“Saving Grace”, Good News About Grace - Part 1 of 7 – January 5, 2014 at SBC Psalm 145:8

Everything, about the American way of life, . . . teaches us, that you get, what you earn, in life, . . . that, there is no free lunch, . . . you make your bed, . . . and, then, you lay in it. In America, we are very much aware, of the values, of competition and winning, . . and, we know what it means, to work hard, and use elbow grease.

We value effort, and sweat. We tell people, "You get, what you deserve, in life", . . . and, "If you want to, make something of your life, . . . it's up, to you."

This is called, . . . the American, work ethic. The only problem, with the American work ethic, is God doesn't operate, . . . on the American work ethic. It makes it difficult, many times, for us to relate to God, . . . because, we're in this driven, work mentality.

The problem, is Psalm 145:8 – *"God is gracious, and compassionate, slow to anger, and rich in love."*  God is a gracious God. That means, He loves, to be gracious, . . . to you. God loves, to bless people, . . . who don't, . . . deserve it. That's, His nature. Aren't you glad, for that? I'm glad, that God blesses people, who don't deserve it.

You can't understand, the Christian life, . . . unless, you understand grace. It is the heart, of our faith. It is the heart, of our relationship, to God. When you understand grace, . . . you're going to feel, closer to God. The more you understand grace, the more you're going to be drawn to God, the more you're going to love God,

. . . the more you're going to be grateful to God. It is by, that system of grace, that God brings us, . . to Himself.

Today, we're beginning, a series, called **"Good News, About Grace"**. What is grace? Grace is a multi-faceted diamond. There are many, aspects to it. There is, . . no single definition, to describe, . . what grace, is all about.

One definition of grace, is "God's love, . . in action." Another definition: "God giving me, what I need, . . . not, what I deserve." Another, really neat one is, "Grace is the face, God wears, . . . when He looks at, my failures."

You need to understand, the difference between, . . . grace and mercy. Mercy, is when God . . . **doesn't give us**, what we do deserve -- punishment. Grace, is when God gives us, . . . what we **don't deserve** --blessing.

Many Christians, . . . think, . . . they understand grace. You are saved, by grace. You've known that, for many years. But, I've discovered, that even many Christians, although they know they're saved by grace, . . . they sure don't act like it. In fact, they spend most of their life, thinking and acting, . . like we're saved, by works.

For many of you, even though you know, you're saved by grace, and you don't get into heaven, by doing good, your entire life, . . . is built on pleasing God, . . by trying, to be perfect. And, you think God, . . . is some unpleasable parent, up there in the sky, . . . with a clipboard and pen, watching your every move -- "That was good, . . . that, was bad" – and, you think you have to, . . . earn, . . . God's approval.

You think, if you do a certain number of good works, God's going to say, "Good girl, . . good guy! You got it." And, if you don't do those things, . . . God says, "Forget it! You're worthless." You're saved by grace, . . . but, you're actually, . . . living, . . . by works.

When you, . . . really understand grace, . . . it's going to bring so much joy, to your life. It is the most liberating thing, in the world. You can be a Christian, for twenty, thirty years, and never really learn, . . . to live by grace.

So, we're going to do, a series on it.

My goal, is that through this series, . . . you will not, just, understand grace, . . . but, you will experience it, . . . you will feel it, . . . you will enjoy, . . . the grace of God, in your life. Because, it does bring, . . . so, much joy.

\*\*\*\* Today, I want us to start, with the foundation, . . which is, Saving Grace. For many of you, this will just be, a review. You understand, Saving Grace. But, you cannot, build a structure, without the foundation. And, this is, . . . foundational. It's good, to periodically, . . sit back, and remind ourselves, what a good deal we got, . . . when we received, . . . the grace of God.

Today, I want us to look at five aspects, . . . of Saving Grace. How is it, you know for sure, . . . you're going to heaven, . . . when you die. This is built around, . . . an acrostic -- G.R.A.C.E.

**G – GOD'S GIFT TO ME.** Romans 3:24 – *"All of us, need to be made right, with God, by His grace, . . . which is a free gift, through Jesus Christ."* It's a, free gift. Because, of this American work ethic, . . . many people think, that they're saved, by works, . . . by earning, their way to heaven, . . . by being good enough, that God says, "OK, come on in."

If you were to ask, a hundred people, . . . "How do you get to heaven?", . . . you'd get a lot of different answers.

But, basically, they would all be like this, "You've got to earn, your way, to heaven. You'd hear things like, . . . "The way you get to heaven, is you try to be good, and do your best", . . . or, "Work real hard, at being good, and just try to be a good, moral person", . . . or, "Do more good things in life, than, you do bad things in life, and if your good pile, is higher than your bad pile, God's going to say, `You're a good guy. Come on in.'" It's all based, on works, . . . not grace.

You need to understand, that God says here, . . . that, salvation, is absolutely free. You don't work, . . for a gift. It's a, free gift. God says salvation . . is absolutely free. You can't earn it, you can't buy it, you can't work for it.

This is the fundamental difference, between Christianity, . . . and, every other religion. Every other faith, every other belief system, . . . I don't care if it's Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, etc. You can summarize, . . every religion, in one word. Of all the other religions, . . Christianity is the only religion, that's built on grace.

That says, God just, gives you, salvation. You don't do anything, . . . to earn it. Every other religion, . . is based on works, and you can summarize them . . in one word -- "**do**". There are certain things you do, in order to gain, God's approval. Each system, . . . is different. One religion says, do "these" things, . . . another, "these" things. You do certain things, in order to gain bliss, gain heaven, gain God's approval. It's always something . . you have to do. Rules, regulations, rituals, etc.

On the other hand, if you were to summarize Christianity, in one word, . . . it's the word, . . "**done**". It's already, been done, . . . for you. It was done, . . . on the cross, . . . by Jesus Christ. He paid for, . . your salvation. He paid for, . . . your sins. It's already, . . . been done.

If someone were to ask you, . . "What can I do, to be saved?" You could, just say, "You're . . too late!" It may, kind of shock them. You could, say this, "You're about 2000 years, . . . too late! What needed to be done, for your salvation, . . . has already been done, . . . and, you can't do anything, about it."

Jesus Christ, already, did it. He paid, for your salvation, on the cross, . . and, now, it's a free gift, to you. That's why, when He was hanging on the cross, He stretched out His arms, and one of the things He said was, . . . *"It is finished."* He didn't say, "I am finished", . . because, He wasn't. He's still alive, today. He resurrected Himself.

He said, *"It is finished."* What's the "it"? Your salvation. The plan to provide grace, . . . for every person, who needs it. It's finished. God says, "Here it is. It's a, . . . free gift."

There isn't anything you can do, . . . to save yourself. You just accept, God's free gift, of grace. I'm not getting to heaven, based on, what I do. I'm getting to heaven, based on, what has already been done, for me, by Christ. That's the greatest gift, . . . you're ever, going to be offered. You're never, going to get a better deal, than that.

**R – RECEIVE BY FAITH.** God's gift, is received, by faith. Ephesians 2:8-9 – *"For it is by grace, that you have been saved, through faith, and, this is not, from yourselves. It is the gift, of God. Not of works, so that no one, can boast."* Faith, is the key, . . . that, unlocks the door, . . . to heaven.

It's just, a gift, . . . but, you have to receive it, . . . by faith. If I have a gift, for you, and say, "Here's this gift, for you. It's $100. Come and get it." It will just sit there, . . . unless, you come, and receive it, . . . by faith. You have to, have faith, . . . that, I'm going to, give it to you.

He says, because salvation, is a gift, . . . you can't brag, about it. If you could work, your way to heaven, do you realize, how miserable, it would be, in heaven? Everybody, would be bragging, . . . about how, they got there. We'd all be trying to, "one-up" each other, with great stories, . . of what great people, we were, on earth.

God says, "It's a grace gift, your salvation. I just give you, forgiveness, for free. I give you, heaven . . for free." So, what do you do, with a gift. You can't, brag about it. You can only accept it, and be grateful for it.

Romans 4:16 – *"People receive God's promise, by having faith.*  *This happens, so that the promise, can be a free gift."* Salvation, isn't based on, my performance. It's based on, . . . God's promise. It's not based on, . . my goodness. It's based on, God's grace. I'm getting to heaven, not based on my merit, . . but, God's mercy.

That's why, He gets all the credit, . . . all the glory. There's nothing, I can do. It's a free gift, that's received, by faith. The Bible, is full of stories, illustrating the principle, of grace. There are, many of them. One of my favorites, is in the Old Testament. 2 Samuel 9, is a story, of a young disabled boy, . . named Mephibosheth.

Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan, the grandson of King Saul, in the Old Testament. Remember the story, of David and Saul. David was going, to be the king. Saul was the current king, and Saul was jealous, of David. So, most of David's life, Saul was trying to kill him. He chased him, . . all over the countryside.

David spent most of his time, hiding from Saul, . . . avoiding being killed, out of jealousy. But, David never, . . retaliated. In fact, he became best friends, with King Saul's son, named Jonathan. They made a secret covenant, . . . that, if either of them ever died, . . . they would take care, of each other's family.

Later on, both Saul and Jonathan, were killed, in battle. And, David, became the king. All of Saul's relatives, immediately, were in fear, . . . thinking, "David, who King Saul has been trying to kill, all of his life, is now in control, and he's going to kill, all of us." They all tried, to escape, and hide.

One of them, was the son of Jonathan, named Mephibosheth. As the nurse, was carrying the young boy out, in the escape, she dropped him. His legs were broken, . . . and, he became a paraplegic. So, here was this young disabled boy, living in fear, frightened for his life, that the man who was now king, would retaliate against him.

One day, David says, "Is there anybody still alive, in Saul's household, that I can show kindness to?" They said, "Yes, there is. There's one little kid. He's a disabled little boy, named Mephibosheth. He cannot walk." David said, "Bring him, to me." You can imagine, . . . the fear, in Mephibosheth's heart.

Here's the king, inviting him to the court, . . . and, he's thinking, "I'm going to be killed, executed. It's over. It's done." But, to his surprise, when he arrived, David said, "I'm going to take you in, Mephibosheth, and make you, a part of my family. I want you to live here, in the palace, for the rest of my life. I'm going to pay, all your bills. I'm going to meet, all your needs. You are to sit at my table, each night, and dine with me, and I'm going to treat you, . . . just like, you're one of my own sons." That's, grace.

The Bible says, that God comes to us, and we're broken, . . . we're disabled, in areas, of our lives, . . . crippled, in some areas. Our emotions, are crippled, or other things are happening in our lives, . . and God comes, and says, "I'm going to bring you, into My family. I want you, to sit at My table. I'm going to treat you, like royalty, . . . one of My own, . . . simply, out of My grace."

\*\*\*\* Remember the story, that Jesus told, . . . of the prodigal son. There was a man. who had. two sons. One of them, got a little anxious, and was independent spirited. He came and said, "Dad, I want you to give me, . . . my half, of the inheritance." And, the dad said, ok. He split the future inheritance, and gave half, to the one son, right then, and the kid took off. He skipped town, went over to Jerusalem, . . . started partying.

He's having, a great time -- wine, women and song, living it up, . . blowing, all the money. One day, he runs out of money, and there's no ATM's, in Jerusalem. He hits bottom, morally, spiritually, financially -- every way, possible. In fact, he ended up, having to work, feeding pigs in a pig sty, . . . and, he was so hungry, that, he would eat the food, . . . that, the pigs were eating.

And, Jewish people, don't eat pork, . . so, that was about as low, as you could go -- living with a pig, and eating a pig's food. Culturally, he couldn't get, more degraded. One day, while he's in this mess, the younger son says, "What am I doing!?! My father's servants, are treated better, than this. I'm going, to go home. I'm going to go, back to Dad, . . . and, say, `Dad, I've blown it. I've made, a mistake. I'm sorry.

I don't deserve, to be called, . . your son. Just make me, one of your hired servants, and I will work for you, as a servant, not as a son, the rest of my life, because, your servants, are treated better than I was, out in the world.'"

The story goes, that as the prodigal son, was coming home, the father saw him, from a long way off. It says, he ran out, to greet the boy. He grabs him, in a big bear hug, and hugs him, and embraces him. He didn't wait for him, to get cleaned up, to get that smell, of the pigs, off him. He hugs him, and says, "Bring out, the royal robes. Let's, party! My son, . . . has come home." That's, . . . grace. The kid deserved, condemnation. The kid deserved, to be judged, rejected, a lecture from the dad, saying, "I told you so!" But, instead, he's received with love, unconditional love. That is the grace of God, . . and, it's received, by faith.

**A – AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE.** God doesn't, . . . play favorites. Regardless, of your background, . . . regardless of your status, regardless of your sin. It doesn't matter, whether you've been, a religious person, . . . or, a non-religious person, . . . or, you have any religious background, at all. Rom. 14:16 – *"The promise, is not only for those people, that live under the law, of Moses. It is for anyone, who lives with faith, like Abraham."*

Who are these people, . . who live under the law, of Moses? The Jews. The Jewish people, were given the law, of Moses. Moses, was their leader. They were given, the ways of God, to do the right thing, . . . before, the rest of us, were given them.

Have you ever thought about, why the Jews, were called, God's chosen people? Does God love them, . . . more than, He loves, the rest of us? No. They were chosen, . . . for a purpose. They were chosen, to spread the message, to everybody else, . . . to tell the world, that there is one, true God. That's, what they were, chosen for. They were kind of like, . . . the missionaries, to the rest of us.

Now, God has taken that task, and given it to the church, . . . which includes Jews, Gentiles, and everybody else, who put their faith, in Christ. God says, it's available to anybody, . . . who opens up, their heart, in faith. Romans 10:13 – *"Everyone, who calls on the name of the Lord, will be saved."*

It doesn't say, only really good people, will be saved, . . . if they call on, the name of the Lord, really religious people, really smart people. No. It says, . . . anybody. Anybody, . . who calls on, the name of the Lord, . . . who has faith, in the grace of God, . . . will be saved.

The sad thing is, that even though, many people know, . . that God offers His grace, His unconditional gift to us, they still try, . . . to work their way, to heaven. They think, that something in their lives, is making them, good enough, . . . that, they don't need, to receive God's gift of grace, . . . through Christ.

You may have done, some really nifty things in life, . . . but, if you think, they're going to get you, into heaven, forget it. Heaven is perfect, . . . and, you're not. The only way, you're going to get in, . . is by receiving, God's gift to you, receiving it by faith, . . . which is available, to every person.

**C – GRACE COMES THROUGH CHRIST.** John 1:17 – *"The law, was given through Moses, . . . but, grace and truth, came through, Jesus Christ."* Why, through, . . . Jesus Christ? Why is Jesus Christ, the only way, to heaven? Why not, Buddha? Why not, somebody else? Why, . . . Jesus Christ?

Because, He paid the price, of admission. He's already paid, for your salvation. Nobody else, . . . has done that. On the cross, . . . He paid, for your sins. Grace is free, no doubt about that. But, it is not, . . . cheap. It cost, Jesus Christ, . . . His life. He paid, . . . for, your ticket.

The law, tells me, when I do wrong. It says, "You blew it!" But, Grace says, "Here's how, to get back, on track. You're, . . . forgiven. Let's get going, . . . in the right direction."

Romans 5:15 – *"Many people, have received God's gift of life, . . . by the grace, of the one man, Jesus Christ."*

In the Bible, the favorite description, for someone who has grace, who's accepted God's grace, . . . the favorite description, for a believer, . . . is the term, . . "in Christ." That phrase, "in Christ", is used over 120 times, in the New Testament. It refers to somebody, who has found salvation, . . . through, the grace of God, being in Christ.

Let me explain it, like this. This “bulletin”, represents my life, . . and, let's let the Bible, represent Jesus Christ. In my life, there are a lot of things, I've done wrong, . . that disqualify me, to live in a perfect place, like heaven.

There are things in my life, that have ripped up my life, the things that I have done wrong, the things that I'm ashamed of, that I don't want anybody else, to know about in my past, and I wish I could do them over. There are things, that have really hurt me deeply, where I've hurt others, and they've hurt me. Sins, that I've committed, thoughts I've thought, actions that have been hurtful, to other people.

So, I look at that messed up, broken, damaged, scared life, and I think, "There's no chance, of this, . . . getting into heaven. It's certainly, not perfect." But, the Bible says, that Jesus Christ, takes my life, with all the scars, with all the tatters, with all the mistakes, with all the guilty things in my life, . . . and, the Bible says, that when I come to Jesus Christ, and I say, . . . "Jesus Christ, I open my life up to You, and I want to accept, Your free gift, of salvation", . . . then, God puts me, . . . in Christ.

When I'm in Christ, can you see, my imperfections? Can you see the things, that I'm ashamed of? Can you see the things, that have ripped up my life? All you can see, . . when I'm in Christ, . . . is Christ. When God takes my life, and all the pieces of it, that are kind of messed up -- really messed up – and, He puts me, in the life, of Christ. I get into heaven, . . . on Christ's ticket. When He looks at me, with eyes of grace, He only sees, . . . the perfection, . . . of Jesus Christ.

Galatians 2:21 – *"Don't treat, the grace of God, as meaningless. For if we could be saved, by keeping the law, then, there was no need, for Christ, to die."* If you could be saved, and could get to heaven, on your own merits, . . . the cross, was a waste. If you could have gotten to heaven, without any help from God, Jesus wouldn't have come, and died on the cross, for you. But, there was, . . . no, other way. You're either, going to get into heaven, . . . in Christ, . . . or, you're not going.

It's a, free gift. You just, accept it, in faith. Grace is all that God does for me, because of what Jesus Christ did for me, . . . on the cross. Another acrostic of GRACE, is . . . God's-Riches-At-Christ's-Expense.

**E – IT IS EXTENDED THROUGHOUT ETERNITY.** Romans 6:23 – *"The wages of sin is death, . . . but, the free gift of God, is eternal life, through Christ Jesus, our Lord."* The results of God's grace, are going to go on and on, forever. Eternal life, is one of the benefits, of grace. Eternal life. You could say, that grace is the gift, . . . that, keeps on giving. God saves the best for last, . . . and, the best, is yet, to come. With Jesus Christ, it just keeps getting, better and better. The Bible says, the free gift of God, . . . is eternal life, in heaven.

What is heaven, . . . really, . . . going to be like? The Bible tells us, that heaven is going to be, . . . a wonderful place where we're free, from all pain, all suffering, all sadness, all sorrow, all grief, all depression, all loneliness, etc. It’s going to be, . . . an awesome place! And, it is, . . . the gift, of God.

There's only, one catch: You have to, accept it. If you get a gift, and you don't unwrap it, . . it's a worthless gift. You need to realize, that Jesus Christ, makes this grace gift, available to everybody, . . . but, it is also, customized, specifically for your life, . . . because, God knows exactly, what you need.

You're never, going to get a better deal, . . then, we've talked about, today. Open your life, to the grace of God, . . . through, Jesus Christ. It's your only hope, . . . and, it's free.

You may, be thinking, "If I come to God, . . . with all the ways, I've messed up my life, God's going to give me, some big lecture. I'm going to, feel condemned. I'm going to, feel judged. In fact, I'm not going to, feel good, at all. If I come to Christ, I'll just get all this rebuke, and reproof, and feel bad, . . because, I know how many times, I've blown it, . . . and, God's going to say, `I told you so!'"

If you think that, . . . you're sadly mistaken. That's what grace, is all about. Jesus says, "Come to Me!"

In the Bible, there's the story of a woman, . . . who had numerous, moral failures. She had, what you'd call, . . . a reputation. One day, some religious leaders, actually caught her, in the act, . . . and, they brought her to Jesus, and threw her on the ground, in front of Christ, . . . expecting Him, to condemn her.

"What are you going to do, about this woman, who's violated, all kinds of principles, of God?" Jesus defended, her dignity. He protected her. In front of the whole crowd, He said, "All right. Anybody, who's here, . . without sin, . . . you can cast, the first stone."

Of course, since there was no one in the crowd, who was perfect, . . they all began, to slowly, walk away. Then, in the privacy, of that **one on one encounter**, . . . Jesus looked at this woman, who was filled with guilt, and said, . . . "Where are, . . . your condemners." She said, "They've all gone, Lord."

Jesus said to her, two very profound things, *"Neither, do I condemn you. Now go, and sin, no more."* That's all He said. No long lecture. No big lesson. Then, Jesus said, . . . *"I didn't come, to condemn the world. I came, to save it."* If you are expecting, to come to Christ, and be filled with a whole bunch of condemnation, . . . you missed the boat. You haven't, heard the story. You don't, . . . understand grace.

Isaiah 30:18 – *"The Lord longs, to be gracious, to you."* God wants to, be gracious . . to you. It is His nature, to bless, . . . undeserving people. He's waiting for you, to accept, . . . His grace. He enjoys, being gracious. He's not, . . . mad at you. His heart's, broken for you, . . . but, He wants you, . . . to come home.

\*\* Does grace, just mean, that I can accept God's gift, and keep on living any way, . . that, I want to?, thumbing my nose, to God? Of course not. No, He said, "I don't, condemn you." And, then He says, "Now just stop, doing it. Go, and sin, no more. Let Me, help you, change." He's not, saying, "Just keep on doing, whatever's destroying your life, whatever's opposing the laws of God." He just said, . . *"Go, and sin, no more."*

God's amazing grace, is available, right here, and right now. Today. That's why, He brought you, here. You're not here, by accident. If you have never received, . . that, saving grace gift, . . what are you waiting on?

SAVING GRACE, Good News About Grace - Part 1 of 7

Psalm 145:8 - *"The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love."*

WHAT IS GRACE?

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Rom. 3:24 - *"All of us need to be made right with God by His grace, which is a free gift, through Jesus Christ."*

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Ephesians 2:8-9 – *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith --- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."*

Rom. 4:16a – *"People receive God's promise by having faith. This happens so the promise can be a free gift."*

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Romans 4:16b – *"The promise is not only for those people that live under the law of Moses. It is for anyone who lives with faith like Abraham."*

Romans 10:13 – *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

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John 1:17 – *"The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."*

Romans 5:15b – *"... many people have received God's gift of life by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ."*

Galatians 2:21 – *"[Don't] treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if we could be saved by keeping the law, then there was no need for Christ to die."*

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Rom. 6:23 – *"The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Isaiah 30:18 – *"The Lord longs to be gracious to you."*

How will I Respond to God's Saving Grace?

The rest of the series:

Restoring Grace - How God wipes out guilt and helps you start over.

Sustaining Grace - How God gives you the power to keep on going.

Healing Grace - How God does miracles in your life.

Liberating Grace - How to break free from perfectionism.

Assuring Grace - How to defeat your doubts.

Offering Grace - How to extend God's grace to others.