

Series: **Christmas 2017**

CDOBC – beginning on 12/3/17

Today's Title: **"Past, Present, and Future Grace"**

December 31, 2017 - Selected Passages

OBJECTIVE: To look at the past, present and future grace of God in our personal life and the life of CDOBC.

This morning I want to talk about the "Past, Present and Future Grace" of God in your life, and the life of this church. I want to help you see how God has been working in your life - the path He has marked out for you - and I have 2 reasons for this.

First, I want to help you see / know the path God has marked for each of us - and to encourage you to move forward on that path.

Second, I want to help you see / know the path God has marked for our church - to encourage you to move forward on that same path.

I've noticed - as many of you may have noticed - that finishing something is difficult for many people.

I can remember being told when I was growing up:

"Finish what you started."

I love to work around the house - painting a room with new colors or a remodeling project. I love to demo stuff - to tear it down, and then to rebuild it - to see the 'new thing' come together...taking shape. About 5 years ago I remodeled our

kitchen - redesigned the layout - and when I told Kim we had to demo the current counter-top and cabinets - she was a bit nervous. All she could imagine was me swinging a sledge hammer and destroying the place! I assured her that would not be the case - we would demo / take apart the kitchen - re-use the cabinets - so there would be no sledge hammers!

For many people, their salvation experience - the 'demo' or tearing down of their old life - and putting their faith in Christ is exciting - a huge impact in their life - the dramatic change. But some don't finish what they started - they start their new life in Christ, but they don't finish it - they never advance or move forward in their faith.

In the bible, we see many verses that speak to the beginning of the Christian life. I'm referring to this as:

The past grace of God in your life:

John 3:16

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

Romans 3:24

"...are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..."

The theological term for this is *justification*.

Justification is God declaring you righteous because of your faith in Jesus. Your sin is forgiven - placed on Jesus - and the righteousness of Jesus is credited to you - to your account.

For those who are believers in Christ - these verses look to the grace of God in your past. They bring you back to the moment you put your faith in Christ.

For many of you - this happened when you were a young child, and you can't remember any part of your life that didn't involve Christ.

For some of you - these verses bring up recent history. In the last year or two you came to realize God's love for you - your own sinfulness - and the only forgiveness for your sin is through Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection.

That's the past grace of God in your life.

Next is the present grace of God in your life:

2 Corinthians 5:17

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

No matter when you were saved, this is the present grace of Christ in your life.

So often people come to faith in Christ - and they never realize what's supposed to happen next...they're never told of the next step to take in following Christ.

Maybe that's you...you've been saved / converted / put your faith in Christ - and you come to church when you can - but that's the extent of it...and it's been bothering you because it seems the hype on the front end of this thing doesn't match the day-to-day reality.

You heard fulfillment and purpose in life is found in Christ - and now that you've put your faith in Christ, you're still looking for that purpose and fulfillment.

The present grace of Christ is frustrating for many Christians. They understand and have experienced the past grace...and they look forward to the future grace of Christ - but the present grace is like a Christian Unicorn...does it really exist?

Theologically - the term for present grace is Sanctification. This means to be 'set apart' - 'to be cleansed' - 'to increase in holiness'.

Elsewhere, Paul talks about being "transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2), and about being "conformed to the image of Jesus" (Rom. 8:29).

The present grace of Christ - or the *sanctification* of the Christian, means as you learn about Christ and His commands in the bible, you apply those things to your life. The easy, but unfulfilling path is to change your external actions - but the difficult and fulfilling path is to change your heart.

One place to start is tomorrow - begin reading the bible each day. I want all of us - the entire church to read through the bible together in 2018. We're using one of the plans from the You-Version Bible App - and each day has specific passages for all of us to read.

Another place to start is by reading the Sermon on the Mount - **Matthew 5-7**, and applying what Jesus says to your own life. Warning: This might be a life-long pursuit!

Another way to experience the present grace of God in your life is through a small group. When you're in a small group, you will get to know other Christians in the church as you study God's Word, pray and fellowship together. This is a great way to learn and talk about how the bible applies in your daily life.

The future grace of God in your life:

For our purposes this morning, future grace is what God has yet to do in this life...and the life to come.

What I mean by future grace is the promises of God which are rooted in the grace of God.

Future grace is what God will do in your own life...and what He will do in the lives of others.

2 Peter 3:9

“The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

Philippians 2:14-16

14 Do all things without grumbling or questioning,

15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

16 holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

James 1:12

“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him.”

2 Timothy 2:11

“The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him...”

All of these passages are looking forward - speaking of what God will do either in this life - or in the next life.

When we speak of God’s future grace in the next life - the theological term for this is *glorification*.

Past grace of God we are justified through faith - *justification*.

Present grace of God - we are sanctified / increasing in holiness as we learn and apply God’s Word - *sanctification*.

Future grace of God - at death, the believer is perfected as we are with the Lord in Heaven - it’s our *glorification*.

Having confidence in the future grace requires you to have faith in what He has promised.

There’s no magical formulas in Christianity. You cannot manipulate God through rituals or obedience.

Followers of Christ are called to simply trust in the promises of God. He will accomplish His providential will no matter what you and I do - but the Lord desires to use you and me in that process, so we can grow in our faith and enjoy the blessing of being used by God to expand His Kingdom.

- What are you doing today, in the present grace of God, to prepare your heart for the future promises of God?

If you're not occupied with the present grace of God, you won't be ready or prepared to participate fully in the future grace of God!

The past, present and future grace of God...

I hope dividing your life into these 3 areas of grace help you see what God is doing in your life.

Now, I want to take these same divisions - past, present and the future grace of God, and I want to use these to help us look at the church.

I want you to see how God wants to use / is using this church in similar ways He's working in your life.

Past grace of God at CDOBC:

Looking back over the years, our church has been blessed by God's grace. The many salvations over the years - baptisms, expressions of God's grace through physical help offered.

Meals prepared by people in the church and brought to those who needed help.

Teams who serve at GRM.

Over the years financial gifts we've been able to give to Salvation Army, GRM, Hands of Hope, ICS, IMPACT of Southern AZ, and Teen Challenge.

This has been a place where the Gospel has been preached for over 40 years!

God has given this church a legacy of grace. His grace litters our past!

Danger: Past grace can become the focus of a church.

While we must remember and celebrate the past grace of God, we must not idolize it or try and make the past grace our present and future grace. We must be grateful and celebrate God's past grace in this place, but we need to look forward to what God is doing today...and tomorrow!

Present grace of God at CDOBC - is what God is doing now. Talk about Amazing Grace! Don't walk through our present history with your eyes closed!

One of the mistakes I made as a parent was when our kids were babies, I kept looking forward to the next stage.

I was looking forward to when they could crawl.

I was looking forward to when they could walk.

I was looking forward to when they could feed themselves.

I was looking forward to when they could read.

I was looking forward to when they could clean their own room /tie their own shoes / dress themselves...etc.!

The problem is I didn't appreciate the moment - and when the moment is gone, it's gone forever!

We are experiencing something that is so rare in the Christian world...Appreciate this moment!!!!

Don't let your vision of God's present grace be overwhelmed by buildings.

God's present grace is much more than buildings.

It certainly includes buildings. To dismiss or ignore our new campus is to dismiss or ignore God's blessing. But the buildings are not the focus.

- When Jesus turned water into wine...the wine was not the focus.
- When Jesus healed people - their restored health was not the focus.
- When He multiplied the 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish to feed over 5,000 people - the focus was not the food.
- When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead - the focus was not Lazarus.

In all these things...Jesus was the focus.

Many people never saw Jesus...they only saw the wine, the healing, the food or Lazarus...but they missed out on the most important thing...Jesus!

Don't let the buildings - the new campus be the focus.

These buildings...this new campus help us focus more on Jesus! They will help us share the Gospel with more people!

Our Christ-given mission is the focus - *to reach more people for Christ and to help them grow in their faith.*

The present grace of God in our church - is how we are busy with the mission Jesus gave us.

- How can we help those who don't know Jesus - get introduced to Him?
- Will we personally grow in grace, so we will be grace-givers to everyone who walks through those doors?
- Will we invite people in our life to hear and experience the gospel and love of Jesus?
- Will we see our culture with eyes of grace?
- Will we see people who are far from God as God sees them - as He is patiently waiting for them to hear the Gospel - because He wants all men to be saved?
- Will we sacrifice some of our favorite things / preferences - if it helps reach more people for Christ?

Over the past year, I've been trying to lead you - the church - in what I believe is the direction we must follow.

- Our theme for 2017 has been "Embracing Change".
- Last January, I spoke about change - "Godly Transitions" - hoping you would understand the Gospel - your own faith - is all about change in your life - as God changes you - transforms your heart and mind through His truth.
- I then spoke on "Simplifying Church". The work preceding this series was about 9 months long - as the

leadership in the church - 50+ men and women worked at developing our 5 steps of Following Christ here at CDOBC. In this series, I spent 5 weeks explaining these 5 steps: 1) Belief & Baptism 2) Worship 3) Growing & Connecting [small groups] 4) Serving and 5) Sharing.

- Next, I took you through a 9-week study on the Godhead - the Triune God - God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.
- Within that study was Easter, where we looked at the Power & Passion of Jesus.
- In July, I started another 9-week series which I called: “Mission Possible”. The thesis of that series was to help you realize God’s mission for His people has always been to reach the nations with His message of salvation.
- On September 10th, I began the 11-week series: “The Scandal of Grace” - to help you understand the scandalous nature of God’s grace to all of us. I wanted you to see that God’s grace is illogical... unfair...and irrational, and I wanted to help you understand the joy and difficulty of God’s grace, so more people will be reached with the grace of Christ, and for Christians to grow in their faith.

The consistent theme / thread I’ve been trying to do through the sermons throughout 2017 is to help us realize the purpose for the past grace of God in our life - in our church - is so He

can use us to share His love, grace and truth with those who don't know about it!

He didn't save us through past grace...so we could do our own thing...according to our own preferences.

He saved us - so others could be saved through us!

He saved us - so we could grow in our faith...in our relationship with Him. But this is not done only through studying your bible, but also through sharing the Gospel with others!

This is the present grace of God - using what He's given us - to accomplish the mission He's commissioned us with!

The future grace of God in our church.

What will this be?

I don't know.

I don't know the *details* of the future grace of God in my life...and I don't know the *details* of the future grace of God in this church. Key word: details.

In a general sense, I know what the future grace of God will be. He promises to never leave me or forsake me - so I can depend on Him "in the valley of the shadow of death", or when we're scaling the mountain tops.

He promises His power and love will be ours in abundance, no matter what we face.

I know His future grace will involve sharing the Gospel - giving out and living the grace and truth of God, but I don't know the *details* of what that will look like.

I know this with great certainty - His future grace will require me / us to change.

His future grace will not be a different message - it will be the same truth - but the methods will be different as the culture will be different.

If we are a faithful church, the future grace of God will share / communicate / demonstrate the timeless, perfect Gospel by different means - different styles.

What does 2018 hold in store for us?

The Gospel will be first and foremost.

I will continue to lead you to be fully engaged with reaching others with the Gospel.

2018 Theme: "A Confident Future"

Beginning next Sunday - I will begin 2018 by preaching a 3-week series where I hope you will be convinced that we / the church - have "A Confident Future".

Apply it...

The past, present and future grace of God.

If you're a believer in Christ, He has been at work in your life. I hope you realize the different stages - different points of emphasis for each stage of grace.

Justification, Sanctification, and your eventual Glorification. Each stage implies movement - a progression or advancement in your faith.

Past grace - *Justification*: we move from no faith, to having faith in Christ.

Present grace - *Sanctification*: we begin to get rid of sin in our life - and move toward holiness - we begin to think and live in ways that fall in-line with what Jesus would think and do.

Future grace - *Glorification*: when a believer dies, they will be glorified - be perfect in the presence of God. Future grace in this life refers to what God will do in and through you - how God will empower you to live for Him - and how God will use you to reach others with the Gospel.

1) Have you put your faith in Christ? Do you have the grace of God in your past?

2) Have you moved from the past grace of God in your life - to the present grace of God in your life. Are you learning and growing in your faith? Are you being *sanctified* - increasing in holiness? Is your heart being changed?

3) Are you looking forward to the future grace of God - in this life and in the next?

Are you open to God working in new ways in the future?

Are you looking for ways God can use you to accomplish His mission? (Are you serving...moving through the 5 steps?)
Are you excited about Heaven - investing in Heaven?

Close in prayer