

AMAZING GRACE

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Scripture: Hebrews 4:16; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 Corinthians 15:10

Today, I want us to focus on one word, and that word is “Grace”. We use grace very commonly (I don’t want to use the word loosely) because there always is a sense of something gracious, something benevolent, something nice about grace. We name our children “Grace”. We have so many songs about grace and how incredible grace is. We have musicals that have been written about “Amazing Grace”, and books as well. Max Lucado had a book called “What’s so Amazing about Grace?” All of this has to do with this one word that has such extraordinary meaning and such breadth and scope in terms of the way it has been used. But today, I want to narrow it down. I want us to look at it in the context of biblical literature, and to see, in the context of the bible: How do we understand grace?

The first thing that comes to mind is that grace has its source in God. Paul reminds us so many times in his opening words, in Romans, and Corinthians, and Ephesians – “Grace and peace to you from God the Father.” Grace and peace to you; not that he is offering it, but it is from God the Father. Grace comes to us from God, and God shows both mercy and grace to us. Yet we know that they are not the same. Mercy withholds a punishment that we deserve, while grace gives us a blessing that we don’t deserve.

“What blessings?” you may ask. Let me give you a few.

Hebrews 8:12 and Ephesians 1:7 talks about the blessing of forgiveness that is offered to us by grace. Colossians 1 reminds us about reconciliation that comes to us because of grace being offered in our lives.

John 10:10 – abundant life comes to us through grace.

God’s Holy Spirit is offered to us through grace.

John 3:16-18 reminds us that we have a place in heaven because of the grace that has been given to us.

Grace, in the Greek, comes from the word *charis* which means the state of kindness and favor towards someone, often with a focus on a benefit given to the object, or a benefit that we receive. If those are just initial foundations for us to look at grace, let’s now look specifically look at some of the verses that I’d like for us to kind of spring from to gain a better understanding about grace.

1. Hebrews 4:16 *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*
2. 2 Corinthians 12:9 *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 of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*
3. Ephesians 2:8-9 *For by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast.*
4. 1 Corinthians 15:10 *But by the grace of God I am what I am and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them though it was not I, but the grace of God that is within me.*

These four verses give us different perspectives, different facets of our understanding of grace. So let’s look at each one of these verses through the grid of blessings and kindnesses that God gives to us that we don’t deserve.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT GRACE FROM THESE BIBLICAL VERSES?

1. Draw near with boldness and receive mercy and grace.

Hebrews 4:16 *Let us then with confidence, draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

It has an invitation to receive. Draw near with boldness and receive mercy and grace. Incredible! Both offered to us. Mercy for what we've done; and we don't deserve that mercy. And then grace – blessings that God has given us, or giving us again for something that we don't deserve. And yet, through this verse God says, "To receive mercy and grace, we can come without any fear, without any trepidation, but boldly. Come boldly!"

For what? To get these two. To get grace that is offered to us. And then he says, "Grace in our time of need." Are you a needy person today, desperately needing something in your life? Have you gone to the throne of grace? Have you brought that need before Him? Paul elsewhere states, "My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus." All your needs beloved, even the one that you have today, that's eating away at you, making you anxious and worried. Even that need.

I have experienced God's supernatural provision many times, and I know that some of you have as well. But God also provides in ways we may not like. Sometimes we like to receive it in specific ways that keep our pride and our dignity intact. But trusting Him, coming boldly before His throne of grace and saying, "Lord, this is my need. Will You meet it?" means that we take our hands off on how we get that need met, and allow God to meet our need in the way that He wants to meet it.

So the question hangs before you and me as we look at this first understanding of grace. Beloved, grace allows needy people to come boldly before God's throne of grace and say, "Lord, here is my need. O Lord, will You meet it?" I'll leave that for you to respond.

2. It produces strength in weakness.

2 Corinthians 12:9 *But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore Paul says, "I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me."*

The context: This is Paul talking about the thorn in his flesh that the Lord wouldn't remove. Thrice he went to the Lord and said, "Lord, would You please take this away," and the Lord said, "No!" But he was promised that in this area, he would experience the power and strength of God. It was probably something that he anguished over because it says that he went thrice to God asking for it to be removed. But take a look at this! God's grace, that is the grace that came into this situation that was a thorn in the flesh to Paul, this grace was so sufficient that he ends up saying that he would rather boast about this particular weakness, because he gets to see the power of God. He would rather boast about all the weaknesses rather than the strengths, because in his weaknesses he is seeing the amazing strength of God that comes in the sufficiency of God's grace. Basically, he is saying that this thorn in the flesh pales into insignificance in light of the amazing all-sufficient grace of God.

What about you this morning? Do you have a thorn in the flesh, a situation that you've asked the Lord many times to take away? But it's still there with you, and finally, you've just begun to accept it and say, "Okay. Que será será, whatever will be, will be. this is my lot. I'll accept it." But I wonder whether you have taken it to the Lord and said, "Lord, will You let Your grace come into this area? It

is an area of absolute weakness for me. Lord, from Your word I understand that Your grace will be sufficient, that it is in the weakness that I am in, Your strength, Your power will be available. Lord, I want it. Here's the area. Would You let Your grace pour into it?" Beloved, ask the Lord for it because sometimes these thorns in the flesh can be irritating, debilitating, stressful, demeaning, depressing, thwarting things that you want to do. And the only way to get over it is to be able to take it to God instead of letting your emotions and your responses hold sway over you. Receive the grace of God in all its sufficiency. And I believe that then, you and I will be able to look at these areas and like Paul says, "Nothing! My weaknesses are nothing compared to the power of God that I see in these areas." That's grace at work in you and me.

3. It's a free gift, so boasting is redundant.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast.

Think about it! The salvation that we enjoy has been offered freely to us. The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord. and we accept this free gift. How do we accept it? By faith; not by anything that we do. We don't get this free gift because of our humanitarian works, because of our philanthropy, because of our community involvement or our pedigree, or something else that we have done. Nothing can merit us salvation. It is a free gift given to us because of the love and the generosity of God, and it's not dependent on anything we do. We receive it into our lives by faith – faith that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. It's a free gift from God.

Therefore beloved, we can't boast about who we are, whose we are, that we are Christian, that we are better, that we are children of God, we are part of a faith family, or anything like that. No! Paul reminds us that it's been given freely to you and me. Therefore, boasting is redundant and irrelevant. In fact, he says, "As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified and the world's interest in me has also died."

So, we Christians cannot be arrogant about our faith. We need to be able to walk in grace and with grace, for Paul warns us that we are who we are because of God's grace and not because of anything that we have done.

4. It defines who we are.

1 Corinthians 15:10 But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them though it was not I but the grace of God that is within me."

What is Paul saying? He is saying, "I may be a missionary, an apostle, a child of God, a bible teacher, correspondent for the Holy Spirit, or a mentor. I am all of this because of God's grace. Why does he say that? because on a dusty Damascus Road, when he was going with zeal and enthusiasm after Christians to put them to death, Jesus met him and changed the trajectory of his life. And everything post that, he says, "I owe to the grace of God that made an intervention in my life. I am who I am because of God's grace."

What about you beloved? Does grace define you? Has grace defined you? Are you different? Can you say, as Paul says, that God's grace was not in vain? Are you able to say that? Look at your life, as I look at mine and say, "From the point that I engaged with Jesus, and He gave me the free gift of

salvation, when grace came into my life, has it been different? Has it been in vain or not? Is there a difference? Does it define you in beautiful ways?

Unfortunately, even at this point, another question can be asked – whether the grace that has been given to us, are we misusing? Are we continuing to spurn this free gift that has been given to us? As Paul asked the question, or pre-empted a question that many would ask in light of free grace: “Do we continue to sin that grace may abound?” And he says, “No, certainly not! We cannot let the grace of God be in vain in our lives.” There’s got to be a marked difference from the time grace came into our lives so that we are defined in different beautiful ways that reflect the glory of God in our lives because of grace that has changed us.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind, but now I see.

T’was Grace that taught my heart to fear
And Grace, my fears relieved
How precious did that Grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares
We have already come
T’was Grace that brought us safe thus far
And Grace will lead us home.

God’s wonderful, extravagant grace, given to you and to me, and it should not and must not be in vain. Four points:

1. It’s an invitation to receive. Have you received it?
2. It produces strength in my weakness. Are you exercising that strength?
3. It’s a free gift, so boasting is redundant. Are you making sure we receive and walk humbly before the Lord?
4. It defines who you are. Is it defining who you are as a child, a son or daughter of the Most High God?

Thoughts to think about, make corrections, new alignments, change trajectories. But let’s be able to say that God’s grace is not in vain in my life. So help me God.

Shall we pray? O God, our heavenly Father. Even as we’ve looked at this grace that You’ve so freely offered to us, we are humbled, cannot believe that You would give it to us. Ones who were far away from You, ones who are steeped in sin and yet, Your incredible love pursued us and offered this grace to us. Lord, we are ones who have come to know Your Son as our Savior. We pray that we would allow Your grace to continue to shape and mold us into the kind of people You want us to be, that the world may see You and want to know You through the lives, the grace-filled lives that we, Your children live. Help us Abba, to do so. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.