

1 Corinthians 15 (Part 2): 3-11

Walking Out God's Grace

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1 Corinthians 15. This is really the end of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians that we have in our New Testament Bibles. And he's going to be dealing with the doctrine of the resurrection here as we get into this chapter. But we're going to deal with some preliminary issues here today.

Let's start in verse 3, backing up slightly to a couple of verses we covered last week. But let's start in verse 3. Read down through verse 11 with me. Follow along as I read, it says,

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the 12. ⁶Then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James and then to all the apostles. ⁸Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared to me. ⁹For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹Whether then it was I or they, we preach.” (ESV)

Stop there. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, open our hearts to this, the ministry of Your Word. Teach us today and instruct us. But also, Lord God, fill our hearts so that we leave from this place encouraged, hopeful, and fed. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

Last week we covered the essence of the Gospel. You'll remember that Paul talked about three basic elements. Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried and was raised on the third day. And that is going to springboard him into a discussion throughout the course of this chapter on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the importance of it. And so, we'll get into that as we get further into the chapter.

But first of all, he begins by mentioning the appearances that Jesus made to various individuals after his resurrection to show that he was alive. And he marks down basically five things that he mentions. We'll put them up on the screen. Just so those of you who take notes, you can see those again.

Post-resurrection Appearances

- Cephas (or Peter)
- The Twelve
- 500 assembled believers
- James
- Paul himself

First of all, he talks about **Cephas**, which, of course, is **Peter**. Cephas is his Aramaic name. Peter would be his Greek, the Greek form of his name. Also Simon, of course.

And then he mentioned, **The Twelve**. Then he talked about **500 assembled believers** at one time who saw an appearance of the Lord. He mentioned **James**. And then finally, he mentions **(Paul) himself**. As he then was the last to receive a visitation, if you will. And I want to begin to just talk through some of these and talk about the significance of his appearing to these individuals.

And the first one that he mentions is Peter, or Cephas. I like to use Peter, his Greek name, I guess. I find it interesting, significant, that Jesus would make such effort to speak to this man. One of the initial appearances. Actually, the very first appearance was to a woman. That was to Mary Magdalene, who received the very first appearance of Jesus as he rose from the grave.

But Paul mentions Peter here because I think he's building to some things which we'll get into in a second. Do you remember the last time? I mean, if you think about right before Jesus appeared to Peter, what was their last connection? The last time they saw one another, their eyes met, was immediately after Peter denied that he knew him for the third time.

In fact, why don't you turn with me over to Luke 22. Keep your finger here. Scoot over to the Gospel according to Luke. Let's take a look at this passage. It's very significant, very powerful. Luke 22. It's a fairly long chapter. Skip down to verse 54. Luke 22:54 goes like this:

“Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. And Peter was following at a distance.”⁵⁵And when they had kindled a

fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them.”

What do you see? Two things Peter's done wrong here, hasn't he? First of all, he's following Jesus at a distance. And he's warming himself by the fires of the enemy. But that's another message. It says, in verse 56,

“Then a servant girl, seeing him, as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, ” Hey, ‘this man was also with him’ .⁵⁷ But he denied it, saying, ‘Woman, I don't know him.’⁵⁸ And a little later, someone else saw him and said, ‘You also are one of them’ . But Peter said, ‘Man, I am not’ .⁵⁹ After an interval of about an hour, still another insisted, saying, ‘Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.’⁶⁰ But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you're talking about.’ And immediately while he was still speaking, ” (it says) “the rooster crowed.”

Look at the next couple of verses.

“⁶¹ And the Lord turned and looked at Peter and Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him ‘before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.’⁶² And he went out and wept bitterly. ”

Yeah. How would you like your last sight of your Lord and master to be you doing something really creepy, denying Him. How serious of an issue was it? Certainly, Peter had heard Jesus talk about this before because Jesus had actually mentioned the idea of denying Him.

Let me show you a passage from Matthew chapter 10. Everyone, Jesus said,

Matthew 10:32-33 (ESV)

So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, (But look at this) but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

Yeah, kind of serious. Am I saying that Peter was basically lost at that point when he denied the Lord? No, certainly not. Do you remember the last thing we're told about Peter when we read that passage in Luke 22? The very last

thing we're told is that he “*wept bitterly*” and we know that those were tears of repentance and sorrow, godly sorrow. And so, Jesus is now coming to speak to him. Oh, I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall and heard that conversation.

We know that Peter got right with God because he went on to become a very powerful, important pillar in the church. But just because somebody cries doesn't necessarily mean that they're getting right with God.

We're moved by people's tears, aren't we? When people cry, we immediately get uncomfortable when people start crying, usually, unless you were raised like me in a house full of women and you saw it all the time.

People still to this day, when I'm talking to someone, a woman and she starts crying, she'll go, I'm really sorry. I go, that's okay. Don't worry about it. I was raised with women. They cried all the time. In fact, I tried to make my sisters cry on several occasions, and that's enough about me. Anyway we're overly, we're moved by people's tears. And yet it doesn't always mean that they are genuine in their repentance or true sorrow over what has actually taken place.

Do you remember Paul actually wrote about this? In his second letter to the Corinthians, he said that “*godly grief*,” your Bible may say sorrow if you have an NIV, but,

2 Corinthians 7:10 (ESV)

...godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

...godly grief produces a repentance that (actually) leads to salvation, whereas worldly grief (actually goes on to) produce death.

Because worldly grief is all about being sorry I got caught, being sorry that I don't get to keep sinning like that. It was really fun, or whatever the case might be. But it's not a genuine desire to get right with the Lord. But Peter's was.

And, so let's go back, let's turn back to 1 Corinthians Chapter 15 and think a little bit more about this meeting between Jesus and Peter. Have you ever had someone turn their back on you? And I mean, really do something nasty?

Whereas they seem to be a friend before they did something that was really mean or just showed that they weren't as devoted to you as perhaps you might

have thought otherwise. It's especially hurtful when you yourself are going through a particularly difficult time. Jesus was going through a particularly difficult time.

Here He was standing before these men. You can call it a trial. It wasn't a trial. Kangaroo court. It was illegal. It was unbiblical. They were searching for witnesses to try to have some level of agreement so they could accuse Him and take Him to Pilate. And it was all going on in the wee hours of the morning. Which, by the way, the law forbade them to have trials during that time of the day.

It was just, it was all against the Word of God. And yet, here's Jesus, being mocked and ridiculed and even beaten from time to time in this situation. And here's Peter, outside, warming himself by the fire, being recognized as one of Jesus' followers. And 3 times denying that was the case.

And that, after earlier in the evening, Peter making some braggadocious claim about the fact that he was ready to go to his death, if necessary. You remember how that all came down? Jesus announced to all of the disciples earlier at the Last Supper that they would all desert Him that night.

And Peter spoke up and said, not me! I will not, in fact, I'll go to my death. I'm ready to die for you tonight. And that's when Jesus told Peter that not only was he not ready to die, but that he would actually deny that he even ever knew Jesus. Not once, but 3 times.

It's that same Peter that Jesus now appears to in this post-resurrection happening. And I have to wonder how Peter felt in that meeting. It must have been pretty difficult for him.

Have you ever noticed that when you do something wrong, you want people to be mad at you? I mean, it usually just feels better. And if they're not, you're like, bummed. It's like, why don't you just yell at me, or maybe take a swing or something like that? I'll feel better about what I did. But, when somebody responds to what you did with an act of kindness and grace, that can be hard to take, can't it?

And here is Peter knowing that he denied the Lord. Not once, but 3 times! And Jesus now makes this special post-resurrection appearance to him in a personal way and he knew that he didn't deserve the forgiveness that he was getting. He knew he didn't deserve this special visitation of his resurrected Master, but he got both. And that can be hard. But that's a demonstration of grace. We'll talk

more about it in a bit, but if we go back to verse 5, look here in your Bible again, chapter 15 verse 5.

It goes on to say that, *“after he appeared to Cephas, he then appeared to the twelve.”*

Now remember, the term or the title, *“the twelve”* doesn't necessarily refer to a number. It refers to the group, because they weren't 12 anymore by this time. Judas had committed suicide. And we know that when Jesus appeared for the first time to these men, Thomas wasn't even with them. And so, they were at least the ten at that point, but they continued to refer to them as, *“the twelve”* just because that was what they were called.

But this is one appearance we don't have to wonder about. John, who was there that night. And this took place at the very evening of the day that Jesus emerged from the tomb. John was an eyewitness and he wrote about this appearance. Here's what he said in the 20th chapter.

John 20:19-20 (ESV)

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

On the evening of that day, (meaning resurrection day) the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. And then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

Probably in shock, but glad nonetheless, right? Here He is. He's alive. They had seen Him die. They had seen Him die. And here He was, standing in their midst. And just to bring Him out of that shock, Jesus shows them His hands and His side where He had been thrust through with a spear just to show it's really me.

Now, this was a very important occasion for the disciples when they gathered and saw the Lord for the first time. Because remember, this is when the Holy Spirit was first imparted for regeneration or salvation. John goes on to write that,

John 20:21-22 (ESV)

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you, as the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, (it says) he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

This is the very first initial time of the Spirit now coming in to indwell the children of God, those who put their faith in Jesus and what He did on the cross by which we are born again. So, a very important appearance here that Paul reminds us of here in 1st Corinthians 15.

Next, we're told if you look at verse 6 that Jesus made a somewhat larger appearance. It says here, *"then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at the same one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep."*

Here's what's interesting about this appearance. We really know nothing about it because it is nowhere else in the scripture given to us except right here in 1 Corinthians chapter 15. We believe that it happened in Galilee. You'll remember that when the angel first appeared to Mary, at the empty tomb, the angel said he is risen just as he said, now go and tell his disciples and tell them to go to Galilee, and he's going to meet them there.

And then you'll remember Mary took off running toward wherever the disciples were holed up, and Jesus met her along the way. And she recognized him and fell at his feet, grabbed his feet. And he said, it's all right, it's fine. *"Go tell my,"* And he repeated, *"Tell them to go to Galilee because I'm going to meet them there."*

And we believe that this is where this large gathering of disciples took place and Jesus appeared to them. Paul made the statement that at the time of this writing, which was sometime between A.D. 53 and 56, that the majority of these individuals were still living, although he said that some of them had fallen asleep.

And by the way, don't let that term, fallen asleep, weird you out at all. That is a euphemism used in the Bible to describe the body at death. It does not describe the individual. Okay? Paul describes the individual at death later when he says, To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. (2 Corinthians 5:8)

Your soul can't sleep. Your spirit can't sleep. Have you ever noticed when you go to sleep at night, your brain doesn't shut down? You ever notice that? Some of you have really whacked out dreams. That's another story. But have you ever noticed that just your body sleeps, things keep going, right? Well, only the body rests, only the body dies.

The soul and the spirit do not die. They go to be with the Lord to await a new resurrected body one day. But the physical body takes on very much the appearance of sleep, which is why in the New Testament, it is referred to as falling asleep. But you don't fall asleep. You go to be in the presence of the Lord. Just wanted to make sure there wasn't any confusion about that. Verse 7 goes on. I love this one. It says,

“then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.” Now the word apostles here refers to the group beyond just the 12. Remember, even though we think of apostles as the 12 apostles, there were a lot more than 12 apostles.

Ultimately, there was a lot of people who were referred to as apostles. Barnabas was an apostle, John Mark was an apostle, Titus was an apostle, Timothy was an Apostle, Silas was an Apostle. The word Apostle means, sent forth one. But He's already appeared to the 12, the closest of the disciples. But He also, and this is something we also don't have a record of, He appeared to a larger group of apostles.

But I want to have you take note of the fact that Jesus also appeared to James. Now, this is very significant. You might even be thinking to yourself, why would He pinpoint one of the other of the disciples? I mean, we know why He'd pinpoint Peter because Peter denied Him. Why would He pinpoint one of the other disciples like James?

Well, this isn't the disciple James. This is not James, the son of John or the brother, excuse me, of John. Remember, he called those two guys sons of thunder. They were brothers. They were fishermen. But this isn't that James. This is James, the son of Joseph and Mary, the half-brother of Jesus. And what's significant about this particular and very personal post-resurrection appearance is that James was an unbeliever.

Jesus has appeared now to a denier. And now he's appearing to an unbeliever, one of his own brothers. We know they were unbelievers because John told us. He told on them. Look at this passage. John chapter 7 verse 5.

John 7:5 (ESV)

For not even his brothers believed in him.

For not even his brothers believed in him.

And these guys, they didn't believe. In fact, we're told that at one point, they thought He was so out of his mind, they came to take control of Him and take Him home. He went back to the region of Nazareth. This is told us here in Mark, it's the only place it's told. It says,

Mark 3:20-21 (ESV)

Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."

Then he went home, and the crowd that gathered again was so great that he couldn't, (they couldn't even get together to) "eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, (That means to take hold of Him. Why? For they were saying,) "He's out of his mind."

Isn't that interesting? His family could only explain the zeal that He had, and His heart for doing the things of the Lord, by saying that "*He's out of his mind.*" And I have to wonder how many times that history has repeated itself over the years.

Has it ever repeated itself with you? Have you ever had somebody wonder if you were maybe tweaked, because you were, it's like, man, dude, you're going to church all the time? You read that Bible? Are you serious? They come up to you like they want to take your temperature or something.

You know what's interesting is that before we know Christ, we're doing, we're living like normal people. Which is living for self. I'm living to please myself. I'm living to honor myself. I'm living for my own comfort and my own pleasure. And as the world says, my goal in life is just to be happy, right? Because that's all you can be is just happy. You just got to make yourself happy. That's normal.

Well, then suddenly I realized that's a bunch of hooley and I come to Jesus, make Him my Savior and Lord, and I start living for Him instead of living for myself. Instead of living to make myself happy, I'm living to serve and love Him. And by the way, there's more joy that goes along with that than any happiness the world can understand.

But suddenly my life, and the reason I get up in the morning, is different than it was before. What does the world think? Thinks you're crazy. You're nuts. You're one of them there Jesus freaks. They don't get it. And I get that, that they don't get it. And you should too. We're always going to appear rather nuts to the people of the world so be it.

But, James was the one, one of the brothers that thought that Jesus was out of His mind, went to go take hold of Him, didn't believe. But he knew that Jesus had been arrested. He knew that they, the Sanhedrin, had turned Him over to Pontius Pilate, and they knew that Pilate turned Him over to the guards to be crucified. He knew that much and he knew that Jesus had been taken down off that cross dead. He knew that too. Of those things, he was painfully aware.

But somewhere in the sovereign wisdom of God, it was determined that Jesus would then appear to His half-brother. Wouldn't you love to have been in that room? These guys grew up together. Wouldn't you have loved to have been in on that meeting? When Jesus, I don't know, maybe He appeared the same way He appeared to the twelve. Because it says that they were behind locked doors. Because they were so afraid of being arrested themselves.

And Jesus suddenly was just among them, and He's like, hey, "*Peace be with you.*" Ah, that's pretty freaky. Who knows if maybe He appeared to James in a similar sort of way? James is just going through the motions of whatever, and suddenly Jesus is just standing there. Hey, James, it's Me!

Can you imagine what that would be like? Can you imagine how that would absolutely just transform your life? Well, guess what? It transformed James' life. He went on to become not only a believer, but he became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. James was like the pastor of the church in Jerusalem. Went on to write a book in the Bible. Follows the Book of Hebrews.

That's by James, the half-brother of Jesus. And he went on to give his life, too. It actually isn't in the scripture, but the Jewish historian Josephus tells us that eventually the Jewish religious leaders took up rocks and stoned him to death.

I have no idea or no doubt rather, that James went to his death with joy. You know why? Because he knew Jesus was alive. He knew this brother that he probably once thought of as just a brother, but who now he understood was the son of God was even now seated at the right hand of the glory of God. And he knew Jesus was waiting for him right there. That'll change your life.

So, how many of Jesus's brothers came to faith? We're not exactly sure because we know for sure He had 4 brothers and some sisters. We know of one other brother. The small little book of Jude, right before the Book of Revelation, was written by Jesus' half-brother, Jude. We know that at least 2 of them got saved and became very important to the early church.

There's a reference in the Book of Acts that's interesting. Acts chapter 1, it says,

Acts 1:14 (ESV)

All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.”

Now, again, we don't know how many that refers to. And what's interesting about that Greek word is that it is actually translated better, siblings, and it doesn't necessarily just encompass males, it could encompass females. That is probably better translated, “*with Mary, the mother of Jesus and his siblings.*”

Again, how many of them, we're not sure. But, how crazy to be raised in the same home with Jesus and, like James, to come to find out that he is the very son of God, the lamb of God, slain from the foundations of the world.

Verse 8 goes on, look with me in your Bible, says,

“Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared to me.” This is where Paul talks about the fact that he got a visitation from the Lord. But notice he says it was different from all of the rest. He, Paul, was an unbeliever, just like James was when he got his visitation.

Remember, Paul's is told about in the Book of Acts. He was on his way to Damascus. But you'll remember what Paul was on his way to do. He was going to arrest Christians. Because he was the, he was the quintessential anti-Christian. He really disliked the whole Christian thing, and he even more disliked Christians themselves. Wanted to see that they were arrested and put away, and Paul would have been greatly happy if this whole Christian thing just would have gone away.

And yet, Jesus appeared to him, on his way to Damascus, the appearance of which sent Paul to his knees on the ground, blinded him. But notice that Paul

speaks of this appearance as, he says, I'm like as one untimely born. That's an interesting term. The Greek phrase would literally speak of like a miscarriage. But in this case, Paul is using it to describe how he was abnormal, I suppose, in his spiritual birth. Can you relate?

C.S. Lewis said the same thing about his own birth, spiritual birth. You might know that C.S. Lewis actually came to the Lord later in life and he tells how he was born breach. In other words, he said, I was born kicking and screaming.

C.S. Lewis was an amazingly brilliant man. And he was an atheist for the majority of his life until he began to deal with the facts of Christianity, which he couldn't deny. Those are all written down in his book, *Mere Christianity*, and he came to faith in Jesus Christ, but he didn't want to. He literally didn't want to come to Christ. And he tells about how, I didn't want to, I didn't want to believe. It's abnormally born.

But Paul speaks of his own birth as abnormal. Why? Well, he explains. Verse 9. Look there with me.

“For I am the least of the apostles, (he says,) unworthy even to be called an apostle. (And then he explains why) Because I persecuted the church of God.”

Paul never forgot about the fact that he persecuted believers, that he stood there when Stephen was being stoned to death and said, yes! Finally, one down. However many more to go. Let's get these guys. He never forgot that.

But listen, I want you to be careful here when you read Paul's words, because when he says to you that he is the least and that he is unworthy, Paul is not wallowing in what you and I would call self-pity. Or, Paul never considered himself a second-class citizen in the kingdom of God, even though he persecuted the church, even though he says right here, I was unworthy. I'm unworthy to be a Christian. I'm unworthy to be called an apostle. He's not feeling sorry for himself because in order to do that, he would have to focus on himself.

What he's doing here is he's making these statements to prepare us for what he's about to say, and that's in verse 10. And I want you to get a hold of this statement. He says in verse 10,

“But by the grace of God, I am what I am.”

Guys, I wish that we could all get a hold of what Paul is saying right here. “*by the grace of God, I am what I am.*” Because I believe if we could, it would change us. I believe it would transform how we think about ourselves, how we see ourselves. Because what we're hearing in the apostle Paul is in stark contrast to what we hear every single day in the world in which we live.

Our culture, our society you know that it's just drenched in me, don't you? And I'm not talking about me personally. I mean, self. It's drenched in self. Everything is about, it has been said, we live in the most narcissistic society ever to live upon the earth. I don't know if that's true. I haven't lived in every society that has ever been on the earth.

All I know is we're pretty stinking narcissistic. And what that means is we think about ourselves constantly. It's all about me. And you can tell that it's all about us because we have all these hyphenated self-words that just dominate. People are always talking about their self-image or their self-esteem.

And self-esteem is a huge theme in schools and elsewhere. And it's so interesting. We see somebody with low self-esteem and we think, oh, you need to have, you need to have high self-esteem. And we forget that any kind of self-directed obsession is selfishness, even if it's low self-esteem. Sure, I don't think very highly of myself, but I'm still thinking of myself all the time. Low self-esteem is still thinking about me. It's all about me. It just doesn't happen to be a very good report, but it's still all about me.

Well, we look at that and we go, well, that person needs to have high self-esteem. That's our answer to make them think about good things about themselves all the time. You see, the point is, it's still self-absorption. We're self-absorbed.

Let's just admit it. You guys. Okay. Can we at least be smart enough to say, I live in a society and for the most part, I'm all about this. I am extremely self-absorbed. I think about myself constantly. How I feel, and so forth. How people are feeling about me, and on and on and on.

Listen, when Paul says here in these verses, I'm not even worthy to be an apostle, because I persecuted the church. I'm like a guy who was born weird. And I don't even deserve any of this. He's not wallowing in narcissism. He's saying that to underscore and to highlight the fact that, yeah, I'm not worthy, but I am a believer and I'm not worthy to be an apostle, but I am an apostle. What does that underscore? God's grace. God's grace is what it highlights. And that's

why Paul spoke about his unworthiness so that you could see God's goodness when you see them side by side.

You see, we don't do that. We just talk about ourselves because we want people to see us. Paul talked about this because he wanted people to see Jesus and how good Jesus is. You see, and that's the difference. And it's an important difference to understand.

"...by the grace of God, I am what I am."

The emphasis is not me. The emphasis is His grace. What is God's grace? Definition for you on the screen.

Grace is God's attention and favor toward us that is neither earned nor deserved.

God's grace. It's His attention and His favor toward us that is neither earned nor deserved. That is the definition of God's grace.

You don't deserve it. You didn't earn it, but you got it. Do you know when I'm sharing the gospel with people, you guys, you've heard me say this before. One of the biggest things, one of the biggest objections people have to accepting the gospel message that God loves them and died on the cross for them is they immediately talk about themselves.

We're sitting there saying Jesus loves you. He died on the cross. He rose again from the grave so that you might be saved. Oh, but I don't deserve that. Who does? Find me one person who deserves God's love and attention. None of us deserve it. We're all unworthy. Get over it. Don't let that hang you up. But you know why it hangs us up? Because we're all about me. We're all about us and people will say to me when I tell him Jesus for has forgiven you for everything you've ever done. Oh, but pastor, you don't know what I've done.

See, it reflects right back to self, right again. No! Get your eyes off yourself. I'm telling you that God's promise, is if you confess your sins, He's faithful and just and will forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. That is a promise of God's Word. Oh, but pastor, you don't know.

I know this: I know what He did on the cross. I know that when he was ready to dismiss His Spirit, He said, *"It is finished."* (John 19:30) I know that. And I know that means paid in full. I know that. You see, our own narcissism is one of the biggest barriers to us embracing grace. Grace means you don't deserve what you get, and we don't accept it because we don't deserve it.

I can't take that, because I don't deserve it. That's what grace is! We're missing the point because we've made it all about ourselves rather than understanding, Jesus. It's all about you. It's not about me.

Oh, that takes the pressure off. “You mean I never will deserve his love. I never will be good enough?” Oh, now that's not an excuse to go out and be bad, mind you, but it helps me to understand that it's all about his goodness and grace. That's what Paul's talking about when he says, “*by the grace of God, I am what I am.*”

He's telling you that what I am is a byproduct of God's grace. That's why he ends with the words that we read in the last area of what we're dealing with here this morning. He says,

“*And His grace toward me was not in vain.*” That word, vain, means empty, meaningless. His grace toward me was not meaningless or empty.

“*On the contrary,*” Paul says, look at this, “*I worked harder than any of them,* (speaking of the other apostles) *though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.*”

Did you notice those words, again, “*not in vain.*” God's grace came to me. I am what I am because of God's grace and his grace to me was not in vain.

Now that causes us to ask the question; Is it possible to receive God's grace in vain? Great question, I'm glad you asked. Because I believe it is. I believe that's why Paul said it. I think it's possible to receive God's grace in vain. And what I mean by that is God gives us grace to live. And there's a partnership that we enter into when we receive that grace.

And that partnership element is that God is going to give you everything you need. But you've got to step out in faith. That's your side of the bargain. But on his side, he'll provide you with everything you need for life and godliness, right? Every, all the gifts, all the power, all the strength, you name it, he'll give it to you. But what do you have to do?

Well, you have to get off your duff. And that's what Paul is saying here. Did you notice? He says here, “*I worked harder than any of them.*” That's his part of that cooperation, that participation. He says, I got up and I did it, but it was his grace working through me. Paul is saying, I stepped out in faith. I just started serving the Lord, but His grace met me at that point. And it was His power, His ability and so forth. And it happened because of Him.

But Paul said, I still worked hard. But I worked hard because of God's grace. Right. And for you and I, it almost sounds like, well, wait a minute. Which is it? Did you work harder? Did God's grace work hard? Yes. Yes. Right?

There's the, again, that's that participation. How in the world would somebody receive God's grace in vain? Hey, we can say no. Paul could have said no. He got called, right? I'm sending you as an apostle to the Gentiles. Ah, no. We can do that. And then you've received God's grace in vain. Because you neglected it.

Hey listen, didn't Jesus tell us parables about people who received talents? Which meant money in the sort. In the, case of the parable, of course, it's figurative. But who just went and buried that, what they'd received from the Lord? Doesn't he tell parables about that?

So yeah, you can take what God gives you and you can bury it. But that would be receiving God's grace in vain. Here's the question I would like to ask as we get ready to close.

First of all, number 1, how has the grace of God affected your life?

We've looked at Peter, we've looked at James, and we've looked at Paul. Three individuals, the grace of God made a pretty big impact in their lives. I mean, Peter went from the denier to the apostle to the Jews. James went from an unbeliever to the pastor of the church in Jerusalem. Paul went from the persecutor and hater of Christians to the apostle of the Gentiles. Lover of Jesus Christ. That's pretty powerful, you guys, isn't it?

I mean, we're talking life-changing, powerful, aren't we? Very cool. So, what has God's grace done in your life? How can it be seen in your life? What transformation has happened in your life? These are good questions to ask.

And some of you could stand up right now if you had an opportunity, and you could talk about how God's grace has transformed your lives, you know?

Some of you went from people who were addicted to drugs and alcohol, or pornography, or gambling, or whatever. And God set you free. And God's grace is evident in your life because you've been set free. Some of you can tell about how your marriages were just absolutely healed from being in the garbage can of life. And God picked you up and brought healing and restoration to your relationship.

Others can talk about just, your thoughts, your mind was just a place of sickness and darkness. And God's grace came into you and literally changed the way you think. All kinds of wonderful things.

But the last thing we're going to do is sit back and just say, ah, I don't know. I don't think there's been any change, because that we're not going to do that because that's receiving God's grace in vain. We're going to step out, right? We're going to take whatever he's given us and walk it out.

And then, what the Lord has for you to do. You got saved. Wonderful. Now, what are you doing with the grace of God to empower you to go into this world and shine the light of who you are into the dark place where people of the world are, because they desperately need to see the light of Jesus Christ shining through you.

And that's going to only happen through His grace operating in your life as you step out. And that's where we need to be, right? We need to be thinking about this and saying, Lord, I realize, duh, I don't think you put me on this earth just to work and earn a paycheck and eat so I could buy things and then die and give my stuff to somebody else. I think maybe I'm here because you want me to serve you and to show other people the way that they can know you so they can be saved.

So, let's walk out the grace of God. Let's not receive it in vain.