

Confronted by Grace

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Date: 03 May 2026

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[0 : 00] All right, good morning, church. Today we'll be reading from Numbers chapter 15, and if you're reading with us with the church Bible, it'll be on page 115. Here then, God's word to us today. Numbers chapter 15, verse 1.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving you. And you offer to the Lord from the herd or from the flock a food offering or a burnt offering or a sacrifice to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering or at your appointed feast to make a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

Then he who brings his offering shall offer to the Lord a grain offering of a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a quarter of heen of oil.

And you shall offer with a burnt offering or for the sacrifice a quarter of a heen of wine for the drink offering for each lamb. Or for a ram you shall offer for a grain offering two tenths of an ephah of a fine flour mixed with a third of a heen of oil.

And for the drink offering you shall offer a third of a heen of wine, a pleasing aroma to the Lord. And when you offer a bowl as a burnt offering or sacrifice to fulfill a vow or for peace offerings to the Lord, then one shall offer with the bowl a grain offering of three tenths of an ephah of a fine flour mixed with half a heen of oil.

[1 : 34] And you shall offer for the drink offering half a heen of wine as a food offering, a pleasing aroma to the Lord. Thus it shall be done for each bowl or ram or for each lamb or young goat as many as you offer.

So you shall do one do with each one as many as there are. Every native Israelite shall do these things in this way in offering a food, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

And if a stranger is sojourning with you or anyone is living permanently among you and he wishes to offer a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the Lord, he shall do as you do.

For the assembly there shall be one statue for you and one for the stranger who sojourns with you, a statue forever throughout your generations. You and the sojourner shall be a light before the Lord. One law and one rule shall be for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you. The Lord spoke to Moses saying, speak to the people of Israel and say to them, when you come into the land to which I bring you and when you eat of the bread of the land, you shall present a contribution to the Lord.

[2 : 46] Of the first of your dough, you shall present a loaf as a contribution, like a contribution from the threshing floor. So shall you present it? So of the first of your dough, you shall give to the Lord as a contribution throughout your generations.

But if you sin unintentionally and do not observe all these commandments that the Lord has spoken to Moses, all that the Lord has commanded you by Moses from the day that the Lord gave commandment and onward throughout your generations, then if it was done unintentionally without the knowledge of the congregation, all the congregation shall offer one bowl from the herd for a burnt offering, a pleasing aroma to the Lord with its grain offering and its drink offering according to the rule, and one male goat for a sin offering.

And the priest shall make atonement for all the congregation of the people of Israel, and they shall be forgiven because it was a mistake. And they have brought their offering, a food offering to the Lord, and their sin offering before the Lord for their mistake.

And all the congregation of the people of Israel shall be forgiven, and the stranger who sojourns among them because the whole population was involved in the mistake.

If one person sins unintentionally, he shall offer a female goat, a year old for a sin offering, and the priest shall make atonement before the Lord for the person who makes a mistake, when he sins

unintentionally to make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven.

[4 : 23] You shall have one law for him who does anything unintentionally, for him who is native among the people of Israel, and for the stranger who sojourns among them. But the person who does anything with a high lamb, whether he is a native or a sojourner, reviles the Lord, and that person shall be cut off from among his people, because he has despised the word of the Lord, and he has broken his commandment.

That person shall be utterly cut off, his iniquity shall be on him. While the people of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day.

And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation. They put him in custody, because it had not been made clear what should be done to him.

And the Lord said to Moses, The man shall be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp. And all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, as the Lord commanded Moses.

The Lord said to Moses, Speak to the people of Israel, and tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a cord of blue on the tassel of each corner.

[5 : 41] And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the Lord, to do them not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore over.

So you shall remember and do all my commandments and be holy to your God. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God.

I am the Lord your God. Let us believe and respond to God's true and living word. Thanks. Great. Thank you, Lydia.

Let me pray for us. Difficult reading, but thank you, Lydia, for reading that for us. Lord Jesus, we come to your word. We want to not just know or analyze the words and phrases and sentences, the details.

We want to see the big picture. We want to see what you have to say to us. And so speak to us, God, from this challenging passage. Come and draw us to yourself. In your great name, I pray. Amen.

[6 : 38] Let's see if you know these words. Grace. She takes the blame. She covers the shame. Removes the stain. It could be her name.

Grace. It's the name for a girl. It's also a thought that changed the world. And when she walks on the streets, you can hear the strings.

Grace finds goodness in everything. Grace. She's got the walk, not on a ramp or on chalk. She's got the time to talk. She travels outside of karma.

She travels outside of karma. Grace. She carries the world on her hips. No champagne flute for her lips. No twirls or skips between her fingertips.

What once was hurt. What once was friction. What left a mark no longer stings. Because grace makes beauty out of ugly things. Grace finds beauty in everything.

[7 : 38] Grace finds goodness in everything. So sang the Irish rock band U2 once upon a time. Friends, ours is a world which is starved of grace, and we are poorer for it.

In a world which has increasingly become digital and moved online, social scientists have warned us that one of the consequences of social isolation is that not only this increased polarization and political polarization and division within families, but within society, we have much less empathy than any generation before us.

We are far less trusting. We know how to handle differences less graciously than any other generation before us. Friends, how many of us have grown up at homes where sharp comments, cutting remarks, always being put down or made to feel small was the norm?

How many of us saw our fathers ridiculing our mothers, siblings getting preferential treatment, or parents' love and affection being earned through good grades and filial piety? Friends, how many of us walk into the office each day feeling that we're walking into a gladiator ring of office politics, where every mistake is turned into a weapon against you, where any error is made, you made to feel, I was publicly exposed and you made to feel silly?

And what about the lack of grace towards ourselves? How many of us are our own worst enemies, always accusing ourselves, the negative self-talk in our own voice, telling ourselves that we're stupid?

[9 : 36] In a world in which everyone keeps the score, where mistakes are seldom forgotten, where any prospect of future depends on current success, success, we live in a world in which relationships are transactional, calculated, cultivated for what they can give us, rather than how they can serve us, we live in a world that is starved of grace.

Paul Hewson writes this, It's clear to me that karma is at the very heart of the universe. And yet, along comes this idea of grace to upend all of that. Grace defies reason, it defies logic. Love interrupts, if you like, the natural consequences of our actions. Grace makes beauty out of ugly things. The passage of scripture we're looking at today, Numbers 15, is not an easy passage, but it's a passage that is all about grace.

It is all about grace. It's about the unfathomable grace of God towards undeserving sinners. It's about the way that God does not give us what we deserve. If you're new to Watermark, we're working through the book of Numbers, the fourth book of the Old Testament.

[11 : 01] And it's the story of how God's people leave Egypt, and He takes them through the wilderness towards the promised land. The promised land is a land of flourishing and thriving life.

But as they go from Egypt to the promised land, they've got to go through the wilderness, and they've got to live by faith. They've got to trust God in the wilderness. And we've been saying this is an apt analogy for the Christian life.

Those of us that are Christians know that we too have been saved from a terrible, terrible past, a slavery from which we could not save ourselves. We were under God's wrath and judgment in hell. And God has saved us, and He's bringing us through to the new creation, the new heavens and earth. Heaven, you could say. But on the journey between our salvation and heaven, we've got to travel through this wilderness, this life, this wilderness of faith.

And on this journey of faith, we must trust Him. And so the book of Numbers is about how God's people are called to trust Him and hold on to Him and live by faith on the journey through the wilderness.

[11 : 59] But if living by faith and trusting the sovereign God is the one thing they call to do, it's the one thing that they do not do. And so remember how chapter 14 ends.

Neil spoke to us last week. In chapter 13 and 14, God sends our 12 spies to go into the promised land and to check it out and to say, tell us which way we should go. What is the land like? Should we go this way or that way? How should we enter the promised land? And the spies come back and they say, it's a good land, but we should not go. It's dangerous. God will not be with us. The people are unkind. We should not go. Let's not listen to God. Let's rather go back to Egypt. And they treat God's promises and His presence with doubt, disdain, and disobedience.

And so how does the chapter end? Well, chapter 14, verse 22. God says, None of the men that have seen my glory, what I did in Egypt, and have put me to the test these ten times, none of them shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers.

[12 : 56] Verse 28. As I live, declares the Lord, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you. Your dead bodies will fall in the wilderness, and all of your number listed in the census from 20 years old and upward, who have grumbled against me, not one shall come into the land that I swore to make you dwell in, except Caleb and Joshua.

And so the book of Numbers starts so hopeful. God is with these people. He's bringing them through. Just hold on to me. Just trust me. I will bring you to glory. And they're full of doubt and disdain and disobedience, and judgment comes upon them.

And the story at this point is a flood of casualties. Friends, in the midst of all the darkness and the doubt of Numbers 11 to 14, and all the mess of Numbers 16 onwards, a rich vein of gold is Numbers 15 that we're going to look at today.

It's like this beautiful rich vein of gold in a dark, dank mine. And we're going to see something of God's grace. So let's dive in and look at it. Firstly, encountering God's grace.

Encountering grace. I don't know if you've ever done anything really stupid in your life. I'm sure you've never done anything like that. I've done that many, many times. And you've done something silly or stupid, and it's going to make you look really bad.

[14:12] And you know the other person knows, but they haven't said anything yet. Could be a couple of seconds where you're waiting, what are they going to say? Or it could be a couple of days. I remember many times like that with my dad, right?

I'd done something dumb, and he knew, or I knew that he knew, and I was just waiting. What is he going to say? What are the first words that are going to come out of his mouth? I could tell you many stories, but we'll move on, right?

How are they going to react? In light of Israel's ongoing unbelief, mistrust, incessant rebellion, look at what comes out of God's mouth here. 15 verse 1.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that you are to inhabit, the land which I am giving you, then this is how you shall worship me.

God does not say, If you guys can get your act together, and if you guys can sort yourselves out, and by some miracle that's unfathomable, you manage to get yourselves into the promised land, well, then we can talk about things.

[15:15] That's not what he says. He says, I, I am going to bring you into the land. I am going to go before you. I'm going to drive out your enemies. I'm going to bring you to the land of milk and honey and favor and goodness, the land which you don't deserve, but I am going to do it for you.

I am still going to bring you through. God is looking at these people now, and he's saying, I am not done with you. I'm not finished with you. You and I still have a future together.

And when you come in, this is how you shall worship. Friends, you see God's amazing grace here? After all their complaining, and their moaning, and their accusing, and their shaking their fists at God, God says, I am not done with you.

I'm still going to bring you in. A couple of years ago, friends of ours in K-Town, a very, very good friend of mine, he was one of the pastors at the church that I served at, one night, they've got, he and his wife have two kids, one years old and four years old.

One night, his wife puts the kids to bed, and comes through and says to him, we need to talk about something. I've got something to tell you. And the room suddenly goes very, very ice cold, and very quiet.

[16:23] And over the next couple of hours, she says to him, honey, I need to tell you something. I've been keeping a secret from you for the last seven or eight years, and I swore that I would never tell you.

I would go to my grave with a secret, but I've been convicted by God, and I need to tell you this. I need to come clean. And so, over the next few hours, through a waterfall of tears, she tells him that seven or eight years ago, she had a two-year affair with someone that she'd met at the sports club. He wasn't a pastor at that stage. He was working and traveling a lot for work, and while he was traveling, she engaged in a two-year affair with this person. And it had ended long ago, but she had sworn she was never going to tell him it was a secret that she was going to take to her grave.

But, over a couple of weeks before, God had been speaking to her, and she felt like she needed to come clean. And so, she tells him, and my friend, her husband, goes into complete state of shock and meltdown as he tries to process what he's just heard.

That not only has his wife betrayed him in the most unbelievable way, but also that the last five or six years of their marriage has not been what he thought it was. He thought they'd had a great marriage, but actually there's this whole dark secret that has been going on.

[17:35] And in some ways, their marriage is not what he thought it was. And so, my friend just collapses, and he breaks down as he's trying to process wave after wave of grief and anger and questions and doubts and all sorts of things.

And then after a couple of hours, he says, listen, I need to go for a walk. And so, he gets up, and he goes to the front door, and as he does that, he turns around, and he looks at her, and he says, Laura, I need to tell you two things.

One, I still love you. Two, we are going to get through this together. And then he goes outside into a long walk into the night. And today, if you ask them, their marriage is better than it's ever been. He says, the trust in their marriage is greater than it's ever been. They're doing really well. He's back in ministry and pastoring again. We will get through this together. We still have a future together.

Friends, that's what God is saying to his people here. Despite their betrayal, and their unfaithfulness, and their rejection of him, God looks them in the eye, and says, we have a future together. I know it looks dark and messy now.

[18 : 38] I know your life is a mess, but as Ray Orton says, you're my mess, and I'm going to deal with it, and I'm not giving up on you. We are going to get through. When I bring you into the land that I am giving you, when I've driven out the enemies before you, when I've gone before you, and parted the Red Sea, and provided food for you, and done everything that you can't do, you will worship me, and we will be one again together.

And so look at what God says here about their worship. Lydia read it, all these details about bulls, and goats, and wine, and olive oil, and all sorts of things. But look at what God is saying here. Two things I want you to notice about their worship.

First, notice the abundance of their possessions. All these animals, and this produce, these are things that belong to a prosperous society. At the moment, these guys are no bandits in the wilderness.

They don't have any food. They don't have any produce. God's got to bring meat to them. God's got to bring manna from heaven. They are as poor as anything. And God says, when you go into the land, you're going to have so many flocks, and goats, and bulls, and so much food, you're not going to know what to do with it.

And come and bring it to me and offer it as an offering. The abundance of their possessions. God is promising that he will give them what they don't deserve. What they deserve is to bear the guilt for their sin.

[19 : 50] But God is going to lavishly bless them. Though their sins, they are many. His mercy is more. But look at what else here. In the Old Testament, look at what kinds of offerings they're going to offer here.

It's a bit hard to see, but in the Old Testament, there's typically three main kinds of offerings. There's more, but three kind of main categories. There's the sin offering, burnt offering, fellowship offering. A sin offering is you bring an offering to God when you've done something tragically wrong. You've sinned, and you need to pay the penalty for your sin. And so you bring an animal, and the animal dies, and it's burnt, and it's offered to God, and it's kind of like saying, my sin is put on the animal, they will bear the sin for me.

I deserve to die, but they will die in my place. But that's not the kind of offering that God is talking about here. There's different procedures for that. The second offering is a burnt offering.

It's when someone brings an animal, and the whole animal is burnt up as an offering to God. And it's a way of saying, God, all that I am, I'm not keeping anything from me, I give my entire life to you. It's the picture of a subject to the overlord.

[20 : 51] There's an overlord, and the subject says, I belong to you, everything that I have is yours. And so you bring a burnt offering as a kind of part of your worship, your devotion. You say, God, everything I have belongs to you.

But that also has other things. That's not what they're talking about here. Here what they're talking about is a fellowship offering. And a fellowship offering is when you bring an animal to the priest, and some of it is burnt and offered to God, some of it is given to the priest to eat, but some of it you eat with the priest and with God.

And the picture here is you are hosting a meal. And there's meat, and there's carbohydrates, and there's oil, and there's wine, and the picture is here is a banquet table, and we are sitting down together.

God and the priest and me, I am hosting a meal, and we're having fellowship together. You know how in the Bible, a meal is always a picture of relationship, right? When you host someone for a meal, you're not just opening your home, you're opening your heart.

You're saying you are welcome here. God says when you go into the promised land, despite all your sin, I am going to sit down and have a meal with you. I'm going to open up my home. I'm not just wiping away your sin.

[21 : 55] I'm giving you a seat at the table. I'm including you. Though, he says, though, all this mess, we will get through this together. We still have a future together.

Friends, grace, it takes the blame, covers the shame, removes the stain. It travels outside of karma. Karma says, you get what you deserve.

Grace says, you get what you don't deserve, and you do get what you, you don't get what you do deserve, and you do get what you don't deserve. If God, grace makes beauty out of ugly things. Now, what does this tell us? It tells us that the heart of Christianity is relationship. The heart of Christianity is relationship. God, grace is not just an idea, or a concept, or a free pass to skip cosmic detention.

It's not just a crutch to get through life. Christian faith is profoundly personal, intimate relationship. It's why, when someone says, well, if God is so gracious, why can't I just sin, and do what I want, and then at the end of my life, I'll just ask for forgiveness?

[22 : 58] And Jesus says, you don't understand the first thing about grace. Because grace is not just wiping the slate clean, so you can carry on, and do whatever you wanted. Grace is the seat at the table. It's saying, come into my family.

It's saying, we're going to do life together. It's saying, I will be your father, you will be my child. But, grace is God not giving us what we do deserve, eternal separation from him, so that we can get what we don't deserve, which is intimacy, personal enjoyment of the living God forever.

So friends, what does this grace look like? What does it look like? Well, it looks like Jesus coming to Zacchaeus. You remember Zacchaeus? He's a tax collector. He's an outcast. He is a pariah of society.

He is rejected, unloved, and Jesus says, Zacchaeus, open up your home. I want to come and have lunch with you today. Grace looks like Jesus coming to the woman at the well, social outcast, morally despised, unloved, and rejected, and Jesus comes to her and says, I know everything about you.

I know all the skeletons in your closet. There is nothing that I don't know, and I love you still.

Friends, grace is Jesus coming to the lady who is trafficked into sex work, and everyone despises her and says, what is she doing in here?

[24 : 10] And Jesus is welcome. I love you. Friends, grace is Psalm 103. That says, as far as the east is from the west, so far will God remove our sins from us.

As a father has compassion on his children, so has the Lord had compassion on us. Friends, grace looks like the father of the prodigal son, saying, sacrifice the fattened calf.

My son is home. My son was lost, but now is found. My son was dead, but is now alive. Friends, grace, this is what God does. And God says, yes, Israel is a mess, but I am not done with you.

We will get through this together. Two things I need you to know. I love you, and we will get through this together. Isn't that amazing? This is the God that we've come to worship this morning, friends.

This is the God of grace. So now, how do we find this grace? How do we access this grace? How do we come into this gracious relationship? Well, it's not automatic, and it's not found by just simply attending church.

[25 : 11] Grace isn't just something that, by osmosis, it just happens by attending a church service. Grace is something that you've got to pursue, or you've got to find. Friends, some of us here today, will leave this place, having never encountered the God of grace, and we will die in our sins.

But God does not want that. But the God of the Bible longs for us to encounter His grace, and so be transformed. And so look at what happens here. If you've got your Bible, look at verse 22 to 31.

In this passage here, Moses talks about the sins of the people, and he talks about two different kinds of sin. He kind of contrasts and compares two kinds of sin. Look at verse 22. He says, Verse 27.

If one sins unintentionally, he shall offer a female God, a year old for a sin offering. But then look at verse 30. Here's a different scenario. But, the person who does anything with a high hand, whether he is a native or sojourner, reviles the Lord.

That person shall be cut off from amongst his people. Because he has despised the word of the Lord, broken his commandments, that person shall be cut off, and his sin shall remain upon him. Such a great picture, right?

[26 : 41] If anyone does anything with a high hand, it's like a picture of somebody who's shaking their fists in defiance, right? I love this picture. Go ahead. Call the cops. See if I care. It's a picture of somebody saying, Stuff you, God.

I'm going to do things my way, and see if you care. See if I care what you think about it. Do you remember last week, we asked the question in the catechism, What is sin? Sin is rejecting or ignoring God and the world that he's created, not doing or being what he's commanded in his law.

But scripture tells us that sin is far more nuanced than just saying, Do this, don't do this. The condition of our hearts, the motives of our hearts, the mixed motivations, the self-awareness, the lack of self-awareness, all these things make it a complex and multifaceted issue.

And so scripture here differentiates between unintentional sins and intentional sins. Okay? Or our actions, our motives, our thoughts, our attitudes that do not honor God, but the unintentional ones are ones that we're either not aware of or we kind of like, we're suddenly made aware of it without realizing that we're going into it.

But on the other hand is what they call the sin of intentionality or high-handed or deliberate sin. This is kind of a willful rejection where you know what you're doing and you pursue it nonetheless.

[27 : 58] And the Bible says that both of these things are sin. Both of them are deadly serious. Both of them, there's a problem, but the consequences are maybe slightly different. Okay?

So think about it this way. In marriage, if you married, you probably sin most days, right? There's the bickering.

There's the little comment. There's the lack of thoughtfulness. There's the lack of appreciation. The lack of care or graciousness towards one another. And there's kind of like just these things that you say, friends, this is a sin.

We should not do that. We should love our wives like Christ has loved the church. Okay? But that's very different from somebody that says, I'm going to go and have an affair. I'm going to go and look for pornography.

I'm going to go and flirt with that person at the office. There's one that is, they both sin, they both wrong, but one is kind of, you don't really realize it or suddenly you awaken to it and it looks terrible.

[28 : 54] The other one looks appealing. You think, I'm going to pursue this. Or maybe another way of thinking about it is like this. Think about how we handle money. It's one thing to be very careful, maybe overly careful, overly planning, maybe not very generous because we are so particular.

Actually, if we're honest, that's probably greed. It's a form of greed. That's not good. We should run from that. But that's very different from saying, hey, let me go to Macau and gamble away everything I have or I'm going to go to the races after church this afternoon or I'm going to go and hand in an expense receipt at my office that was from a personal expense.

That's a very different thing, right? And so the problem here is that both involve rejecting and ignoring God. Both are not doing what he's asked in his word. But the problem is that the second one by its very nature is cutting ourselves off from the grace that we need.

This one says, oh, I'm a sinner. I need grace. God, forgive me. This one says, God, take your grace somewhere else. I'm doing what I want and no one's going to stop me. It's not that one is wrong and the other is fine.

They're both wrong. They both need mercy. But this one is shaking its fist at God and saying, God, I will do things my way and you're not going to tell me what to do. And so the issue here is not is sin serious.

[30 : 07] They're both serious. The issue is upon realizing and seeing our sin and recognizing it for what it is. What is our attitude? Do we hate it or do we persist in it?

Do we fight it or do we defend it? Mark Devers says this, the Christian stands with God against his sin. The secular person stands with their sin against God.

And that's the difference here. And Moses says that we're going to sin. We are people of sin. None of us are perfect. But what do we do with our sin? Do we stand with our sin against God or do we stand with God against our sin?

And that's what the story is about in the story of the Sabbath, right? Verse 32, there's the story of this guy and he goes out into the field on the Sabbath day and he's picking up sticks and he's going to go and make a meal and everything and he gets in deep trouble.

And we may think, what? This guy's just picking up sticks. What's wrong with that? Just give him a break, right? But actually, what is he doing here? Just a few weeks before, God has given them the Ten Commandments and he knows the commandments.

[31 : 09] On the Sabbath day, set your day aside for God. Devote yourself to him. He is the Lord that brought you out of Egypt. He saved you and rescued you. You belong to him one day a week. Devote yourself to him.

Don't work. Let, trust God to provide for you. And this guy says, take that rule somewhere else. I'm going to go do my thing. And he goes out in the open defiance of God, shaking his fist at God, saying, no one's going to tell me what to do.

And how does it end? It ends terribly. A terrible death. Friends, you may be familiar with Jesus' teaching about the unforgivable sin. It's kind of somewhat similar, right?

It's a little bit different, but it's similar. Some people say, what's the unforgivable sin? Is it like, if I do this, or if I do this? Actually, what Jesus says, there's any sin in the whole world that is able to be covered by his grace, except there's one that can't.

The one that you refuse to bring to him. The one that you refuse to come to his only means of grace and say, God, I need you. It's the one where our hearts are hard and callous and say, God, I'll judge you.

[32 : 13] Who are you to judge me? That's the only sin that they cannot be graced from because you're not bringing yourself towards him. If you're familiar with Jesus' parable, the two prodigal sons, we see something similar here, don't we, right?

The younger brother, he's clearly the more immoral one. He takes his dad's money, he goes off into wild country, living it up on drinking and prostitutes and living however he wants. And he's far more immoral than his brother, but he comes to his senses and he says, what am I doing?

And he realizes what he's done and he goes home and he says, Father, I've sinned before heaven and against you. Father, I'm so sorry, I'm not worthy to be called your son. And the father says, slaughter the fattened calf.

My son is home. He's welcome. Bring the ring, bring the robe. Let's celebrate. But the other son, the older brother, he's sinister, he's brooding, he's angry, he's jealous.

And the father says, come, come inside, you brother's home. He says, get lost. Why should I come inside? That son of yours wasted all my inheritance. And he's brooding and he's angry and he will not reconcile.

[33 : 23] And Jesus leaves the parable open and he's asking us the question, which one are you? Which one are you? Are you going to receive grace or are you going to stay far away?

Friends, how do we find grace? How do we come into this amazing relationship with the amazing God of the Bible? We come to him in our hands and say, Jesus, I need you. God, I need you.

I don't have what it takes. We come to the one who stands with arms wide open, ready to welcome and forgive with healing grace and say, Jesus, I need you. Well, friends, as we come to the last section here, look at verse 37 and onwards, remembering grace, remembering grace.

As we come to a close, how should we, what should we do? What does this mean for our lives?

Well, in scripture, the way to grow in spiritual maturity and therefore the way to attain the spiritual blessings that God promises, grace and peace and all these things, is not by telling yourself, I'm a Christian now.

I better do what good Christians do. Okay? That's not the way to grow in grace. The way to grow in grace, that's the worst thing you can do. The way to grow as a Christian is to remember what Christ has done, is to remember the depths from where he saved us.

[34 : 35] Remember the grace of God to never, ever forget what God has done. Remember the grace in which you stand. Remember how you're saved by grace alone. Remember that you were dead in your sins, but God in his great love raised you up and saved you.

Remember the grace of God and run to it and let it infiltrate every aspect of your life. Friends, as Christians, the way that Christians change deeply is when the grace of God intersects with a very real problem in our lives.

When the real everyday stuff of life intersects with the grace of God, that's how our hearts change deeply. And in this final section, God wants his people to remember the grace of God every single day and so be changed by it.

And so what does he do? He tells them to make some tassels, some kind of like long threads to put blue material or thread in them and to tie them to the hems of their cloaks.

Now why should they do that? Well, two reasons. The one, the hem of the cloak in the ancient world is kind of an extension of your identity. It is who you are. Remember when David is in the cave and Saul comes and he cuts off the hem of Saul's cloak.

[35 : 43] Why is that so offensive? It's not just that he ruined his designer jacket. It's that it's a way of saying you're dead to me. Right? He's cutting off his identity. So the hems of your cloak there's this analogy there's this kind of extension of who you are.

Many people in the ancient world had their initials or signature kind of sewed into the hem of their cloak. But the other thing is there's this blue thread. The blue thread is the veil between the holy place and the most holy place is made of blue material.

And God wants them to every single day with the clothing up there as they're walking the streets as these tussles are shaking and maybe shining in the sun every day to remember we stand by God's grace alone.

Who am I? Who is my identity? My identity is not my work or my job or whether I have a boyfriend or a girlfriend or my kids or my parenting. My identity is the fact that I'm saved by grace.

That I was dead in hell destined for an eternity without God. But God in his rich mercy Jesus went to the cross for me and saved me and brought me into the family and given me a seat at the table.

[36 : 44] Friends, many, many years later Jesus Christ was sitting at the celebrating the Passover meal with his friends his disciples.

The Passover meal was a covenant meal and they're remembering the way that God had rescued his people from Egypt by the blood of the Lamb. And at that table Jesus takes some bread and he breaks it and he says tomorrow my body the real the Passover lamb is going to be broken for you. And then he says whenever you gather break bread in remembrance of me. In remembrance of me. Jesus takes a glass of wine and he says tomorrow my blood is going to be shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

Whenever you gather do so and drink in remembrance of me. Remember my grace. I think you've got communion elements with you don't you? Friends, if you follow Jesus we're going to take communion together now.

Why don't you open that up? If you're not a follower of Jesus this is us remembering. This is us having a meal. I'm sorry this is a pretty pathetic meal compared to a bull and goats and lambs and oil and everything else.

[38 : 01] But this is meant to be a meal. Every week we gather every second week we gather we have a meal and God is with us and he looks us in the eye and he says two things I love you I'm not done with you my grace is sufficient.

Friends, are you a follower of Jesus? Christ's body broken for you. Remember what he's done.

Friends, this week when you go to the office there are going to be a thousand reasons why you think that your identity is built on meritocracy and how good you are how well you perform. Friends, in the journey of life through the wilderness there are a thousand voices Justin reminded us this morning there are a thousand voices in our lives and the voices are all saying you're not good enough you suck if only you were better or they say look how good you are you must be amazing you're better than everybody else.

Friends, your identity is built on shaky ground but if you want to make it through the wilderness if you want to get to the promised land if you want to get out of Egypt and make it all the way to glory remember remember the grace of Christ.

Friends, Christ's body broken for you on the cross your sins covered your shame done away with Jesus died for you let's eat and remember what Jesus did for us.

[39 : 21] at the end of the meal Jesus takes a glass of wine he says my blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins grace covers the shame takes the stain travels outside of karma it swallows karma grace Christ's blood shed for us drink and remember what Jesus did for us.

Jesus today we drink of your grace remember what you did for us thank you Christ for dying on the cross thank you God the ultimate lamb of God thank you Jesus for rising again you didn't just die as an example you didn't just die to show us how to be sacrificial and selfless and loving you died for our sins and you rose again and now you sit in the throne of heaven and you intercede for us and you welcome us and you pray for us and you apply the blood of your death for us and you welcome us home God we love you we need you we thank you remind us day by day God I pray that Lord I pray for anybody here today that feels unworthy pray God for anybody here that the voice of their mind is telling them you're not good enough I pray God for those that have grown up with parents that maybe life worked on the basis of meritocracy that love was given to us on the basis of good grades or filial piety oh God by your power break that over our hearts and our lives remind us that God you are a different kind of parent that your kingdom operates on a different ethic completely by your spirit

God set us free Jesus I pray that the grace of the living God will intersect with the very real issues of our lives in such a way that changes us oh spirit of God do that do that in our midst do that even

now help us to walk out of here differently because we've encountered the God of grace we're going to sing a song that we've been singing the last few weeks faithful he has been faithful he will be gracious he has been gracious he will be worthy he has been worthy he will be why don't you stand and let's sing this together and if you would like prayer for anything there are going to be prayer stewards around the room that can be related to sermon or anything else once you come to a prayer student we'd love to pray with you let's for the rest of us let's worship and sing now let's pray let's pray let's pray let's pray let's pray