

1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-9

THE GRACE OF SALVATION

Grace, peace and mercy be unto you from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I generally start off each sermon by saying something like that. Those aren't just words that I use to warm up my voice. Those are words that Paul and John use to start many of their letters. They're not just a greeting, but they hold a deep meaning, a deep wish for a special blessing to be placed upon those who are reading the letters or hearing a sermon.

Yet, Paul starts off this letter by first establishing his credentials, because the letter to the Corinthians is a letter to a congregation that's involved in all sorts of sins. He eventually gets to the greeting in verses three and four saying: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus".

Then for the rest of our text Paul begins to tell the Corinthians what it means to receive God's grace. Paul doesn't even expand upon the mercy or the peace, but for now he just sticks with God's grace. And so that's what I'll do for you today. What is it that I'm hoping that God will bless you with when I say to, "Grace peace and mercy be unto you,"? At least what am I hoping that the grace of God will do for you. We'll have to talk about peace and mercy another day.

For starters let's begin with an overview of what Paul's saying and expand upon the opening of his letter from there. For starters Paul says that he's writing to people who are sanctified in Christ Jesus. Then he makes his greeting of grace from God to the people. He tells the people that this grace from God was given to them in Christ Jesus, and this grace enriched them in every way. You are enriched with spiritual gifts. Through these gifts Jesus sustains you guiltless until He comes back. And remember Paul begins by saying that God is doing this and then he ends by saying that God is faithful so that you can trust that He will do this.

Now let's think of this not as a letter written to a troubled congregation of Corinth, but rather as a blessing being pronounced upon this congregation here in Mitchell. What's this grace that God uses me to bless you with? And if you find yourself thinking, 'He can't do that, he's only a pastor!', then think on these words from God.

The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to Aaron and his sons". Those were the priests back then, and the pastors today. Say to them, "Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. So shall they put My name

upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them” (Numbers 6:23-27). When any pastor speaks the words of God to you, you are being blessed.

So, onto how you’re being blessed through today’s reading. Firstly, let’s start off with the assurance of your status that you’re sanctified in Christ Jesus and what that means. To be sanctified means to be set apart as sacred and holy for God. Later in this letter Paul tells the Corinthians, “you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Cor. 6:11). In Baptism you were washed, given the gift of the Holy Spirit and set apart as a child of God.

Too many people, even from our own congregation, have forgotten their baptisms. We all need this reminder so that we may return to the promises of God in our baptisms, because a baptism without faith is dead. Come back to this promise that you are a child of God, and stop walking away from God.

Come back to the church and weekly receive the blessings of God starting with the grace of God. What’s the grace of God. A simple confirmation explanation is to take each letter of the word and say: God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. But that needs more of an explanation. What is God’s Riches? What is Christ’s Expense? We’ll expand upon that in the sermon.

Paul told the Romans that “the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one-man Jesus Christ abounded for many.” (5:15). The grace of Jesus overcomes the sin of Adam. From Adam we inherit original sin, and even without our actual sins this sinful nature deserves to be burned up in the wrath of God. Yet God freely gives us His grace to overcome this sinful nature. So, if sin leads to punishment and hell for all, what does grace lead to? Paul tells Titus that, “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people” (2:11).

That’s it. That’s what we’re looking at today. Instead of punishment for sin we’re looking at the offer of salvation for all people. Why wouldn’t you want to be here to receive that blessing. Some Christians believe that once we’re saved we’re always saved, but Scripture is clear that salvation can fade away, and the longer a person stays away from the church the more chance they face of losing their salvation. Paul clearly tells some Galatians that they “have fallen away from grace” (5:4). He also warns the Colossians saying, “**if indeed** you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard” (1:23). As great as it is people do fall away from God’s Gospel of Grace.

And so you need to keep being reminded of this grace that was given to you in Christ Jesus, and which enriched you in Jesus in every way. Paul speaks here of spiritual gifts. To the Ephesians he says that “the God and

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (1:3). Why would you want to give that up? Yet, I admit just saying every spiritual blessing is a bit vague. Of course, it would be hard for Paul to list every spiritual gift, but he does mention one: guiltless.

To be guiltless is to be blameless, sinless, beyond reproach and without fault. Can you imagine that God sees you that way? Do you see yourself that way? Paul told the Colossians, “You, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, [Jesus] has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before [God]” (1:21-22).

Remember that in Baptism Jesus takes all of your sins upon Himself and you receive all of His righteousness. Part of that righteousness is the guiltless nature of Jesus, and since we’ve now progressed to the death of Jesus let’s look at His guiltless nature there.

In the gospels of Luke and John we find a three-fold statement by Pontius Pilate that he finds no guilt in Jesus. “Pilate said to [Jesus], "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in Him.” (John 18:38). “Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I am bringing Him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in Him.” (John 19:4). “When the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him.” (John 19:6).

What was the point then of this crucifixion of a guiltless man? It was so that you may be declared guiltless, not before people, but before God your heavenly Father. That’s what the grace of God does to you when you hear it in faith – it makes you guiltless.

Here in our text and later on in this letter Paul assures us that God is faithful. God will do this. Paul says, “God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” (1 Cor. 10:13). The temptations to sin, especially that of turning away from the church and God are going to come, but when they do come God will help you through them.

Yet when we reject God’s help and we do sin “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Each Sunday in many and various ways you are being placed back onto that path of eternal salvation and guiltless standing before God Almighty. “Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.” (1 Tim. 1:2). Amen.