

cripture Reading: Ephesians 3

8 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; 10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, 11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. 13 Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.”

''Paul: The Minister of Grace''

Last week we considered the Apostle Paul as the prisoner of Christ and this week we will focus on him as the minister of Grace. As we did with mystery, we studied God’s Grace at length in chapter one, and you can go back to those messages for more details if needed.

- **This morning, as we consider the Apostle Paul as a minister of Grace, we also want to learn what that means for us and our lives today.**

As we saw back in chapter one, the word grace is used almost 150 times in the Scriptures [and the word gracious adds almost another forty]. We should remember that God’s Grace, or unmerited favor, is not how we might use this word in our everyday human interactions...

We can use ‘grace’ when we are showing mercy or pardon: George extended Joe grace.

We use it to express a temporary exemption or reprieve – a grace period that your bank might offer.

We use it to describe a charming or attractive trait or characteristic:

‘I am glad my father-in-law has the saving grace of humor.’

It is used as a title or reference for a duke, or an archbishop- addressing them as His grace.

And finally it is often the name we give to the short prayer at a meal asking a blessing or giving thanks!

- **Those are all important & commendable, and I will come back to them in a moment.**
- **However, when we consider the Apostle Paul as the minister of Grace we are speaking of God’s saving Grace: The unmerited favor God shows to His people.**

God’s grace, as unmerited favor, was first given to man in the Garden after Adam’s fall:

There God first announced His Grand Plan of Salvation...

BUT God did not wait to see if Adam or Eve or any of their heirs would repent and try to do better before offering His Grace...

- **No, God promised right then and there that the Seed of the Woman, who would be Jesus, would come and crush the seed of the serpent, which He did on the cross, dying as the lamb of God.**
- **Jesus was the raised in power at the resurrection confirming this glorious victory over sin and death.**

Thus, the Old Testament Saints were commanded to bring a spotless lamb to sacrifice as an expression of their faith in that promise of salvation!

This is why the sacrifice of Abel was accepted and the work of Cain was not.

We have seen this division and these reactions down through the ages and they continue even after the work of Jesus was completed!

- The pride of man still wants to do things their way!

The Apostle Paul has been driving home in these opening chapters that our salvation is all of Grace:

- God's unmerited favor extended to undeserving sinners.

Remember his powerful statement in chapter two when we read at verse 4:

“4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” And the Apostle repeats himself just to make sure we do not miss the point: 8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

So, with all that in mind, let me dig into our text from Ephesians 3:

In verse 7, the Apostle Paul said he became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

Paul then goes on to humbly explain what this means...

8 :To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,”

The Apostle to the Gentile was to minister Grace to them, not because he was someone special, but rather because he was the recipient of that same saving Grace!

The Apostle here sees himself with the proper humility that all Saints should demonstrate. Now we know about Paul's pride, how he held the coats of those who stoned Stephen and went on to persecute the Church. But does this make him more notorious than the Chief Priests or Pontius Pilate who actually crucified the Lord of glory? Did he commit more crimes than the thief on the cross or was he guilty of adultery & murder like King David was? Obviously, the answer is no.

The Apostle explains this more fully in a passage in I Timothy that we often quote in our time of confession in worship:

I Timothy 1: “12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, 13 although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. 14 And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 15 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. 16 However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. 17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

The bottom line is that each and every one of us knows our own hearts and lives better than anyone else:

Some may see us more clearly, which is why we husbands are thankful that God gives us help-meets and you children should be thankful to have loving parents...

But at bottom, we should sense the wickedness of our own hearts which keeps us humble before God: There is much truth in that declaration, “there but for the Grace of God go I.”

- Thankfully we do not follow all the sinful desires of our hearts, but we should always remember that we must depend on the Grace of God each and every day!

And the working out of this Grace in our lives is what the Apostle then turns to at verse 9 where we see that his ministry was “to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;”

➤ A minister is one who proclaims God’s truth not only to the people of God but to the whole world!

The Apostle Paul never hesitates to proclaim God as the Creator Who brought forth all there is remembering that it ALL centers around Jesus, the Son of God: [sorry, we are NOT the focus of the story of Jesus] We saw this in the great sermon at Mars Hill and Paul proclaims it clearly in these familiar words written to the Saints at Colossi:

Colossians 1 “13 [The Father] has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. *[now that sounds like it could be about us, but Paul is NOT finished]* 15 He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. *[anything left out?]* All things were created through Him & for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. 19 For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.”

Continuing on in our text the Apostle Paul say that now the mystery of God’s grace has been revealed: 10 “to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, 11. according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord...”

So not only are we to see the Apostle Paul as the minister of Grace, but that we as members of Christ’s Body, the Church, would be ministers as well!

AND this is something we should be excited and confident about as we see the Apostle declaring in verse 12: “in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. 13 Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.”

Remember that we are in the midst of a long parenthetical comment as the Apostle prepares to pray for these Saints where he does not want them to worry about him, if you will. He says those tribulations are for their glory because he was the minister of Grace to them and they should realize that he was being persecuted because he proclaimed the truth! As I have pointed out, we are to be such ministers today and again we see this more fully explained in the Epistle written to the Saints at Corinth: The controversy at Corinth, where everyone was separating into camps and sowing division gives Paul the opportunity to teach them about service in the Kingdom:

I Corinthians 3: “5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

- The Apostle Paul was a minister of Grace in both Word and deed.
- We are called upon to be the same as we share the truth in love.

We are to be those who clearly proclaim the truth about the Gospel, how God extends His Grace to all those who believe based on the work of Jesus and not anything that we have done! And as we purpose to do that, it can bring us back to all those other ways the we use the word ‘grace.’ Asking a couple of questions will help us see the point I want to make: Why do we love? Well, it is because God is love and we are made in the image of God! Knowing that intellectually does not make us loving if there are no loving actions in our lives {remember I Corinthians 13 we read last week?}

Why is there so much beauty and diversity in the world around us? Because it is God’s Creation and that is the kind of author He is! Again, we must demonstrate that grand truth by how we appreciate that beauty & diversity and reflect it in some small way in our lives.

- And that brings us to Grace!

We should be excited about God’s gift of Grace, we should be sharing it with others, AND we should be living lives that reflect how we were saved by Grace, God unmerited favor!

So, let me quickly return to those other uses and help us see some of the practical examples...

While we fully understand and affirm that only God extends the unmerited favor that brings us to Christ, it should be reflected not only in our intellectual sharing but by actions in our lives... When we show mercy or pardon, by extending someone grace, it is much the same as forgiving someone because we are a forgiven person. We should be those extending opportunities to people rather than those saying someone does not desire such a thing. When we use it to express a temporary exemption or reprieve – a grace period at a bank, it can be an opportunity to share about the REAL Grace that has been extended toward our real debt of sin against our Holy God! When we use it to describe a charming or attractive trait or characteristic in someone we know, it is not only a kind gesture, but again can remind us about how God views us through the righteousness of Jesus rather than our own sinful qualities.

And while we don’t often use “His Grace” as a title or reference here in America today, it does remind us of and demonstrate to others our respect for authority.

We could start with just using proper titles like Mr. & Mrs. when children address adults, or men opening doors for the ladies, and yes even showing proper respect to those who hold public office.

- And finally I think it is good to say ‘grace’ with short prayer at a meal asking a blessing or giving thanks!

It gives us the proper focus, it is a witness to those around us and we never know what the impact might be! [share the Bauer story] Truly it is through such actions and attitudes that we can in some small way show the world that we have experienced amazing Grace of God, His unmerited favor, in our lives.

- We show the world the glory of God’s Grace!

Communion Meditation: Psalm 32

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered.

2 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit.”