

**All-Inclusive Grace**

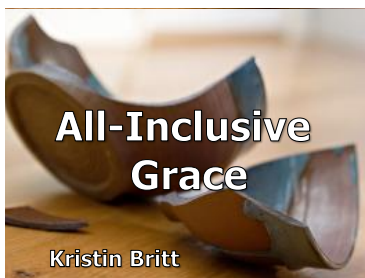
August 6, 2017

**Romans 9: 1-13**

<sup>1</sup> I am a follower of Christ, and the Holy Spirit is a witness to my conscience. So I tell the truth and I am not lying when I say <sup>2</sup> my heart is broken and I am in great sorrow. <sup>3</sup> I would gladly be placed under God's curse and be separated from Christ for the good of my own people. <sup>4</sup> They are the descendants of Israel, and they are also God's chosen people. God showed them his glory. He made agreements with them and gave them his Law. The temple is theirs and so are the promises that God made to them. <sup>5</sup> They have those famous ancestors, who were also the ancestors of Jesus Christ. I pray that God, who rules over all, will be praised forever! Amen.

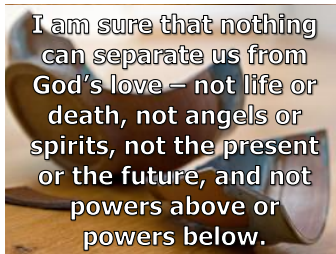
<sup>6</sup> It cannot be said that God broke his promise. After all, not all of the people of Israel are the true people of God. <sup>7-8</sup> In fact, when God made the promise to Abraham, he meant only Abraham's descendants by his son Isaac. God was talking only about Isaac when he promised <sup>9</sup> Sarah, "At this time next year I will return, and you will already have a son."

<sup>10</sup> Don't forget what happened to the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. <sup>11-12</sup> Even before they were born or had done anything good or bad, the Lord told Rebekah that her older son would serve the younger one. The Lord said this to show that he makes his own choices and that it wasn't because of anything either of them had done. <sup>13</sup> That's why the Scriptures say that the Lord liked Jacob more than Esau.



Continuing in the theme, "Broken: Good News for Tough Times," I have a holy privilege to talk about Grace. Grace. Amazing Grace. That beautiful and mysterious Gift from God. Grace that heals and makes us complete—in God.

Pastor John began this series acknowledging our brokenness, both in spirit and in body, and our need for grace. He went on the following week with “Labor Pains,” Paul pointing out that we wait, expectantly, for God’s work in our lives, for our purpose, for Grace to be evident. Last week in “Inseparable,” we were reminded that “Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.”



Ah, that’s Grace. Please pray with me.

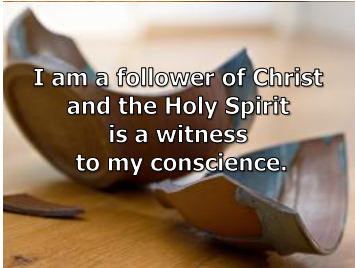
This is the day You have made, O Lord. We rejoice, and we seek your Word. Now I pray Let my words and all our thoughts be pleasing to you, LORD, our Rock, our Redeemer, our Source of Grace. Amen.



If you like to follow in your Bible, I’m covering a lot of ground in Romans Chapter 9. You may wish to have that open.

Grace. Songs are written about Grace. In Bible study classes, we talk about definitions of Grace. The free gift of salvation. Underserved mercy and love. We’re thankful for Grace, we know we don’t deserve it, we can’t earn it, and yet it’s given to us freely, and is encompassed by incomprehensible love. Yes!

But, who is it for?



I've led a strange life, from early childhood knowing Jesus as my Friend, born in a manger to bring me Life and Peace; to turbulent young adulthood when I tended to live more in the world than seeking in Jesus that life of peace; to a chaotic time of young marriage, trying to raise children who love Jesus and balancing a new, incredible, growing Faith; to this time of more mature spirituality, yet with still a long way to go and more questions than answers in my prayers.

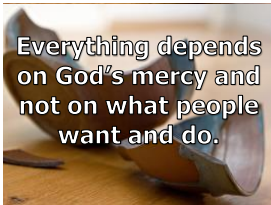
Has grace always been for me? When I was too young to understand it? Yes, we call that Prevenient Grace, the grace that comes before we know what it's really doing in our lives. Was grace for me when I denied it? I believe that is still Prevenient Grace. When I was too busy to notice it working, but striving to get it right? John Wesley called that Sanctifying grace, the working of the Holy Spirit changing our hearts. Certainly I recognize grace in my life now, especially when I take time to be with God in prayer, meditation, and studying the Word.

I've learned, from reading the Bible and from Christian mentors much wiser than myself, that Grace is for me in all of those times. But why? Is it because I'm a proclaimed Christian who has accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior? Well, yes, at least, that's our witness as Christian believers, the tradition of our faith. But why me, and who else? I mean, is it my choice?



The challenge Paul makes in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans goes around us as individuals and straight to God, taking the choice out of our hands and placing it firmly in God's. Paul is grieved for the Israelites, his people, because they have rejected grace. He reminds the reader that it was to the Israelites that the promises were given, the promises, the glory, the Temple. Also, the famous ancestors, David, from whom came even the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Yet the Jews suffered in

Paul's time and they suffer still. Paul asks, "Then, is God unfair?" No, not at all. In verses 15-16 we read,

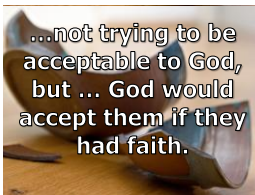


The Lord told Moses that he has pity and mercy on anyone he wants to. <sup>16</sup> Everything then depends on God's mercy and not on what people want or do.

You see, Paul argues that the People of the Promise have rejected the Means of Grace, the Incarnate Word of God, God's vehicle of redemption, but our willful rejection does not sever the promise, the connection to God in Christ. Verse 18: "Everything depends on what God decides to do!"

To be chosen by God does not depend on biology. Otherwise, Esau the elder son of Isaac and Rebekah would have received the Promises. God chose Jacob. God says, "To be chosen by me is not an act of biology. It is an act of faith." This is an act of God's faithfulness, and our faith in God who chooses us.

The next several verses in chapter 9 quote the Prophets Hosea and Isaiah, and give support to Paul's argument. God will make his people those who are not yet his people, and those who are and who reject him now, God will scatter. And after all that Paul says in verse 30,



What does all of this mean? It means that the Gentiles were not trying to be acceptable to God, but they found that he would accept them if they had faith.

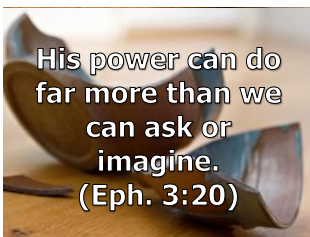
God's choice, and our Faith in God's choice, enable God's plan of salvation to reach the people of God everywhere. Grace!



To me, this is an incredible word of hope. We live in an increasingly interreligious culture. In Sioux Falls last week, I shopped alongside Muslim women who wore colorful drapery clothing and the same look of love and friendship I hope was on my face when our eyes met. On a cable TV program not long ago I watched as a Catholic Priest and a Jewish Rabbi discussed Scripture and prayed together. In our community right here in Winner, we may converse with other Christians who worship in very different ways than we do in the Methodist Church. We may encounter some who seek Jesus and yet are also connected with Lakota spirituality. This all may tempt us to notice differences and experience fragmentation more than unity.

But, can we imagine God's choice extending beyond our walls, our understanding? We accept that Grace extends beyond Jews to Gentiles, yes. Can we accept that Grace extends beyond Jews and Gentiles to Muslims? Mormons? Or even beyond any Abrahamic traditions?

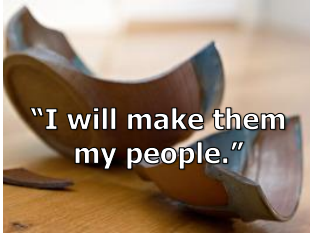
To paraphrase Paul in Romans 9:20, Who are you, friend, to question or even limit God?



Is God, who is able to do more than all we ask or imagine, able to be God to all those? And to those who say "none" when asked about religious preference?

(Pause)

Speaking through Hosea, God said,



“Although they are not

my people,

I will make them my people.

I will treat with love

those nations

that have never been loved.

<sup>26</sup> “Once they were told,

‘You are not my people.’

But in that very place

they will be called

children of the living God.”

Just as the Gentiles in Paul’s day needed to hear that that they could receive grace even though they weren’t born Jewish, there are people in our community who need to hear that even though they weren’t born to Christian or “religious” families, God deeply desires to give them grace, in faithful relationship with them.

At Middle Collegiate Church in Manhattan, New York City, a certain Sunday saw a Muslim man named Mohammed and a Jewish therapist named Susan among the hundreds who made their way down the aisle to receive Communion at the Table of Grace.

What can that look like in Winner? Last Sunday we had our first community Fellowship meal downstairs. There were three or four families present who are not currently connected with our church. A handful of our congregants greeted and conversed with these people at the door or in line for food. But...What could have happened if our church families had actually sat at table with the newcomers, eaten their meals with them?

Do you see this slide? “I will make them my people.”

God desires his people – ALL his people – to receive grace. Our key verse this week Romans 9:1 – “I am a follower of Christ, and the Holy Spirit is a witness to my conscience.” If we claim that, then we have the privilege to convey the message of grace to those of God’s people who have not yet heard this Good News.

Next weekend we have two events in which we can bring a message of grace. Saturday is our time to serve at the Banquet in Sioux Falls. Jack has already invited many of you who have not helped in the past to experience an incredible time of service and love. On Sunday, August 13, we’ll have another opportunity to extend the Table of Grace. Will you come worship in the Park with us Sunday night? Will you share a meal with someone who looks different from you? Will you offer hospitality and conversation with someone who doesn’t usually come to church on Sunday morning? Will you help blur the distinctions and let God move your imagination to share Grace?



God’s grace has Power to bind together all that our human differences would declare broken. You see, this vessel is coming together. It represents the healing of personal brokenness—I have received this, and some of you know that healing also—and as we heal individually, it also represents the healing of the world’s brokenness.

God is in our world, and so are we. Amen.