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Ephesians 1:1 – 1:2 ~ Grace to you

For those of you who weren't here last week, prior to Tim sharing I announced that I was about to start a series on the book of Ephesians. What we're going to do is just work right through the entire book from chapter 1:1 to chapter 6:24.

There will be some verses that we go over somewhat quickly, and there will be some verses where we linger for quite some time. For instance, we're going to just look at the very first word of Paul's greeting to the church – "grace", and we're going to camp there for some time.

I would suspect that much of the body of Christ has some mental concept of the meaning or reality of that word. Its one of those words you hear thrown around so much in the body of Christ that it virtually means nothing more than "God bless you" after you sneeze. Or maybe slightly more than that, grace, in many minds, is anything that God does that we don't deserve.

How did you get that new car? Oh, just by the grace of God. How did you pass that test? "Well, by the grace of God". No. That is not right. Grace is real. Grace is fantastic. But grace has nothing to do with you stumbling across nice things in the natural arena.

And in saying that I am not saying that God may not of helped you on your test or helped you in your finances. That may be kindness. That may be provision. But that is not grace. Grace is a very specific reality having to do with a very specific relationship. Grace is the nature and reality of your relationship with God in Christ. And we, brothers and sisters, must grow up in our knowledge of grace.

The word grace has been robbed of its meaning because we apply it to everything. The unbeliever out there almost gets hit by a bus and then says "boy, I survived by the skin of my teeth". But when the Christians almost gets hit by the bus we say "I survived by the grace of God". But we mean the same thing. Grace means "skin of my teeth". No.

What I want to talk about today is that Paul, in the opening of this letter to the Ephesians is wishing upon them a greater and greater experience of what is the true grace of God. Paul is wishing them both the experience of grace and the experience of peace. Both of them can be misapplied by the natural mind. But both of them are pregnant with spiritual reality that is ours in Christ.

In fact, you'll find that Paul begins every single one of his epistles with this opening blessing. Grace to you and peace. A couple times he throws in "mercy". But its generally "Grace to you and peace". Now, it is essential to know that He is not hoping that God would cause them to get a greater quantity of grace and peace. He is hoping, expecting, desiring, that those who have come into the reality and relationship of grace and peace would come to know themselves there, live there,

abide there, live out from there, be defined by all that grace and peace mean. He is hoping for a greater measure working in them, a greater working of grace.

Grace isn't a feeling. Peace isn't a feeling. Grace and peace are part of what you've come to in salvation. And grace is the nature and reality of relating to God in Christ. In other words, **grace is the way that God relates to you in Christ. And you grow in grace when you grow in your spiritual understanding and actual experience of that relationship.**

Grace is a word that is often used in contrast to the Law. What was the Law? The Law was God's righteousness, character, nature, holiness and perfection demanded of your flesh through written words. And it was impossible. Grace isn't just God forgiving you for falling short of that. What is grace? Grace is God's righteousness, character, nature, holiness, and perfection given to you and working in and through you through the very life of His Son.

Do you see the difference? The Law looked at you and found you guilty and liable and said "thou shalt die". God looked at you by grace and said "its true, thou shalt die, but in my Son thou shalt live. And all that my Son is, shall be yours". Oh, the riches of grace. And how do you know and live in grace? By faith. We looked at that a few weeks ago. Grace is accessed by faith (the mind of Christ, the understanding of the spirit, the knowledge of God, the renewed mind, etc). But that's off our topic.

I don't know about you, but when I often hear grace preached, I hear about how wonderful it is that God pardon's our shortcomings. But friends, do you understand that grace isn't God just pardoning your shortcomings? Grace is God destroying the source of your shortcomings and giving you all that Christ is. Grace is a relationship with God where Christ Himself has been made all things unto you. Oh, and its bigger than that.

Its actually much bigger than that. I'm just scratching the surface here. Grace is not only the end of Adam by the blood of the cross. Grace is then the death of Christ working in you to bring a manifest end to all that is sin, to all that misses the mark, to all that falls short of the glory of God, to all that transgresses the covenant that you are in. Grace is God bringing an end in you to all that He has put away. And grace is God letting you live in and by the one who is the righteousness of God.

Somebody asked me a question in the Colossians class the other day. They said that they always heard of grace as something that was more or less reactionary. When you fall short, God hands out a bit of grace. No, that is not right. Let me tell you something. **If sin is something that you understand yourself to do on occasion, then grace is something then you will think you need on occasion. But if sin is something that you are, then grace must be something you live by.**

I realize that there is a verse that speaks of us approaching the throne of grace and receiving it in time of need. But that is not a quantitative hand-out. That is an ever increasing experience, understanding, realization of a grace in which you already stand, and every minute is our time of need. You might experience grace in a particular situation, but it's a grace in which you have already stood. We have to understand that we are that which falls short, and so it is only in and by grace, the life of another, that we can serve God.

Let us never forget that Jesus says "apart from me you can do nothing" , and "the flesh profits nothing", and Paul says "there is none who does righteous, not even one", and "in my flesh dwells no good thing". This is the reality of the nature that works in the sons of disobedience. Grace is first the punishment and adjudication of that nature, and then the working in us of that very death, and then the offering through us to God the very fragrance of His Son.. And it is therefore Christ Himself working in us that renders us able to serve God. All things are by grace. We serve God by the grace that works in us, or we don't serve Him at all.

(1Co 15:10) But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

(Eph 3:7) Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

(2Th 1:12) That the name (nature, life, character) of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

(Heb 12:28) Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: 29. For Our God is a consuming fire.

What does this fire consume? All that is not of grace, but rather by flesh under law. God has one thing that we can bring to him on His altar? The death of the old. What was the one thing in the old testament that God received of the animals that were brought to die? Only the fragrance of their destruction. A sweet aroma unto the Lord. Were any of them good enough to live? No, they were good enough to die.

Every animal that was brought to that altar represented yet another time and place where Israel broke covenant with God. Now we're not going to get into this right now. If you want to get more into this, come to the Friday night meetings where we're dealing with the blood, or the Saturday meeting where we've been dealing a bit with the priesthood. But grace wasn't just the blood on the door. Grace wasn't just baptism through the sea. Grace was God applying blood to every transgression and offense of covenant. Some of you are following me.

Regardless, Grace doesn't say "Ok, Jason because Jesus died instead of you, now you can live.". No! Forever erase that from your mind. Grace says "Ok Jason because Jesus brought you into His death, now He can be your life". "Because you are justified by death, now you can walk in the newness of His resurrected life".

Grace is not escaping judgment. Don't ever let anybody tell you that. Grace is bearing judgment in the Lamb, so that the risen Lamb can be your life. Grace is not God letting you live. Grace is God letting you bear His Son's death, and subsequently abide in His life. Grace is not a pardon of Adam. "Oops, pardon me God, I think I may have committed an offense.". "No, daughter...you are the offense, but grace will justify you through death, and save you through my risen life".

Look with me at Romans

(Rom 5:10) For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God **by the death of his Son**, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

(Rom 6:3) Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised up from *the* dead by the glory of the Father; even so we also should walk in newness of life.

(Col 2:11) in whom also you are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² buried with Him in baptism, in whom also you were raised

(Rom 7:4) So, my brothers, you also have become dead to the law by the body of Christ so that you should be joined to Another, to Him raised from *the* dead, that we should bring forth fruit to God.

Grace! A death we couldn't die. A life that we couldn't live. And fruit that grows in and through us by this one to whom we've been joined. So that all we do, all we are, is by the grace of God.

Its bigger than we thought. Its bigger than we can think. But in the church today grace means everything from God's supposed leniency to a prayer we say before meals. "Make sure to say grace before you eat that!".

When I was a child somebody tried to explain grace to me like this. They said "imagine that you are standing on a road and a bus is heading towards you full speed. Well, Jesus sees you in that predicament, runs out on the road, pushes you to safety, and then He gets smashed by the bus instead of you".

But you see, that story is all wrong. It was a nice little story to hear around a campfire at Christian summer camp when I was eight, but its simply not the truth. What they should have told us was this: "Imagine you are standing on the side of the road watching Jesus about to be hit by a bus. Then suddenly, Jesus runs over to you, picks you up, takes you back with him into the road, and you both get smashed together. Then, HE is raised from the dead, looks down at you, and says "if you want to live, I will now be your resurrection and your life".

I know that doesn't sound as nice as the first story. But unless you bear His death, you cannot bear His resurrection.

But grace is this unspeakable relationship that you have with God through the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son. First working in you a death that you couldn't die in a million years. A death that actually removes both the offense with the offender. And then, can it get better? Yes then a continual relationship of sanctification, purification, transformation through His blood. Through conformity to that death. We can't spend much time there this morning, but suffice to say that it is through conformity to this death by grace that you are transformed. Then what? Is there more to grace? Paul speaks of the unsearchable riches of grace. Yes, grace,

having removed the old, having killed and consumed the dead, now turns your very soul into the manifestation of Jesus Christ, the one mightily working in you.

I'm not talking about you becoming Jesus. I'm talking about the sacrifice put away so that now there can be an offering. I'm talking about blood being shed so that now there can be some incense, the fragrance of Christ. I'm talking about "I've been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me". I'm talking about Romans 6 where Paul defines grace.

Paul, how would you define grace? Would you say that we should sin all the more because grace has me covered? No. I would say that grace is first of all being baptized into Christ's death, then buried with Him where all of the old is put away. And then Christ raised and us walking in the newness of His resurrection. That's how I would define grace.

Jesus, how would you define grace? Would you say it was letting that woman caught in adultery go free without being stoned? No... that was just demonstrating that all of her accusers were equally in need of grace. I would say (Joh 3:18) "The one not believing in me has been condemned already" I would say (John 6:53) "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood you have no life in yourself". And then I'd say "(John 5:25) "Truly, truly I say to you the hour is coming and NOW IS when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live".

Do you see that the judgment of God finds you either way. You are either judged by God in the Lamb, and therefore by His grace you can live in and by the Lamb. Or you are judged by God on your own, apart from the Lamb. And it's a fearful thing to fall into the judgment of the living God apart from Christ, for He is a consuming fire.

You are stricken with His judgment either way. The only question is whether you face your death in that Lamb, and then find your life in that Lamb? That's what the Hebrews did. Death visited Goshen that night. It just found the Hebrews already dead in the blood of the Lamb.

Or are you going to face your death apart from the Lamb. That's what Pharaoh and the Egyptians did. They faced judgment apart from the blood of the Lamb and there was a cry such as was never heard before coming out from the death of that night.

Can you hear what I'm saying. I'm saying that unless you fall on the Rock and are broken together with Him, then the Rock will fall on you and you will be ground to powder. Many of you have heard that verse. Maybe you have heard me say that in the Greek the word broken there in "sunthlao" (*soon-thlah'-o*) – meaning, quite literally "broken in union with, or broken together".

"When I am lifted up, I will draw all men to myself". "When One died, all died.". This is the judgment of grace. You either face His death, bear His death, and so live by His life. Or you cannot appear before Him. "No man shall appear before Me empty, sayeth the Lord". No man shall appear before Him without bearing the death of the Lamb.

I won't go into this in detail, but if you're curious look at Exodus 13:13. This is immediately after the night of the Passover. They hadn't even crossed the Red Sea yet. The people wake up in the morning and God says "whatever opens the womb is

mine". "The Firstborn is mine." Of course this speaks of Christ. We've spoken of that before and we will again.

But then he says this curious thing. He says, "Look, Moses, if you have a donkey. If you have a stiff necked, stubborn, bull-headed, firstborn donkey (I'm paraphrasing)...here is what you have to do. You either redeem that stiff necked donkey with the blood of a lamb, or you break that donkey's neck. Those are the only two options. Either that donkey is redeemed through the blood of a lamb. Or that donkey must have its neck broken. What a strange thing to say the morning after the great Passover? Or is it?

Jason, what are you saying? I am saying that we stand and live in the life of another, **by grace**, and are the redeemed of the Lord. I'm saying that we faced judgment through the blood of the lamb rather than the breaking of our rebellious neck. I'm saying that no man can stand before God empty. No man can stand before God without that blood. "No man can see God and live." But a man that has died with the Lamb can see Him, know Him, and be known of Him.

We either walk through His death "I've been crucified with Christ", "I've been baptized into His death", or we face the plagues of Egypt. What grace this is! A death that is given to you, then worked in you, and a life that is manifested through you and experienced by you. What grace! You either stand by grace, stand in grace, or you cannot stand. Redeem the donkey with the blood of the Lamb or break its neck. You've got just two options.

But there is one thing that you cannot do. There is one thing that you must NEVER DO. You must never claim that this grace just pardons the offense without crucifying the offender. **You must not think or teach that the grace of God is the freedom to live your life with God's stamp of approval. Oh no, friends. The grace of God is the freedom to lose your life and find His.** The grace of God is taking "His yoke upon you", His cross, His death, and finding rest for your soul. The grace of God is in being "conformed to His death that you might attain to His resurrection."

(Mat 10:39) He who finds his life shall lose it. And he who loses his life for My sake shall find it.

(Mat 16:25) For whoever desires to save his life shall lose it, and whoever desires to lose his life for My sake shall find it.

(Luk 9:24) For whoever will save his life shall lose it, but whoever will lose his life for My sake, he shall save it.

Grace is a relationship with God wherein you have lost your life and found His. And therefore all that *was* true of what was once *your* life is no longer true of you. For instance, there is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And the other side of that same coin is that all that is true of the Life you have gained has become true of you. You are accepted in the beloved. You are the righteousness of God in Christ. You have the mind of Christ. The Spirit of the Son cries out from within you saying "Abba Father". All of this is yours by grace.

Do you see grace? All that God could possibly give a human being can only be, and has been, given to you in and as the person of His only begotten Son. You now stand in that Son, and in His relationship with His Father. You are adopted. Colossians 3 – you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Grace is God knowing you in His Son. Grace is you knowing God in His Son.

Now, that being true, we must not fall short of grace. Every other gospel, other than grace, Paul the apostle calls a curse. Every other gospel other than Christ's death, burial, and resurrection being made unto you your way, your truth, and your life, is anathema. Paul is very clear about this in Galatians.

So, then what? So then, we just not fall short of grace. We must not fall short of knowing the fullness of grace. There is a series of verses near the end of the book of Hebrews that have to do with falling short of the grace of God. I don't have time to go into this in detail, but I'll advertise again our Saturday morning study of the book of Hebrews.

Let me just say this. If you are a born again believer, you have come to the fullness of grace. God doesn't have a lesser version. Nevertheless, you can fall short of knowing, experiencing, enjoying, and repeating the benefit of grace.

In Hebrews 12 verses 15 and 16 the apostle warns believers to be careful not to fall short of the grace of God. And what is His example of "falling short of the grace of God". His example is Esau who sold his birthright for a cup of stew. Brothers and sisters, God has given you the "right", the birthright, to be called sons of God. God has given you His very Son. We must grow up in grace. We must not fall short of knowing that birthright, ours through new birth.

But grow in grace and *in* knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen. (2Pe 3:18)