

Grace Flows
Luke 4:12-14

In a song by one of my favorite Christian singers, Robin Mark, are the words,
Grace flows like a mighty river,
And one day I just dipped my fingers in,
Your love caught and dragged me to a deeper place,
laughing and flailing . . .

I love the miracle of “Grace” that these words reveal to us. They speak about a mystical experience that takes place as we respond to God’s good and perfect gift of salvation, how as we begin to give our hearts freely to Him, His blessed grace, grabs hold of our souls and begins a lifelong relationship that we cannot even imagine will take place. And if we dare to fully surrender our hearts, our minds and our souls to Him, we too will have the experience that Robin Mark colorfully describes here with the words . . . “One day I just dipped my fingers in, and your love caught and dragged me to a deeper place, laughing and flailing”.

Perhaps your conservative mind can’t quite imagine the mystical experience that the singer speaks about in these words, but folks I can. And I am so thankful that I can.

This is “grace” and this is the love of God being freely poured out upon His beloved sons and daughters, and I invite you to surrender up whatever might be keeping you from such intimate experiences with our Lord and to move on ahead and to begin to fully enjoy the blessed “grace” that the Lord Jesus freely gives to us.

But how then do these words fit with the text of our passage of scripture that we will study today. Listen and then we’ll talk about this blessed treasure of “Grace” that our Lord freely pours out upon us as we surrender our lives to Him.

Listen to these words given to us in Luke chapter 14 beginning in verse 12,
¹² He (this is the Lord Jesus) said also to the man who had invited him,
“When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed, because they

cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."
(Luke 14:12-14)

Here as the Lord Jesus was meeting with a group of religious leaders in one of their houses, He once again took the opportunity of the circumstance that He was involved in and He turned it into a teaching moment for these Scribes and Pharisees.

Always a teacher, and ever and always a giver of the truths of the gospel, Jesus never failed to continually press forward to fulfill the purpose for which God the Father sent Him to the earth. He described that purpose in another place in scripture, when He said, "I came not to do my own will, but to do the will of the one who sent me". And He said in another place, "I have come to seek and to save those who are lost".

And now here, we find Him in the home of one of the Pharisees, doing exactly that, ministering to a group of sincerely devout men, church leaders of that day, men well entrenched within their beliefs, but sadly, they were men who were profoundly wrong in their understanding of the scriptures and consequently, profoundly lost.

They didn't know they were lost, of course, but they were, and terribly so. They were men of the cloth, men who spent most of their waken moments studying and teaching the scriptures, but still yet, men who knew not the word, and knew not the Lord who had given it.

They were the "lost sheep of Israel" that Jesus spoke about in Matthew chapter 15 where He said,

²⁴ . . . "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew 15:24)

These men and the others of the Israelite race were God's first mission field. The gospel was to be first to the Jew and then to the Gentiles.

And so here, at this dinner party, we find Jesus reaching out to these church leaders with His truths. And not just with basic truths, but also with the precepts and the principles and the meanings behind those truths. Jesus truly wanted these lost sheep of Israel to be reclaimed.

And on this occasion, He took the opportunity to teach these men about the simple and uncomplicated concept of “grace”. Why would that be so? It was because Jesus readily saw within them a continual and pervasive form of self-centeredness, always searching for ways to elevate themselves and to gain favored attention for themselves.

And here, Jesus was saying to them that they needed to change the direction of that flow of favor and attention. To change that flow from always flowing in their direction, them always being receivers, to instead, them being “givers”, givers that freely gave, while asking nothing, and expecting nothing in return, a truly strange and uncharted concept to them.

And let me say to us, that that precept of “giving while asking nothing in return”, stands as the most foundational of all the characteristics of grace. Why is that so? It is because, by God's definition of the concept, grace, “real grace”, is an ever and always an out-flowing gift, a form of giving that is ever and always flowing outward and forward.

His grace is part of the “river of living waters” that flows out from the throne of God. Those living waters first flow out from Him, then through us, and then out to anyone and to everyone who would receive them. That is God's intent and that is God's desire for “grace”.

And that simple principle regarding “grace” has a plain and unmistakable meaning in that we clearly know that a river never flows backwards, it always flows forward.

And our Lord's grace must never be restricted or impeded. If “grace” is not allowed to freely flow, it will become like the manna in the desert, quickly losing its power and its purpose, becoming stale and stagnated, useful to no one, especially to the one who has chosen to stop its flow. The once “living water” will become bitter to the taste and will surely produce illness within a soul.

Here in this scripture passage, using the example of a dinner party, Jesus explained to these church leaders that by their habit of inviting only those guests who could later return the favor to them, the will and the purposes of God could never move forward. That kind of behavior was a form of “earned grace” which was not grace at all, but more a kind of earned wage.

By their behavior, those men were always attempting to turn the flow of grace back upon themselves, trying to make that river flow backwards, but only instead creating a log-jam that, in the long-run, would not be of any real benefit to them at all.

Why would that be so? Why can we never really gain the favor of others? It is because, they are just like us, interested only in themselves, garnering attention just for the purpose of furthering their own desires, giving nothing to anyone. Very similar to circular reasoning.

With that being true, where does that then leave us in our efforts? It leaves us with a room full of self-centered individuals, each seeking for his own will and his own way, interested only in self, a fruitless pursuit that gains nothing.

But grace, real grace, is not that way at all. Grace is ever and always giving and flowing forward, rivers of living waters flowing first out from the throne of God, then through us, His beloved "carriers of grace", and then on out to those who might not otherwise ever know and enjoy God's loving provision.

Why must it first flow out from God? It is because God and God alone is the keeper of all good and perfect gifts. We are told that in James chapter 1, where He tells us that.

¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father. (James 1:17)

But from where and just how will those good and perfect gifts come to us? As we know, they do not simply magically appear out of the air directly from God.

No, as we well know God doesn't do it that way. From these scriptures, we see that God instead uses men and women and angels to bring those good and perfect gifts, especially His gifts of grace and mercy.

May I say that again because you and I need to understand this clearly. During these living years that we have on this earth, our Lord gives us really good and perfect gifts, flowing to us daily, blessing us and meeting our needs, and often in an abundant provision. But He most often gives us those blessings through the hands of people, men and women just like you and me, and those Scribes and those Pharisees.

And folks, those good and perfect gifts dare not get wedged within our own fingers, held onto by us and not freely flowing on out to God's intended receivers.

This truth is the essence of Jesus' instruction to these Pharisees. He is saying to them, I have gifts and provisions that I intend to shower upon my children and I am giving you the special privilege of being the messengers and the deliverers of those special gifts.

And He warns them, and us, to take care, that within that process, you do not mistake what is taking place and you yourselves hold on to and misuse and misapply His gifts. He's saying here, you must pass my gifts along to the exact people and in the exact way that I intend for them. If you intervene and pick and choose the ones that you would rather give them to, then you will be guilty beyond measure. You will be taking gifts intended for the poor and needy and you will be giving them to people who already have plenty and will be unappreciative of those gifts.

That is the meaning behind the command given later by the Lord Jesus as He told His disciples to carry the good and perfect gift of His "grace" on out to the rest of the world. He told them to "go ye into all the world, preaching the gospel and making disciples, beginning first in Jerusalem, then out to Judea and then out to the uttermost parts of the world".

This is God's will and God's plan for us and for the continual flow of His grace. And that has been so from the first days of his revelations to us. We can read it clearly all through these scriptures, and especially so in scriptures like those given in Deuteronomy chapter 6. Let me read those to you.

⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

And listen!

⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.
(Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

Folks, can we not hear these words. This is God's clearly given call for us to become a vibrant flowing conduit of His grace? Grace begins with God Himself and with His word. It flows out from Him first into our own heart, soul, mind and strength. Then grace flows on out to our family, then out to anyone and everyone that we encounter along the way of our day, in our friendships, in our workplaces and even and especially to the people we don't know and don't have any other relationship with.

Grace flows like a mighty river. We need simply to leap into its flow and allow it to carry us along the loving path that God intends it to flow.

And let me strongly encourage us to not busy ourselves with trying to "think through" the path that God's grace might take us. Note here, that the ones Jesus chose to receive God's special grace were very unlikely recipients, especially from the viewpoint of those wealthy and highly statured Pharisees.

This grace was to flow to the street people, *the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind*. What an unlikely and even disgusting lot of people, smelly, unkempt, people with bad habits and many of them in need of special care. I am sure that besides the inconvenience of such an effort, it was also very distasteful, far below the perceived status the Pharisees had about themselves.

But Jesus was saying plainly and clearly that this is the ministry that he was calling those men to be a part of and telling them to just go and do it.

Two relatively current examples of this call to join in with God's vision for grace come to my mind. The first is a book that I read some years ago, entitled "In His Steps". It was the book birthed a more recent movement "What would Jesus do?" sprang out from.

And although, some of the more highly placed bible scholars of our day stood back and took opportunity to criticize the theology behind that book and that movement, the basic tenets that flowed forth from that book and that movement were pretty solid. They instructed you and me to, when faced with the many choices of our day, all those many possibilities of blessings and curses

that we encounter, to simply choose the path of righteousness, to ask the question, "What would Jesus do?" And then, to get on about it!

Here, with these Scribes and these Pharisees, Jesus spoke plainly about what He would do. He would be a giver, a conduit for the blessed grace of God. He would bless those who could not bless themselves or anyone else. He would give to those who have no means of giving back.

That is why He came to this earth, to minister to and to save those who could not save themselves. That was who He was and that was who His Father was and that is what flowed out from Him and from His father's throne, grace, always giving, never asking back.

The second example that comes to my mind that demonstrates God's vision for grace comes from a completely secular source, a Hollywood movie of a few years ago, entitled "Pay it Forward". I really don't recommend the movie to you, but still, it has a principle that is an excellent demonstration of the true nature of "grace".

In the movie, a principle of giving was explained to a young boy in which, for a gift that he received, he was, in turn, not asked to return the favor to the giver, but rather to pay the debt of the gift forward, to instead of repaying the giver, to give three similar gifts to others who were completely unrelated to the original gift.

Folks, I am relatively sure that the Hollywood writers and movie makers did not intend to give such a clear demonstration of the meaning of "grace", but they did. And that demonstration has provoked me to want to do the same.

Think about it. God has given each of us great and unnumbered provisions, both of a temporal and of a spiritual nature. And He simply asks that instead of us trying to pay Him back, which we could never do anyway, to simply pass the grace on forward, to ourselves be givers, never asking back.

And the precept behind God's grace promises that as long as we will allow His grace to continue to flow on through us and out to others, His grace will then ever and always be fulfilling any need that we might have. That is the nature of the God that we serve.

Consider what we have been saying here about “grace”. If I will allow grace to flow freely through me out to you, and if you allow grace to flow freely through you out to me, each of our needs will have been met through the other person. And if the same grace were to flow through and out from all the other people, meeting other people’s needs, everyone would be blessed beyond measure without any of the usual sins of selfishness and self-centeredness that corrupt our daily lives.

And yes, in the society and the culture that we live within today, such ways of selfless love and graciousness seem completely impossible. And perhaps, on a wide scale, God’s manner of “grace” is impossible in this totally depraved “crooked and perverse generation”.

But folks, Jesus is saying to us, His beloved disciples, that grace needs to begin with us. And that if we will “pay His grace forward”, that if we will be the conduit of His grace on to three other people, and then to three more and then to three more, then He Himself will take care of any needs that we might have.

Dear Christian, this blessed grace that God has shown to me is wonderful beyond measure. And I know that you feel the same way too. Do we not want other people to experience the blessings that we are receiving from our Lord?

Those words again from that song,
Grace flows like a mighty river,
And one day I just dipped my fingers in,
And Your love caught and dragged me to a deeper place,
laughing and flailing . . .

God’s loving and blessed grace is a gift beyond all others, a gift that we need to let flow freely through us out to anyone and everyone who will receive it.

Listen to these words and we’ll close,

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.
(Ephesians 2:8-10)

Let’s pray.

