

# Amazing Grace

By Ben Owens | August 7, 2025

Humans are finite. Regardless of time, place, or culture, this is one thing we all have in common. We have limits. There are certain things we can do, and certain things we can't. And each of us can only do so much at one time. To be human, therefore, is to make choices. We order our lives around things that need to get done. We evaluate what's most urgent--or perhaps most important--and we prioritize accordingly. "This now, that later on." While individual capacities vary, all of us are constantly engaged in this kind of thinking. The unpredictability of life complicates things further. Often, some unforeseen crisis throws a wrench in the gears of one's best-laid plans.

This is all common knowledge. But here's the important thing: none of this applies to God. The Bible describes a God whose "greatness is unsearchable." We see this powerfully in those terrifying final chapters of the book of Job. That barrage of unanswerable questions contains a number of enormous lessons. But among them is this: God's sustaining of the universe consists of countless essential tasks, all being conducted concurrently without any difficulty. The same God who keeps the heavens stocked with snow, also sees to it that the lions get fed, the stars shine, and the eagles fly. And He's not struggling to keep up. God is not a cosmic plate-spinner, barely holding it all together as sweat drips from His furrowed brow. No, His genius design set the cosmos in motion, and his sustaining power keeps it going. He's never overwhelmed, never fatigued, never so occupied with a large task that a small one needs to be moved to the back burner.

But I think we see God's limitless immensity *most* profoundly in the story of the Gospel. Luke's gospel account begins in an odd place. After a formal prologue describing the careful research and planning undergirding what follows, Luke introduces us to an old, barren Jewish couple.

*"There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years." (Luke 1:5-7)*

Herod was justifiably famous--both for his architectural achievements as well as his treacherous and paranoid commitment to retaining power. But, regardless of what we might have expected, Herod is not the focus here. Instead, we meet the relatively obscure Zacharias and Elizabeth. Why them?

Some four centuries earlier, the prophet Malachi had joined the chorus of Old Testament authors who promised a coming Messiah. But Malachi (along with Isaiah) also predicted that

this Messiah would be preceded by a forerunner, a great prophet to prepare the way for the Messiah's arrival.

*"Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the Lord of hosts." (Malachi 3:1)*

The next chapter gives us some insight into the nature of this coming messenger's ministry:

*"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." (Malachi 4:5-6)*

These promises were among the last lines written in the entire Old Testament canon. Someday there would be a messenger, whose job it would be to prepare God's people for the arrival of the Lord himself. Then a century passed, and another, then two more. And during that time, the Jewish people endured the iron-fisted domination of one pagan empire after another. Things didn't look good. How about those promises? And then we meet Zacharias and Elizabeth. We don't get much of their life story. In fact, our scene opens just as the aged Zacharias has been selected for a once-in-a-lifetime act of priestly service.

*"So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:8-17)*

What a scene. Did you catch the reference to those dangling promises from Malachi? Zacharias sure would have. Not only will his prayers for a child be answered, but his son will be the long-awaited messenger! He will have the privilege of siring the great prophet who prepares the way for the Lord's great salvation invasion. And that's just exactly what happened. Famously, Zacharias asks for a sign, needing a little extra convincing. He's miraculously struck dumb--there's an answered prayer for you. But that hiccup notwithstanding, God makes good on His promise and the episode concludes with Elizabeth's rejoicing:

*"Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people." (Luke 1:25)*

And so we return to where we began. What is going on here? Well, Luke is telling the story of the historical fulfillment of God's great redemption promises. John the Baptist is important because he prepares the way for Jesus. And Jesus is important because He is God incarnate, come to save us from our sins. He is the heart of history, the Savior of the world. Following John's birth, Zacharias' speech is restored and, looking into the face of his baby boy, he prophesies the following:

*"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:76-79)*

Knowledge of salvation, remission of sins, light for those who sit in darkness--what could be more important? God is fulfilling centuries of promises that trace back to the Garden of Eden, promises for all mankind. Were God like us, we might expect Him to have to pass over the longing prayers of an old childless couple. Bigger fish to fry, what with the salvation of mankind and all. Yet that's not what He does. He sends the messenger *and* he picks Elizabeth to bear him, answering their prayers for a child. The same Psalm that extolls the Lord's unsearchable greatness also tells us that He "is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy. The Lord is good to all, And His tender mercies are over all His works." (*Psalms 145:8-9*)

In this story, we see all of it come together: unsearchable greatness and tender mercies. This is consummate grace. Genius grace. God is a grace virtuoso. He can save the world and throw in an answer to an infertility prayer for a flourish--without breaking a sweat.

This gives us a window into the glory of God's gospel love. Jesus did not come to die for some amorphous horde. He came to die for a world of people, of individuals. And He cares about every one. We receive the salvation He offers by simply trusting Him.

And if you are in Christ, what a comfort this is. The God of Creation, sustainer of the stars, the one who turns the hearts of kings and will reign over an endless kingdom--cares about you and your ordinary concerns. And not only does he care, but because of his infinite power, He can answer your prayers. He can act on your behalf. He is reconciling all things to Himself in Christ. All of Creation will be redeemed. He will judge the world in righteousness. And He's not too busy for you.

*"I will extol You, my God, O King;  
And I will bless Your name forever and ever.  
Every day I will bless You,  
And I will praise Your name forever and ever.  
Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;  
And His greatness is unsearchable.  
Psalm 145:1-2*