

The Ultimate Experience of Grace- 3

John Newton wrote,

“If the Lord be with us, we have no cause of fear.
His eye is upon us, His arm over us, His ear open to our prayer
- His grace sufficient, His promise unchangeable.”

The grace of God is greater than sin’s destructive power. Those of us who receive the gift of His grace can experience its limitless power in this life, and be glorifying God throughout eternity for the grace that is ours in Christ.

The Big Picture:

I. We were selected by Grace

“...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will...” (Eph. 1:4-5).

- Election – “chose” (selection with purpose to be freed from sin)
- Predestination - (adoption and character)

“...according to the kind intention which He purposed in Him...(:9)

“...having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will...” (:11).

George MacDonald said,

“I find that doing the will of God leaves me no time for disputing about His plans.”

II. We were saved by Grace

Verse 1 of Amazing Grace

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

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us...” (Eph. 1:7-8)

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” (Eph. 2:8-10).

- We are saved by grace, and not by works
- We are His Workmanship
- We are saved for good works

Verse 2 of Amazing Grace

‘Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

III. We were given a Stewardship of Grace

“Indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you...” (Eph. 3:2).

- Sanctification
- Service

The service we render to others is really the rent we pay for our room on this earth. It is obvious that man is himself a traveler; that the purpose of this world is not “to have and to hold” but “to give and to serve.” There can be not other meaning. (Wilfred T. Grenfell)

Verse three of Amazing Grace

Thro’ many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come;
‘Tis grace hath bro’t me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

IV. We will ever Celebrate His Grace

Inexhaustible Grace – can never measure its depths (character of God)

We will spend eternity with an awesome sense of praise to God for His grace.

God's character is expressed in His grace to us. We will never comprehend the depths of His character – God is love!

“He predestined us... (:5) ...to the praise of the glory of His grace... (:6)

“...having been predestined... (:11)...to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory” (:12).

For those who believed in Christ

“...with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.” (:14)

Verse five of Amazing Grace:

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.

The Stewardship of Grace: sanctification and service

In Ephesians 3 Paul writes of the stewardship of grace:

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles - if indeed you have heard of the **stewardship of God's grace** which was given to me for you... of which I was made a minister, according to **the gift of God's grace** which was given to me according to the working of His power. To me, the very least of all saints, this **grace was given, to preach** to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ..." (Eph. 3:1-2, 7-8).

Paul was given grace to be a minister as a gift; to preach the riches of Christ.

How did grace come to Paul?

Today I want to look at how Paul's experiences brought him greater grace.

One day Paul visited heaven. Whether it was a vision or virtual visit, he wasn't sure. In every way it was as real as could be. Some have surmised that this experience took place outside of Lystra during his first missionary journey.

One day they came across someone who had been lame from birth, and after laying hands on the man he was supernaturally healed. The crowds cheered in astonishment and began to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods. When they tried to explain that they were only men on a mission and not gods, the crowds had a severe reaction.

“But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. But when the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.” (Acts 14:8-19-21)

When someone is left for dead after being stoned, it isn't likely that they'll just get up and walk away, wiping the dust off their trousers.

In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul was defended His apostleship by His experiences. In chapter 11 he mentioned being stoned, among other great trials. He said that he had suffered more than all the other apostles. In chapter 12, he relates an experience in the spiritual realm.

Paul testified visiting the heavenly realm.

“I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago – whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows – such a man was caught up to the third heaven.

And I know how such a man – whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows – was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak... Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me – to keep me from exalting myself!” (2 Cor. 12:1-4, 7)

Scripture refers to men experiencing the spiritual realm:

At the Mt. of transfiguration, Peter, James and John went up to a high mountain with Jesus.

Matthew writes,

And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him, ...a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, 'This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!'" (Matt. 17:2-5).

Prophets were God's spokesmen, and had incredible experiences with heaven.

"When Elisha the prophet was being hunted down by the Arameans one morning his servant was awakened one morning to the realities of the spiritual realm:

Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, 'Alas, my master! What shall we do?' So he answered, 'Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' Then Elisha prayed and said, 'O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.' And the Lord opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. When they came down to him, Elisha prayed to the Lord and said, 'Strike this people with blindness, I pray.' So He struck them with blindness according to the world of Elisha."

2 Kings 6:15-18

This illustrates one way to stop a great pursuing army.

Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesian Christians of spiritual realities,

"Finally, be strong in the lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."

Eph. 6:10-12

Paul had a vision of heaven which left him with a real potential of pride.

A thorn in the flesh was given to Paul to protect him.

The result was that he was greatly humbled.
Paul's response was to *'pray it away.'*

“Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, My grace is sufficient for you for power is perfected in weakness.” (verse8-9)

Jesus answer was “The thorn stays; but you will also have sufficient grace.”

God always answers our prayers: “No,” “Yes,” “Wait,”
“I have something better for you.”
Sometimes this is hard for us to accept.

Paul's lesson on grace: Jesus said *no* to the thorn removal but *yes* to grace

Grace is the strength of Christ that comes to us as we are humbled.

“... Most gladly, therefore I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.” (v. 9-10)

well content – “to think well, approve, acquiesce, take delight or pleasure.”

Areas of trials:

Weakness – *astheneais* – infirmities, physical weakness, lit. strengthless.

Insults - *hubresin* – reproaches, verbal abuses (outrage), revile.

Distresses – *anagkais* – proper, needs, responsibilities.

Persecutions – *diogmois* – to put to flight, to drive away, to pursue.

Difficulties – *stenochoria* – anguish, Lit. –narrowness of place.

(Strongs Concordance)

Verse 4 of Amazing Grace:

The Lord has promised good to me,
His Word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

Trials are God's instruments that produce positive character qualities and prevent negative ones. Therefore, it is right to respond with attitudes of joy and gratefulness. The focus must be on what the trial will produce in character growth instead of the present pain or inconvenience.

Verse 9 speaks of power being **perfected**.

– (tellios) is translated “mature,” or “complete”.

James echoes, that we rejoice because of ‘The perfect result of trials’.¹

Grace is Christ's strength in our weakness

– “dunamas” dynamite - power

The philosophy of the world might be,

“What can't be cured must be endured.”

Paul's was, “What can't be cured can be enjoyed.”

William Wilberforce, led the fight to abolish slavery in the British Empire, was physically weak and frail, but he had deep faith in God. A fellow worker, Boswell observed of him, “*I saw what seemed to me a shrimp become a whale.*”²

Grace is His strength in our weakness.

“God gives grace to the humble; trials humble us.”

He Giveth More

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,
 He sendeth more strength when the labors increase;
 To added affliction He addeth His mercy,
 To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
 When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
 When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,
 Our Father's full giving is only begun.

¹ James 1:4.

² William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p. 1866.

His love has no limit, His grace has no measure;
His power no boundary known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth and giveth and giveth again³

Only God...

Can turn a mess into a message

⚡ test into a testimony

⚡ trial into a triumph

⚡ victim into a victory.

³ Annie Johnson Flint