

A God Who Provides (Grace)

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I'll leave you to look at these notices and to use them, I hope, to help you in your prayers through the week for the different things going on in the church. We're going to turn now to our Bibles and to our reading this morning.

Once again, we are in the Old Testament in 1 Chronicles chapter 17. You'll find that, I think, on page 348 if you have one of our church Bibles.

We're spending a few weeks together in this single chapter of the Bible. I don't usually do that, but we're going to be staying in this chapter a few weeks because it is one of the great chapters of the Bible, one of the great turning points, the great covenant with David.

And as such, it illustrates for us some of the great truths that we find all the way through the Bible story, telling us what kind of God it is that we know and we love and we worship.

So we're going to read together again this chapter, beginning at 1 Chronicles and verse 1 of chapter 17. Now, when David lived in his house, David said to Nathan the prophet, Behold, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the Lord is under a tent.

[1 : 1 5] Nathan said to David, Do all that is in your heart, for God is with you. But that same night, the word of the Lord came to Nathan, Go and tell my servant David, Thus says the Lord, It is not you who will build me a house to dwell in.

For I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up Israel to this day, but I've gone from tent to tent and from dwelling to dwelling. In all the places where I move with all Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel whom I commanded to shepherd my people, saying, Why have you not built me a house of cedar? Now, therefore, thus shall you say to my servant David, Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be a prince over my people Israel.

And I have been with you wherever you've gone, and have cut off your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a name like the name of the great ones of the earth, and I will appoint a place for my people Israel. I will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more. Violent men shall waste them no more as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will subdue all your enemies. Moreover, I declare to you that the Lord will build you a house. When your days are fulfilled to walk with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom.

He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be to him a father, and he will be to me a son. I will not take my steadfast love from him as I took it from him who was before you, but I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever.

In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David. Then King David went in and sat before the Lord, and said, Who am I, O Lord?

[3 : 2 5] And what is my house that you have brought me thus far? And this was a small thing in your eyes, O God, who have also spoken of your servant's house for a great while to come.

And you've shown me future generations. O Lord God. And what more can David say to you for honoring your servant? For you know your servant.

For your servant's sake, O Lord, and according to your own heart, you have done all this greatness in making known all these great things. There is none like you, O Lord.

And there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears. And who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making for yourself a name for great and awesome things in driving out nations before your people whom you redeemed from Egypt.

And you made your people Israel to be your people forever. And you, O Lord, became their God. And now, O Lord, let the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house be established forever and do as you have spoken.

[4 : 37] And your name will be established and magnified forever, saying, The Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, is Israel's God. And the house of your servant David will be established before you.

For you, my God, have revealed to your servant that you will build a house for him. Therefore, your servant has found courage to pray before you. And now, O Lord, you are God.

And you have promised this good thing to your servant. Now, you have been pleased to bless the house of your servant that it may continue forever before you. For it is you, O Lord, who is blessed.

And it is blessed forever. Amen. And may God bless to us his word. Well, perhaps you'd turn with me back to the chapter we read together in 1 Chronicles 17, page 348, if you have one of the church visitors' Bibles.

We're back again this week in this, one of the great chapters of the Bible. And we're asking the question, what kind of God? What kind of God are we in the Christian church really talking about?

[5 : 50] What kind of God is the Bible really speaking about? Now, that is a very important question. It's a vital question. Whether you're somebody who is a Christian believer, or indeed whether you're somebody who's a skeptic and an unbeliever.

And maybe especially the latter, because if you want to reject God, if you want to choose to be an atheist, then at least you ought to be sure, aren't you, what it is that you're rejecting.

That seems a fairly reasonable thing to say, doesn't it? But I suspect that most people don't. I suspect that what many people are rejecting when they're thinking about God is not the God who is presented to us truly in the Christian scriptures.

Maybe the God of other religions they're rejecting. Maybe the God of popular belief about what Christianity is. But it is not, in fact, the true God the Bible presents to us.

So, for example, if your view of God and religion is like that of Napoleon, who said that religion is excellent stuff for keeping common people quiet, then, of course, your God is a tyrant.

[7 : 03] Your God is a tool of suppression. And then you'll want to reject him. You'll agree with Karl Marx, who says that the first requisite for happiness of the people is the abolition of religion.

Well, I think probably most sensible people the world over today would say that the abolition of Karl Marx and his ideas has brought far more happiness and dispelled far more misery than the abolition of religion.

Ask anybody living in one of the former Soviet republics. Look at Zimbabwe today, where for the first time in 40 years they're not voting for a Marxist, Robert Mugabe.

I read even just the other week that in Cuba they're about to change the Constitution so as to allow private property. So it seems that all over the world people at least have realized that Marxism is not something that helps people, but something that devastates and destroys people.

But there are still plenty of people other than Karl Marx who denigrate and damn religion. Richard Dawkins probably today is one of the most famous of those.

[8 : 12] Far worse than AIDS, far worse than mad cow's disease, Richard Dawkins says a cause can be made, a case can be made that faith is one of the world's great evils compared to the smallpox virus, but much harder to eradicate.

It's interesting, isn't it, by the way, that Richard Dawkins uses the word evil there. But he won't allow an absolute God who will determine what good and evil should be. There's nobody so absolute these days as those who deny the absolute.

It's ironic. But, you know, in our day of terrorism, where there's so much done around the world that is evil and that is done in the name of God, and of course it's become fashionable, hasn't it, to lump all faith together as though it was all much the same thing.

So that if it's liberal and in moderation, then it's all right. But if you have too much of it, if it gets too serious, if it gets anywhere towards the end that might be called fundamentalist, then of course it's dangerous.

And it's all the same. Well, is that right? Is it just all the same? Is the main thing that nobody in their faith just gets too serious?

[9 : 33] Or possibly too fanatical? Well, if you don't have any real definition at all for that word, God, G-O-D, then, well, yes, that might be the case.

All the more important then to see who the real God of the Bible actually is and how he is defined, indeed, how he actually defines himself and how different he is from all that so many people suppose God really to be, both inside the church and outside the church.

So that's our task here in 1 Chronicles 17 for these few weeks. We're asking what kind of God is the covenant God whom the Bible reveals to us?

We saw last time that he is, first of all, a God who proclaims. He's a speaking God who speaks clearly to human beings in the language they can understand so that he can reveal himself to them.

And there are two important things, remember. God speaks, first of all, so he can be found, so he can be known, so that real relationship can be established with him. That's the antithesis of all human religion, all rationality, all philosophy.

[10 : 48] God's not hidden. God is not leaving us in silence and with uncertainty and with mystery everywhere, so we have to seek for him. No, God reveals himself to us.

God is the one who searches for us and finds us. And he shines his light into our human darkness and lights it up with the true knowledge of him so that we can know him.

And, second, God goes on speaking to us so that that relationship with him can be nurtured and continued so he can bless us as we walk with him. What a relief that is!

We don't have to agonize and guess and wonder how to live. How can we live to please God? Are we living to please him? We don't have that crushing anxiety that so much religion has.

Will God accept this offering or not? Is it enough? Do I need to do more? No, God speaks clearly. And we saw that in the first five verses with David the king.

[11 : 49] David wants to build a temple for the Lord but God speaks to his prophet Nathan and says, go to David and tell him a better way. And that's always his way.

In those days, God did speak through his prophets but now, Peter says in his second letter to us, that we have as a Christian church both the words of the prophets of old and also the commands of our Lord and Savior through his apostles to guide us like a lamp in a dark place until the Lord Jesus comes.

We, he says, have everything we need for life and godliness. We have something better than the word of God through the prophets. We live in these last days as Hebrews 1 tells us.

When God has spoken to the world ultimately in his son. And so we now have a complete word from God because we live in this age of fulfillment. We don't live any longer in the age of promise.

That's why the book of Hebrews repeatedly says that we have everything better. We have better promises. We have a better sacrifice. We have a better covenant because the redemption in Jesus Christ is now complete.

[12 : 58] It's a finished work. Christ has come. He has died. He has risen. He has ascended. And God's revelation, God's word to man is all about the testimony to his redeeming work in Jesus Christ.

And so obviously once that redemption is finished, then the scriptures are complete. God will never add anything to the finished work of Jesus Christ and his redemption.

So we shouldn't expect him to add anything to his message about Jesus Christ. And that's why Peter says the scriptures are a sufficient word for us today. They are complete.

They're not incomplete. They give us everything we need for life and godliness. In the words of the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles preserved for us.

The Holy Spirit's work was not inadequate when he inspired the scriptures. He didn't leave anything out by mistake. He didn't leave anything out that he wanted us to know and that we need to know.

[14 : 02] Jesus promised his apostles in the upper room that he would come, the Spirit, and lead them into all truth so that they, the apostles of Jesus, would testify and bear witness to that truth in the world through what they speak and through what they have now written.

So we as Christians today, we don't need to look anywhere else than the Bible. We don't need to have new revelations or special revelations so as to know how to live and what to do. That is impossible because we have all the divine words that ever we will need.

To think that we need fresh revelations, fresh prophecies and so on today, that's to deny that the Holy Spirit is competent to give us the scriptures that we need.

If we do that and look for that, we're saying the Bible is not sufficient, that it's not complete, that it needs complementing and supplementing. But no, God has given us everything we need for life and godliness and that should be a great comfort to us as Christians today.

God is not silent. He's not dumb. He's not disinterested in us. He's a God who proclaims himself to us in words that we can hear him and so that we can obey him.

[15 : 22] And for us who live on this side of the coming of Jesus in this great age of fulfillment when his work is complete, we have such a clear, complete, and better revelation even than somebody like King David here in this chapter who had his own personal prophet, Nathan.

We have everything we need, says Paul, to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus and to equip us for every good work. We have everything we need from a God who proclaims himself to us.

So that's the first thing. But the second thing is that we see in this chapter what God proclaims about himself to David. And he is, above all, a God who provides.

That is, our God, the God of the Bible, is a generous giver, not a greedy taker from human beings. He's a God who provides for his people, not a God who creates creatures to provide for him.

Now do you see how the Christian scriptures turn every religion in this world absolutely on its head? That is the very antithesis of natural human religiosity.

[16 : 38] Human religion says, I must provide things for God. I must do things for him. Whether it's building temples for him or making offerings to him or doing religious duties for him, doing good things for him, or, as we've said in so many perverted minds today, or we must fight wars for him or kill people for him or blow people up for him or blow ourselves up to kill people for him.

If we do these things religiously, then God will look upon us with favor and bless us and give me the life perhaps that I want to live, answer my prayers. That's human religion in all its forms.

And of course, it takes many, many forms, many cultural expressions. It might be part of an organized, recognized religious system, a world religion that we know. But it might equally be just a vague sense of spirituality.

But in the end, they are all the same thing. This ancient culture in the Near East was superficially very different from us, David's time, but not fundamentally different.

And in those days, it was expected that great kings, especially when they had won wars and conquered kingdoms, that they would come and build temples for their gods to say thank you. And that would then mean that their gods would bless them.

[17 : 58] If you go to the city of Rome, you'll see ample evidence of that. One is the Arch of Titus, which Caesar, after he sacked Jerusalem in AD 70, had made.

And it depicts all of those scenes. That was part of the triumph of an emperor, dedicating these things to his gods. And so David, here he is, a great king and living in that world.

And David too, wants to build a great temple for his God. And that sort of thing still goes on. It's gone on all through history. It just takes different forms. Great men, especially when they come towards the end of their lives, they want to do great things, great legacies.

The Bill Clinton Foundation, and so on. Well, think of the great, wealthy men of our day today. People like Bill Gates, and Warren Buffett, and so on, setting up vast foundations with billions of dollars to do great things all around the world.

And indeed, they are doing some great things. Bill Gates has devoted himself, I think, to eradicating malaria. And, well, I certainly think that probably he's much better able to spend billions of dollars wisely than most of the governments in the world.

[19 : 11] Don't you think? It's his money. And those are great things. But it rather looks like the same sort of thing, doesn't it? It's a quasi-religious act. And you can see that in so many different ways in the religious behavior of human beings.

Think of all the pilgrimages that take place in so many different forms in different religions. Hindus going to the holy rivers like the Ganges and others. Muslims who aspire at least once during their lifetime to make that great pilgrimage to Mecca to do the Hajj.

Or Roman Catholics very often doing similar sorts of things, wanting to go to Lourdes or places like that. It's the same in the sort of folk religion that we still have the vestiges of, the folk Christianity that we have really in our country today and other countries that people call Christian.

The sort of thing where people want to do something for the church. I've been a loyal member of the Kirk all my life. I've been a pillar of the Kirk. So I want to have a plaque on the wall that will help the church or something of that nature.

All the same kind of thing. It's all religion. It's building temples for God. And the unspoken thing often is that, well, surely God will look upon these things that I do and will bless me in return.

[20 : 36] But you see, God makes absolutely clear all through the Christian Bible that He is not that kind of God.

Not at all. I want you to see that so clearly just in this chapter. Look at verse 4 and look at verse 10 and see the extraordinary contrast that there is there.

Verse 4, It is not you who will build a house for me to dwell in. And verse 10, I declare to you that the Lord will build you a house.

Isn't that staggering? That God is the initiator. That God is the builder. That God is the provider for David.

Not David, the provider for God. The true God is a God who provides. It's not about what we can do for Him. It's all about what He is doing for us.

[21 : 36] What He's been doing for us right from the very beginning of this story. See, what God says to David is that He's not nearly so interested in temples as buildings as He is in building a dynasty for David's line so that one day at last the son of David would rule forever in a kingdom of peace and of safety with all His people's enemies destroyed forever.

That sounds like paradise, doesn't it? Well, yes it does. That is what God is promising. Look at verse 9. I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more.

That's the promise that God had given about His people right back from the very, very beginning of the story of the Bible. Right back from the story of Abraham. You might want to turn with me right back to Genesis chapter 12 just so you can see so clearly in that chapter where God first gives that promise of a kingdom and a people and a place.

God said to Abraham right at the very beginning, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you and I will make of you a great nation.

I will bless you. Make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you I will curse and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

[23 : 14] That's what Ralph Davis calls the quad promise of God. The four things he promises Abraham progeny, a people, a family. He promises him a place of peace and safety.

He promises him his own presence to protect him and guide them. And he says to him, It's not just for you and your little family. It's part of my plan for the whole wide world to bless all nations through you.

That's what God has promised from the very beginning. That's what Moses sang about after God rescued his people Israel out of the bondage of Egypt and they were on the way to the promised land.

And in Exodus chapter 15 Moses said, Lord you will plant them on your mountain the place that you have made for your abode. The sanctuary, the temple, O Lord, which your hands have established.

You see, it's God who provides the place and the sanctuary for his people, not the other way around. God who is building the temple that really matters. His own dwelling place, his house, to share with all those that he calls his people.

[24 : 23] And he's doing it all for the sake of his people. They're not doing it for him. Look in this chapter again, look in verse 6. He talks about judges who shepherd my people, his people Israel.

Verse 7, David's to be a prince over my people Israel. Verse 9, again, it's a place for my people Israel that God promises. Again in verse 10, my people Israel and all through.

Our God, the true God is a God who provides for his people. He's the one who's building them a home. And it's a lasting home, an eternal home.

With the God of your Bible, you see, it's not what we offer him. It's not what we do for him. It's not what we give to him. It's all about what he gives to us.

The true God is a God who provides for his creatures, not a God who plunders from his creatures. The Christian writer and apologist was once asked apparently to give a simple answer as to what marks out Christianity from every other religion.

[25 : 35] And in a flash he said, oh that's easy, one word, grace. Grace. That's the word that encapsulates everything I've been saying about this God who is the provider for his people.

The amazing grace, that's the word at the very heart of the Christian gospel. And in this chapter God is pressing that message home again and again into David's heart in the most vivid of ways by saying, I will be the one who builds the future for you.

And the chronicler too who records it is pressing it home to his readers. That includes us. Now why was he doing that? Was David some sort of a legalist?

Did David not know what God was really like? Did David really think that he could buy God's affections by doing his good works?

Didn't he know that God was a God of grace and mercy that saved his people despite themselves not because of what they were? Of course David knew that. David knew that far better than most of us.

[26 : 44] Just read his Psalms. Just go back one page to chapter 16 here and read the extraordinary Psalm of Praise which is all about God's goodness and grace and his mercy. David knew that so why this emphasis on God's free sovereign grace?

And why is the chronicler restating it again to his people? Well friends I think it is because simply the grace of God is one of the hardest things for human beings to really grasp to really digest to really understand to really lay to heart and believe just because it is the very antithesis of everything that our religious self-justifying hearts want to believe.

We want to believe that we have something to offer so that God should bless us even if we're believers as David was. And so there's a constant drift isn't there in our hearts and in our minds towards worshipping the wrong God.

A God who is different from the true God. In our minds constantly we are imbibing the false ideas that are all around us of what others think God really is.

And so we start to think that what really does matter is what we do how we perform what we are building for God not what he has built for us. And that's why we tend either towards pride and hypocrisy if we think that we are doing well and wonderfully for God or else towards despair and terrible guilt when we realize that we're not up to scratch.

[28 : 29] That's why one of the biggest problems for religious people is living with crippling guilt. People from my Roman Catholic background for example so often who have no assurance that their salvation is purely and simply and only ever from the grace of God.

So often they live lives crippled by guilt wondering if God really will accept them. But it's a problem for all of us even who know the true biblical faith who do understand grace because we constantly are forgetting in our hearts that God really is the God of grace the God who provides.

grace and we constantly put those burdens on ourselves again and again and those are burdens friends that we can never possibly truly bear. That's never been a problem for you in your life well all I can say is praise the Lord but it is a problem for nearly all of us.

That's why the New Testament letters are repeating again and again grace grace it's all by God's grace because you see however correct your theology of grace may be in your head however correct your intellectual grasp of the grace of God may be that is not enough it's not enough it has to become personal gospel to you again and again and again right deep down in your heart it's no good just having a cold rational knowledge of God's grace the sense of that grace has to be on your heart and it has to be stoked again and again and again like a fire to keep it aflame that's what the Bible means by the word remembering constantly telling us to remember God's grace but not because we've forgotten in our heads the gospel is it but it's because in our hearts we are constantly stopping believing it we stop rejoicing in that experience of God's real liberating grace and that's why we need constant reminders of what kind of God it is we really serve and know through Jesus Christ he's this kind of God he's the God who provides he is the God of amazing grace grace and if you don't keep that alive in your heart then you will drift back into a kind of burdensome religiosity that enslaves so many people the world over today instead of the joyful liberating service of a God who provides everything that we've ever needed and everything that we need in order that we can please him sometimes it's especially important for keen young believers who are spiritually alive like David

David God says has a right intention in his heart you mean well he tells him later on but God had to help David to see the bigger picture of what he was doing to see what it was really about how grace really is abounding to a lost world it's not just a little temporal story it's not just a story about you this is an eternal story about blessing abundantly all God's people forever look at verse 14 that's what he says isn't it I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom forever and his throne shall be established forever this is an eternal story of God's grace and then in verses 16 to 18 David clearly grasps that because he says everything that you've done to me oh Lord and for my family I see now that's just a small thing but you've shown me the future you've opened up my eyes to just how great your grace really is it's so easy isn't it to make God's story far far too small so that it's all about me and my life and my relationship with God alone when that happens we become very focused on ourselves on the present horizons on our own personal horizons in life so naturally then everything becomes about well am I doing well or am I not doing well am I succeeding or am I failing am I doing evangelism as I ought to be am I praying enough am I having my quiet time is God pleased with what I'm doing and so on and so on it's easy then but that's our horizon to become burdened to become miserable to become joyless even King

[33 : 14] David could become all taken up with just what he was doing and what he ought to be doing for God should I be building a temple should I be doing this or that or whatever and God's answer to David by the way is not oh lighten up David don't take me so seriously no it's the opposite of that isn't it he's saying take God much more seriously look up see how much bigger is the plan and purpose of God that you have been brought into and involved in grasp just how wonderfully he really is the God who provides everything see the greatness of his story of grace see what he is building today not just for you and your little family but for the whole world forever and ever and the great king who is going to be their leader and their shepherd understand the scope of that grace the gospel isn't just something to deliver us from our personal guilt our personal sin our personal lines great as we need delivered from that it delivers us says the

Lord from the whole of this evil age and for a whole new creation in which we ourselves have been granted a great place and it's when we understand that you see that we're truly liberated and that's what David experienced here it was a liberating experience for him to show him just how much greater God's plan and purpose was than ever he'd fully grasped how much greater the gospel really is you see when that suddenly happens to you well you begin to get a true perspective on yourself and your own life and just how small our own personal issues really are our own concerns compared to the greatness of God and the greatness of what he's doing in this world verse 16 David says who am I what is my house that you brought me thus far oh this is such a small thing so big in my eyes but it's such a small thing because now you've shown me the future and what can I say he says you've made known all these great things these unparalleled things for who is like verse 21 your people the people redeemed by you rescued by you made yours forever and ever and ever no there's none like you Lord no God beside you a God who provides a God of extraordinary grace who has redeemed the people to be his not just for this time but for all time for eternity

David says who am I that have a part in this and that's what bowled him over that's what humbled him humbled by the God of grace the great provider and friends that's what we need to be bowled over by and humbled by again and again and again that even all our Christian service whatever it might be however great it might be it's such a small thing who am I in this extraordinary scheme of God's grace and yet by his extraordinary grace and provision every one of us who names the name of Jesus has been granted a part in that great story in what he is building forever and ever and ever and he has provided all of this for us in the Lord Jesus Christ he is the great provider and the gracious provider so the life of faith isn't just about you and me about what we are building for our life about what we are doing for God thank God for that it's not about our performance it's all about

God's great provision it's about him what he's provided for us and David says in verse 23 let your word be let it be amen that's the response isn't it of somebody who's understood the God of grace I will build you a house I will establish the kingdom of great David's greatest son forever and he says let it be so that's our God he's the giving God he's the God of grace he richly provides even for us an entrance God into into that marvelous everlasting kingdom of light the household of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ aren't you glad if you're a Christian believer today aren't you glad that you can rejoice that this God the covenant God the giving God the God who provides is the true God and is your God if you're a follower of

Jesus today that is the God you worship let's pray heavenly Father how we thank you that you are the one who has spoken into the darkness of our world to reveal yourself to us as the very opposite of all that is in our hearts help us we pray to grasp not only in our minds but also in our deepest hearts in our emotions in our feelings also what it means that you are the one who provides us with everything we need for life and godliness and for everlasting life and godliness help us we pray to be people who love your grace and who proclaim that grace for we ask it in

[39 : 43] Jesus name amen amen don'tation and the■■■■■ what are the many many you for to be would know this fire nauc to be the small ferment and the Everybody can save them as like we have our together