

THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

AUGUST 14, 2016

A SERMON BY THE REV. WILLIAM R. FLEMING



IF WE LOOKED IN DEPTH FOR DEFINITIONS OF GOD’S GRACE, WE WOULD SPEND HOURS BURIED IN A VARIETY OF SOURCES. LET ME SHARE THE ONE I LIKE BEST FROM R.P.C. HANSON:

“GRACE MEANS THE FREE UNMERITED, UNEXPECTED LOVE OF GOD; AND ALL THE BENEFITS, DELIGHTS AND COMFORTS WHICH FLOW FROM IT. IT MEANS THAT WHILE WE WERE SOME SINNERS, WE HAVE BEEN TREATED AS SONS AND HEIRS.”

FROM A BOOK TITLED *AMAZING GRACE* ARE HYMN STORIES FOR DAILY DEVOTIONS. I CHOSE THE WORDS FROM A HYMN “*WONDERFUL GRACE OF JESUS*”, BECAUSE THE WORDS ARE AN EVEN DEEPER EXPLANATION OF GOD’S GRACE.

*WONDERFUL GRACE OF JESUS, GREATER THAN ALL MY SIN; HOW SHALL MY TONGUE DESCRIBE IT, WHERE SHALL IT’S PRAISE BEGIN? TAKING AWAY MY BURDEN, SETTING MY SPIRIT FREE, FOR THE WONDERFUL GRACE OF JESUS REACHES ME.*

*WONDERFUL GRACE OF JESUS, REACHING TO ALL THE LOST, BY IT I HAVE BEEN PARDONED SAVED TO THE UTTERMOST; CHAINS HAVE BEEN TORN ASUNDER, GIVING ME LIBERTY, FOR THE WONDERFUL GRACE OF JESUS REACHES ME.*

*WONDERFUL GRACE OF JESUS, REACHING THE MOST DEFILED, BY ITS TRANSFORMING POWER MAKING HIM GOD'S DEAR CHILD, PURCHASING PEACE AND HEAVEN FOR ALL ETERNITY-AND THE WONDERFUL GRACE OF JESUS REACHES ME.*

*CHORUS: WONDERFUL THE MATCHLESS GRACE OF JESUS, DEEPER THAN THE MIGHTY ROLLING SEA; HIGHER THAN THE MOUNTAIN, ALL SUFFICIENT GRACE FO EVEN ME; BROADER THAN THE SCOPE OF MY TRANSGRESSIONS, GREATER FAR THAN ALL MY SIN AND SHAME; O MAGNIFY THE PRECIOUS NAME OF JESUS, PRAISE HIS NAME!*

MANY CHRISTIANS AMONG US BELIEVE WE KNOW EVERYTHING WE NEED ON THE SUBJECT OF GOD'S GRACE. AS I ALLUDED TO EARLIER, MANY QUICK AND EASY DEFINITIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED FOR GRACE ARE INADEQUATE. USING RESOURCES AND VARIOUS MEANS OF RESEARCH SOME OF OUR THOUGHTS AND THOSE OF THE SERIES ENTITLED "FUNDAMENTALS OF THE FAITH", ARE SHARED BELOW.

1. GRACE IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF GOD'S GIFTS TO HIS PEOPLE.
2. GRACE IS EPITOMIZED ON THE CROSS OF CALVARY. FOR US IT IS NOT EASY TO FULLY GRASP THE GRACE OF GOD.
3. GRACE IS EXPRESSED IN A VARIETY OF WAYS AND FORMS. GRACE IS THAT BENEVOLENCE WHICH IS Poured OUT ON GOD' PEOPLE REGARDLESS OF THEIR SPIRITUAL CONDITION. GO IS GRACIOUS IN MAKING PROVISIONS

FOR THE LOVE OF ALL PEOPLE. ROMANS 5: 1-2 SAYS “THEREFORE HAVING BEEN JUSTIFIED BY FAITH, WE HAVE PEACE WITH GOD THROUGH OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST.” JUST AS A LOST PERSON CANNOT OBTAIN SALVATION THROUGH JUST GOOD WORKS OF HIS OWN, NEITHER CAN THE CHRISTIAN MAINTAIN HIS SALVATION BY EXCLUSIVELY DOING GOOD WORKS. IT MUST BE A COMBINATION. SALVATION IS OBTAINED AND MAINTAINED BY GRACE.

#### 4. GRACE IS PURE.

J. I. PACKER DESCRIBES GRACE THIS WAY:

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, GRACE MEANS GOD MOVING HEAVEN AND EARTH TO SAVE SINNERS WHO COULD NOT LIFT A FINGER TO SAVE THEMSELVES. GRACE MEANS GOD SENDING HIS ONLY SON TO DIE ON THE CROSS SO THAT WE MIGHT BE RECONCILED TO GOD.

CONSIDER THIS POSSIBILITY, THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES INVITES YOU TO A MAGNIFICENT BANQUET. IT IS AN EVENING THAT YOU WILL NEVER FORGET BUT AS YOU LEAVE THAT EVENING YOU GREET THE PRESIDENT AT THE DOOR AND WISH TO SHOW YOUR APPRECIATION. YOU SAY TO HIM, “MR. PRESIDENT, I WANT TO

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR THE WONDERFUL EVENING. I KNOW THIS MUST HAVE BEEN A VERY GREAT EXPENSE, SO I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A SMALL CONTRIBUTION TO HELP COVER THE COST.” YOU THEN PRESS A COIN INTO HIS HAND AND LEAVE. THAT IS NO TRUE COMPLIMENT.

THE GRACE OF GOD IS ABSOLUTELY OURS! WE DO NOT HAVE TO EARN IT- INDEED WE CANNOT EARN IT. THIS TRUTH IS NOT AN EASY ONE TO BELIEVE BECAUSE WE HAVE COME TO DOUBT THAT NOTHING CAN REALLY BE FREE ANYMORE. BUT WE MUST BELIEVE.

GRACE IS THE SOURCE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. WHILE THE LAW DEFINES RIGHTEOUSNESS, GRACE DELIVERS IT. THE LAW WAS NEVER INTENDED TO BE A MEANS OF OBTAINING GOD’S GRACE, IT WAS GIVEN TO DEMONSTRATE TO PEOPLE THAT GRACE WAS DESPERATELY NEEDED.

SOME THEOLOGIANS BELIEVE AND EXPRESS NONSENSE THAT GRACE IS GIVEN ONLY TO THE HUMBLE: THAT WHEN OUR LORD CAME TO EARTH HE CAME TO MINISTER TO THE POOR, THE SUFFERING, THE NEEDY. BUT I WOULD SUGGEST THAT GRACE IS APPROPRIATELY GIVEN TO ALL OF GOD’S CHILDREN.

GRACE IS ALWAYS GRANTED IN HARMONY WITH GOD'S OTHER ATTRIBUTES. IT IS POSSIBLE AT THIS POINT TO MISUNDERSTAND THE GRACE OF GOD BY SUPPOSING THAT GRACE SOMEHOW IS GRANTED AT THE EXPENSE OF GOD'S HOLINESS OR HIS JUSTICE. NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH. GRACE DOES NOT SET ASIDE THE REQUIREMENTS OF JUSTICE; IT SATISFIES THEM.

GRACE IS BOTH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IN WHAT HE GIVES: GRACE IS THE OUTPOURING OF GOD'S UNSOLICITED GOODNESS AND LOVE UPON SINFUL PEOPLE. THIS GOODNESS HOWEVER MAY NOT ALWAYS BE RECOGNIZED, BECAUSE IT SOMETIMES COMES IN THE FORM OF PAIN AND SUFFERING.

MY DEAR FRIENDS GOD IS GOOD NOT ONLY IN WHAT HE GIVES; BUT ALSO IN WHAT HE WITHHOLDS; AND WHAT HE TAKES AWAY. WHILE WE MAY NOT UNDERSTAND THE REASONS WHY, IF WE BELIEVE THAT GOD IS A GOD OF GRACE, WE MUST BE ABLE TO SAY AND FEEL LIKE JOB: "THE LORD GAVE AND THE LORD HAS TAKEN AWAY. BLESSED BE THE NAME OF THE LORD."