**The Grace of God in Jesus Christ**

March 25, 2016

Key Verse Romans 5:8 – *“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

Before we begin, I would like to tell a very short story that, over time, has become somewhat of a legend. Some decades back, there was a meeting of many theologians and experts in comparative religion in Britain. The purpose was to figure out if there was any one belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities. Incarnation? Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. Life after death? Again, other religions had accounts of life after death. The debate went on for some time, until noted Christian writer C. S. Lewis wandered into the room. “What’s the rumpus about?” he asked, and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity’s unique contribution among world religions. In his forthright manner, Lewis responded, “Oh, that’s easy. It’s grace.” While this story has been retold and details have changed over the years, the main point remains the same. What separates Christianity from other major religions of the world is the five letter word, “grace.”

Often we hear that word used in so many different ways like saying “grace” before we have a meal, describing a nice person as being “full of grace,” an unwelcomed person or enemy being described as “*persona non grata*” (i.e. a person without acceptance and grace) or overcoming some difficult situation in life “by God’s grace.” Many songs are written about it and many more people are named after it. However, for a word so simple, it is difficult to come up with a single definition that can encompass all its meaning. One commonly used explanation of grace is “receiving a gift you do not deserve.” However, a dictionary definition does not quite do this word justice, so we need to turn to the Bible which has a lot more to say about grace. I pray we may delve deeper into God’s word in this passage so we may come to know and experience the fullness of God’s grace for ourselves.

Let’s read verses 1 and 2 together, **“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And weboast in the hope of the glory of God.”** These two verses help establish what life is like when we believe in Jesus, lives filled with joy and the peace that only comes from God. However, to really appreciate these verses we need to think about what our lives are *without* Jesus. When we compare these verses to Ephesians 2:1-3, the contrast is truly terrifying – **“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.”** As these verses illustrate, a life without Jesus is no life at all. Without Him, we are dead in our sins and only seek the fleeting pleasures that sin offers. But no matter how great it may feel in the short term, the consequence is that we becomes slaves to sin, forever under Satan’s hold through our fear of death. Last year, we had a workshop on “The Slavery of Death” where we looked at how all our worries, insecurities and desire to save ourselves stem from our fear of death because death renders everything about us and our lives meaningless.

This may sound a little abstract so let us think about this in more concrete terms. We do everything in our power to stave off the spectre of death – “I have to get into a good school. I need to get great grades. I need a job so I can make money. I have to get a house, start a family, save my money so I can one day retire and enjoy life, etc. If I lack even one of these things, my life is not worth living.” Rather than seeking God, we only seek the things of this world and live solely for ourselves even though all these things are temporal and can be taken away at any given moment. But the worst of all is that we come to see God as the enemy; a burden and an obstacle in the way of me having the life I’ve always wanted. Sadly, all we become are captives of sin, utterly powerless to free ourselves from sin’s hold and fully deserving of God’s judgment. Yet even though we were enemies of God and objects of His wrath, God made a way for our severed relationship to be restored and be reconciled to Him.

Why does God go so far out of His way to save sinners? Why does He go to such outlandish lengths just to be with us!? May we read verses 6-8 together please, **“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** God’s love is divine. It is pure, it is holy and it knows no limits. Even when we were powerless and completely separated from Him, He revealed His love through Jesus Christ our Lord. Through His death on the cross for our sins, Jesus broke our chains and freed us when we had no power to save ourselves out of His amazing love for us. Jesus bore the full consequences of our sins in our place even though we were His enemies fully deserving of God’s judgment. His love is far beyond any comparison to our own. People love those who are attractive and beneficial, but feel burdened by the powerless and those who can do nothing for them in return. In rare cases, someone may give his life for a good person. But God sacrificed Jesus, His one and only Son, for us who were His enemies all for the sake of drawing us back to Him. There is nothing in us or about us that merits His love but God gives Himself to us anyway through Jesus Christ. This is the very definition of grace; being given the greatest gift in the whole universe even though we are the least worthy of it.

May we read verse 8 again please: “**But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** In just those nine words God revealed the true meaning of grace. And when we truly receive this grace, a profound change takes place within us. Ephesians 2:4-8 proclaims; **“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by *grace* you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his *grace,* expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by *grace* you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”** God’s grace not only saves us but gives us life as children of God and coheirs with Christ. It is hard to believe, given our present lives, that we are already seated with Christ in His kingdom. We already have a place with Him in His family for all eternity. Our struggles and difficulties in life often make us forget this amazing privilege. Who has time to look forward to God’s kingdom when I still have bills to pay, assignments to submit, a family to take care of and a future to worry about? However, Paul reminds us that the grace we receive is not some distant promise but something that has power and meaning for us right at this very moment; **“Not only so, but wealso glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”** When we place our hope in Jesus, even our sufferings become opportunities for us to grow in Him and know Him all the more. Through them, we come to know Jesus all the more and grow in His character and likeness. I pray we may be able to bring all our struggles us in our life to Him so we may rejoice and give Him praise as He guides us through them.

If we look at verses 9-21, it feels as if one need a law degree to read through this legal document filled with all these technical jargon and arguments being made. Thankfully, it can be paraphrased as how God’s grace surpasses the weight of all our sin and failure. By using Adam as a representative for all mankind, Paul passionately expresses how much more so God’s grace gives us eternal life through Jesus’ death and resurrection. May we read verse 15 together, **“But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!”** When Adam disobeyed God, sin and death reigned over everyone. No matter how much we tried to measure up to God’s perfect standard, we all fell short because of our sins and were doomed to eternal separation from our Heavenly Father. But through Jesus’ one act of obedience to God and His one-time sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins, we receive life in abundance. Again, we have done nothing to earn this and will never be able to do anything in our lives to earn this yet God graciously offers this gift to all who believe in Him. It is impossible to list and describe everything else that come with His grace but we can clearly how marvelous and overflowing it is. All that He asks of us is to just accept it.

Even though I have been a Christian all my life, for the longest time I could not accept His grace. I spent the first two decades of my life obsessing over being worldly “good” (good son, good friend, good student etc). I did everything I could to have people recognize me as a good person, believing I could be good with little to no help from God. But while others around me praised me for my goodness, my heart was filled with all forms of lust, jealousy and pride. I saw God as the obstacle stopping me from living the life I wanted to live so when university came around, I saw it as the perfect opportunity to finally live life on my own terms. But the more I sought my own freedom, the more I became a slave to my desires such as porn, lots of gaming and long nights out on the town. It wasn’t long before my grades cratered to a point where I really considered dropping out of university and my family life became severely strained. But the worst part of this was the realization that I was no good. I had no peace in me because the only words running constantly through my head were “You’re no good. You’re no good.” It got so bad that for two weeks I lay in bed and didn’t leave my room because I had no strength to go on. I was powerless, broken and utterly alone. But it was at this time I was studying Romans with Peter and was convicted by this very passage. It felt like Jesus was speaking to me though the passage “Yes! You are no good but I love you so much I am willing to die for you. I will make you good.” I was completely overwhelmed. I had done nothing to deserve Jesus’ love because I turned away from Him for so long, yet He continued to love me when I couldn’t even love myself. Because of His grace, I realize how much I need Him in my life all the time. Rather than following my own way, I have been learning how to follow Christ. Rather than seeking to be good in the eyes of the world, I seek to be good in the eyes of my Lord and Saviour through serving Him in all the situations He has placed me in. I have experienced His peace and joy even in harsh circumstances and have grown to know Him all the more. I pray that I may be able to share all that I have received and help others to truly know Christ and the immeasurable richness of His grace.

In conclusion, we have witnessed how God has lavished His grace upon us through Jesus Christ out of His great love for us. As underserving and sinful as we are, He willingly calls us His own and wants nothing more than to reconcile us and have a relationship with each and every one of us. At this time when we celebrate His death and resurrection, I pray we may continue to experience His grace, grow in faith and readily share this joy we have received with everyone we encounter in our lives.