



CHRISTIAN CRUSADERS

7401 UNIVERSITY AVE., CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50613

(319) 277-0924

INFO@CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

WWW.CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

The Flow of Grace

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Rev. Lee Laaveg

TEXT: John 1:1-5,12-14,16 (NASB1995)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. ... For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.

Dear friends,

Grace and peace are always for you from God, our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Language always captures my imagination. As a wordsmith, as a preacher, I'm always curious about words and language. So recently I read the new words that were added to the dictionary in the year 2020. I'd like to share a few with you. One is "biggsie." I don't know what you think that might mean, but it means "an exaggerated sense of one's own importance; to be conceited." Here's another: "coulrophobia." That's an

extreme and irrational fear of clowns. “Fantouche”: to be fancy, showy, and stylish; it usually describes someone disparagingly because they're gaudy and pretentious. Here's one that you might think of with people. It's “jerkweed.” It literally translates as someone who's obnoxious and detestable. Another word is “sadfishing.” No, that isn't a word describing how I function when I get in a boat and chase fish. It is, on social media, someone who exaggerates difficult emotional situations to gain sympathy from online readers. Here's another: “skunked.” Again, it doesn't describe my fishing ability. It literally means drunk, intoxicated, or high from marijuana. Interesting, isn't it, to explore new words and how they're defined?

Well, here is a word you've heard all your life, especially within the church. It's the word “grace.” You've heard it all through the years. I hope you've experienced it in your life story. Grace is the unmerited favor of God, the gracious disposition of God toward us as his people, God's unconditional love. It's a gift given in a moment, but it can also be a prevailing attitude of one person to another designed to bring joy and pleasure. In classic Greek, it was the favor of the gods. Grace: in a biblical sense, grace flows from God's heart and God's character, it's never deserved. Grace comes because God chooses to delight in us. God delights in you. In the Old Testament, Yahweh always is described as one whose heart is turned toward the weak and the lost and the undeserving.

Perhaps God's gracious will toward his people is better understood through a few stories of biblical characters. Do you remember the story of Esther in the country of Persia? She's part of Ahasuerus' harem. Haman is an evil character who has plotted to kill all the Jews. And Esther rises to the occasion, and in a banquet with the king and Haman asks for the king's favor. Esther asks for the king's grace. If you remember the character Jacob, his name literally means “grabber,” he was born as a twin holding onto the heel of his brother Esau. Later, he cheats his brother out of the birthright, then deceives his father and steals his blessing. He runs to avoid revenge from his brother, Esau. And then 14 years later, Esau is going to meet Jacob, and Jacob wrestles with God overnight, begging God's blessing. Then when he meets Esau, Jacob does not ask for fairness. He asks for Esau's favor. He asks for Esau's grace. After centuries of slavery in the country of Egypt, God sends Moses to be the deliverer for His people. Through 10 plagues, the pharaoh is convinced to let them go. It's the story of the exodus. Then after a miraculous crossing of the Red Sea and this tremendous victory over Pharaoh and the Egyptian army within just a few weeks, the people of God are building an idol, a golden

calf. They're in a drunken orgy and a party praying to this idol. Moses comes down the mountain and he pleads with God on behalf of the people. Is Moses asking God for justice, for fairness? No, Moses is begging God for grace, for undeserved mercy and favor. Yahweh, all through the Old Testament desires His people's loyalty, love and faithfulness. He desires are obedience and trust. But instead, the people of God through the biblical witness show disobedience, unfaithfulness, and even defiance. We know what that's like from our own faith journeys and still, Yahweh our God shows us mercy and gives us forgiveness.

Grace is the final revelation of God's heart. It climaxes in the birth, life, death on the cross, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ comes to reveal and embody grace to us. Do you know that the apostle Paul used the word grace a hundred times, but Jesus never used the word grace? Jesus's life exuded grace. Jesus embodied grace, but he never used the word grace. Think of Jesus calling His disciples to follow Him. In Old Testament time, rabbis invited disciples to study and devote their lives to a master. And they always choose the brightest, the best, the smartest, the cream of the crop. But Jesus offered invitations to be disciples, to fishermen, to tax collectors, to blue collar boys. It was an invitation of grace. Do you remember when Jesus healed a leper in Matthew 5, and before the healing, Jesus reached out and touched him? The miracle of healing revealed Christ's power and His identity, but Jesus's touch conveyed grace. In John 8, pharisees dragged a woman that they had caught in the act of adultery. They threw her in the dirt at Jesus's feet. They caught her. What did the law say? Stone her. What do you say? Jesus said, "If you are without sin, go ahead and cast the first stone." One by one, they drop their stones and left. Jesus said, "Where are your accusers? Isn't there anyone to condemn you? I do not condemn you either. Go, leave your life of sinning. But I forgive you, go your way."

Grace is in the person of Jesus. We talk in the church about grace all the time, and it's this ethereal concept and we don't know how to connect with this elusive concept. But grace comes to us in the living relationship of Jesus. Grace is actualized for us when Jesus went to the cross, hanging as if he were a beaten, bloody criminal, even though He was perfect. He died in our place. He had the power to call the forces of Heaven to set him free, but instead from the cross, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." That's Grace. In Romans 5, it says we are justified by faith and we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and we have access to this grace in which we live. Grace is the free gift God offers to all who will receive it, but please

always remember, grace is never free to the giver. It cost the Father His precious son, and it costs Jesus His life, His blood shed on the cross. But in Jesus' name, God lavishes His grace on you. Grace is God's salvation, the promise of forgiveness, to be spiritually reborn, to be reconciled into God's family of love. It's a total package. It's grace from God.

Well, how do I receive it? If you're underwater for a significant period of time, what do you want more than anything? Oh, you want air. We want to draw deeply of the love and grace of God, because we're broken, we're sick of ourselves and we're empty. If you shut down a dam, the flow of the river continues and the water of the river backs up, but then if you opened up the dam, it turns the electric turbines and the lights up everything with power. When we shut out God and His grace, it can't flow to us. But if we open our hearts, the power of God's grace flows into us. If there were someone lost in the desert and we were afraid that they were dying out there, dying of thirst, and then we found them and we brought them to an oasis, wouldn't they drink deeply to quench their thirst? The scripture says that you and I are spiritually dry, but we today can come to Jesus and drink of the living water that flows from His heart.

Have you ever driven by a radio station with a tall tower pumping out the powerful radio wave frequencies? If you turn your radio on, you tune in the receiver to the right frequency in order to receive the signal from the radio station. So, we receive Jesus by opening our minds and hearts and tuning in to receive gladly what God offers to us in the name of Jesus. In Ephesians 2, it says "For by grace, you've been saved through faith. This is not yourselves, it's God's gift." And that gift is not a one-time moment in John 1:16, the gospel we read, it said, "Of Jesus Christ's fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace."

Let's turn now to a story of a woman who knew how to receive grace, she teaches us how to receive grace. The story is told in Luke 7. She is a woman of the city. It describes her as an immoral sinner. She's a "professional lady." She survives by selling herself. All through her adult life, she's been used by many and then discarded like garbage, but not by Jesus. Jesus understands her and Jesus loves her. So now Jesus is at a party hosted by a Pharisee and this woman of the street crashes the party. The Pharisee, the keeper of the law, is disgusted that Jesus would allow her to lie at His feet. She comes intruding, uninvited into the Pharisees house, falls at Jesus' feet, and from behind Him, anoints Him with expensive perfume, kisses his feet, weeps on His feet, and then dries

His feet with her hair. It's a spectacle of intimate affection. It's a shocking example of a woman so grateful to Jesus for His love that she adores Him. What does she teach us about how to receive grace? First, the woman is aware of her unworthiness. She owes Jesus a debt she can never repay. Second, she's astonished at Jesus's grace and acceptance of her. Third, she accepts His love and forgiveness and she reciprocates. Fourth, she anoints Jesus' feet with perfume and with her tears in sorrow or of regret and shame. She weeps. But maybe it's tears of joy. And she kisses His feet in adoration and gratitude. It's an expression of her deep love and loyalty for Jesus. And finally, as she lays at the feet of Jesus, she worships Jesus as her savior and as her God.

Dear friends, in the name of Jesus, God today offers you the fullness of His grace. Grace upon grace: it flows to you like the powerful current of a river. Literally, we all can swim in the ocean of God's grace. And today, again, at the feet of Jesus, we receive His grace. And what do we say? Lord, your Grace is awesome. Your Grace is amazing. Jesus, we praise you.

Amen.