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### The Sufficiency of Grace

Back a few months ago, we did a short series on grace while we were starting the Ephesians study. We talked at some length about the reality of grace, as well as some misunderstandings of grace. And very briefly, you could summarize what we concluded by saying that grace is a death that you could not possibly die, in order to participate in a Life that you could not possibly live. Although much of the church uses the word in a host of other ways.

How did you get that new car? Oh, just by the grace of God. How did you pass that algebra 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. **The old creation is not the realm where grace offers you anything.**

And in saying that I am not saying that God cannot help you on a test or help you in your finances. Those sorts of things happen. That may be kindness. That may be provision. But that is not really 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, must grow up in our knowledge of grace.

Grace, like all spiritual things must be defined and understood in and as our experience of Jesus Christ. Otherwise **your own heart becomes the defining of a reality that His heart has already defined.** Our own desires, spiritual or natural, become the definition and expectation of grace, when in fact He has already predestined, defined, and given grace in and through the person of Christ. Its not given unto you to classify or define it. It is given unto you already defined, and ready to be revealed.

Many believe that grace is reactionary. In other words, when you fall short, God hands out a bit of grace. If you mess up big-time, God hands out more 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'm not going to review everything we talked about grace today. I just want to summarize it again in this brief sentence. Grace is a death you could never die, that allows you to participate in a life you could never live. It is first a death and judgment of the old man. It is then conformity to His death, a death that works in you. And then a life that you abide in, and live by. Both the death and the life are by the grace of God.

But make no mistake about it. Grace is not an escape from judgment. Don't ever let anybody tell you that. Grace is the wonderful gift of 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 die.** 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, son...you are the offense, but grace will justify you through death, and save you through my risen life". Romans 5:10.

We must never claim that this grace just pardons the offense without crucifying the offender. **We must not think or teach that the grace of God is the freedom to live our life with God's stamp of approval. Oh no, friends. The grace of God is the glorious freedom to lose our life and find His. Yes, its freedom. But its not freedom to be yourself. It's the freedom from yourself, so that you and I can walk in the liberty of the Spirit.**

But today I want to speak about the **sufficiency of grace**. This was the primary topic of what I was recently sharing in Arkansas. Its still on my heart, and I would like to take the opportunity to share it here as well.

This year, the Lord has been bringing me back again and again to the sufficiency of grace. The sufficiency of grace.

**2Co 12:7** And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. **8** Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. **9** And He said to me, **"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."** Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. **10** Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Do you know how a word or phrase in the New Testament can suddenly swell up in your heart so much larger than it ever has before? Its always been there, but suddenly you're seeing it with new eyes. That is what has been going on with this phrase - "the sufficiency of grace." It is swelling up with meaning. It is being filled up with reality. And it is both wonderful, and at the same time a bit frightening because of how real it has started appearing to me. And how real I knew it came to be to Paul.

The part that was a bit frightening was what I saw to be the seriousness and severity of the sufficiency of grace. When God told Paul that His grace was sufficient, you have to remember the kind of life that Paul was experienced in the natural. I would suppose that not too many men in history have had a more distressing, troubled, tortured, pain-filled life in the natural. So contrary to the Christian life of the average American, you might say that Paul's life really stunk. Now I understand that there was the joy of the Lord in it, the fellowship of the Spirit, the communion of the saints (when he wasn't in prison). But I don't even think that Hollywood could capture the kind of suffering and turmoil that this man endured most of his time in the flesh.

You see, what Paul had to face in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 was that what God HAD given him in and as the person of His Son was truly sufficient for him. Despite all appearances in the realm of sight, despite all experiences in the realm of the earth, grace is all that was truly needed. It was sufficient. It may not end the tribulation of

the world, but it is greater than the world. It may not fix the natural creation, but it raises you up out of it, crucifies you to it, and seats you with Christ in God. It may not pull the thorn out of your flesh, but it crucifies the flesh to your soul together with the thorn.

**Joh 16:33** These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

There was definitely something going on in Paul's life that was extremely uncomfortable for Him. It was in the realm of the flesh, it was in the natural. We know that. That is one thing we know for sure because he calls it a "thorn in the flesh". Some people think it was a sickness. Some think it was Jewish persecution. Some think it was a literal demon. There are a variety of opinions about it. It doesn't really matter to me. I'm fairly sure that the Spirit of God intentionally didn't want Paul to describe it. I'm also sure it was quite horrible for him or he probably wouldn't have mentioned it, knowing what we know about the other things he endured. I'm sure it wasn't a hangnail.

Whatever it was, we know that it buffeted, that is tormented, Paul. And three times Paul calls out to the Lord for it to be removed. What does God say? "Paul, I'll fix that situation and it will be sufficient for you"? "Paul, I'll pull out that thorn and it will be sufficient for you"? "Paul, I'll protect you from this in the future, you can count on that being sufficient for you". "Paul it won't last long, just wait it out and you'll find that to be sufficient for you".

No. None of that. Now see, that strikes me. What does He say? "Paul, **my grace** is sufficient for you". Paul, what **I have given you** in Christ, as Christ, is far more than you need for all things. Paul, grace is what I have already done, and it is where you already stand. And I'm telling you that it is sufficient for you. Like I said "in this world, you will have tribulations. But I have given you something bigger than the world. I have, in fact, overcome the world".

I can picture Jesus saying to Paul..."Paul, do you not know that in being baptized into Me, I have baptized you into My death. Paul, do you not know that, though your body is buffeted, your soul dwells with Me in God. Paul have you not seen that the cross has crucified you to the entire world. Paul, sight accesses circumstances, but faith accesses grace. Sight sees this thorn in your flesh, faith sees a new creation. Sight sees your earthly fears and pains and weakness, faith sees and abides in the grace of God. And the grace in which you stand is sufficient for you."

So Paul goes on to say "well then, Lord...more happily then, I will boast in my weakness, because in my weakness I am made strong".

I can see the Lord saying "Yes Paul, its true that you need help, **but my help will never make you sufficient. My help will cause you to find the sufficiency of grace.** Yes Paul, I hear you crying out to me. But rather than showing you a lesser deliverance, this time let me show you the sufficiency of grace. Yes Paul, I see your tears...**but rather than doing something for you in the earth, let me show you by the Spirit of revelation what I have done for you in the heavens where I have raised you and seated you in my Son.**" "Paul, I'm not changing this circumstance, I'm showing you a finished reality that transcends and defies all circumstances. I'm going to show you grace – what I have done in my Son".

Now, don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that God never changes or helps natural circumstances. Obviously he does. That is a manifestation of His kindness, or provision, or care...just as he does the ravens or the lilies of the field. Certainly. There are times when He will heal a body, or a mind, or provide supernatural finances. And I'm not against any of that. I've seen it all myself. I believe in it and am thankful for it, and will continue to pray for it. **But there are also times when God seems to be much more interested in not showing you what He can do, but what He has done.** There are times when rather than provide something new for you, He longs to show you the fullness of what He has provided - the provision of grace - and cause grace to be sufficient for you in all circumstances.

Now to me, that is both wonderful and scary. Its wonderful to the measure that you've come to know the reality of grace. Its scary to the measure that you have not.

Because you see, grace will only be as sufficient to you as far as you've seen grace. And here, once again, we come back to the necessity of Christ being revealed in you - the revealing of the Person in whom all grace exists. The person in whom grace is a reality. **Its easy to believe "that" grace is sufficient. Its very different to know the sufficiency of grace.** I suppose that every Christian would agree "that" grace is sufficient. I would also suppose that very few live in the sufficiency of grace. Its easy to **believe in** what God has done in Christ. Its another thing to **abide in** it and find it sufficient in all situations, because that only works in you to the measure that Christ, your life, has been revealed.

You can't abide in a doctrine. You can't rest in a theology. You can't find sufficiency in a Bible verse. You must abide, rest, and find sufficiency in a Person who has been made unto you a death you couldn't die and a life you couldn't live.

If your spiritual comprehension of grace goes only as far as a pardon from transgression, then right there is the limit of its sufficiency for your heart. It might be sufficient to take away some feelings of guilt. It might be sufficient to make you confident that you're not going to hell. But Paul needed a greater reality, a greater realization of grace than that. Frankly, brothers and sisters, I need a greater realization of grace than that. And I suppose that you do, or you wouldn't still be at this church.

I did an analogy once where I compared salvation to a super-computer. The analogy works well with grace as well. Imagine somebody giving you a new state-of-the-art computer with a 1000 Gig hard-drive, 10 Gig ram, High-speed everything, wireless everything, incredible graphic capabilities, an unimaginable software package....and you say "thanks" and you sit down and do nothing on it but play computer solitaire on it for the next 40 years. What a horrible misunderstanding and misconception of what you have! Its not like you don't have the entire incredible computer. Its not like everything that it can do is not right there available to you. **But you see, your comprehension of what you have, becomes the limitation of what you experience.**

We don't know anything about this vast and measureless grace in which we stand. We know virtually nothing of it when we are first born again. We only know our perceived need - which we think has to do primarily with a need for pardon. We only know we like solitaire. We want solitaire. We know nothing about the ocean of

divine brilliance and love and purpose and wisdom and redemption – death and resurrection - that has been accomplished in Christ...and the grace of God that grants you His judgment and brings you into His death that you can be found in His life.

But, you see, the Spirit that is in you knows all about it. The Spirit that is trying to testify in your heart knows the deep things of God. He knows the things that have been freely given. The Spirit knows everything that you have come to, and desires to show it to you that you might live in that reality. Paul says "the Spirit was given that we might know the things that have been freely given".

The Spirit lures you in with solitaire but He built and programmed the computer. He knows what you have. "He knows the deep things of God". He wants to show you what you've come to. He gave you the manual, but you flip through and only read the parts about solitaire. And even the stuff that has nothing to do with solitaire, somehow you read it and apply it to that. You apply every chapter to whatever view of this computer that you already have. What a problem? Isn't that what we somehow do with the Bible. We flip through it and somehow make every verse apply to something we think we already understand.

You see, first the Spirit of Truth convicts you of sin. First He says "Christ is the answer". First He says "Christ is Savior". But then that same Spirit begins to deal with you according to the truth of what you have come to in Christ. You accepted a Savior, but you don't realize that He is only a savior because He is New Life altogether. More than that, he can only be new life if there is a complete destruction of what was formerly there. And so you have also come to a great death. And not only that, the death was more than His death, the death was your death. "When one died all died."

Do you see what I'm saying? You don't see any of that when you're born again. You don't understand grace. You've read the word in the Scripture, but you just signed up for a Savior. And yet, grace is much larger than a pardon from sin. How do you come to know it? How does the reality of it become the reality of your soul? By the Spirit of God revealing this life that is in you. Revealing this grace that you've come to. Revealing the grace in which you stand. As Jesus says "the Spirit will take the things of mine and reveal them unto you".

I know people, you know people...that come to a genuine new birth. Born again of Spirit. And yet decades later have little or no more comprehension of what they have come to in Christ then the day they were born again. And generally, these people find something in religion that they fall in love with, and serve that...at least for a while.

But with some, a desire for truth survives all of that...and they begin to ask some questions. And a realization begins to work in them. A realization that this computer does far more than just solitaire. A realization that grace is far more than Jesus dying so I don't have to. In some, the Spirit of God is given liberty to show not just a greater view of grace, but the complete **sufficiency** of grace.

If grace, by the Spirit of God revealing salvation becomes in you the working of a death that you couldn't die and a life that you couldn't live...then it truly can overcome the world. It truly can become the sufficiency of all circumstances and situations. And we can actually come to say with Paul:

**Phi 4:11** Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

And the true translation of the last verse there from the Greek is "I can do all things IN Christ, the one empowering me".

And in the past several months, it seems to me that the Lord has had his finger right on this in my heart. There were plenty of years gone by when I supposed that the sufficiency of grace had to do with God somehow "giving me enough" to get through something. Or perhaps it meant God not letting me endure more than I could handle because, after-all, grace would be there to catch me if I fell.

But you see, my small view of grace has been swallowed up by a larger view and I have begun to see that what God HAD done for me in Christ was really all that He could give me. And my heart, more than anything else, has needed to know that what God had accomplished, and what now stands as reality in Christ, is sufficient. Its difficult to describe all that changed in me as my new view of grace swallowed up my smaller view. But I will try.

I started to see that nothing in, on, or of the earth would ever add or take away from grace. **I saw that grace wasn't Christ PLUS anything.** It was Christ as everything. And to be honest, at first I both loved and disliked the view of that. On the one hand, I always love a greater view of Truth. On the other hand it seemed too huge to even think about. The implications were monumental...to myself, to everyone I would ever share with, to my family, to the world, to the church. But nevertheless, there stood grace in my view as "Christ plus nothing".

And it was like the Lord spoke to my heart and said "Jason, I would like to work in your heart in such a way that **life becomes an experience of my grace, and not your things made better by grace**". Grace was Christ plus nothing, and it was sufficient. Not Christ plus good circumstances. Not Christ plus good emotions. Not Christ plus good families. Just Christ and all that is real and true in Him. Just a finished work ready to be revealed.

I saw that what He had given to me in Christ was everything that God could possibly give a human, and to find sufficiency in anything else was actually to **cheapen grace**. God certainly didn't seem to me to be AGAINST any natural good thing, but when I started to see it....I saw that no good natural thing that He grants or allows are really the reality of grace. Again, there's nothing wrong with good natural things. What's wrong is for me to understand them as the grace of God.

Can you see what I mean? **I saw that when I tried to find sufficiency in anything other than the reality, experience, and substance of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, then I was trying to add to grace...and in so doing I was taking away from grace. I was making grace insufficient, or making grace a means to something else I wanted to be sufficient.**

And I did a word search in the New Testament looking for the word grace. And in every place I found that word I found it dealing exclusively with God's finished work

through the cross of Jesus Christ, and how it now works in and through believers. I couldn't find grace fixing things, bringing rain, providing money, protecting from accidents, or any such thing. I found grace 119 times in the New Testament declaring a finished work that was meant to become the reality, the substance, and the sufficiency of all that you and I have come to in Christ. Again...**grace alone sufficient, and not things made better by grace.**

And I'll get a little personal here. Some of you may have had panic attacks before. I've had them on and off my entire life. Sometimes disappearing for years at a time, other times lasting for days and weeks on end. And after some long weeks of emotional pain and intense panic attacks, and calling out to God to heal my mind, I began to think about the sufficiency of grace.

The thought came to me – I know that He is able to...but what if God doesn't ever fix this, change that, heal this, remove that. What if God just teaches me the sufficiency of Christ made all things unto me...**until I can actually BOAST (like Paul) in the things that make me small...so grace can appear all the more huge.** What if the fixing of me could actually get swallowed up and lost in the true knowing of Him. What if grace – what God had done in Christ – could actually be my sufficiency.

Now again, don't take this to mean that God doesn't or can't heal. He obviously does and can. I don't mean to suggest that God does not know your natural needs, or provide, or protect, etc. But I'd like to suggest that these things aren't really grace. Grace is what God has provided/given/poured out/caused to abound **in Christ....and not in the earth. And regardless of what God does or doesn't do in the earth, grace hasn't changed. No situation, circumstance, emotion, or event can change the reality and sufficiency of grace.** Can you hear that?

**Grace is not a bunch of different things He is doing. Grace is the wonderful thing He has done, and then the ever increasing spiritual discovery of his finished work.** It is what and where you are. And it is far more than you could ever ask or think. The question then gets whittled down to this one thing....do we know grace? Is grace sufficient? Or do we want grace PLUS....something else.

Well, for me...most of my life the PLUS was all I cared about. Grace was a biblical word I had memorized. It was a spiritual concept that I suppose had some sort of meaning to me. Some sort of theological meaning devoid of any substance or experience.

But in this most recent battle against panic attacks, the question would come to me – is my sufficiency in emotion? Is my sufficiency in circumstance? Is my sufficiency in something of the old creation or the old man? What if my brain always fights against reality with these ridiculous emotions? What if I have to pastor a church, love a wife, raise a family in such dreadful weakness and uncomfortable natural nothingness?

**What if grace has nothing to do with what He gives to me as mine....but is only what I find in Him as His?** .... And that's when I began to weep. That's when I began to cry because I knew it was true. **Grace is not what he gives me as mine, but what I find in Him as His.** What I am allowed to participate with Him as His. And of course, in finding what is His, I find what is also mine. And so as Paul

says "do you not know that all things are yours?". Well, yes....but not mine as mine, but mine as His.

And in my heart these last few months there has been a scary side to that....and then there has also been a wonderfully freeing side to that because grace never changes. Its not contingent upon anything. Not emotion, not time, not situations, not anything. Its timeless. Its finished. Its stands complete. Grace stands, but have I learned to stand in the sufficiency of grace? It is there as a reality. Its ready to be revealed. Its already what and where and who you are in Him. Its known by faith. You can't change it. You can only discover it by the Spirit revealing Christ. And the more the Spirit of God reveals the reality of God's grace, the more you and I find it to be exceedingly sufficient.