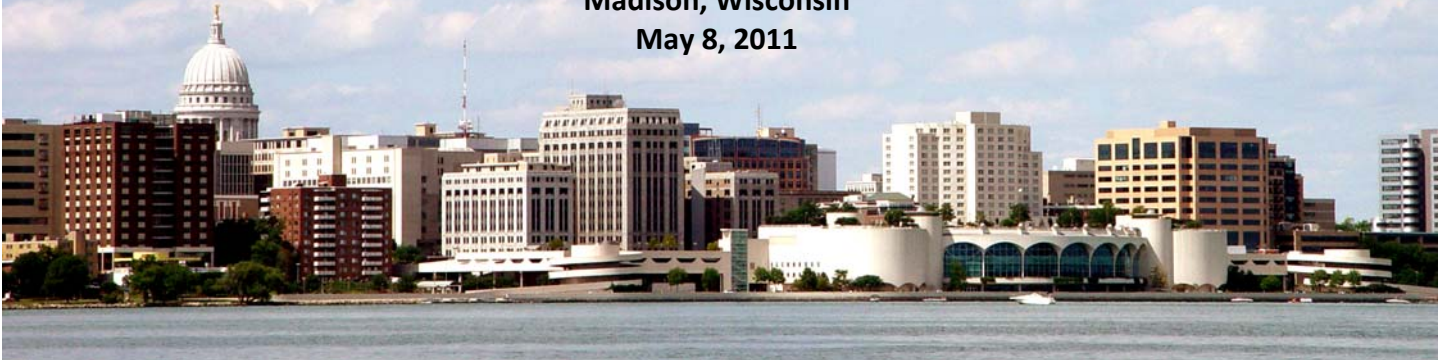


“Amazing Grace”

TITUS 2:11-15

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This morning I would invite you to think with me about God’s plan of salvation. A lot of times, we focus on our part of it; that is, we study the importance of faith, repentance, and baptism. However, this morning I would like for us to consider God’s role in it by looking together at the amazing grace of God. As far as I can tell, the word *“grace”* is used at least 132 times in the Bible. Literally, the word refers to a “gift,” and it is perhaps one of the most beautiful and powerful words in the Bible. In the NASB, at least, the first time the word is used is in the Old Testament, in Ezra 9:8. The Jews had just returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian Captivity. They were so thankful that God had allowed them to return, and the prophet Ezra said, *“But now for a brief moment grace has been shown from the LORD our God...”* What a powerful statement, to realize that their deliverance was a gift from God! The last time the word *“grace”* is found in the Bible is in the very last verse. Way over in Revelation 22:21, John closes the book by writing, *“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.”* And so we find that grace is referred to from the days of the prophets all the way to the very last words of the Bible.

As you can imagine, grace is a very broad subject, and certainly we could have come up with a list of characteristics, and we could have gone from here to there all through the Scriptures looking at this and that. We could have looked at a hundred different verses! But this morning I would invite you to open your Bibles with me to one passage, one little paragraph on the grace of God, and this passage comes from a man who understood the grace of God more than just about anybody else. It is a passage written by the apostle Paul to a preacher he had dropped off on the island of Crete, in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. The preacher’s name was Titus, and I am referring to Titus 2:11-15 (p. 1866). In Titus 1, we discover that the situation in Crete was very chaotic. The church was basically in a state of confusion, and so we find in Titus 1:5 that Paul drops Titus off with the mission of setting things in order. He was to do this by appointing elders in every city. These were to be strong spiritual men who were to be capable of silencing those who were upsetting whole families by teaching things that they should not teach. And that’s just the situation with the church. There was chaos in the congregation.

Not only that, but the entire island had a reputation. Sometimes we hear the old saying that Madison is “78 square miles surrounded by reality,” a statement attributed to Lee Dryfus as he ran for governor back in 1978. Of course the figure back then was 30 square miles, but even as the city has grown, most of us who live here understand what he was saying. Well, it is interesting that the island of Crete also had a little saying that was

often repeated. If you have your Bibles open (and I really hope you do), notice what Paul says in Titus 1:12. He was referring to the locals, ***“One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’”*** And then Paul said, ***“This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith....”*** Crete, therefore, had a reputation, and it was not good. Going over into Titus 2, Paul then directly addresses various parts of the church: He has special instructions for the young, the old, the men, the women, and he even has some special encouragement for the slaves in the congregation, concerning how they were to behave. And so he just plows right into it. However, instead of just saying, “Hey, this is the way it needs to be...because I said so,” he doesn’t do that, but instead, Paul pauses the letter and he gives an explanation. Why should we care about all of these instructions? If you will, please look with me at Titus 2:11-15,

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, ¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. ¹⁵ These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

As we look back at these five verses, I would like for us to study the grace of God.

I. And starting right away in verse 11, we find that GRACE BRINGS SALVATION.

In verse 11, Paul says that ***“...the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men.”*** And right here we are reminded that God’s grace is a gift. We notice that God caused it to happen. Salvation starts with God. We do not deserve it. The grace of God cannot be earned. Some of you might remember the little chipmunk incident we had here in this building last summer. Somehow, a chipmunk found its way into this building, but instead of setting a rat trap, instead of setting poison, instead of letting it slowly starve to death, we have a dear sister who insisted on feeding the little critter! She felt sorry that it was trapped in this building all alone with nothing to eat or drink, so she set out the little chipmunk buffet downstairs, a little cup of water and some chips. That is grace! The chipmunk did nothing to deserve being fed. The chipmunk did not deserve another chance at life. After about three weeks, I was up here going through my lesson early on a Sunday morning, and it jumped out of this tree up here, we came to a mutual understanding, and it was escorted out the front door, very much alive. And this is all because one of our members felt sorry for the little critter. Her grace was made evident to the chipmunk.

Now, in a similar way, we do not deserve our own salvation. Just as that chipmunk cannot shake it’s fist and say “You owe me,” so also God owes us nothing. In fact, it’s worse than that: Because we have sinned, we deserve to die. And yet in spite of this, salvation is a gift from God. It is a gift that we can never earn. Even “good people” don’t earn it. As the Lord said in Luke 17:10, ***“So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.’”*** In other words, even when we obey the Lord, we are not earning anything, but we are simply doing what we have been commanded to do. Salvation is not what God “owes” us after a righteous life. As Paul said in Romans 5:8, ***“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”*** In other words, God moved first. The grace of God has ***“appeared.”*** It has become evident to us, as if someone has turned on the light in a dark room. We were lost in darkness, and God did something about it.

And, as Paul says in verse 11, this light, this salvation, has appeared **“to all men.”** He is talking about the entire human race. The grace of God is universal and has been made salvation possible to everyone. The grace of God is available. First of all, then, **“...the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men.”** Salvation is a gift from God.

II. There is a second lesson we can learn about grace in this little passage of Scripture, and that is: GRACE TEACHES US HOW TO LIVE (verse 12).

And this is where Paul addresses one of the most common misunderstandings about grace, the idea some people have that since we are saved by grace we can do whatever we want to do. However, we notice in verse 12 that Paul talks about grace **“instructing”** us. The word **“instructing”** brings across the idea of training a child. In fact, the root of **“instructing”** is the Greek word for child. It is the basis of the word “pediatrician.” Grace, therefore, teaches us just as a parent would train up and discipline a child, and we find that this training involves both the negative and the positive.

On the negative side of things, we find that grace teaches us to **“deny ungodliness and worldly desires.”** That is, there are some things that grace teaches us to turn away from. The word **“deny”** literally means “to disown.” In other words, there are certain things that we are to stop doing. There are things we need to give up—anything that is not holy, righteous, or pure. The grace of God teaches us not to look when we shouldn’t look. The grace of God teaches us to **“deny ungodliness and worldly desires.”**

But then on the positive side, the grace of God teaches us to **“live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age.”** The grace of God teaches us to keep ourselves under control. The grace of God teaches us to live a righteous life. The grace of God teaches us to live like God. The grace of God teaches us to be conservative with our money so that we can share with those in need. The grace of God has appeared and is teaching us to change the way we live. And I know that’s not what most people think of when they think of grace, but that’s what the Bible says. Grace has a way of changing us. Most of us are probably familiar with the story of John Newton, a slave trader, the captain of a slave ship. At some point in the 1700’s, Mr. Newton had some kind of conversion experience, and the way he saw it, the grace of God changed the way he lived. He gave up the slave trade and became a minister. He would go on to write the song, “Amazing Grace.” He went on to write his own epitaph, “John Newton, once an infidel and Libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preserve the faith that he had long labored to destroy.” The grace of God, therefore, gives us direction. The grace of God teaches us how to live.

III. We learn something else about grace as we find that GRACE CAUSES US TO ANTICIPATE THE RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST.

In verse 13, Paul says that we are **“...looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.”** Grace, therefore, gives us hope. Grace causes us to eagerly anticipate the return of Christ. The word **“blessed”** refers to being happy. Paul, then, is saying that thinking about the return of Christ should make us happy. The day is coming when we will be able to meet the Lord face to face. And this is not the kind of hope that just kind of wishes that someday the Brewers may win a game, but this is a **“blessed hope,”** it is a sure thing. A friend of mine preaches at a church in Louisville, Kentucky, and for some reason he made a comment that was somehow connected to the Kentucky Derby this weekend. On his

church's Facebook page, he said, "Go to church this Sunday: The odds are 1 to 1 that you will meet God!" Yes, we have a **"blessed hope"** of meeting God. Today, we meet God in worship, and someday we will meet God face-to-face. We fully expect that Jesus will appear a second time. When we invite someone over for dinner, we expect them. When they show up at the door, it is not a surprise, but we have been planning for it. That's the way it is with the return of Christ. We are looking forward to it. We are planning for it. We are getting ready for His return.

Eight times in the New Testament we read about Jesus returning **"like a thief in the night."** In other words, we might not know the exact time, but we can be prepared for it. For some people, His return will be like the arrival of a SEAL team at 1 a.m., but for those who are prepared, for those who are living **"sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age,"** His return will be like a great family reunion. Grace causes us to eagerly anticipate the return of Christ.

IV. There is another concept in this paragraph, and that is: GRACE IS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS ON THE CROSS.

And we notice here that grace is not just any gift, but it is a gift that came to us because of a great sacrifice. Grace is a gift from God. Grace is demonstrated through Jesus, **"...who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed."** Grace, therefore, is expensive. Grace has allowed us to be redeemed. The word "redeem" means to "buy back," like a debt being paid off. Jesus paid our debt of sin. When we sin, we violate the Law of Christ. Even one sin causes us to owe a debt that we could never pay back. Most people have some experience with debt. We know what it means to be in over our heads. We know the crushing burden of having thousands of dollars racked up on a credit card. We know what it means to struggle to make the mortgage payment during a difficult time. Sin is like that. When we sin, we owe, but we are not able to pay it back. There is nothing we have that God wants. There's nothing we can do to make things right with God on our own. That's where the grace of God comes in—like judge who imposes a penalty so that there is justice but then steps down from the bench and pays the fine for you himself. In a similar way, Jesus has **"redeemed us from every lawless deed."** The grace of God has paid our ransom from sin. We have been kidnapped, we have been held hostage by sin, but Jesus paid the price to get us back. Because of God's grace, therefore, we are no longer slaves to sin. He gave Himself **"for"** us. The word **"for"** means that Jesus died in our place. Jesus died as our substitute. He took the death penalty on our behalf.

Now, in a very practical way, this means that we now know how expensive sin really is. Jesus gave Himself up on the cross to purchase our freedom from sin. We have been bought and paid for. He purified for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. He owns us. We are His servants. We have been purified, and we are now zealous to do what is right. That's what grace means. It means that we have been purchased. We no longer live for ourselves, but we now live for Him. As Peter said in 1 Peter 2:9, **"But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."** The blood of Christ paid the price. As Peter explained in 1 Peter 1:18-19, we **"...were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold...but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ."**

And when we study the Scriptures, we find that the blood of Christ and baptism are very closely tied together. In fact, what the blood of Christ does, baptism also does. I have included a chart for you to consider:

	Jesus' Blood	Baptism
Justification	Romans 5:9	1 Corinthians 6:11
Forgiveness of Sins	Hebrews 9:22	Acts 2:38
Sanctification	Hebrews 10:29	Ephesians 5:25-27
Purification	Revelation 1:5-6	Ephesians 5:26-27
Salvation	Romans 5:9	1 Peter 3:21

We put all of this together, and we find that baptism is the point where we come into contact with the blood of Christ. Baptism is the point where we receive the grace of Christ. As Paul said in Romans 6:4, ***“...we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”*** This does not mean that we earn God’s grace, but it means that we accept it. Like the chipmunk who accepted the generous buffet from one of our members, so also we accept the generous grace of God. We have been bought and paid for, so we are now ***“zealous for good deeds.”***

Because we are so thankful for the price that God paid, because we are so thankful for the sacrifice, we do good, we want to please God, and we do not think of it as being a burden. So, instead of going around complaining about how everybody needs to serve me, and instead of moaning and groaning about what everybody else needs to be doing, we look at what the Lord did on the cross, and we go out there and offer our own lives as living sacrifices. We do for others what He did for us, and we do it gladly. That is grace! Grace motivates by keeping our focus on the sacrifice of Jesus.

V. There is one final very small point I’d like for us to take away from this passage, and that is: GRACE IS A MESSAGE THAT MUST BE SPOKEN WITH AUTHORITY.

After saying all of these things about grace, Paul says to Titus as the preacher, ***“These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.”*** Now, some preachers have taken this and have said, “See, I am the boss here, because Paul says that I have authority.” And from that we get the denominational “pastor” system, the idea that there is one “pastor” who runs the church, that he is the CEO, that he is the chairman of the board, that he is in charge. However, we do not find that concept anywhere in the Bible. In the Bible, there is no distinction between “clergy” and “laity.” Those terms are not there. But instead, all Christians are described as being ***“a royal priesthood”*** (1 Peter 2:9). And so when it comes to the oversight of this congregation, I am not running this place; but rather, my very narrow responsibility is to preach the word of God.

So what do we do with this statement in verse 15? What Paul is telling us here is that Titus was to speak God’s word in an authoritative manner. In other words, Titus was not in charge of the congregation; however, Titus had a mission, and his mission was to preach the word of God. In a similar way, when it comes to grace, all of us here this morning also have a God-given mission to pass along what the Bible says on this subject, and we also have God’s instruction to do it with authority. This is the word of God. When we realize what the Lord has done, we cannot help but tell someone about it. We are motivated by the grace and love of God.

Conclusion:

This morning we have just barely touched on the subject of grace, and yet we have learned that it brings salvation, that it teaches us how to live, that it causes us to look forward to the return of Christ, that it is based on the sacrifice of Christ, and that God's grace is a message to be passed along. We live in a city where we are surrounded by people who have no idea what the grace of God really is. There is so much to learn, but to accept God's grace, we need to turn away from sin, and we must then allow ourselves to be briefly dipped in water so that our sins can be forgiven. This doesn't mean that we earn our salvation, but it means that we accept God's free offer on His terms, not ours. If you have any questions, we hope you will ask. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com