

God is Gracious - Knowing God Series
Pastor Deborah Oakley – GFC – Feb. 12, 2017

February is Black History Month and as you know – slavery was a horrific part of black history. But did you know that Christians played a big role in ending slavery? And did you know that a revelation of God’s grace drove that process?

The fight to end slavery in England was led by a man named William Wilberforce. He was elected to the House of Commons in 1780 at the age of 21. For the first couple of years in politics, he did nothing. But in 1785, he had a spiritual transformation. He was planning to get out of politics and go into the ministry, but he realized God could use him where he was.

At that time, England was the largest slave trader in the world. Slavery was a huge part of the British economy. William Wilberforce felt called by God to do something about that, so he turned to a pastor named John Newton for counsel. Newton became his mentor. He challenged Wilberforce by telling him God has raised him up for such a time as this.

So William Wilberforce took on the mission of abolishing the slave trade in England. But it did not happen overnight. Wilberforce introduced bills in the House of Commons to abolish slavery every year for twenty years. He gave speeches, he prayed, he argued. But most of all he did not give up. He persevered in spite of receiving death threats and being assaulted. And finally, on Feb. 23, 1807 – 20 years after William Wilberforce started – the British government finally voted to end the slave trade.

This is a true story of faith, commitment and most of all, perseverance. But it is also a story about grace. You see – John Newton – the pastor who mentored Wilberforce in his quest to end slavery - was a former slave trader.

He was the captain of a slave ship and during one voyage his ship endured an eleven-hour storm on the Atlantic. Newton considered his survival a miracle, so he became a Christian. He gave up the slave trade and eventually became a minister.

John Newton also wrote hymns. In fact, John Newton wrote the most popular Christian hymn of all time. 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.

John Newton was well acquainted with God’s amazing grace. At 82, just before he died - Newton said, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things, that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior."

A revelation of God’s grace changed John Newton and challenged William Wilberforce to fight to end slavery.

We are in a sermon series entitled Knowing God and today my sermon is called God is Gracious. We talk about grace and sing about amazing grace, but few of us really know what grace is. In the English language we use “grace” to describe many things.

- A blessing over our meal
- A talented or skilled athlete or dancer
- Beautiful or well spoken words
- Expressions of kindness and mercy

However, in biblical terms grace is one of the most fundamental attributes of God. It is the free and unmerited favor of God. The key word here is “unmerited.” You see grace, is a completely undeserved and free gift given to us by God through Christ.

A. W. Tozer defined Grace as, “The good pleasure of God that inclines Him to bestow benefits on the undeserving.”

In the Old Testament grace was meant to show favor, kindness or compassion to an inferior or to pardon and show mercy when it wasn’t expected or deserved. Exodus 34:6 says:

The Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

In the Old Testament, the Children of Israel constantly disobeyed God. As a result, they were taken into captivity. But God was still gracious! Ezra 9:8 says -

But now for a brief moment grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in His holy place, (The NIV says a firm place in his sanctuary.) that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage.

When this passage was written ten tribes had been taken into captivity, but some of the tribe of Judah and Benjamin had escaped. Even though they rebelled - God was gracious and allowed a remnant to remain.

And here’s why: to give them a peg in his holy place. In the Old Testament a peg referred to a tent peg. This means that this remnant was able to find land and set up tents which were firm and secure. This meant they still had a stake in the Promised Land. Even in their rebellion God did not abandon them or His promise to them. He even allowed them to experience a measure of revival in their bondage! This did not happen because Israel deserved it. It happened in spite of their unrighteousness and rebellion. It happened because God is gracious!

This should give us hope!

Our God is gracious and even when we fail – He does not abandon us.
 He always gives us a peg to drive into our land of destiny!
 He always gives us a measure of revival!
 Aren't you glad that God is gracious!
 The New Testament is overflowing with examples of God's graciousness.

Consider the woman that was caught in adultery. The Law said stone her.
 The crowd shouted "stone her." But Jesus said in John 8:7

If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.

Under the law they had every right to bury her under their stones. But Jesus came to fulfill the law and brought grace to the undeserving.

When Lazarus died, both Mary and Martha blamed Jesus for not coming earlier. "If you had been here my brother would not have died." These were strong words of accusation. Jesus could have taught them a lesson right then and there. With just one word He could have sent them to be with Lazarus. But that's not what He did. Instead, He opened his mouth and spoke gracious words of life – Lazarus came out. And Lazarus did.

What about the Prodigal Son? This is such a beautiful picture of the graciousness of God. The father could have told his son to take a hike but instead he embraced him and celebrated his return from a life of sin and squalor. Instead of judgment he showed grace.

Even from the cross Jesus showed grace to His accusers. After they pounded nails through his hands and his feet and cast lots for his clothes - He still cried out in Luke 23:34

Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

In the New Testament, grace was revealed through Jesus Christ.

So let's look at three important truths about grace.

1. Grace is a Person

Jesus was and is the very embodiment of Grace. John 1:14 says:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

In Hebrews Jesus is called "the Spirit of grace." So the only source of grace is Jesus. Jesus and grace are synonymous. They are one and the same.

2. Grace Has a Plan

The plan of grace is really evident in the letters of the apostle Paul. Eph. 2:8-9 says:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast.

The plan of grace is salvation. Titus 2:11 says:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.

Paul elevates grace over the law and the works of the law. Romans 3:28 says:

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

Paul makes it very clear that salvation is not something that can be earned. It can be received only as a gift of grace.

3. Grace Has a Purpose

John 1:16 says:

From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.

The purpose of grace is to bless you...in every way, every day, come what may... whether it's a good day or a bad day...the purpose of grace is to bless you.

2 Cor. 9:8 says:

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

So we see the person of grace is Jesus, The plan of grace is salvation, and the purpose of grace is to bless us. So...

Why is God Gracious?

Certainly not because we deserve it. There is one reason and one reason only for the graciousness of God towards us. And that reason is the unconditional love of God towards His creation.

God loves without condition – there is nothing we do to earn it.

God loves us without limit – there is no end to His love.

God loves us without cost to us.

We cannot earn the grace of God, nor can we un-earn it.

Grace means that you can do nothing to make God love you any more or any less than He already does.

God is gracious because He is love.

It is His character to love even if love is not returned to Him. He will give us good things because of His goodness. He extends favor, mercy, and kindness on whoever He pleases because it's who He is.

God is gracious because He is our Creator. Even when we don't acknowledge Him, He still blesses us because He wants to. God created mankind and He won't turn His back on His creation.

How is God Gracious?

He Forgives Us

1 John 1:9 says *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

He is Patient Toward us

Jonah 4:2 says *I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.*

He Fulfills His Promises To Us

2 Cor. 1:20 says *For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ.*

He Justifies Us

Rom. 3:24 says *Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*

To be justified means we have freedom from the guilt and punishment of our sins.

He Redeems Us

Ephesians 1:7 says *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.*

Through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross we have received God's grace.

He is Merciful Towards Us

Grace is getting blessings that you don't deserve.
Mercy is not receiving the punishment that you do deserve.

Lam 3:22-23 says:

Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.

Which brings us to another question:

When is God Gracious?

God is gracious all the time, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year no matter how we act, what we do or what we say. Even when we are disobedient to Him He is still gracious. It is His character to be gracious and He does not change based on circumstances. James 1:17 says

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

God does not change. He is always gracious and always meets our needs. Is there an area of lack in your life? By His grace Jesus wants to supply whatever you are lacking.

Paul said in Philippians 1:19:

For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

of us have areas in our lives where we lack what we need. All of us get physically exhausted, mentally drained or spiritually depleted. By His grace, God wants to supply whatever we may lack.

The word supply in the Greek means contribution. It's also a very old Greek word that literally means "On behalf of the choir." Let me explain where this word came from.

Thousands of years ago in Greece, a huge choral and drama company practiced endlessly for a huge and important theatrical performance. After a great amount of time, effort and practice it was finally time for the show to go on the road. But there was one major problem – they ran out of money.

These people had given their lives to this production. They had committed all their resources to making sure the performance succeeded. But they ran out of financing, and the show was over before it began. It was the end of the road for them and their dream.

At that exact moment, a wealthy man heard of their crisis and made a huge financial contribution on behalf of the choir. This benefactor "supplied" all they needed to get the show on the road. In fact, the amount was so enormous that it was more than they needed. It was an excessively large and abundant gift.

Today I want you to know that the supply of the Spirit of Christ in your life is excessively large and abundant. Sounds like a Tsunami to me.

You see when you have run out of steam, when you've given it all you've got but it wasn't enough, when you don't have one more ounce of energy left, when you've drained all your resources and you're unable to take one more step unless someone steps in to help you...

This is the exact moment when Jesus Christ steps in to "supply" an overwhelming, massive, generous amount of His grace and strength. That is the exact moment that He releases a Tsunami of grace. He enables us to do what we couldn't do for ourselves.

One of the most dangerous heresies on earth is an emphasis on what we do for God instead of what God does for us. It's the belief that God helps those who help themselves. Actually the opposite is true. God helps those who can't help themselves. He helps the helpless the weak and the undeserving. God is our wealthy benefactor and He said in 2 Corinthians 12:9

My grace is sufficient for you.

According to Thayer's Greek Lexicon, the word sufficient has two main meanings: "to be possessed of unfailing strength; and to be enough."

So, God's grace is God's power and God's power is always enough.
Grace is the power of God to save us and the power of God to keep us.
And grace is the power of God to get us through whatever we go through.

God's grace brought the Children of Israel through the Red Sea.
God's grace brought Daniel through the lion's den.
God's grace brought Shadrach, Meshach and Adednego through the fire.
God's grace brought David through the fight with Goliath.
God's grace brought the disciples through the storm on the sea.

And no matter what difficulties you may face, God grace will always be enough for you!

If you need financial help, His grace is enough.

If you need healing, His grace is enough.

If you need help in a relationship, His grace is enough.

It doesn't matter what the devil or the world throws at you, because no matter what - God's grace will always be enough!

His grace is enough when you're on a mountain top and His grace is enough when you're in a valley!

His grace is enough when you're flowing in the river of God and His grace is enough when you're in a barren desert.

No matter what, God's grace is always enough!

When Jesus said “it is finished” it was finished and there’s absolutely nothing you can add to it!

Salvation is accomplished by grace plus nothing!
The ability to enter God’s presence is by grace plus nothing!
Every blessing from God is received by grace plus nothing!
Freedom is obtained by grace plus nothing!
The grace of God is sufficient and Jesus is enough!