

**Grace is Greater**

**Part 2 of 8**

**Grace Is Greater Than Your Guilt**

**Psalm 32:1-2**

Psalm 32:1-2: “What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven! What relief for those who…God has cleared their record!”

When Kim and I went to New York City for the first time, a man on Canal Street – *the holy grail for bargain shoppers* – approached us and whispered, “You wanna buy a Louis Vuitton handbag?” I didn’t particularly want to buy a handbag but when the man named his price, I was intrigued. I thought I’d stumbled on the bargain of a century! I couldn’t just buy one!

Of course, these weren’t real Louis Vuitton handbags he was selling – we knew that. But these “copy-handbags” looked good enough for Kim to carry. It was only after I’d handed over my cash that we began to discover just how flimsy these counterfeits were.

While counterfeits may look like the real deal, they seldom work as they’re supposed to:

* The pirated movie is shot all out of focus.
* The fake handbag dissolves in the rain.
* The luxury pen is an ink explosion waiting to happen.
* The hour hand on the copy-watch goes backwards.

It’s the same story with counterfeit gospels. They look like the real gospel, but they don’t actually work. They don’t set you free, they don’t bring lasting peace, and any joy that comes with them soon runs out.

Buy into a counterfeit gospel and it won’t be long before you find yourself burdened with doubt, debt, duty, and depression. You’ll discover that what you thought was good news is actually bad news sold with a fake label.

I believe the number one reason we have counterfeit churches is we preach a counterfeit gospel. We’ll never have a real church unless we preach the real gospel. Do you know the difference?

• A counterfeit gospel says you better love God; the real gospel declares He loves you!

• A counterfeit gospel preaches God *can* forgive you; the real gospel declares He already has!

• A counterfeit gospel says you need to get holy; the real gospel declares that in Christ you already are!

• A counterfeit gospel points to your badness; the real gospel reveals His goodness!

• A counterfeit gospel says God can; the real gospel says God has!

Sadly, the vast majority of Christians have been sold a counterfeit gospel. They’ve bought into a message that looks like the real thing, but it’s inferior.

Read the New Testament and you might come away with the idea that there’s more than one gospel.

For example, the very first words of the New Testament in the King James Bible are, “The Gospel According to Matthew.” Read on and you’ll also find the gospels according to Mark, Luke and John. Keep reading and you’ll come across Paul telling the Romans about “my gospel” before warning the Corinthians to hold firm to the gospel that “I preached to you.” Read all the way to the end and you’ll also encounter the “gospel of your salvation” (Eph 1:13), the “gospel of peace” (Eph 6:15), the “glorious gospel of the blessed God” (1 Tim 1:11), before finally reaching the “eternal gospel” proclaimed by the angel (Rev 14:6).

Of course, these are all labels for one and the same gospel. There’s only one gospel in the Bible and that’s *the* gospel, which was known to Paul as the *gospel of grace*. Paul said in Acts 20:24, “I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.” The gospel of grace is *the*gospel and there’s no other.

When Paul refers to the *gospel of grace*, he means exactly the same thing as when he and others refer to the *gospel of Christ*or the *gospel of God* or the *gospel of his Son* or the *gospel of peace* in other places. All of these gospels reveal the One who is called Grace, who was given to us out of the fullness of the Father’s grace, and through whom we’ve received grace upon grace.

What about when Jesus refers to the *gospel of the kingdom* in Matthew 24:14? Is this a different gospel?

Whenever you hear Jesus talking about the “kingdom” you can substitute the word “king” because the kingdom is nothing without the king. Who’s the King? His name is Jesus. When Jesus says we’re to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,” he’s essentially saying, “seek me and my righteousness.” And where do we find his righteousness? In the gospel!

Romans 1:17 says, “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”

To sum up, the *gospel of the kingdom* is the *gospel of Christ* which is the *gospel of God* which is the *gospel of grace*. They are different labels for the exact same gospel message.

We’re in a series called *Grace Is Greater*. Hebrews 12:15 says, "See to it that no one misses the grace of God." Over centuries a lot has been spoken and written on the subject of grace. Yet perhaps nothing’s as hard to *explain*as God's grace.

* *It doesn't make sense.*
* *It isn’t fair.*
* *It can't possibly cover over what I've done.*

The best way--perhaps the only real way--to understand it is to *experience*it…or let me say it more accurately: to experience *Him*, because Grace is a person - Jesus. Jesus is grace personified.

In this series we want you to begin moving past your hang-ups toward an understanding of grace that’s bigger than your mistakes, your failures, and your seemingly impossible situations.

Last week’s teaching was grace is greater than your depression. This week’s teaching is grace is greater than your guilt!

Let's admit it. All of us, at some point in our lives, have had to say, "I did it!" James 3:2 says, “Indeed, we all make many mistakes.” I know this may be hard for you to believe…but even I have made a few mistakes.

The other day I lost my temper. It was only for a moment, but it was enough. Damage was done. Later, I felt sick about what I did and took steps to make amends. This is how guilt works. It’s a signal that our lives have been disrupted by sin. It’s a sign that a hurt needs to be healed; a mistake has been made and needs to be corrected.

But there’s a problem.

Ever since sin was given free rein in the Garden of Eden, guilt has gotten out of control. Sometimes we feel guilt over clearly remembered wrongs we’ve done. At other times we may feel guilty and not know why.  We wake up with a feeling of unworthiness and shame with no specific deed to identify as the source. Our feelings of guilt are irrational, leaving us at a loss to identify the source or the solution.  Guilt can lock us in its prison and shackle us so that we feel helpless.  It robs us of energy and steals our joy.  Guilt can leave us smoldering in anger or suffocating in depression. Worst of all, guilt never goes away. Like an alarm that won’t switch off, for many of us, guilt is the soundtrack of our lives.

Guilt can be destructive and debilitating.

This weekend consider two things: How we cope with our guilt and how grace is greater than our guilt.

1. How we cope with our guilt:

The Bible talks about the ways we normally deal with our guilt. We bury it, blame others, or beat ourselves up. Let’s take a closer look at these three things.

🡪 We bury it.

Proverbs 28:13 says, "You will never succeed in life if you try to hide your sins."

In Psalm 32:3-5 David says, “I wouldn’t admit what a sinner I was. But my dishonesty made me miserable and filled my days with frustration. My strength evaporated like water on a sunny day until I finally admitted all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself, ‘I will confess them to the Lord.’ And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.”

🡪 We blame others.

Genesis 3:12, “‘Yes,’ Adam admitted, ‘but it was the woman you gave me who brought me the fruit, and I ate it.’" Adam’s actually blaming God, “It was the woman *you* gave me.”

Proverbs 19:3 says, “People's own foolishness ruins their lives, but in their mind they blame the Lord.” We say, “God, why are You allowing this?”

🡪 We beat ourselves up.

Psalm 38:3-8: “My health is broken because of my sins. My guilt overwhelms me— it is a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and stink  because of my foolish sins. I am bent over and racked with pain.  All day long I walk around filled with grief. A raging fever burns within me, and my health is broken. I am exhausted and completely crushed.  My groans come from an anguished heart."

2. How grace is greater than our guilt:

“Neither do I condemn you. Go your way and sin no more.” (John 8:1-11). To the paralytic whose friends tore off the roof to get their friend to grace, he said, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” When grace sensed the rising resentments among the Jewish leaders, He said, “’So that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,’ – He said to the paralytic, ‘I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home.’ And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone, so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God.”  (Mark 2:1-12).

Hebrews 10:22 says, “Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”

Romans 8:3 says, “God, sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.”

2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him.”

🡪 Justified = Not Guilty, Entirely Pleasing To God

Colossians 2:13-14 says, “He has forgiven you all your sins: Christ has utterly wiped out the damning evidence of broken laws and commandments which always hung over our heads, and has completely annulled it by nailing it over his own head on the cross.”

Romans 4:25 says He was, “delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”

Romans 5:20 says, “Where sin abounds, grace much more abounds.” Because of God’s grace…

🡪 You’ve been forgiven freely.

Ephesians 1:7 says, "For by the sacrificial death of Christ we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven. How great is the grace of God."

🡪 You’ve been forgiven fully.

Hebrews 7:25 says, “Christ always lives to make intercession for us." God forgives fully.

🡪 You’ve been forgiven finally.

Jeremiah 31:34, “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Romans 3:23-24 says, “Yes, all have sinned; all fall short of God’s glorious ideal; yet now God declares us “not guilty” of offending him if we trust in Jesus Christ, who in his kindness freely takes away our sins.”

Psalm 32:1-2: “What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven! What relief for those who…God has cleared their record!”