The Grace of Sufficiency

## A Savior of Grace

## By Steve Viars

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### Faith Church

5526 State Road 26 E

Lafayette, IN 47905

**Website:** <http://www.faithlafayette.org/church>

**Online Sermons:** <http://www.sermonaudio.com/faithlafayette>

Would you agree with me this morning that whether we like it or not that religious ideas play a dominant role in public life whether we're talking about on the local or the state or the national or the international stage? Hardly a day goes by without some emphasis on religion and, again, whether we like it or not, we're placed in the position of having to think through the way we ought to respond to events like that in our own minds and the conversations we're going to have with our friends, with our family members, with our neighbors, our coworkers, sometimes complete strangers that is just everywhere. For example, the morning I was preparing this message, that was the screenshot of CNN's website: "Christians Kidnapped: ISIS abducts women and children in a Syrian village." Religion. If you look at CNN's homepage this morning and as far as I know they are not a religious organization, but what do you have on the home page of CNN this morning? A picture of Jesus advertising a presentation they are going to be making "Finding Jesus: Faith, Fact and Forgery." I've not seen that yet. I would anticipate it would be coming from a more modernist or liberal perspective but they're talking about Jesus. And you recognize a picture of Benjamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister of Israel, who I think I may have heard is coming over to the US to give a little speech or something this week that might be a bit controversial but there it is.

Hardly a day goes by without events like this occurring in our world so what are we supposed to make of all of this? The Islam? The Christianity? The Judaism? Well, there are some who take to the internet and the airwaves and suggest that all of this, these terrorist killings, are an indictment of all Islam. Some people believe that, that every Muslim worldwide would affirm the appropriateness of the conduct of groups like ISIS. Then there are others who would suggest that it has nothing to do with Islam at all. In fact, you may know, some leaders in our government have chosen to never use the phrase "Islamic terrorist" because they believe that offends Muslim sensibilities, it wrongly and unfairly lumps all Muslims together. So some of those governmental leaders from our country would not affirm what CNN even said on Tuesday about the importance of understanding that those Syrians that were kidnapped on Tuesday by ISIS were Christians. You say, "How do you know that our government might not affirm that?" Well, it's easy: when a group of Egyptians were recently beheaded, we're not talking about playing tiddlywinks here, folks, when a group of Egyptians were recently beheaded by members of ISIS solely because they were what? Were Christians. When our government discussed that event, they referred to those people not as "Egyptian Christians" but as a "Egyptian citizens" as if their religious beliefs had nothing to do with that story.

Our president recently likened ISIS' burning of a Jordanian fighter pilot in a steel cage to the so-called Christian Crusades in the middle ages as if to suggest, I suppose, "Well, we've done bad stuff too." And we're left to try to decide in our own hearts and minds, "Well, is that a reasonable analogy to make today or not?" The State Department recently suggested that we should start jobs programs in Muslim countries because Muslim youth flock to terrorism because they don't have better vocational options.

Now, I'm not trying to be controversial here. That's not my way. But I'm just simply saying we could give examples like that all day long and yes, we may not like it. I understand you may not like the fact that I'm even mentioning this. We may not like it but religious ideas come to surface in all sorts of ways practically every day and we have to decide what we're going to think and we have to decide what we're going to say.

Now, it's not just on a national or international level. You may be aware that our state legislature has been considering a whole series of religious freedom bills. For example, one that would have addressed whether a school like Indiana Wesleyan, are you glad for Indiana Wesleyan? Do you think that's a good school? Are you glad that they are here in our state, this part of the country? Whether they ought to be able to enforce their employment requirements and still participate in certain government programs or do they have to abandon their beliefs even though obviously the school was founded on religious principles, in order to participate in public life? That's a very important question.

Or if a person buys equipment and starts, let's say a video production business, can he on religious grounds decide there are certain types of material or events he prefers not to record? "I respect your freedom to do that if you want to but I choose not to participate."

If your daughter starts a baking business to earn money for college, that sounds like a pretty good idea, huh? She has distinguished herself for making cakes that look like pictures that her clients bring to her and then a man shows up and says he wants a cake for his wedding and he pulls out a lewd picture from the internet that is inappropriately sexual in nature. Should she be able to decline that business without the threat that she's going to be sued for discriminating against his gay wedding?

Can a Christian who owns a DJ business say that he's not going to play music styles that depict women in certain demeaning ways? He's not going to use his equipment to play music that is foul or graphic in nature and if that's what you want at your wedding, you're going to have to find someone else to do it without fear of repercussions by the state.

It really comes down to: are you only free to practice your faith in your home and your church but if you have a business, you now have to surrender your religious freedom? That was the Hobby Lobby issue, by the way. Thus, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. Amazingly, one of the groups that has come out in opposition to that legislation is named "Freedom Indiana." Please let that irony roll around in your head for a moment. A group that calls itself "Freedom Indiana" opposing pending legislation on religious freedom.

Now, while I'm seeing how many controversies I can throw on the table in one morning, the lead article in our local newspaper 2 Sunday mornings ago on homeschooling where a local retired public school educator criticized homeschooling and said there is no better place for a student to experience a broad curriculum than a traditional school. Really? Well, since the majority of families who are homeschooled, not all but the majority in our community do so on the basis of what? Their religious convictions. How do we respond when government employees take positions like that? Criticizing homeschoolers? And while we're just having fun, you're having fun, aren't you? This is the world in which we live. We might as well talk about it openly. We could throw in another local administrator's suggestion that if a parent doesn't like the way the I-Step testing process has shaken out this year, the best thing to do would be to withdraw your student during the period of the time of the test, homeschool them and then re-enroll them in public education after the tests are over which may not seem religious on the surface but for anybody familiar with what the Scripture teaches about the concept of submission to our governing authorities, that suggestion is deeply religious and, I believe, deeply flawed religiously.

So, for what I think is now the fourth time I've said this: whether we like it or not religious ideas play a dominant role in public life and we have to decide, "What are we going to think about that? What are we going to say about that? What are we going to do about that?" Well, let's see if we can find some direction on all of this from the word of God, shall we? Open your Bible, if you would, to the Gospel of John 1. That's on page 71 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you. I realize if you're watching this online, you probably don't have a Bible under the chair in front of you. You're going to have to find it in the index. That's the price you're paying for watching this sermon right now in your jammies with a cinnamon roll next to you.

Now, I realize some of you are relatively new to our church and you might be thinking right about now, "What kind of hot mess have I gotten myself into this morning?" Well, let me try to just explain what we're trying to accomplish today and really what we're trying to accomplish Sunday after Sunday after Sunday. Our church's theme this year is "Finding Grace" and it's taken from this marvelous text that I have been reminding us of every Sunday this year, Hebrews 4:14, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession." That's what we were just singing about, by the way, standing. Let us hold fast our confession, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence." Are you glad for that? Not arrogance. Not pride. But there is a level of confidence, "to the throne." There is some authority in this issue. "To the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." So our goal is to learn what it means to do just that, to find grace individually and as a church family this year.

Now, just to be clear, our approach to the Scriptures here at our church is called expository preaching. So what does that even mean? Well, it means that we base our beliefs on the word of God. That's what we're about. It's not current events. It's not man's opinion. It's the sufficient word of God. So what we do around here is at the end of every year, November or December, we actually lay out a preaching schedule for the next 12 months generally focused around extended sections of Scripture, sometimes even entire books of the word of God. That's what keeps us off hobby horses, if you think we are off of them. That's what keeps us off hobby horses is the issue of expository preaching. Well then, how do we do that? Sunday after Sunday, here's what our task is: it's to look at that particular passage of Scripture and we ask ourselves, "Now, what does that say? What does God's word say and what does God's word mean?" The reason that's so important is because we believe the word of God is inspired, breathed out by God. Now, others don't have to believe that. We have zero interest in imposing that on anybody else but we believe that the word of God is inspired. Every word. To be technical, the verbal, plenary, inspiration of God. Every word and every word to the same degree which is why we spend so much time giving careful attention to the grammar of the text, to the definition of the word so the overall context of the sentence structure, to the overall argument of the passage. What does the Bible say and what does the Bible mean?

Then the next step in that exegetical process is to ask ourselves, "Now, what would that have meant to the original audience?" Not to us, to the original audience. So we're asking questions like, "Who was this written by? Who was it written to? Why was it written? When was it written?" All those questions are important aspects of the discipline of hermeneutics which is a big word perhaps for the art and science of Bible interpretation and that's what guides our exegesis. That's what guides the process of leading out the meaning of a passage of Scripture.

However, we don't stop there. It's not just what does the Bible say, what does the Bible mean, what does the Bible mean to the people who originally received it but the final step in the process is to do what? It is to ask through that lens, "Well, how does that apply to us today?" You see, this isn't just a history lesson. Did you know that? I'm not a history professor. It's like the psalmist said, "Your word is a lamp unto my feet," when? Right now and regarding ISIS. "Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."

So we're talking about practical applications to every day life every Sunday but that's the end of the process. That's not the beginning of the process. Now, couple that with how Scripture commands pastors to do what? What's my job? My job is to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry and so part of that is helping all of us live biblically and effectively in the day and age in which God has sovereignly placed us and I would appreciate your prayers. I hope you pray for me. I could really use it. And part of what you could pray is that I would have balance of knowing how much time in any given Sunday to spend in the text, how much time to spend in practical application and what practical applications ought we to be talking about because that requires the wisdom of Solomon to keep all of that in balance for sure.

Now, finding grace. The first several weeks we provided what amounts to an introduction to the doctrine of grace and we've been studying some of the key bread and butter verses, so to speak, about this great doctrine. Well, we're making a shift today between today through Easter. Did you know Easter was coming? Looking kind of Easterous outside, huh? How would you like to be looking for your Easter eggs this morning? So between now and Easter, we want to especially focus on the life of Christ in the Gospel of John. I'm so much looking forward to leading us in this study.

We're going to be talking about a Savior of grace from the Gospel of John and in this morning's verses we're going to be celebrating the grace of sufficiency and why we would say it that way is going to become very apparent as we read this text. Please follow along now in the Gospel of John, chapter 1, verse 1.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Do you understand that that's talking about Jesus, the Word. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him," do you believe that? We sang about that this morning, his creative design, "and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men." Uh-oh, "The Light shines in the," what? Well, that's sounding kind of antithetical. That's sounding potentially discriminatory. "Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There came a man sent from God, whose name was John," this is John the Baptist. "He came as a witness, to testify about the Light," why? "so that all might believe through him. He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light. There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him." What? The word did not know Him. "He came to His own," tragic, "and those who were His own did not receive Him. But," thankfully the other side of that discussion, "as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." Now here's our central text this morning, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father," he was, "full of," what? "Full of grace and," what else? "Truth," you have to have both. "John," the Baptist, "testified about Him and cried out, saying, 'This was He of whom I said, "He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me."'" And then the Apostle John summarizes all of this in verse 16, "For of His," what? "For of His fullness we have all received grace on top of grace, on top of grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him."

What a great text. We're talking this morning about the grace of sufficiency and with the time we have remaining, let's think about 3 ways that Jesus demonstrated his sufficiency. You know, there are a lot of ideas out there about Jesus' ministry. There are people who have said to me on the internet this week, "You know, Jesus never rejected anybody. He accepted everybody on their terms." Really? Somebody actually said to me on the internet this week that you could summarize the message of the Bible with these words, "Just be nice to people." There it is, just be nice. Well, is that consistent with what this text is teaching us about the life of Christ? That's really the question before the house. Three ways Jesus demonstrated his sufficiency. Then I'm going to try to tie it all back to, you know, one of you brought up some controversial issues at the beginning. I don't remember which one of us it was but I want to try to tie it all back together in a package when it's all done, okay? That's where we're going with all of this.

1. Our sufficient Savior allowed himself to be examined by eyewitnesses. Clearly, that's an emphasis in this text where the Apostle John still can't get over the fact that he had the privilege of walking and talking and living with Jesus Christ over an extended period of time. It's not like he's writing as a theorist or somebody who heard another person talking about Christ, he was an eye witness to what Christ said and what Christ did. Think about how powerful that is even in this culture. For example, you probably heard about the tragic traffic accident involving Bruce Jenner on a coastal highway in California. Some of us have been on that very stretch of highway. We can picture exactly where that happened. It appears that Jenner's vehicle which was also pulling a trailer ran into the back of a car which pushed that car into a third car which was pushed across the center line which was hit by a Hummer coming in the other direction and regrettably the driver of the third car was killed in that collision. Well, what was one of the first things that the police were requesting on the news? For an eyewitness to come forward. There's all sorts of forensic evidence that they had but they were looking for eyewitnesses. Why? They wanted to know was Jenner speeding before the accident? Did he appear to be distracted? Was he driving erratically? And even if one person had come forward and suggested that any of that was true, it would have dramatically impacted that particular case. One eyewitness. Well, John's point here is that Jesus allowed himself to be examined not by one but by hundreds and hundreds of eyewitnesses over an extended period of time and what John the apostle is now recording in his Gospel is what? We found him to be absolutely sufficient. To be full of grace and truth.

Now, let's trace the argument through the text. John says he was willing to take on a human body, "the Word became flesh." We refer to that as the doctrine of the incarnation, the perfect, eternal, second person of the Trinity, the holy Son of God taking on a literal human body through the miracle of the virgin birth. I realize many people would mock the fire out of that. We are a Bible believing church without apology and so we affirm what the eyewitness affirmed, he was willing to take on a human body. Why? For a lot of reasons including so that he could be tempted in all points yet without sin. In fact, the writer of Hebrews in the text that we have been quoting all year says that exact thing in Hebrews 4:15. You see, it would have been one thing to hear that Christ was sinless, it's something entirely different for an eyewitness to have that truth confirmed over a long period of time.

Also so that he could sympathize with our weaknesses. That's how that text also argues. We don't have a high priest who can't sympathize. He had a body and eyewitnesses saw what he did in his body. That's why the writer of Hebrews goes on in the next chapter, by the way, to make the amazing claim that Jesus actually learned obedience in that body. That's fascinating. You say, "How could that possibly be true?" He learned through experience by having that body.

Of course, ultimately he took on a human body so he could die on the cross in our place as a substitutionary atonement for our sin. For our sin. We're not particularly interested in thinking about or talking about everybody else's sin. We've got plenty ourselves to occupy our focus and attention which is why the Apostle Paul said this in Colossians 1, "And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds," you know, that sounds a bit discriminatory, "engaged in evil deeds." Now, listen to this, "yet He has now," Jesus, "reconciled you in His fleshly body," there's the incarnation. "He has reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach."

Now, it's very important to understand that Islam would deny much of what we just said about the person and work of Christ and I'm not pretending to be an expert on Islam and I'm not saying you should try to be but I would say this: because this is such a dominant topic in our culture day after day after day after day, I think followers of Christ need at least a rudimentary understanding of the subject. That's why if you go online today, you're going to find a link to an article that I want to encourage you to download and read. It's entitled "[Understanding Islam](http://www.faithlafayette.org/uploads/Church/Understanding_Islam.pdf)" by David Gunn. Now, it's not a provocative article. It's not a one-sided article. In fact, I honestly believe if you handed that article to a Muslim friend or coworker, that person would read it and say, "Well yeah, that's exactly what we believe." But you need to know a little bit about what does a Sunni Muslim believe and how is that different than other branches of Islam? You need to understand how does Islam compare to biblical Christianity? How is it similar? How is it different? That's what this article will give to you. Now, I'll tell you, the article is only 4 pages. You could read 4 pages, couldn't you? Now, to practice full disclosure, it's in like 4 point type. I'm just going to tell you that. But I would encourage you to get that.

Also, while we're in the neighborhood, you could also sign up to receive that Baptist Bulletin monthly for free. Our church has a subscription. What I like about that is, there's a lot of great helpful articles about ministry and so if you want to, there's information also in your bulletin about how you can sign up for that.

Now, John went on to say that Jesus was willing to live with people. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us," literally meaning he pitched his tent. He lived with us and we with him. That is so important. In fact, if you know the epistle of 1 John which occurs later in your Bible, you know that John went back to that issue, being an eyewitness. He said, "What was from the beginning," Jesus, "what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also." You could say it this way: John still had not gotten over the miracle and the majesty of Christmas, of God with us.

He goes on to explain: Jesus revealed God's character in ways that only God's Son could accomplish. "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father." It's the majesty and the mystery of the Trinity: one God in three co-equal persons. And it was the Father's plan that his only begotten Son would perfectly reveal his character to his people. And I realize I have kind of dumped a lot of theology on you quickly. I understand that but here's the bottom line, the conclusion, the singular focus of those eyewitnesses was what? Jesus' fullness. His sufficiency. "For of His fullness we have all received."

Now, perhaps you've heard somebody say that Muslims believe exactly the same about Jesus that Christians believe. Have you ever heard that? Well, that's simply not true. That's not even close to being true. Let me quote a bit from this article that I recommended to you where Gunn suggests, again, not needlessly provocatively, he said "Islam affirms of Jesus that he was a prophet. He was a miracle worker. He was sinless. He was virgin born and the Messiah. However, it flatly denies Jesus' deity, his crucifixion and his resurrection," and he quotes the Quran on those points. Then he goes on to say this, "Christianity regards those doctrines as not only important but absolutely essential for doctrinal soundness and even for salvation. What that means is that every Muslim, militant or not, every Muslim who believes his or her Quran holds beliefs about our Savior that are deeply offensive to us yet there are no calls on the part of Christians anywhere for jihad." We're not talking, by the way, about a picture on a magazine somewhere in France. We're talking about ideas that are deeply offensive to us. There is no call for revenge killings, for burning people in cages, for taking of hostages. And what I want us to understand this morning is there are theological reasons rooted in the doctrine of grace that explain that distinction. More on that in a few minutes.

Now, what else did John emphasize about the life and ministry of Christ in this text? Our sufficient Savior told us the truth about our moral condition. By the way, I'm not talking about somebody else's moral condition, I'm talking about ours. We're not even through the prologue of the first chapter of the Gospel before we're reading about darkness. Darkness. Black. Darkness that has to be exposed starting with our own. John said, "The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." I just want to say to our church family: moral relativism will never serve a person or a country well. I almost hesitate to use this analogy lest I lose half the audience immediately for reasons I'm not even going to wade into this morning but not everything is a shade of gray.

So all of us and even political leaders have to decide whether we and they are going to talk about the existence of good and evil and a moral relativist cannot bring himself to the place of talking about sin or talking about darkness or talking about evil. Now, what we need to see is that was the point of John the Baptist's ministry. You realize, by the way, there are 2 Johns in this text: there's the writer of the Gospel, the Apostle John, who is telling us about the ministry of the forerunner of Jesus who was a man named John the Baptist. Well, John the Baptist came preaching a message of what? Just accept everybody? Whatever you want to do is fine? Just be nice? Again, I'm not trying to be sarcastic needlessly but I'm simply trying to help us think logically and biblically. What was the ministry of John, the forerunner of Christ? What was his ministry all about? And the answer is: the need for repentance. Recorded in places like this, tell me if this sounds antithetical, Matthew 3:7, "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them," I'm okay, you're okay? He said, "You brood of vipers." It makes me sound like a cream puff and that sounds rather discriminatory and I'm not sure he cares who wrote about him in the paper the next day. "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance." There is no moral relativism there. Clear, direct proclamation of the truth and what I hope that we'll see logically is that it was that and only that that could set the appropriate stage for receiving the message of grace.

The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And the principle, in case this is not clear, the principle is: the more we acknowledge the depravity of man starting with ourselves, the more we'll see our desperate need for God's sufficient grace. That's why John was so delighted to report, "For of His fullness we have all received grace on top of grace, on top of grace." It's like the Empire State building, floor on top of floor, on top of floor. When you think about the ministry of Christ being full of grace and truth, you could summarize it: grace on top of grace, on top of grace. You see, praise the Lord, our sufficient Savior was and is full of grace and truth. That's the bottom line of this text. "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him."

Now, question from the text: how did person's respond to that message? Respond to the message of the need of repentance and therefore the opportunity to accept the gift of grace? Well, some chose to reject God's grace. "He came to His own, and those who were His own," what? "Did not receive Him." Why? Why? Because they were not convinced of their need for grace, that's why. The Pharisees saw themselves as being righteous because of their birthright and their good works so they rejected Christ as their Messiah and Savior because they found his message offensive that there would ever be anything wrong with them, therefore why did they need grace. And it would not have been in their best interest for Jesus then to not tell them the truth. The zealots and others wanted a political leader who would help them overthrow Rome and so Jesus' regular insistence that his kingdom was not of this world was a disappointment to their nationalistic agenda. Think about how different that is than the message of Mohammed.

So "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him," because they saw no need for grace but thankfully people like John and many others chose to accept his gift of grace on Christ's terms. Not their own. Others chose to accept his gift of grace because they acknowledged their desperate need. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name."

Now, where does that leave us, this understanding of John 1, where does that leave us with some of those unanswered questions that somebody posed at the beginning? It's been so long ago, I forget who it was but how do you tie all of this together? I mean, what do we do with a message of Jesus being a Savior who was full of grace and truth? Where does that leave us regarding some of these questions on an international and national, state and local level? Let me throw out 9 affirmations just to at least get us thinking about this. I realize every one of these could be parsed far more than I'm going to have time to this morning but let's start here: we affirm that many unspeakable evils have been perpetrated in the name of Christianity. I also want to say that you don't have to go back to the Crusades in order to make that point. The Westboro Baptist Church, if you're wondering, "Why did our church drop the name Baptist?" This is one of the reasons. Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas, going around and picketing military funerals with all sorts of hate-filled slogans. That proves that some Muslims aren't the only ones who use the appearance of religion to justify their wickedness. By the way, do you realize that that church, a Baptist Church, just announced that they are going to picket the funeral of Leonard Nimoy. Spock. They are going to picket Spock's funeral. Spock, live long and prosper. I tried doing it in the 8 o'clock service and my fingers just don't work. I needed a rubber band or something. But live long and prosper. They are going to picket Spock's funeral. By the way, did you know, where did Leonard Nimoy get that? He got that from his Jewish upbringing. Did you know that? Even that has religious overtones.

So I'm saying, we could talk more and more about that but we affirm, you don't need the Crusades to make that point. You may not know this and you may not like me saying this but even here in the state of Indiana, at one time there was a fairly strong segment of the Ku Klux Klan here. I'm not talking about down South. I'm talking about here. And what's especially amazing is that some of those Klan members used their Christianity to defend their activities. That's just a fact. So you might have a man wearing a Klan hood on Saturday night serving as a Deacon in the Baptist Church on Sunday morning. Fact. Anything but well representing our sufficient Savior who is full of grace and truth.

Now, on the other hand, if we're going to start being the theologian in chief, then we have to, I think, say this: we would encourage persons genuinely interested in the Crusades to study that one through just a bit more. One of the lessons I learned in college was: don't take somebody else's position on something if you have the opportunity to study the original source documents. By the way, you know if you're a part of this church, I say this to you all the time: don't believe me, go back and study the word yourself. The Crusades lasted hundreds of years and we have extant letters written by Crusaders back to their families explaining why they were doing what they were doing and some if not many of them were actually financing that themselves and they were trying to love their brothers and sisters in Christ who had been oppressed by Muslims. Again, don't believe me about that, go back to the original documents. I would encourage you to often pay attention to what's on the Gospel Coalition's website. There is a lot of great information there and Kevin DeYoung who pastors up by Michigan State, wrote an article, posted a blog about "[What about the Crusades?](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2015/02/09/what-about-the-crusades/)" That I would encourage you to get.

You may also want to read this article, it's in Christianity Today, "[The Real History of the Crusades.](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/mayweb-only/52.0.html)" That too, by the way, is available. You can get that on our website this morning if you just want to download that. But what I'm saying is: just because someone wants to use the Crusades as some kind of parallel to an Islamic terrorist burning a Jordanian pilot to death in a steel cage doesn't make it a reasonable analogy and I think we have to say that.

I would also say this and I'm quoting now from Gunn in this particular point: we acknowledge that many Muslims including at present the majority of Muslims in America oppose militaristic interpretations of jihad and view the actions of these terrorist groups as moral atrocities. You see, just like we don't want to be lumped in with the vile actions of the Westboro Baptist Church, it's not fair, it's not true, it's not gracious to do that to all Muslims. So in case I'm not being clear because I realize sometimes clarity is one of my problems, what I'm saying is: let's be more careful about posting right wing rants on Facebook that aren't careful with the facts. We're called upon to be people of truth ourselves.

On the other hand and you can tell I'm trying to drive this boat in between the buoys, we affirm that many terrorists are operating off of their brand of Muslim faith. Do we ignore this? It's just ridiculous. And their actions cannot be understood or defeated apart from that acknowledgment. Now, you can disagree with me on this. You understand, we have dumpsters on our property. There's all kinds of things I might say this morning. Feel free to put it in the dumpster on the way out. But I personally believe it's disingenuous to avoid the use of the phrase "Islamic terrorist." Just like it was disingenuous to refer to the group of Egyptians recently who were beheaded for their Christian faith as simply being "Egyptian citizens," not "Egyptian Christians." I don't think that's being full of grace and truth. I think it needs to be called out occasionally.

Now, we also want to add this: we believe our gracious Savior taught a clear separation of church and state and we don't want or expect the state to accomplish the church's mission. Jesus made it clear in places like Matthew 22:21, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s." You might say, "Why would you even put that in there?" Here's why: some people wrongly believe that all religions are fundamentally the same and only superficially different and so when they see the activities of the Islamic state, they think Christians have a similar desire. That's not true. You might even want to read this article in the Atlantic Monthly which is not a publication I recommend here on a regular basis but that's a very interesting article, "What ISIS Really Wants: The theological underpinnings of their actions."

We also for sure need to say this: we believe our gracious Savior taught us to never impose our religious beliefs on somebody else by force. You remember what Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews. But as it is," the second time, "My kingdom is not of this realm." Even when Peter cut off the ear of one of the soldiers seeking to arrest Christ in the garden, do you remember this? Jesus didn't say, "Go at it, Peter! We're going to bring the kingdom of God by force of governmental law." No, he rebuked Peter and he actually took the time to put the soldiers ear back on which is why Baptists have stood so strongly historically for the separation of church and state. I don't know if you know that. That's a Baptist thing. We also stand equally for individual soul liberty because we believe the decision whether to receive Christ should be made by the individual, not coerced by the state. We are all about religious freedom for everybody. And if you say, "Explain some of your ranting." That's why.

I'm skipping a lot for sake of time but I would highly recommend this article by John Piper. It's on the "Desiring God" website, "[How Christians Should Respond to Muslim Outrage](http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-christians-should-respond-to-muslim-outrage-at-the-popes-regensburg-message-about-violence-and-reason)." It's actually a couple of years old now. That particular event happened several years ago but the principles in the article still hold true and that's on our website as well. You might say, "Man, you're acting like you want me to do a religious study?" Yeah, that's about it. That's about it. That's really about it.

We would also say this: we believe that God instituted government. Do you believe that? And that we have clear responsibilities to it and, by the way, it has clear responsibilities to us. Like what? Well, 1 Timothy 2 commands followers of Jesus Christ to pray for our governmental leaders. And I just want to call upon all of us to acknowledge that our president and other national leaders here and in other countries facing terrorism and exactly how to respond has no easy answers and I really do believe that if followers of Jesus Christ would spend more time praying for our president instead of mocking him out on the internet, we'd all be in a better place. So that is a biblical and...by the way, you say, "I don't agree with him." Do you think that the people to whom Paul wrote 1 Timothy would have agreed with all of their governmental leaders? And yet we're still called upon to pray.

We're also, according to Romans 13, called upon to obey and honor our government which is why this recent suggestion by a public school leader to show your dissatisfaction with the state test by just withdrawing your children, homeschooling them and then re-enrolling them afterward is so in appropriate. What kind of a lesson does that teach our children about honoring and obeying authority even when it's hard? Where is the grace and the truth in that?

I also would encourage us to be very thankful for the many governmental leaders, whatever phase of government you want to talk about, who are so open to the appropriate place of religious ideas in public life. We've got a lot of them here in our community, we ought to be thankful for them. We've got a lot at the state level, we ought to be thankful for them, etc. etc. I think it's great when Christians run for public office who participate in the democratic process. We have a participatory democracy. Thank God for that. Therefore we have a stewardship to communicate. That's why I believe our elected officials ought to pass this Religious Freedom Restoration Act and I think you ought to encourage your state house representative to do so. I think it's wrong for Christians to expect their legislators to stand up for their religious freedom down in Indianapolis if you're not willing to stand up with them in Lafayette. You might say, "People are going to accuse us of being discriminatory. People are going to accuse us of being bigoted. People are going to blah, blah, blah." Listen, people can say whatever they want to say but religious freedom matters. I care about the religious freedom of your daughter who someday might start a bakery. Do you care about the religious freedom of your daughter who someday may start a bakery? Don't let people spitting a little venom on you stop you for standing up for what's right in a participatory democracy that we've been given. And if you're not going to stand up, then don't fuss about the fact that your elected leaders won't stand up for you.

Also, we reject superficial substitutes that fail to recognize the depravity of man and our desperate need for grace. When that quote came out about the State Department suggesting that you don't win the war on terrorism by killing terrorists, you need to start a jobs program to discourage participation in terrorism, I was actually down in Florida teaching a class to 140 college freshmen about how biblical counseling is different than other systems including behaviorism. What I was explaining is behaviorism has no place for the depravity of man and therefore sees no place for the corresponding need for a Savior of grace. We believe that ultimately problems can only be solved by getting to the heart of the matter and that means valuing environments where we can call sin sin and then we can point men and women to the Savior of grace. Which is why the local public educator's comments about homeschooling were so unfortunate. You realize that many if not most of the homeschoolers in our community have taken that responsibility on for what? For religious reasons. They rightly see education as being first and foremost the responsibility of whom? Of the parent, not the state. And they want to create an environment where the true nature of their children can be exposed just like it was in John 1. Why? So that the beauty of our gracious Redeemer can be embraced at the level of the heart.

And I want to go on record this morning as having said: I have watched a lot of children grow up in this church over the last 27 years and I'm glad for all the ones who went through public school and did well. I'm glad for all the ones who went through Christian school and did well. But some of the finest young people to graduate in this community have been homeschooled and I believe it is an offense to the sufficiency of Christ for representatives of the state to suggest that there's only one way to educate a child even if our gracious Savior who was the way, the truth and the life has been banned from the premises.

One more thing: we celebrate the grace and truth of our sufficient Savior, don't we? And we seek to relate to others in a similar fashion and that is the challenge and we need to pray for our government that they would relate in truth and grace. And it's a challenge for us as well. When do you speak truth? When do you exercise grace? That requires the guidance of our sufficient Savior.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

*Father in heaven, thank you for the opportunity to study this important passage and, Lord, I pray that you would help us as we continue to think these things through. Thank you that we have the Holy Spirit resident inside of us. Thank you that we have your word in our hands. And thank you for the priesthood of the believer, of us as individuals and for individual soul liberty. So I pray, Lord, that you would help us to think these matters through and when we need to speak the truth, Lord, help us not to be so attached to the approval of man that we fail to speak. When we need to live it, I pray that we would. And Father, when we ought to wrap all of that in grace, we would pray that you would give us the wisdom to know how. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.*