

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF DENTON
JANUARY 15, 2012
REV. JOHN BURTON

TEXT: EPHESIANS 2:8-9
SERMON: GRACE

“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.”

INTRODUCTION

The sermon this morning is on GRACE. But to be honest, I used to always have a bit of trouble understanding the difference between God's Grace and God's Mercy. At least until someone once said, "Mercy is not getting what you deserve, Grace is getting what you don't deserve,"

Mercy is when, after worship, the struggling minister was met at the door by a young boy who said, "Preacher, we were going to invite you over for fried chicken, but he got well." Not getting what you deserve - that's mercy!

But grace is when the perennial bachelor, always gruff and miserly to attract a woman, went on a Caribbean cruise. As he walked up the gang-plank he noticed a beautiful woman who gave him a warm smile as he passed. That night he happened to be seated at her table. During the course of the meal he commented that he had seen her that day on the deck and had appreciated her warm smile. When she heard this she smiled again and commented, "Well, the reason I smiled was that when I say you I was immediately struck by your strong resemblance to my second husband." At this he perked up his ears and replied, "Oh, how many times have you been married?" She looked down at her plate, smiled demurely and answered, "Once." Grace is getting what you don't deserve."

POINT ONE -- WHAT IS GRACE

But grace is more involved than that.

Grace implies that there are a lot of undeserving people out there who are in need of grace! Not wanting to keep any of you who feel you have no need of grace, you may slip out any time; I'm sure you can get right into your favorite restaurant!

Now, for those of us who remain, Jesus tells us that by grace alone shall we approach the Lord and enter into Heaven! Heaven, the place you have to ask for

them to turn up the heat! My wife wants to go there, but she wants to take a blanket and her down slippers with her, just in case!

Grace is the love of Christ that brings us into that close fellowship with God, that acknowledges our weaknesses, that shares our strengths, that goes beyond what is expected! Grace is what takes us from our world to God's Kingdom!

Grace is God's response to our faith in Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior! When we believe in Jesus, we come into the family and God opens his heart to us with unexpected love!

POINT TWO -- GRACE BY FAITH NOT WORKS

For those of us seriously interested in getting into God's kingdom, maybe I should say a bit more about how we come by grace.

Let me make one thing painfully clear; we cannot earn it! I don't care how much money you give to the poor, how many hours you volunteer, how many people you help. You cannot earn God's grace! Grace is something that you can only be given -- like love!

That reminds me of a story about Oona Chapin (wife of the late-Charlie Chapin) and Carol Matthau (wife of Walter Matthau). Carol had been depressed over her husband's health after his heart attack and she mailed Oona an unhappy letter. Right away she got back a letter. When she opened the letter all the pages in the letter but one were blank and something wrapped in tissue fell out onto the bed. When she opened it her eyes almost popped out. It was an old, exquisite diamond bracelet. Absolutely priceless. But more than that, it was a touching gift. On the sheet Oona had written, "Darling, I couldn't bear your sounding so depressed, so I'm sending you this to cheer you up." When Carol told her closest local friend, Felicia Lemmon about it, she asked, "I mean what do you say? What can you say??" At which point Felicia shrugged. "Send her a wire," she suggested. "Still depressed. Keep 'em coming."

Grace is something which God sends to us, knowing that we deserve it no more than an unexpected, priceless diamond bracelet. But it is not given because it has been earned. It is given out of love!

As I said, grace comes from our faith. Not the kind of faith that inspires you to put that crazy radio station's bumper sticker on the back of your bumper because

they might call your number and you might win a prize. That's not faith, that's gambling.

Having faith is like the young soldier who was fighting in W.W.II. During the fighting he dived into a foxhole just ahead of some bullets. As he tried frantically to deepen the hole he unearthed something metal and brought up a silver crucifix, left by a former resident of that hole. A moment later an army chaplain dove head first into the hole. Holding out the crucifix, the soldier gasped, "Boy am I glad to see you! I know this thing works, but how do we get it started!" Faith is complete confidence in God's presence and ability to sustain you!

It is God's gift to you. But there is a catch. Like every other gift, the gift of grace can only be yours if you'll reach out and take it. Like the soldier reaching out to take the crucifix.

POINT THREE -- RESPONSE TO GRACE

But, once a person has it, what are we to do with it?

Clarence Jordan, in his famous "Cotton Patch Version" of Paul's Epistles presents our text this way:

"With Jesus Christ, God resurrected us and elevated us to the spiritual household. This clearly demonstrates forever the untold richness of his favor which he so kindly bestowed upon us in Christ Jesus. So again, I remind you, you have been rescued by his kind action alone, channeled through your faith. You didn't get this on your own; it was God's free gift. So nobody can brag that he did it himself. For we are his doing, made for the good deeds which God intended all along for us as Christians to practice."

When we receive grace we are to give grace, it's as simple as that.

Take for example Thomas Edison who was working on improving his first light bulb. When it was done he, to the astonishment of onlookers, handed the finished bulb to a quite young helper, who nervously carried it upstairs, step by step, to the vacuum machine. At the last moment, the boy dropped it. The whole team had to work another twenty-four hours to make a new bulb, but when Edison looked around for someone to carry it upstairs, he gave it to the same boy. The gesture probably changed that boy's life. Edison knew that more than a bulb was at stake.

When God forgives us our sins...we should forgive the sins of others. That's grace. When God shows us mercy...we should show mercy to others. That's grace.

CONCLUSION

God's grace calls us to give what we have been given, grace, to others.

Do you have it? Are you willing to give it away?

I pray that your answers are yes and yes!