

Galatians 2:15-21, 3:10-14

June 12, 2016

“A Finishing Grace”



- we've been trying to keep up with St. Paul the last couple of weeks as he outlines and defends the central importance of how we are saved ... by grace, through faith in Christ ... apart from the works of the law
- today we get into a couple more specifics
  - how much grace do we need and how long do we need it for?
  - is grace just an initial blast from God's jumper cables to jolt us into spiritual life so that, once we have been given a new start, we can get ourselves home?
- what is the reality of being sinners living in a sinful world, subject to the temptations of the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh?
  - do we need occasional grace here and there along the way for those times when our life stalls out?
    - or gets drowned out
    - or choked out?
  - or do we need grace more than just occasionally?
- does grace simply fill in the holes and complete what we are unable to do here and there?
  - this past week we had some pothole repair done in the parking lot
    - it was getting pretty bad and it did take 4 tons of asphalt, but the holes are all filled in and it will do for a while
- so, just how much grace do we need?
  - how long to we need it?

-there are two schools of thought here:

-imagine a dark, wintry night and you are far from home

-the road is icy and the snow is blowing and drifting and you are worried about getting home safely

-suddenly there's a patch of ice and a gust of wind and you are in the ditch

-what now?

-you need a Saviour ... you need someone to pull you out before you perish

-not long after a pair of flashing yellow lights emerges from the darkness

-a tow truck ...thank the Lord!

-your good Samaritan has arrived!

-before long he's got you hooked up, pulled out and back on the road

-and what's more, he did it for free!

-Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved  
a wretch like me! I once was lost but now I'm  
found, was blind but now I see

-what's next? He wishes you safe journey, points you down the road toward home and says, "drive careful now"

-and you get back behind the wheel and continue your white-knuckle journey toward home

-there was grace ... but now it's up to you

-here's the other school of thought:

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-“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see”

-what's next?

-he doesn't simply wish you well and turn you loose to face the dangerous elements on your own once more

-he looks at you and looks at the dangers outside and says, “It's not safe for you to be on the road by yourself tonight. Come up in the cab of my truck with me and I will drive you all the way home”

-and you start to sing ... “Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come; 'Tis Grace that brought me safe thus far and Grace will lead me home.””

-do you see the difference?

-there's grace to get you started ... and there's grace to get you all the way home

-which one is the right one?

- how would you define idolatry?
  - idolatry is the worship of a false god or gods
  - it is fearing, loving, or trusting a person or thing more than our fear, love and trust in God
  
- also does your definition of grace leave your salvation partially depend on yourself and what you do
  - does grace just get you started, or does grace get you all the way home?
  - is getting home ultimately dependent on God, or is it partly dependent on you
    - if it partly depends on you, that's idolatry
    - if it partly depends on you, it will either trap you in a life of self-righteousness
      - or it will curse you with a white-knuckle existence in which you will never have any certainty of getting yourself home to heaven
  
- what is the focus and aim of all of Scripture?
  - I asked that question a month ago on Confirmation Sunday
    - the Bible is only, ever, always about one thing ... the life and salvation from God through Jesus Christ
  - you could ask the question this way ... why did Jesus come?
    - did he come to point us the way home, or to carry us home?
  
- what is the most asked question in the Bible?
  - it is not "what does this mean?"
    - it is, in one form or another, "what must I do to be saved?"
    - "how do I get home?"

- David asked it ... “I have sinned against the Lord ... what now?”
  - “I’ve sinned against the Lord again ... what now?”
    - have I used up all the grace I’m entitled to?
- Psalm 32 ... David prays, “When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.”
- David has been zealous and faithful ... a good king
  - he trusted in the Lord and the Lord delivered him
    - the paw of the bear, the mouth of the lion ... God saved him
    - the mighty power of Goliath ... God saved him
    - King Saul’s attempts to kill him ... God saved him
    - capture by the Philistines ... God saved him
- but now ... Bathsheba ... adultery ... pregnancy ...
  - palace cover-up ... lies ... intrigue ... murder
- and what’s more, David’s own sin has blinded him to the guilt of what he has done
  - part of him looks in the mirror and can’t see what he’s done
  - and yet, part of him knows all too well what he has done
    - “my bones waste away with my groaning all day long”
- has David used up his nine lives?
  - has he used up all the grace he’s entitled to?
    - who will save him this time?
- the one who saved him from the bear and the lion, the one who rescued him from Goliath and Saul and the Philistines ... he will save him again
  - God’s amazing grace isn’t just there to get you started, it’s there to get you home ... it’s a finishing grace

- what must I do to be saved?
  - how do I get home?
    - do I have any grace left?
- Jacob wanted to ask it as he wrestled with the Lord all night in prayer
  - he knew he would meet up with his estranged brother Esau the next morning and he feared the worst
    - Esau was coming with an army
      - was he going to exact revenge for Jacob's treachery 20 years before?
- grace had brought him safe thus far ... would grace get him home?
- it's the kind of question that gets asked when you just know your situation is hopeless and you are helpless
- sometimes people don't see how bad their situation really is
  - the Pharisee in the gospel today didn't understand how really, really bad his situation was
  - he could see this prostitute hanging around near Jesus and he could only think how bad a sinner she was
    - he could only wonder why Jesus didn't see it
  - Simon the Pharisee was guilty of the sin of idolatry
    - he was trusting in his own ability, his own "good enough life" to save him
- to know that you need grace not just to get you started, but to get you home is a gift of God
  - David understood that his life had not simply hit a little pothole
  - this was a sink hole that would swallow up entire lives, mini-van and all
    - there was nothing he could do to fix this one

-Jacob knew it too

-he wasn't getting out of this one by himself

-any salvation would have to be a miracle of God and a gift of his life-long, continuing grace

-what did the Pharisee need to learn ... his hopelessness

-what did David come to know ... his hopelessness

-that by works of the law no one will be justified

-so David prayed this way:

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.*

*Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*

*Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

-but David prays one more step:

*Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*

-do you know where the joy of salvation comes from?

-it comes from the grace that not only pulls you and me out of the ditch today, but stays around for tomorrow, and ultimately will get us home

-and it does something else too ... rather than give us licence to sin (shall we go on sinning that grace may abound?), it blesses us with the inner desire to sin less ... it gives us a willing spirit

-and there's something else too ... all during that ride home in the cab with your personal the tow truck driver Saviour ... what are you doing? ... there's this ...

*-Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.*

-and there's this ...

*-my tongue will sing of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise*

-so, having been saved by grace through faith, what will my life look like?

-do I still live under the law or do I live under grace?

-Paul says, "I died to the law, so I no longer live, but Christ lives in me

-I live by faith in the Son of God

-I no longer rely on works

-I rely on Jesus and I live by faith

-Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law

-cursed is everyone who does not abide by all the things written in the book of the law

-what hope is there for the likes of you and me who are under the curse?

-Adam and Eve should have been cursed ... they were forgiven

-David should have been cursed ... he was forgiven

-the prostitute should have been cursed, but she was forgiven

-the Pharisee didn't realize that he was a sinner too

-he was afflicted with the blindness of self-righteousness

-and with the same love for sinners Jesus helped him see his sin and the finishing grace that God bestows



- what we need to see here is forgiveness with an edge
  - it's not the "we'll just ignore it" grace that is so common
  - it is forgiveness that confronts the misery of sin head on in all its ugliness
    - sin is no trivial matter
    - sin leads to death (Uriah and even an infant, David's son). -
  - sin produces alienation, ugly pride, and judgmental comparisons (Simon and the woman)
    - sin shames, crushes, and destroys (the woman)
  
- here we see the truth of sin and the costly grace that comes from the Christ who wears a thorny crown
- he blesses us with grace that does more than get us started in a life of faith ... it's grace that gets us home