

RIVER OF GRACE

Romans 3:20-24

For by works of the Law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the Law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the Law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

GRACE! GRACE! GOD'S GRACE!

Alone in the stillness and solitude of one's own thoughts when all pretensions are long past, resulting in the simplification of our existence with its only companion being that of reflection, the disposal of the superfluous allows the mind to see things as they really are; just like a mental scrapbook filled with grand and beautiful images walking in tandem with dark regrets of the past.

Thus, during the winter season of life, what most moves us is some reminiscence of a far-off memory when right prevailed and all was well with the soul. Yet, as delicious as this might sound, the reality of bad decisions and less than exemplary actions displayed toward mankind soon deaden these feelings of joy and replaces them with thoughts of hopelessness regarding the afterlife.

Instead of being proud of "a life well lived", worry and dread take the lead with such discordant drumming that emotions of peace soon are replaced by sensations of failure; behavior that assures a ticket to nowhere prompting the question to repeat itself like a broken record playing the lyrics: *"Why would the Creator want a person like me that has sinned throughout life to ever be with Him in heaven? I am not worthy to even be in His presence. It is absolutely hopeless! In this, my winter season of life, after my last earthly breath, only darkness will welcome me."*

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a frequent happening to walk into a resident's room and find him/her staring out the window into space, wearing such a distressed sad expression that it haunts one for days on end.

Although the individual possesses a thorough understanding of Scripture learned by attending church from childhood forward, and can be a part of discussions during devotional time with the group, when alone and engrossed in deep contemplation, it is a totally different

situation. Instead of leaning on the Sword of the Spirit (Bible Scripture) to prevent the voices of the dark spiritual world from launching an all-out attack, feelings of shame, discouragement, and even hopelessness soon root out all God's blessings and assurances of His wonderful and glorious gift of grace.

Consequently, it is imperative to take a closer look at God's grace in order to internalize its depth of meaning so that we all might view death of the earthly body as a time of celebration of light rather than fear, darkness, despondence and dread.

Grace Defined

Generation after generation of believers have endlessly debated and discussed the definition of God's grace, and even gone to the extent of breaking it down into categories as it applies to forgiveness. Yet, at the end of the day, *"the concept of the crazy wonderful gift of our Lord's grace"* still even now remains a mystery to the human mind; so much that the mere brains of man will grapple with it until entering into the heavenly kingdom.

Thus, although many individuals can quickly recite from memory John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"* without hesitation, totally overlook its abstract significance as it applies to the true meaning of life.

In order to substantiate this truism, just float down "God's River of Grace" for a bit and let the miracle and mystery of its waters soak all the way into your heart and soul.

Folks, think of a normal busy day in September when the enemy purposely flew planes into New York City buildings; causing chaos, loss of life, and turmoil forever in the hearts of innocent, unsuspecting souls that were simply going about their business. Then, recount the "River of Grace" whose waters flowed in all directions, seeping into the hidden crevices of the darkest places. Survivors appeared from out of the

rubble showing enormous courage and shared countless stories about lives willingly sacrificed because of loving their neighbors as themselves. Additionally, the “Water of Grace” moisturized parched, dry praying lips and washed away tears streaming down the faces of man all over the world; providing a trickle and then an outpouring of hope.

Those same “Waters of Grace” could also be witnessed when the clouds above a once calm ocean caused tidal waves to rush ashore swallowing dwellings and carving a wall of destruction for miles around. Yet, in the aftermath, small boats and even a solitary kayak carrying strangers from afar could be seen floating from house to house calling out, “Just checking! Is anybody there? We are here to help. Reach for our hand!”

No matter the terrain, “God’s River of Grace” found its way to mankind throughout all generations on earth; even if it required the removal of mountains, stone by stone. Think of a howling, angry wind that swept away homes; leaving death and destruction in its wake. Picture people frantically searching for “home sweet home” and finding only a slab of concrete in its spot. Lives lost! No food or shelter! God’s children left standing in rubble!

Yet, amidst all of this appeared the “Water of Grace”. Then, what was perceived as only a distance sound, turned into the noise of supply trucks, shovels, and nourishment being carried in the arms of first one, two, and three or more individuals that soon multiplied into God’s mighty army; all because they loved their neighbors as themselves.

Yes, folks, these were times of disaster when heaven and earth were moved to reach out and the flood of grace poured in tirelessly without end. No matter who suffered, it washed its way into the places that were hard and rigid, tearing down walls that separated us from one another.

Thus, no matter the situation; whether death, disaster, illness, or destruction, God’s “River of Grace” is more powerful than all of these put together. Why? The love that flows from this stream never seeks attention but is simply always there; just quietly completing its course without danger of ever becoming low or running dry.

Sweet child of God, having read just a few examples that depict how precious the grace is that flows from your Creator's hand, this writer implores you to take a moment, in a time of solitude or in the company of a friend, and look back on your earthly journey with the purpose of identifying the moments when you felt the cool liquid from the "River of Grace's" gentle touch. Was it while grieving the loss of a loved one? During the Depression? When being given the diagnosis of a disease? Childhood? Teenage years? Adulthood? It may be when you found yourself exclaiming, "I can't believe I was able to get through that time!" Well, the writer has news for you! "You" did not get through that time by yourself. The precious "River of God's Grace" had seeped into every fiber of your being; imparting the necessary wisdom and strength for what you faced. You see, without our Savior, we are but helpless human beings, unable to live for one second on our own.

After processing the numerous times when it was truly a wonder that you even survived a situation, have you thought about the ways God blesses each one of us without our knowledge? Instead, simply out of love, He is quietly always there encouraging and cajoling us to move forward; one small step at a time.

Friend, by now, have you finally comprehended with all the saints the breadth, length, depth, and height of God's love for you? Our Lord has his eyes on you during your wakefulness and while you sleep, and will never leave your side.

So, rather than recounting the number of times you have sinned and fallen short of his glory during your earthly journey, the writer implores you to center on the moisture from the "River of Grace" that has caressed every fiber of your being along the way. Let none of us allow the dark powers of the night to get our mind off course. Keep your thoughts on that Bright and Morning Star just waiting to illuminate a path for your feet to safely travel toward Him every moment of your life.

Then, as your body responds to the aging process with wrinkles, aches and pains, face it with the blessed assurance that you are worthy of being in God's presence. Remove from your mind the thought that you

are unclean and lack righteousness. Since Jesus died on the cross in your place, if you truly believe and have asked him to come into your life, then your name is written in “The Lamb’s Book of Life.”

Then, after you have departed for your heavenly home, the same “River of Grace” that saturated you throughout your sojourn will totally wash away the flaws in your earthly body and soul and you will be cleansed, purified and made perfect; all because of a Heavenly Father whose love never fails. Grace! Grace! Amazing Grace!

Until that departure, it is important for all God’s believers, no matter what age, to internalize the meaning of the words spoken by our Savior when he said, “Follow me”.

In doing so, we must all ingrain in our very fiber that to take up His cross and follow means a focus on the unseen world, rather than the seen world; an understanding based on exactly what is required when making that commitment as a disciple.

Folks, the grace you just read about that Christ has extended to us all our lives came at a very costly price; that of a Father that gave His only Son to die on the cross for our sins.

Therefore, it is more than just attending church, reading your Bible, and praying. In addition to these behaviors, it means becoming a humble disciple of Christ; a decision that requires loving God first, your neighbor second, and yourself third; all while accepting the definition that your neighbor is defined as all God’s creation, no matter the color of skin, race, or gender.

Thus, it literally means to follow Jesus’ words, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey ever thing I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.”

Ladies and gentlemen, let us not cheapen God’s gift of grace by accepting behavioral standards modeled by those living in the real

world. Instead, let us follow the teachings of Jesus and serve as a reflection of the behavior that is required of those choosing to walk in His light. Does this mean we should be pious and think we are favored and live a perfect life? No! It means the standards chosen for living under His care will be costly; that of facing many obstacles and hard decisions while on this journey called life. Above all, let us always live a life that sends the message that the gift of grace was paid for with unimaginable suffering on the cross by God's only begotten Son.

Therefore, let us cherish it and treat it with great reverence; a gift from God so precious that it is not viewed as an unlimited source of forgiveness that allows us to sin at will, but instead, truly internalize and accept what it means to take up the cross of Christ and follow Him.

I Know Whom I have Believed

I know not why God's wondrous **grace**

To me He hath made known,

Nor why, unworthy, Christ in love

Redeemed me for His own.

Recommendation:

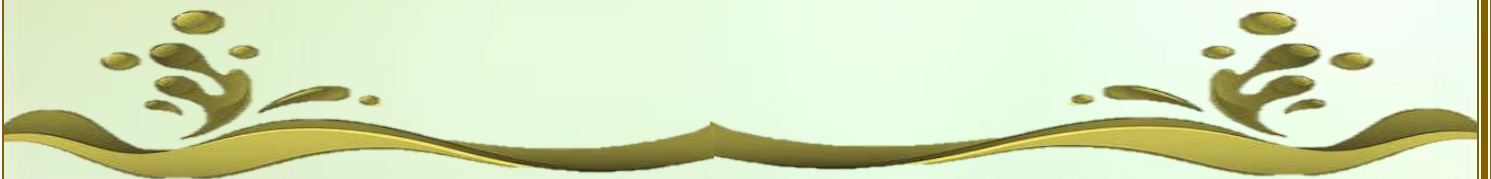
Do you recall in Scripture when Jesus sent his disciples out two by two? Why? Our Savior knew they would gather strength from one another. If you live in a nursing home, I implore you to follow the Lord's lead and invite a fellow resident to share a time of fellowship with the goal of supporting one another. Share your heart filled concerns and be bolstered up by "God's River of Grace". Then, reach out to others in the same way. If you need to be connected with a resident, ask the activity director or administrator to assist you in your search. **1 Thessalonians 5:11 reads, "***Therefore encourage one another and build each other up,*****

*just as in fact you **are** doing.” Read below, words from Saint Augustine (Confessions) that you may want to use as a prayer.*

“The house of my soul is too narrow for you to come into me; let it be enlarged by you. It is in ruins; Restore it. There is much about it which must offend your eyes; I confess and know it. But who will cleanse it? Or, to whom shall I cry but to you?”

“Confessions”

Saint Augustine



Special Thanks

Did you listen to “It Is Well with My Soul” that was performed by Noteworthy from Schweitzer United Methodist Church? Just place your mouse on the designated button and sing along with the video.



***Recording shot by Mason Scruggs,
Catholic High School at St. Joseph's
Catholic Church, Springfield,
Missouri. Our thanks to both the
Noteworthy group and St. Joseph's
Catholic Church.***

