

Grace For The Lost
Luke 15:1-7

One of the passages of scripture that I dearly love and is so very demanding upon my soul is the one given to us in the Book of Philippians chapter 3 verses 10 and 11. Those words . . .

¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:10-11)

And folks, I really do want to do this! I want to “Know Christ”!

But I must confess to you that as I read these words of scripture and I try to fathom the mind and the heart of our Lord, I struggle. After over fifty years of Knowing Him as my Savior, I still don't really know Him. I want too, but I don't!

And yes, I'm saved and I have complete confidence of that. But still, the depths of knowing who our Lord really is, is so beyond my comprehension that I can find no words to describe it.

And as those of you who follow along with me each week in this study of the Gospel of Luke know, with each study that we undertake, the mysteries of the depths of God only grow.

And at the top of the list of the mysteries that we encounter is the blessed mystery of His “Grace”, His “loving Grace”.

“Grace” is demonstrated so often and in so many ways throughout these gospels that the number is beyond searching out. And again, though I have read and I have studied about grace so many, many times, “Grace” truly still does remain a mystery to my hapless mind.

For me, one of the most difficult aspects of the mystery of God's “Grace” is how a Holy and Just God can decide to give His “Grace” to us when we, you and I, and all of mankind deserves the opposite. We deserve “absolute and eternal destruction”. But our Loving God doesn't give us what we deserve. He instead gives us “Mercy” and “Grace”. “Mercy” and “Grace”!

Beginning with Adam and Eve and their rebellious choices and then continuing on with their son, Cain, and then on and on. Throughout all of human history, without any reason of goodness on our part, whether it be now or something God might possibly see at some time in our future, our Loving God chooses to show us “Mercy” and “Grace”, to save us and to give us “eternal life”. Folks, God’s “Grace” truly is amazing!

I’ll pause for a moment and read our scripture passage for today. And we’ll talk more about God’s “Amazing Grace”, especially towards us “lost ones”.

Listen to these words given to us in Luke chapter 15 beginning in verse 1,

¹ Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.

² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

³ So he told them this parable:

⁴ “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?

⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’

⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. (Luke 15:1-7)

Again folks, of all of the provisions made for us through the love of Christ there truly is none more needful than this one described for us here in these words, the life-giving provision of His “Grace”.

And why is that so? Why is “Grace” so absolutely needful for us?

In Ephesians chapter 2, God expressed that need in this way, He said,

¹ As for you, you were dead (note that word carefully, we were “dead”, “dead”) in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the

body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Folks, are you hearing these words? This was me! And this was you! Wretched creatures deserving only eternal damnation! But listen! Verse 4,

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 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 2:1-10)

May I repeat myself again dear Christians! Though we can read about the “Loving Grace” of our Lord here in these precious words and we seek to understand it with our minds, “Grace” is something that you and I might never truly comprehend, certainly not the far-reaching length and breadth of it and of its provision.

Why is that so? It is because “grace”, real “grace” is a gift flowing out from the treasure vaults of the Wisdom and the Loving Heart of God, and ministered to our heart, soul and mind by God's Holy Spirit.

And as verse 4 of Ephesians 2 tells us, Grace is filled with the mystical nature of our Lord Jesus Christ, powered by and overflowing with a pure, unsullied love that requires nothing on our part to earn its favor and it allows nothing to stay its course. Grace goes about its own path, accomplishing loving and caring plans and purposes, making generous and compassionate provisions and asking nothing in return. Verse 4,

⁴ . . . because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. (Ephesians 2:4-5)

Perhaps in those first moments of creation, we, mankind, having been created in the very image of God, might have possessed some of that same nature of loving grace. And we might have in those beginning moments understood it better. But sadly, that all changed as the sinful behavior of Adam and Eve took

its course. And especially then continuing on within the behavior of Cain, and then on and on, grace became one of sin's first casualties. Grace no longer lived within the hearts of mankind.

But folks, our Loving God did then, and does now, want you and me to "rise back up", to regain that precious lost Godly attribute, to rejoin Him in His "Loving Grace".

And He has given us the "Way", the only "Way" that we do that. And He didn't have to forfeit His Holiness and His Righteousness to do it. He didn't have to just "excuse" our sin. That would have violated His own Holiness. No, He chose to Personally, Himself pay the debt and suffer the punishment for our sin for us.

And the Way God the Father chose to do that was to send His Son, the Lord Jesus, to suffer and to die to pay the debt of our sin. The Lord Jesus then became our "Way", our only "Way", to overcome the sin that had taken up residence within us and provide us a "Way" that we could rejoin our Lord and to once again become the "creation" that He desired when He first created us there in the Garden.

Folks, this is one of the meanings of those precious words given to us by the Lord Jesus when He said, "I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life". And He went on to say that He was the only Way, the "only Way" that anyone would be able to come back to God the Father.

In the words that I read a moment ago there in Philippians chapter 3, "I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection", think for a moment what those words mean. The "power of His resurrection" means that as He was "resurrected" all the sin within my soul, your soul, and all those who receive Him as Savior and Lord, was wiped away, completely gone, forever. From that moment of His "resurrection" on forward, we have been "justified", freed from the power and the control and the penalty of sin. Forever!

And that folks, was "Grace", a free gift, given to you and to me, restoring our hearts and our souls back into a "oneness" with God, our Savior.

And it is in words such as these in this passage, that the Lord Jesus is telling us, you and me, that we ourselves are free to move on past all the corrupt natural

tendencies that we have acquired in this life and to enjoy His grace in our own lives.

And not only we ourselves, but, and so importantly, that we are also to be the messengers of the “Good News” of that same “Grace” to other people, people who are lost like we once were.

Here in this passage, the Lord Jesus is addressing men of the cloth, church leaders who were supposed to have experienced the loving grace provided within salvation, men who should have been reaching out to extend the loving grace they received on out to other people, but yet they were not. They were instead, being standoffish, judgmental and uninviting to the lost ones around them. In verses 1 and 2 we read,

¹ Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him (the Lord Jesus).

² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” (Luke 15:1-2)

Folks, where is “Grace” within those words of the Religious Leaders? There is none!

Thankfully, Jesus didn’t let that kind of behavior go without speaking truth that should bring conviction into their hearts. Beginning in verse 4, Jesus told them how they really ought to be thinking and behaving. He said to them,

⁴ “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?

⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’

⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. (Luke 15:4-7)

Here, Jesus is telling those religious leaders that these men in front of them, the sinners and the tax collectors, are “lost sheep”, lost, but yet not “far off”, lost but not wandering confused and aimless in some wilderness or forest, lost, but in plain sight and desperately in need of a Shepherd to rescue them.

But unfortunately, from their response we can see that the Scribes and the Pharisees did not have ears to hear the “cries” from the lost sheep all around them. And they didn't have ears to hear these words of truth being given by the Lord Jesus. They were blind guides, caught up in and consumed by generations of man-made traditions, unable to comprehend the blessings of “Grace”.

But lest we, you and I, become too condemning of those Scribes and Pharisees with their unloving and uncaring behavior, God gives us these words of Ephesians 2 as a reminder to us of the unholy and wretched condition from whence we ourselves were reborn out of. Listen again to these words!

¹ As for you, (and folks, in these words God is speaking about you and me) As for you, you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

I must confess to you folks that these words describe my past life so very well. I was completely consumed by the world and its ways. I was lost, completely lost, and I was taking as many other people as I could with me into my lostness.

Thankfully, the Lord Jesus was so very gracious to me. Just as this parable explains, He came and He found me and He rescued me out of my lifestyle of sin. And I am eternally thankful to Him for being my faithful Shepherd.

But with that being said, we must be warned to never allow ourselves to completely forget the condition from whence we came.

If we do completely forget, we are in danger of becoming like these Scribes and Pharisees, judgmental and condemning. And instead of reaching out to the “lost sheep”, we too will quickly walk away from them.

Thankfully, Jesus was always full of mercy and grace. He came to seek and to save those who were lost. And here, as we read that “the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.” His response was to welcome them

into His presence. He loved those lost sheep and He wanted to save them out of their sin.

But not only that, He wanted these religious leaders, these Scribes and Pharisees, to catch the vision for reaching out beyond their comfort zone and to also seek to save those who are lost.

And Jesus wants the same for you and me in our modern day churches. Like these Scribes and Pharisees, we also center most all of our attention on the inner workings and the activities of our own churches. And while that is a very good thing, because that is where discipleship is carried forward, we are also being called to give out the gospel, to seek and to save those who are wandering around outside of the church.

Here, Jesus left no room for question or misunderstanding. Here, His words to us who are inside the church clearly instruct us to reach out beyond our church walls, beyond our churchy ways and habits, and to seek to save those who are lost. His parable again, verse 4

⁴ "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?

⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.'

⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. (Luke 15:4-7)

As our God looks down upon this earth, He sees and loves everyone with the same love. And His desire is the same for each of us, that we, that all those out there, might be saved.

And He proved His love in that He sent His Son to suffer and die on the cross, to pay our due penalty, and to rescue us from sin. In Hebrews 12, we read the words,

² Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)

Don't we just know that saving the lost sheep, saving you and me, was foremost on the mind of the Lord Jesus as He hung there on that wretched cross?

The words of this parable are such an excellent word-picture for me. Listen to these words again . . .

⁵ And when he has found it (the lost sheep), he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' (Luke 15:5-6)

These words give us a picture of the Lord Jesus as He ascended into heaven with you and me, draped across His shoulders. Psalm chapter 24 . . .

⁷ Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

⁸ Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle!

⁹ Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

¹⁰ Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory! (Psalm 24:7-10)

I take great joy in imagining you and me, the lost sheep draped across our Lord's shoulders as He, the Lord of Hosts, carries us through the gates of glory.

And this folks, is "grace", the unmerited, free gift of loving salvation that is ours in our receiving of the Lord Jesus as our Savior.

From that first moment that He finds us in our wilderness and He reaches down, picks us up and places us upon His shoulders, our lives and our eternal destiny is completely changed. We are forever His from that first moment onward for all eternity.

Those words given in John 17:3,

³ And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (John 17:3)

Our eternal life begins that first moment that Jesus places us upon His shoulders. His grace and mercy gives to us a loving relationship that makes all the remaining moments of our life, both here and in heaven, a joy beyond measure.

And again, this is “grace”, an unmerited, free-gift from our loving Father, His adoring Son and from the Holy Spirit who lives within us.

And folks, lest we wander from this grace and become like these Scribes and Pharisees in our beliefs, let’s commit these words about God’s grace to our memory. Again, those words from Ephesians 2,

⁶ . . . God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—

⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

¹⁰ For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.(Ephesians 2:6-10)

Folks, these scriptures are clear . . . God has not just given out a general invitation for us to come and find Him. Not at all!

In His “grace”, He has come to look for us, and to find us and to lovingly bring us into His kingdom. That is why you and I are hearing these words today. It is not of ourselves, but all of Him. He came and found us, and He lovingly placed us upon His shoulders and brought us here.

Our only part in this great gift of grace is to be willing to be found by Him. And then to allow His loving grace to flow on through us and out to others who are lost and in need of a Savior.

May I close with these words from Ephesians 2,

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—

⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Let's pray.