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Grace Evangelical Church
Sunday, September 5, 2010
The Lord's Table
"God's Amazing Grace"
I Timothy 1:12-17; Ephesians 1:7
First Message In Series – "Living In God's Grace"

God's grace is amazing, penned John Newton who came to know Christ when he was involved in the slave trade.

God's grace is truly amazing – astounding. It's amazing because it's that which God displays to us when we don't deserve one bit of it. It's amazing because it goes to the very essence of our spiritual problem, our separation from God. It's amazing because it tells us that we don't have to live in our sinful ways, but we can be changed by the power of the living God, grow in that grace, and become like the Lord Himself. God's grace is amazing because it provides us an eternal hope of someday being with the Lord forever.

Saul before his name was changed to Paul, becoming the Apostle Paul, discovered what God's amazing grace had in store for him.

He succinctly describes God's grace in our text in I Timothy 1:12-17 as he gives a testimony of what God's grace means to him, as he looks back on his life of some 30 years in serving his Lord.

Note the text:

"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus . . . (I Timothy 1:12-14).

Note what Paul is saying here about his experience with God's grace.

1. God's Grace Is Diametrically Opposed (I Timothy 1:13).

Before Paul experienced God's grace he was totally against God's Grace revealed in Jesus Christ. He used 4 words to describe what He thought about God and His grace.

1. Blasphemer.

Paul is saying that He defamed the name of Christ. He railed against Christ. He belittled the name of Jesus Christ. He trashed the name of Christ. He had no respect for Jesus Christ and His grace. As Paul states in Acts 26:11, he tried to coerce believers in Christ to blaspheme the Lord.

2. Persecutor.

Dr. Luke in Acts 8:3 recorded these words regarding Saul before his conversion to Christ.

"Saul was in hearty agreement in putting (Stephen) to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Some devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentations over him. But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison."

3. Violent Aggressor.

Again Dr. Luke records these words of the Apostle Paul as he testifies before Agrippa – Herod Agrippa II, the great-grandson of Herod the Great. He had already appealed to Caesar, but Paul took this opportunity to witness to this Jewish King.

"So then, I thought to myself to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities" (Acts 29:9-11).

4. Ignorant in unbelief.

Paul means that he carried out the actions he listed as an unbeliever who was ignorant of the fact that he was blaspheming and persecuting the ONE who wanted to be his SAVIOR AND LORD.

Paul is saying that he had a hatred for Christ because he didn't know who He was and what He could do for him.

Yes, Paul knew about the God of the Old Testament, and he thought he was carrying out measures that would please Him. But his actions were done in ignorance because he didn't realize that Jesus Christ was the Messiah foretold in the Old Testament. He thought the Jewish believers in Christ were diametrically opposed to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He would have no part of that and was convinced that the Jewish believers in Christ should be imprisoned because of their faith in Jesus.

What the Apostle describes here that he did to the believers in the first century before experiencing God's grace is still happening in our world today. Those who live in countries of the persecuted church are persecuted for their faith, some are thrown into jail, others are killed.

I just received Voice of the Martyrs September magazine telling that the Christians in the nation of Laos have been persecuted since communists seized control of the country in 1975. Leaders of the Lao Evangelical Church, the only legal evangelical church, do not report incidents of persecution to their government for fear of losing their status as church leaders.

One pastor was thrown out of his village and now preaches to two house churches every Sunday using his cell phone.

Another pastor had his village raided by police. They confiscated and ate their food, destroyed their clothes and told them, "If you don't give up, we will destroy your faith like we destroy malaria. The Pastor said that they knew that the cross was heavy, but they would not give up carrying the cross. They were stronger because they knew what the Bible says has become true, that they will be disliked.

Even in this country, there are various kinds of persecution taking place, and the cults and various world religions deny Jesus is God and the Savior for all who accept Him personally by faith. They oppose the biblical God's grace.

In Ft. Myers, Florida, recently there was a court hearing after a school banned Bibles on Religious Freedom Day. The district censored World Changers' message simply because it included the Bible, while other private groups remain free to distribute their private literature. Liberty Counsel is involved in this hearing.

In Alaska the ACLU sought to have certain property tax exemptions of churches revoked.

In California a school district tried to stop an after-school Good News Club in the nation's second largest school district.

In North Carolina a second grade boy was told not to give Bibles to his friends on Valentines Day.

In Michigan the school tried to stop the distribution of religious literature, including Campus Crusade For Christ "Survival Kits."

Providentially, the Liberty Counsel was able to represent these different situations and see freedom reign.

Then in our state of Wisconsin a judge acted to declare the National Day of Prayer

unconstitutional.

Much of this is done ignorantly and in unbelief.

But the bottom line is that such action is in opposition to the biblical God's grace.

The world's philosophy, the old nature we all possess from Adam, and the devil himself are no friends of God's Grace. They all stand diametrically opposed to what the biblical God's grace is all about.

Why? The world's philosophy, our old nature, and the devil are all concerned about what can happen by one's self. It's all based upon selfishness. Yes, there maybe a little dab of the Bible mixed with man's limited reason, or it may be all of man's limited reason, but in the end it all depends upon man or in some cases there is an all out trust in the evil one. They are all opposed to God's grace because man thinks he can get to the god he believes in by doing something good that will outweigh the bad that he does. In the process he hopes that all roads lead to God whoever that God is.

But it is all based upon man thinking that the good he does will outweigh the bad that he does, and his God will be pleased with him and his God will give him the good life after this life.

But that is directly opposed to the biblical God's grace? Why?

God's grace can't be worked for in any form whatsoever.

ii. God's Grace Is His Gift To Us – He is the Source (I Timothy 1:14). Yes, God's grace is His gift to humanity.

That's what the Apostle Paul discovered. He had Christians killed in the name of God thinking he was doing a good work for God. He discovered he was opposed to God's grace for God's grace couldn't be earned. It was a GIFT from God.

Note what I Timothy 1:14 tells us, "And the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love with are in Christ Jesus."

Paul is saying that I discovered the grace of God was a GIFT, in fact that grace went far beyond my need. It was abundant, it was unsearchable, not trackable, unlimited.

That's why Paul penned to the Ephesians, "For by grace you are saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2;8-9).

Read again Philippians 3:5-6 – where he said that he had zeal in persecuting the church, that he was in regard to the Law, found blameless, but those things he counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Paul realized that what he did for God was against God for he was doing it to get accepted before God, and that would get him nowhere before God.

God's grace was a GIFT. It couldn't be worked for in any form. That's why God's grace is opposed today. Man wants to live his life on his terms in his efforts.

III God's Grace Has Unlimited Power (I Timothy 1:15).

"It is a trustworthy statement (meaning an axiomatic truth is about to be introduced – used only in the pastoral letters), deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world (incarnation) **to save sinners**, among whom I am foremost of all – or the worst of sinners" (I Timothy 1:15).

The story of God's grace coming to Paul was when he was Saul as he was on his way to Damascus to find believers in Christ to bring them back bound to Jerusalem (Acts 9:1-31).

On his way to Damascus the Lord came to Paul in a bright light and asked Paul, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

Interesting that the Lord didn't say to Paul, "Why are you persecuting My followers or Christians?"

Christ was telling Paul that believers in HIM were so united with HIM in the church, that to persecute them was to persecute HIM. That is what is happening today in our world and country as well. Those who persecute believers today in any form are really persecuting the LORD. That's why we need to pray for those in the persecuted church.

Paul asked who was speaking to him. The LORD answered very specifically, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

Jesus in His grace showed up to Saul, the hater and persecutor of Jesus' followers. Yes, a direct hater of JESUS CHRIST – A sinner desperately needed God's grace – what he didn't deserve.

But God's grace is greater than any sin and any sinner, and Paul said he was the worst sinner.

God showed Paul His mercy – Paul didn't receive what he deserved – He got mercy rather than judgment.

God showed Paul His grace – Paul received what he didn't deserve – God's grace.

Which was all wrapped up in God's love, which included the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in Paul's life.

God's grace has the power to break through any opposition to HIM. The philosophy of the world, the old sin nature we have from Adam, the Devil, any sin, yes, death itself cannot stop the unlimited power of God's grace.

For God's grace includes the gospel of Jesus Christ, the death, burial, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ who paid the eternal payment for our breaking God's law which is death. God's grace has all-power to forgive the sinner, and make him a child of God, a part of God's forever family.

What did Paul do?

**IV. God's Grace Must Be Accepted – Received (I Timothy 1:14,15; Acts 26:19).
"with the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (I Timothy 1:14).**

Paul responded to the Lord's grace in faith apart from anything he could do on his own for God.

God's grace was wrapped in God's love and faith - the faith that Paul placed in Jesus Christ to be his personal Savior. That's why Paul told King Agrippa that he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision (Acts 26:19).

As he came to Damascus, Paul was blinded by the Lord's light for 3 days. In the meantime, God spoke to Ananias to go and visit a man by the name of Saul at the house of Judas, for he is praying there.

Ananias was hesitant at first, for he knew of Paul's persecution of Christians, but the Lord assured him that Saul was a chosen instrument of HIS to bear His name to the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.

Ananias went to the house where Saul was, laid hands on him, Saul received his sight and the Holy Spirit came upon him. Saul was baptized. He took food and was strengthened, and started to testify in the synagogue that Jesus is the Son of God. The people were amazed that this man who was known for persecuting followers of Christ was now saying that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah of Israel.

What changed Paul's life from being a hater of Christ to a lover of Christ, from one who had Christians killed, to loving Christians, from a man who thought he was serving God by his good works, to basking in God's love for him apart from any works he could do for God? **The Answer is GOD'S GRACE.**

GOD'S GRACE WAS MORE THAN ABUNDANT TO THE APOSTLE PAUL! GOD'S UNLIMITED POWERFUL GRACE CAME TO PAUL AS HE WAS GOING TO ARREST CHRISTIANS, AND IN OBEYING THE LORD - PLACING HIS FAITH IN THE LORD - HIS LIFE WAS CHANGED FOR ALL ETERNITY.

Paul experienced on the Road to Damascus what he wrote to the Ephesians in his first chapter, "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (1:7).

V. God's Grace Is A Life Long Journey (I Timothy 1:16).

Certainly, the rest of the book of Acts and Paul's letters in the New Testament are evidence of the power of God's grace at work in the life Paul.

But note the text in I Timothy 1:16.

"Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life."

As Paul writes this first letter to the young pastor, Timothy, he has served the Lord some 30 years. He evidently is reflecting on his life as he writes to Timothy. In so doing, Paul realizes that God chose him to be an example to others of God's grace in **HIS patience** with Him.

The word, patience, means longsuffering – to be long enduring.

Thinking back on his life, Paul knows that it was because of God's longsuffering that He came to know Christ as Savior.

Paul knows as well that it is because of God's longsuffering with him as a follower of Christ he is at this point in his life,

God was longsuffering, long enduring with him in his personal life and his ministry.

These are some incredible words from the Apostle Paul who turned the world, in which he lived at that time, upside down for Jesus Christ.

As he reflected over 30 years of his walk with the Lord and the ministry, his mind turned to the longsuffering of God with him through the years.

And God used His longsuffering with Paul to be an example to those who would yet believe in Jesus Christ.

How about us today? God's amazing grace is still the same because the biblical God is still the same.

Is God's grace still longsuffering?

Need I ask the question,.

Think about the opposition to our Lord's grace in our world and in our country, some denying the very existence of Jesus Christ and His grace. Others living in awful idolatry and immorality. Others mixing man's reason with God's grace. What a hodge-podge of ideas and life-styles in our world.

Where is the judgment of the biblical God? He is showing His longsuffering, giving time for His gospel of grace to be shared by you and me and the missionaries we support. God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Yes, God's day of judgment will come, but right now the biblical God is displaying His grace in His longsuffering.

What about us as followers of Christ? Is God longsuffering to us in His forever family? Definitely.

We have wrong attitudes, we display unforgiving spirits, we become lazy in our daily walk with the Lord. We take for granted the things of the Lord. We sometimes criticize others, and we may try to manipulate others. Yes, God is longsuffering with us. We need to confess our sin of disobedience and go on in the power of the Holy Spirit.

But God's longsuffering with us, is an example to others that God has not left us and we want to please Him in all that we do.

And as God is longsuffering with us, we need to be longsuffering with others, encouraging each other on in our walk with the LORD. And that's hard sometimes. We must remember that we are dealing with a person's will, and that takes time for God to move and encourage in His ways.

Yes, God's grace longsuffering in our lives is a life-long journey.

VI. God In His Grace Only Receives The Praise And Honor (I Timothy 1:17).

"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."

God's grace is not about me or you, because we didn't deserve it. It's about the LORD, the eternal King, who has LIFE in Himself, He is invisible at this point, but He is the only ONE who receives the honor and glory not just for time but for eternity. He receives the glory for He is the SOURCE of His grace that He gave to us - His grace as a gift to be received by faith and to be lived out in His power for His glory.

It's truly God's amazing grace.

That's what the Lord's table we commemorate today is all about.

God's grace wrapped up in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ through His death, burial, and bodily resurrection for us. In the midst of those rejecting Him and crucifying Him, He uttered these words of grace, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." He was willing to feel that His heavenly Father had forsaken Him on that cruel cross - grace. He died in our place to pay the penalty for sin which is death - grace. He rose from the dead bodily to win for us God's redemption - along with forgiveness of sin and eternal life - grace.

Through faith in the Lord, His longsuffering is a vital part of our daily lives - grace.

Yes, we commemorate the Lord's table here once a month, some do it more often. Regardless, every time we commemorate this table we do show forth the Lord's death until He comes - Which means this table is God's reminder to us of GOD'S AMAZING GRACE.

As we reflect on God's amazing grace we are taken back to the time when we accepted Christ – when His powerful grace changed us. No matter what one's age, or what one has done or not done, all of us are sinners before God needing His grace and forgiveness through faith in Him.

We are then taken by way of our memories through the time we have known our Lord in our personal walk and service for Him.

Time slips by quickly. God's presence is closer than yesterday.

Yes, there have been challenges, some real difficulties, perhaps some issues still not settled, but in the midst of it all, there is God's grace - His constant longsuffering and encouragement to us is to keep on keeping on to finish well to the glory of God.

Without God's grace we have nothing. But with God's amazing grace we have all that pertains to life and godliness in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior!

Indeed, it will be worth it all when we see Jesus!