

Grace!

Ephesians 2:4-9 HCSB But God, who is abundant in mercy, because of His great love that He had for us, (5) made us alive with the Messiah even though we were dead in trespasses. By grace you are saved! (6) He also raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavens, in Christ Jesus, (7) so that in the coming ages He might display the immeasurable riches of His grace in *His* kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (8) For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift-- (9) not from works, so that no one can boast.

Introduction:

Grace is a terribly misunderstood word and defining it sufficiently is notoriously difficult. Some of the most detailed theology textbooks do not offer any concise definition of the term. Someone has proposed an acronym: GRACE is G od's R iches A t C hrist's E xpense. That's not a bad way to characterize grace, but it is not a sufficient theological definition. One of the best-known definitions of grace is only three words: God's unmerited favor.

- W. Tozer expanded on that idea by saying, "Grace is the good pleasure of God that inclines him to bestow benefits on the undeserving."
- Berkhof is more to the point when he says' grace is "the unmerited operation of God in the heart of man, effected through the agency of the Holy Spirit".

The key word in what these great minds have said is this, "unmerited". Grace, my dear friends, is completely undeserved and therefore it leads to the conclusion that grace is in essence a free gift given to us by God through Christ.

ILL: I would like you to imagine for a moment that we're standing at the gate of Nain, through which a casket is being carried with the corpse of a young man, the only son of his mother, and she a widow. A great crowd follows in observance of the Jewish precept of "attending the dead unto the grave." Heads are bowed and faces manifest the deepest sorrow for the bereaved. Bitterly the mother weeps as she walks behind the casket, for he, her only son, had been her only support.

Then suddenly the mourners are interrupted by a man who hurries forward, "here let me deal with the dead, I can bring him back to life." Instantly the procession halts and with mystified faces gaze upon the speaker as he elbows his way through the crowd.

"All this man needs is **EDUCATION**," explains the man while boldly approaching the casket. And from his books of science and philosophy he attempts to teach the young man in the coffin. But in vain he watches for the flush of life to return; there is no response. Education has failed.

Another man approaches the scene, confidently proclaiming that he can bring the young man back to life, and so he begins, "Now young man, exercise **WILL POWER**. Make up your mind that you are going to live. Exert your will, and choose to live – the choice is yours. You can get up if you only will". But there is no response as the previously confident man looks upon the lifeless face of the young man. Free choice and will-power has failed.

Then another man came toward the crowd, calmly and with a sense of peace about him. For a few moments no one moves. Then the man speaks, "My friends, do you not know that what this man needs is **RELIGION**? Through the knowledge of the Torah he will be revived". And he sat down by the coffin's side. Taking a scroll from under his arm he declares, "Now I will reveal to the young man the precepts of the law, for if he will keep them faithfully he will live again". "But" inquires one of the bystanders, "how can a corpse observe the laws since he cannot even hear your words? Until he is first alive, all the Jewish precepts will avail nothing". Sorrowfully the rabbi walks away, religion has failed.

Then from the crowd steps the figure of **ONE** who walks with perfect confidence and composure to a scene of certain failure. A sudden hush falls on the expectant throng as he

stands for a moment beside the coffin. Then He speaks, his voice calm but authoritative. “Young man, I say to you, arise!”

Eagerly the people draw close. Who is this? What power is there behind his simple words? What manner of man is this? But then their questions are suddenly answered. The eyelids quiver, the flush returns to the cheek; the heart throbs once more, and the young man rises to his feet.

What had happened? Jesus imparted life. The man was dead and it was life that he needed. This is the one great essential. Education will not do; nor will free choice or human rights; not even religion, however sincere it may be, will ever make the grade. None of the things we regard as being of value is equal to the task of restoring life. Only God’s grace begets life!

How often do we think about grace? Consider your own life. We need not even look very far or at great and mystifying examples. For instance, how many of us parked our cars here this morning and thought of God’s grace that brought us here safely. To the majority of us grace is only a concept, an abstract idea. We understand grace, but do we know grace? Do we know him personally?

- E. Stanley Jones once said: “Grace is free, but when once you take it you are bound forever to the Giver.”

See friends, grace is never about the concept of the principle, but rather about the truth of the gift given to us freely by the giver – Jesus Christ. Far too often do we, who are ultimately indebted to the marvels of grace, neglect the importance of it and we tend to lose our appreciation for it. I believe that the most important thing to bear in mind when we think about grace is that it is a free gift, given to us by Christ.

In order to explain this I would like to read to you from **Genesis 6:8-9**:

- **Genesis 6:8 HCSB** Noah, however, found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

Noah grew up in an environment of faith and by the grace of God became what he is said to have become.

We are told,

- **Genesis 6:9 HCSB** These are the family records of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among his contemporaries; Noah walked with God.

How did Noah get to be blameless before God? To answer this question we must go back to verse 8, where we are told and “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” Some people read these verses as if Noah found grace from God because he was righteous and lived a blameless life. But that is not the case and, in fact, to read it that way is to get it backward. Verse 9 does not come before verse 8, nor is there even a connecting participle between them, as if to say, “Noah found grace because he was righteous.” Actually, Noah’s righteousness was the product of his having found grace and is therefore the proof of that grace, not its basis. This is a great biblical principle, namely, that the grace of God is a free gift and always comes before anything. In fact this grace is essentially necessary for us to live righteous lives, for by it we are made righteous as we read earlier this morning. God loves us solely because He loves us. He is gracious to us only because He is. It is a gift!

ILL: The Russian Czar, Alexander, used to love to disguise himself and mingle with his people to hear what they have to say. One night he visited the army camp and listened to some soldiers. While passing a tent he saw a young soldier sitting at a table with his head on his arm, sound asleep. The Czar tiptoed to the back of the chair and looked over his shoulder. There on the table before him he saw a loaded revolver. Beside the revolver was a sheet of paper with a long list of gambling debts. After seeing the total the Czar noted a sentence below the figures saying, “who can pay so much?” Suddenly the czar understood the situation. The young officer had gambled away all he had and was about to take his own life for fear of not being able to meet his debts.

Then the czar took up the pen and below the young soldier's question wrote the words "I, Alexander, Czar of Russia". Quietly he turned away and went home.

The next morning the young officer woke up and immediately took hold of the revolver when suddenly he saw writing on his letter that he had not put there. He read the words of the Czar and in amazement he dropped the revolver. At that moment a messenger came to his tent with a bag of money from the Czar. The young soldier's debt was paid and his life was spared.

Conclusion:

Friends, we too, have accumulated a large amount of debt. A debt so great that none of us would ever be able to pay the price. But there is good news, we don't have to. See, just as Noah received his righteousness as a gift through grace and the young soldier his life through a gift, so too do we receive the gift of God's grace that paid our debt for us in order that our lives might be spared.

- The well-known preacher, A. T. Pierson, once said, "However poor a preacher, I can preach the gospel better than Gabriel can, because Gabriel cannot say what I can say, "I am a sinner saved by grace."

Go from the house of God this morning, knowing full well that you have been saved by grace, and by grace alone. Let this be to you encouragement to either share that salvation with others, or to fall to your knees and plead with God to grant you that same salvation.