

## “Grace Came”

John in his gospel does not tell about Jesus’ birth, but goes way back to the beginning of creation, and how the *eternal Son of God* was there! But then, incredibly, this Son of God came and lived among us for a while! John 1:14 is a profound verse: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us.” In other words, the human Jesus was God’s word to us, God’s message to humanity. In that verse, John continues: “And we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, *full of grace and truth*.” John says Jesus was filled with God’s grace! Jesus spilled over with God’s grace!

*Grace* is one of those words that pops up in the New Testament again and again. It’s one of the great words that describes the Christian experience, part of a believer’s special vocabulary that probably means little to those who aren’t saved.

What is grace? *Grace* is God’s unlimited, undeserved, unearned favor and good will offered us. It’s God taking the initiative and reaching out to us in love, even though we don’t deserve it because of our sin and rebellion against God. It’s the kindness God shows us that we can do nothing to earn or achieve it. It’s God’s willingness to accept us though we’re unacceptable, to love us even when we’re not lovable, to save us even though we deserve judgment and condemnation. Grace is always difficult to define, and until you’ve experienced it, no definition will fully convey what it’s like.

The eternal Son of God came and made His home among us, “*full of grace*” (John 1:14). John says more about God’s grace. “From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (John 1:16). Jesus was gushing over with God’s grace, and from His fullness we have all received, “grace upon grace.” The Greek literally says: “grace instead of grace.” What an odd phrase! It seems to be saying that God’s undeserved kindness in Christ is so limitless that every time we take some from Him, there is more grace to take its place! It’s kind of like standing on a beach, with a bucket. As a wave breaks in, we fill the bucket. But another wave breaks in, and more water just keeps coming. In Jesus, we can draw from an ocean of God’s kindness and mercy – it just keeps flowing – wave after wave. There was a little girl during World War II who was a refugee from bombed out England. This little girl was sheltered by an American hostess. The first time someone put a full glass of milk before the little girl, she looked at it and asked, “How much may I drink?” She wasn’t sure it was all for her! John says we can drink deeply from a *limitless supply* of God’s grace in Christ!

The next verse says, “The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Does this mean that there was no grace and no truth before Jesus came? No grace, no truth, at all in the Old Testament? No! For instance, it was through grace that God called Israel to be His people and gave them their mission. But with the coming of Jesus we see grace in a way that nobody ever experienced it before! God’s kindness towards us was so extravagant that God allowed His holy, sinless, perfect Son to be executed on a cross for our sins!

Sometimes the New Testament writers were overwhelmed when they thought of how lavish God’s grace is! For example, we read these words in Ephesians 1:5-9:

For example, “God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding. God has now revealed to us his mysterious will regarding Christ—which is to fulfill his own good plan” (Ephesians 1:5-9).

But I wonder how many of us who say we’re Christians are experiencing a life rooted in the grace of God. In some ways, perhaps, it’s more like we’re living by *law* than by *grace*. We can be caught up in “trying to be good”, trying to follow the rules, doing religious things. This tends to produce a rather bland, joyless kind of faith. *But a life rooted in God’s grace produces joy, and the power of a Christ-filled life!*

Here are questions we can ask ourselves to gauge whether we’re living a life in grace or not: Do I do good so God will accept me, or do I do good *because God has accepted me* in Christ? Or to put it another way, do I try to live a good life *in order to be saved*, or do I try to live a good life *because I’ve been saved by God’s grace*? Is the focus of my faith a joyful relationship with Christ, or is it being religious and keeping the rules? Does my Christianity make me feel self-righteous, or does it make me feel humble and grateful to God?

Can you see something of the difference between living a life focused on my *religion and morality*, or on other hand, living a life rooted in *God’s grace*?

*Jesus offers us a life rooted in the grace of God!* To experience grace is to experience the wonder that we are loved, just as we are. Now we may think, “Well, I don’t see the big deal. I don’t think I’m that hard to love! I mean, I can see where God would have trouble loving some people!” Some of these idiots and scum bags we hear about in the news...the perverts who are into child porn...people who shoot someone or knife someone, sometimes over the most stupid things...the person who steals from their company, then gets caught. I can see why God would have a hard time loving some politicians, some used car sale people, some rappers, some of my family members or my neighbors. But, why would God have a problem loving me? So, we can play our little game of self-justification. That’s a very generous thing you did on the cross Jesus...for some of these people.

“*But, Lord, I’m not that good.....*”. If people only knew *everything* about me – some of the things I’ve thought, some of the things I’ve done. There was this lady in the hospital, a church member. Her pastor visited her. Her pastor closed the visit with a prayer, “Oh, Lord, bless this Thy servant...may Thy servant...Thy servant this, thy servant that...”. After the pastor finished, there was a look of embarrassment on the lady’s face as she said, “Pastor, I’m really not that good!”

We can’t experience God’s grace, His kindness and mercy, until we realize that we don’t deserve it! And that’s not to put us down, to make us feel bad here in church. It’s just the truth, isn’t it?

There was janitor in large city bank who was sweeping up the floor of the president's office after banking hours. A telephone rang and the janitor answered it. An excited voice at the other end demanded, "Can you tell me what the Federal Reserve Bank discount is, what's the current prime rate, and help me understand what this "crypto currency" is all about?" The janitor replied, "Mister, I told you all I know about banking when I said hello!" There's something refreshing about this janitor's honest assessment of who he was!

In order to receive God's grace – His kindness and mercy and forgiveness – we have to have an honest assessment of our true status before God: God is holy, and we are not; all our good works and religion do not restore our lost relationship with our Creator. We don't deserve God's generous goodness and lavish love. When I come to that place in my life where I recognize my unworthiness and my need, there's good news! There's a limitless supply of grace for me! God loves me just as I am. I don't have to do anything, or be anything, to try to convince God to love and accept me. I am *saved* by this grace.

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...*full of grace*...and from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace." (John 1:14,16). No wonder people get excited about *grace*!

I can imagine, then, somebody saying something like this: "This is not a bad deal! God loves and accepts me just as I am. There is nothing I can do to make myself righteous and acceptable to Him. So, it really doesn't matter if I sin and live as I please. God's going to love me and be kind to me, no matter what! This is a pretty nice arrangement. If God likes to shovel out grace, why don't I just sin a lot! That'll give God plenty of opportunities to give me His love and grace.

Well, the Apostle Paul ran into this argument when *he* preached a gospel of grace. Paul's message was that we are not under the law, but under grace. We are not saved by trying to keep the law, but by God's grace, and putting our faith in Christ. But there were those who said, "Well, if we're not under the law, we can sin, and live as we please, because grace will cover us then. Paul says, "No way!" In Romans 6:1 Paul writes, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" *The Message* renders this verse: "So what do we do? Keep on sinning so God can keep on forgiving?" (Romans 6:1). Paul says, how can we who are supposed to be dead to sin, and living a new life in Christ, continue to be casual and flippant about sinning!

Can you imagine coming to the place in your life where you realize you need God – you need His help and mercy. Then you turn to Christ, and you see Him hanging on the cross for all your sins and failures – and you say, "Help me, Lord. Save me, Lord". And He does. He forgives you, gives you a fresh start in life, and a place forever in His kingdom. Then after all that, you turn to Jesus hanging on cross and say, "Hey Lord, thanks for the grace!" Then you *stomp, stomp, stomp* all over that mercy and grace by continuing to sin, and living a life centered in your will, not His! 2 Corinthians 6:1 says, "As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain."

God loves us just as we are, but He loves us too much to allow us to stay just as we are! It's this *grace at work in us* – the love and kindness God has shown us – that motivates us to love God back, to seek His will, and to want to please Him. We do this not to try to *earn* our way into heaven...but *because* God has been so extravagantly good to us in Christ!

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...*full of grace...*” (John 1:14). *An abundant, limitless supply of grace is available for each of us – thanks to Jesus!*

Maybe you're broken and struggling – hurting inside. There's the guilt and the shame over things you've done, or things you've failed to do. You wonder how God could forgive you. But He has, in Christ.

Maybe life's challenges have just been too much for you. You're feeling alone, afraid. What you're facing in life, your situation, seems just too much. You want to have faith, you want to trust God to provide, but it's so hard. But God's grace is sufficient for your weakness. God's unlimited supply of grace can see you through. You say, “But I don't deserve it.” Well, none of us do.

On the other hand, maybe you're a bit too smug and self-righteous, resting on your laurels because you go to church, you're religious, you live a pretty decent life, and you think you can do it yourself when it comes to salvation. Grace is okay for some people, but I don't need it. Really? If we could “do it ourselves” when it comes to being saved and acceptable to God, why did Jesus have to die for our sins?

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...*full of grace...*”. “And from his fullness have we all received, *grace upon grace...*”. “For the law was given through Moses; *grace* and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (John 1:14, 16-17).

Is your life rooted in grace? To truly experience God's *grace*, lavished on us in Christ, is one of the most life-changing and liberating experiences we will ever have!

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