



from the desk of . . .

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IT'S ALL ABOUT GRACE

Matthew 20:1-16

When I use illustrations to make a point, for the most part I refer to personal experiences. But this past week I had lunch with Jimmy Kolb, & he told me something that had just happened to him that's a perfect example of what we're going to be talking about this morning. And so, with his permission ...

Jimmy is in his final semester of college, which means he's doing his student teaching. And for those of you who are teachers, you'll remember ...

that's kind of an intimidating experience.

Well, in Jimmy's initial meeting with the teachers he discovered that some of them met before school to play basketball ... & they invited Jimmy to join them.

So, the next morning, bright & early, an enthusiastic Jimmy shows up at the school, ready to bond with the other seasoned teachers. He parked over by the gym, went up to the door, slid his brand-new key-card in, & opened the building ... which apparently alerted the alarm system, & he immediately discovered that he had only 30 seconds to disarm it!

So, there Jimmy stood, helpless, in the middle of the hall, watching the clock tick down & having absolutely no idea what the security code was.

At which point the loudest alarm he had ever heard was sounded. People in neighboring houses were awakened. And within moments the police arrived.

But just then, the superintendent, who was to play basketball too, walked in the door.

He immediately went over & disarmed the alarm.

So, what do you think the response might be by the school superintendent to this young student teacher? ...

It was grace. "Jimmy, don't worry about it."

And that's what we're going to talk about this morning. So, *Good News*, as recorded by Matthew, to you who have gathered here for worship at C.C.R.M.

Within your hearing comes the Word of the Lord ...

"The Kingdom of heaven is like this. Once there was a man who went out early in the morning to hire some men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them the regular wage, a silver coin a day, and sent them to work in his vineyard. He went out again to the marketplace at nine o'clock and saw some men standing there doing nothing, so he told them. 'You also go and work in the vineyard, and I will pay you a fair wage.' So they went.

Then at twelve o'clock and again at three o'clock he did the same thing. It was nearly five o'clock when he went to the marketplace and saw some other men still standing there. 'Why are you wasting the whole day here doing nothing?' he asked them. 'No one hired us,' they answered. 'Well, then, you go and work in the vineyard,' he told them.

"When evening came, the owner told his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with those who were hired last and ending with those who were hired first.' The men who had begun to work at five o'clock were paid a silver coin each. So when the men who were the first to be hired came to be paid, they thought they would get more; but they too were given a silver coin each. They took their money and started grumbling against the employer. 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'while we put up with a whole day's work in the hot sun - yet you paid them the same as you paid us!' 'Listen, friend,' the owner answered one of them, 'I have not cheated you. After all, you agreed to do a day's work for one silver coin. Now take your pay and go home. I want to give this man who was hired last as much as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do as I wish with my own money? Or are you jealous because I am generous?'"

And Jesus concluded, "So those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last." (Matthew 20:1-16)

May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen

One of the things I did during my recent study time was to pray about what the Lord would have me preach on this year. And it immediately became apparent where He wanted me to begin ... grace.

When we talk about our faith, that's where we start.

Now to be honest, for most of us, grace is a difficult concept to accept. And the reason is ...

our society is predicated on performance.

We teach our kids ... if you want to be successful ... work hard. If you want to do well in school ... study, study, study. If you want to be a good musician ... practice, practice, practice.

We teach our kids that there's no such thing as a free lunch. If we want something ... we've got to work for it. In fact, if it sounds too good to be true ...

(it probably is). We teach our kids this.

And then we take that mindset into our faith. And we tell ourselves that if there's anything worth having in the Christian life ... we've got to work for it. Our salvation is dependent on keeping the Golden Rule, obeying the Commandments, on being "good" boys & girls.

Well, that mindset can rob us of the joy of the Christian life. So, I want to use a prop to teach you the "balance" of grace. Because if we don't understand balance, all of this can get distorted very quickly.

So, we're going to use this 3-legged stool. (X) This is our picture of grace. Grace on top with 3 legs, & we need to correctly understand each leg if we're going to have a "well-balanced" view of grace.

The 3 legs have to do with:

- disobedience
- blessing
- behavior

The 1st leg of our 3-legged stool is a simple sentence ... grace saves **disobedient** people. Now, in order to understand that statement we need to recognize sin as Scripture teaches it.

Now we don't like to talk about sin today. We prefer to say ... "I made a mistake. I messed up." But Scripture is more direct & uses words like:

rebellion, wickedness, & disobedience.

God hates sin ... He hates disobedience. God hates it because it's contrary to His holy nature. (1 Peter 1:16) It's impossible for God to do anything wrong. He can't lie. (Titus 1:2) He can't cheat us. He can't misrepresent the truth. Sin causes separation between ourselves & God.

(Isaiah 59:2)

God must punish the sinner. (Isaiah 13:11) If He didn't, He'd be approving that which is contrary to His holiness. So, God must deal with sin ... & there are those who will face the consequences of their disobedience. (Galatians 6:7)

Scripture teaches that "everyone has sinned & is far away from God's saving presence." (Romans 3:23) What that means is ... there's no difference between moral people & immoral people. There's no difference between churchgoers & nonchurchgoers. There's no difference between Kim Yong of North Korea ... & us.

Why? ... because "everyone has sinned & is far away from God's saving presence."

Imagine everyone in the world lined up on the CA coast. And God says, "Okay, you can earn salvation if you can swim to Tokyo. Ready, set, go,"

Some of us would drown before the water gets over our heads. Others of us would drown after 300 or so yards. Some good swimmers would make it a mile out into the ocean before they'd drown. Michael Phelps, Ryan Lochte, Janet Evans, Jenny Thompson ... might get out there 20 miles or so. But none of us would get anywhere close. The goal is just too far to reach. (Matthew 5:48)

The only difference between the Olympic swimmers & us is the depth of the water we all drown in, & the amount of energy we expended to get there.

We all drown. We all fall way, way, way short.

The old hymns put it perfectly ... "Rock Of Ages" ...

"In my hand no price I bring;
Simply to Thy cross I cling."

"Guilty, vile & helpless we, Spotless Lamb of God was He;
Full atonement! can it be? Hallelujah, what a Savior!"

"Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!"

I'm ashamed to admit it, but there was a time when I struggled with John Newton's song ... "a wretch like me." I thought that was a little harsh. ... I would have preferred ... "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a stumbling saint like me." That has a nicer, softer, ring to it, doesn't it? "Wretch" is a harsh word.

But until we come to grips with the fact that we are wretched because of our sinful nature before God ... we can't truly understand His amazing grace.

Let's talk about that for a moment.

What is God's grace? What does it look like?

One of the best scenes of God's grace is found in Luke 23. It's a picture of a man hanging on a cross, right next to the Savior of humanity, Jesus Christ. And as this criminal is hanging there, he looks over at Jesus, & says ... "Jesus, save me!"

"Jesus said to him, 'I promise you that today you will be in Paradise with me.'" (Luke 23:43)

Now does this guy do any good works to get saved? ... He literally can't raise his hands. He can't join a Church. He can't even get Baptized. He can't give any money. He can't work at CORNFEST. He can't do anything. He's totally & absolutely relying on the grace of God in the person of Jesus Christ. (John 14:6)

He looks at Jesus, who is shedding His blood for that man's sins (Colossians 1:20) at that very moment & says ...
"Jesus, save me."

And Jesus responds ... "it's done."

Grace! Grace! One of my favorite definitions of grace is ... "that which we don't **deserve**, that we desperately **need**, that we could never **repay**."

Do we deserve salvation? ... No, we're disobedient.

Do we desperately need salvation? ...

You bet we do, because judgement is coming.

Can we ever repay it? ...

No, it comes from the goodness of God's character.

Another example of God's grace is found in the "but" passages of Scripture. These are statements where the disobedience of humanity is revealed, & then the word "but" appears, & grace is laid out for us,

all in one sentence. (i.e., Romans 3:20-22; Titus 3:3-5)

(page 1411, Ephesians 2:3ff) "Actually all of us were like them & lived according to our natural desires, doing whatever suited the wishes of our own bodies & minds. (That's the disobedience part.) In our natural condition we, like everyone else, were destined to suffer God's anger. (Judgment.)

"But God's mercy is so abundant, & his love for us is so great, that while we were spiritually dead in our disobedience he brought us to life with Christ. It is by God's grace that you have been saved." (Ephesians 2:3-5)

God's unmerited favor given to us ... just because He loves us. That's where salvation comes from.

The great Presbyterian preacher, Donald Barnhouse said ... "love up is adoration, love out is affection, love down is grace."

With mercy, we don't get what we deserve ... judgment.
With grace, we get what we don't deserve ... eternal life.

Can we earn that? ... no.

And our correct response is ... outrageous gratitude.

Let's talk about the 2nd leg of our stool ... blessings. Grace supplies our **blessings**. John writes ...

"Out of the fullness of his grace he has blessed us all, giving us one blessing after another. (John 1:16)

Blessing after blessing after blessing after blessing.
The picture here is waves coming in on the seashore.

They keep coming & coming & coming & coming & coming.

Anything that's good in life is a blessing from God, (Malachi 3:10), & it comes to us simply because of His grace. It's unmerited favor on our behalf. And if we're truly going to enjoy the blessings He has for us ...
we need to understand how they come.

Which means that we need to receive these blessings. We need to be willing to receive God's gifts. Not feel guilty about them ... not try to purchase them ...
just simply receive them.

Jesus told this great parable about a man who had a vineyard. (Now the man represents God.) He hired some men & agreed to pay them a silver coin,
(the regular wage), to work in his vineyard.

The way it operated back then was that a person would be hired in the morning, work all day, & then be paid. They'd go & buy their food, & then eat at night.
If they didn't work ... they didn't eat.

So, he hired these guys at the beginning of the day. He told them he'd pay them a silver coin ... "now get to work." He went back at 9:00, & then at noon, & hired more men. At 3:00 in the afternoon he hired even more people. At then we're told that at 5:00 he went out & hired others who were still standing around.

"Why are you wasting the whole day here doing nothing?"

"No one hired us."

"Well, then, you go & work in the vineyard."

At 6:00 it was quitting time. These last guys had worked an hour. So, the man began to pay them, starting with those whom he hired last. He paid them a silver coin. They received a full day's wage ...

even though they only worked 45 minutes.

Why did the man do that? He didn't need them. They certainly didn't get much work done. Why would he do that? ... Simply because of His grace. He knew if they didn't get paid that day their family wouldn't eat. He wanted to provide for them. He wanted to bless them.

Their response was to receive it with gratitude.

Just take it.

Having had 6 of our grandchildren with us at various times over the summer, I'm reminded that kids are much better at receiving things than we adults are. We're here at the Church, it's about 2:00 in the afternoon, & I say to them ... "Okay, I'd like to get you guys some ice cream, across the street at Comet." Well, let me tell you, there wasn't the slightest hesitation at all. In fact, they were standing on the corner waiting for me.

When God blesses us, there's no reason to feel guilty or to make excuses, we simply receive those blessings appreciatively because they come from His grace.

The other thing we need to do is reject bad attitudes. Because bad attitudes can steal the joy of the blessings that God has for us.

The 1st attitude we see here is of compensation. "I'm working for you, God ... so I 'expect' you to compensate me now for the task I'm doing." "The men who had begun to work at 5:00 were paid a silver coin each. So when the men who were the 1st to be hired came to be paid, they thought they would get more."

They expected to get more ... even though they were told they'd get a silver coin.

In other words, the people who worked all day got paid the same as those who worked an hour.

Okay, I want you to be completely honest with me, in your heart, if you think that's unfair, please raise your hand. ...

Do you know why we think it's unfair? ... Because when we read this passage we instinctively identify ourselves with the guys who worked all day. Right? ... We're serving. We're here. We're doing stuff.

Let me remind you again about disobedience. We bring nothing to the party. We're who we are simply by God's grace. The truth of the matter is ... we should identify ourselves with the ones who were brought in at 5:00 in the afternoon to receive His wonderful blessings.

If we can reject the attitude of compensation, that we need to be "rewarded" for what we do, then we'll save ourselves from the trap from expecting corresponding blessings when we do work on His behalf ...

& then being disappointed when they don't come.

The 2nd attitude is the one of comparison.

"They, (the all-day workers), took their money, (one silver coin), & started grumbling against the employer.

'These men who were hired last worked only one hour, while we put up with a whole day's work in the hot sun - yet you paid them the same as you paid us!'

"Listen, friend,' the owner answered one of them, 'I have not cheated you. After all, you agreed to do a day's work for one silver coin. Now take your pay & go home. I want to give this man who was hired last as much as I gave you. (Listen to God speaking here.) Don't I have the right to do as I wish with my own money?

Or are you jealous because I am generous?'"

As soon as they started to compare what they were given from the gracious landowner to what someone else got they lost the joy of what they received.

God in His sovereignty has the right to dispense His blessings anyway He chooses. (Romans 9:20) That means there will be other people in our lives who will have more than we do. But as soon as we start comparing ourselves with them we'll lose the joy of our own blessings.

Remember when we were teenagers at Christmas, & we opened up a present under the tree, & it was beautiful pea green shirt or blouse, & we were so excited, we couldn't wait to wear it to school, & show all our friends.

And then our sister opened her gift & it was ski boots. Ski boots! "Why didn't I get ski boots? Mom & Dad must love her more than they love me."

And all the joy we experienced from our paisley shirt or blouse just a moment earlier went out the window because we compared our gift with someone else's. Don't fall into the trap of comparing your blessings. "Why do they have more than I have?" Because as soon as we start comparing we lose the joy of our own blessings.

Which brings us to our 3rd leg. The 1st one had to do with disobedience, the 2nd had to do with blessings.

The 3rd deals with behavior.

A 2-legged stool cannot stand. If we stopped with the 1st 2 thinking ...

"okay, if God's freely giving me all this grace, why not just have 'fun'? Why not go & sin as much as I want?"

The Apostle Paul addresses that kind of rationale with 2 words ... "Certainly not!" (Romans 6:2) He says that it's an abuse of God's grace. Grace steers our **behavior**.

"For God has revealed his grace for the salvation of all people. That grace instructs is to give up ungodly living & worldly passions, & to live self-controlled, upright, & godly lives in this world." (Titus 2:11-12)

That's what we want to do, isn't it? ...
We want to say "no" to ungodly living & worldly passions.

So, what's our motive for doing that? ... Is our motive to earn God's favor? ... Is it to make Him love us a little more? ... Because if it is, we'll find ourselves continuing to be frustrated. God loves us perfectly right now. He loves us unconditionally. He loves us absolutely. He can't love us anymore than He does at this moment.

So, we don't try to earn His love. Rather we live our lives in godly fashion in response to His graciousness.

Scripture says that we should be "eager to do good."
(Titus 2:14)

Does that describe you? ... Some of you are enthusiastic Cubs' fans, or White Sox fans, or Bears fans, or Bulls fans, or Blackhawk fans. ...

Are you enthusiastic about the Lord & doing good?

If you're trying to earn God's approval you'll never feel the right way about serving Him. But if you've been overwhelmed by God's grace in your life, saving you from disobedience & giving you blessings; if you focus continually on how good He's been to you, your attitude of gratitude will be ... "how can I say thanks?" ...

And the way we demonstrate thanks is by saying "no" to ungodly living & worldly passions.

The 3-legged balanced view of grace reminds us that it saves us from disobedience, it supplies our blessings, & it steers our behavior.

Grace changes **everything**. And when we start to live gracefully, it will change the way we think, it will change the way we work, it will change the way we give, it will change the way we relate to others.

Everything changes when we live a life of gratitude.

I want to encourage you, as we begin a new year here at C.C.R.M., to look at it as the year of God's grace in your life. I want you to consider how your disobedience affects Almighty God ... & what He has done for you in spite of it. I want you to consider how He has blessed you. And, I want you to seriously look around here at C.C.R.M. & take a more active part in the ministry opportunities that are available. Because of all that Jesus has done for us ... we should serve with gratitude.

You all know that I love books. Well, the best book that I've found that deals with grace is the Bible. Go to a concordance, or just google the word "grace", & look up all the passages in the Scriptures & then read them ... & you will be blessed beyond belief.

MARANA THA

"The Kingdom of heaven is like this. Once there was a man who went out early in the morning to hire some men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them the regular wage, a silver coin a day, and sent them to work in his vineyard. He went out again to the marketplace at nine o'clock and saw some men standing there doing nothing, so he told them. 'You also go and work in the vineyard, and I will pay you a fair wage.' So they went. Then at twelve o'clock and again at three o'clock he did the same thing. It was nearly five o'clock when he went to the marketplace and saw some other men still standing there. 'Why are you wasting the whole day here doing nothing?' he asked them. 'No one hired us,' they answered. 'Well, then, you go and work in the vineyard,' he told them. When evening came, the owner told his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with those who were hired last and ending with those who were hired first.' The men who had begun to work at five o'clock were paid a silver coin each. So when the men who were the first to be hired came to be paid, they thought they would get more; but they too were given a silver coin each. They took their money and started grumbling against the employer. 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'while we put up with a whole day's work in the hot sun - yet you paid them the same as you paid us!' 'Listen, friend,' the owner answered one of them, 'I have not cheated you. After all, you agreed to do a day's work for one silver coin. Now take your pay and go home. I want to give this man who was hired last as much as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do as I wish with my own money? Or are you jealous because I am generous?'" And Jesus concluded, "So those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last." (Matthew 20:1-16)

Grace saves _____ people

Grace ... that which we don't _____, that we desperately _____, that we could never _____

Grace supplies our _____

Grace steers our _____

Grace changes _____