ever thought about how bizarre that it is? I mean here's the most important person in history in the world and they're using his name as an expletive. As some kind of verbal exclamation point. I mean you never hear of anybody hit their thumb with a hammer and you yell out Taylor Swift! I mean it probably never happen. No one stubs their toe and says, "LeBron James!" right? It just, I mean it's so bizarre that you would just pick this person's name and yell it out. Or like the word hell, right? Think about this, hell. I mean if you think about the concept of this place and you say now it's used as some kind of exclamatory punctuation, right? And you think someone doesn't drop something on the ground and say, "aw Chili's!" right? Or "That's one Starbucks of a fish you caught!" I mean it's just a strange way to garnishing your sentences. Right? Here are words, God, Jesus Christ, Hell that are given to us from God so that we would have our attention arrested so that our minds would be filled with meaning and would make our minds ponder and stop and think through what a big deal that is and now it's lost it's meaning because the culture has them used in such weird bizarre out of context ways that's so ubiquitous it doesn't mean anything in people's minds. I mean that's a strange phenomenon is it not? Eternally important words with no meaning attached to them. (02:00)

With that in mind, I want you to consider what these people might have in common. Rod Stewart, Aretha Franklin, Beyoncé, Johnny Cash, Elvis Presley, Steven Tyler, Willie Nelson, Hare Krishna chants, Wika ceremonies, "Star Trek 2 The Wrath of Khan", The Simpsons. Now there's a riddle that's hard to solve. What are all those people have in common, those movies, those shows? Well, all of those have some utilized or broadcast the 1779 lyrics of John Newton's hymn "Amazing Grace". All of them. Powerful words, Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost and now I'm found. Was blind but now I see. I mean poignant words, powerful words, deep, rich words if you think about them. But the problem is that most people don't. (03:09)

I can prove that by going to any of those people and daring to call them what they've called themselves in those lyrics. Tell Beyoncé she's a wretch and see how that goes. Probably not to well. Go up and talk to these people about the days when they were lost. Tell me about your story when you were lost or spiritually blind, I'd like to hear more about that. That song that you just sang. Naw, most of them are not going to have any answer for you, matters of fact they'll be offended by the question. Why? Because they're words that roll out of their mouth that has some sentiment behind them that has nothing to do with the actual words and phrases that they're singing. And the ubiquitous and common nature, they are the most well-known English song lyrics in the world. Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see. And the problem is that they're so common that not only the world but us Christians can sit here and sing them this morning, as we did, and really not be amazed or astonished or astounded by the thing that we just said is so amazing. Amazing grace? Is it that amazing to you? Or is that become words that have no meaning because it's become such a moniker of Christianity that of course we believe the grace of God is amazing. (04:27)

I hope that our study of what has been known as the prodigal son will help to remedy this problem for us. Maybe it can be one thing that might help you never say the words, "amazing grace", without really stopping to say what in the world did I just say, what does that mean? And have your heart and your mind really try to at least get back to what those word should do and that is to make you feel surprised, astonished. Think about that, "amazing", "astonished", right? Those are words "astounded" that reflect my attitude about something that I did not expect, didn't expect that, that was a surprise. I'm amazed at that, that's not now I thought it would go. I mean that's what the words mean. And grace can't be something we feel entitled to and ever have that sentence make any sense that there's amazing grace. It's a sweet sound to me, it saved a wretch like me. That has to be something that is guarded against and I think a good study of our parable particularly the heart of it at least from our perspective as those, I hope most of us are recipients of that grace, we're going to get to today. (05:39)

Verses 22 through 24 of Luke 15. We've been in this parable now, the third parable of Luke 15, this is our third installment of our study as we think through what's going on in this passage after we saw, first segment, the sin of

this prodigal reckless living son, and then we looked at the repentance that was worked in his heart, that was last time we were together. And now it's time for us to consider the father's response which should be something you don't yawn your way through and say, "Well that's what I expect dad to do." If that's what you expect, then it's not going to be astonishing, amazing, astounding. It should be unexpected if we understand the elements of this parable. Now of course the punch line is coming in verses 25 through 32, we'll get to that in our final installment of this study. (06:23)

But for now, let's study verses 20 through 24, remembering where we've been. A son spends all of his dad's money, goes to him says I want my inheritance which in essence means I wish you were dead, I'll take your inheritance now. I don't want to be in your house. I want out from under the control of your authoritative leadership in my life. I don't like it, I want to be free, so give it to me. I'm going to take it now and I'm going to Vegas and I'm going to spend it all on prostitutes and gambling and getting drunk and all this reckless living. And then the famine is going to hit and now I have nothing and I can't get a job, the only job I can get is this kosher Jewish boy going out there and feeding pigs, swine, as I'm feeding the pigs this slop, I look at it longing to eat it because I'm so malnourished and emaciated and hungry. And then I come to my senses and we saw that that was a gift of God, the repentance granted to us. And I said I've got to go home. I need to resume my relationship with dad that I thought was so terrible. And as he rehearses the line in verse 18 and 19, this is where we stopped last time, he says I've got to go and tell my father I've sinned against heaven and before him and I'm going to tell him I'm no longer worthy to be called his son and I'm going to make a proposition here and I'm going to say treat me as one of your hired servants, just let me come back as a slave in your house. All that's the preparation. (07:49)

Verse 20, and he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off his father saw him - and now I know you're expecting this but you shouldn't - felt compassion, not only feel compassion but it was a compassion so enthusiastic that he ran and he embraced him and he kissed him. And the son said to him - here comes the rehearsed line - father I've sinned against heaven and before you, it doesn't mean they're insincere, they're sincere, he recognizes his sin, he feels his guilt and he gets out the second line, I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. And we're expecting that third line in the bottom of verse 19, and treat me as one of your hired servants. And for whatever reason perhaps because the father interrupts him, we don't even have that line come out. But the father, verse 22, said to his servants, that apparently ran alongside or behind the father as he went out to greet his son, they're standing around and he says to them, bring quickly the best robe. Put it on him. Put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet and bring the fattened calf and kill it. And let us eat and celebrate. Oh, there's the theme we had the lost sheep is found and the shepherds celebrates with his friends. The lost coin was found verses 8 through 10 and the gal brings all of her neighbors together and celebrate with me. And here we have the celebration, why? For this son was dead and he's alive again. He was lost and he's found, there's the theme. And they began to celebrate. (09:15)

We've got that thrice over in this passage. Lost is found, celebrate, celebrate, celebrate. And this time it is so poignant, it is so amazing that the father would take such an egregious, wayward, rebellious son and run to him with open arms and kiss him. That's not what we expect. I know we are living here most of us, unless you're visiting from out of town, we live in sentimentalized child centered, idolatrous family focused kind of Orange County living and we have such a sentimentalized view of parent and child. I mean this is what we expect but we're not telling this story in Orange County in the 21st century. This story was being told in the 1st century where the father's honor was at stake, where he had just in a very bizarre way, he had liquidated his assets or at least a third of them because the older son got double portion so a third of his wealth goes to his son. He had to sell his property I'm assuming just in the logic of this passage at great losses to cash in all that he owned so that he could give his second son, this rebellious son, who said I wish you were dead and I'm out of here, I'm going to go do whatever I want, so he could give him all of that. And the egregious nature of the self-indulgence that we looked at two weeks ago to think through the reality of what it was to see the shame that should have been brought upon this father and the only way to reconcile that with what had happen is for him now, as his son comes back, is to shame him. He should be angry but instead of anger what we get here, look at it again, verse 20 let's just make our observation from verse 20. He goes out there to go to his father. Father sees him, he runs to him and he feels compassion. Compassion, that ought to surprise you because that's not the response we should expect. Number one on your outline if you're taking notes, and I wish that you would, jot this down number one. We ought to be amazed that God, if we think about your life, feels compassion toward you, a penitent sinner, and not anger. (11:12)



1. Be Amazed God Feels Compassion Not Anger

He should feel anger. Now again we've so sentimentalized father and son. We've so sentimentalized God and you. I know to us we can't think of God doing anything but showing compassion, but the right thing for a holy God to do is to feel anger. I've told you this story before. I remember preaching on some passage that dealt with God's anger and a lady at the door so angry with me that I would ever talk about God being angry. Which I thought was a little ironic because she was so angry with me saying God never gets angry. And I had to remind her of a little phrase I asked her, you know I didn't do this as condescendingly as I'm about to express it to you. But I said, "Hey, have you ever heard of the phrase, God's wrath?" I wanted to hand her a dictionary, come on show, look the word up, wrath for a minute. You know what wrath means? Wrath means anger. Now it's not a capricious anger, it's not kicking the dog, he's not throwing vases around, he's not tipping over dressers. It's not that kind of wrath but it's a measured anger. The anger that you have I hope when you see something that is egregious and unjust and that feeling you get and the feeling that you want is a resolve of that. And the resolve of the anger is getting the payback. I want you to pay me back, as a matter of fact if I took a third of all that you had and I said I'm going to Vegas, I'm going to spend it on prostitutes and gambling and getting drunk and gorging myself with food and I spent everything that you, just think of that, a third of your wealth. You know your net worth? Figure that out, a third of it all, and I took it all and wasted it. And it started with I wish you were dead, I don't want to see you anymore, I want you to get away from me and I want to get away from you. And I went off to Vegas and then I came back with my tail between my legs. You should be angry. And the first thing I think you would say is, pay me back. Which by the way is what the penitent son started thinking about, I want to be a servant I'll try to pay you back, I'll do the best I can. I'm thinking any reasonable person would say, "Okay, let's get started on that." Pay me back. (13:01)

Anger in the Bible attributed to God is a just anger like a judge would feel on a bench in Santa Ana in a courtroom when some thug who comes into his courtroom has been convicted and tried of some kind of terrible crime where he's victimized people and he sits there listening to the facts and he has a judicial anger and he's ready now to sentence. That's the right kind of response. Matters of fact that feeling of resolve of sentencing, that's why you pay money to go to those movies where you have the plot tension where there's a villain who villainized and all of a sudden, the hero comes along and what you want him to do even you nice waify little Orange County girls that seem so nice on the outside, you're sitting there in your seat with popcorn saying, "Kill him! kill him! kill him!" It's what you want. Now why is that? You turn into some terrible person in the theater? No, that's the godly sense of justice that you have that the bad guys should be punished. (14:05)

If you go out into the parking lot, you see some teenaged thug, some punk come up to some man, some 70 year old man on our patio and look at him, call him names, spit in his face and push him to the ground. Now don't tell me you're only a nice person if you look at that teenager and go "Aww I love you. I love you. Can I get you a doughnut? You need a cup of coffee?" Matter of fact I think something is wrong with you if you don't feel anger. You do understand what we're talking about here. A God who is so holy and so righteous that it's hard for us even to comprehend the problem God has with your sin and mine. Your sin as we tried to set up a couple weeks ago looking at the problem of sin is so egregious and appalling to God there is no rightful reaction that he should have. If he is a just God but to look at your sin and to feel anger. What kind of anger? Kick the dog, throw a vase against the wall, no. The anger of a just God saying there needs to be payment. Pay me back, settle the score. (15:03)

I don't go to those movies. Great, have you ever watched National Geographic? Even you tree hugging type people, right? Can see a squirrel find a nut and he works hard to find that nut and he's got that nut and here comes this monkey and he steals that nut and you get mad at a monkey. Aww that's a cute little monkey, why are you mad at the monkey? He stole that nut from that squirrel and he worked so hard, I had 30 seconds of tape watching him find that nut and now that monkey came and took the squirrel's nut. I hate monkeys! You want the score settled. The problem is when you're the monkey or you're the villain or you're the bad guy, unless God grants us that gift of repentance, which from our perspective is holding up the mirror of God's word and recognizing I am a wretch before a holy God. God should punish me. I'm no longer worthy to be called his son. I've earned his wrath. And then having God respond in an unimaginable way, instead of anger he shows compassion. If that's not surprising to you, or our word, if that's not amazing to you, if you're not astonished by that, then you don't understand the problem of your sin. Which we've tried to deal with, and I'm not trying to preach that sermon but it's a distance between our singing of songs and the reality of what we mean by them. I started with you can sing Amazing Grace and not feel amazed by grace. You can also say who saved a wretch like me and you really don't believe it. It reminds me of that Christian periodical in England it was published there were a half a million copies of this that

were already on the newsstands. And the publisher was a Christian publisher had to go back and retract all of those half a million copies because one of their Christian writers had referenced a member of the royal family as a miserable sinner and the royal family got in a little tiff over that, they were upset about it. And the pressure was recall all that, you can't say that about the royal family. Well, the irony of that is of course the royal family is supposed to be, you know, part of the Anglican Church, the Church of England, the common prayer, the book of common prayer I think it's page 23 has the prayer of confessions to be said every day. The evening prayer of confession and certainly you say it in the church and you're supposed to respond and everyone together, here I'll just quote it. Oh Lord have mercy upon us miserable sinners. Well, that's what you say every day if you're a good Anglican. That's what you're saying in church every week at least if you attend church. Surely the royal family has all sat there and said and admitted we're miserable sinners, miserable offenders are we all. I just don't want anybody calling me that because why? I don't really believe it. We have to believe that. And if we do then I've got a passage for you. Please turn there really quick, Psalm 103. (18:06)

If you've been around Compass, I know it's one of my favorite Psalms, I quote it all the time. But let's look at it afresh. Psalm 103 verse 8, let's start in the middle of this Psalm. The Lord, Psalm 103:8, is merciful and gracious. The Lord is merciful and gracious. You understand the distinction without getting too divisive and too you know technical here in terms of the distinctions. I understand they overlap in terms of the grace of God and the mercy of God but the concept of mercy primarily at least at the core of it lexically talking about mercy, you picture that guy who's being whipped by some, you know, some guy who's an executioner or some kind of guy giving the penal response to some kind of crime and they're whipping this guy and he's earned 39 lashes and at lash 15 he's crying out for mercy. Have mercy on me and that means I know I've earned these stripes but please don't give them all to me. Mercy, the withholding of the due penalty. You should pay me back, mercy would be you don't have to pay me back all of it. Or mercy, incredible mercy, you don't have to pay me back any of it. Incredible mercy. (19:14)

Grace on the other hand is what we already read when we went through our passage when a son who deserves to be a servant paying back dad and then a dad saying get out of here, get lost, instead he's getting robes and rings and sandals on his feet. That's grace. The Lord is merciful he doesn't give you what you do deserve and he's gracious, he gives you things you don't deserve. Why? Because the anger that you did earn, that you should have and he's slow to express that. He's abounding in a thing that really restrains it, it's called love. Steadfast love, hesed, faithful love. And even as a parent in a covenant relationship with God he's not always going to chide us, not going to keep his anger forever even in his discipline. He doesn't deal with us according to our sins, that's for sure because he's merciful and gracious. And put it in monetary terms, nor repay us according to our inequities. He must be very loving, verse 11, for as high as the heavens are above the earth so great is his steadfast love toward those who – this is all conditional by the way, if you're with me so far in this sermon and you're thinking this is for everyone, it is only for the people in the room who fear him. See that's a descriptive of the penitent person. The penitent person recognizes I'm sinful, I deserve God's punishment but instead God, I'm begging for his mercy and his grace, it's recognizing the problem I have before a holy God. And those that do, man, his love is expressed as such massive quantity that it could be described as that vacuum between heaven and earth. (20:54)

And talk about the sins that should make his angry toward me, well the compassionate God, verse 12, has removed them from us. As far as the east is from the west. So far does he remove our transgressions from us. I just want you to think about your transgressions for a minute. You'll never be amazed at grace unless you realize your transgressions should cause God anger. If I said think of the worst transgressions you've ever committed. Think about those. For some of you it doesn't take too long because you're looking at your resume and you're going back into your past, you've got these high points of really egregious things. You think this is the worst, this is bad, and I said great, now I'm going to put it all up on the big screen up here, I want you to all look, let's start with Bob. Bob let's put your sins up on the screen and let's replay the video. You didn't know God was taking video of it all, but here it is. Show it all for us. You'd be embarrassed, here it comes. And I think what should God do in response to that, the God who loved you the God who instructed you, the God that gave you a conscience, the God who revealed himself in creation, the God who gave you the word, the God who gave you all the things that should lead you to take the investment of his good and serve him and instead here you are violating his law, transgressing his rules and serving yourself and indulging in your own pleasure to the expense of God's holiness and I think what should God do? He should pay you back. That should anger a holy God. And yet he takes those things, all those big things you just thought of and he taken them how far? As far as the east is from the west. Why? Because here's our word, at least in English, new Testament word, splagchnon, compassion. He feels for you as a father shows - here's the Hebrew equivalent – compassion to his children. So, the Lord shows compassion again it is contingent on this, the



work of God in your heart to fear him. To be penitent over your sins. He shows compassion to those that fear him. He knows our frame he remembers that we are dust. (22:46)

I hope that amazes you that a God that should respond to you by saying, “pay me back” you’ve sinned, you’ve violated my standard there’s got to be judgement for you. He’s willing to say I will be compassionate because my nature is to love the penitent. Be amazed that God feels compassion not anger. And again, this is all qualified by whether or not we’ve experienced what we’ve talked about last week, the repentance that comes from the work of the Spirit of God in our lives. (23:20)

Be amazed that God feels that way toward you. While he was still a long way off his father saw him, and felt compassion. How enthusiastic was he? He ran and embraced him and kissed him. His compassion is overwhelming, it’s aggressive, it’s enthusiastic, it’s whole hearted, it’s sincere. And the son starts in, now that I’ve got dad’s attention here. Father I’ve sinned against heaven and before you, verse 21 printed there on your worksheet, bottom of verse 21. I’m no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as, we didn’t even get to that phrase. And the father breaks in verse 22. But the father said to his servants. Now wait a minute, that’s exactly what you’re going to say. Dad let me be a servant, let me be a slave, I’ll be here, I’ll work, I just want to be back in your favor, I made a mistake, I’m sorry, I’ve sinned. God’s mad, you’re mad. I’m sorry. Please forgive me, I’m not even worthy to be your son but make me your slave. And here’s the father who ran to meet the son and here’s all these servants that ran alongside which is by the way for an oriental culture, ancient near eastern culture, to have a father running in his robes that’s an undignified thing, you don’t do. He’s willing to be undignified to show his express his compassion for his son, the servants scurry behind the father and he turns to those servants and says this, “Bring quickly the best robe, put it on him. Put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet.” (24:47)

If I squandered your property, if I wanted you dead, if I said I don’t want to be around you and I came back after my egregious appalling sin against you, you’d say, “Pay me back.” And then I guarantee what you’d want me to do is to get lost. I don’t deserve it. I don’t deserve to be back in your home. Matters of fact you reject me, I reject you, that’s only fair. If I want to be accepted by you there’s some things that ought to be in place. Go back to high school if you would, as painful as that might be for some of you. Except for those of you who were on the football team. You know who you were, the rock stars of high school. You wore your jerseys on Friday. Pep rallies, girls dancing in short skirts cheering you on. Oh, you were that, you were all that in high school. Of course, when it got cool there, you put your Letterman jacket on. Walk around campus. Then there’s guys like me, the band geek, right? Played trombone of all things, I mean come on. Your all hanging out with your guys, all your Letterman jackets on, just had the pep rally, cheerleaders coming up to you. I’m walking up, trombone case in hand. Hey, I want to join your group. Give me one of those Letterman jackets. How’s that going to go? I wouldn’t have dared, right? I know how that’s going to go. Get lost, get lost loser. No wait a minute, I want one of your, I think it’s really cool that you have those jackets, it’s really cool that everyone’s paying attention, it’s really cool that you are the focus of our Fridays, right? In the fall I want to be on your team. Nope. We get the jacket, we get the adulation, we get the glory because we went through hell week before school started, we do our practices, we get out on the field, we get beat up every week. Listen you take your little trombone and get out of here. That’s what would happen, right, football players from high school, right? That’s what would happen. Oh, you’re not speaking up now, huh? (26:55)

Let’s even say it’s a categorical distinction. You’re one of those gals in the Olympics this summer. The women’s gymnasts. Right, your bodies are like [boom – sound effect]. And you can just go [pzzzt - sound effect] all over the place. And I go wow that’s really cool, you’re getting endorsement deals, you’re on the boxes of cereal, that’s awesome I want that honor. So, I go down there I say I want to be part of the team man. I say, watch I’ll try to do a cartwheel for you, man. They’d say, “Dude, you’re not a woman, you can’t do a cartwheel, you’re no good, you didn’t, I mean we gave up our childhood, no you can’t be a part of our club. You can’t have the honor, adulation and the glory, we’ve earned this you haven’t.” They would reject me. It’s worse than that, it’s worse than not putting in the time, it’s worse than having a categorical distinction between who they are and who I am. Think about this, there’s a moral issue to this. It’s like I guess the grown-up version to the football team is the Firemen, right? You cool guys, you firemen, okay. So, you’re sitting there, your trucks have been waxed, right, your cars look great, the firehouse and your cool uniforms. Gal shows up to take her picture of the fireman’s calendar, you’re petting the Dalmation. Right? You’re so cool, seminary grad walks up, I want to be part of your team. I want to be, give me one of those, I want a badge like that, I want to be in your calendar man. Let me pet the dog. Okay? And then I reveal a little fact, or you find that little fact about me, not only am I a geeky pastor, I’m a part-time arsonist, I go around lighting fires, the fires that you put out, and the thing that you stand against, I’m for it, I’m involved in that. I’ve



been doing that all my life, burning things up. Just set a couple fires last week here in Orange County. But I want to be on your team, it's really cool, I want to be in your calendar. Let me have some of that glory that adulation that honor. Ahh, it'll be like my high school days I suppose, I mean I don't think I'd be, I think I'd be rejected. (29:26)

Can you imagine what the servants thought who had been faithful, obedient, we had not betrayed their master and the son here is coming back after doing everything that's completely antithetical to all that the servants have done? And that son walks up and the master turns to the servants says, "Get him the best robe, get him a ring, put shoes on his feet." Do you know that there are angels that surround the throne of heaven right now who never had an aberrant thought, they've never coveted, they've never been greedy, they've never gossiped, they've never lusted, they've never lied, they've never cheated, they have never stolen anything? And according to Hebrews chapter 1 those ministering spirits are being commanded by the one at the throne to whom they shield their face and you sing songs half the time don't even think about what you're saying and he's dispatching them to serve you. You deserve to be rejected by God and instead you'll be honored. Number 2, you should be amazed at that. Be amazed that God will honor and not reject you. (30:44)

2. Be Amazed God Will Honor and Not Reject You

That astounding, that is not expected and if you expect it, if you expect God to honor you, you don't understand the gospel. You do not understand grace. Grace is amazing because you should be off the team, you did not earn it, you don't get a Letterman jacket, you should not be on the Women's Gymnastics Team in the Olympics. You are not even categorically qualified for it and not only that you can't be a fireman because you're the one lighting fires. The holy ones of heaven look at you as a sinner. And yet the father is commanding holy angels to go serve you. I put this in the future tense because the ultimate service is coming in the future, and Jesus told those parables in Luke, we've already looked at them, one day you're going to walk into a kingdom and he's going to say, "It's been prepared for you from the foundation of the world." He himself is going to gird himself with an apron to serve you. That is unthinkable, astounding, amazing, astonishing. If you're not amazed at that, you don't understand the equation. How amazing that God would not be angry at you, instead he would have compassion for you? How amazing that God would not reject you but he would honor you? (31:51)

And how does he do it? I don't want to over interpret the parable here but I cannot think that those people that were listening, that were this parable was directed to the Pharisees and the scribes wouldn't have a good working knowledge, of course they did in the first century there was no TV or internet to get distracted, they knew their Bibles, right? And I don't think they could hear about a robe being put on one who is guilty, one who egregiously sinned and not think about Isaiah 61. In Isaiah 61 we read not too long ago in our Daily Bible Reading, of the people of Israel who had sinned in their idolatry, they deserve God's punishment and sure enough he was going to discipline them in Babylon but as a nation he was going to bring them back. And then he starts making promises near the end of Isaiah if you've studied it, you've been a part of CLASS, you've listened to the breakdown of how Isaiah works, you know he's looking now to the restoration in the post-exilic period but beyond that telescopically he's looking to the fulfillment ultimately how he's going to bless his people and he starts speaking in these terms in Isaiah 61:6. You're going to be called priests to the Lord, now that's a special group, that's the Letterman jacket group, and you're all going to be called priest to the Lord. You're all going to be spoken of as ministers to God. You're going to eat the wealth of the nations. You're going to have the glory, it's going to be your boast instead of shame that you deserve. You're going to have a double portion. Instead of dishonor, you're going to rejoice in your lot. Therefore, in the land you will possess a double portion and you'll have everlasting joy. But they've been just pounded by the problem of their sin, they saw how wretched they were and now they're having a statement out that. Well here's the response a few verses later, verse 10, Isaiah 61:10, I will greatly rejoice in the Lord. My soul will exalt in God, he has clothed me in the garments of salvation. How do unworthy people, wretched people, become people that are now honored? The picture is you've been robed in garments of salvation. You've covered me with a robe of righteousness, like a bridegroom decks himself out like a priest. No one better dressed than the priest, with all the jewels, like a priest. And like the bride adorned herself with jewels. That's how you're going to be clothed by God. (33:56)

He honors you. It says there in the passage, verse 22, bring the best robe. Who in the world, in that household, right? Who in that household is going to have the best robe? Dad, right? Like I hope in your house, who has the best car, I hope it's not your teenaged son, right? You do. Who's got the best robe, very important in an honor based society, dad has got the best robe, he's telling his servants, "Go, get the best robe in the house." Which of course is his. Wrap

it around my son. And then a ring, and I'm thinking a ring, you want to talk about jewelry all of a sudden, this guy coming back from a famine, he's emaciated, he's dirty, he stinks, you're worried about jewelry? What's that about? Gals were you at the Women's Retreat, smile at me if you were at the women's retreat. You remember they talked about Mordecai, at the end, who gets exalted? He takes the leadership responsibility that Haman had and Esther there of course is instrumental providential heroine of the story. And in that passage in chapter 8 when it says that Mordecai is now going to be exalted, guess what they start talking about? One sentence in the middle of all that, he was given a ring. What's that all about? A signet ring and then it says he was put over all of Haman's property. See the ring was not just, oh it's just a ring, it's not even like our ring, the only jewelry I'm wearing is a wedding band. This is a household signet, it's like, I don't know if this is a good analogy but, it's like when the notary comes in with their little crimped thing and it's a seal. It does something important. You took that signet ring and you use it with wax and you would validate contracts on behalf of the family. You would seal up communications that were important or legal. The signet ring, you want to talk about not being accepted as a servant in the house, now you're a son, it's not that you're back, here you have the authority of the family. You not only bear the name, you bear the signet ring. I mean this is not just thrown in there, like oh give him a necklace, why don't you get him a bracelet, No, the ring was the critical element that showed his authority in that family. Whoa, talk about humbling, he should be rejected and now he's got the signet ring. And shoes on his feet. No one wore shoes in the ancient world in a home if they were servants. Servants always went barefoot. I mean look it up, in all the historical records I mean you've got household owners and their families, the princes and the princesses and anybody of wealth they wore sandals and shoes, the servant didn't. They walked around barefoot. Talk about again another sign that you are not a servant here. In a sense as Christians we are servants of God but you have the regal authority with a signet ring and you now become my child. You are my child. (36:52)

Quickly get the best robe, put it on him, put a ring on his hand, shoes on his feet. Thirdly, I guess I should say this, before I leave that point. You do understand and I said this quickly, but if I wronged you in an egregious and appalling way this boy did to his father, you should say pay me back and then you should say get lost. That is an active response of you wanting retribution for what I've done. There's restitution and then there's the passive sense get lost, you've rejected me, I'm rejecting you, get out. None of my good stuff goes your direction. I just want you to think through those concepts and instead you get honor, you get no need to pay back there no condemnation, no retribution that you receive for your sins and then you get accepted you get the honor, you get relationship established. Pay me back, get lost. The active punishment, don't have to incur it. The passive punishment of outer darkness, don't have it. You get accepted, you get embraced, you get a God who says you're my child, I'll never leave you or forsake you. I know it's long distance now in many senses and many respects but one day, face to face, the dwelling place of God will be among man, you will be in the New Jerusalem. You will not be cast into outer darkness. That kind of acceptance, that kind of honor should really make you think grace is amazing. (38:20)

Verse 23 and 24, now we start the celebration, bring the fatten calf and kill it. Which by the way remember this is a context of famine, this reminds us of how rich the father was that they have a fatten calf in the middle of a famine in the land. So, he's got enough money in this theoretical story to fatten up a calf which you would do for special occasions like a wedding or some kind of family celebration, some kind of maybe a feast day that you were having. The fatten calf he's ready to go, and he's already there, he's a fatten calf, kill it, let us eat, let us celebrate. So, you've got this emaciated, malnourished kid who wants to eat pig slop who is now walking home. Dad runs out, embraces him, give him gifts, mercy yes, not going to have you pay me back, grace I'm going to accept you and shower gifts on you. Now let's celebrate. Kill the fatten calf, let's eat, let's celebrate. And then he has to announce to everyone, this my son was dead and now he's alive again, and he was lost and he's found. And they began to celebrate. (39:24)

You read commentaries on this passage, they will make it clear that the analogies of the shepherd, the woman and the father are all analogies that apply to Christ who is being chided for reaching out to or seeking and saving the tax collectors and sinners. And he said we ought to celebrate because of course I'm like the Shepherd finding the sheep, I'm like the woman finding the coin, I'm like the father finding the son. So, everyone needs to understand I guess in a fair reading of the text that the figure of the father here is Jesus. Understand that. And a lot of commentators will go out of their way to say, listen, there's no reference in this passage at all to the mechanism of our salvation but only the fact that God is a compassionate God, or Christ in this case is a compassionate Christ seeking and saving the lost. Well that's true, understand that. But I can't imagine Jesus talking about the celebration of finding sheep, finding a coin and finding a son which really in this last parable that's the most expansive and extensive parable of Christ telling us about the joy we should have in celebrating reconciliation between the alienated sinner and the

righteous father. I don't think there's any way he can tell that story without that overarching sense that there's a price involved in this, that there's a cost that we see even from the cradle in Bethlehem there's the shadow of the cross hanging over that cradle. (40:59)

That even in the midst of his teaching he has to remind his disciples I'm going to be betrayed by the chief priests and scribes. I'm going to be delivered over to them to be killed. It's going to end in a very dramatic scene of him in the Garden of Gethsemane, sweating so profusely it's like there's blood coming out of his head because he's dripping so much, he's just stressed and his soul is troubled. That celebration is marked with a sobriety because you just don't have reconciliation because God wants to forgive, he has to have a mechanism to satisfy that justice we talked about. I don't think Christ can tell a story about reconciliation without at least at some point thinking of the fact that his life is going to have to be spent to achieve it. Which in a small microcosm I guess is like that fattened calf that has to die so that kid can eat because he's about to die of malnutrition. And in that sense in a microcosm every day you eat you prove the principal that something dies so you can eat, right? You're going to eat lunch today it's going to keep your body fueled and nourish you, why? Because something dies and even you tree hugging, you know, vegetarians, that poor plant had to die, right? This piece of salad is not having a good time going down your esophagus, let me just tell you. It's over, it's a bad day. Much like in this text everyone's happy except the calf, am I right? He dies that day. The calf dies, he gets his throat slit and thrown on the Hibachi. That's pretty rough for him. He doesn't get to celebrate, he's thinking he's got time here, he going to get fatter this week. Nope, you're going to get killed today. So, in that sense, theologically, let's get out of the text for a minute and think about the reality that grace is most amazing from the Christian perspective in all of scripture because Christ is willing to die so that you can live. Number 3 you should be amazed by that. Be amazed that Christ would die so that you could live. (42:54)

3. Be Amazed Christ Would Die so You Could Live

You want the heart of the gospel? That's it. How can God really love us so much when we have earned his anger and his rejection, that he would take his own Son and allow his Son to die so that you and I could live? That is amazing. Aww, I think you're stretching the text. Listen I'm not trying to interpret the text in terms of this is what he has in view, but I do think it has to be somewhere in his mind. And I got to tell you at least if you want to throw one little piece of evidence out there let's just look at this word here used in verse 23. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. We read it K-I-L-L, kill there are six different Greek words that are used in the Greek New Testament to translate the word kill. So, in one sense you can look at it backwards and say you have a choice of any of six words to translate this word kill. The word "kill", the concept that comes to us in our English text about 100 times in the Greek New Testament you have one of these six words employed to bring across the concept of something being killed, someone, something, some animal being killed. Christ could have picked any number of words, six of them at least that he did use elsewhere to get that point across. He uses a word that outside of this context is only used 3% of the time, literally 3 times outside of this particular passage, to describe something being killed. Let me read you a couple of them. (44:22)

One is in chapter 22, Luke chapter 22 verse 7, then came the day of unleavened bread on which the Passover lamb was to be – here's the word – killed, only it's not translated kill there it's the same Greek word *thuo* it's translated here sacrificed. How about this one, Paul employs the word *thuo* in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 7. For Christ our Passover lamb has been "thuo"ed. And then in this passage he uses it three times. Bring the fattened calf and *thuo* it. That's verse 23, bring the fattened calf, right? And *thuo* it. Verse 27, as the servants reported, as the brother complains in verse 30, you have the word *thuo* used three times in this passage the minority word. The most rare word for describing the death of someone but usually describing the sacrifice. And you know what? That's how he's presented in the Bible, isn't it? Go back to Isaiah 53 in your mind. There's going to be a sacrifice that is going to pay for our sin, just like a burnt offering, a sacrifice. Go back to the concept of paying God back and being rejected, in the concept of sacrifice there is that sense of active punishment of God that when the person of Messiah was to be sacrificed like a burnt offering, all the things that are described to pay God back in the justice of God for sinful violation are words like this, Isaiah 53, to be pierced, to be crushed, to be chastised, to be wounded. That's why in your mind if you think it's the death of Christ that saved you, and you're right, it is, then why didn't he get his head chopped off in a guillotine? Well, they hadn't invented that yet, yeah but they could have swiped his head off with a sword. Why didn't they hang him from a rope like Judas then just [crack – sound effect] and he's dead. Why not? Because it wasn't just about him dying, it was about being crushed, it was about being having my life chastised. (46:25)



The concept of the punishment of Christ, the wounds, the piercing is as much of our salvation as him breathing his last, as a matter of fact that is the focus of it in so many of the passages that we have in the New Testament, not only prophetic statements in the past. When you picture him tied with leather straps to a post as the strong Roman soldiers took that Cat-of-Nine tails, that whip with nine ends on it with all those pieces of shards on the ends and plowed his back as he bled, or the blood came off his forehead because they pressed that crown of thorns like nails into his head and he is suffering and not dying. Those were the active wounds being inflicted on him for the payment that you should pay for but Christ was paying back what you owed. (47:12)

We talked about the reality of if I spent all your stuff you'd say pay me back and get lost. Well, how did that work? Let me quote for you Matthew 27. It says around the sixth hour darkness fell over the land. Now think about that. If you were here a couple Good Friday back we did a sermon about the darkness that fell over the land at the crucifixion. We referred back to the darkness that could be felt, it was a way to put it, the idiom of being felt, it was a thick black, dark, dark, darkness in the Exodus plagues. We talked about even that, this kind of retreat of God on this scene. And in that context in Matthew chapter 27 that's where we have in the darkness, it's says he cried out, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" in Aramaic. You know what that is, right? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Which I hope you know is a quote of Psalm 22. It was to bring to mind of all those looking on of the pain of Christ, not in the act of punishment which he's been receiving all afternoon and all morning and all through the night before. But now it was that passive punishment, get lost. Let me read the rest of it for you. (48:22)

Psalm 22, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me? Why are you so far from my words of groaning? God, I cry out day and night but you do not answer. Night by night and I find no rest. And it goes on. The passivity. God should look at you and be angry enough to pay you back. He should look at your sin and say you don't belong here, you're rejected, get away from me into outer darkness where there's weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth. As it's put in 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, he should say, away from me, away from the Lord and the glory of his power. Pay back and get lost. Christ went to the cross to have all your sins paid back and then he suffered and absorbed the rejection of God the Father, as the father said on an afternoon, get lost. And because of the deity of Christ that was the most infinitely painful reality that anything could ever comprehend or imagine and it paid for my sin and yours. As you sit here as a penitent sinner it's amazing that God would kill Jesus Christ so that you and I could be forgiven. So that we could be said, well no longer lost, let's make it real clear though, no longer dead but alive. (49:37)

There's no condemnation for those in Christ. I quoted Romans 1 because that law of sin and death, you sin you should die has been reversed. Set free in Christ Jesus, he did that by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and condemning sin in the flesh. You should be amazed at that. A lot of hymns have been written about that concept of being amazed. We read that, we should be amazed. We don't get anger, we get compassion, we don't get rejection, we get honor, and to accomplish it all, Christ willingly goes and demonstrates his love by dying in your place. John Newton put it well, amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, now I'm found, was blind but now I see. Amazing. (50:33)

Isaac Watts wrote the same thing about the love of God. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all. Charles Wesley, amazing love, unthinkable, it's not expected, how can it be, that thou my God shouldst die for me. Another one that we sing around here, written a hundred years ago, Charles Gabriel, I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene. And wonder how he could love me, a sinner, condemned unclean. You've heard those hymns, you know those hymns, right? Maybe you don't know this one. Written less than one hundred years ago, published in 1946 by an African pastor. Pastor Sibomana, who on another continent a world away in our culture wrote of the same things because in his penitent experience he knew what it was to experience the grace of God. And he wrote a hymn called "Oh How the Grace of God Amazes Me". Oh how the grace of God amazes me! It loosed me from my bonds, and set me free! What made it happen so? His own will, this much I know, Set me free as now I show, At liberty. My God has chosen me, Though one of nought, To sit beside my king in heavens court. Hear what my Lord has done. O, the love that made him run to meet an erring son! This has God wrought. Not for my righteousness, for I have none, but for his mercy's sake, Jesus, God's son, suffered on Calvary's tree; crucified with thieves was he; Great was his grace to me, his wayward one. And when I think of how, at Calvary, he bore sin's penalty instead of me. Amazed, I wonder why he, the sinless one, should die for one so vile as I; My savior he. Come now the whole of me, eyes, ears and voice. Join me, creation all, with joyful noise: Praise him who broke the chain holding me in sin's domain and set me free again! Sing and rejoice. (52:54)

Oh how the grace of God amazes me. I hope that a study of the father's response should be a surprise to you. Makes



grace a little more amazing for you this morning. And I hope you never forget the high cost that it took to demonstrate that grace and that was the death of Jesus Christ. So, on a week when we need to be profoundly thankful for the most profound things and I'm going to ask the ushers to come forward for us to celebrate the Lord's Supper this morning. If you are not a Christian do not participate in this, you can just sit silently or better yet you need to see your need and repent of your sins right now and put your trust in Christ. For those of us that have it's time for us to think about the amazing grace of God. It's a sober celebration when we think about the cost but it's one that has to be profound and sincere. So, you take these elements, they'll be passed to you, take that bread, take that cup, you spend time silently speaking to God about the amazing grace. Start with your own confession of anything that may be there that you have not addressed before God. Do the best you can with that so that you can take these elements with a penitent heart. I'll come back up in a few minutes when you've had time to talk to God silently and we'll take these elements together. (54:15)

May your non-Christian counterpart this week will likely throw up a few words and phrases, sentences maybe in paragraphs about being thankful, usually to some undefinable thing. Other people will be thankful to God whoever they define him to be for a lot of temporal things that really won't really matter in one hundred years from now. I felt that it was providential that we reached this particular place in our study of Luke to setup our week of cultural thanksgiving so that we might really see how distinct we are in terms of having something so profound to be thankful for. A kind of profundity in terms of my life because I deserve God's punishment which my non-Christian counterpart doesn't even comprehend, they don't think they do. Knowing that I should be rejected by God but instead because of the amazingly high price of Christ dying on a cross and absorbing all of the punishment that I deserve. It's been removed from me as far as the East is from the West. I will never be told to pay back for my sin, I will never be told to get lost by God. I am his child and while what I will be is not yet know I have confidence because of the finished work of Christ. I will receive this inheritance. Yes, we've been clothed forensically, legally, theologically in the righteousness of Christ but one day we're going to be clothed not only with resurrection bodies but in a place where God and all of his glory in an unmitigated fashion is expressed to us and every desire will be met, every passion, every righteous thirst will be satisfied. Paul prayed in Ephesians chapter 1 that the churches would have the eyes of their hearts enlightened so that they might be able to comprehend with all the saints the kind of inheritance that we have stored up for us. I hope this morning our time in the word has been a fuel, a catalyst for your heart. To be able to be profoundly thankful whether you're dealing with a life-threatening illness or whether you're financially in straits, whether your family is torn to pieces, whether you're eating a hot dog for Thanksgiving on Thursday by yourself in your car, I hope you can sit back as a child of God, like Paul had to and Silas did and a lot of the martyrs of church history with nothing on the outside looking like it's going for them but so profoundly thankful. Paul, picture him, strapped to the stocks in Philippi singing worship songs at midnight to God, in too much pain to sleep I'm sure, but thanking God for what had been given to him in Christ. All these elements are there for us so that we might remember, I hope we not only remember the price but the great privilege that comes with that price in terms of being forgiven children of God. So, with great thanksgiving I hope you can join with me in eating this bread and drinking this cup. (57:33)

Father we are grateful and we should be more grateful than we are. We want to seek right now and resolve to be profoundly thankful for the fact that we deserve to be excluded to be assigned a place of paying you back for every violation, every wrong thought, every wrong action, every wrong word that we've ever spoken. But instead you treated your son so though he were the one who committed all those sins, rejected your son in a very real sense that afternoon on a cross that had eternal implications because of his deity and we sit here today in the 21st century completely forgiven of our sins, those of us that have repented and trusted in your son. So, God we're thankful for that if nothing else was going right in this world that would be fuel for an eternity of thanksgiving and yet God for most of us we are so blessed beyond that, far beyond that. So, God I pray that we would have such a different perspective, not just on thanksgiving as the culture talks about it but just in our worship everyday as we come to you with a real profound humble kind of gratitude that we would rejoice, that all of our body, all of our faculty would be involved in being profoundly thankful for what you've done for us in Jesus Christ in who's name we pray. Amen (59:04)