

“A Matter of Grace”
By Brother Parrish Lee
Sunday, July 8th 2013

Giving honor to God, who is the Head of my life; giving honor to those who have gone before me, both in the scriptures, and throughout time, and in this ministry: Our founding pastor, he and his family, our bishop, he and his family, Pastor Wilson, Brother Kenneth, he and his family, who labored in this office, giving respect to them. Giving honor to them, and giving honor to all of you who are in attendance today. Our theme of the month is, “Grace.”

Part 1: The Free Gift

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

Ephesians 4:7 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

Lord, we thank you for such a wonderful time, in gathering and worshipping and praising and communing with you, O Lord. God, there truly is none like You. We count it a great privilege to come before and have audience with You. Lord, we pray, as You have blessed us through our praise and worship time, as You have said that You would inhabit the praises of Israel. We pray a blessing on the message at this time, Lord, that it would be *exactly* according to Your will. Lord, You have said that Your Word would not return unto You void, but that it would accomplish that which You have sent it to do. So, we thank You, we praise You, and we honor You. God, I pray that I would be able to be out of Your way, for I do not matter—simply to be an instrument of Your will. And everyone said, amen.

Part 1: The Free Gift

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: (Ephesians 2:8) When I went to look up the definition of grace (I thought this would be a wonderful way to start off service—start off with the definition), it was quite amazing. It’s really hard for people to describe grace. I looked in the regular dictionary; I looked in religious subject books and what-not, and they all had so much—because, frankly, it is so inclusive of so many things. It was hard for them to contain it in one or two words. Even to pinpoint how much the vastness of grace is. But as we do look to the definition, these are what stand out: benefit, favor, gift, joy, liberality, thanks, thank-worthy, and thank-worthiness.

The Bible says For by grace are ye saved through faith—now, it’s important to know that we are saved, actually restored by grace. It is grace that saves us, and, yes, through faith. The next important point is that we didn’t do anything to deserve it. We didn’t do anything to earn this grace. We couldn’t do anything to bring grace down to us. It is, as the Scripture says, the gift of God.

But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. So, God’s grace is specific. It’s not a cookie-cutter thing. It’s not a generic thing. God’s grace is

specific, you could even say, designer. It is specifically and it is personally for you according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Now, so we don't stray here, the grace that God has given you won't look exactly like the grace that He has given someone else. The grace that He's given me won't look exactly like the grace that He's given you, Tom. It will accomplish my salvation; it will accomplish your salvation, but, when we look into our lives, the grace that God has measured out in the gift of Christ won't look exactly the same because it is a designer edition. And another thing about that: The grace that is in Sister Becky's life or Brother Andy's life or Brother Jesse's life is not deigned for the grace that is in my life to conflict; the grace that God has given us is for us to be able to work together. It is not meant to strive, it is not meant to be in conflict, it is not meant to bring hurt. It is a measure of the gift of God.

The challenge we have, because of the society we are in, is not to take this marvelous grace for granted. Before I became a Christian, I heard this Scripture, Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace are ye saved through faith..." I never understood it. People tried to explain it, but I felt like they didn't understand it, either. The truth is, I heard it so much, I got accustomed to it, it didn't mean a big deal to me. In our society today, you give somebody something, and you know what they want? a little more. You know, you just got a job, and you want to know how often you get paid, and how much is in that paycheck... You know what would really make me happy? a little more. And how many days off do I get? You know what would really make me happy? a little more. Oh, you just made my favorite meal? You know what would really make me happy? a little more. We have to be careful not to be caught up; we have to be careful not to take this grace that God has given us for granted.

Just recently I went to Baltimore (that's where I'm from—that's that city where that team just won the superbowl) because my sister was receiving her doctorate degree. What an honor. I flew out there on Sunday evening, I was going to be coming back the following Saturday. While I was there I noticed something. I noticed the gas prices. When I left here, gas prices were about \$4.10, \$4.15, \$4.19 a gallon, but when I arrived there I saw gas prices as low as \$3.39 a gallon. That was on Sunday. On Monday I saw about those same prices: \$3.39, maybe \$3.43. Tuesday I saw the same thing, but on Wednesday, I was picking up some stuff for the occasion, and I saw one station whose price was \$3.69. You know what I had the nerve to say? "Wow, that's high!" After three days, I was already acclimated; I had already taken \$3.39 for granted. It took the Lord to slap me and say, "You know, \$3.39—if you were where you had just come from, you'd be calling people on the phone saying, 'Gas is fifty cents cheaper at this gas station.'" That is entirely an attitude we have in the world today. We so soon can forget a blessing; we take it for granted. We just want to make sure that we don't follow through with that attitude when talking about what God has done for us. It's that special that it just has to stand out. We could talk about this quite a bit, but we have to move on.

I'd like to highlight one more point about how marvelous His grace is. From the book of Isaiah:

Isaiah 42:8 I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another...

Now consider this: the holy and righteous God will not give His glory to another. I will not give my glory to an angel. I will not give my glory to the strong. I will not give my glory to a mountain. I will not give my glory to the ocean. I will not give my glory to a person. I will not give my glory to any plant. I will not give my glory to anything, because I am the Lord. And yet, look at what He has done: He gave us of His spirit, He gave us of His forgiveness, He

gave us of His power, He gave us of His healing touch, He gave us of the truth of His Word. That's how intense, and how far the love of God stretches. Now that's what we call love. For all these things and so much more to be included in our grace, that's love.

Part 2: We have to have a commitment to the grace given to us.

2 Corinthians 6:1 ...beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.

Somewhere along the line there has to be a commitment to this grace of God. Somewhere along the line, if you receive it, then God would like for you to be committed to it. It is the type of thing that is freely given, and yet has such a great cost. Have you ever gotten anything that was such a great deal—it didn't cost hardly anything—but, after you got it, you realized it was costing you quite a bit? Well the grace of God has never been cheap—the Bible says for God so loved us that he gave His only begotten son (John 3:16). So this grace did cost something; somebody paid a cost for this grace.

But back to our commitment. You know there is a place in the Bible where Jesus could not do many miracles, and the Bible says he marveled at their unbelief (Mark 6:1-6). There He is, the Lord of Glory, on the scene, and He can't do one good thing, here, because of their unbelief. There's another place in the Bible where the Lord is talking about two cities and said woe unto them, because of those same works would have been done in Sodom and Gomorrah they would have never been destroyed (Matthew 11:23), because they would have appreciated, they would have turned, they would have repented, they would have counted the cost. They would have allowed themselves to be accountable, having seen the works of God. There's another place where it talks about ten lepers, and how the Lord healed them, and He told them to go show themselves unto the priests. He healed all ten, but when the one returned to say thank you, His question was, "Were not ten healed? Where are the nine?" (Luke 17:12-17) So, there is a cost associated with these great things that the Lord gives. He only wants to give us more. Jesus wants to fill us to overflowing. I can actually empathize on that: That's the one that's so personal. You can just imagine how it must have been. They were lepers, so they couldn't go around much. They couldn't touch people. They had to eat in separate places. If they wore clothes, nobody else could wear them—they had to be burned.

I can imagine the Lord saw their plight, saying, "I have watched over their lives and seen their struggles and pain. I knew when they got their leprosy and I have been waiting for this moment, I have planned this healing. I set this whole thing up; I knew you were going to be here. I was only looking for you to just turn and say thanks, and give glory to God." Lepers! In fact, when the one turned, I can imagine what he was thinking: "God, I thank you, because You have done what no one else could do. You have done the impossible. There ain't no cure for this. There ain't no resolution. I get my family back. I get my life back. I get a career. You know what? I get love. I get people. I get to go into the Temple, like everybody else. I can give praise and worship so much more, personally. I get a testimony of the love of God. I can imagine how that must have been. Can you imagine what would it have been like if not only the other nine had returned to bless him and thank him, but all the witnesses had turned to glorify God? How he would have been able to pour out more because of their attachment to the commitment.

1 Corinthians 15:10 ...His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain...

We would make a terrible mistake to place a limit on what the grace of God will do. We would also make a terrible mistake not to do due diligence to the commitment that we make. Have you ever known people that want to put forth the minimum amount of effort and get a maximum reward? This doesn't work that way.

Some of you have looked at others in their Christian walks or in the church. And it has seemed that God has blessed them and skipped over you. Sometimes, maybe, we get to feeling a little left out, a little passed on by. A little like the spotlight has just missed us. The truth of the matter is that that's a lie straight from the pit. The grace that God has given you is so particular; He desires to do marvelous and wonderful things. We can't even fathom in our minds a limit as to what He can do. But we don't know, some of these people that have such wonderful things that they show on the outside, we don't know what they had to go through to get there. Sometimes we judge only by the outward, and not having looked at the path or the journey that God has had to take the through to exalt them. He built them up, to put knowledge, to put love and compassion, to be able to put understanding, to put wisdom, to put longsuffering. The point of this is that we can learn by. It's not to be able to compare ourselves, but to be able to help them testify. One thing is for sure, and that is that God is not a respecter of persons (Romans 2:11). Nobody is more special than anybody else. Their calling and their grace maybe different, but not more special, not above. In the eyes of God, we are all more special. Sometimes we look at somebody else, and we think, "Man, I'd like to have what they have. Like Jacob: God made him a great man, changed his walk, made him a great leader over many people. I would like that." If you would like that, be ready to wrestle with the Angel until the breaking of the day. If you would like that, imagine that your family had been threatened, and you didn't know which way to turn, until you try out, and allow the deliverance of God to come in. Or maybe you say, "You know that Peter, he had a testimony. He got out there and he walked on the water. I'd like to be able to do that." If you would like to be able to do that, get out of the boat. Get out, and step on the water in the faith of God. If you're not willing to trust God to do it, it's not something that you really, really want. If you want to have great victories over the battle, you have to be able to pray with Him one hour. It should not be a big deal if somebody else got the great victory, but not me, because we are all a party to it.

Acts 11:23 Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad...

So, when he came, he had seen the grace of God. You know what that means? it can be seen! The grace of God *should* be able to be seen. You ever go to someone's house and you can tell; there's a certain spirit coming out—I can feel the love that's going on in here? I can feel there's some sort of a demon-chasing something that's a sanctifying spirit that they had put in this house. Or you ever go to a house and, without anybody even telling you, you could tell that there's trouble on the inside; I don't know what it is, but I know it's something here. As a Christian, somebody should be able to walk with us, talk with us, go where we go... "You know what? Whatever is going on in this person's life, there is something that draws me to them. There is something—I can't put my finger on it, I can't explain it, but I can see it, there's evidence, it's there." As a Christian, that is our heritage: The grace of God can be seen in us.

Romans 12:6-8 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us...

We cheat ourselves if we think that our salvation consists only of being saved from the Lake of Fire. We cheat ourselves if we say, “Yeah, grace means I don’t go to the Lake of Fire.” You’re cheating yourself. That grace of God that brings salvation also consists of our calling, it consists of our gifts, it consists of our victories, it consists of the path where God is leading us. Our salvation is quite intense. It consists of the revelation that God had. There is a big difference between grace and mercy. The Bible says it is because of His mercies that we are not consumed (Lamentations 3:22). It is because of His mercy that we are not destroyed. The Bible says that His tender mercies are over all of His wonderful works (Psalms 145:9). How great His mercy is. Because of His mercy, we are not destroyed, His mercy is all over all of the wonderful that He has made. But as great as that mercy is, it doesn’t save you. As great, as wondrous, as awesome as His mercy is, it doesn’t get us to Heaven. Just because somebody let you out of jail; it doesn’t mean that you are rich. Just because somebody picks you off of death row, it doesn’t entitle you to sit with royalty. Just because the charges get dropped, it doesn’t mean that you become the CEO of so many different things. No, no, no, no, no, no. That’s mercy, and mercy is why we are not consumed. Grace, on the other hand, is what’s going to get us home. Grace teaches us. You may say, “What if I have mercy, and I don’t have grace?” If you have mercy and not grace, then you don’t make it to home. Don’t think we can deal with grace only. What would it be like to inherit mansions and walk through the gates of pearl and down streets of gold still have on filthy rags, you still have your sin chained to you? Mercy hasn’t washed those away yet. That is why you can’t talk about mercy without talking about the life. Without the shedding of that precious blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, yes, that mercy would still be waiting for us; it would still be waiting to be revealed. So, yes, saints, we need both grace and mercy.

Part 3: Grace is given to help us accomplish God’s will

2 Corinthians 12:7-10...My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness...

I don’t know what his thorn was, but I know what some of mine are, and I can’t wait to get rid of them. I’m trying, I’ve been complaining, I’ve been saying, “Lord, if You would just take them away, I’ll be okay. If You would just get in there and take *most* of it away, enough of it that it don’t bother me so much anymore.”

So, in this grace that God has given us are temptations, and battles. There are things that we have to go through that we turn to the grace of God to be strong. For the Lord, yes, the Lord helps us and lets us know how weak we are, then we turn to Him for strength, for His strength is made perfect in our weakness. “Well, you know what I had to go through? I had this *terrible* battle I was going through: It was my bills! It was my cable—they cut my cable off. I had to give up my fancy phone and had to go to a regular analog phone. That’s really bad. You know what? I had to downsize on my car. I couldn’t take as many vacations this year. I had some battles...” Praise God! Thank God for battles! We, within His grace, are made perfect! His strength is made perfect in our weakness! He lets us know the answer: This is why this one came; this is why I’m going through this, so that I can turn to the Lord and see His strength.

Titus 2:11-13 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men...

Some might say, “What am I supposed to do with this grace?” I’m glad you asked. I will tell you, the Bible says, teaching us that denying ungodly and worldly lusts (Titus 2:12):

1. So we are supposed to be taught by it; we are supposed to learn from grace.
 2. After Jesus healed the ten lepers, and only one returned, His question was, “**Where are the nine? They are not to be found, save for this one who has returned to give thanks.**” So we are supposed to thank God for His grace.
 3. This is really easy: If your grace can be seen, that means that you are supposed to share this marvelous grace.
 4. Grace teaches us to look for that blessed hope and the appearing of the Great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ.
- We’re supposed to be taught by it; we’re supposed to thank God for it; we’re supposed to share it; and we’re supposed to look for achievement in the hope of God.

When it comes to grace I have a personal example. Some years ago I worked third shift at a job, and trying to keep in shape, I decided to try to get some exercise. I’d eat a little something on the first break, and I’d eat something in the morning, but, at lunchtime (which was really two o’clock in the morning) I would take that thirty minutes and I would go jog around the parking lot. It’s about two miles and I could both do the jog and take a quick shower afterwards and be back to work. That was okay. It’s not as easy as I thought it was, but, you know, in the early morning hours, there’s a lot of dew that comes up from the ground. Sometimes it would rain, and water the grass. Those night hours, that’s when I found out the definition of what a nightcrawler was. I would see these worms that had come up and they would be going across the pavement or some would actually be going out across the parking lot to the other side, which I knew was certain death, because “He ain’t going to make it across the parking lot; he’s just a worm.” Me, with my big compassionate spirit, sometimes I would grab my ID or an ink pen and I’d, you know, flip the worms back on the grass, and I just saved a worm. There was a lot of worms out there. Sometimes I could spend my whole break... I remember one particular time when I would do that to those worms they would start squirming and crawling and they were just resistant to that touch. “You stupid worm, don’t you know I’m trying to save you?” You see it coming, don’t you? Right there, God gave me a message, right there, “Yes, that worm, that thing that’s nothing but a little piece of flesh, can’t even see where it’s going, and you can see he’s going out to certain death, and you are like that worm. So many times when you go out to do your will, and you think you know what you’re doing, but you’re nothing but flesh. All you have to do is ask! Then I come and try to set your life... You can even sense My touch and you resist it. You go ahead and do what you wanted to do, even though I know that you’re going to lead yourself to destruction. I know you’re going to wind up killing yourself. You’re a lot like this worm.” The Scripture in Isaiah says that God called Israel worms (Isaiah 41:14). Because we are resistant to His correction and His reproof and His love and His focus and His ammunition and we recoil and we try to get away. So oftentimes when God tries to lead us and guide us and direct us and save us from problems and troubles. From our own selfish decisions we resist, we coil and stiffen up and still want our own way. God just told me, “Even though you are like this worm, and my ways are above your ways as the heavens are above the earth, still, I give you grace; still, I give you mercy. Still, I came to take your sins away.”

Thank you very much.