

Sermon – 30/08/2009 am

Grace and Peace

Study Text: Philippians 1:2

What do you understand by the word grace? Do you hear this word much or do you use it in conversation? Maybe you know it from saying 'grace' before meals. In that context grace means 'thanksgiving' – it comes from the Latin 'gratia'. You know and use other forms of the word grace, like gracious or graceful. But as a noun we do not use this word that much.

Do you know what it means to be saved by grace? Do you know what it means to stand in the grace of Jesus Christ? You have of course heard of the song and more recently the movie, called 'amazing grace'. What does this title mean? What prompted John Newton to write this song in 1772? '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'. Newton understood the word grace.

Although born into a Christian home Newton was orphaned at the age of six and went to live with ungodly relatives. He ran away and started living for himself in every sense of the word. He lived to have his fill of sin. He ended up trading human beings from Africa. One day the ship he was on was caught in a storm and Newton began to fear for his life. Recalling what he had been taught as an infant he cried out to God who alone could save him. The Lord heard his prayer and saved him not only from drowning but from the fires of hell. By the grace of God, Newton became a new man. He became of preacher of that grace by which he was saved, the grace that is found in Jesus Christ.

Grace

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:2). This is how Paul greeted the members of the church at Philippi. It is the greeting he used in all of his letters. But let us not pass over it just because we have heard it before. Let us not think Paul wrote these words without thought as to what they meant. We should stop and ask what Paul did mean by these words. We should stop and meditate on the words 'grace' and 'peace' because they are central to our salvation, to our justification and our sanctification.

The Greek word *charis* is translated 'grace' in this verse. This word was commonly used as a greeting by Greek speakers in Paul's day. It was like their 'good day' or 'good bye'. The Jews on the other hand greeted one another with 'shalom' meaning 'peace' – the second word in Paul's greeting. Paul was not using unusual words but he filled these words with a whole new meaning. He greeted these believers with grace and peace *from God the Father and Jesus Christ*. This was an exclusively Christian greeting.

Grace is from God and from Jesus. Grace is related to love and to mercy. Love and mercy are human as well as divine attributes, but grace as Paul sees it is a divine attribute – or at least divine in its origin. Grace is undeserved or unmerited favour. It is love for the unlovely. It is love for those who hate you. Do you find it easy to love those who hate you?

But I did not hate God you say? When you lived for yourself and ignored God and his commands you offended him. You were an enemy of God because of sin. We were all born in sin and we commit sin. Our sin separates us from God. Our sin makes us enemies of God. The Bible says *the wages of sin is death* (Romans 6:23). In our sin we are condemned to death as enemies of God.

Unless and until we are reconciled to God, unless we become his friend rather than his enemy, this condemnation remains.

God has reached out to us in love and mercy. *God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son* (John 3:16). But did the world welcome the love of God – did men receive Jesus Christ the Son of God? ‘This is the heir’ they said ‘come let us kill him and the inheritance will be ours’ (Luke 20:14). Still today men and women reject God saying this world is mine, this life is mine, and I will do with it as I like.

God reached out to us in grace. *The word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ* (John 1:14, 17). While we were still enemies Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). God gave his only Son to die in order that he might forgive our sin and reconcile us to himself. On the Cross Jesus took the penalty for our sin. He died in our place in substitutionary atonement for sin. *God loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sin, propitiation by his blood* (I John 4:10, Romans 3:35).

This is the special love, the supreme love that is called grace. Grace is the giving of everything to one who deserves nothing. *God did not spare his own Son but freely gave him up for us all* (Romans 8:32). God gave his only Son and Jesus gave his own life. God gave everything for you who deserved nothing, you who in your sin were an enemy of God.

This word grace had special meaning and significance for the apostle Paul. Paul was a violent man who attacked Christians and killed them. ‘Oh wretched man that I am who will deliver me from this body of death’ he cried out. John Newton, drunken brute of a man that he was, echoed these words in his hymn.

Grace is a word of victory. Sin once reigned in death, but grace now reigns unto eternal life (Romans 5:21). The wages of sin is death but ... there is a 'but' that changes everything ... but *the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord* (Romans 6:23). *There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus* (Romans 8:1). Jesus gave his life as a sacrifice for sin. He satisfied God’s wrath so we are no longer condemned – and Satan can do nothing about this. It is God who justifies who is he that condemns? This is the victory of grace, the grace of God.

Our justification, our being declared righteous rather than being condemned by God, is all because of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. We are justified freely (without any cost) by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:24). What’s more, God’s grace continues to be poured out upon us for our sanctification. Having been saved by grace we now live by grace.

The gift of God includes the Holy Spirit. In the Holy Spirit we know the abounding grace of God. We stand, we walk, and we live each and every day in the wonderful grace of God. The grace of God keeps us from falling; the grace of God lifts us up when we do stumble.

The apostle Paul had a physical affliction, a thorn in the flesh, which he asked the Lord to remove. How did the Lord answer him? Did he heal Paul? No. He said *my grace is sufficient for you* (II Corinthians 12:9). In weakness Paul would be more aware of the strength of the Lord. He would know the abounding grace of God every day.

Do you know the grace of God in justification? Do you know the grace of God in sanctification? Do you by God’s grace forgive others; do you by God’s grace live a contented life, rejoicing in the Lord always? You cannot live this way in your own strength. You need God’s grace. His grace is sufficient for all your needs.

Peace

Grace to you and peace (1:2). We are more familiar with the word peace than grace. Peace is the opposite of war. As wars rage in so many places around the world we keep hearing of ‘peace talks’. Peace in the Middle East, peace in Africa, or peace somewhere else. We, thankfully, live in a region of peace. But still we have so many conflicts to deal with in life. Do we have peace in the workplace, or in the playground or in the home? Do we have peace in our own hearts or do worries and fears keep us from having inner peace?

It is this inner peace that Paul was referring to as he wrote this greeting. He wrote of peace from God and Jesus. It is actually peace from God and peace with God. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). Paul mentions peace after grace and for good reason – because peace flows from grace. Someone has described grace as a fountain and peace as the river that flows from it.

When Paul said *shalom* or peace in greeting someone it was not a vague wish that that person would not have trouble at work or at home that day. He was talking about being reconciled to God and having God’s peace in your heart. Sin brings us into conflict with Almighty God. Walking in sin our souls are troubled and restless. David prayed *restore to me the joy of your salvation* because sin had robbed him peace and joy (Psalm 51:12).

Christ is our peace (Ephesians 2:14). Through his blood Jesus has brought us, indeed bought us, peace with God. Jesus said *my peace I give to you, not as the world gives. Let not your heart be troubled or afraid* (John 14:27). In Christ we have peace with God and that peace overflows, along with his grace, into every aspect of our life.

‘Do not be anxious about anything but pray’ Paul told the Philippians. Through prayer, through looking to the Lord and being thankful for his grace you will know the peace of God that passes all understanding. This peace will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7). How desperately we need such a guard upon our hearts and minds, living as we do in a corrupt and morally bankrupt society!

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon