

Sermon Title: **“How Do We Accept Grace In Vain?”**

Bible: **1 Samuel 17:38-40 & 2 Corinthians 6:1-13**

When: on the 5th Sunday after Pentecost, June 23, 2024

Where: about 25 people (plus YouTube Live Streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. What Is On Your Bucket List?

English is my second language. Sometimes it is not easy to learn English. But sometimes it is very fun to learn English. I still remember when I learned about the “white elephant” from the meeting of United Women in Faith, which, at that time, was known as the United Methodist Women. At first, I was perplexed in my mind about how we could bring a white elephant to the church. I love an elephant and a white elephant! Another English phrase that I enjoyed learning was “bucket list.” Do you have a bucket list? What is on your bucket list? What do you want to do, before you kick the bucket? Since we are alive, I believe that we have things we want to do. At least, we can dream about doing something. How many items are on your bucket list? My bucket list has changed a lot, but these are the most updated ones: To go to Hawaii; to go to Disney World, as I have been to Disneyland; to have a cruise trip, and to get a pilot’s license. Because of this bucket list, I volunteer my wife to become an owner of a private jet someday. I would also like to experience having a beehive (at first, it was to build my own beehive, but as I live in an apartment, it is not possible); to learn a musical instrument, and to be a YouTuber. I believe that I will be able to achieve some things

on my bucket list, and some might be changed, as they might not be possible. But to have the bucket list itself gives me a feeling of a life and joy. What is on your bucket list? What is on your bucket list to give you joy, a lively feeling, and hope for tomorrow?

2. Do You Have Any Bucket List Items for the Church?

And do you have any bucket list items for the church? As a denomination, our church achieves many bucket lists. We helped to end slavery in the United States! We welcomed and supported female pastors, and you and I are the witness! We enjoy having ethnic pastors just like me, beyond the differences of race and culture, right? We are so glad to have our LGBTQ+ pastors fully in our denomination. These are some of our achievements on our bucket list. As you might know, many other denominations still struggle with these bucket list items.

As a local church, do we have any bucket lists? What bucket lists do we have? We know that our church is small, right? Nevertheless, we love our church, right? Then, what bucket lists do we have? What do we want to do for the church? We do not need to wear big and uncomfortable suits of armor. That armor might have worked for Saul when he was king, or for our former church members when we were a bigger church, and for big churches that we see and know about. But, we are small, perhaps like David. We might not need the armor, the bronze helmet, and the king's sword. David went forward with what he had: his sling and five stones. What are our five small stones? Sometimes we need to see what others have and what they do, in order to compare and learn, but we do not need to forget what we have. What are

our five small stones? Do we have our own bucket list? Then, what is on our own bucket list?

3. How Do We Accept Grace In Vain?

Very interestingly, when the Apostle Paul and Timothy wrote the letter to the Corinthian church, they asked for not accepting the grace of God in vain. How do we accept grace in vain? One lesson from the story of David and Saul is to be ourselves. If we give up being ourselves, the grace to us and in us can be in vain. When we look at others' hands only, not looking at our hands, how can we accept our grace from God to our hands? And the Apostle Paul and Timothy put a stress upon the word "now." It says, "Look, now is the acceptable time; look, now is the day of salvation!" We live today. We cannot live in the past, or in the future. Even if we can learn from the past, and even if we can be thankful for the past, we cannot live in the past. We live today. Even if we can hope for something for the future, and even if we can work and save for the future, we cannot live in the future. We live today. God gives us grace today and now!

This does not mean that our daily life will be challenge-free or pain-free. We cannot avoid challenges and pain in this broken world. The Apostle Paul, who was a great servant of God, experienced many hardships: beatings, imprisonments, sleepless nights, hunger, and on and on. Even our Lord Jesus could not avoid experiencing suffering, the way to the cross, and death.

If we accept grace in order to guarantee that everything will go well, it will be in vain. The grace that God gives us is to be with us today and now, even in our struggles and our

suffering. You are not alone. God is with you. God is walking with you. God will save you. This is grace. The reason why the Apostle Paul and Timothy were able to live fully in the here and now was that they had this grace.

4. Open Our Hearts!

When Goliath came forward to fight, many were afraid, and they closed their hearts. But one little boy named David opened his heart and saw the living God within himself. Even though he was small, he faced the challenges with what he had. Paul and Timothy did not forget God's holy presence in their daily lives, even though they went through many, many hardships that they could not explain or understand. Regardless of the situation, they could focus on their ministry and live fully day to day.

Where is your living God? Where is our living God? Let us open our hearts wide! Even if we are small, we can do something. Even if we are close to kicking the bucket, we can make our own bucket list and achieve something. Even if we are facing many challenges, we can live today fully. Where is our living God? Where do you see our living God?

Closing Prayer

Loving and living God, you promised to be our God, to be with us, to walk with us, and to save us. Sometimes, we are just afraid, and close our eyes and minds. Sometimes, we are just tired of our daily lives. But our God, our Lord, please help us to open our hearts wide to you. Please lead us to live today fully, to make our own bucket list, and to achieve some of the items on it! In Jesus' name. Amen.