

THE GRACE OF GOD HAS APPEARED
TITUS 2:11-15

Forty years ago this summer, Grace Bible Church held its first worship service. For forty years, GBC has been worshipping God, discipling believers, evangelizing unbelievers, and sending the gospel through missions to foreign lands. For forty years we have seen and experienced God's faithfulness to us.

As we approach the anniversary celebration on August 11, we are going to take three weeks to reflect on and delight in various aspects of God's faithfulness to us. We want to be reminded, by looking to the past, that God has been kind, good, and faithful in His care of us. And remembering His past provision will embolden us with confidence to trust Him to be faithful to us in the future.

As we look to the past, I want to focus our thoughts in the next three weeks around three themes that have identified us as a church body:

- ✓ God's *grace* — the grace that brings us to salvation and the grace that sanctifies us in salvation. Our vision for ministry is encapsulated by the phrase, "Shepherding God's people by God's grace for God's glory." To shepherd God's people means that we care for them by leading them to the gospel and then discipling them in the gospel. And we do that by grace — by the empowerment of the Spirit of God. It's God's work and God's grace that saves and sanctifies.
- ✓ God's *Word*, the Bible — the Spirit of God is the One who saves and sanctifies, and He does that through the Word of God. So we are committed — in all our ministries — to teaching the Word of God so that the Spirit has a tool to use in people's lives to change them.
- ✓ God's *church* — ministry is about God's people. We need buildings, but ministry is not about buildings; ministry is about the care of souls and the fellowship of the brothers, under our great, older brother and Savior, Jesus Christ.

You might notice a progression in those themes: Grace...Bible...Church. Our very name has represented what we are about and what we desire God to do in us.

This morning, we are going to consider the first of these three great themes, God's grace, through Paul's letter to his disciple Titus — Titus 2:11-15. In that passage, we are reminded that,

GOD'S GRACE IS HIS PROVISION FOR OUR PAST, OUR PRESENT, AND OUR FUTURE.

Let us see, from Paul's pen and God's Word, four statements about the sufficiency of God's grace:

1. God's Grace is Sufficient for Our **PAST** Life of Sin (v. 11)
2. God's Grace is Sufficient for Our **PRESENT** Battle with Sin (v. 12)
3. God's Grace is Sufficient for Our **FUTURE** Life with Christ (v. 13)
4. God's Grace is Sufficient for Our **ONGOING** Ministry in this World (vv. 14-15)

1. God's Grace is Sufficient for Our PAST Life of Sin (v. 11)

- One of the dominant truths we have seen in our study of Romans is the pervasiveness of our sin.
 - ✓ Before Christ, we were dominated by sin, controlled by sin, compelled by sin. Sin is what we wanted and sin is what we did. Even when we tried to do good, we never tried to obey God for God's glory — we tried to obey and fulfill God's demands so that we could be right without God.
 - ✓ But God intervened. Those great words, "but God" are implied in this verse in the phrase, *the grace of God has appeared...*
 - ✓ When Paul says that God's grace appeared, he doesn't mean that God's grace didn't exist earlier. The OT is filled with evidences of God's grace (**Gen. 6:8**; 18:22ff; **Ex. 34:6f**; **Ps. 84:11**; Zech. 12:10).
 - ✓ But God's grace made a particular appearance — in the person of Jesus Christ (cf. **3:4-5**).
 - ✓ The word **appeared** means "revelation," and "sudden appearance." It is used particularly of divine action; like light suddenly appearing and dispelling darkness in creation, the light of God's grace was particularly manifested in the suddenness and brightness of Christ's revelation.
 - ✓ We should also understand that when Paul talks about the appearance of grace, he's not just talking about Christ's birth at His advent; he is talking about His entire life and ministry that culminated in His absorption of God's wrath at the cross. In His resurrection we see God's power; in His work we have received grace for ministry and grace for spiritual transformation (**Rom. 1:3-5**).
 - ✓ Of all the places that we experience God's grace, we experience it particularly in God's Son —

"The early Christians did not say in dismay: 'Look what the world has come to,' but in delight, 'Look what has come to the world.' They saw not merely the ruin, but the Resource for the reconstruction of that ruin. They saw not merely that sin did abound, but that grace did much more abound. On that assurance the pivot of history swung from blank despair, loss of moral nerve, and fatalism, to faith and confidence that at last sin had met its match." [E. Stanley Jones, missionary to India, in 1942.]

- What is particularly notable is that this grace brought **salvation to all men**.
 - ✓ That doesn't mean that all people (mankind) were saved.
 - ✓ It does mean that he has provided the means of salvation for all men. Christ's death is sufficient to pay the debt of sin for all men and the offer of salvation is made to all men (so that all men are responsible for rejecting Christ if they do not believe). No one is excluded from salvation's offer — even the "lowest" of men can be saved (e.g., slaves, **vv. 9-10**).
 - ✓ God is the Savior of all men in that He makes the offer of salvation to all and He graciously and patiently withholds judgment of sinners. But He ultimately is the Savior only of those who believe in Him for salvation (**1 Tim. 4:10**).

- ✓ Friends, this is great news for all of us!
 - If you have trusted in Christ, you have experienced God's grace that has freed you from God's wrath. You have been made free. You are no longer under condemnation and you are no longer bound and compelled by sin. You are **free indeed** (Jn. 8:36).
 - If you are not a believer in Christ, this is still good news for you, because the offer of salvation is made to you and Christ is sufficient and able to save you. Friend, there is no sin so great that it cannot be overcome by Christ's death and resurrection. There is no sin that cannot be forgiven. There is no sin that is beyond the hope and provision of God's grace. Whatever your sin, confess it to God and ask Him to forgive and redeem it and liberate you from it, and He will do that *for all your sin*. His grace is sufficient for you.
 - What all of us need most is salvation from God's wrath; and that is exactly what God's grace gives us — He delivers us from His wrath.
- ✓ This is the good news that we have been proclaiming and rejoicing in for 40 years. Whatever sin we have done in the past, God's grace has appeared in Christ and is sufficient to liberate us. But there is more good news about God's grace. It's good for the past, and it's sufficient for the present.

2. God's Grace is Sufficient for Our **PRESENT** Battle with Sin (v. 12)

• God's grace enables us to say "no" to sin

- ✓ My biggest problem in life is me: I can't sleep at night because *I* am anxious; I have problems in relationships because of *my* conduct and *my* words; I struggle with pride and various temptations because *I* have desires that are fleshly and ungodly. *I* need help.
- ✓ God's gracious salvation has liberated me from the penalty of sin, but I still need help for the power of sin — the "want to" attraction of sin, and God's grace helps with that as well.
- ✓ Notice that (v. 12), the appearance of God's grace in Christ is ***instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires....*** God's grace (in the person of Christ) ***instructs*** us. Christ is grace personified, and through Christ we are taught how to live. We need to be taught, because like immature children, we are ignorant, prone to be deceived, and weak. And God gives us the instruction and guidance we need through Christ — and Christ *always* serves as this gracious guide.
- ✓ The goal of this instruction is not that we "know" something, but that we live some particular way. And the first way he teaches us to live is to deny ungodliness and worldly desires.
 - To deny ungodliness means that we not only avoid ungodliness, but we renounce it. We understand that sin is not an inconvenience, but that it will destroy us (1 Pt. 2:11). So we repudiate and renounce and disown sin and its power over us. Anything that is "against God," we renounce. We actively and aggressively and purposefully fight against and resist sin.

➤ We not only fight against sin, but we also fight against and resist the **worldly desires** that lead to sin. My problem is not that I sometimes say the wrong things, my problem is that I think the wrong things and desire the wrong things and out of the overflow of those inward desires, I speak and act. Those sinful desires are themselves sin, and God's grace teaches us to deny and renounce those very desires.

... Sin will never be defeated in our lives until we address our motives and desires. "Why do I want that sin?" "What am I wanting so badly that I am willing to sin to get it or avoid it?"

... If we want to win the fight against sin, we will fight at the level of our desires; and God's grace enables us to do just that.

... Notice that in this verse, Paul doesn't give us a process for how to deny sin. Paul's point is that when sin is evident in our lives, it is possible (because of the grace of Christ) to say "no" to that sin and not engage in it. It is possible, like Joseph, to flee temptation.

... God's grace teaches us that we need to say "no" to sin and then empowers us to be able to say "no" to sin. Before salvation we could only indulge the flesh, and now we can starve it.

• God's grace enables us to say "yes" to obedience

- ✓ God's grace in Christ not only teaches us what to do in relation to sin, but also how to live in relation to God — God's grace teaches both what we are to stop doing and what we are to start doing.
- ✓ There is a way to live that reflects God's grace and salvation, and that is the way we are to live.
 - We are to live **soberly**. This is self-controlled and disciplined living. It is the kind of living that comes from a sound mind — thinking clearly, seriously, and purely. It is self-restraint.
 - We are to live **righteously** — there is a right thing to do or say in every circumstance, and that's the way we are to live. For every ungodly action there is a righteous replacement that honors the Lord and that is what we are to put on and do — even if it is costly to us.
 - We are to live **godly**. This is the antithesis to **ungodliness** that we are to deny. The godly man does the things that God sanctions and desires.
- ✓ With all three of these actions, notice that there is intention and purpose. The person who is godly is not "accidentally" godly — he is godly because he has purposed to live his life in that way. Godly living does not "just happen" — it is the result of plans, intention, purpose, discipline, and relying on God's grace to instruct and empower a new way to live.

• God's grace enables us to live in this world

- ✓ God's grace instructs us and gives us grace to deny sin and embrace righteousness **in the present age** — that is, in the very world in which we live — in the here and now ("now" is lit. translation).
- ✓ In the middle of the world in which we are surrounded by corruption, deceit, rebellion, anger, hatred, dishonesty, and perversity, God has enabled us to deny those things and live godly.

- ✓ This was a helpful and encouraging word to the churches in Crete, that were living in a perverse culture (cf. 1:12-13a) — and where perversity was influencing the church (1:16).
- ✓ It is possible, because of the power of the grace of God (cf. Rom. 5-8), to be godly while surrounded by the ungodliness of the world. Because of God's grace, that's not an impossible task.
- ✓ This verse reinforces what Jesus prayed in the Garden — Jn. 17:15-16 ("I do not ask..."). He doesn't ask us to be taken out of the world, because we don't need to be taken out to be protected, because once we are in Him, we are not "of the world," even as Christ is not "of the world."

"Right here, right now, God's grace operates to make us the kind of people who live the kind of lives that honor God and benefit others and ourselves. The grace of God extends the power not just to rescue us from an evil world, but to transform us in the midst of it." [John Kitchen, *Pastoral Epistles*]

- This is what has been our joy to see over and over through the ministry of this church body — how God, in His grace is giving freedom from entangling and ensnaring sins, and helping people to live godly. I look at the lives of the members of this body, and as I look at you I frequently think of the word "grace" stamped on the foreheads of your lives — I know something of the story of your life and I see that the only thing that can account for your transformation is God's grace. There is no other explanation for how you can be what you are today.
- God's grace is adequate for our past, for our present, and thirdly, for our future...

3. God's Grace is Sufficient for Our **FUTURE** Life with Christ (v. 13)

- God's grace has not only appeared, but in its appearance it is instructing us (v. 12) in particular ways. And part of that instruction is not only how we are to live now, but to **look for** the culmination of our salvation in the further **appearance** of Christ's great **glory** (v. 13).
 - ✓ We are not only to be "looking," but the implication is that we are to be eagerly anticipating (like a check in the mail or a wedding day).
 - ✓ This looking is not something we do occasionally, but it is regular — we live as people who are always looking for Christ's second coming. We are always anticipating Him and His coming.
 - ✓ Specifically, Paul says we are looking for **the blessed hope** — the happy, delightful confidence that Christ will finish His salvation and take us to His heavenly home (Jn. 14:1ff); it is particularly a delight for us because there we will always be with Him (1 Thess. 4:17) and see Him (1 Jn. 3:2-3).
- Our **great God** — our **Savior** — will come in His **glory** and we will be eternally with Him.
 - ✓ Notice the pronoun — He is *our* God. That emphasizes that we belong to Him. We are His, and He is ours. And nothing can separate us from the love that He has for us.

- ✓ In His first incarnation, with rare exception, Christ shielded His glory. But the brilliance of His nature will be revealed in His second coming and it will never be hidden from us and we will not be kept from it. He will come in the full demonstration of His power and we will see and enjoy it.
 - ✓ We will see and enjoy this glorified Christ because we will be transformed. In this body we cannot see Christ's glory and survive (Rev. 1:17). But when He redeems us fully, then we will be able to see Him. So this verse teaches us that we should look for His coming, because He will finish the salvation that He has begun in us. Our future life with Christ is secure and safe (1 Pt. 1:3-5).
- When we think about Christ's return and Heaven, we tend to think of things like: all illness and sin removed, and perfect relationships, and unending fellowship, and a life of ease. But the greatest reality is that we not only see, but are with our great God and Savior, Jesus. And the only reason that we can be confident in that future is that God's grace has secured it for us.
 - God's grace is the reason our past is made right, we are enabled to live right in the present, and we can be confident that we will eternally be made right in our heavenly home. And as Christ has secured these things for us, we have a further ministry in this world, which is the fourth statement in this passage about the sufficiency of God's grace...

4. God's Grace is Sufficient for Our ONGOING Ministry in this World (vv. 14-15)

- Verse 14 reiterates some of the reasons Christ died for us — He died not only to pay the penalty of sin, but He died to remove the power of sin from our lives, so that we can be *redeemed* from a few *lawless deeds* (NO! — *every lawless deed*). And He died so that He might purify for Himself (i.e., for His glory, so that *He* is exalted) a people that belong to Him who are *zealous for good works*. He died so that we could say “no” to sin and “yes” to obedience.
- Because God's grace has been so gracious to us, He also expects us to do one more thing: He expects us to have a grace-giving ministry to others:
 - ✓ We are to *speak*. We are to teach and instruct others about the truths just explained.
 - ✓ We are to *exhort*. We are to call people to action when they are weary and help them when they are weak (1 Thess. 5:14).
 - ✓ We are to *reprove*. We are to expose sin in particular people's lives so that they are corrected — so that they repent and change and grow.
 - ✓ And all these things we are to do with *authority* — not from our own authority, but from the authority of Christ and His Word. This book is powerfully transformative (as we will be reminded particularly next week); just teach it and let it do its work.

- ✓ It is worth noting that these activities are ways that we extend grace to others. It is not “mean” to exhort and reprove and declare the authority of Scripture. It is a means of grace to those who hear. It’s the way we point people to the hope of Christ and the solution of their greatest need.
- After I had been pastoring for just a couple of years, I ran into a friend from seminary who had not graduated yet. He asked me, “does it work?” “Does what work?” “You know — our motto — ‘preach the Word...’ Does it work to just preach the Word?” I don’t remember all that I said to him that evening, but I know what I say now — Yes. Yes, the Word and this Word of grace is powerful to effect every change that every man needs. I have seen the sufficiency of God’s grace to change me and I have seen the sufficiency of God’s grace to change you.
 - ✓ For 40 years we have been pointing people to one great truth — the truth of God’s grace that is able to give life and keep people alive. For 40 years we have seen people’s lives changed by that truth. And for as long as we are here, we will stand on God’s grace alone as the means for transformation.
 - ✓ We can do no better than to echo the words of Martin Luther who, when asked for the reason of the success of the Reformation responded:

“I have opposed the indulgences and all the papists, but never by force. I simply taught, preached, wrote God’s Word; otherwise I did nothing. And then, while I slept...the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a prince or emperor did such damage to it. I did nothing. The Word did it all... For it is almighty and takes captive the hearts, and if the hearts are captured the evil work will fall of itself.”

- ✓ This is the effective power of God’s grace. Christ has done all we need.

BENEDICTION: 1 Thess. 5:23-24