

**THE
BON AIR
PULPIT**

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Scripture: **John 1:17, 3:17**

Sermon: ***Take Grace Freely***

All of us who walk with the Lord have special moments of grace. They are moments when what we have heard all of our lives suddenly become very special to us or very real to us. That experience, one of those experiences happened to me about six months ago and became the basis of what I wanted to talk to you about this morning. A couple of scriptures out of that experience became more real to me, that I wanted to call your attention to this morning. They are found in the book of John 1:17. It says this “for the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” The law through Moses but grace and truth through Jesus Christ. Then in John 3:17, all of you can quote from memory verse sixteen, but to often we don’t continue to read on. Let me begin reading at verse seventeen. “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world.” Let me take just a moment. When God sent the law through Moses, it said that broken laws have consequences. When we disobey Him, there are things that then we have to endure. This passage of scripture said that when Jesus came, He did not come to let all the consequences of our sins come to pass. When he came, He came that the world might be saved. All that we have learned through Moses, that is that sin must be punished, you would think, that when Jesus had come, that that is exactly what He would do. Instead, He took an exact opposite approach and He said that He came that the world might

be saved. “Whosoever believes in Him, is not condemned but whosoever does not believe stands condemned already because, he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. This is the verdict. Light has come into the world but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come to the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.” One of American’s greatest Christian writers is Philip. He has written a wonderful book entitled *Whatever Happened to Grace*. The thesis of the book is simply that grace is the most essential component of the Christian faith and therefore it ought to be the most consistent pronouncement of the church. It was built on a story he heard about a lady who came in off of the streets in Chicago. She not only was homeless but she made her living off of the street. The kind of life she lived could not even be described in a room like this. One of the ladies in the Goodwill Center, who was trying to help her, was giving her food and taking care of other needs. In the course of conversation, asked her a question. She said “have you ever thought about going to church?” The lady said “church, oh no, I feel bad enough about myself already. If I went to church, they would make me feel worse.” Dr. Yancey said that when Jesus was alive, people like this woman, were comfortable around Jesus. In fact, as you know, one of the reasons that people who were good people, didn’t like Jesus, was because that people who broke all of the rules and ran away from God seemed to feel comfortable about Him. You recall that one of the worse things they said about Him, He is a friend of all of those sinners. Dr. Yancey asked, what has happened that when Jesus came people who broke all of the rules felt comfortable around Him and now those of us who are trying to carry His name, people don’t want to be around us because we make them feel worse. What Jesus came to bring was a sense that whatever you have done, and wherever you are in running from God, there is a God who loves you

and cares for you and a God who stands ready with open arms to receive you. What He said was we need to come back to the open arms of the gospel where people feel comfortable as they have turned away from Him. I wanted to take a moment this morning to help us to dust some of the cobwebs off of this most essential word perhaps in the New Testament. It is the word grace. I have understood grace better when I have put it by another truth. That truth is one of the great truths of the Bible and it is called justice. Justice means that every person that has been created, is a person of infinite worth. Justice means that that person is made in the image of God. Because a person is of such worth, they are to be treated fairly and they are to be treated with dignity. One of the challenges that Christians has always had is that we would be able to elevate people and we would treat them with justice. Now because we live in societies, these people of infinite worth, and what we have done is create a body of laws that will say this will help to insure that every body is treated fairly and with justice. When people don’t do that, they are brought to what we call the bar of justice. What the bar of justice simply says is we will make it so difficult for you that you will learn that it is not worth your time to treat people wrongly. Part of that is the recognition is that every person is to be treated with justice. Now notice grace. You understand grace if you realize that grace is saying we are not going to give you what you deserve, and that is, that we will bring the consequences of the law to you. We are going to give you something else. Instead of consequences, we are going to give you kindness. Instead of giving you the full brunt of all the justice, we are going to come to you and say maybe we will see you not as you are, but what you could be. Instead of justice, we will give you mercy and kindness. There is an old story that comes out of the law about a man who had just been convicted of his crimes and he turned to the judge and the judge said, “Do you have anything you would like to say?” He said “Yes, I would like

to throw myself on the mercy of the court and the court has always had mercy.” The judge looked at him and said “Sir, you do not deserve mercy.” The man said “Sir, if I deserve mercy, I would not have to ask for it.” Grace is giving you what you don’t deserve. Grace is turning and saying, “I am going to do far more than the ordinary. I am going to do far more than the expected, I am going to throw grace on you.” Every person who has a friend, has experienced grace. Every person who has ever done anything wrong, has experienced grace. Everybody who has ever understood God, has experienced grace. We understand that if God gave us what we deserve, none of us could plow through the snow this morning, because none of us would be here. What we have received from His gracious hand is not what we deserve. He has given us grace indeed. The story that never uses the word grace but describes it, is the story that all of us know. It is about a young boy who ran away from his daddy. He broke his family, he broke the laws of culture, he broke the laws of God. One day he ended up in a pig pen. He started off the story by the young man saying, “Daddy, give me.” The story ends by the young man saying to his daddy, “Forgive me.” He comes back ,and listen to the words of the boy. “I am not worthy.” Then you enter into a whole new area. An area of grace. You remember the boy said, “Maybe I could just be one of your servants. That would be more than I deserve.” The daddy said, “Servant, kill the fatted calf, bring the best robe, bring the ring, lets throw a party.” God just over threw him with wonderful, wonderful, grace. Psalms 103:10 said it this way. “Oh Lord, if you marked iniquity, who would stand. You have not treated us according to our sins, you have treated us according to your mercy.” Who of us could be here today if we really saw the

book where God wrote down everything you have ever done and it was all before us today. The reason we are here is because He has not treated us according to justice but according to mercy. You must understand in my analogy that justice has to come before grace. That is the reason I read for you the passage of scripture, the law came through Moses before grace could ever come through Jesus. I wanted to ask you, why is that so? The reason of course is you never understand grace unless you understand justice. Justice tells you what you should have had, grace tells you what you had instead. If you don't know you are a sinner, how can you ever appreciate forgiveness. If you never know you did wrong, how can you ever experience that somebody said, I will give you a second chance. If you never know what you should have got, how can you ever appreciate what you really had. Once you understand that the law, then you can appreciate how deep it is, that God reached down and gave you His mercy. We sang the song awhile ago, it is the most famous song in Christian history. If you take a survey in any country around the world, which has been done, and ask them what is your favorite hymn, in every country of the world, the favorite Christian hymn, after all of these years, is still Amazing Grace. Most of you know the story. John Newton was a man who made his living selling human bodies. He was a slave dealer. He used to leave England, go down and pick up bodies, put them down in the hull. It is now estimated that fifty per cent of those men would have been dead by the time they got back to England. He used to recognize that there is no need of going down picking up bodies with an empty boat. What he would do is bring rum and liquor and he would sell that to the natives and he would get them drunk. They would put them on the boat and sell them. That was John Newton. One day some one gave him a New Testament. John Newton began to

understand the story of Jesus Christ. When you all allowed us to go on our sabbatical, one day we left where we were staying and went to a little town called Olney in England. The reason we went to Olney is because there is a cathedral there which was built in the 1500's. When you go in, if you think the three pictures on the back here are too much, how would you like to go in and they have the pastor in the 1500's and all the way down to the present pastor. The reason that they kept that there is because when you go in, you are really not interested who the present pastor is, it is because in the middle of it, it says pastor, John Newton. The parsonage is still used. It is a two story and they take you up to the second story and they take you into a room and they said in that room John Newton began to think about what God had done in his life. Listen to the word again. Amazing grace how sweet the sound that save a wretch like me. Do you understand there is a no justice until you understand what you should have gotten, you will never understand what God gave you. Grace is always hard to give. It is easy when somebody does you wrong to get mad at them. That is the easy thing to do. It is hard when they do something wrong to say, "Let's see if we can't work this out." It is easy to want to run away from God when you want to do what is wrong. It is hard to turn around and come back. Grace is always hard. When God reaches down and says that He is willing to receive us, it is the hardest thing God ever did. If you think grace is cheap, let me tell you how much it cost. It cost the death of Christ on cross. He turns to you and says in spite of all of what you have done, I will do the hard thing, I will pay the big price. I will turn to you and offer you grace. Years ago there was a man who was invited to go to the Moody Memorial Church in Chicago. They asked him to speak four nights and every night he spoke on the phrase, God is love. For those of you who have never been to Moody Memorial Church in Chicago, if you go by the windy, foggy, city, there is a little phrase outside of the door. A neon sign

that says, God is love. What it says to everybody who passes by is I want you to know that if you want to know the essential message of what Christianity is about. This is it. God is love and His grace is reaching out to you. If you and I could ever understand that, you and I would be much deeper and better than we are. When you understand that, you really understand the motivation of what Christianity is all about. You didn't get up and come this morning because you felt you had to. You came this morning because you felt you wanted to. What drove you is the recognition of what God has done in your life and you recognize it has been what you have not deserved but it is what He has given to you. I love the little story of the rich boy who had a very unique illness. His mother and daddy searched all over the Internet and found the most famous surgeon in the world and flew him to America where this famed surgeon could operate on the son. As most things to this day, it made the internet and a poor woman in Chicago learned that this famous doctor was coming to take care of the rich boy. She had been told by the doctor her son had the same disease, the same need of surgery. She had no money. She contacted the rich family and the famous doctor and said "Is there any way you can come to Chicago and take care of my son." The gracious surgeon said he would. He performed the surgery on the rich boy and flew to Chicago and took care of all the needs of the hospital and performed the delicate surgery on this poor boy. Before the man flew back over seas, he went by to see the rich boy, told his family everything is fine. The young boy said "Thanks doc." He flew over to Chicago and went to see the poor boy. He said you are okay too. The poor boy did like this, [motioned to him to come over to him] and the doctor bent over and the poor boy said "Doc, thank you." You know I am never going to stop telling people what you have done for me." You see sometimes the little rich boy may have thought, he could buy it. The poor boy knew it was all of

grace. The reason you and I keep going in our Christian life is the recognition of what He has done for us and we are never going to stop telling others that they are there. Let me close by telling you the dark side of grace. It said Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world. Jesus did not come into the world to let all the consequences of sin flow over you. He came into the world to save you. He came to offer you grace. Listen to what He says. "He that does not believe, is condemned already." This is the back side of grace. God said, I am tried to tell you through the prophets, I tried to tell you through everything I have done, but I wanted to use the best means I could use. I wanted to send my Son and I wanted to tell you that He laid aside all of the glories he had with Me and He came to the earth and He became a little boy. He went through everything that people go through until finally they turned their back on Him and put Him on a cross and killed Him. The whole story of what Christianity is about is that I came to offer you grace. If you turn away from grace, there is nothing else to tell you. If that does not melt your heart, if that does not break your spirit, if that does not make you want to surrender your will to Him, there is no other message from heaven. Ultimately, what you do is when you sin finally, you do not break God's law, you ultimately break God's heart. If you will not receive it, then there is no other answer to be given. I wish that in my life and in yours, that people who turn away would feel comfortable as they did with Jesus for they would recognize that the message we can offer them is grace. There is a message of a second chance. There is a message of a father who still loves you, there is a message of something not of what you are, but what you could be and they would feel comfortable in wanting to come to Jesus and want to come to His church. It maybe this morning you

came out in the snow and God has spoken to you in the message of grace. You say I want to do something for Him. I want to do something, not because I have to or feel like I ought to. I just want to. I want to give my heart and my life to Christ.