

“It’s a Grace Life!”

“It’s a great life!” Have you ever heard somebody say that, perhaps with a trace of discouragement or bitterness in their voice? “Yeah. It’s a great life!” When I was in high school I worked at a wholesale shoe firm. One of the employees there was an elderly German man. Often I would hear him say this, “It’s a great life....iffin’ you don’t weaken.”

My message today is a word play on that familiar phrase, “It’s a great life.” I want to say today that it’s possible for our life motto to be: “It’s a *grace* life!” For the Christian life is a life rooted in grace: God’s grace expressed to us in Jesus Christ!

The Scripture text I will use is from 1 Corinthians 15: “But by God’s grace I am what I am, and the grace that he gave me was not without effect. On the contrary, I have worked harder than all the other apostles, although it was not really my own doing, but God’s grace working with me.” (1 Corinthians 15:10 *Today’s English Version*). These are the words of the Apostle Paul. He describes himself as a man totally captivated by God’s grace! He says by the grace of God I am what I am! That grace motivated him to pour all his energy into the work of Christ. Even then, he acknowledges that it was *God’s grace* working through him!

Let’s consider how being a Christian is meant to be *a life rooted in God’s grace*! First of all, ***the Christian life begins in grace***. None of us is forgiven of our sins and accepted into God’s family because we do something to earn it. None of us becomes a Christian because we attain a certain level of goodness that makes us acceptable to God. Forgiveness of our sins and a relationship with God are offered as a gift through Christ. This is what “grace” means: *God’s mercy and kindness shown to us, though we don’t deserve it and cannot earn it!*

This is what the Bible means when it says we are “saved by grace”. Listen to these words: “But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:4-9). Notice, it states that we were “dead” in our trespasses and sins, then made alive in Christ. By grace we are saved. It is not our own doing (vs. 8). We can’t save ourselves. No matter how good we think we are, we have no room to boast (vs. 9).

Titus 2:11 says, “For the *grace* of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.” And Acts 15:11 tells us, “We believe that we will be saved through the *grace* of the Lord Jesus.”

This truth is at the heart of the gospel. Yet many people don’t get it! Many people think if we just live a good and decent life we will be acceptable to God. If there is a heaven, we get there by “being good”. Unfortunately, even many people *in the church* operate under that assumption too. A man wanted to join a large, well known Presbyterian church. That church wouldn’t accept anyone as a member unless they went through a class where persons were challenged to commit their lives to Christ. When told this, the man responded: “Why, I’ve been a good man

and a fine Presbyterian all my life! Why is it now necessary for me to commit my life to Christ just in order to join this church?” He thought he was “good enough”. On the other hand, an alcoholic who had been helped by Alcoholics Anonymous said, “After all I’ve done, I could never qualify to be a Christian.” He, too, was hung up on a goodness-oriented type of Christianity – he thought he could never be good enough. But God’s message to us is that *none of us* can ever be good enough to earn a place in God’s kingdom or family. Likewise, none of us *is so bad or far gone* that we can’t be forgiven and begin a new life as a child of God when we turn our life over to Christ! *The Christian life begins in grace!*

But, the Christian life also continues in grace. Here are some of ways this is played out. For example, *it’s through grace alone that we can live a clean and holy life.* Here’s something that can happen once we become a follower of Jesus. We start out as a Christian realizing we’re a sinner saved by grace. But after a while we begin to focus on all the good things we do as a Christian: we go to church, we pray, we read the Bible, we give money to the church and worthy causes, maybe we teach Sunday School or serve on a church committee. Perhaps we don’t smoke or drink or swear (at least not that much!), etc. *Spiritual pride* seeps in. *Self-righteousness.* Look at how good a Christian I am! And the sense of grace is lost.

Here’s the thing: Can we really obey God and follow His commands on our own? Jesus command to love God and love others goes much deeper than just following some rules like serving on a church committee, or not smoking. Can you and I bless those who curse us, and do good to those who do bad things to us? Can I forgive that person who hurt me so much? Can I really care about the jerk who lives next door to me, or is a coworker? Can I resist that temptations that always seems to get the best of me? I don’t know about you, but I don’t have the power to live a pure life, or to love people as Jesus loved them? I need *Jesus’* help with this! But when we rely on God’s grace and power we really can live a clean life and love others with that extra mile love Jesus’ talked about. The Christian life *continues* in grace as we depend on God for the moral strength to do what is right.

It also continues in grace *as we depend on God for strength to overcome life’s trials and difficulties.* Earlier I mentioned the Apostle Paul as a man totally captivated by God’s grace. We see this as Paul talks about his “thorn in the flesh”, some problem or handicap or illness that he asked God to take away, but God said “no”. Paul describes it this way: “Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Notice, “My *grace* is sufficient for you.”

None of us (unless we have a strong masochistic streak) like to go through suffering. We prefer life to be smooth and to have things go well. But one of the positives about going through difficult times is that it can teach us to live by grace – to rely on God’s power to see us through. Are you going through a difficult time right now? Let it be your teacher, to show you that

there is a strength far beyond our own, and we don't have to face anything in life depending just on our own limited human resources!

The Christian life *begins* in grace...it *continues* in grace, also *as we depend on God to do the extraordinary thing for the Lord*. What do I mean by this? How much are you and I doing that we simply cannot do without the grace and power of God? What are we attempting to do for God that we know will fail, unless God does something extraordinary to make it happen? So many of us say we are Christians, but we are living just at the level of our own limited abilities and knowledge.

Some time ago I read the book *Shout It From the Houseltops*. It tells the story of Pat Robertson, and the founding of the CBN television network. It's a remarkable account of God's power and intervention. Pat spent a week secluded, fasting (he ate no food) and praying. The outcome was the establishment of the Christian Broadcast Network. That network became the prototype of other Christian based networks that have since been established. It's been used greatly of God to win people to Christ and strengthen Christian believers.

The person who helped write the book *Shout It From the Houseltops* explains how about half way through, he was so impressed with the story of what God was doing through Pat Robertson that he heard God saying something to him. He took a felt-tipped pen and wrote down what he felt: "*Attempt something so big, that unless God intervenes, it is bound to fail.*" The world sorely needs followers of Jesus who are going to dream big dreams for God, and attempt impossible things in the name of the Lord!

I've been talking about living a grace-filled life. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Christian martyred by the Nazi's, talks about life in grace: "The true Christian life consists not in keeping commandments, however stringent, nor in following principles, however lofty, nor even in the imitation of Christ. It is a life in grace – that is...of daily and hourly dependence on power from on high...". Notice, "of daily and hourly dependence on power from on high."

A man in a church was described by somebody else in his church this way: "He's so alive! What a stodgy, boring person he used to be! I am amazed at the difference. He seems so vital, so involved with people, so warm and loving. But most of all, he's expectant – as if at any moment something new and exciting is going to happen. And you know – it usually does!" This man's pastor then says, "What must we do to discover a life like that? Where do we begin?...We must start with...an experience of grace which manifests itself in joy!"

This joyful life in grace is available to all of us, through Jesus Christ! I hope you know the Lord, and can attest to the fact that, in Christ, it's a grace life!

*Harry L. Kaufhold, Jr.
Community United Methodist Church
June 28, 2020*

