

# God's Marvelous Grace

by Chuck Smith

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*Chuck Smith's sermon emphasizes God's grace and the importance of turning back to Him for restoration and renewal.*

**Duration:** 27:29

**Scripture:** Genesis 12:7, Exodus 20:3, Exodus 32:8, Deuteronomy 7:1-2, Psalm 1:2-3, Psalm 19:10, Ezekiel 11:19

**Topics:** "Grace"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the downward spiral of the nation of Israel as they turned away from God. Despite God sending prophets to warn them and call them back to Him, the people refused to listen and even persecuted the prophets. The speaker then focuses on Ezekiel chapter 11, where God promises to give the people a new heart and spirit so that they may walk in His ways. The sermon also highlights the current trend in the church to avoid mentioning sin and judgment, instead focusing on creating a seeker-friendly atmosphere.

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## Transcript

This morning we'd like to draw your attention to Ezekiel chapter 11 and beginning with verse 19. As Ezekiel is talking about the wonderful grace of God, God speaking of the captives that were in Babylon and throughout the world said, I will give them one heart and I will put a new spirit within them and I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh and I will give them a heart of flesh that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and do them and they shall be my people and I will be their God. As we look at the history of the nation of Israel, first of all we marvel at all that God had done for them.

He brought them out of their bondage in Egypt. He destroyed the pursuing Egyptian army. He led them through the wilderness and there he provided for them manna day by day and water out of the flinty rock.

He had given them his perfect law, the commandments, the statutes, the judgments. These were the rules for a good life and if they would follow them, God promised that they would live a life of peace, of happiness, and of prosperity. David had declared concerning the law of the Lord, the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.

The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. And the judgments of the Lord, they are true and they are righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold and in keeping of them there is great reward.

Again in Psalm 1, David said, if a person would meditate upon the law of the Lord, that they would be like a tree that's planted by the rivers of living water, bringing forth fruit in their season, his leaf also shall not wither and whatsoever he does will prosper. A good, long, prosperous life. These are the rules that God has given, that we might enjoy a good, long, prosperous life.

He gave to them the land that he had promised to Abraham that he would give to his descendants. He had driven out their enemies from before them, he helped them subdue the land, and then he prospered them abundantly in the land. That's what God had done for them.

In turn, this is how they provoked the Lord. They had turned their backs upon God. They had ceased worshipping him.

They had cast his commandments aside. The very first commandment was, thou shalt have no other gods before me. But they began to worship the gods of the pagans around them.

They began to make little idols of stone and wood which represented their gods. And they had become pagan and forsaken the worship of God. Sex had become one of their chief gods.

Their minds had become absorbed with their sexual passions. Money and possessions had become a god to them. They set their goal to be rich.

They were willing to lie, to cheat, to steal, or do whatever it took to get rich. Power had become a god to them. The desire to control others and then pleasure, one of the major gods, and they began to live solely for pleasure.

They had turned their backs upon the true and the living God. They really wanted nothing to do with him. They did not want to retain the thought of God in their minds.

They wanted to be liberated from the law of God, which they looked upon as restraining them from their pursuit of their other gods. They wanted to sin freely without the feeling of guilt. That's a big hue and cry in our world today.

The psychologists have told us of the problems that can develop when we have a guilt complex. And so the goal of our modern society is to liberate people from any kind of feelings of wrong. And they say that everything is just relative, so that you can do whatever you see to be right, and you don't have to feel guilty for it, because if it's right to you, then it is right to you.

And do it. Don't feel guilty. Because they had turned from God, God endeavored to keep them from destroying themselves with the evil practices that they had taken up.

And so God began to allow them to experience national disasters. They were mild to begin with, but they became gradually more severe. And they would call upon the Lord in the time of their distress.

He would deliver them from the oppression of their enemies, and then they would turn from the Lord, and they would forsake him. He again would allow them to be taken captive, let their enemies defeat them, and again they would call upon the Lord, and he would deliver them. The pattern continued for hundreds of

years.

They're turning away from God and beginning to worship false gods. The resulting national problems, they're turning back to God and being helped and prospered. And in their prosperity, forgetting God, and again beginning to worship the false gods, leading again to national problems, and in their distress, turning back to God and being delivered and blessed.

And this became a pattern that repeated itself over and over again, ad nauseum. But every time they would go down, they would go a little lower. Every time they would try to rise, they wouldn't quite rise to the previous heights, so that the total trend was downward as they were going away from God.

Now God had sent prophets to warn them, and to call them to turn back to God, and told them the consequences of their sins, what it would do to them if they continued in their evil ways. But they did not want to hear the true prophets of God, so they beat them, they imprisoned them, and they actually stoned many of them. They wanted to sin freely without the feelings of guilt, and they sought to stop the prophets from declaring their message.

I see the very same attitude developing in our worlds today. People don't want to hear about sin. They don't want to hear about the judgment of God that is going to come against sin.

They don't want to hear about sin when they go to church. They don't want to hear that nasty four-letter word, hell, or be warned that those that continue in sin will surely spend eternity in hell apart from God. They would rather hear soothing words, the words of the false prophets who speak about a loving God, who would never, never of course, send anybody to a place as horrible as hell.

They want to be able to go on in their sin, and no need to fear the judgment of God that will come against sin. They would rather just hear about, keep smiling, and keep a positive attitude. It's interesting that the major movement in the church today is to develop a seeker-friendly atmosphere, to make no mention of sin, no mention of the judgment of God, and to entertain the people, let them enjoy their experience in church without any feelings of guilt.

As time went on, the nation Judah continued to sink deeper and deeper into their wickedness until the judgment of God finally came. Now it's interesting to me when God brought his final judgment, he did it in segments that were separated by years. In other words, it wasn't just, woof, cut off.

But in 597, 607 BC, the Babylonians came. They conquered the city of Jerusalem, and they took a few captives back to Babylon. Some of the brightest, most promising young men that they might train in the schools in Babylon, that they might become counselors to Nebuchadnezzar.

But life pretty much went on as usual in Jerusalem, and the people continued in their sin. So in 586 BC, the Babylonians came again. And this time, the judgment against Jerusalem was a little harsher.

They had taken more captives from Jerusalem, and in this captivity included in it was Ezekiel the prophet. But again, the people would not turn to God. They continued in their path of evil, and so the Babylonians came back in 586 BC, and they wiped out Jerusalem completely.

They left no one alive. They destroyed the temple. They destroyed the walls.

They burned the city, and it was the end. But God was so gracious. He gave them warnings, warnings before the judgment came.

And I believe that God does give warnings before his great judgment comes. I believe that 9-11 was a warning to the United States, and that we, for a time, heeded the warning. The senate got out on the steps and actually sang, God bless America, and they acknowledged God.

But soon we lapsed back into that sort of careless attitude towards God and the things of God, and I believe that we're going to have another warning. How long will God put up? I don't know. How long will God be easy on us? I don't know.

But if we don't turn, if we don't repent, you can be sure that God's judgment will fall upon America, just as it did on Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel had gone into captivity even earlier. That should have been a warning to Judah, the southern kingdom.

In fact, Jeremiah wrote about it. Jeremiah said, the Lord said to me, have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up into every high mountain and under every green tree, and there has prostituted herself. And after she has done all these things, I called to her and said, turn to me.

But she did not turn. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. Now because backsliding Israel committed adultery, I put her away.

I gave her a bill of divorcement. Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went out and played the harlot also. And it came to pass that through her whoredom, that she has defiled the land and committed adultery by worshiping idols of stone and wood.

In all of this, treacherous Judah has not turned unto me with her whole heart, but only in an outward pretense, saith the Lord. God had offered to save her right up to the last moment. Jeremiah was there in Jerusalem pleading with the people to turn to God, turn from their wickedness.

But they put him in prison, and they threatened to kill him if he spoke any more in the name of God. They had rejected the opportunities that God gave to them to repent. And there was nothing left for God but to bring his judgment upon them.

And thus they were defeated and taken into captivity. Now, as they are suffering, they are taken into captivity. There in verse 16, God said, Although I have cast them off among the heathen, and though I have scattered them among the nations, yet will I be to them a little sanctuary in the countries where they have come.

They have been separated from the temple. They've been taken far from the temple, the sanctuary of God. But God in his grace, God in his love, said, Even there where they are captives, I will become a little sanctuary unto them.

The sanctuary was a place of refuge where people could meet with God. And God said, I'll be a refuge to them, even in their captivity, and they can meet with me there. And so God is promising that he would still meet with them.

And though they deserved all that had happened to them and even much more, still God is promising that he would be there for them and to meet with them. When I was about five years old, living in Ventura,

there was a evangelist that came to our church. His name was Gypsy Smith.

And he sang a song that I can remember snatches of it. I won't guarantee to the total accuracy, but I was young and it impressed my mind, the lyric, the thought. It was, You're a million miles from the gates of peace, but you're one little step from God.

You found it so easy to turn from the path, but it was so hard to get back. But you'll find that his arms of grace have been open wide to your feet as you sadly trod. Though you're a million miles from the gates of peace, you're just one little step from God.

The people have become miles from the temple, but yet God said, I'll be there where they are in captivity. Only one little step. Just turn from your sin.

Turn from the worship of the false gods. Turn to me, God said, and I will be there. I'll be a little sanctuary to them.

But then God in his grace promises that he will bring them back into the land. He told Ezekiel to say to these people, verse 17, thus saith the Lord God, I will even gather you from the people and assemble you out of the countries where you've been scattered. And I will give to you the land of Israel.

There is nothing that they had done to deserve this grace of God, but how gracious was God, the God that we serve. He extends his grace towards us today. Maybe like the children of Judah, you have strayed.

You strayed far from him, but in his love and grace, he is still offering to restore to you that which you lost because of your going away from him. Surely the story of the prodigal son tells us of the willingness of the father to receive again the son and to restore his inheritance. God then promised in verse 19, I will give them one heart.

I will put a new spirit within you and I will take away the stony heart and I will give a heart of flesh. Giving them a one heart speaks of a undivided heart. One of the major problems that we have today is a divided heart.

Yes, we have a passion towards God, but we also have a passion towards many other things. And too often, these other things exceed our passion for God. The first commandment was thou shalt have no other gods before me.

And yet that's the problem with so many people. They've allowed other things to supersede their commitment and their love for the Lord. That's what happened to Judah.

And as a result, ultimately, Judah lost the inheritance that God had given unto them. David prayed, unite my heart to fear thy name. He recognized that there was a danger of having a divided heart.

Lord, may I have a united heart, not divided, but a united heart to fear thy name. Jesus said, you can't really serve two masters. You cannot serve God and Mammon.

God promised that he would put then a new spirit in them. Jesus said, if you're not born again of the spirit, you will never enter into the kingdom of heaven. The Lord is promising to put a new spirit in them, to take away the heart of stone, now you've heard of people and it is said of them, oh, they are so hard hearted.

What did they say? Well, they are unfeeling. They are unmoved. They are just uncaring.

They have a hardened heart. But God said, I'll take away that hard heart. I'll put within you a heart of flesh, a heart that can be open to God, open to the things of God, the new spirit, the new heart.

Oh, how we desperately need that. And then in verse 20, the Lord said that they may walk in my statutes. You see, with the spirit alive, we can now walk in the statutes of the Lord with a heart that is soft and open to him.

We now walk in the statutes of the Lord. We keep his ordinances. We do them.

And God said, they will be my people and I will be their God. One little step, turning away from the path that you have taken that has led you away from God and turning back one little step, you'll find that God is there to meet you. God is there to forgive you.

God is there to receive you, to pardon and to cleanse and to restore to you that wonderful inheritance that he has promised to each of us in and through Jesus Christ. I would encourage you to take that step today. Father, we thank you that you are there.

You are there to meet us in whatever condition we might find ourselves in bondage, in slavery, to the habits and to sin, to those things that we've allowed in our lives, those things that we have begun to worship that have taken us as captive. Lord, you're there to set us free. You're there to cleanse us, to pardon, to forgive us, to forgive us.

And so, Lord, even as your Holy Spirit is now speaking to our hearts, may we indeed turn, turn toward you, take that step and be renewed and restored in our relationship. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Shall we stand? The pastors are down here at the front. They're here to minister to you today. You that would like to take that little step back, looking at your life, looking at what's happened, seeing how that you've been taken captive by the habits and the things that you've opened the door to, and how you find yourself in bondage and slavery to the things of the flesh.

Your heart has become hardened towards God and the things of God. But today the Spirit of God's been speaking to you, and you know it's time for you to get right with God. These men are down here to pray with you and to help you to take that step and to go from this place in the richness of fellowship with him.

The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make his face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace.

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