

**Ephesians 5**  
**February 21, 2016**  
**The Cross of Grace**

A mother had invited some people over for dinner. When everyone was seated, she turned to her 5 year old daughter and asked her if she would like to say grace.

"I wouldn't know what to say mommy," her daughter replied.

"Just say what you hear mommy say," her mom said.

Bowing her head, the little girl paused and then said, "Lord, why on earth did I invite all these people over for dinner?"

Now grace has several meanings. Of course, we all know about grace as the prayer you can say before you eat thanking God. There is the grace that we notice when we watch very beautiful dancers perform. But in the Bible the idea of grace is little bit different. The Greek word translated as “grace” in the New Testament is charis. And this word is the root word of another word if you take off the “s” and a “ty” it becomes charity. And charity means to see someone who is struggling and to help them through acts of compassion and kindness without them asking you. This is very close to what we mean by grace as the love and forgiveness of God given to us without our asking or deserving it. This is what Paul meant when he wrote – “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast” And it is this grace, through the Holy Spirit, that is actively at work shaping us, forming us, and restoring us.

Well, let me give this example. [SHOW PICTURE – 1965 GTO] As you look at this picture what do you see but a broken down car past its prime. We would call this a junker, something that you haul to the junk yard to sit there and rust away. But, someone saw this car

and worked on it. And after a lot of work it became this. [SHOW SECOND PICTURE] This is a picture of grace. God see us, truly sees us, with all our faults and failing, dings and dents – those times when we think we are on the trash heap of our lives, broken down, and used up. God sees us and loves us. And gives us a love that transforms us. We didn't ask for it and may not always deserve it. But this gift is given. That is grace. And if you have ever done car restoration you know you don't start on the outside but you start on the inside and work your way out. In the same way, grace enters our hearts and works its way out transforming us. All we have to do is accept it into our hearts and our lives. All we have to do is realize that God is not done with us. No matter what you are going through, God is not done. No matter what you are facing, God is not done. No matter what hurt you have on your heart or difficultly weighing on your mind, God is not done. God is at work in our lives. And we need to have the eyes of faith to see it and accept it.

That's what grace is all about. That no one is really lost. Our Gospel lesson is one of the most powerful stories in the New Testament because of it speaks of this extravagant love and grace that can be so hard to understand at time. This story of a young man who insults his father by demanding money, travels to a far country where he loses it all, and then in his shame and regret comes home.

And as he comes into sight of his home, before he can say he is sorry, his father who has already been standing on the front porch looking down the road comes to throw his arms around him and welcome him home. This is grace. This is the grace that gets inside us and transforms us day by day into the image of Christ.

So, what does grace look like in our life? what does the picture of grace look like for us.

[Show VIDEO] So, what is your picture of grace at work in your life. This week I was reading a story of a man who wrote about his picture of grace as he struggled in life and nearly lost everything because of his alcoholism. He said, “I remember my worst night. Everything was falling apart – my job, my family, my health. I remember sitting there facing the bottle of vodka – just staring at it. I had felt the stirrings to change and gone back and forth in my sobriety. But in that moment I stopped thinking about myself and what I needed. I thought about my little girl and my wife and what taking this drink would do to them, how it would destroy them. I had a friend who gave me a pamphlet on how to get help and on the back was a prayer I said aloud – God, give me grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, Courage to change the things which should be changed, and the Wisdom to distinguish the one from the other. Living one day at a time, Enjoying one moment at a time, Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace, Taking, as Jesus did, This sinful world as it is, Not as I would have it, Trusting that You will make all things right, If I surrender to Your will, So that I may be reasonably happy in this life, And supremely happy with You forever in the next. Amen. – and when I said in prayer the word grace, I knew I was not alone - my family, even through everything I had done to them, was still standing by me giving me support to get better. But I also realized that God who sees me for who I really am wasn't giving up on me either and was working within me, forgiving me, giving me the strength to want more out of life than what's in the bottom of a bottle. Isn't that grace? That God loves you just the way you are, but he doesn't want to leave you there. Isn't that grace? That works in you, even when you don't know it. And if you experience this you can't keep it to yourself and that's why after many months to get

sober, I now work with others, to share my story, to let them know there is always hope and an amazing grace.”

This is the slow persistent grace of God that works in our lives. This grace that takes us from the junk heap of life and renews us into beautiful children of God.

grace as a journey – a journey that begins with prevenient grace which is God’s work and influence in us before we even know it. And then justifying grace that moves us to the point of saying yes to Christ and surrendering our hearts and lives to him. And sanctifying grace which is God’s work over our lifetime to shape, guide, and restore us into the image of Christ.

It is this journey of grace that changes hearts and lives. Grace that forgives us. Grace that we surrender to. Grace that exposes us to a higher standard of how to act and live.

For this is what Paul wrote about when he said – “Out of great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is a gift of God – For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works.”

When we follow Jesus, we walk in his footsteps to be forgiven and freed, strengthened and sustained, loved and led forward with a new heart to be living examples of grace. For when we think of grace, we think of the hymn we come to sing next. This hymn written by John Newton, slave trader turned preacher, who turned his life around and was instrumental in ending the British slave trade all because of God’s grace at work in his heart and life. This hymn that is often chosen at funerals for its message of eternal life, but is a hymn of tremendous joy. That is why, I think, it touches people’s hearts on such a deep personal level because it gives us such hope that God never gives up on us and there is always a way forward no matter

how dark it may seem. That God is always at work in our hearts and lives, slowly and surely, transforming us from the inside out.

It is this grace working in our hearts renewing us from the inside out. This grace, this gift given to us where all we have do is accept it as we say, “Here’s my life, Lord. I give it to you. I accept your love and grace. I’m yours. Restore me and make me the person you want me to be.”

We are a people of grace - people who are called to be more than we are. So, let us accept this gift that came at great cost to Jesus was died for each of us, but is offered freely to us all. This amazing grace that will renew, redeem, and restore our lives and our world. Amen.