

KNOWING THE GRACE OF GOD

TEXT: II CORINTHIANS 8:1-9

Introduction:

1. HA Ironside told the story of a Christian who was challenged by a Unitarian to produce just one passage of Scripture to prove that Jesus had any existence before He was born of Mary in Bethlehem.
2. The Christian quoted II Corinthians 8:9, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”
3. The Unitarian objected that this Scripture had nothing to do with the pre-existence of Christ.
4. The Christian replied, “But the Bible says ‘He was rich.’ Was Jesus ever rich on earth? When was He rich?”
5. HA Ironside said, “The position is unanswerable if one believes the Bible to be the Word of God. Jesus was never rich on earth. But He was rich in the glory that He had with the Father before the world was. What riches were His! And He gave all up and became poor in order that bankrupt sinners might be made wealthy for Eternity. He who trusts in Him is made heir to all the riches of glory which the Father delights to share with all who come to Him and accept His grace.”
6. There is an expression the apostle Paul uses twice in his epistle to the Ephesians – “the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7; 2:7).
7. In Ephesians 2:7, it is “the exceeding riches of his grace.”
8. I would like to speak about stewardship this morning, but I believe that in order to properly understand stewardship, we must first understand the grace of God.
9. The word “grace” appears five times in II Corinthians 8 (8:1, 6, 7, 9, 19).
10. I have entitled my message, “Knowing the Grace of God” (8:1, 9).

I. THE GRACE OF GOD BESTOWED ON THE CHURCHES OF MACEDONIA (8:1-5).

1. The apostle Paul referred to the good example of the churches of Macedonia, that is, of Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and others in the region of Macedonia, in order to exhort the Corinthians to give generously.
2. When Paul referred to “the riches of their liberality” (8:2b), he called it “the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia” (8:1).
3. I have entitled this morning’s message, “Knowing the Grace of God” (8:1, 9).
4. Matthew Henry said, “The grace of God must be owned as the root and fountain of all the good that is in us, or done by us, at any time; and it is great grace and favour from God, and bestowed on us, if we are made useful to others, and are forward to any good work.”

5. That is why Paul said, “But by the grace of God I am what I am” (I Cor. 15:10).
6. The Christians in Macedonia gave very generously, with “the riches of their liberality (9:2), that is, as liberally (generously) as if they had actually been rich.”
7. How is that possible? How could they do that?
8. It was only by the grace of God.
9. It was “beyond their power,” i.e. their ability (8:3), yet they trusted God that He would provide. They were very ready and determined to give – “they were willing of themselves” (8: 3).
10. The churches in Macedonia prayed Paul “with much entreaty” to receive their gift (8:4).
11. This sort of generous giving cannot be understood apart from the grace of God. A lost sinner cannot comprehend it, and even some carnal Christians struggle with it.
12. Notice that first “they gave their own selves to the Lord,” and then they gave their contributions, “by the will of God” (8:5).
13. Let me stop and ask this important question: “Is your giving according to the will of God?”
14. These Christians in Macedonia had surrendered themselves completely to the will of God.
15. These Christians in Macedonia had surrendered all they had to the Lord Jesus Christ.
16. Frances Ridley Havergal was a Christian devotional writer, poet, hymn writer and musician who was born in 1836 in England. Her father was a pastor, poet, and church musician who authored about 100 hymns.
17. At the age of 3, Miss Havergal could read; at the age of 4, she began reading and memorizing the Bible; at 7 she began writing verse.
18. Miss Havergal was converted and committed her life to Christ at the age of 14. She said, “I committed my soul to the Saviour ... earth and heaven seemed brighter from that moment; I did trust the Lord Jesus.”
19. She was proficient in several modern languages, in addition to Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.

20. Miss Havergal had a thorough training in linguistics and music and was a talented pianist and singer.
21. She was also a devoted Bible student, memorizing the entire New Testament, as well as the Psalms, Isaiah, and the Minor Prophets.
22. Frances Ridley Havergal wrote many hymns, her most famous being, “Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.”
23. One line in that song goes like this: “Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold.”
24. There is an interesting story behind those familiar words, written in 1874. In 1878, Miss Havergal wrote to a friend, “The Lord has shown me another little step, and, of course, I have taken it with extreme delight. 'Take my silver and my gold' now means shipping off all my ornaments to the church Missionary House, including a jewel cabinet that is really fit for a countess, where all will be accepted and disposed of for me ... Nearly fifty articles are being packed up. I don't think I ever packed a box with such pleasure.”
25. “I don't think I ever packed a box with such pleasure.”
26. Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).
27. Don't miss out on the wonderful blessings of God!
28. Judson Wheeler Van DeVenter was an artist and a preacher. He wrote the great hymn, “I Surrender All.” He said, “For some time, I had struggled between developing my talents in the field of art and going into full-time evangelistic work. At last the pivotal hour of my life came, and I surrendered all. A new day was ushered into my life. I became an evangelist and discovered down deep in my soul a talent hitherto unknown to me. God had hidden a song in my heart, and touching a tender chord, He caused me to sing.”
29. That's the grace of God!
30. There are two words beautifully linked together several times in Paul's epistles – the words “grace” and “abound” (cf. II Cor. 8:7; 9:6-8a).
31. Do you want to be “abounding” in the grace of God?
32. Do you want to feel the love of God in a very special way – “For God loveth a cheerful giver” (II Cor. 9:7b).

33. Whatever we give to the Lord's work, it is only giving to the Lord what is already His own.
34. The Lord said in Psalm 50:10, "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof" (Psalm 50:10-12).

II. THE GRACE OF GOD TO BE BESTOWED UPON THE CHURCH AT CORINTH (8:6-8).

1. The apostle Paul told them that Titus was sent to go and take up a collection from them (8:6).
2. Titus had already begun this work among them, therefore he was urged to finish it (8:6).
3. It was Paul's intention to stir up the Corinthians to this good work of grace giving. He said upon they already abounded "in every thing," in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in their love for Paul and the other Christians.
4. Therefore, Paul wanted them to "abound in this grace also" (8:7).
5. Notice what it was that the Corinthians abounded in – faith is mentioned first, for that is the root.
6. For without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6), so those who abound in faith will abound in other graces and good works also; and this will work and show itself by love (8:7).
7. To their faith was added "utterance" – these Corinthians had received many spiritual gifts, particularly in utterance; and with their utterance there appeared knowledge (8:7).
8. They abounded also "in all diligence" (8:7). Matthew Henry said, "Those who have great knowledge and ready utterance are not always the most diligent Christians. Great talkers are not always the best doers; but these Corinthians were diligent to do, as well as know and talk, well."
9. They abounded in love (8:7), and Paul goes on to say that they should prove the sincerity of their love by being generous givers (8:8).

III. THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST (8:9).

1. In II Corinthians 8:9, Paul wanted them to consider the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. First Peter 2:21 says Christ left us an example, that we “should follow his steps.”
2. The wonderful example of the churches of Macedonia was such as the Corinthians should imitate; but the example of our Lord Jesus Christ should have an ever greater influence.
3. Paul said, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” (8:9), that though He was rich, as being God, equal in power and glory with the Father, rich in all the glory and blessedness of heaven, yet for our sakes He became poor.
4. He not only became a man for us; He became poor also.
5. Our Lord could have been born in a king’s palace, but he was born in a manger.
6. He was born in poor circumstances and lived a poor life. He said, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20).
7. He lived and died in poverty. He was born in a borrowed stable and was buried in a borrowed tomb. And all of this was for our sakes, that we thereby might be made rich, rich in the love and favour of God, rich in the blessings and promises of God, and rich in the hope of eternal life.

CONCLUSION:

1. I began my message with a quote from HA Ironside, and I will conclude with another quote from him.
2. “How can I speak of following Him, how can I speak of being saved by His grace, if I do not seek to imitate Him in His self-denying concern for those in need? He saw me in my deep, deep need, and He came all the way from His home in heaven, laying aside the glory that He had with the Father from eternity, down to the depths of Calvary’s anguish – and to the darkness of the tomb. He who was rich for my sake became poor, that through His poverty I might be enriched through eternity. And He has left us an example that we should follow His steps.”