

Sunday, July 21, 2019

Ephesians 2:1-10

John 1:14-17

God's Grace

With our third suggested topic for our "At Your Request" summer series, I was asked, "say something about God's grace. To respond to this request is not easy because to truly justify our understanding of God's grace means to focus on what it is and how people are transformed by it, through it and for those who fully believe in God and in His Son Jesus Christ, how these people live in grace guided by God's righteous way of living on earth as we prepare for the life to come.

A little something about God's grace would be to sing the favourite hymn of many, "Amazing Grace" without knowing the full background story of this beloved hymn. To say something more would be to share with you why John Newton, a clerk and a slave trader who through God's grace wrote these words as his life changed in 1779. Newton worked in the slave trade but after God changed his life, he immediately stopped and just over 11 years later he preached at the parish churches in Olney, England. Newton identified himself with King David's word "Who am I O Lord God that you have brought me here?" (I Chronicles 17:16) It was God's grace which helped him recognize who he was and enabled him to see. On his tombstone, it reads "John Newton was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned and appointed to preach the faith he had long laboured to destroy." God's grace had made the difference in his life.

What is grace? We talk as though we understand it. The bank gives us a grace period. People in leadership fall from it, musicians speak of a grace note. An actress may be gracious, a dancer graceful and we name hospitals, infant girls, pre-meal prayers grace because it suits us. It's a church word along with forgiveness faith and fellowship but do we understand it?

In Max Lucado's book, Grace, described it as, "a drenching about it. A wildness about it. A white-water, riptide, turn-you-upside-down-ness about it. Grace comes after you. It rewires you. From insecure to God secure. From regret-riddled to better-because of it. From afraid to die to ready-to-fly. Grace is the voice that calls us to change and then gives us the power to pull it off. When grace happens, we receive a new heart and a new spirit from God. It is really "a spiritual heart transplant." This means that God dwells within us. That is, Christ Jesus is in us. No other religion or philosophy makes such a claim No other movement implies the living presence in his followers. We do not get grace, but we do

receive it. Grace meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us. We are forever changed because of God's grace.

Such is the case of the story in John 8 which describes a woman caught in the act of adultery. This woman was taken from where she was, marched through the streets and brought to the Temple. Jesus was teaching in the temple and a crowd gathered around him. As those who had accused the woman of her sins stepped in front of the crowd, they spoke to Jesus. Teacher this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?" What was Jesus to do and say?

How could the woman deny the charge= she had been caught. But what Jesus does is outright amazing. He stoops down and writes in the dust. And then standing upright, beside the woman he states, "All right, stone her. But let those who have never sinned throw the first stones." Jesus then stoops down again waiting. Rocks fell to the ground, Jesus continued to write in the dirt. Then the accusers slipped away one by one until only Jesus and the woman was left with the crowd. The accusers left. Jesus then asks the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of the condemn you?" No. "Neither do I Go and sin no more. This woman had received Christ's gift of grace. Jesus does the same for all of us no matter the sin—immorality, stupidity, dishonesty, irresponsibility or whatever it is—Jesus intercedes on our behalf and we receive grace.

As was read from Ephesians 2: You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. But you have been saved by God's grace. God raised us up with Jesus and gave us a seat with him in the heavens. By grace you have been saved through faith not as a result of works, so that no one may boast but because it is the gift of God!

Just think of a time when you are carrying many packages- usually shopping a couple of times of year—before Christmas or special holidays, when there is a special sale on or when we need to buy gifts for special events as well, weddings, new baby, graduations, birthdays, anniversaries,. We often walk around and our hands are full. But what happens if/when you see someone you know. Your hands are full and you cannot even exchange handshakes or hugs. As C.S. Lewis wrote, "A man/person whose hands are full of parcels can't receive a gift." How full are your hands to not even receive God's promise which arrives as a gift; given to all equally. Do you have faith ready to receive what this gift of grace

offers to us? Or do we walk away not sure of the Gift or the Giver? Maybe you are afraid and just unsure of what this gift is all about.

The prophet Isaiah wrote that when you are afraid God will be gracious to you and when you cry out to him what you receive is grace and more grace. God knows what you are capable of handling each day. And yet when you acknowledge your need for help and cry out, the moment he hears, he will answer. Grace will lead you each and every day and will keep you safe as your journey through this life. God's grace will release your fears; you may be anxious about some matters in this world but grace controls all things through God's love and guidance.

Grace comes from God and through his love for us all, we are able to receive this gift in Jesus Christ. From John 1 we read that the Word became flesh and lived amongst us and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son full of grace and truth. From Christ's fullness we have received grace upon grace. Grace comes through Jesus and is not given because we have done good works but in order that we may be able to do them. Karl Barth a 20th century theologian states, "Grace must find expression in life, otherwise it is not grace."

The parable of the father who had two sons is from Luke 15. In this teaching story, the second son demands his inheritance, leaves the farm and squanders all his money away. He realizes that he could live better as a hired hand instead of eating castoff food from the pigs he cared for. He comes to his senses and returns home. When he arrives back at the farm, the father doesn't yell at him, beat him or anything like this, He welcomes him into his embrace and prepares a banquet for everyone. The father acts out of grace for what he thought was lost. The father lavishes his son with gifts and does not find fault with what he has done. He just loves him. This is grace.

Grace is God's gift to you in Jesus Christ. We experience grace because Jesus is the one who enables change. But we do not always acknowledge the gift that God gives to us. We think that it is ordinary, already used, no value, been around already it is not what we want. Why do we say this? Because God's gift is Jesus and over 2000 years ago the angels told the shepherds "There has been born for you a Saviour who is Christ the Lord. Sometimes we forget the words which fulfill God's promise to us that a Saviour would come. This baby was born for you. Jesus is the gift.

Jesus is the treasure and grace is precious because Jesus is the same. Jesus changes lives and so does grace. To discover grace is to discover God's love for you, his stubborn resolve to give you a

cleansing, healing, purging love that lifts those who have been hurt back on their feet. You do not save yourselves- it is Christ Jesus in you and through you.

This grace that God gives us is a grace that grants us first the power to receive love, and then the power to give it. A grace that changes us shapes us and leads us to a life that is eternally altered. All we need to do is have faith in God. Grace happens here and now. Grace happens because of God and your faith in Him. You who believe will never be the same for you are no longer who you once were.

Martin Luther, the great reformer stated, "Should anyone knock at my heart and say, "Who lives here?" I should reply, "Not Martin Luther, but the Lord Jesus Christ." And we can say this with confidence because for by grace you have been saved through faith. This was God's doing and Christ lives in you and shall lead your life.