

# God's Great Grace

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Preacher: Ian Naismith

[ 0 : 00 ] Good evening everyone, really good to see everyone here tonight. As we come towards the end of our studies in 1 Samuel, we've been going quite a long time in the book, and I think gained an awful lot from it. Three more to go, and tonight it's chapter 29.

I want to start with some history. History can be quite educational for us, and I want to start with a war that I think has been largely forgotten, the Spanish Civil War. I was trying to think what I could remember offhand about the Spanish Civil War.

And I came up with just three facts. One was it was in the 1930s. The second was that it brought General Franco into power. And the third was that George Orwell and Ernest Hemingway were both involved in it and wrote about it.

Now maybe you can do better than that, but that was the sum total of my knowledge of the Spanish Civil War before I researched it. Actually, it was a long and very difficult conflict between the Republicans, who were the government of Spain, and the nationalists, who ultimately were led by General Franco, who were the revolutionaries.

The nationalists were supported by the Soviet Union, sorry, the Republicans were supported by the Soviet Union, and the nationalists, the insurgents, were supported by Italy and Germany, and probably some tacit support from other Western countries.

[ 1 : 21 ] Over 200,000 people were killed and fighting, and another 200,000 were slaughtered. That wasn't why I was talking about the war. There's one reason I was talking about the Spanish Civil War, and there's a term that's come into English from that war, and the term is fifth columnist, fifth columnist.

During the war, the nationalists were marching on Madrid, and their soldiers were divided into four, I suppose four battalions. They called them four columns.

And General Moyer, who at that time was leading the nationalist troops, said, when we get to Madrid, there's a fifth column of our supporters who are in the city, and they will rise up with us, and we'll defeat the enemy.

And, of course, that is effectively what happened. Fifth columnist, people who are loyal to one side, who are embedded in the other side. The term became particularly prevalent in the United States during the Second World War.

Well, in 1 Samuel chapter 29, the big question that is being asked is, is David a fifth columnist? Is David among the Philistines so that when they go to war against Israel, he'll rise up against them, and he'll help Israel defeat those who have given him refuge?

[ 2 : 41 ] The generals of the Philistines generally take the view that he is likely to be. He is an Israelite among us. He is bound to be on their side when push comes to shove. And Achish, the king, takes the other view, and he says, no, he's been very loyal to me.

I have complete confidence in him. I'm sure over the centuries, there have been many similar conversations had in similar kinds of situations. In fact, neither of them was really right.

This was more muddle than method in the way David was acting, and it was probably as big, certainly as big a problem for him that he was among the Philistines as it was for them.

And the story of 1 Samuel 29, although it's not explicitly said, is how God rescues David from the problem that he's got himself into with the Philistines.

He gives him a way out. That means he doesn't have to fight either for or against the Philistines or the Israelites. And we'll talk about that and some thoughts on that for us.

[ 3 : 49 ] Probably worth a little bit of background, though, because our series in 1 Samuel has been a little bit spread out recently. So just looking through the kind of climax of 1 Samuel, the last few chapters. 1 Samuel, of course, from about the middle is largely the story of the interaction between

David and Saul.

Saul, who has been rejected by God because he was so often disobedient to God's ways. David is anointed the future king by Samuel. And then it's largely the story of Saul's jealousy and how David manages to escape him.

And if we jump forward, and I think my numbering's wrong there, so I apologise for that. That's what PowerPoint does when you try to do clever things. In chapter 26, I think it was that David spared Saul's life.

David was in a prison for the second time at you kill Saul, and he decides not to. And that is the last interaction that David and Saul have together.

And the rest of the book kind of intersperses things about David and things about Saul. So in chapter 27, David flees to be with the Philistines.

[ 4 : 58 ] We'll talk a bit more about that because it's quite significant for what we're looking at this evening. And then in chapter 28, which we looked at last week with Peter, we're back to Saul, and Saul consulting the medium and getting the news that he's going to lose the battle, he's going to be killed in battle.

Chapter 29, which we're looking at this evening, David avoids fight against Israel. And then the follow-on from that, which I think New is taking us to next week, is how David defeats the Amalekites.

And then the last chapter is back to Saul and how Saul is defeated in battle and dies. So our chapter tonight sits between Saul consulting the medium and ultimately Saul being defeated. And actually, the chronology of 1 Samuel, the timing of it, what we're looking at this evening probably took place before the events that we looked at last Sunday. The author of 1 Samuel is more concerned with the narrative and with the flow of his accounts and in a sense with keeping the suspense going as we move through the book than he is with strict chronology.

But most likely, the events we're reading at this evening were before those that we looked at last week. So what is the background from chapter 27?

[ 6 : 13 ] It's quite a long time, I think, since Neil took us through that. So just a brief reminder of that. David has taken fright. He's really concerned that Saul ultimately is going to be able to kill him.

There's been several attempts that haven't succeeded. And David takes fright and he thinks, I'm going to go into the Philistines. I'll be safe there because Saul won't come and get me.

So he goes with his men and he makes peace with the king of the Philistines and he's given a place in Ziklag to settle down there. While he's there, his army is busy.

They're going out to battle and David tells Achish the king they're going to battle against the Israelites, against his own people. In fact, David's taking them out in battle against the enemies of Israel.

He's deceiving the king. But he's building up favour among the Philistines. He's allowing himself to be there and to live in peace with them.

[ 7 : 14 ] And he maybe thinks he's doing quite well. Now, Neil, when he was speaking on chapter 27, said quite memorably, I think, that David's plans become more and more cunning, convoluted and compromised as you go through the chapter.

And that's exactly right. The receipt which he started at the beginning grows and grows and David's position goes more and more from the truth and the way that he should be.

And in chapter 29, it looks as if his chickens have come home to roost. Because the thing which David undoubtedly didn't want was for it to be a battle between the Philistines and the Israelites. He's presented to the Philistines that he'd come over to their side, but he is still an Israelite and he is still ultimately loyal to Israel. Albeit that the king of the Philistines is his friend and the king of Israel is his enemy, nevertheless, David is ultimately on the side of God's people and he has this tremendous problem that he's expected to go out with the Philistines and to fight against the Israelites and he really doesn't want to.

Now that is all reading into the chapter, it's not explicitly said there, but I'm pretty sure that's the case. And David is in a pretty desperate situation.

[ 8 : 36 ] If he goes out and fights with the Philistines against the Israelites, then he really destroys any chance he has of ultimately becoming the king of Israel.

If he's fought against his own people, against God's people, what right has he subsequently to become their king? On the other hand, if he turns around and fights against the Philistines, he's

fighting against the man who's become his friend, he's putting his men and himself in great danger and that's not a situation he wants to get into either.

Really, David wants to be as far away as he can from it. And it looks as if David's in an impossible situation. Last week when Peter was speaking, he talked about two kinds of hopeless situations that we could think about.

One is the hopeless situation that really is hopeless and there's a danger where you're complacent and don't realise it. And the other is the hopeless situation which looks hopeless to us but actually isn't hopeless because God is in control.

Saul in chapter 28 is a good example of the first kind of situation. There is no hope for Saul. He's rejected God. He's been rejected by God and he's going to his death.

[ 9 : 50 ] David in chapter 29 is the hopeless situation where actually, ultimately, it's not as hopeless as he might have thought because our God is powerful.

Our God is able to work in what seems like a hopeless situation to us and God rescues David from it. So if we just walk quickly through the chapter and then we'll have a few points that hopefully will have some practical relevance for us.

So at the beginning of the chapter and the Philistines are gathering together, they're going to war against Israel. And this looks as if everyone thinks this is the big one. This is the one which will decide which of these nations is going to prevail.

It's not just a little skirmish between the two. This is something that is really serious and where there are going to be very significant outcomes as indeed there were.

And all the commanders and rulers of the Philistines, they come together, they march together in front of their king, Achish. And at the end, maybe looking a bit sheepish, are David and his men.

[ 10 : 59 ] And the Philistine commanders say, what are they doing here? Here we've got some Israelites. Why are we taking them out and thinking they're going to fight against their own people?

And Achish says, no, this isn't just Israelites. This is David. David's my friend. He came over to our side more than a year ago and he's been loyal to me ever since.

And Achish had got some of the plunder that David had given, so David had kind of curried favour with him. And Achish believed that David was loyal. The Philistine commander said, no, come on, be sensible about this.

This is the man who killed Goliath. This is the man who's fought against us. This is the man who the Israelites go around singing about. They sing about the number of Philistines that he's killed, that he's killed tens of thousands where Saul has slain his thousands.

He cannot be loyal to you. Achish doesn't believe them. But he goes back to David again, probably rather sheepishly, and says, well, my commanders won't go out to fight with me.

[ 12 : 04 ] If you're with me, would you mind going back? Go back to the city where you are, and we'll go out to battle. Now, I imagine at that point, David must have been delighted.

Here was his opportunity to avoid going to battle. But he plays the game. He's keeping his deceit going, and he avows his loyalty to Achish.

Is there anything that you can find against me from when I came until now? Why can't I go and fight? Now, verse 8 is quite interesting because he says, Why can't I go and fight against the enemies of my lord, the king?

Who is my lord, the king? Achish thought it was him. Most commentators seem to think actually David was meaning Saul. But he obviously didn't want Achish to know that. But that may well have been what he meant.

If he had to go to battle when Push came to Shav, David may well have turned on the Philistines and supported the Israelites. Achish then pleads with him, and eventually David goes back, and next week we'll find out what happened in chapter 30.

[ 13 : 14 ] It was just as well they went back because he came back to a pretty dreadful situation, but I won't go into that this evening. So that's the story. What can we learn from it?

Three things I'd like to take away this evening. The first is God's unchanging purposes. Way back in chapter 16, God had led Samuel to Jesse's family.

Samuel had anointed David as king, and from then on David was going to be king. Now David did some pretty silly things, none more silly than what we're thinking about this evening.

He did many, many good things as well, but he was God's chosen king, and God's purpose wasn't going to change. And David was rescued from the Philistines in this chapter so that God's purposes

could be fulfilled, so that God's king will be the one who rules over Israel.

Despite all David's failures, despite all the wrong that he'd done, and the silly things he'd got involved in, God's purpose hadn't changed, and he was leading David to his ultimate destiny to be the king of Israel.

[ 14 : 35 ] Isn't it good for us to know that God's purposes for us don't change? We may be unfaithful to him, we may do things that are very silly, we may do things that are very wrong, but if we are in God's hands, if our faith is in Christ, if we are the children of God, then God's purposes will be carried out in our lives.

And ultimately, we will be made more like Christ, ultimately we will be like Christ when we go to be with him. The whole of Scripture is the story of how God's purposes have been worked out in human history.

And right from the start of Genesis to the end of Revelation, we see the unfolding of God's plan and of God's purpose for our lives. And at times, people in Scripture have been able to look back and they can say, I didn't understand at the time what was going on, but now I see what God's purpose was.

Great example of that is Joseph. Joseph in the Old Testament, he's sold into slavery by his brothers and he goes down further as he's unjustly accused and put into prison.

And then as he rises up and has become the second in command to Pharaoh and his brothers come and they're seeking his forgiveness, Joseph can forgive them because he said, you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.

[ 16 : 06 ] God was fulfilling his good purpose even at the time when you were going against his will and when it seemed there was no good that could come of it.

Young people in Kids Church at the moment are looking at the book of Job and right at the end of the book of Job having really wrestled with all the things he'd been inflicted with, the loss of his riches, the loss of his family, the loss of his health and really struggled to understand God's purposes in it.

Job says in chapter 42, I know that you can do all things, no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

Let's take confidence in that this evening, that whatever happens to us in life, whatever difficulties we go through, if we're in God's hands, we can have the confidence that he will work things for what is best for us, that his purposes ultimately will be fulfilled.

God's purposes don't change and despite human frailty and failure, he will bring them about.

Second thing I think we can learn from this chapter is about God's unexpected servants.

[ 17 : 28 ] One of the books I read had as the heading for his commentary in this chapter, accepting the Philistines as your personal saviour. Now obviously he's trying to be a bit funny in doing that, I'm not sure it worked that well, but it got the point across that it was the Philistines through whom God worked to fulfil his purposes.

It was these leaders who were so against Israel and against David and yet through them God brought about what he intended. He saved his servant David from having to get into that situation where he's fighting against his own people or turning against those who had given him refuge.

And as we read through the Old Testament, particularly in the New Testament as well, particularly Old Testament, we see time and again how God uses those who have no knowledge of him and no desire to serve him, but he uses them to help fulfil his purposes.

Particularly as the Israelites fail time and time again and God wants to discipline them for their sin. It is the nations round about, these heathen, pagan nations who have no respect for the God of Israel and worship their own false gods.

They are the ones whom God uses as his servants, as those who will bring about his purposes.

And when we come to the New Testament and we come to the death of the Lord Jesus, that was God's purpose that Christ should die.

[ 19 : 03 ] And those evil men, Judas, the leaders of the Jews, the Romans and so on, those who brought about the death of the Lord Jesus, they were also bringing about God's purpose and making sure that his will was done.

God uses unexpected people, often godless people, to bring about his purposes. And we need to be very careful that we don't limit what God can do or who God can use.

We would generally think the people that God uses are those who are spiritual, who are godly, who follow the Lord Jesus closely and are really committed to him.

And God does use such people clearly in many, many ways. But our God is so big and so great and so wise that he can use even the most unexpected people for his glory.

It's a little story. I don't know if it's true, but it's quite amusing. There was a woman who was very poor and also was very godly, a Christian woman. And at one stage, she got to the point where she had no food in her house.

[ 20 : 12 ] And so she prayed to God that he would provide for her needs. Now as this happens, this woman had a neighbour who wasn't a Christian, who was an atheist, had no interesting Christian things and she heard the woman praying.

And she thought, I can play a little trick on her here. So what she did was she went out and bought some bread and she put it in the doorstep and waited for the Christian woman to come out and find it.

Of course, when she came out, she was full of thanksgiving to God that he had answered her prayer and that he had provided for her needs. Another woman came and said, sorry, you've got it wrong.

It wasn't God who provided. It was me. And the Christian woman immediately retorted, no, it was God who provided. He just used the devil to do it.

I thought that was quite an interesting story. I don't know if it's true or not, but it actually illustrates the point that very often people do things and they don't necessarily do them for the right reasons.

[ 21 : 13 ] And yet God can use them. And that must be an encouragement to us as well. An encouragement that God can use even people like you and me.

We are all flawed. We have all failed. We have all done things we shouldn't and not done things we should. We've done some very silly things. And we, I'm sure most of us and not all of us, feel really unworthy to be used as God's servants.

And yet we are the kind of people whom God chooses to use. Many of God's servants in the scriptures who are most fruitful in their ministry were people who say, well, how could they ever be used by God?

Jonah. Jonah who turned into a great missionary who turned a whole city around to worshipping God. and yet only did that after he'd run away and been swallowed by the fish and been really chastened by God.

Peter who failed time and time again so impetuous so full of himself and so in many ways quite arrogant and proud of his own capabilities until the Lord's crucifixion.

[ 22 : 26 ] Peter then becomes humble and becomes used by God as the one who the day of Pentecost preached this sermon where thousands of people come to know Christ.

And we can think of lots of other examples. Never limit the ways in which God can use you and don't feel because you're inadequate and we all are that God can't use us.

And that's not an excuse to keep on doing what we feel like and thinking God will use us anyway. We really want to be like Christ and to grow more like him in our lives. But don't think because you've failed in your life because you've not followed God or worked for him as you should have that he's not able to use you.

God uses the most unexpected people as his servants. And then finally, I think this chapter brings to us God's unlimited grace.

Because it's all about the grace of God to David, isn't it? That David has messed up and God takes him out of that situation because of his grace.

[ 23 : 36 ] David deserved nothing but what he would have got had he had to go out with the Philistines and face that dilemma. He got himself into a mess and he deserved to bear the consequences of that mess.

Instead, God acts in the situation, acts through these Philistine commanders and he lets David away with no stainless character, no dilemma at the end to face and able to go on then and to serve God and to be king.

And that's a reminder to us, isn't it, of the unlimited grace that God has for us. Yes, we fail time and time again. Yes, we're sinful and will be sinful for as long as we live on this earth.

But our God's grace is greater than our sin and his forgiveness is greater than our failure. Isn't it great for what we're thinking of this morning, there's no condemnation condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

However bad we are, however bad we've been, because of the grace of God and his love for us, then we have forgiveness if we know Jesus as Saviour.

[ 24 : 52 ] Jesus has taken our punishment, taken our place on the cross and because of that we are forgiven even as we continue to sin. Not that we should deliberately sin, that's our last part, the argument of Paul in Romans, we don't sin so that grace may abound more.

We want to become more like Jesus and to live lives of holiness. And yet we know that when we do fall, when we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and he forgives us our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

Now in this situation, David got away, as I said earlier, scot-free. He didn't have to face the consequences of his failure. Now that's not always the case.

Even when we are forgiven by God, sometimes there are still consequences we need to face and a great example of that is David in 2 Samuel. David in 2 Samuel where he goes wrong and is adultery with Bathsheba and then the murder of Uriah and he's brought up by Nathan who points out his sin and David is thinking I'm going to be punished by God for this I'm going to die because of what I've done and Nathan says no you won't die God is gracious God is forgiving but there will be consequences.

First consequence was the death of the baby that came out of the union and then further consequence down the line in terms of David's family ending up tearing itself apart.

[ 26 : 22 ] And for us too sometimes there will be consequences of our sin. Even though we've been forgiven even though we've experienced the grace of God to some extent we may still have to live in this world with the consequences of what we've done.

And perhaps some of us are in that situation this evening that there are things in our past that we look back on and they're still causing problems in our lives in our families in our relationships or whatever.

But even if we're in that situation it's good to know as David did that when the sin was confessed and when forgiveness was sought God's grace was unlimited.

And even though the consequences would come still the forgiveness was there the grace had been experienced. I think that should be one of the great things we take away from both morning and evening today.

The grace of God for us. As we're thinking this morning the work of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit in our lives and the great relationships we have with them and the way that they can help us through day-to-day life.

[ 27 : 39 ] And this evening as we thought of the grace that David experienced and the thing that he got from God this freedom that he didn't deserve let's rejoice that that is our experience too and let's be aware this week of the grace of God in our lives as we seek to serve him and follow him.

I want to end by reading a verse of one of my favourite songs about grace it's one we have sung in the church in the past though not for quite a long time but I think it's really powerful and let's just soak in these words as we meditate on God's goodness to us.

It says grace unmeasured vast and free that knew me from eternity that called me out before my birth to bring you glory on this earth grace amazing pure and deep that saw me in my misery that took my curse and owned my blame so I could bear your righteous name grace paid for my sins and brought me to life grace clothes me with power to do what is right grace will lead me to heaven where I'll see your face and I'll never cease to thank you for your grace.

Let's pray together. Our Father we thank you for your word to us this evening. We thank you that although it is about a different time and a very different situation from what most of us are likely to face yet it is so relevant and meaningful to us.

we thank you that you are the God who fulfills your purposes and whose purpose can never be thwarted even as we may do silly and sinful things.

[ 29 : 29 ] We thank you that you are the God who can use even us flawed and unspiritual in many ways as we are yet you are the God who is willing to use your servants and even at times to use those who wouldn't own your name to fulfil your purposes.

And we thank you above all that you are a God of grace that as we have failed so you sent your son to deal with that failure as we should have been condemned so your son came and took our place and took our punishment.

Help us to marvel in your grace daily as we come to you as we confess our sins and as we know that our sins are forgiven through the death of the Lord Jesus.

We thank you for your word to us this evening. We pray that you will help us through this week to live as those who are followers of the Lord Jesus and to serve him well and to witness to others about him.

We give you our thanks in his name. Amen.