

# Grace to Believe Jesus

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[ 0 : 00 ] If we wouldn't mind just opening your Bibles to John chapter 1, and we are continuing in our series today. We're doing a short little series through January called Grace Upon Grace.

And so from John chapter 1, we're going to let it guide us and lead us into what the topic is for today. And if you don't have a Bible, don't worry about that. We also have verses up on the screen. And so we began last week looking at John 1 and seeing this amazing grace that God has given to us that we got to see Jesus. And we can see Jesus even today.

And Jesus came, he put on flesh to make God known to us, but he also came and revealed life as it should be. But here's the thing, seeing Jesus demands a response.

Because not everyone that saw him believed he was God, nor did they go in for his offer of life as it should be. So seeing Jesus is one thing, and that's an amazing thing.

[ 0 : 56 ] That is an offer to us. That is one of the graces upon graces that is an offer to us. But believing in him is a whole nother kettle of fish. And that's what we're going to consider today. We're going to stay in the same passage we read last week, not because we are lacking any kind of like ingenuity or creativity, but there's such richness in this passage that, man, there's so much to mine out of it.

And so let's let it guide us into believing what it says about believing in Jesus. So John chapter one, verses one to five, and then we're going to actually jump to verses nine to 16 that says this. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

But the true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

[ 2 : 13 ] And the word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness about him, and cried out, this was he of whom I said, he who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.

For from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. This is God's word. Would you quickly pray with me? Lord, as we consider your word, as we consider what we are going to ponder today about what it means to believe in Jesus, I just pray that you would come, Holy Spirit, and make your truths known to us.

May it echo into our hearts. May it profoundly affect us. We pray that in your name. Amen. So it begins with calling Jesus the word, and then we're reminded later on that the word became flesh, and it dwelt among us.

That's what it calls Jesus. It also calls him the light that came into the darkness. And it said about the light that the darkness has not overcome it yet. And yet he came into the world, and yet the world did not know him.

It says his own people did not receive him. And you might ask, how can that be? If God stepped into the world in a visible way, you would expect belief to be a given if someone was able to see God and to know him in that very personable way, right?

[ 3 : 45 ] You would think, and all of us think, man, if God would just show himself to people, maybe even to the loved ones in our lives that aren't believers, if he would just show himself as he is, then that would do the trick.

But belief and knowledge don't necessarily work together that way. Belief is but one response to knowing something. Now, I would say sometimes belief is easy, right?

The chair you all are sitting in, when you saw it today, you processed a dozen or more data points about that chair that you have already known. You probably didn't even realize that you did that. You know it's made of wood. You know it's constructed in the typical chair fashion with four legs and then a seat on top and has a back support behind it. How many of us, when we walked in today and chose our chair, closely examined it before we decided, no, no, no, this is the one I need to sit in.

We got to visit a family out in Southern California over the Christmas holidays. And one of the things we did together with my brothers and sisters and their kids and all the cousins together was a lot of fun. And one of the things we did was go to a roller coaster park.

[ 4 : 55 ] And I invited one of my older brothers and he joked that he would never go to one of those things because he would spend all his time checking the welds on the roller coaster, right? So we all went, but he didn't.

And I'm still not sure who was the smarter for that because it was so jam-packed. I think we got on four rides the whole day. So there's something interesting in this to learn about belief.

You don't closely examine every chair you're going to sit in because if it fails, the cost is pretty minimal, right? But for my one brother, he had weighed up the cost for a roller coaster failing and justifiably that is much more serious.

And here's the point. The greater the consequence for belief, the more serious you should weigh it up. Blaise Pascal, he was a 17th century French mathematician, theologian, philosopher.

This is what he looked like just to prove how French he was. I mean, that is the Frenchest person I've ever seen in my life. He put this consequence of belief into a philosophical argument that is known as the Pascal wager.

[ 6 : 03 ] And he says this, if God is real, then there is infinite reward or there is infinite suffering awaiting us dependent upon our belief. But if God is not real, then there is nothing awaiting us after this life.

And his wager is in this scenario for the believer. They have everything to gain, but very little to lose. But for the unbeliever, they have very little to gain and everything to lose.

Now, I would say this, as amazing as that is and reasonable and logical, it is not the best reason to believe in God. But it does square us with an important truth.

There are consequences related to belief. Now, one might make the counter argument to Pascal here that like, hey, what about believing in such things as leprechauns?

You know, if you believe in leprechauns, it comes with promises that one may find gold at the end of rainbows. And to not believe means you could miss out on that. But well, not believing in such things will keep you from wasting your life running around looking for mythical creatures that don't exist and will never make you rich.

[ 7 : 12 ] In this case, not believing is of great benefit to you, right? Simply believing in things that might yield a great reward is only good to the degree it is likely to be true.

Having the purest faith in leprechauns won't make them appear, nor will it make them real, nor will it bring you into a pot of gold one day.

Why? Because so far, it has never happened to anybody. Belief is only as good as it can be tested and proven, right? We believe in the chairiness of chairs because we've successfully sat so many times in them and they have never failed us.

Or they have very rarely failed us. And we have seen others do the same time and time again. The occurrences and cumulative hours that chairs have proven themselves to us are too many to count. And we don't doubt the chair and we don't think twice about it because it has been tested and it has been proven. But I'm not here to convince you about chairs, am I? I'm here to convince you about Jesus.

[ 8 : 22 ] So why do we doubt that Jesus is who he said he was? And let me speak to those who are in the room here that might be skeptics. Maybe you're checking out Christianity. Maybe you're just an unbeliever.

You might call yourself agnostic or atheist. And I just want to say, man, I'm glad you're here. And you might have this legitimate question. Fine, Jesse, but how can God be proven?

Many might say, I'll believe if I can see him for myself. But here's the thing. We believe in wind that we can't see, but nevertheless, we know it's still there.

Why? Because of its effects. Flags wave, trees sway, sails get filled with wind. Those are signs that point to a reality.

They point to wind being real. So then what are signs that we can see that point to a God that we can't see? The more you and I, we have nature, there's one.

[ 9 : 19 ] The more you and I understand nature, the more we see it, the more we see into it and its design and its intelligence. It can make us curious to ask the question, okay, how did that get there?

Was it beamed from an ancient alien race onto our planet, which is a real theory? Or was it by random chance through near infinite iterations of the evolutionary process?

Or does intelligence beget intelligence? Like wind that fills a sail, when we see design, is it a sign that there is a designer?

Verse 1 and 2 of the chapter we read, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him.

All nature was made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In the beginning was the Word. We talked about this last week. The Word, that Word meaning logos, which is wisdom and intelligence and perfect knowledge and harmony and reason.

[ 10 : 24 ] And Jesus is that thing. It's the embodiment of that. So all things were made through him. And everything we get to experience in nature has the mark of the divine in it.

The things that we see, even of organisms and organic structures, the stuff we can see with our eyes, we see that there is design to it. There's intelligence and purpose to it.

The more we even get to see beyond those things, right? The substructures of living organisms, down to the molecular level, the more we see into that world, the more we see intricate design and intelligence even to that level.

It's absolutely amazing. And I would argue today that these are signposts for us. Nature demands that we have to believe in something. And for you, it could be Gornak the alien, or it could be the impossible odds of evolutionary chance, or it could be an intelligent designer that we cannot see. But does your belief stand up under testing? The proof and testing of God's existence includes nature. But here's the thing.

[ 11 : 32 ] It also goes beyond it. Because God has been inserting himself into history and interacting with man. And ultimately, he did that most clearly with Jesus.

The word put on flesh and dwelt among us. And then it says this about him. In John 1, verse 9. He was the true light. Jesus was this true light, which gives light to everyone.

He was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him. And yet, the world did not know him. Now, one might argue this idea about being able to know Jesus falls apart because anyone can claim anything from history that can't be tested.

Jesus, he came into history. But, man, we could say that about anything. For example, I could tell you that there was a man named Bill who lived in the Pyrenees in the 12th century, and he had magic beans who could dance and play accordion.

Right? I could say that, and you could roll your eyes, as one should. Fair enough. And yet, that doesn't negate the fact that history should be taken into account as we consider belief in Jesus.

[ 12 : 44 ] Think about this. We don't question whether Caesar Augustus was a Roman emperor. Right? Much has been written about him. Right? Much has been written about him in the historical record during his lifetime and afterward.

We know he had an impact on history. Specifically, we know that the Roman Empire and his impact on it was undeniable. And you and I, we could rightfully say we cannot see Augustus today, but we would not deny that he lived.

And we also wouldn't deny that he was an emperor of Rome. But did you know that he also claimed to be the son of God? We believe a lot of things about Augustus, but we don't believe that one, do we?

And even though many during his time did and even worshipped him as one of the gods, we don't. And that brings us to the conversation about Jesus. There are too many historical events and too many records about Jesus to deny his existence.

Even Jesus' skeptics wrote about him and about what he was teaching and the works he did. A Jewish historian named Josephus wrote this about Jesus about 60-ish years after Jesus had died

on the cross.

[ 13 : 55 ] And he said, now there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works. A teacher of such men has received the truth with pleasure.

He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him.

For he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and 10,000 other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct to this day.

The Roman historian had tasked us, wrote similar things about Jesus around this same time. And these guys didn't know, they may have not known what to make of Jesus, but they did not, they couldn't deny his existence, nor his claim that he made, that he was the Messiah, nor the indelible mark he left by the works that he did and the miracles that surrounded him, or his death and his resurrection.

Now, some of the claims about Jesus, many will believe, but being the Son of God rising from the dead, how do you prove those things?

[ 15 : 12 ] How do you test those things? And for many, Jesus is in the same camp as Caesar Augustus. Historic figure, yes. A guy that left his mark on history, absolutely, but they don't go as far as to go in for the divinity part.

But should that be the final word on Jesus as the Son of God? And I would argue that Augustus' claim to divinity actually helps us with this argument, and here's why.

The cult following of Augustus as Son of God eventually died out. But the tribe called Christians, as Josephus puts it, never stopped believing that Jesus was the Son of God or the Messiah, and they never stopped increasing, even through all kinds of persecution.

And this brings us to the next point about the veracity of belief through proof and testing. Belief is proven by her children. It was once believed that the world was a flat surface with edges.

You could fall off of and into nothingness. It was once believed that the earth was the center of the universe. Those beliefs were disproved by her children.

[ 16 : 24 ] They didn't last. They didn't stand the test of time. They didn't stand up to our experience and the truths that we begin to know from science. And that, it brings us into an undeniable law about truth.

Anything untrue cannot stand over time. So far, chairs have been proven by her children, right? It's a good design to put your faith in.

But Caesar Augustus as a God, he didn't stand up against the test of time. That truth was disproved by her children. It isn't just that Caesar claimed to be God.

It's also what he stood for. His kingdom, his rule, his virtues, his value system. These also didn't stand the test of time. Power as a virtue unto itself failed.

And that value system fell with the Roman Empire. Now, by comparison, consider the Christian influence upon history. The British skeptic and historian Todd Holland wrote about this in his book titled Dominion.

[ 17 : 32 ] And what he does, he traces the origins of Christianity, its rise within the Roman Empire, and its ultimate triumph over the Roman Empire. And also, its many influences in many places over the last 2,000 years.

And as a skeptic, he proves how many of the virtues that we espouse today are actually grounded in Christian belief based upon the person of Jesus and what he taught and the life as it should be as he presented it to us.

Today, we care for the poor and the vulnerable. We consider them. We consider it a virtue to help them. You know what? That was unheard of prior to Jesus.

No society, no culture, no civilization ever did that. Rome was built upon the idea that the powerful had the right to wield control and rule and oppress however they deemed it suitable for them.

So the abolition of slavery in the civil rights movement was built upon the idea that all are created in God's image and thus equal in value.

[ 18 : 39 ] And until this Christian doctrine and virtue begin to be known and have influence, slavery and oppression of the vulnerable was kind of an unquestioned given over the ages, no matter

where you lived.

Many of the modern virtues that are taken as normative and obvious today is actually the fruit of Christianity's influence over the last 2,000 years.

These have neither failed nor have they fallen away over time. Again, Jesus is proven by his children. But one might ask, can't I take the good virtues of Christianity and live by them without going as far to believe that he is the son of God?

Do I have to do that? Well, here's my pushback to that thought. Believing in Jesus also requires receiving Jesus on his terms. Some find belief hard because Jesus made some claims that are hard to believe.

Dying and rising from the dead. I get it. That is a hard one to believe. Him being the son of God, that is a hard one to believe. But some find belief hard simply because they don't want it to be true.

[ 19 : 53 ] Because of the implications, if it is true. It is why John connects believing in Jesus with receiving in Jesus, or receiving him. John 1, 11 to 12 says, he came to his own and his own people did not receive him.

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. So what does it mean to receive Jesus? Well, it adds that idea adds an important dimension to what it means to believe in Jesus.

In one sense, Jesus is truth to know and to study and learn and to grow in that knowledge is very important. But he is more than that.

He is a person that embodies all truth. He is a person to accept and to love as well. And that demands a different kind of response from us. Think about this.

If you lived during Caesar Augustus' day, you may have heard about him. Maybe you lived in a far off nation. And you may even have believed all that you heard about him.

[ 21 : 02 ] That he was the Roman emperor. That he was the son of God. Now, so far, that is merely belief in Caesar as he says he is. But if Caesar showed up at your city's gates with army in tow to offer you peace under his rule, even if it was offered at the tip of the sword, that changes a lot about your belief in Caesar.

You now have some options. Option number one, you can deny he is Caesar and not receive him. You can believe he is Caesar and not receive him.

Or you can believe he is Caesar and receive him as Caesar. Now, according to history's account, the first two options would go very poorly for you. But option three would mean life as you knew it would have to change.

That's the same with Jesus. Believing and receiving Jesus means your life will change. And perhaps that is why many of us find it so hard to believe.

Not because God has hidden himself so well. Rather, we prefer our lives to remain as they are. Firmly under our control.

[ 22 : 14 ] But believing and receiving Jesus as he is. Means that he is king. That he is king over all kings. He is lord over all lords. And that we have to surrender to him.

And to his rule. That we have to be citizens of his kingdom. And in his kingdom, there are ethics and values and virtues and ways of being. That he says, my disciples live this way.

They, as I am, they follow me. And that's the hard part. We love the idea of salvation without sovereignty. But that's not what God has offered. That's not the grace upon grace that is offered to us.

We can't have salvation without sovereignty. His sovereignty. He is a king. And he is a king that rules over his people. He calls us to be holy because he is holy.

And he gets to tell us what is and what isn't acceptable for us to do. Believing and receiving Jesus means a whole new way of living and being.

[ 23 : 14 ] Which is why verse 13 connects salvation with being born again. It doesn't just kind of change who you are. It totally changes who you are. You become a new person altogether.

Everything changes. But I want to say this. It's worth it because of what happens when we do believe Jesus and when we do receive him. Those who believe and receive Jesus, we get to become God's children.

It's important to know the cost of believing. But it would be foolish to neglect the rewards. In verse 12, it says, he gives the right to become children of God.

Which, to be honest, is a softer translation than others that I've seen. Because those Greek words have kind of a semantic range that probably mean more like, By God's power, he bestowed a blessing upon those who believe to become his children.

And this blessing and this power is seen in what he says next. We are born as God's children. Not by our desire. Not by our determination. But not by our strength or by any natural means.

[ 24 : 22 ] It's not a physical birth that is taking place that we get to see with our eyes. It is a spiritual birth that is happening within that we cannot see. And yet, this transformation that is hidden cannot be hidden.

Because when we become God's children, things absolutely change. But we do have to reckon with, this is what happens to us. It is God's work and it is God's will that is accomplished by him. And it's from this idea, this very simple idea that we are not born of our will. We're not born of the flesh. But we're born of God, which is a spiritual thing. So we get these great doctrines of regeneration and adoption.

And where regeneration teaches the changes that come from being born again. It's a new way of being. We have a new heart. We have new desires. We have a new will. We have new loves. We have new allegiance.

And then we see adoption. Adoption teaches us the joy that we didn't choose God. He chose us. Like anybody that goes to adopt a child, they're not on there saying, I get to choose you. The adopted parents get to choose the child.

[ 25 : 24 ] And so God did to us. He adopts us. And that teaches us the joys and rewards of being chosen by God to become his children. He is God. That means, as God, through adoption, it means he is our father.

And we get to know the assurance of his love for us. The inheritance that we have from him as his children. This eternal life that is promised to us and that is guaranteed and that we get to taste even now in him through his abiding presence.

And as verse 16 says, from him, from Jesus, his fullness, we all have received grace upon grace. Because believing Jesus and receiving Jesus means you get to receive his fullness.

When you believe in him and you receive him, he's not giving you a small thimble of himself. He is giving you his fullness. It's grace upon grace.

Goodness upon goodness. Love upon love. Joy upon joy. Peace upon peace. Why? Because he has made us his children. Chosen by him.

[ 26 : 30 ] Chosen to be in him. Chosen to be his sons and his daughters. And because of that, we are different. We are in the world, but we are not of the world.

And we bear witness to him as children of God, which means this, the collective witness of the transformed lives of God's children. Over the ages, that is the greatest apologetic, that Jesus is the son of God.

By now, billions have done that. Billions have believed in him. Billions have received him across the globe and across the generations. And we all stand together in witness to him and in wonder of him as those who believe in him and have received him.

Not once, but every day of our lives. Amen. As the band comes up and we look to respond today, if you aren't yet a follower of Jesus, will you make that step today?

Will you believe and receive him on his terms? Before you come to the table, which we're going to do in a moment, the communion table, before you do that, you got to come.

[ 27 : 42 ] You got to come to him. You have to believe and receive Jesus as Lord of your life and as the Savior who rescued you from sin and death. And in a moment, there's going to be an opportunity for you to respond.

There's going to be a prayer up on the screen. I'm going to encourage you today. Do that. Come to him. If you're here and you're already a follower of Jesus, as we come to the table, first think about this.

Believing and receiving Jesus on his terms isn't something we did once. It's something that we do all the time, every single day. And that's what it means to follow Jesus.

As the scripture says, the just shall live by faith. Faith, believing and receiving him. What do we need to believe and receive from him in this moment? As a follower of Jesus, what do you need from him right now?

What does he have on offer for you today? Before you come to the table, what can you, or when you, before you take his body that is broken for you, his blood shed for you, what is on offer for you today?

[ 28 : 46 ] Let me pray. And then after I'm done praying, you can go to the table nearest you, take the bread and the cup back to your seat. And I would encourage you to just spend some time of examination, time with God, quietly pray to him and respond to him.

And then when you're ready, take communion. Let's pray. Lord, bless this moment. Come and meet us right where we are.

And you're a God that can do that. We thank you for the grace upon grace that is available to us in Jesus Christ.

And as we come to you, whether it is my friends in the room who are taking that first step of faith to believing and receiving you, or it is coming to the communion table, that we would experience grace upon grace.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.