

#12 Northside Natter

10 June 2020

Today I'm looking at **Grace**.

There are 160 mentions of grace in the bible. These are recorded instances where man found grace or favour in the sight of God, or other notable people. When we find grace in the eyes of another person, it's because we've done something to earn that favourable response. For example, I work hard, reach my set targets every month and I earn the boss's respect for how I run the department. Sometimes, I get a prize for being the highest earner for the group. That's a nice reward. However, the grace of God is not earned at all. No-one deserves the grace of God, yet he gives it freely to those who ask with a genuine heart (*in repentance and humility*).

The word grace, in the old testament is *hen* (Hebrew), but as used in the new testament is *charis* (Greek and pronounced *khar'-is*). The definition in the NAS New Testament Greek Lexicon for *charis* follows:

- *Grace which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness: grace of speech*
- *Goodwill, loving-kindness, favour of the merciful by which God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues*
- *What is due to grace is the spiritual condition of one governed by the power of divine grace and is the token or proof of grace with a benefit*
- *Thanks, recompense or reward*

We can see by the definition above, that God's grace is a benefit or reward. For what? Approaching God, acknowledging his existence, and wanting help to change our lives? What brings us to that point where we know we need intervention? Usually something like despair, or a pressing need to change the way our life is headed, or just an understanding that we can't do this by ourselves. We simply need help.

Once we acknowledge that we need help to live life, and turn to God as the only one who can do that for us, he steps in and does just that. For however long it takes to get us to salvation, he is ordering our steps to that very goal. But does this sound like something that is worth a reward? I don't think desperation has ever been reward-earning, yet that's exactly what God gives.

Why would God give us his saving grace when we don't deserve it? Honestly, we've made a total mess of our lives, doing things in our own stubborn and wilful way, and now we want him to step in and get us out of it? Many parents would say, "you made your bed, now lie in it!" Such is the philosophy of this world. But God does not subscribe to the philosophy of this world. I'm so glad he doesn't.

There is a parable in the new testament that will give us insight into what God's philosophy is. **Luke 15:11-32** is well worth reading and I encourage you to do so. This is a story also made famous through artists' renditions, like Pompeo Batoni and Rembrandt. It is a deeply

moving story of what is known as the Prodigal Son. The word *prodigal* means *wastefully extravagant* and the story clearly shows what that looks like.

A son, who takes his inheritance, leaves his father and brother to the hard labours of farming because he wants to live life his own way, without those burdens of responsibility. When his inheritance, friends and good times have petered out and left him destitute, starving and filthily clad, this young man reaches that point of desperation. He must do something or die. Going home seems his only option, yet how can he face his father again? The father he turned his back on. In complete humility and repentance, he made the long and arduous journey home. Once there, he threw himself down at his father's feet and begged for forgiveness, saying he would happily work as a servant, if only his father would take him in.

Did this young man's behaviour merit a reward? He got one all the same. His father's delight at the return of his son was so overwhelming that he killed the *fatted calf, called around all his friends and neighbours and celebrated this lost son's return. His father's joy was so strong that he set his best robe on the young man, put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. The son was undeservingly reinstated to his original status.

This father could have said to his son, "you made your bed, now lie in it." Instead, he chose to forgive, to show mercy and to allow love for his son to fill his entire being. He was overjoyed at the young man's return. This is how the Lord deals with us. Not through punishment for our wilfulness, or abandonment, but through love and mercy for our return to him. What was done before has been forgotten and wiped from memory. He gives us a fresh start. He gifts us with his saving grace. His favour is ever towards us.

This Godly favour leads us to salvation where we are given an even greater gift. We are filled with a goodly portion of the Holy Spirit. Our God never ceases to give us gifts. His love for us is evidenced **in** us. It shines through our lives. It radiates from everything we do. Its brightness cannot be hidden. People know immediately that something is different about us. They want what we have. As the definition of grace, above, says:

- *What is due to grace is the spiritual condition of one governed by the power of divine grace and is the token or proof of grace with a benefit*

We are envied for the lives we have. We are blessed with our heart's desires. We want for nothing we need. Even our trials and tribulations are borne more easily than those around us. God's love emanates from us and we share it with others generously. We can afford to be gracious when God has been so gracious towards us.

We're living the life, brothers and sisters.

**A fatted calf is an animal that is fed a special diet over time, to fatten it up and make its meat more flavoursome, and is kept for rare or very special occasions. It is highly prized.*