

# Grace

by Richard E. Bieber

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*The sermon emphasizes the power and presence of God's grace in our lives, and encourages us to welcome its call and respond to the needs of others.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 24:9, Luke 16:19, Luke 19:1, John 9:25, Ephesians 2:8

**Topics:** "Gods Grace", "Redemption"

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## Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches on the transformative power of God's amazing grace, using the story of John Newton, the author of 'Amazing Grace,' as an example. He emphasizes how Grace reaches out to the broken, the forgotten, and the oppressed, offering redemption and new beginnings. Bieber challenges the congregation to recognize Grace in unexpected places and to respond with compassion and action, drawing from biblical parables like the rich man and Lazarus, and Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus. He reminds believers that Grace is present for all, calling each person to welcome it, let their light shine, and extend grace to others, ultimately leading them safely to the Banquet Table of the King.

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## Transcript

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound

That saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost, but now am found,

Was blind, but now I see.

The man who wrote those words had blood on his hands, as the captain of a slave ship---until he had an encounter with Grace. Until he found himself in the presence of God.

When Grace came to John Newton, he could have pulled up his collar and turned away, as many do. But Newton fell to his knees in shame. And the Lord Jesus lifted him up, touched him with forgiveness, gave him a new start.

Grace. We see it when the tax collector in our Lord's parable cries out in the pain of his soul, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" and goes down to his house in peace. Or the woman who comes quietly into Simon the Pharisee's dining room and starts washing Jesus' feet with her tears. She leaves that place in peace. Or the thief on the cross, "Jesus: remember me when you come into your kingdom."

"Today you'll be with me in Paradise."

Grace. It has come to many of us.

But what about the men and women on John Newton's slave ship with no one to speak for them? Beaten, violated, dying of thirst. Where was Grace for them?

Or the men, women and little children we see night after night on the news, their homes bombed to bits, stumbling down the road, goaded by the police, and herded into some camp behind barbed wire. The world is full of living souls, pushed aside and trampled on, with no one to help them. Where is Grace for them?

Has God forgotten these people? The God who watches over the sparrows and the lilies of the field, where is he for the woman whose husband was killed by some dictator's goons, and now she has five little ones to look after, and no place to go?

They're dying out there by the thousands, while the movers and shakers of this world are becoming harder and meaner by the day.

It doesn't make any sense, as long as we think in terms of this life only---as long as we believe that this life is all there is, that once you're dead your dead. If that's how it is, forget about Grace and get out there and claw your way to the top. Or build a wall around your life and let the tyrants out there keep tramping on the helpless ones.

But our Lord tells us that Grace has not forsaken the ones we have forsaken. Grace has not forgotten the men and women on those slave ships, or those orphan children wandering around in the streets of a bombed-out city.

"There was a rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.

And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, full of sores,

who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom."

As long as he was in this world, Lazarus was abandoned by all but the dogs who licked his sores. It would seem that even God's Grace had forgotten him. But no, Grace was right there, waiting to carry him to Paradise the instant he left this world.

But wait a minute! How can that be? Wasn't Lazarus a sinner like the rest of us? How come there is no mention that Lazarus repented of his sins? The only thing he could offer God was his suffering. Yet, off he goes, straight to Paradise.

Of course, if you are among those who are convinced that this life is all there is, that once you're dead, you're dead, this parable of our Lord makes no sense. But if you're willing to take Jesus' word for it, he's giving us a glimpse of Grace which we often miss:

When Jesus died on the cross, he joined his suffering to all the suffering ones nobody cares about. His shed blood wraps itself around the forgotten ones with unspeakable power.

They were the last in this world. But they are the first in Paradise.

They were mistreated in this world. But they are honored in Paradise.

And ...if we are followers of Jesus, we may soon be among those oppressed souls. It will happen when it happens. But for many followers of Jesus a time of severe trial is coming.

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake."

Matthew 24

Rejection is promised to us, in one form or another, if we are serious about following the Master. Yet, even as we suffer, we are also promised, that we will be sustained by God's Grace in the midst of our suffering.

And those suffering ones out there, who never heard a kind word, even from the so-called Christians---Grace is waiting to do for them what it did for Lazarus. This is Jesus' promise in this parable.

So if Grace extends to Lazarus, and millions like him, if Grace sustains the persecuted ones, where do we fit? We haven't suffered like they have, but aren't we also sustained by Grace here in this place right now?

Absolutely! Grace is as close to us at this moment as it is to Lazarus in Paradise. Grace is in our midst. The Spirit of the Lord Jesus visits us afresh as we open our hearts to him today in this place. But Grace also has a message for us which we must never forget.

"The rich man also died and was buried;

and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom.

And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame.'

The Rich Man was a man of faith. He called Abraham his father because the God of Abraham had already touched his life. So why is he in such misery? Did God's Grace fail this man? No, God's grace did not fail him. Here's how Father Abraham explains it.

But Abraham said, "Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.

And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us."

And he said, "Then I beg you, Father, to send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment."

But Abraham said, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.'

And he said, 'No, Father Abraham; but if some one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

He said to him, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead."

Luke 16

The Rich Man knows exactly why he is where he is. He understands why he is now the beggar. The problem is, Lazarus cannot help him. It's too late. The gulf between Paradise and Hades is too wide. Lazarus cannot even help his brothers who are still alive on the earth. But Grace is right there for those brothers, waiting for them to wake up.

Amazing Grace. It's here for us all---but, when it calls our name, we need to welcome it.

No matter whether we've been believers for years and years, or whether we just found faith yesterday---or maybe we're not sure what we believe---Grace has a way of calling our name at an unexpected moment. And when Grace calls our name, it's time to wake up.

Well, did Grace call the Rich Man by name? Absolutely! The Rich Man was in a hurry to get to the synagogue. Isn't that where you find grace? Synagogue? Church? But Grace was not waiting for him at the synagogue. Grace was lying at his gate. Grace was calling out to him through Lazarus. This was the final call of Grace for the Rich Man. All he had to do was stop for a moment and see if he could do a little something for this suffering soul. Grace was calling out to him, but the Rich Man wasn't paying attention.

And sometimes we aren't paying attention.

"But Lord, I didn't know it was Lazarus. I thought she was just another bag lady."

"Wait a minute, Lord. That wasn't Lazarus, that was my lazy cousin, Joe."

"You mean to tell me that that gossipy old woman, who lives next-door and forever wants to bang my ear, is Lazarus?"

Just as Grace was calling out to the Rich Man, it calls out to us in simple, clear ways. We could be looking out the window at the dark clouds and the rain, when quietly, Grace steps up beside us and calls our name---puts a thought in our mind that we know is a word from heaven. All we have to do is open our heart. For whenever it receives a welcome Grace sits down at our table and eats with us, blesses us.

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector, and rich.

Zacchaeus too is a Rich Man. He's on his way home from the office thinking about the wonderful dinner waiting for him. He looks back sees a crowd coming up the road. "What's going on?" he says. "Why, Jesus of Nazareth is coming through town on his way to Jerusalem."

He sought to see who Jesus was, but could not, on account of the crowd, because he was small of stature.

So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way.

And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today."

So he made haste and came down, and received him joyfully.

And when they saw it they all murmured, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."

And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I now give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I will restore it fourfold."

And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.

For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost."

Jesus didn't preach to Zacchaeus. He didn't tell him what a sinner he was. He just sat there eating with this man and his family. But Grace filled that room. Grace flooded that mans soul.

"Behold, Lord, half my goods I now give to the poor. And if I've defrauded anyone of anything, I will restore it fourfold."

I once was lost, but now am found,

Was blind, but now I see.

When Grace calls us by name, all we have to do is welcome it. It will sit at our table too. It will fill us too, with the joy of heaven. It will give us strength to let our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven.

So....

Grace is here for the penitent soul, John Newton.

Grace is here for the suffering soul: Lazarus.

Grace is here for the hard-nosed Rich Man and Zacchaeus.

Grace is here for each of us.

Grace is in our midst right now in the Spirit of our Lord, calling us each by name to come down out of our sycamore tree, receive him joyfully and bring him home with us.

He will give us all the power we need to take that next step of faith, to clear away the clutter and let our light shine.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come,

tis grace has brought me safe thus far,

and grace will lead me home.

God's grace will take us safely to the end of our journey and land us at the Banquet Table of the King. All we have to do is keep opening our hearts.

First to God,

Then to each other,

Then to Lazarus whom God keeps sending across our path.

was blind, but now I see.

Lord, give us the wisdom to know what to do with what we now see!

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/richard-e-bieber/grace/>

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