

THE GRACE OF GOD ... in the Gospel according to Isaiah
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(ISAIAH 30:15-33)

The grace of God has always been greater than human weakness. Man has ever been a changeable creature, for during the passing of time his habits, environment, and all things associated with him have undergone change. Yet in startling contrast has been his attitude toward God. Persistently and consistently throughout the ages, sinful man has resented divine intervention in his way of living; for man prefers to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, than to inherit the riches of grace for ever. This chapter provides a striking example of that fact.

The God Who Witnessed

The people were annoyed; the prophet was getting on their nerves. Their countenances were strained as they watched the young man in their midst. Conscious of their animosity, but determined to do his duty, Isaiah lifted up his voice and cried, "Woe to the rebellious children, said the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me . . . that walk to go down to Egypt . . . to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh . . . Woe . . . woe . . . woe to these people . . . For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not . . . ye said, No." Few readers will deny the fact that the ancient scene appears to be strangely modern. Long afterward, another Preacher uttered the same message: "How oft would I have gathered you . . . and ye would not" (Matt. 23: 37).

The God Who Waited

"And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him." If God rejected us as quickly as we reject Him, utter disaster would overwhelm us. The patience of God is a wonderful thing; and this alone will be responsible for the salvation of innumerable people. God still perseveres with sinners when all others have abandoned the task. I shall always remember the lady who appeared annoyed when certain people refused to accept Christ. Yet, when I asked how long it took her to decide, she answered, "Twenty-seven years." God had been very patient with her—she had need to be patient with others.

The God Who Worked

It does not necessarily follow that when God is waiting, He is inactive. "And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." Oftentimes ships are compelled to seek shelter by the force of a sudden gale. Similarly, there are times when God with great deliberation permits the seas of life to become tempestuous. Then, lives seem to be in jeopardy; but even in the unpleasant experiences of life, the purposes of God are fulfilled. Adversity and affliction are unwelcome guests, but the statement that God allows His ministering servants to remain within sight suggests that He waits to hurry to the rescue of any who ask for assistance. The fact that His voice sounds behind us

THE GRACE OF GOD ... in the Gospel according to Isaiah suggests that we are travelling in the wrong direction. God says, " Turn around, for this is the way."

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform:
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

The God Who Won

The prophetic nature of Isaiah's message presents a harbinger of hope. We know that this utterance will be fulfilled in Israel's destiny; but the same glorious thing can happen to others, for "God is gracious, and full of compassion." Says the prophetthe ornament of thy molten images of gold: thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth; thou shalt say unto it, Get thee hence. Then shall he give the rain ... in that day shall thy cattle feed in large pastures ... Ye shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the mighty One of Israel" (vv. 22-24; 29,30). The beginning and the end of this study provide a striking contrast. Had God abandoned His effort when the task was only half completed, it would have been a major tragedy. God sees the end from the beginning, and with great patience works toward the ultimate triumph. His grace is superb.

Grace there is my every debt to pay,
Grace to wash my every sin away;
Grace to keep me spotless day by day,
In Christ for me.

Just Waiting

During the year 1909 Dr. Wilbur Chapman 'visited Australia, and addressed 3000 men in the city of Melbourne. It has been said that his address that day was one of the greatest he ever delivered. The Southern Cross Mission Souvenir carried a condensed report of that memorable meeting, and I take the liberty of reproducing Dr. Chapman's final illustration.

" In the city of Chicago one of our young business men came home one day to find that his wife had lost her reason. She had been ailing for weeks and months. The climax came, and she had gone mad. He did what I should like to have done if the wife had been mine. He gave up his business to stand by her side and help her. The neighbors came to him and said, 'You must take your wife away. She frightens our children.' Having sufficient means, he moved to the edge of the city of Chicago and built a splendid house. The neighbors came again and said, 'The shrieks of your wife terrify our households, and you will have to move.' He led them politely to the door and said, ' My property begins at the iron fence, and my obligation is to my wife.' Then the old family doctor came to him and said, 'George, why don't you take your wife down to the mountains of Tennessee? She was born there. Let her dabble in the brook like a child; let her gather wild flowers; let her hear the birds sing, and maybe she will come back.'

" He took her South as suggested, and she dabbled in the brook like a child, cut flowers, and listened to the mountain birds; but the summer passed, and her reason did not return. The gentleman took her in his private car back to his Chicago home heartbroken. He carried her, so frail she was, in his

THE GRACE OF GOD ... in the Gospel according to Isaiah arms up to her room. He put her in bed, and she went to sleep. She slept for fifteen minutes. She had not had a natural sleep like it for a year. He scarcely breathed. She slept for an hour, and then he put his ear down to her lips to hear if her breathing was regular. She slept for two hours, then three, then all the night; and in the morning, just as the light came through the window and kissed her face, she opened her eyes and was herself again. Looking up into his face, she said, 'Where have I been?' 'Oh,' he replied, as he reached down to cover her face with kisses, 'you have been on a long journey, but you have come home.' 'But where have you been all the time?' she asked. He answered, 'All the time right by your side. Waiting, waiting, just waiting.'

I was only a small child when I first heard the story of the drowning of an Indian woman in America. With her son she was swept away in the flood waters', but she might have been saved if she had not been so terrified. The young man was a strong swimmer, and did all within his power to calm and save his mother. However, she was exceedingly frightened, and each time the water swept across her face, panicked and struggled desperately. Again and again the son regained his hold upon her clothing, but as the struggle continued, he began to lose his strength and was forced to leave her. With great difficulty he dragged himself ashore, where he wept and said, "Oh mother, I could have saved you, but you wouldn't let me."

The Greatness of Grace

Grace is one of the great words of Scripture, and preachers in every age have tried to define it. The dictionary declares that "grace" is divine favor; but Christians will readily acknowledge that this meagre definition is inadequate. Perhaps it is best expressed through an acrostic. G..R..A..C..E. Great Riches At Christ's Expense. The boundless mercy of God is now within reach of a sinner, for like Jacob's ladder, the Cross of Christ has made it possible for man to reach the hitherto inaccessible. The limitless wealth of the Eternal may now enrich impoverished people.

I cannot mention his name, for if I did he would be very displeased. He was a saint who loved helping others. He took a penniless boy off the street, fed and clothed him, and taught him the business. He became a father to the young fellow, and the years passed by. Then came the time when the young man separated himself from his friend, and within yards, opened another shop in direct opposition. Under-cutting prices, he stole the trade, and brought his "father" to the edge of ruin. However, the boy broke first, and was destitute. Then he was taken back into the old home and forgiven. That was grace-grace that had been placed in a human heart by the God of grace.

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