Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

The official name for a meeting of representatives from all the churches of a denomination is a **synod**. And so, for example, every three years, elders from each of the Reformed Churches of NZ gather together for a synod. Sometimes though, usually when some major issue flares up, a special synod can be held to deal with that issue.

And this was the case way back in 1618. Because of the teachings of a certain theological professor in the Netherlands, a special synod was held. It was held in the Dutch city of Dordrecht, but because Dordrecht is a bit hard to pronounce, it is more commonly known as the **Synod of Dort**. It was held from late November 1618 through to late May 1619. And that means, of course, that we are in the middle of the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dort.

The name of the theological professor was **Jacobus Arminius**. He actually died before the Synod was held, but there was a group of people who agreed with his teaching; they were called the **Arminians**, because of his name.

Well, the views of Arminius were summarized in a document that became known as the **Remonstrance**. To remonstrate is to protest. When you boys and girls squeeze your lips and eyes together, and tell your parents that you do not want to clean up your toys, you are remonstrating – protesting. The Remonstrance document contained five points of theological protest.

And while the synod did many other things, its major accomplishment was to put together what became known as the **Canons of Dort**. And boys and girls, Canons does not mean big guns but faithful measurements or standards. The Canons of Dort respond, point by point, to the five errors of Arminianism, by laying out the correct teaching of the Bible. And that 400 year old document is one of the four confessions of faith of our church. Members of this congregation agree that the Canons of Dort faithfully summarize what the Bible teaches on these matters.

Now, the five points of the Canons have come to be known by the acronym **TULIP** – Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints. And together they are called the **Doctrines of Grace**. And we are going to see that all five of these points are in the passage we are looking at today. And we shall also see why they are called the Doctrines of GRACE. And this will be a wonderful encouragement to our faith and life as believers.

But this is part of this **conversation** between Jesus and the Jews. As we saw last week, v22 tells us that this conversation took place during the Feast of Dedication. That feast celebrated a time when the temple was recaptured and cleansed and rededicated to the Lord, after having been defiled for a long time. And this conversation is the seventh and **last discourse** or sermon or speech of the Lord Jesus. It is *the* discourse where Jesus is most plain and complete about Who He is.

And it ends with the same **responses** we have seen throughout Jesus’ discourses with the people – some do not believe Him and/or want to kill Him, and others believe. So we too will have to decide how we respond to what Jesus reveals about Himself.

Well, this passage divides up into three main parts – the question of the Jews, the answer of Jesus, and then the two responses. So those will be the three main parts of this sermon as we walk through **the discourse that reveals the glory and grace of Christ**.

1. And first of all, in v24, we have the **challenging question** from the Jews. They say to Jesus, “*How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly*.”
   1. Now, Christ means Anointed One. It is the Greek version of the Hebrew word Messiah. The OT prophets said that one day Messiah/Christ would come. So the people are asking Jesus to plainly say if He is the promised Christ. He has said this *privately*, twice, and *other people* have called Him the Christ, but these Jews are demanding that He publicly and plainly say if He is the Christ.
      1. The problem is though that there was so much **misunderstanding** about the Christ at that time. The teachers of the Jews had twisted what the prophets said about the Christ and added their own ideas, so that the Christ the people were expecting was not the Christ promised by the prophets.
         1. It would be like you thinking that a minister is someone who bakes cookies and repairs washing machines, and asking me if I am a minister. If I just replied, Yes, you would still have no idea about who I am and what I do.
      2. Plus, you simply cannot understand Christ **apart from the cross and the empty tomb**. And Jesus’ death and resurrection were still to come. So just declaring Himself to be the Christ so far would have been almost pointless.
      3. But think back also to what we have read in John’s Gospel so far:
         1. Everything Jesus has said in the previous six discourses adds up to I am the Christ. Last week, when Jesus said, **I** **am** **the Good Shepherd**, He was saying, I am the fulfilment of God’s promise in Ezekiel 34 to send a shepherd to His people. In other words, I am the Christ.
         2. And in view of what Jesus goes on to say here about **His works**, He has turned water into wine, He has healed a dying boy when He was not in the same town as the boy, He healed a man who was paralysed for 38 years, He fed a crowd of more than 5000 people with a few bits of bread and fish, He walked on water, and He healed a man born blind? What does all this add up to? I am the Christ.
         3. So Jesus *has* revealed Himself as the Christ. But He knows that no matter how plainly He says this, some there will not recognize Him or listen to Him. And ultimately they will seek to kill Him.
2. So that brings us now to vv25-30 and Jesus’ **theological answer**. And here is where we see the five points of the Doctrines of Grace that make up the acronym TULIP. We will not be able to say all that can be said about these doctrines. There is also wonderful mystery in these doctrines. But today we want to see how they reveal God’s grace in Christ.
   1. In v25, Jesus begins His response to their demand to tell them if He is the Christ by saying, “*I told you, and you do not believe*.” And these words are about the doctrine of **Total Depravity (TD)**. What TD means is that the natural condition of every person born is that of being spiritually *dead*. And in the same way that physically dead people cannot bring themselves to life, spiritually dead people cannot believe in Christ of their own will. What has to happen first is that the Holy Spirit must give them a new nature; He must make them spiritually alive. Then they can believe in Jesus.
      1. Now, you might be wondering to yourself if I am reading more into these words of Jesus than He intended. But we have to consider Scripture with Scripture. So let’s look at what Jesus has said in His earlier discourses:
         1. **John 3:5***,* “*Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’*”
         2. **John 5:21**, “*For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom He will.* Salvation requires a spiritual resurrection.”
         3. **John 6:44***, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.*
         4. And in terms of Jesus’ words to these Jews, turn to **John 8:42-47**: “*If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but He sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires...* Verse47 *- Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.*
         5. So Jesus knew that these Jews were TD – spiritually dead. That is why they did not believe His words.
      2. Now, you and I cannot know this about specific persons. We *are* *not* taught this in Scripture so that we can start trying to work out who is totally depraved. Our task is simply to share the good news about the forgiveness of sins in Jesus because that is what the Holy Spirit uses to bring people to spiritual life. The reason we are taught this doctrine is so that we would be thankful to God for His amazing grace to us in Christ. TD teaches us that our relationship with Jesus did not begin with us. Even if you remember a moment when you chose to accept Jesus as your Saviour, before that the Holy Spirit had made you spiritually alive! You are saved by grace alone – it is all glory to God for your salvation. Right now your heart should be filled with a Hallelujah!
   2. But as they say on TV commercials, But wait! There’s more! For as we come to vv26-27, we see that our salvation is also about the doctrine of **Unconditional Election** (UE). Jesus says to these Jews, “*But you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me*.” So there are those who *are* the sheep of Jesus and there are those that *are not* the sheep of Jesus. And the doctrine of UE is the teaching of Scripture that before the creation of the world, God the Father graciously elected or chose, and predestined some sinners to salvation. And the unconditional part is that there is nothing the elect are or do that makes them worthy of being chosen.
      1. And again, Jesus has consistently taught this in His discourses:
         1. Election –
            1. **John 6:37**, “*All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out*.” So there is a defined group that the Father gives to Jesus. **John 6:39** , “*And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given me, but raise it up on the last day*.”
            2. And in **John 10**, Jesus spoke about His sheep. In v16, He said, “*And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd*.” Jesus knows all whom God has chosen.
            3. And looking ahead to **John 17:6**,“*I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world*.” God has elected or chosen some to salvation.
         2. Unconditional –
            1. **John 1:13**, “…*who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God*.” It is God’s free choice, not anything we will or do.
            2. **John 5:21**, “*For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom He will.*” Not to those who do this or are that, but to whom He will.
      2. So do you see the grace in UE? If you believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, it is because God chose you before the creation of the world. There are lots of people out there who do not know Jesus. And some of them may remain in unbelief their whole lives. So why did God choose you? The answer has nothing to do with you. You are a miserable sinner just like them. God simply chose to make you the object of His electing love. How humbling! How inspiring!

This truth led Geoff Bullock to write this hymn – “*Oh, the mercy of God, the glory of grace, that you chose to redeem us, to forgive and restore, and you call us your children, chosen in Him to be holy and blameless to the glory of God. To the praise of His glorious grace, to the praise of His glory and power, to Him be all glory, honour and praise, forever and ever and ever, amen*.” And we too should say, Amen! Hallelujah!

* 1. But wait! There’s more! For as Jesus talks in v28 about giving *His* *sheep* eternal life, we see that our salvation also includes the doctrine of **Limited Atonement** (LA). And this is the teaching of the Bible that Jesus’ work on the cross was only for or limited to the sins of God’s chosen ones.
     1. And again, this has been the consistent message of Jesus in His discourses:
        1. **John 10:11**, “*I* *am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*.”
        2. **John 10:15**, “*I lay down my life for the sheep*.”
        3. And very soon, in **John 13:1**, Jesus will say, “N*ow before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end*.” Jesus’ work and His love was and is only for His sheep.
     2. Now, many professing Christians point at a verse like **John 3:16**, which says that “God so loved *the world*…” as proof that the doctrine of LA cannot be right. But we have already looked at John 3:16 and seen that it does not and it cannot mean that God loves and saves every single human being. And if Jesus died for the sins of every single human being but His death only benefits those who believe in Him, then He basically ‘**wasted’ a whole lot of His precious blood** on a people who will not believe in Him. Whereas according to the doctrine of LA, every drop of blood that Jesus poured paid for every sin of all of God’s chosen ones. Every ounce of His sacrifice was 100% effective.
     3. And last Sunday we saw from 10:3 that Jesus **knows His sheep by name**. This means that in His agony on the cross, He knew that He was suffering and dying for Andre’s sins and Hens’s sins and Jacob’s sins and Hannah’s sins… This is why Charles Wesley’s wrote this hymn: “*And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour’s blood? Died He for me, who caused His pain – for me – who Him to death pursued? Amazing love! How can it be that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*” And this awestruck amazement and thankfulness should be ours also. Is it yours?
  2. But wait! There’s more! For these words of Jesus in vv27-28 about the sheep following Jesus and He giving them eternal life are the doctrine of **Irresistible Grace** (IE). IG is the teaching of the Bible that God will bring all those He has chosen in Christ to salvation. Irresistible means powerful and compelling and unable to be resisted. And this is entirely consistent with who God is. Of course all He chose will come to salvation. He is not a weak God who can only invite and hope for the best? No, He brings to salvation.
     1. And this too has been Jesus’ consistent message in His discourses:
        1. **John 6:37**, “*All that the Father gives me will come to me*.”
        2. **John 10:3-4**, “*The sheep hear His voice, and He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out. When He has brought out all His own, He goes before them, and the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice*.”
        3. **John 10:16**, “*I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice*.”
        4. Illustration – Zacchaeus – Come down. He came down!
     2. Another hymn-writer wrote, “*’Tis not that I did choose Thee, for Lord that could not be. This heart would still refuse Thee; hadst Thou not chosen me … My heart owns none before Thee, for Thy rich grace I thirst; this knowing, if I love Thee, Thou must have loved me first*.” Again, praise God for His glory and grace in Christ!
  3. But wait! There’s more! For in **vv28-29** we read of the sheep, “…*and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand*.” And what we have here is the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints in these verses. And let me remind you that saints does not mean just a few super-holy Christians but every believer. Every child of God is a saint – a set-apart one. And the doctrine of the PotS is the teaching of the Bible that God preserves and causes to persevere all He has chosen in Christ; none of them will fall away.
     1. And this too has been Jesus’ consistent message in His discourses:
        1. **John 6:39**, “*And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day*.”
     2. If it were up to you and me to somehow cling to Christ or to keep choosing to believe in Him, we would have little room for confidence. What these words reveal though is that God preserves us in faith or causes us to persevere in faith.
     3. Earlier in the service we sung Song 138: “*Through trouble though my pathway be, You will revive and strengthen me*.” And the Psalmist said this and we can say this because God is sovereign and He is a promise-keeping God!
  4. Well, our response to these five doctrines of grace should be one of worship and thankfulness, and an eagerness to demonstrate our thankfulness with obedience.
     1. If you have spoken five hallelujahs to these doctrines, don’t walk out of here unaffected or unchanged – don’t go back to those same bad habits and angry responses and addictions and devotional laziness; go from here resolved to show God how thankful you are for His glory and grace in Christ by how you think and speak and behave.

1. Well, Jesus concludes His theological answer by saying in v30, “*I and the Father are one*.” And of course, this is the wonderfully mysterious doctrine of the Trinity. Jesus was there in front of those Jews and the Father was in heaven. So you had two distinct persons. But Jesus was saying that they are one in essence and in will and purpose. And this is as plain as Jesus gets about who He is. And these Jews knew full well what He was saying. And that is why we see the **Typical Responses** to Jesus Christ in vv31-42. And we will be very brief here.
   1. We are told that the Jews tried to stone Jesus. Stoning someone meant throwing stones at them until their body was smashed to a pulp and they died. It was the OT punishment for capital crimes.
   2. So Jesus asks them, for which work of mine are you stoning me? But they replied that they were stoning Him not for His works but for blasphemy. Again, they knew that He was claiming equality with the Father – divinity.
   3. Earlier in the service we read from **Psalm 82**. This Psalm is a criticism of Israel’s leaders. It says, “*They have neither knowledge or understanding, they walk about in darkness.*” Very appropriate words given what Jesus had being saying to these Jewish leaders about their being total depraved. But we are told in v6 of the Psalm that God called the whole congregation of Israel that He led out of Egypt “gods – sons of the Most High.” So Jesus is asking the question, if God called Israel sons of God, how can I be blaspheming if I call myself the Son of God?
   4. So Jesus is trying to keep a lid on this situation, if you like, because it is not yet time for Him to be arrested and crucified. But He is also being as clear as He can be *at this time* about who He is.
   5. So He then calls on them to **consider His works/miracles**. But their response in v39 reveals their spiritual deadness. The only conclusion that everyone ought to make to the report that Jesus walked on water and turned water into wine and healed the blind and the paralysed is that He is the Christ and He ought to be believed. But they instead try and arrest Him. As the saying goes, *There are none so blind as those who refuse to see*.
   6. But in v40, we see that Jesus **withdraws and leaves Jerusalem** and goes back to where His public ministry began – the Jordan River. And there, we are told, “*Many believed in Him*.” So in Jerusalem, where all of the religious experts were, we see unbelief, but at the Jordan, where your ordinary Joshuas and Esthers were, there is faith.

So our closing question today is: What about you? Jesus says I am the bread of life, I am the light, I am the door, I am the Good Shepherd. He turned water into wine, walked on water, healed the sick, and raised the dead. This all adds up to Him being the Christ, the Son of the living God. Do you believe this?

Let us pray:

Amen.