

# 5 Ways Easter Demonstrates God's Grace Towards Us

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**John Piper** remarks on the 131 times we see the word “grace” in the ESV translation of the Bible, most of which are found in Paul’s letters. “No wonder he’s called ‘the apostle of grace.’” One thing all of those letters have in common is that they were written after Jesus died and rose from the grave. *Charis*, the Greek word Paul would have used, means “favor, kindness, blessing [...]. In the New Testament, ‘*charis*’ primarily refers to the unmerited favor and kindness of God towards humanity.” This word is also related to salvation.

Why are grace and Easter so closely connected? Here are five ways Easter demonstrates God’s grace towards us.

## 1. The Grace of Salvation

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” (Ephesians 2:8).

We celebrate Easter to remember that Christ’s death saved us; he was the offering God demanded to atone for our sins. We cannot earn salvation. We must address the cross, look at it, and contemplate that gory offering of God’s only Son. We then let our gaze

shift to the empty tomb where Christ conquered death and offered us the gift of victory over death – over the sins which separated us from God.

But we cannot accept the second gift without first receiving the crucified Christ. We get to the empty tomb through the cross. While we want the shiny, celebratory grace right away, we first have to see how our undeserved gift was bought for us by the One who received undeserved punishment. The one person who never sinned was our spotless lamb.

“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9). This is what the heavenly chorus declares to Christ, the Risen Lamb, seated on the throne of Heaven. We join them because of his grace.

## 2. Grace Is Unexpected



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No one made Jesus get on **the cross**. He is a king who did the unthinkable by leaving his throne. He came to do something the disciples could not seem to imagine, even though he told them over and over: he must “be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Matthew 16:21). Jesus’ trajectory is clear, and yet the disciples could not believe such a thing would happen to the mighty Savior whom they believed had come to save them by asserting his power, not by serving others, and not by hanging from a cross.

James and John even asked Jesus: “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.’ Jesus said to them, ‘You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?’ And they said to him, ‘We are able’” (Mark 10:37-39).

Their request reminds us that, while they heard what Jesus said, they did not always understand. Many people would witness Jesus’ **healing** miracles, yet they did not believe he was the Messiah, or they continued to believe he would wield a sword

against Rome. “For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them” (Matthew 13:15).

People wanted the Messiah to appear a certain way and say certain things: to exalt Israel and conquer a mortal army. He instead arrived as a humble man, serving others and calling us to do likewise. Even after many miraculous healings and other astonishing examples of his power, his broken body was a disaster to them. The disciples had been following a warrior king; where was his sword, his battle cry? Where was his victory?

The necessity of his death and the grace inherent in his sacrifice turned their worlds upside down because, though privileged to walk with Jesus, they were still broken by **sin**.

### 3. Grace Is Uncomfortable



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**Paul David Tripp** says that we can respond to the brokenness and dysfunction of our world, both personal and general, by either cursing or mourning. Cursing is self-centered, but mourning is better. “Mourning cries out for God’s redeeming, restoring hand. Mourning acknowledges the suffering of others. [...] Mourning grieves what **sin** has done to the cosmos and longs for the Redeemer to come and make his broken world new again.”

At least while cursing one might wield a sword and destroy his mortal enemies, like the king Israel imagined Jesus would be. Whereas one might imagine a sense of release in cursing, in getting angry, mourning is sad, dark, personal, and uncomfortable. But it is also “a response that is prompted by grace.” At Easter, we mourn Christ’s horrible death on **the cross**. Before we enter the victory, we spend time considering the horror.

We want grace to feel soft, to behave gently, to be clean, neat, and plush. We want pain to end, relationships to heal, and money woes to cease. Says Tripp, “I think there are times for many of us when we cry out for God’s grace and we get it — but not the grace that we’re looking for. We want the grace of relief or release. We get those in little pieces, but largely they are yet to come.” Sometimes, when we cry out, he will take us back to the blood-soaked dirt beneath Jesus’ feet.

We await the fulfillment of grace in the return of Christ, where he will gather up all believers to himself and put an end to pain forever. We long for that day to come soon. Meanwhile, our promise is this: “**God is faithful**; he will use the brokenness of the world that is your present address to complete the loving work of personal transformation that he has begun.” We know this because he was broken, but he did not stay that way.

#### 4. Hope Is a Facet of Grace



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“Our hope is rooted in the grace of God,” John Piper asserts. “It is based on the grace of God. If God were not a gracious God, we would have no hope.” We only need to hope for something when it is not available to us right now. We hope for surgery to be successful. Although we cannot see the outcome, surgeons have performed the procedure countless times with success. On the **strength** of that evidence, we have hope. Our hope, as Christians, comes from the example of **the cross** and the empty tomb.

How can our hope endure when it seems as though Christ will never return? “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here” (Matthew 16:6). Jesus not only told us what we need to know – that he is our Savior, the Son of God – but he showed us who he is so we could remember and believe. **The cross**, the empty tomb: these are the most vivid pieces of evidence available to us. They are powerful pictures of grace which give us hope because Jesus keeps his promises.

We know, says Piper, that we are forgiven, and salvation is available to us if we believe. We remember Christ's plea to the Father: "forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). This free gift is ours to claim because God rose from the grave, defeating his death and ours. We can also witness the power of ongoing sanctification as a result of that free gift, right now. We wield power over death when we resist sin.

Paul wrote that sin came into the world because of one man – Adam – and "death reigned through that one man, [however], much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ." We place our trust and our hope in this promise.

## 5. Grace Is for Believers



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Easter is the center of the gospel; it is where we point when one argues that all roads lead to the same God. We say "then why did Jesus have to die?" We need to submit to the crucified and risen Christ in order to be saved. The gift of grace is available to anyone who will receive it, but our friends and loved ones can also deny the gift and live apart from Christ eternally.

**Piper** reminds us that "the eternal comfort and good **hope** through grace are yours [...] if you have yielded to the lordship of Christ." He refers to **2 Thessalonians 2:16-17**, a benediction from Paul that speaks of "our Lord Jesus Christ" who is also "our Father." That is, we belong to a family united by faith in the Triune God, not in three gods or any gods we choose.

And in order to receive grace, we need to realize how much we need it. We frequently behave as though, to be fully functioning adults, we must be independent, not needing God. The reverse is true: eternity is in his hands, and he desires for us to come to him humbly, like children (Matthew 18:3).

Perhaps most people you talk to think they are doing just fine without the grace of God, or they think they are already working out of that grace because they do good things and have a strong work ethic. But our **inspiration**, power, and motivation all have the same source: the gracious gift of our Savior on **the cross**. Salvation is only available through the cross.

Easter is the essential picture of grace but one that makes a lot of people – even Christians – uncomfortable. And though it is nothing we can hold in our hands, we can and must share it. As we give the gift of Good News, we get more grace, more of the blessing which is the Spirit's indwelling presence to help us speak boldly and to endure rejection, even persecution, while we declare his name. We receive the power to hope that someone who is as we were, separated from God, will hear the message and receive it.

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