

AMAZING GRACE
Ephesians 2:8-9

Good News About Grace
June 30, 2013
Pastor Nathan J. Thompson

These past weeks we've been looking at the wonderful good news about God's grace. The Bible says we're saved by God's grace; the only way to heaven is through the doorway of grace. The truth is we can't earn it; we can't work for it; we can't buy it. It is a gift from God.

The Bible says in Ephesians 2:8-9, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast."* If we could work our way to heaven can you imagine how boring heaven would be? Everyone would be bragging about how they got there. The Bible says, however, we're simply saved by God's grace.

Not only that, but the Bible says we're forgiven by grace. We don't deserve it and yet God says, "I forgive you." The Bible also says we're sustained by grace. Philippians 2:13 says, *"For it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure."* God will never ask us to do anything he doesn't give us the ability and power to do. And that's grace.

Then the Bible teaches that we're healed by grace. He heals our broken hearts and binds up our many wounds. We're also liberated by grace. We talked about how we don't have to live under the rules and regulations of legalism.

Jesus said, *"Come unto me all you who are tired and weary and I will give you rest."* We're also given talents by grace. God has given each of us the ability to do something well and we are to use it for him.

We're also transformed by grace. The Bible says we're transformed by the renewing of our minds. 2 Peter 3:18 says, *"Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus."* The more we grow in grace the more we're going to grow spiritually.

The bottom line is this—it's all by grace. Everything God does in us, for us, and through us, he does by grace. Robert Louis Stephenson said, *"There's nothing but God's grace. We walk upon it. We breathe it. We live it and die by it. It makes the nails and axles of the universe."*

That's what we've been looking at this summer. But it would be a tragedy if we had gone through this entire series and some of us had still never received it. If some of us had never really opened our lives up to receiving the grace of God. As we conclude this series we need to ask the question, "How do we get it? How do I receive the grace of God?"

The Bible says in three simple words: By trusting Jesus. God made it so simple that nobody could say it is too hard to understand. It's not twenty-three steps, and four pathways, and thirty-two rituals to go through. The Bible says, trust in Jesus. That's it. It's as simple as putting our faith in him.

John 1:17 says, *“The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”* All of grace, all of what we’ve talked about these weeks is centered in a person. He is the source. Grace and truth come through Jesus. If we don’t get it through Jesus, my friends, we won’t get it.

We don’t get grace through religion. We don’t get grace through a ritual. We don’t get grace through rules or regulations. We don’t get grace by having the right doctrines. We do, however, get grace through a relationship, through receiving God’s gift of friendship and love.

God’s grace is free. All we can do is open our hearts to receive this gift. It’s a free gift, but it’s not cheap. It cost Jesus his life. Grace is really the most expensive commodity there is. Jesus died on the cross to pay for it. When Jesus died on the cross he did three things.

He first of all paid the penalty for sin. This means my penalty for sin has already been taken care of. It’s like receiving a “Get out of jail free” card in Monopoly. That’s what grace is. One day we’re going to stand before God and he’s going to say, “You blew it. You sinned.” Someone has to pay for those sins. And Jesus did. He paid the penalty for sin so we can be forgiven.

Jesus, secondly, broke the power of sin. What that means is that Jesus now gives us the power to say “no” to sins; power to change bad habits, hurts and hang-ups that so easily mess us up. Finally, in Jesus, the presence of sin will be obliterated. One day we’re going to heaven and there isn’t going to be any sin or pain there—it’s guaranteed because of Jesus’ cross.

So as we conclude this sermon series I will suggest three ways that each of us can express gratitude for God’s grace. First of all I can show my gratitude for God’s grace by making my life count. The truth is that we can’t really understand the grace of God and keep on living the same way we have always lived. God’s grace renews and changes us.

Because of Jesus’ death on the cross you and I were spared for a purpose. He did not suffer and die so we can just go on living any old way we want to. He made us for a purpose; he redeemed us for a purpose; he died for us for a purpose. And God calls us to fulfill that purpose.

The abilities, the talents, the opportunities, the education, the freedom, the relationships and all the blessings of God were not given just to be squandered—or just for our own success and wealth. Rather they were given to us for a purpose. God wants us to use them for a purpose. He has shown us his grace; we need to make our lives count.

A second way we can express our gratitude to God is by becoming, and growing as, a generous person. If we want to measure how much we understand grace; if we want to measure how much we are living by grace; if we want to measure how much we are grateful for grace we can look at our giving. 2 Corinthians 9:7 says, *“Each one of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”*

What was Jesus like? He was a giver. God so loved the world that he gave. We’re never going to become like Jesus until we learn to be like Jesus. The Christian life can really be summed up in these words—love, serve, give. Until we learn to be generous with our time, our money, our life, our resources, our opportunities, we’re not going to be like Jesus.

The truth is, my friends, that we don't own anything. God loans it to us for 60, 70, 80 years. It is all his in the first place. If my sons or daughter came to me when they were young children and I gave them ten dollars to buy me a present where's the money coming from in the first place? And yet God does that with us.

He gives to us liberally, generously, abundantly. Then he says, "Now show a little gratitude. Be generous in giving yourself. Give a tithe back to me." Why, because God needs the money? No, because he wants us to become like him. He wants us to have a Jesus-heart, not a stingy one.

The third and final way we can express our gratitude to God is by sharing with others the good news of grace. Acts 20:24 says, *"But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry of the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace."*

An important part of our mission in life, my friends, is to tell other people the good news of grace. God put each one of us on this earth for a reason. He has a mission that only you and I can fulfill. Each one of us here knows Jesus because someone told us. Who are we going to tell?

If someone died for you would you want to know about it? Yes, and that needs to be the motivation behind everything we do here at Messiah. Jesus died for every single person in this area and world. Every week there are people in this area who sit at home on Sundays watching TV, with a newspaper and coffee, totally unaware that Jesus died for them and that God's grace is also available for them.

If a person lives and dies without ever knowing that their sins are forgiven, that there's a purpose for living, then for that person Jesus' death is a waste. The Bible tells us in 2 Peter that our God is not willing that any person should perish, but that all should come to repentance and new life.

God wants everyone in his family. Everyone needs Jesus. Because God cares so much we need to care. One of the ways we show our gratitude to God for our gift of salvation is to share that good news with others and invite them to worship, to SS/VBS, to a church event.

A question: Is anyone going to be in heaven because of us? Take some time this week to think of someone you can invite to worship; someone you can encourage to bring their kids to VBS/Sunday School; someone you can invite to a Messiah Bible Study. Start praying today that God would open their hearts, and start praying that he would use you in this important witness.

We know, my friends, that there are many people today who are desperate for good news. Lots of people today are running from fad to fad, to new age therapies and seminars, to psychic spirituality, to self-help books. Some are trying to find fulfillment in an affair, in being a workaholic, in being obsessed with a sport/ hobby. Still there's a gaping hole inside them that only God's grace can fill.

But be assured, my friends, that we have the greatest news in the whole world—God's amazing grace. Make sure you make your life count; live a life of extravagant generosity; tell as many people as we can about this good news of Jesus Christ. May God's amazing grace and love bless you each and every day!