

“The Grace To Come To Jesus”

Let me ask you a question. It has to do with two fictional stories. One is the Tolkien classic, *The Lord of the Rings*, and the other is the popular late 1990s television series *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. Here's the question: What does Frodo Baggins have in common with Buffy Summers? In both stories, everyday people discover they have been chosen to be a part of something bigger than themselves. It isn't an easy thing, but it is powerful, meaningful, truly awesome. Here's the thing, when you come to faith in Jesus Christ, part of what you discover is that you also have been chosen. It isn't a fictional story. It is spiritual reality. It explains a lot. It changes everything, and Jesus makes it clear here in **John 6**. If you hear it and believe it, you will find it inspires a profound and humble thankfulness, and it helps you to follow Jesus.

Last week we saw that **John 6** is a turning point in the ministry of Jesus. It is when he declared himself to be the bread of life, who not only gives eternal life but satisfies the hungry heart. It was at this point many people, who had been following Jesus because of what he was doing for them, turned away. It is in this setting, as the disciples watch some people still believing and others turning away, that Jesus gives a word of explanation. The point he so clearly makes is this: ***No one truly comes to Jesus unless God the Father, draws them to Jesus. We need to accept that and be thankful for it.*** Now, **John 6** is a long chapter, and it records a very free-ranging dialogue Jesus has with the crowd. So, we have to tease out the main points he is making.

The first thing that stands out in the story is that...

I. THERE IS, IN THE HUMAN HEART, A DEEP-SEATED RESISTANCE TO TRUE FAITH IN JESUS.

Look at **verses 35-36**, *Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. There's a common saying, seeing is believing. Or I'll believe it when I see it.* It's actually important to understand that there were people who saw Jesus, heard him, watched him in action, and witnessed his miracles yet did *not* believe. Jesus himself addresses this here in **John 6**. There is a deep resistance to faith.

A. Bible Scholars and Theologians sometimes call this the doctrine of Total Depravity or Radical Depravity or Total Inability.

It does not mean everyone is as bad as they possibly could be but that the totality of our humanity is affected by a deep-seated animosity to God. ¹ We are given insight into this in **John 3:19-20**. It says: *And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.* ²⁰ *For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.* It says that the reason no one can come to Jesus unless they are drawn to Him is that no one *will* come to Jesus unless and until this resistance is overcome.

B. It is important to remember this whenever we worry about the issue of free will when it comes to saving grace.

In a helpful book titled *Chosen by God*, R. C. Sproul wrote that one definition of free will is the ability to choose what we want.² He goes on to point out that left to ourselves in our sinful self-reliant rebellion against God, even given a thousand opportunities human beings do not come to Christ unless God draws them to want and desire him.

The issue can be illustrated like this: If I placed in front of you two choices for lunch today. On your left hand, your favorite piece of steak or cake. On your right hand, a bowl of rat brains over rancid, molded, maggot filled broccoli stalks. And I said choose your lunch, you have free will, what would you choose? Well, you would choose the steak or cake. Suppose I give you a second choice, a third choice. You might say, Hey, you can give me a thousand choices, but I'm never going to choose the rat brains and the rancid, moldy, maggot filled broccoli stalks! It's not that I don't have free will. It's that I can not want that or desire it so I will not choose it. Give me a thousand chances, opportunities, and I will always choose the cake.

When Scripture says, as it does in **Romans** that the natural mind is hostile to God. It is saying the natural sinful mind does not *want* God on God's terms. We don't want to admit that we are sinners and we need to be saved. We don't want to acknowledge Christ as our Lord and submit to his authority. That's why although they should have worshipped Jesus and believed in him instead they grumbled and left him. The first truth that comes out in this passage is that *There is, in the human heart, a deep-seated resistance to true faith in Jesus.*

So the second and central truth in this passage is that...

II. NO ONE CAN COME TO CHRIST UNLESS THEY ARE DRAWN TO CHRIST BY GOD, THE FATHER.

Let's pick it back up in **verse 37**, *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.* ³⁸ *For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.* ³⁹ *And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.*

A. There are people who have been given to Jesus by God.

Ephesians 1:3-5 In a context of heartfelt thanksgiving Paul writes. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,* ⁴ *even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love* ⁵ *he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.* God gives people to Jesus.

B. The people given to Jesus are also drawn to him.

Jesus makes this point twice in **John 6. Verse 44**: *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.* **Verse 65**: *And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."* The words "no one can come" in **verses 44**, and **65** allow for no exceptions except the one exception that God the Father draws them to him.

The little word *"can"* is important. No one *"can"* come. I imagine just about every one of us had a parent or a teacher who, took it upon themselves to teach us the difference between *may* and *can*. I had a teacher who always made this clear. If I raised my hand and asked, "Can I get a drink of water, please?" She would say: *"Larry, I'm sure you can go get a drink of water. You are physically able to drink, I'm sure. Would you perhaps like to know if you may go get a drink of water?"* The distinction she was making was right. The word *"can"* has to do with what you are able to do. The word *"may"* has to do with what you have permission to do. Jesus is not saying no one has permission to come to me. He is saying that no one is *able* to come to me unless the Father draws and enables him. Faced with choosing something

totally unappealing to you the issue is not that you need permission. It's just that you are not able to bring yourself to want it.

There are people given to Jesus. They are drawn to him and it follows

C. Everyone who is given to Jesus and is therefore drawn to Jesus will come to Jesus and be saved

In **verse 44**, Jesus says: *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.* That little word draws is also an important little word. It doesn't mean to simply entice, or encourage a person in a certain direction. It means to actually draw or pull them there.

This same Greek word is used in **James 2**, where James talks about rich people abusing Christians. He says: Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? That word "dragging" is the same word translated "draws" in **John 6:44**! The same word appears in **Acts 16**. In that passage certain men seized Paul and Silas and *dragged* them into the marketplace to face the authorities. The point is that this word means much more than to be invited! It means you do not come to Christ unless God irresistibly and effectively draws you to Christ!

We may not even be aware of the way God is at work in and on us. But God's grace is at work in us. In **Acts 16:14** we're told about a woman named Lydia who came to believe in Jesus. Listen to how her story is told. It says, *One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.*

This is not saying only some who believe in Jesus are chosen and drawn to him it is saying everyone who comes to Christ and believes in him has been given to him and drawn to him. I once had a lady tell me a strange, sad story about a Bible Study she attended. She said pretty much every week at the end of the Bible Study, one older man would pray the same basic prayer with a sort of despairing passion. He would say something to the effect of: "*O, Lord, I believe Jesus died and rose again for my salvation. I have received Jesus as my Savior, so please, Lord, let me be one of your chosen people.*" That's a sad example of one way you can misunderstand what the Bible teaches. Jesus is not saying that it is possible to come to him and trust in him and end up not being chosen. He is saying if you come to him, it is because you have been enabled to come to him, and you have been drawn to him by the Father.

You know, in the John Newton hymn *Amazing Grace*, he put this in the

lyrics. We sing, *Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved.* It's grace all the way through and all the way down. There was another accomplished and popular hymn writer in the 18th and 19th century named Josiah Condor. He wrote a hymn titled: *Lord 'tis not that I did choose Thee.* The lyrics include these lines.

Lord, 'tis not that I did choose Thee;
For, Lord, that could not be;
This heart would still refuse Thee,
But Thou hast chosen me;

Twas sov'reign mercy called me,
And taught my op'ning mind;
The world had else enthralled me,
To heav'nly glories blind;

My heart owns none before Thee,
For Thy rich grace I thirst;
This knowing, if I love Thee,
Thou must have loved me first.

The human heart has a deep-seated resistance to faith in Jesus. No one can come to Christ unless drawn to Christ by God, the Father.

III. THIS TRUTH, THAT GOD'S GRACE DRAWS US TO JESUS, HAS POWER TO BOTH HUMBLE US AND ENCOURAGE US.

A. It is humbling because there are aspects of this teaching that are hard to fathom.

1. We should not be surprised at the mysteries intertwined in any discussion of our part and God's part in bringing us to faith in Christ. Romans 11:33 says: *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!* If the God revealed in the Bible exists and what the Bible teaches about him is true, then you would expect that you would find some things that transcend your understanding. God wants you to trust him with what you do not fully understand and believe everything he has revealed to you even when it stretches you.

2. There are some things the Bible never argues. It simply declares! Two truths simply declared in the word of God are: The fact

that God chose men and women before the creation of the world and the fact that men and women choose God, with true freedom, liberty, responsibility, accountability. The Bible teaches both truths.

Acts 2:23 says: *This man (Jesus) was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; (God's choice) and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross (man's choice).* Some people call this a paradox or a mystery. It is not a real contradiction but the appearance of incompatibility between two truths. Sometimes a pair of truths stand side by side, seemingly irreconcilable yet but undeniable. *The way that God's choice and your choice work together is a mystery the Bible declares but never dispels.*

3. God is love. God loves the world and everyone in it. As **Psalm 145** says, *God is loving toward all he has made.* The problem is in spite of His love and his sincere offer of Himself to everyone; no one wants him! No one chooses him. So what the Bible tells us is not that God's love is less than we had imagined, but God's love is greater than we had dreamed. He refuses to lose everyone. He goes after some on whom he sets his heart, and he pursues us, and draws us and call us and reveals Christ in and to us in such a way that we begin to see, and freely come and believe in Jesus.

The Bible never fully answers all the questions as to why God doesn't do this for everyone or how God works in such a way that he does not violate something essential to our human nature and personal responsibility. In many ways, it leaves us with some mysteries, and that's the way it needs to be.

Years ago, there was a sixteen-year-old girl in our church who had grown up thinking that if God choose her, she wouldn't have to do anything at all. She would just end up a Christian somehow. In a teaching once I suggested you can visualize core elements in the Bible's teaching about all of this as a triangle. On one side is God's sovereignty, on the opposite side is human responsibility, and across the base is mystery. If you neglect any one of those three key elements, you lose the balance that is found in the Scripture. She came and told me that when she heard that she realized that God's sovereignty was in his hands, how God's sovereignty worked out in her life was a mystery to her, but her responsibility to God was clear: She needed to come to Christ and trust in him as her Savior, and she did.

You need to come to Christ and trust in him. If you haven't come to him and placed your faith in him as the one who died to pay for your sins and rose to be your Lord, come to him. What you will discover in the end, if you trust in Jesus, is that it is God who has drawn you to Jesus.

B. As humbling as this all is, there is also something profoundly encouraging about it.

Look at **verses 38-40**. Notice how often it speaks about the Father's will. Jesus says: *For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*” The emphasis is not on your will but God's will!

All who come to Christ will be kept, will persevere, will be raised up because that is the will of God. God chose you, knowing all about you, your deepest secrets, faults, and failures. He knew you before he drew you to Christ. He will not lose you.

Sometimes when we are walking with little children, they reach up and grab our hands -- sometimes they will just loosely grab a few fingers and hold on for a sense of security and comfort, but when we come to a busy intersection or have to walk across a busy parking lot we don't let them hold on to us. We know that little children sometimes let go - they get excited or distracted, and they let go, so we switch over to our hand. We do the holding, and we hold them gently but firmly, and we don't let go until they are safe.

What Jesus tells us here is that from the very beginning, before we even knew, it was God who reached down and took us by the hand. Having done so, he will never let go. Your salvation does not and never did depend on your grasp of God but on God's grasp of you. Let that be part of your Thanksgiving this week.

Conclusion

The grace for which we give thanks, is not only the gift of Christ Himself but this other gift of grace: The eyes to see and appreciate the beauty and truth in Christ, the opened heart to respond to the call of Christ, the drawing of the Father that brings us to our Savior.

Amen

Prayer of Response

Gracious Father, We thank you that by your Spirit, you awaken in you open our hearts to receive the life-giving words of the Holy Spirit. You draw us mysteriously and so graciously to come to Jesus and receive life. We come to him. We believe in him. We choose to receive and rest on him as our Savior. Our only hope in life and in death is the gospel – that Christ died to fully pay for our sins and rose to triumph over Satan, sin, and death. Enlighten our understanding, deepen in us a sweet and strong humility, and grant that we might truly live in thankful praise for your amazing grace and goodness. Amen.

¹ This doctrine of Total Inability, which declares that men are dead in sin, does not mean that all men are equally bad, not that any man is as bad as he could be, nor that anyone is entirely destitute of virtue, nor that human nature is evil in itself, nor that man's spirit is inactive, and much less does it mean that his body is dead. What it does mean is that since the fall man rests under the curse of sin, that he is actuated by wrong principles, and that he is wholly unable to love God or to do anything meriting salvation. -- Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine Of Predestination*. p. 61 (See Romans 1:28, Ephesians 4:17-19, 1 Corinthians 2:14, Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 8:6-8)

² Sproul, R.C. *Chosen By God*, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Wheaton Illinois, 1988. p. 54