

## The Grace of God

Grace – what do we think of when we hear that word? In everyday language, we think of the grace of an elegant performer, we think of a gracious host, or even of a person who speaks and acts with poise and beauty. When we move into the spiritual realm, we think of God giving sinners good things when instead they deserve hell.

Too often, we become so used to hearing words like ‘grace’ and ‘mercy,’ that our minds hardly stop and take note. The grace of God becomes simply another fact in our Christian life – we absorb it, and once the wonder dies down, we simply give the fact of God’s grace a casual nod, without the rapturous amazement we ought to have.

“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me,” wrote John Newton, a former slave trader. As he considered what he deserved, and the kind of life he’d lived, the thought of God saving him caused him to be bewildered, startled, shocked – amazed. If we truly sit and meditate on God’s grace, it can be nothing short of amazing.

What is so amazing about grace? Perhaps you have got to that point of taking the grace of God for granted. Perhaps you feel you are so used to the doctrine of God’s grace, that it does not have much wonder for you anymore. Then let us go into God’s Word together for a portrayal of God’s grace, that will do nothing short of amaze us, and fill us with the kind of reactions that glorify God.

We’ll be looking in **2 Samuel 9**. That might surprise you – after all, what does the Old Testament have to say about God’s grace? In fact, the Old Testament is rich in God’s grace, and rich in illustrations of it. The one we’re looking at surrounds King David’s kindness or grace to a lame man named Mephibosheth. In this incident, you will find King David a beautiful picture of God’s grace, and Mephibosheth a picture of you and I, the sinner.

The background is this: David has just recently been anointed king over all Judah and Israel. He has defeated many of Israel’s enemies, and come to a place of stability and rest in the kingdom. His time of being pursued by the bloodthirsty King Saul is over. His name has been vindicated, but sadly, his close friend Jonathan was killed in battle with Saul, Jonathan’s father. Now David sits on the throne, the unchallenged king of Israel.

A common act of a newly anointed king in those times was to seek out all the remaining relatives of the previous king, and kill them. If the new king had received the throne by some means other than being an heir to it, it was natural to seek out the relatives and allies of the previous king, and destroy them. This would help to establish your throne and prevent anyone with vested motives seeking to usurp it.

In David’s case, he had every reason to want to destroy all memory of Saul. Saul had ruthlessly hounded him throughout the country. Saul slandered David’s name, tore his marriage apart, forced him to live as a vagabond and even as a refugee in the land of the Philistines. Many of

David's strongest Psalms of lamentation and sorrow were written during the period of Saul pursuing him.

Worse, David twice had the opportunity to kill Saul, and refused to do so – honouring God's appointed authority. Surely, now was the time to get even. Saul is dead, and is no longer in the place of authority. It is David's right now, as king, to seek out and destroy Saul's relatives. But hear the words that must have startled all those standing around his throne: *"And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"*

Here our portrait of grace begins to take shape:

### **1. Grace seeks the welfare of the guilty**

See, grace does more than mercy. Mercy is to spare a person from their just consequences. Grace is to be good to those who deserve the opposite. David seeks someone from the house of Saul, specifically so that David might show kindness to him. For David to simply have allowed relatives of Saul to go on living in his kingdom would have been merciful. But to actively seek to do good to them – is grace.

Here, David shows goodness to his enemies. Grace does more than show us the kindness of sparing us from just consequences, it goes way beyond that, to seek out our own good. And God's grace is this: that He looked for a way to be kind to His enemies. He did not merely allow His enemies to live lives of peace and joy, and enjoy the goodness of life through food, laughter, love and friendships. He could have allowed that, and that would have been merciful.

After all, Jeremiah describes what should have happened to us in **Lamentations 3:22**: *"It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not."* God's mercy is what allows those who hate him to continue to enjoy health, life and the joys of family and friends.

Sinners ought to be consumed by the consuming fire that is the Lord, but His mercy grants us life, and breath. That's mercy. That's David allowing Saul's relatives to live. Grace is God seeking to save the eternal souls of those who had no desire to seek after Him. says:

*Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved).*

**Ephesians 2:3-5**

The Bible describes us in unflattering terms – it calls us children of wrath. To put it mildly, that says, we belonged to a family that made God angry. We were enemies of God. We were rebels running around, refusing to acknowledge the King of the Universe as just that. We, as the family of Adam, declared ourselves autonomous.

Every time we choose to disobey God, we declare that we follow our own law, and do not submit to the King. This whole family was devoted to God's righteous anger and deserve His punishment. To despise God's lordship is to choose to face His anger over sin. But Ephesians tells us that while we were in this spiritually dead state, where, by nature, we kept offending God – God reached down in love and made us alive.

Mercy would have been to simply allow us to keep living. Grace is God giving us eternal life – through His Son Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. Mercy would be not to end our lives here on earth – grace is to rescue us from eternal torment in a lake of fire. God regenerates those who believe, in an act of exceeding kindness to those who hate Him. His love overlooks our ignorance, our brutishness, our stubborn rebellion.

God's grace, firmly and tenderly, steps in to save us from our own self-destructiveness. Just like David sought kindness to Saul's family for Jonathan's sake, so God seeks kindness to us for His Son, Jesus', sake. **Ephesians 4:29** tells us God has forgiven believers for Christ's sake. Grace seeks the welfare of its enemies. But there is more.

## 2. Grace initiates the relationship and pursues the one it loves

*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 shew the kindness 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.*

**2 Samuel 9:1-5**

David went beyond a casual interest in Saul's relatives. He first found a former servant of Saul – Ziba. From Ziba, he got information on a remaining relative – Mephibosheth. From there, David sent and had Mephibosheth brought to himself.

See, this is a beautiful picture of what God does. God does more than feel warmly towards us. God does more than feel sorry for us when we are sinners heading for hell. He did something about it: *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son"* (**John 3:16**). God initiated the means of our redemption, and drew us to Himself.

Ziba is really a picture of the Holy Spirit – the one who draws sinners to God. Jesus said in **John 6:44**: *"No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day."* God draws a person by the Holy Spirit convicting them of sin, righteousness and judgement. The Spirit convicts the person of their need of salvation. And He convicts them of the mercy and grace of God – it is the goodness of God that leads people to repentance.

See, grace is not passive. It does not wait for responses to act. It has a plan in mind about how it will shower goodness on the one it loves, and it initiates. **1 John 4:19** tells us that we love God

because He first loved us. We read in Ephesians how God made us alive while we were His enemies. And Romans 5 sums it up:

*For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

**Romans 5:6-8**

David did not wait till lame Mephibosheth began a journey toward his throne. He sent and fetched him. Indeed, the grace here is that Mephibosheth would have been totally unable to make it to David's court by himself. He needed assistance. Similarly, no one can come to God unless God draws them and illuminates their darkened mind – unless God opens blind eyes, and awakens dead hearts.

When someone is saved, it is not because that person was more diligent than another in seeking after God. It is not because they had less sin, and could see more clearly. It is because God had been pursuing them – and they responded. Grace initiates and pursues. God seeks. Our Lord's description of His own mission is found in **Luke 19:10**: *"For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."*

Grace is looking for the opportunity to be kind, and needs no cue from us to begin the pursuit. If you gave a street beggar some food – that is mercy. But if you diligently seek the name and jail cell of the convicted criminal who robbed you in order to visit them and bring them gifts – that is grace. Grace initiates and pursues.

### **3. Grace extends kindness to those without means to repay**

When David asks if there are any remaining relatives, Ziba does not even bother with a name, he simply states the man's condition: *"Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet."* From a human point of view, this son was not even worth naming. He was lame. He was without ability to stand in the king's presence – for that is a pre-requisite.

No one slouches, reclines, or sits in the presence of the king. Surely, Ziba must have thought, a king would not show kindness to one so unfitting. But that's just the thing. If Mephibosheth was worthy, if he had some virtue in himself, if there was something about him to merit David's favour, this would not be a picture of grace. But here is David calling for a lame man to be brought to his court, so he can treat Mephibosheth like a prince.

If salvation was somewhat dependent on our merits, on our worthiness, on our ability to stand before King Jesus – none of us would make it. But the grace of God is that God calls spiritual cripples, those lame in their souls, into His presence. He seeks no ability in us, for He knows our sinful state has crippled our ability to walk towards God.

The Bible says that while we were without strength – Christ died for the ungodly. There is no good work, no church ritual, no church membership, no act of righteousness that would make

us any less lame, any less unworthy, any less unable to find God. But grace extends kindness to one who cannot repay; to one who has no ability to stand on their own merits.

Grace is undeserved, unearned favour and kindness. Those who think their righteous lives can earn their salvation have not yet understood grace. Those who think their obedience will secure or keep their salvation do not yet understand grace. Grace gives, and blesses the undeserving, and the spiritually disabled. See what is next:

*Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, 'Mephibosheth.' And he answered, 'Behold thy servant!' And David said unto him, 'Fear not: for I will surely shew 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.'*

**2 Samuel 9:6-7**

#### **4. Grace surprises fearful hearts with personal, kind treatment**

Realise what is happening here. Mephibosheth has no idea what is in David's heart. He is fully expecting David to carry out the tradition and execute him that very day. He is carried into David's throne-room, trembling and fearing for his life. He falls on his face, seeking to show David he is no threat to the kingdom. He is seeking mercy. He hears only one word – David saying "Mephibosheth."

Mephibosheth cries out to plead, 'I am not your enemy, but your servant!' And then David delights to shower grace upon him. He says, 'from now on, you will eat at my table, you will have all your land restored to you, and I will show you kindness.' The word 'kindness' is the Hebrew *chesed* – a steadfast, loyal love.

Notice the interaction. Mephibosheth is fearing judgement, hoping for mercy. King David knows him by name, and calls him by name. Mephibosheth responds with a cry of submission. Then David announces his original intentions to be gracious and kind.

How fitting a picture of grace. Once we know of the holiness of God, once we know our state, we fear the certain judgement. As the Psalmist puts it "*If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?*" (**Psalm 130:3**). We know our sins have piled up into heaven – we have stored up wrath against us, like a dam bursting to full. We should rightfully expect nothing but the axe to fall.

But if we have been drawn to that point of acknowledging our sins, and repenting of them, instead, we hear the voice of God simply saying our name. There is much in that. God says to Moses in response to a personal request: "*And the LORD said unto Moses, 'I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name'*" (**Exodus 33:17**).

In **John 10:2-3**, we read of the Good Shepherd: "*But He that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To Him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear His voice: and He calleth His*

*own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.*" God knows us by name. He does not call us by the generic name, 'human.' He calls as David called Mephibosheth. It is a personal encounter. Your Creator and you.

God knows you intimately, and calls you by name. Salvation is personal. Every human being who is saved gets to a point where they stand alone before God and His mercy, desiring that He forgive their sins and not pass sentence. It is in that moment, when we hear God drawing us by name to be saved, that we must respond in repentant faith.

And that is what Mephibosheth's response pictures. Mephibosheth cries out, *"Behold thy servant."* He does not raise his fist in defiance, or say, 'Go ahead, King, do what you want.' Here is a heart hoping for mercy. He is submitted to David's kingship, and surrenders his life to him. Repentant faith comes to God in sorrow for sin, desiring His mercy and a new life. It does not resist God's Lordship – it embraces it as the alternative to continuing to live for self.

When we come to salvation, we must personally admit our deserving punishment, and cry out to God for mercy and grace in Jesus Christ. We cannot save ourselves; we are lame in our feet – we depend totally on His ability to save us. We can simply say to God, 'Behold, a sinner, who desires to become Your servant.'

But then hear David's response: *"Fear not."* Grace calms our anxious hearts. It soothes us. The words spoken most often by Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels, are the words *"Fear not."* David calls on the whimpering Mephibosheth to lift up his eyes and see a kind face, a gentle countenance, that has good in his heart, not evil. John spoke about this in his epistle:

*Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment.*

**1 John 4:17-18**

A fear of judgement is not a relationship which understands grace. Grace casts out those fears, till there is the calmness, the security, the joy of steadfast, loyal love. David's grace is abundant and overflowing, like the Lord's. David effectively says, 'I am not only going to spare your life, but give you what is mine, and invite you to an honoured seat at my table, and give you the land that belongs to me.'

This is what God does for us too, when we are saved. God says, 'Not only am I going to not send you to hell, but I will give you the inheritance of my Son Jesus, provide for you eternally, and allow you to fellowship with Me at My table forever.' **Romans 8:17** tells us, *"And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together."*

**Psalm 23:5-6** tells us of the eternal provision David expected as a believer: *"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."*

**Ephesians 1:5** tells us we have been adopted into the family of God. David essentially adopted Mephibosheth as his own son. He had all the rights that the princes, the sons of David, had. He could have continual fellowship with the king, and eat at his table. This does not make us the little gods that some false teaching makes us out to be, it makes us unworthy recipients of having been blessed with every spiritual blessing in high places.

Mephibosheth then responds in shock: *“And he bowed himself, and said, ‘What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?’”* (**2 Samuel 9:8**). Our pride recoils when confronted with grace. We are still working on a worthy-unworthy mindset. We cannot imagine or explain why God would do this. And so we should. Grace is amazing. If we are shocked by our sin, we should be staggered by God’s grace.

The chapter ends with this phrase: *“So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the king’s table; and was lame on both his feet”* (**2 Samuel 9:13**). Grace is continual: Mephibosheth was never there by right, nor did he have to fulfil certain conditions to remain in that place. His lameness would remain, and so would David’s grace.

Once we are saved, we do not enter a relationship based on worth or unworthiness to maintain our salvation – the same love that caused God to love us as enemies, continues to love us as failing saints.

Perhaps every time Mephibosheth was helped up to that table, he shook his head with a smile, still bewildered at David’s grace. And perhaps he would, from time to time, look over at David’s face, to see if he had changed his mind – only to see that same, kind countenance. Is grace amazing to you? Perhaps these words should mean more to you now as you sing them:

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.*