

- ***READ Ephesians 2:8-10*** What is grace? These verses by Paul in Ephesians certainly help us to understand this foundational aspect of the Christian faith. From these verses we come to know that it is only through the grace of God that we are saved. Nothing we can do can cause ourselves to be saved. We often phrase grace as "unmerited favor", and while I might say it a little differently when I say that it is simply receiving that which is not deserved, I think the point is still made and the meaning of grace can be grasped.
- We read these verses and we know definitions, so I think we would all say that we know what grace means, but does that mean that we know of God's grace? I think there is a big difference between knowing a definition and truly *knowing* the grace of God. If we don't *know* the grace of God then I wonder if maybe we don't truly know about it because all we know are definitions or descriptions. I wonder if maybe we can come to grasp God's grace better if instead of knowing what grace is, maybe we can come to truly *know* God's grace by seeing it.
- I'd like to take some time this morning to consider what grace looks like. I want us to come to see just how picture perfect God's grace is, and we are going to do this by considering the text of Ezekiel 16. It is a long chapter, and we just don't have the time to read the entire chapter, but I want to share a brief outline and some thoughts on the chapter and then see what kind of picture Ezekiel paints for us in the allegory concerning the amazing grace of God.
- The book of Ezekiel was inspired by God so that the people of Israel would be well aware of the impending judgment that was going to be handed down because of their constant unfaithfulness to the Lord. This particular chapter of Ezekiel 16 is a perfect microcosm of the issues that God took with His chosen people. Within it, we will not only see the nature of God in His love, patience, and grace towards the people, but I think we'll also see a somewhat familiar picture that many of us recognize as having been in the place of Israel at some point in our lives. Keep in mind that while Ezekiel mentions Jerusalem specifically, the intended understanding is that of Israel as a whole.

I. Brief Outline of Ezekiel 16

- A. Jerusalem and the people were weak and sinful apart from God before He took them in. (vv.1-5)
 1. The chapter begins with the Lord making sure that the people remembered who they were before God took possession of them. ***"Your origin and your birth are from the land of the Canaanite, your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite."*** The people, especially in Egypt were "raised" by the Egyptians and their gods in a sense. Then even after they left Egypt, they allowed the nations around them to influence them so that they, while not a Canaanite nation, certainly behaved as one because of their following Canaanite gods.
 2. Not only that, but the Lord goes on to say that it wasn't even anything all that appealing. The language used to describe her birth only leaves us with this picture of a dirty child that looked anything but healthy and loved. The people were not a mighty people. Not only did she not look healthy or loved, but she was treated as trash. Upon her birth, it is written that she was thrown into an open field, left to die on her own. Even the day of her birth was hated and not remembered. Israel surely was a pitiful and seemingly despised people.
 3. Everything about these opening verse leaves us with a bad taste in our mouths. Israel was nothing special. She was unwanted, undeserving, unfit, unworthy, and unloved.
- B. God claimed Jerusalem as His city and bride. (vv.6-8)
 1. The image is of a man walking by and seeing this despised child forsaken and left in the field, yet he takes great pity upon this child. God saw the descendants of Abraham in that land of slavery, and He pitied them and blessed them and they grew into a strong people. The people grew up, just as the girl in this allegory grew.
 2. Once God saw that she was grown and "at the time for love", He brought the people out of Egypt. He covered her nakedness with His skirt (an allusion to marriage), and He established a covenant with them. Surely this takes our minds to Mt. Sinai when the Lord established His covenant through Moses with the people of Israel.

- C. Jerusalem had nothing to offer God, yet God claimed her and made her something special. (vv.8-14)
 - 1. Again, the people were numerous at this point, but at the time of Abraham they were very few in number. Yet, God put into motion this plan of them being His covenant people. Yet, what did they truly have to offer in this relationship? The answer is nothing.
 - 2. Notice that everything Ezekiel says in these verses speaks to a benefit that God was delivering to the people. "I bathed you...clothed you...adorned you...put a ring, earrings, and beautiful crown on your head...adorned with gold and silver." Everything that was improved in this relationship had to do with what God did for the people. **(Ezekiel 16:14)**
- D. Sadly, Jerusalem played the harlot. (vv.15-34)
 - 1. Unfortunately, the people did not realize the good thing they had going for them. They sinned by going after the gods of the people around them. They played the spiritual harlot, and they made things even worse by using the blessings of God to the honor the heathen gods.
 - 2. They used His clothes, jewels, gold, silver, embroidered cloth, bread, flour, oil, and honey. They even went so far as to offer their children to these gods. They truly had disgraced God and **v.25** probably gives the most descriptive telling of their harlotry.
 - 3. They had strayed so far from God that most probably didn't see any redemption in their future, and who could've blamed them? They had thoroughly disgraced the Lord.
- E. God would punish her for her harlotry. (vv.35-59)
 - 1. Beginning in **v.35**, the Lord's just nature is revealed in that all of those with whom Israel had committed adultery would be gathered together against them. Meaning, these nations would gather up arms and oppress Jerusalem and her people.
 - 2. "So I will gather them against you from every direction and expose your nakedness to them that they may see all your nakedness." This language is used to express that Israel's weakness would be on full display. They would be completely vulnerable to the power of these other nations because God would allow it.
 - 3. Their unfaithfulness led God to allow all of these nations to turn against them just as they had turned against God. These many gifts they had given these other nations would be ransacked and destroyed. **(v.39)** All of this would be done to show the people that God was incensed by their harlotry against Him even though He had taken them in. Through this punishment, the Lord says that His fury and anger would be pacified. **(v.42)**
- F. Despite all of her sin, God would welcome her back. (vv.60-63)
 - 1. But then this text finishes up by speaking of redemption in the last four verses. God says that regardless of what has transpired, He would not forget the covenant that He had established with the people.
 - 2. All of this punishment that was handed down by God was not because He hated Jerusalem and the people. He did this so that they would recognize that they had broken the covenant. The purpose and goal was for them to realize their mistakes, be ashamed, and return back to God. If they were willing to do this then God would graciously take them back.
 - 3. This unwanted bride who had slapped her loving husband in the face through her adultery would hopefully be humiliated by her decision and actions and throw herself at the mercy of her loving husband. This is truly a perfect picture of God's grace. So what can we learn from it?

II. What We Learn About God's Grace From Ezekiel 16

- A. Our sin causes us to be vile, wretched, pitiful, & unclean.
 - 1. The hyperbole used in this chapter could easily be taken and run with to mean that we are born in sin. Many people use this text to prove such a point just as they do with what David writes in **Psalms 51:5** concerning being brought forth in iniquity and being conceived in sin. I don't buy the concept of original sin at all, because God creates all men pure and upright. (*"Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices."* **Ecclesiastes 7:29**) It isn't until we make our own mistakes that we are soiled and made unclean.
 - 2. It is our sins alone that turn us into something that can be equated with what we see in this allegory of the unwanted child. Our sin causes us to be in need of cleansing and washing. **(I Corinthians 6:9-11)** God is willing to give us cleansing and washing...but it isn't what we deserve.

- B. Our sin leaves us only deserving punishment & death.
1. In fact, all we deserve is to be left in the field and to die in our wretched sinful body. We have rejected God's love, and He would be well within His rights to just allow us to suffer for our sins and to die in them.
 2. From the very beginning, God was clear with man concerning His expectations for us. It began very simply, "do not eat of this tree." Yet, the first two people were unable to keep to that standard and punishment was handed down, the most severe being the handing down of death of the body and death of the spirit away from God. Mankind has been well aware of this truth through handing down the story through word of mouth or the written word. Yet, we continue to choose to transgress God and we only deserve punishment for our sinful decisions.
 3. This picture isn't pretty at all. In fact, it is disastrous, pitiful, and depressing. It is the same picture that we have painted for us of Israel at the beginning of chapter 16 of Ezekiel. Yet...there is certainly more to the story and this picture being painted for us.
- C. Yet, God claims us for Jesus Christ as His bride even though we are unworthy & offer nothing.
1. Even though we are wholly unworthy...God takes us in through our faith towards Him. He is willing to enter into a covenant relationship with us. He is willing to say that I will be your God if you will be my people. The unwanted, vile, wretched, and unloved one has been found wanted, desired, and loved in the sight of God.
 2. But it isn't because we actually have anything to offer God. We have nothing to offer to Him. Mere humanity cannot gift anything to the One who brought him into existence. Yet, His love, grace, and mercy are overflowing to the extend that He would reach out His hand of peace through the giving of His son on the cross. **(John 3:16; Romans 5:6-11)**
 3. We were helpless in our sins. We were vile and wretched in our sins. The wrath of God would be more than justified because we were His enemies because we had rejected righteousness. Yet, now we are given the opportunity to exult, to show jubilation in God because of what He has done in extending to us reconciliation. That is God's grace. It is making the helpless to be strong.
- D. God's grace can turn the most undesirable into a beautiful bride fit for a King.
1. God's grace takes the person who comes to Him broken, messed up, with issues, with problems, overcome with sin, and without hope...His grace takes that person who comes just as he or she is and He turned them into something special. We don't come to God because we are already fixed...no...we come to God because we need fixing!
 2. It is only through God's grace that we receive the washing. **(I Corinthians 6:11)** It is only through God's grace that we are clothed with Christ. **(Galatians 3:27)** It is only through God's grace that we are adorned with ornaments, bracelets, necklaces, rings, earrings, gold, and silver. It is only through God's grace that we are then able to be presented before the King of King and Lord of Lords and made into something special.
 3. This idea might be difficult for us because our culture puts far more emphasis on the bride on her wedding day. Us guys recognize that we are only a part of the wedding out of necessity, and that it is really all about the brides, but that just isn't the case in the Bible. In the Bible it is all about the groom who is Christ. We, those who make up the church, are the bride that is to be presented to Him so that we might be glorious, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing. We are to be holy and blameless as we stand before Jesus. **(Ephesians 5:22-27; Revelation 19:7-9; 21:2)** We aren't those things because of ourselves, but we are only those things because of what Jesus has done for us in washing and cleansing us. But His washing and cleansing through grace demands that we go on from that time living the good works of God. **(Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:11-14)**

Without Jesus as our groom, we are nothing. Without Jesus's mercy, we deserve nothing but punishment. Without the teaching of Jesus, we would not know what right thing to do. God's grace to be saved by Jesus extends to us the ability to be beautiful, clean, whole, and righteous in His sight. That is the true picture of God's grace. May we never portray God's grace as anything different. May we never see God's mercy as something we deserve. May we only glorify and praise Him for giving us that which we will never deserve, and may we constantly throw ourselves at His feet, recognizing that without God...we are a people to be most pitied. Thanks be to God because of His grace, and may we always seek to live in it.

PRAYER