

The Face of Grace

by

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"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen." Revelation 22:21

Did you know that this verse above is the very last words in the Bible? It is God's final word to us. Ah, there's that word, "Grace" again! We know the word, and we have sung the song "Amazing Grace" more times than we can count....but the power behind this little word seems to elude us more often than not. We are comfortable with the term when it is used in the form, "graceful" as we describe a poised ballerina or a beauty queen walking down the runway. But when we realize as we read Scripture that God calls us to be graceful, the concept is lost.

In our Journey Groups, we talk about Grace. The definition we use is "unmerited favor" or "getting something we don't deserve." As believers, we soon realize that we were shown grace when Jesus died for us:

"But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions- it is by grace you have been saved."

Ephesians 2:4-5

Yes, it is that moment in time when we are confronted by our own sinfulness in the light of God's forgiveness and grace that we become transformed. In our hearts we know we deserve death and punishment, as we carry the weights of our sins. We come face to face with a gracious Lord who gently takes that sin and puts it on His own shoulders. He doesn't deserve to carry it nor do we deserve to have it taken away, but alas, we are free. It touches the deepest part of our heart, and it generates Love. In 1 Corinthians 13...The Love Chapter...its says that Love *"keeps no record of wrongs."* Grace and Love are closely connected and they are both gifts from God.

There is a great scene in the movie, *The Mission*, with Robert De Niro, where he plays a South American slave trader, who has killed his brother in a duel after finding out he was having an affair with his wife. He is acquitted of the crime, but he carries the weight of his sin. Father Gabriel challenges him to a penance where he must drag his heavy armor and sword behind him on a long uphill treacherous walk back to the Mission. Along the way, he is confronted by the natives whom he has been kidnapping and selling into slavery. Just when it seems he will be given over to his sinful past, the

rope holding his heavy armor is cut and it falls over the cliff. He is set free. He is shown Grace.

You may understand this Grace from our Lord, but has anyone here on Earth shown you such Grace? Have you ever been shown Love that you didn't really deserve? When I was 18 years old, building swimming pools for a summer job, I screwed up one weekend and got arrested for drunk driving. It was a horrible, shameful time of my life. My boss was a Godly man, and I didn't want him to know about my mistake, for I had told him I was a Christian. However, I was forced to do community service, which would mean I had to leave work early for 2 weeks, and I had to tell him. In a difficult, tearful phone call, I confessed my situation to Dennis, fearing that I would surely lose my job. Instead, I heard a calm, loving voice on the other end of the line, saying, "It's okay Bryan. We all make mistakes. Do what you need to do." It brings tears to my eyes as I remember this today, 30 years later, for it was the first time I really saw the Face of Grace in person. It touched the deepest part of me, and it was a turning point in my life. Grace is powerful!

This week, the Lord is challenging me to show Grace to someone who has wronged me. It is a very critical time in my life and in the life of this person. However, as I get on my knees and seek the Lord's counsel on this matter, He is prompting me to show this person love and grace. It doesn't make sense and it is not deserved, but as I take a step in that direction, I feel peace, and I feel the Lord's pleasure with me. When we show Grace, we are acting like Jesus. We don't worry about the results, for that is up to God.

Brothers, we are ambassadors for Christ, and God wants us to bring the Grace of Christ to this world. We must keep our eyes on Him and His Grace for us, which will help us extend that same Grace to others. This is the Gospel. This is how we will stand out in this cruel world, in which we measure everything by justice and comparative righteousness. If we think we are more righteous than someone else, we hold them to our standard, when in reality, that is not our job. That is for Christ to sort out. We never know, however, if our act of Grace might be used by God to be a turning point in another's journey.

I close with another great scene from the movie, *Les Miserables*, where the criminal Jean Valjean is welcomed into the Bishop's home for the night. In exchange for this kind act, Jean Valjean steals from the Bishop and even injures him as he escapes. The police capture him and bring him back to the Bishop, who vouches for the stolen goods, saying they were a gift. As the police leave, Jean Valjean, stands there, stunned by the grace he has just received. The Bishop looks him in the eye and says these words:

Now don't forget...don't ever forget. You've promised to become a new man

Jean Valjean says, "What? Why are you doing this?"

Jean Valjean my brother you no longer belong to evil. With this silver, I have bought your soul. I've ransomed you from fear and hatred, and now I give you back to God.

That is the Face of Grace, and that is what God is challenging you and me to become.
By His Grace, may we live it out.