

If My People - 6

Grace re-visited

Last week we looked again at what it meant to be the people of God. In that sermon I stressed in very strong terms that unless we know who we are in Christ; unless we know the foundation of His grace in our salvation and our sanctification; unless we have some solid understanding of what God has done and what He expects us to do (and not do!) in this partnership, then we should not proceed in our study of 2 Chronicles 7:14.

If we do not know the truth of who we are in Christ, how we are saved and how we are supposed to live out that salvation - then the exhortations to humble ourselves, pray, seek His face and turn from our sin will become works of the flesh - things we attempt to do in our own power and strength. The "if ...then" scenario is most definitely present here, as we saw in a couple of earlier sermons in this series, but the critical question is how? If our humility, prayer, worship and repentance are not the FRUIT of the grace of God (i.e. the empowering presence of God), then they will be short-lived, superficial and unsuccessful in moving the hand of God to do anything at all in our land.

So we are going to remain camped by the river of God's grace a little while longer before we embark upon the journey through these challenging exhortations. My sincere apologies go to all those who were looking forward to having your pride exposed by the Spirit of God today as we look at what "humble yourselves .." might mean. Be patient though, your time will come ... soon.

We just need to drink some more from the living water of God's grace, mercy, forgiveness and love. We need a refill of gospel truth before we embark upon the treacherous journey ahead. Unless we have our provisions, unless we are stocked up well with a clear understanding of God's grace in all its truth, this will be a most dangerous expedition.

To those who think they know all this and are frustrated because we are not moving on to 'the good stuff'. I feel I must inform you, if that's how you feel, that you do not understand grace yet. **If you think you have had enough teaching on grace then you have not had enough teaching on grace!** If you have the slightest inclination to 'move on' from grace, then I tell you in Jesus' name, you do not understand grace. We should never 'move on' from grace. Open your heart and receive the truth, for in my experience, those who understand grace, even in part, are the ones whose entire spirit leaps with affirming joy whenever they hear it preached. They can never hear the blessed message of God's grace too many times. Something supernatural inside them resonates with God's truth so loudly ... they can almost hear it screaming out *"Yes Lord! Yes! This is true ... this is God ... this is the gospel! Preach it tell me the old, old story more Lord ... more I can never get enough of this life-saving life-changing truth ... my legalistic heart needs reminding over and over again Lord ... tell me the old, old story ... again .. and again ... and again!"*

If that is something like what was happening inside you last week and as I preach today ... then you are well on the way to understanding God's grace in all its truth. If that is not how you feel, then you need a fresh revelation from God ... and you need it today!

Come Holy Spirit ... may there be no legalistic stone unturned in our wicked, self-righteous hearts. Shine the light of your grace and mercy into the depths of our soul now ... in Jesus' name ... in Jesus' matchless name, we pray, AMEN

As I explained at length in my 24-part teaching series '[Amazing Grace](#)' I believe that having a solid understanding of the grace of God is essential to living a victorious Christian life. Grace is not 'God's unmerited favour' – as many people have defined it. Grace is the empowering presence of God Himself available to meet our every need, without any cost to us. Without grace, we are nothing, we have nothing and we can do nothing. In fact, everything in the Bible - receiving salvation, being filled with the Holy Spirit, fellowshiping with God and having victory in our daily lives - is all based upon grace.

It is very important that you and I understand that there is nothing that we can do to save ourselves and pay for our sins. Let's read some Scripture verses – from the Amplified version of the Bible:

Romans 3:10,23-24 *"There is none righteous (none that meets God's standards), not even one. For all have sinned and continually fall short of the glory of God, and are being justified (declared free of the guilt of sin, made acceptable to God, and granted eternal life) as a gift by His (precious, undeserved) grace, through the redemption (the payment for our sin) which is (provided) in Christ Jesus."*

So since man could not come to God, God came to man.

John 1:1,14a *"In the beginning [before all time] was the Word (Christ), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God Himself and the Word (Christ) became flesh (human, incarnate) and dwelt (tabernacled - fixed His tent of flesh, lived awhile) among us ..."*

Jesus became our substitute, paying the debt we owed at no cost to us. He did this out of His great love, His mercy and His grace.

Ephesians 2:8,9 *"It is by free grace that you are saved (delivered from judgment and made partakers of Christ's salvation) through your faith. And this [salvation] is not of yourselves [of your own doing, it came not through your own striving], but it is the gift of God; Not because of works [not the fulfilment of the Law's demands], lest any man should boast. [It is not the result of what anyone can possibly do, so no one can pride himself in it or take glory to himself]."*

What you and I could not earn, God gave to us freely by His grace. But His grace affects our lives in so many other areas. We must realize that God's grace is available to us to make the needed changes in our life. Just as we received our salvation by grace through faith, we need to also trust and receive every other blessing from God in the same way – by His grace.

I'm not sure about you, but when I first got saved, I thought all my problems were being caused by someone else, and if only they would change and act differently, then I would finally be happy. I eventually let the Word of God convict me and reveal that I was the one with the problem. I was the one who needed to change. It seemed like every time I opened the Bible, the message was for me as stuff in my life that needed addressing kept rearing its ugly head. It wasn't long before the devil took the conviction that God meant for good and turned it into condemnation. I entered into a seemingly endless cycle of trying and failing. The old 'do-more-try-harder' treadmill was operating overtime. All that I knew was to try harder to do what the Word of God said I should do.

It seemed that I was always trying. I tried to be good and operate in the fruit of the Spirit. I tried to pray and read the Bible more. I tried to love those close to me and tried to love those in the world around me. I tried to be a better person in so many ways. I tried and tried and tried until I almost died!

All my human efforts produced nothing but frustration. The word *frustrate* is defined in Webster's dictionary as 'to prevent from obtaining a goal or fulfilling a desire.' It comes from a Latin word which means *to disappoint*. Interestingly enough, Galatians 3:10 says, "... all who depend on the Law [who are seeking to be justified by obedience to the Law of rituals] are under a curse and doomed to disappointment." And that is exactly where I was. I had gotten into the habit of taking every Scripture and every sermon I heard and hearing, "If I don't do this, God doesn't love me anymore. If I don't do this, I'm going to lose my salvation." I was being destroyed inside because I lacked the knowledge of the truth (see Hosea 4:6).

Jesus said that the truth will set us free (John 8:32). Well the opposite is true too - if you do NOT possess the truth then you will never be free. You will be in bondage and like so many millions of people in Church across the world I was in bondage for many years and didn't want to admit it. I was blinded by unbelief and just could not see the truth. Then the Lord in His mercy opened my eyes so that I could see what is really in the Bible and that radically changed my life. This was one of those verses:

Galatians 3:3 *"Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?"*

God showed me that I was trying in my own strength and effort to live according to His Word. As I did, I was putting myself back under the law and anytime you or I put ourselves under the law, we are doomed to disappointment and frustration because we cannot obey the law. That is why Jesus had to come to do it for us! He still wants to do it for us - but we have to get out of the way and let Him.

Why do we always seem to want to do it ourselves? It's because that is the nature of the flesh. The flesh, that is our fallen, sinful nature that we have had from birth, wants to conquer its own problems so it can get the glory. I used to think that when I was getting frustrated it was because the devil was attacking me. So I would rebuke him and do some fancy praying and spiritual warfare; I would 'put on the whole armour of God' in some ritualistic way. You name it - I tried it but my rebukes always seemed to fall on deaf ears.

Then I discovered that it was actually God who was frustrating me. Scripture says, "*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*" (James 4:6). Wow! What revelation that was. Little did I know while I was doing all that fancy praying and spiritual armour rituals .. that it was God Who was coming against me because of my pride. As long as you and I try to figure things out ourselves, we are being proud. **Instead of working at obeying the Word, we need to let the Word work in us to produce that obedience as a fruit of the life of Jesus in our hearts.**

We cannot change ourselves. It is the God of peace Himself that sanctifies us through and through, separating us from profane things and making us pure and wholly, consecrated to God (1 Thess. 5:23). When you're convicted by the Spirit to change something in your life, don't take on the task yourself. Just agree with the truth He shows you and say, "Yes, Lord, I need to do that. Your Word is right, and my life is not matching up with the truth that is in my heart. I can see that I'm wrong in this area. I want to change ... and by Your grace I will change. I thank You again for the forgiveness that is mine in Christ and I ask that You change me by Your grace."

In this position of surrender and humility, God gladly gives us more and more grace – and grace is His empowering presence – grace is the power of the Holy Spirit released in us, to meet any and every challenge. (James 4:6). Everything we receive from God - from salvation to sanctification - comes to us by grace and through faith. Grace is the power and faith is the channel or instrument it flows through. Both are needed - we can't have one without the other.

Take, for example, an electric fan. On a sweltering hot day in a room with no air conditioning, an electric fan would be a welcomed sight. But if the fan were placed next to you without being plugged into an electrical socket, it would be of no value. It would only torment you! You could have all the fans money could buy, but they wouldn't do a bit of good if they were not plugged in.

Well, it's the same way in our relationship with God. We could know thousands of methods, principles, and formulas but have no power to make them work. Prayer, Bible study, worship, obedience, confession are all good, and we need them. But if you and I are not plugged into the power source of God's grace, all our methods, channels, programs or disciplines are useless.

The victory is not in our methods - it's in God. It's ... *not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit...says the Lord God* (Zechariah 4:6). God doesn't want us to have faith in our faith; He wants us to have faith in Him. He wants us to be plugged into Him - spending time with Him in personal, private, intimate fellowship. He wants us to seek His face and not just His favours. He wants us to come into His presence because we love Him and want to be with Him, not just because we have our list of requests.

Keep in mind that we are not spending time with God to get or earn His grace. His grace is a free gift - it's not for sale and therefore it cannot be bought with good works – no matter how 'holy' those good works appear. The reason you and I should spend time with God is because we love Him. It may seem awkward to you at first - it was for me - but the more time you spend sitting in His presence, the more you will learn to relax and relate to Him as a person.

When God opened my eyes to His grace, I began to understand what He was trying to tell me all along. I began to realize that we are saved by His grace and also sanctified by His grace. But I still had this feeling lingering within me that I needed to do something. I can't tell you how many times I cried out to God saying, *"What do You want me to do? If You'll just show me what to do, I'll do it."*

Well, one day God gave me an answer. It was there all the time ... I just didn't let it register. He brought me to John 6:28. It's here that the disciples asked Jesus, *"What must we do to do the works God requires?"* Then in verse 29 Jesus responded, *"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."* That's the answer. Believers are supposed to believe! How radical is that?!

Isn't that embarrassingly simple? Maybe that's why the Bible calls us *believers*. We are to believe in Jesus, and trust what the Word of God says about our situation more than we trust what we want, think, or feel. It's true that we need to be obedient to what God has told us to do, but we must realize that only God, by His empowering presence (by His grace) can enable us to make the necessary changes in our lives.

All of my life I have been a *thinker*. I always had a *plan* for how to change my family, myself, and others, and I was always trying to figure out how God was going to do it. I am still like that to some extent ... God has some more work to do in me yet ... but He cut some of that out of me when I got smacked in the face with a statement in Proverbs - which I am sure you already know.

Proverbs 3:5-6 *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."*

It is important to have a plan, otherwise we will never get anything done. But we can't put our faith in the plan - we need to put our faith in God.

Proverbs 16:9 *"In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps."*

We need to plan, but we have to be careful that we don't go overboard and get into excess and wear ourselves out. What we need is balance. The moment we get confused, we've gone too far in our planning. When we sense frustration and confusion, we have stopped drinking from the reservoir of God's grace inside us and have slipped into works of the flesh again.

Grace and works are totally opposite to each other. The more we come to understand what grace is, the less we're going to worry and struggle trying to figure everything out. I discovered that as long as I tried to figure out a way to fix myself or my situation, God withheld His help from me. But when I settled down and believed God to show me what to do, He always gave me the answer I needed - when I needed it. God is never early and never late – He is always right on time. It is by His grace through faith that we are saved, and it's by His grace through faith that we are changed into the likeness of Jesus. Our faith is the channel - His grace is the power. There is a time for specific action, and as we trust God, He will show us what to do and when to do it.

I believe God is confronting many of you right now, the way He has continually confronted me over the years. Perhaps He is asking the question He has asked me many times. ***Are you an achiever or a believer?*** Where is your energy and time being directed? Achieving or believing? We all want to achieve - and we will, by His grace, through faith. Too often we set out with the best of intentions to achieve, even in His name sometimes, without knowing that this is an act of our fallen flesh and it will never bear fruit in the Kingdom of God - the kingdom of grace.

I challenge you to give up achieving (in the flesh) and start believing! God is able to do exceedingly and abundantly more than all we could ask or even imagine (Ephesians 3:20) when we believe Him and allow His grace to have an effect in us and through us. God can do nothing through unbelief and works of the flesh. In fact He will actively oppose them. For works of the flesh are manifestations of pride and God opposes the proud ... but He gives grace (His empowering presence) to the humble.

As you trust God's Word and walk in obedience, God's grace will always be available to meet your every need ... then they will be His methods and His plans and we already know that His plans are good, don't we? Well, we should:

Jeremiah 29:11-14 *"I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity...."*

That 'captivity' for many people in the Church is the prison of the flesh - the chains of legalism - the bondage of religion and we all know that God hates religion and He loves to break its power in our lives and that's exactly what He will do when we choose to believe God and understand His grace in all its wonderful, life-changing, city transforming truth!