

“GOD’S PREVENIENT GRACE” (HOW DOES GOD SAVE US SERIES #1)

Deuteronomy 7:6-11, Romans 8:1-9, John 16:7-11

November 4 & 5, 2023

“A house servant had two large pots. One hung on each end of a pole that he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it. At the end of the long walk from the stream to the master's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. The other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water. For two years the servant delivered each day only one-and-a-half pots full of water to his master's house. The perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, but the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable over accomplishing only half of what it had been made to do. After two years of what it perceived to be bitter failure, the cracked pot spoke to the servant one day by the stream. ‘I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you.’

“What are you ashamed of?” asked the servant.

“For these past two years I have been able to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way to your master's house. Because of my flaws, you don't get full value from your work.’

“The servant said, ‘As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path.’ As they went up the hill, the cracked pot noticed the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path. When they reached the house, the servant said to the pot, ‘Did you notice the flowers grew only on your side of the path, not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them. For two years I have been able to pick beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table.’

“Each of us has flaws. But if we allow it, the Lord will use our flaws to grace his Father's table.”<sup>1</sup>

Friends, for the next three weeks we’ll be looking at How God Saves Us. We’ll be investigating God’s great grace for us that enables us to find forgiveness for our sins and to be able to stand in God’s

---

<sup>1</sup> (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002] pg. 302-303)

presence, pure and holy. Grace, by definition, “is that of undeserved blessing freely bestowed on man by God - a concept which is at the heart ... of Christian experience.”<sup>2</sup> Today we are looking at the prevenient grace of God that goes before us to enable us to make a decision to have Jesus Christ as our Savior and find His salvation.

As the opening story shows us, God is very aware of our short-comings and our faults. He knows that we are imperfect people. God knows how sinful we are and that with all our sins we are not able to stand in His presence. God is holy and perfect, and since we are imperfect and sinful, there is no way by ourselves are we able to stand before God and be with Him. But God loves us, and delights to lead us back to Him, broken as we are, so that we might be useful to Him as He determines. So “*God shows His love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*” so that “*while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son*” (Rom. 5:8, 10).

Our Old Testament lesson of Deuteronomy 7:6-11 explains this. As the Israelites were moving from the wilderness toward the Promised Land, Moses reminded the people of God’s delight with them. Though they had broken covenant with God, God had not given up on them, but rather pursued them so that they might prove themselves to be “*a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession,*” (Deut. 7:6) Moses tells them.

Now that’s not to say that God doesn’t love all the other people of the world. He does, tremendously! But by His grace, He chose the little country of Israel to be His favorite people. Not that they were better than all the other peoples, not that they were stronger, or smarter, or more numerous than all the other peoples, but because He loved them and had made a covenant with them that they should be His chosen people and be the example to the rest of the world of God’s love and grace.

And as time has gone by, that same love and special favor has also come to those who have placed their faith and trust in the Savior of the world, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. All

---

<sup>2</sup> (Walter A. Elwell, Ed. of *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984] pg. 479)

who put their trust and faith in Jesus are adopted into the favored status of people in the world alongside of the people of Israel. And it's not that we deserve it, or that we somehow merit it, but that we have become a part of the great covenant of God to the people who put their trust in Him as their God through Jesus Christ over all other things.

So we also become a "*people holy to the Lord*" as we claim Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. We become part of the family of God who find His blessings, His protection, His provision, and His love "*to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments*" (Deut. 7:9). And we are also called to live according to His commandments as a witness to the rest of the world of the benefits of trusting in the Lord our God through Jesus Christ.

But God's grace went out to us long before we were ready to accept His great love. Each of us had to come to a point when we recognized God's love working for us through His Holy Spirit, even before our point of conversion to faith. God's grace goes out to all the world, inviting all people to come to Him so that He might bless them abundantly as they make their profession of faith and accept His Salvation.

David Slagle, of Lawrenceville, Georgia, gives us a perfect example of God's grace and love working together to bring us back to Him. He says, "Recently my 21-month-old son, who had just learned to say 'Daddy,'" had been struggling with asthma and an ear infection for two weeks. He coughed and sneezed continually, and his nose ran like a faucet. Each night when I came home, he ran to meet me at the door, smiling, coughing, nose running, yelling, 'Daddy! Daddy!'

"I was not repulsed by his runny nose or close-range sneezes in the least (he 'slimed' every shirt I own!). I love him deeply and enjoy his love for me.

"I'm reminded that though I am sick with sin, God loves me deeply and desires that I run to Him as a son crying, 'Abba, Father.'"<sup>3</sup>

Though we were once sliming God with the sinfulness of our lives, God still loves us, so much

---

<sup>3</sup> (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003] pg. 11)

that He delights us to be in His presence. So through the work of His Holy Spirit, God keeps calling out to all of us, so that as we grow to love Him, we might also come running to Him, seeking His love.

The apostle Paul tells it well in Romans 8 of the hope we have in Christ Jesus. You heard his words; *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the Law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit”* (Rom. 8:1-4). Even before we were ready to accept God into our lives as the One who gives life, God was working on our behalf to make a way for us to have Salvation through Jesus Christ.

Even in the midst of our snotty, sinful and rebellious lives, God loved us and decided that He would make a way for us to come back to Him. Jesus’ death on the cross paid the penalty for our sin, atoning us with the Father Almighty, if we claim His sacrifice for our lives. God made the way for us to come back to Him, but the choice is ours as to whether or not we will receive it into our lives. God’s grace, His unmerited love for us, made a way for us to find life in Him through the work of His Son, Jesus. Following the Law cannot accomplish this, for none of us is able or willing to completely follow the Law of God. The Law works to expose our sin, but through the Holy Spirit’s guidance, we are able to find God’s favor as we believe in, receive and follow Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

But we cannot find God’s Salvation outside of Jesus Christ. Though God’s grace is provided to us long before we are ready to receive it, there is no one else whom we can trust in to find forgiveness of our sins and become redeemed and forgiven people. Our lives here in this world, surrounded by chaos, confusion, lies and rebellion against God’s ways, cannot find the redemption we need from that sinfulness. It is only in the work of Salvation through Jesus Christ that we find forgiveness. Therefore *“if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. BUT if Christ is in you, then*

*even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of Righteousness. AND if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of His Spirit who lives in you” (Rom 8:9-11).*

You see, “prevenient grace is grace which comes first. It precedes all human decision and endeavor. Grace always means that it is God who takes the initiative and implies the priority of God’s action on behalf of needy sinners. That is the whole point of grace: it does not start with us, it starts with God; it is not earned or merited by us, it is freely and lovingly given to us who have no resources or deservings of our own...God, in fact, showed His prior love for us by graciously providing this redemption precisely when we had no love for Him...God took action, moreover, when we were helpless (Rom. 5:6), without any ability to help ourselves or to make any contribution toward our salvation.”<sup>4</sup>

So before we were even born, God had already made a way for us to find forgiveness for the sins that we would commit in our life. Because God is eternal, He knows yesterday, today and tomorrow, and He is not limited in His knowledge of what we will do. Since we are human, we follow the lead of our ancestors, and that takes us into sinfulness (living according to our own standards and guidelines rather than following God’s standards and guidelines). No person is perfect, so we all need a means by which we can find our way back to God.

So every day of our lives, God’s Holy Spirit nudges us to grow closer to the Lord our God. He opens our eyes to see the ways that we are living - away from God’s ways - and He invites us to try the alternatives to what we think is just and right and He gives us God’s good and right way to live differently. Then it is possible for us to find our hearts strangely warmed, and we can change our lives toward God’s ways. Let me give you an example.

“During the Great Awakening, when the Spirit of God revived much of our nation's early faith, Jonathan Edwards was presiding over a massive prayer meeting. Eight hundred men prayed with him.

---

<sup>4</sup> (Walter A. Elwell, Ed. of *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984] pg. 480)

“Into that meeting a woman sent a message asking the men to pray for her husband. The note described a man who had become unloving, prideful, and difficult.

“Edwards read the message in private and then, thinking that perhaps the man described was present, made a bold request. Edwards read the note to the 800 men. Then he asked if the man who had been described would raise his hand, so that the whole assembly could pray for him. **Three hundred** men raised their hands.”<sup>5</sup> God’s Spirit was moving in the hearts of these men, going before them to convince them of their sin and enable them to confess that sinfulness and find forgiveness.

God’s prevenient grace goes before us to provide us a way to turn from our wicked ways and find God’s good and perfect ways. Rather than destroy us because of our sinfulness, God keeps on loving us and giving us multiple opportunities to change our course in life so that we might be saved from His wrath focused at those who refuse to seek and follow Him.

So it is by God’s Holy Spirit that we find the guiding toward His redemption in Jesus Christ. Jesus describes the work of the Holy Spirit in our Gospel lesson of John 16:7-11. Listen to what the Holy Spirit does for us. (READ John 16:7-11)

Since God’s ways are not our ways, the Holy Spirit knocks us up-side-of-the-head and shows us what is right according to God’s ways. Through a whole series of events particular to each one of us, He lets us know what sin is, contrary to what the world says it is. He reveals the truth about God and calls us into His righteousness, not the self-righteousness that the world proclaims. He then shows the judgement that we all face because of our rebellion against God’s ways. While Satan would have us believe that we can attain our own salvation by being successful in following our own ways, the Holy Spirit makes it plain to see that we are not judged by the standards of the world, but by the standards of God.

And as our eyes are opened to see sin for what it is, righteousness for what it is, and judgement for what it is, we are able to come to understand that we are not able to find salvation by ourselves. It is

---

<sup>5</sup> (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003] pg. 217)

only through God's love that we find forgiveness through His grace given to us. God is at work well before we figure out the need for Him to be a part of our lives, and He continues to pursue us like a hound focused on its prey. God loves us so much that He desires that none of us be lost in our rebellion against God, but that we come to understand that real life is only with God through Jesus Christ. On our own, we may find some pleasure in certain activities, but even then there is an emptiness within us that nothing in this world can fill. Only God, through His Son, Jesus Christ, brings real life to us as we come to trust Him as our Lord, and receive His work on the cross for our Salvation.

Nothing we do can earn us God's grace. It has been freely given, ready for each one of us to receive, so that we might be blessed by the great love of God for us. Let me explain it like this.

"Tom Allen, a pastor and former Army Ranger, tells this story: I finally saw the movie *Saving Private Ryan* about two weeks ago. I was extremely proud until the last minute of the movie.

"As the movie began, I was proud watching the Rangers take Omaha Beach. Then the story begins when they receive a mission to go deep into enemy territory to save Private Ryan. They hit skirmish after skirmish, and some of them are killed along the way. They finally get to where Private Ryan is holed up, and they say, "Come with us. We've come to save you."

"He says, 'I'm not going. I have to stay here because there's a big battle coming up, and if I leave my men, they're all going to die.'

"What do the Rangers say? 'We'll stay here and fight with you.' They all stay and fight, and it's gory and hard, and almost everyone dies except Private Ryan. At the end, one of the main characters—Tom Hanks—is sitting on the ground. He's been shot and he's dying. The battle has been won.

"Private Ryan leans over to him, and Tom Hanks whispers something to him. Everyone in the theater is crying because Tom Hanks was shot; I was crying because of what he said—it was so terrible. Private Ryan bent down and Tom Hanks said, 'Earn this.' The reason that made me angry is no Ranger would ever say, 'Earn this.' Why? Because the Ranger motto for the past two hundred years has not been 'Earn this.' The Ranger motto for the past two hundred years has been *Sua sponte*, 'I chose this.' I

volunteered for this.

“So, when Private Ryan bent down, if Tom Hanks was really a Ranger he would have said, ‘*Sua sponte*, I chose this. This is free. You don't pay anything for this. I give up my life for you. That's my job.’

“And so when you look at the cross and see Jesus hanging there, what you **do not hear** is ‘Earn this.’ You never hear Jesus say, ‘Earn this.’ He doesn't say, ‘I've given everything for you. Now you need to gut it out for me.’ What he says is ‘*Sua sponte*.’ I volunteered for this. You don't have to pay anything for it.”<sup>6</sup> But, though it was given freely to us by Jesus' great sacrifice, we do need to receive it, be blessed by it, and allow that sacrifice to change our lives so that we might live for Jesus as a result of God's great prevenient grace for us.

Folks, God has supplied us with His prevenient grace so that we might be with Him when this life is over and our journey here on earth is done. It is ours for the taking. But to find God's promise of eternal life, we must receive His gift of grace into our life, and that only happens through Jesus Christ.

If you haven't received Jesus into your life, I invite you to do that today so that He might change you and recreate you into His likeness. If you have received Jesus, but are not living in His grace given to us, I invite you to recommit your life to Him today, so that you may truly experience God's great love for you. Don't put it off. Let Jesus live in you today. Let's pray.

Father, thank You so much for Your great love for each one of us. Thank You for not giving up on us, but rather going ahead of us so that we might find Your love in our life through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Convict us of our sin. Expose it so that we might confess it to You and then find forgiveness. Father, as we come to the service of Communion today, may You lighten our hearts as we confess our sins to You. Change our hearts, O God, and make us new creatures in Christ again. Send us Your Holy Spirit so that we might follow His guidance as followers of Jesus Christ. Bless us so that we might live a life that is pleasing in You. This we pray in Jesus' Name.

---

<sup>6</sup> (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002] pg. 117-118)