

The Meaning of Grace

by Dr. Manford G Gutzke

"For by grace are you saved through faith." That's a simple statement. It has three words in it and if you knew their meaning you would just about know the meaning of the Gospel. You know what believing faith is, it's taking God at His Word. Faith is a matter of taking up the revelation that is in God's Word and committing yourself to it. It is depending upon God, being fully persuaded that what God has promised He is able also to perform. Faith is absolutely essential for salvation. Without faith it is impossible to please Him.

Now take that word "save." By grace are you saved through faith. We need to remind ourselves that saved is a good word, it's a Bible word. If you know what it is actually to be among those that are saved you'll know the assurance, the joy and in your own heart you will really be glad about the Gospel, glad in the Lord, if you know what being saved means. It's quite a thing to know it. We know that Christ Jesus is the Savior and the reason He is the Savior is because He saves. And the people He does it to are the saved ones.

"For by grace are you saved through faith." And when I am thinking about this word "the grace of God" I am reminded of a passage in the Old Testament where the grace of God was shown by a man to somebody else. (II Samuel 9). I'll have to remind you that there was a time in Israel's history when they wanted a king and they talked to Samuel about it and God told Samuel to give them a king and he went out and anointed Saul. Samuel was the prophet and priest, and Saul was king. Saul failed to obey God, and as a result, Samuel came and told him that God would reject him and put another king in his place. So in the process of time, Samuel anointed another man to become king. The one he anointed was just a lad, too young to be in the Army.

It was David, a sheep herder. David was taking care of his father's flocks while his older brothers were in the Army. At this time, Saul was on the throne but his days were numbered and his family would never succeed him. David was a stranger, so to speak. He was first a citizen and then he became a member of the Army, and later got to be a member of the king's court. Although he was nice and people thought a lot of him, no one thought of him as king.

But Saul knew that he was anointed king and Saul began to hate him and to try to kill him. And there arose between Saul and David a conflict. Saul was on the throne and David was coming up. David was going to become king. Saul's own children would not inherit the throne. Saul hated that.

Now Saul had a son called Jonathan and Jonathan was a great friend to David. They were soldiers together, young men together, and any time people talk about anybody being a friend they think of David and Jonathan. David was just one of the soldiers at that time but he was stated to become king. Now Jonathan sets out a remarkable testimony for a man of faith, a man of obedient faith with God. Jonathan knew that David was going to become king and Jonathan actually was a friend to David and helped him in every way that he possibly could and before they separated, as David had to flee for his life, before they finally separated the last time Jonathan asked David to make him a promise. He asked David that when David became king if he would promise him to be kind to his children, kind to his family. And David promised him that if he ever became king, he would.

As time went on, Saul was killed in battle. Jonathan was also killed in the same battle. Now with both of them gone, people began to turn to David and David was crowned as king but Saul's own family

resisted David and there was war for seven years. In the course of that war David got stronger and the house of Saul got weaker and eventually David was crowned king over the whole country and Saul's family was set aside.

"And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" You will remember his promise to Jonathan. "Is there any left of that family that I could be kind to?"

"And there was of the house of Saul a servant whose name was Ziba. And when they had called him unto David, the king said unto him, Art thou Ziba? And he said, Thy servant is he. And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God unto him?" Actually the language means the grace of God. "That I might show the grace of God unto him."

"And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet. And the king said unto him, Where is he? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lodebar. Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lodebar. Now when Me-phib'-o-sheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Me-phib'-o-sheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant! And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually." (I'm going to restore to you all the property that was confiscated from your family and I'm going to give you a place at my table - you're going to be a member of my family for the rest of your days.)

"And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?" (Why are you doing this for me?) "Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house. Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master's son may have food to eat." (He was a man who had worked for Saul. He told him, I want you to take your family and all the others that used to work with you and I want you to go out and work that property for this young man. It's his from now on. You bring him in the returns). "But Me-phib'-o-sheth thy master's son shall eat bread always at my table. Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants." (They turned loose a crew of thirty-five men to work the property that belonged now to Me-phib'-o-sheth). "Then said Ziba unto the king, According to all that my lord the king hath commanded his servant, so shall thy servant do. As for Me-phib'-o-sheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons. And Me-phib'-o-sheth had a young son, whose name was Micha. And all that dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants unto Me-phib'-o-sheth. So Me-phib'-o-sheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the king's table; and was lame on both his feet."

Here is a picture that has in it the grace of God. Here is a man who belongs to an enemy, a man who has been opposed, a man who has fought in a war against the king. The king now calls this man in and he identifies him, finds out for sure who he is, then tells him he is going to do this for him. He is going to give back all the property that he lost. He is going to arrange a crew of workmen to work that land so that the man will always have money. But as for the man, he wants him to always sit at his table. The king's table will always have an extra plate and its going to be for Me-phib'-o-sheth.

Now simply put, God through the Lord Jesus Christ comes into the world and He hunts. He sends out His preachers and teachers to hunt for you and for me. God in His marvelous forgiving grace says to one of His own, "I want you to come and sit at my table and be one of my family." And I get to sit at the king's table – if you can picture Heaven that way and think of Heaven as being a place where all the

household of God sits down at one table – there's a place up there for you and for me. And I can be lame on both my feet. Not much, not much good, but I've got a place up there. That's the grace of God – that's the kindness of God.

I grew up as a young man, through all my boyhood days and my high school days, and later as a school teacher, without understanding the Gospel. I didn't believe there was a God. I didn't believe there was a Heaven. There came a day when I came in contact with an old farmer who believed, who knew the Gospel and could talk about it. He was a widower and we'd talk. One evening I remember this man said to me, "We've talked about a good many things together, would you give me permission to talk about something that is just close to my heart? I want to talk about Jesus Christ." He turned to me in a casual way and said, "Do you know what grace means?" Well grace is a little word – g-r-a-c-e, five letters. I was a school teacher so I opened my mouth to tell him. I know that there was a certain grace that a woman has when she walks across the room, but that's not the grace that you mean when you say "by grace are you saved" and then I got to thinking about when you return thanks at the table, people ask grace, but I knew that didn't mean "by grace are you saved" and by the time I got my mouth open good, I didn't know what to say. Only one good thing about it, I shut it. He said, "Don't feel bad. Scarcely anybody knows. The reason why we never use it is because there is so little of it. About the only way we ever use that word in our ordinary language is as an adjective – grace."

Then he gave this example. "Suppose that on your farm your mother had a rule that she never would turn away a hungry man that came for a meal and then one day a hobo came by. She would wish that he hadn't come but since she never turned away a hungry man, she gave him a free meal and sent him quickly on his way. There was no grace in her heart."

He continued, "Now let us say someone very important in the community came by and was in your yard and it was getting near noon. Your mother suddenly realized he was there and that maybe she could get him to stay for a meal. Even before asking him to stay she hurried and put on a clean table cloth and set out the best silver. Then she went out in the yard and asked him to stay for a meal. He said, 'Oh, I wouldn't think of putting you to that much trouble.' She said, 'Oh, it will be no trouble at all. I promise you I'll just give you pot luck. I won't do anything extra.' She had already opened that special jar of pickles that she was saving and had already decided to use that cake that she was going to keep for the weekend. But she told him, 'I won't go to any trouble at all.' And all the time she is inviting him she is afraid maybe he won't stay. Now in both these cases there is a meal, but this second time there was grace when she gave it. She wanted him to have it."

In that way he finally got across to me the idea that what was meant by grace was the *unmerited favor and kindness of God toward man*. "And God will do something for you just because He wants to do it for you out of the goodness of His heart. It belongs to God to want to do for you. It's His nature to do for you and He wants to give to you. He wants to help you. He doesn't just open the door and say all right if you want to you can come in. No, He goes out and hunts for you just as a shepherd hunts for his sheep. Like the women sweeps for the coin, like the father waits for the son, God calls people to Him. It's going to cost Him. He gave His Son for them. But He wants to do it and He wants to do it for free."

Later, I said to him, "I have been thinking about what you have been saying. The way you put it, the way you make it sound, it sounds as though if I were ever going to get to Heaven it would be free. God would give it to me." "Well," he said, "That's the only way you'll ever get it." I said, "The only people who ever get something for nothing are crooks and thieves." I remember he was putting up the mail and he turned around and said, "Well, there is something I hadn't thought about. Now tonight you agreed to stay for supper. You know you haven't done anything for it and I don't want to make you feel like a

crook or a thief and I don't want to make a profit on you, so I think it will be worth about 18¢. I'd be glad for you to have it, but if you think it is going to make you feel like a thief or a crook, why I'd rather you would just pay for it."

While I was thinking about that he said, "How do you feel about Christmas time? What do you do when people send you Christmas gifts? Do you send them back? Or do you try to figure out exactly how much they are worth." And in that way he opened my mind to the first great truth I understood about the Gospel. You can get something for nothing if the person has it to give, and wants to give it to you. Almighty God who can save the soul and can forgive sins wants to do it and He wants to do it for free. It belongs to His grace, His kindness, His goodwill toward you.

This grace that you have in your heart just comes out of you. It's like juice in a battery in a car. You know you've got a battery in your car and if it's strong, if it has a certain amount of power in it, you just step on the starter and it goes. Every now and again if you have a battery that just goes dead, you step on it and nothing happens. You know there are people like that.

Have you ever had such a day that along about four o'clock in the afternoon you just ran out of all goodwill? And you know another funny thing in some people you can talk to them for just five minutes and they just drain all the goodwill out of your heart, they didn't take only that day's grace but they mortgaged the next three day's supply.

I used to be pastor of a church in Dallas, Texas and I had some church members who just didn't want to do anything for anybody, any time. Listen, they made you feel you ought to be glad they came to church. If they just come and sit, don't disturb them, don't ever ask them to do a thing. I used to wonder how they ever got there and I decided they parked on a hill on Saturday night so that's the only way in the world they ever got to church on Sunday morning. It was all they could do to get in. Why they had rather be at home. Well, they are short on grace. Got no get up and get at it. No inward disposition to want to. But I tell you one thing you do with an automobile battery – you can hook it up on what they call a line and here is an amazing phenomenon in a way you can pass a kind of electricity through the battery and the battery gets strong. Pass the current through and it gets strong. And that's the way it is with us in spirit and that's really what church services are about. You're just in prayer, you just hook up and let the current of the grace of God go through your heart. What we do when we sing these hymns, what we do when we read the Scriptures, what we do when I'm talking to you is getting the grace of God to pass through your heart and if I can preach the way the preaching ought to be done and we have the church services as we will try to have them, and your heart is open, when you're through you'll be more disposed to honor God, more interested in the things of the Lord, than you were before because inwardly you are so much stronger than you were. You can get strong as an ordinary Christian because Christ Jesus died for you. Because God had done things for you, and through the grace He gives you, there will be a certain amount of goodwill toward other people. Now the more of the grace of God you have the more goodwill you possess. God's grace never fails. We run short of it. God never runs short. The inexhaustible riches, the unspeakable riches of grace in Christ Jesus, God really doing good for us, He shall not fail or be discouraged. We can put our whole trust in Him. Just rest in Him. God will Himself take care of you and if you will believe that it will relieve your mind of worry and you'll get to a place where you'll trust God that God will take care of you.

I remember when I was a young Christian I was disposed to worry a great deal and this good friend of mine, this old farmer, seeing that I was inclined to worry tried to talk to me. He asked me, "Do you believe the Lord Jesus Christ died for you?" I said, "Yes." "Do you believe that God gave His Son for you?" I said, "Yes." "Well, what are you worried about? What are you afraid of?"

Then one day he told me this illustration. "Suppose you were walking on your way to town carrying a suitcase, going to catch a train, hoping to catch a ride (as I told you it was eleven horse and buggy miles from town and if a fellow was going to town he would get out on the highway and expect somebody to pick him up) suppose I came along with a truck, I'd stop the truck beside you and I'd ask you if you would have a ride if you didn't mind standing in the truck. After I go along driving for awhile, I happen to look back and see you carrying your suitcase. I'd say to you to put it down and you'd say, 'Oh, that's all right, I'll just carry it.' If you're in the truck, why don't you set it down. You really believe that the Lord Jesus died for you. You really trust in God for your salvation. Why don't you trust Him all the way! So whatever there is on your heart and mind, why turn it over to the Lord and leave it there. Trust Him. He gave His Son to die for you and He's minded to do you good. You don't have to buy it. You don't have to pay for it, you don't have to wait for it. It's free, the free grace of God. God wants to do for you. That's why they call Him a Father. Fathers do for their children. They get a joy in doing for their children. So God gets a joy in doing for us."

That's the significance of the grace of God and it is for that reason that, you and I can take courage because God's goodness is wonderful. His goodness endureth forever. It's the loving kindness of God and the goodness of God that is the ground of our salvation. You and I are safe and sure because God is faithful and good and kind to us. And I hope that everyone of us will understand that enough to appreciate it and thank God for it.