

“WHATEVER HAPPENED TO GRACE?”

Pastor Mike Corwin

TEXT: MATTHEW 15:10-28

GOD’S WORD: GENESIS 45:1-15

I – WHATEVER HAPPENED TO GRACE?

Usually I hold my question till towards the end of the message but today I want to start with it. WHATEVER HAPPENED TO GRACE? Whatever happened to the Christian belief in grace? Modeling God’s unmerited, unearned, undeserved forgiveness? Whatever happened to the things that go along with this word? Things like kindness, compassion, understanding and the big one...LOVE?

As we get into this time of history I see it eroding fast. I read stories about people killing one another for no reason. I see people willing to go to verbal or even physical fights over a mask! On the news a couple weeks ago was a story about two men in a fight on an airplane which hadn’t even taken off yet. They were asked to get off the plane and refused so the pilot cancelled the flight. The next news clip was of 35 – 40 of the passengers beating up the two men in the lobby of the airport and each other! We didn’t like the direction given by Dr. Amy Acton so we picketed and protested at her home where she and her family lived to the point she had to leave her home for their safety and resigned from her position. The Columbus Schools decided to have online schools instead of in person so protestors went to the home of a school board member and protested. There was no civility, there was anger. And O boy the politics. It doesn’t matter whether you’re speaking from the Republican side or the Democratic side, it appears that all we can do is slam and berate each other, make all kinds of accusations, call names, and in general act worse than our kindergarten kids on the playground!

So tell me...where's the grace? What happened to our Lord's commands about things like turning the other cheek, forgive 7 times 70 times, and do unto others as you would have them do unto you? We don't forgive and we certainly don't Love our neighbor as yourself! It seems we have grudges...not grace.

II – JOSEPH:

I think this morning's reading from Genesis is one of the greatest stories of grace in the Bible. The condensed version of the Joseph story is that as a young man he was his father's favorite. He was resented by his other brothers because of this and for his ability to interpret dreams which he revealed to his brothers and seemed to paint them in a bad light. One day when he was going out to the fields at his father's request to take them some food and to check on them, they decided they had had enough and they grabbed him and put him down a cistern to die as his brother Reuben said to save his life. Reuben went back later to get him out only to discover that he was gone because his brothers had pulled him out of the cistern and sold him into slavery to a passing caravan. He was taken to Egypt where he was sold into slavery to the Pharaoh's military commander where he rose to the stature of being the head of the household over the other slaves and the commander's possessions.

The commander's wife wanted him to sleep with her, which he refused to do, and she cried rape and Joseph was thrown into prison, where he once again rose to be an official and helped the warden run the prison. He began interpreting dreams for prisoners and when the Pharaoh had a disturbing dream he was told about Joseph and he was summoned and accurately told the king what his dream meant about an upcoming 7 year famine. Joseph was put in charge of the king's agricultural interests and more and he prepared the land for the coming lean years. These lean years arrived as Joseph had predicted and food ran out, not only in Egypt, but in the lands beyond where his family was. His brothers came and visited and he kept one of them and demanded the others, who didn't recognize him, return home and bring him his youngest brother. In this morning's reading they are standing before Joseph again and Joseph can no longer contain himself. He sends his Egyptian servants away and then tells his brothers who he is and wept so loud it could be heard all the way to Pharaoh's palace.

Here's where most people may disagree with the story. The men who had grabbed him with plans to murder him, the men who had sold him into slavery, the men who reported his death to his father, the men who had cut short his time in his father's house now stood before him. He had the power, as Pharaoh's 2nd in command to have his revenge. He could have ordered their deaths in any gruesome manner he could imagine and we would all agree that he would have been justified. At the very least you would think he would verbally cut them down to size and then tell them to go away hungry because they were certainly undeserving of any forgiveness or kindness from him.

But no...instead of a grudge and hate we see grace. We see that Joseph tells them he forgives them and they shouldn't even be mad at themselves because this was all in accordance with God's will. Because of all that had befallen him he was now in a position to save his whole family. He tells them to go and tell his father he is alive and then to bring him and all their families and possessions back to settle in the land he would give them so they would make it safely through the famine. Then instead of killing them he kissed them and they all cried together. That's grace!

III – TEXT PART 1:

Then we get to this morning's text which I hope you will see shows us a couple of aspects of how we are supposed to show grace in the way God wants us to, and the model of Joseph we just looked at.

Matthew 15:10-28 (NLT)

¹⁰ Then Jesus called to the crowd to come and hear. "Listen," he said, "and try to understand. ¹¹ It's not what goes into your mouth that defiles you; you are defiled by the words that come out of your mouth." ¹² Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you realize you offended the Pharisees by what you just said?" ¹³ Jesus replied, "Every plant not planted by my heavenly Father will be uprooted, ¹⁴ so ignore them. They are blind guides leading the blind, and if one blind person

guides another, they will both fall into a ditch.”¹⁵ Then Peter said to Jesus, “Explain to us the parable that says people aren’t defiled by what they eat.”¹⁶ “Don’t you understand yet?” Jesus asked.¹⁷ “Anything you eat passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer.”¹⁸ But the words you speak come from the heart—that’s what defiles you.¹⁹ For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander.²⁰ These are what defile you. Eating with unwashed hands will never defile you.”

You’ve heard me say that our younger generations will tell you that they aren’t religious, they are spiritual. Here’s a great example of that and it appears that Jesus is telling us the same thing. It’s not about all the manmade rules for how to run a church or practice our faith, none of this matters. What matters is what’s in your heart.

You can obey all the rules about what’s acceptable and clean to eat, as well as how to set the table, how to practice hygiene before you eat, and all the other rules that go along with it. None of that matters to your life of grace. What matters is what comes out of your heart. What you eat is only disposed of by your bodily functions. It’s flushed away and doesn’t affect others. What comes out of your mouth reflects what you believe, what your relationship to Jesus is, how you live, and how you treat others. And evidently what we say is very important to Jesus because our very words according to this passage can defile us.

If I speak to you of unspeakable things, if I use my words to lure you into places and things you shouldn’t be, if I use my mouth to lie to you or to cheat you, or to belittle you, slander you, gossip about you, or to do anything that would lead you away from the faith or the teachings of Jesus then my mouth has defiled me, my heart isn’t in the right place, and grace is absent.

IV – TEXT PART 2:

Then we have the rest of the passage with another message about grace and how it is to be applied:

²¹ Then Jesus left Galilee and went north to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Gentile woman who lived there came to him, pleading, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! For my daughter is possessed by a demon that torments her severely.” ²³ But Jesus gave her no reply, not even a word. Then his disciples urged him to send her away. “Tell her to go away,” they said. “She is bothering us with all her begging.” ²⁴ Then Jesus said to the woman, “I was sent only to help God’s lost sheep—the people of Israel.” ²⁵ But she came and worshiped him, pleading again, “Lord, help me!” ²⁶ Jesus responded, “It isn’t right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs.” ²⁷ She replied, “That’s true, Lord, but even dogs are allowed to eat the scraps that fall beneath their masters’ table.” ²⁸ “Dear woman,” Jesus said to her, “your faith is great. Your request is granted.” And her daughter was instantly healed.

So we have Jesus, a good Jewish man, with all his Jewish friends and followers, with all the good Jewish rules and regulations he was raised with and taught about in the Synagogue traveling. As he does so he is approached by someone he shouldn’t even speak to...a woman. And not only a woman but a Gentile woman!

She comes to him and begs him to have mercy on her (show her grace) and heal her demon possessed daughter. She doesn’t make any claims of being entitled to his healing, no claims of a standing which would cause him to help her, but just asks for mercy. Imagine her faith when she knew she was crossing boundaries of sex and race to ask Jesus for help...for grace.

Jesus at first tells her that he was sent to give the message of grace and Salvation to the chosen people of God, to the Jews. She starts to worship him and pleads with him again to help her. He responds again that it wouldn't be right to take food from the children and give it to the dogs.

You need to know that in the days of Jesus the word "dog" was used quite often to refer to the Gentiles. Jesus is making a point here. He is calling out her differences from the people who run the religion of the day.

But she replies that even the dogs get to eat the scraps from the table. It's then that Jesus gives us the lesson that God's grace is for everyone. He was sent by God to the Jews but the faith of this Gentile woman was deserving of God's grace as well and her daughter was healed.

We are to make sure we give grace to everyone, not just the ones we deem deserving or the ones we like. EVERYONE!

V – GIVE GRACE:

I know from listening and talking to people that some have lost this teaching of Jesus. That some do not show grace to those who don't think the same way they do. Some who condemn and belittle others for their beliefs or adherence to guidelines given for health and safety. They withhold grace from people who are different than them, people who have offended them, people who are of a different political party, people who are of a different faith or denomination, people of a different skin color, people of a different sexual orientation and the list could go on and on for a long time but you get the point.

The Scriptural teachings of today, the words of Jesus we heard this day, show us that grace is for everyone. You don't get to pick and choose. You are only commanded to love one another – to show each other grace. To have your heart so full of Jesus you can do nothing else but live and give grace.

Think this week of how you may be seen by others. Would they see a Christian? Would they feel grace? If not your heart needs some work.

AMEN