

Amazing Grace, Part 1.

John 1: 14-17

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

15 John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.'"

16 And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.

17 For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Two weeks from today is Easter Sunday, what I like to call Resurrection Sunday. Our choir will be presenting the cantata, "Amazing Grace" as we worship the Lord on that day. So that got me to thinking about grace: what it is, why it is so amazing, and how the death and resurrection of Jesus bring that grace to us.

So I thought we would take a break from Nehemiah for three or four weeks and see what the Bible has to say to us about amazing grace.

We have all sung that song, Amazing Grace, probably more times than we can remember. The word 'Grace' trips off the tongue easily and pleasantly. I think it's one of the most beautiful words in human speech.

WHAT IS 'GRACE'?

The word has a variety of meanings. For example, it may mean that someone has found God's approval, as when it said, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen 6:8). It's used in Proverbs to describe someone whose words are kind and loving; their "speech is gracious" (22:11). The word in the New Testament is "charis" which comes from a word that means to be cheerful, glad, or to be well. In Greek literature this word, charis, indicated a favor done out of a generous heart of a person to a friend without any expectation of repayment or of a favor in return. But it was never done for an enemy. Grace in the New Testament is used with a higher meaning.

The classical definition of 'Grace' is "God's unmerited favor" or "God giving to us what we do not deserve." Grace is a great one word summary of what the Bible is about. Thomas Carlyle says: "Grace is more than unmerited favour. If you feed a tramp who calls on you, that is unmerited favour. But suppose that after robbing you, you then feed him. That would be grace. Grace then is favour shown where there is positive demerit in the one receiving it."

In the New Testament, the word "grace" is most often found in the writings of Paul. In the Gospels, it is only found in Luke (eight times) and in John chapter 1. What I found interesting about the passage here in John 1 is that John uses this word, grace, four times in just four verses. It's like he is making the point that the coming of Jesus into this world and the revealing of His glory, this is all about grace and truth. But after this summary statement in chapter 1, John never uses the word "grace" again. He uses the word truth 23 more times in his gospel, but grace appears just here.

But John is making the point that grace and truth are what Jesus is all about. Although John does not use the word, grace, again. He does demonstrate the

meaning of grace throughout his gospel. What can we learn from the gospel of John about grace?

Grace Is Extravagant. (John 2:1-11) Jesus turns water into wine. Not just a little bit, but six stone jars each holding from twenty to thirty gallons (2:6). Verse 11 then says, "This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him." (John 2:11 NKJV). Jesus showed His glory through this sign of grace. Paul talks about the grace that God lavished extravagantly on us in Ephesians 1:

6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.

7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace

8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,

The NIV translates that phrase as, "**in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.**" God grace is extravagant. John 1:16, "**And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.**" Or as the NASB says, "**grace upon grace.**"

Grace Cannot Be Earned. (John 3:1-21). The story of Nicodemus is a story of grace. Nicodemus was a very religious man, a leader among his people, Israel's teacher. He secretly comes to Jesus at night. He knows God is with Jesus in a special way because of the miraculous signs Jesus is doing.

But Jesus strips away all the pretense and all of Nicodemus' confidence in himself and his religion when Jesus tells him (3:3), "**Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**"

Nicodemus was depending on his religious heritage, on his physical birth, on his flesh, to merit him the Kingdom of God. Jesus tells him (3:5-6), "**Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'**"

We cannot enter the kingdom of God through our flesh. It comes through a transformation, a regeneration by the spirit. We cannot cause ourselves to be born again. The new birth is an act of God. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. John 1:12-13 says, "**But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.**"

That is grace, that we are given a new birth through Jesus Christ. This new birth is not from us, but from God. It is a gift. It is grace.

Grace Does What We Cannot Do for Ourselves. (5:1-14). Healing of man at pool of Bethesda. John 5:7, **The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me."** I like the way the KJV describes him, it calls him, "The impotent man." The word is "astheneo" which literally means "without strength." He was weak, sick, diseased, powerless, helpless.

And by grace, Jesus heals him. Jesus did for him what he could not do for himself. He was powerless. Just as the law was powerless to save us. John 1:17, "**For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through**

Jesus Christ.” If the law had power to save, then Jesus would not have needed to come. Paul says in Romans 8:3, **“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh.”** Paul uses that same word, “astheneo,” weak, or powerless, to describe why the law could not save from sin. It was diseased by the flesh. It was powerless. Just like the man at the pool.

Grace Forgives. (8:1-11). The Pharisees bring a woman to Jesus who was caught in the act of adultery and say, **"Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?"** (8:5). Again we have the contrast of the Law and Grace. The Pharisees want to follow the law and stone the woman. But Jesus follows grace and forgives. Verse 11, **And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."**

Grace does not condemn. Grace forgives. Grace does not take life. Grace gives life.

John personally vouches for the authenticity of what Jesus did in practice in John 1:14: **“We have seen his glory ... full of grace and truth.”** In His incarnation, Jesus came to our world on a mission of grace. It’s seen in all His actions and all His words. Will you receive His grace today?

And If you have received His grace, will you then extend His grace to others? We’re called to follow Him.

Every Sunday members of the Landisville (Pa) Mennonite Church have prayed for a son of their congregation. Every month they send him a small sum of money, and every month some of them visit him.

Prayer, money, and visits. These sound fairly typical for a caregiving church. **BUT THIS SITUATION IS NOT TYPICAL AT ALL.** Far from it.

Nine years ago, after a meal with relatives on a calm Sunday afternoon, 14-year-old Keith Weaver killed his parents and his sister. The horror of the crime and the loss of lives rocked the Weavers’ family, the church, and the community to the core.

In the midst of their grief and disillusionment, however, members of the Landisville Mennonite Church got busy. They helped clean the house where the murders occurred, established a legal support committee to care for Keith’s needs so that the surviving brother and sister wouldn’t have to, and founded a “seventy times seven” fund to collect money for his expenses.

They studied grief, forgiveness, and victimization in Sunday School and sermons, calling on the expertise of area chaplains and counselors. And a year after the tragedy, they held a memorial service to lament the loss of their loved ones and **TO RECOMMIT THEMSELVES TO THE JOURNEY OF FORGIVENESS.**

Landisville Pastor Sam Thomas said, “Forgiveness is an act of God’s grace. You don’t forgive and forget. You forgive again and again and again.”

What we need is more grace! More grace from God and more grace working through us to bless the lives of others! When people are touched by the grace of God they become gracious people. They become an actual extension of the grace of God. They do things they would not otherwise do.