

Text: Jeremiah 18:1-8

Title: What God's Grace Does for You

Truth: God's grace forgives, cleanses, and restores.

Date/Location: Sunday September 19, 2021 at FBC

Introduction

In Titus 2:11-14, we learned about God's grace, that is, His unmerited (and for our part, ill-merited) divine favor. It is a saving grace, a teaching grace, and a sacrificing grace. It is also a forward-looking grace, focusing on the appearing of Jesus Christ, and a purifying grace, making sinners into people of God eager to serve Him and others with good works.

In this message, we are going to at the restorative and cleansing facets of God's grace.

I. God's Grace is a Restoring Grace, Jeremiah 18:1-8

- A. The entire chapter hinges on the illustration of the potter's work in 18:1-4. Understand that the potter is in charge; the vessel he is crafting comes into a state where it needs to be fixed or made into something better; and the potter does the necessary restorative work on the clay and makes it into something useful. Even though a mistake may be made by a human potter in the illustration, the divine potter can never fail. God does not make mistakes. Flaws in the clay itself or the wheel mechanism are responsible for some of the problems at a literal potter's wheel, but every failure in real life is due to a failure in the clay, that is, the people.
- B. God explains to Jeremiah that this illustration is like what He does with nations. If a nation is living in sin but hears God's judgment against it and repents, God will relent of the disaster He had planned. This sounds like Nineveh after the preaching of Jonah. The promise for Israel is that God will restore the nation of Israel if it turns from its wrong ways. He would bring them back from captivity (1 Kings 8:46-53). Again, notice the failure is in the "clay" in this case. The solution is in God.
- C. Do you hope this illustration also has a personal application? If God can do such restoration for nations that repent, can he do the

same for individuals? Indeed, He can—and does. And that with much less effort than for an entire nation.¹

- D. Sin always ends up badly, no matter if you are a Christian or not. If you are not, then it ends up *very* badly. If you are a believer, it will have its effect one way or the other. It may be externally in your relationship with others. It may be in a lack of harmony in your relationship with God. It may be a defiled and guilty conscience. It may be physical consequences in your body. Perhaps other consequences will arise.
- E. But there is no shortage of **power** in the divine potter to remake your individual situation into something good and useful, just like he does with nations.

Not only is there plenty of **power**, but also God's gracious favor is the driving force to God's **willingness** to *use* that power in the situation of people who turn from sin. The grace of God will forgive, cleanse, and even help you through the consequences of sin.

And not only does God have plenty of **power** and gracious **willingness**, but He also provided **a place for your sins** to be deposited so that we are not just “pretending” they are forgiven or in hiding or a non-issue. Christianity does not provide a “pretend” solution to sin. It provides an actual solution to it by demonstrating God's righteousness through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. He bore our sins in His body on that tree, so that we could be really forgiven and really live for righteousness instead of evil.

- F. This is why God calls upon us to turn to Jesus Christ and away from our desire and love for sins (all of them). Trusting in the Lord Jesus means that God imputes our sins upon Jesus, and He then applies the blessings of forgiveness and justification and sanctification to us. Hereby, He takes a broken vessel and makes it into something beneficial. Let us pray and strive to be useful vessels (2 Timothy 2:20-22).

¹ God and the “expenditure of effort” are not ideas that truly go together, but the point stands that God easily restore repentant individuals. And He desires to do so.

II. God's Grace is a Forgiving and Cleansing Grace, Psalm 51

The design of the psalms is for general application to all the people of God. Therefore, do not focus on David's sin listed in the prologue to the Psalm. Think of your own situation.

- A. Set forth as an example for us (Rom 15:4), he acknowledged that:
1. He transgressed in specific matters and this transgression was primarily against God, v. 3-4. That is always the case. Sin affects us (1 Cor. 6:18), others around us, even others distant from us. The higher your office and the more people you serve, the bigger the impact of your sin. But transgression primarily reaches to heaven as an attack on God's holiness. It is a self-centered expression of self-autonomy that wants self-gratification and self-elevation and ends in self-worship instead of worship of God.
 2. He is a sinner in general, v. 5. "Born in sin" is the idea. From the moment of his conception, he was a sinner. His mom and dad were sinners, and they begot another human of the same sort as themselves. We need to humbly recognize this fact—we are sinful people, and we do sinful things. Such things, by the way are not merely "mistakes" unavoidable because we are "human." Rather, they are morally culpable choices that we make which do not agree with what God wishes for our lives.
 3. God requires truth not just outside, but in the heart, v. 6, as opposed to deception. The problem with our nature is that it deceives us from the inside, so that we think sin is not a big deal. We want to think highly of ourselves and be "right" even when we are wrong. But deception is a deep problem regardless of our cognizance of that fact.
 4. God does not desire "mere sacrifice" but rather contrition, v. 16-17. External acts of religion without internal reality make God sick and angry because He sees internal just as well as external. Pretend that your internal hypocrisy was on display for all to see, in the exact same way that your external religion is on display for all to see. If you understand how *that* looks, it is easy to grasp why it is sickening to God because He sees it all.

To be contrite means to repent, to know that you are guilty. To be contrite means to recognize that you have offended God and perhaps also your fellow man, parents, children, etc. To be contrite means you are willing to admit, “Honey, I was wrong.” “Mom, I did what I should not have done.” “Please forgive me.” “I am sorry.” Contriteness is not defending yourself or justifying the wrong you did. To be contrite means you have remorse—and not just remorse, but sincere remorse. You *really* grasp and admit that what you did is disobedient to God.

B. The Psalmist then asked God for:

1. Mercy, v. 1. “Have mercy upon me, O God.” This is the cry of a repentant heart, not just a foxhole prayer for deliverance in crisis. Notice similar cries throughout Scripture (Psalm 26:11, 41:4, 41:10, 56:1, 57:1, 67:1, 86:3, 119:58, 119:76, 119:132; Luke 18:13). And note well that God in Christ *is* merciful. David says that God is characterized by lovingkindness and a multitude of tender mercies. God is not stingy with grace, dear struggling sinner. He is rich in mercy (Heb. 8:12, 2:17). By the way, He calls upon His children to be just like He is in mercy (Luke 6:35-36; Matthew 5:7).
2. Cleansing, v. 1, 2, 7, 9, 10. Blotting out, washing, cleansing, purging, washing, hiding Your face from my sins, blotting out, creating a clean heart, renewing a good spirit within me—these are all ways of expressing the author’s desire to be clean from the dirt of sin and its guilt. When you know of the distance that your sinful behavior creates between you and God, you feel it, don’t you? Likewise, you can “feel” the cleansing, the relief, the joy, the happiness of knowing that somehow your sins have been rightly addressed.
3. Joy, v. 8, 12. He did not have happiness when he was living in sin and hiding his sin. It was misery (Psalm 32:3-4). Saved people who have fallen into some pattern of sin, or some egregious instance of sin, lose the joy of salvation. David wanted that back, and so do we when we struggle against sin.

Do not be a joyless Christian, dear friends. We have a lot to be joyful about. But I am advocating far more than the inspirational

“perk up, be happy because God is wonderful!” mantra. This text is telling us that we can be joyful knowing we are forgiven. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us (1 John 1:9). True, deep-seated joy naturally follows as we rest in God’s grace.

4. Closeness to God and continued service for God, v. 11. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Sin makes you feel not only dirty but also far away from God (Isaiah 59:2), estranged in your relationship with Him. But that does not have to continue. Confess with genuine confession and be brought into closeness with God. If you have never confessed sin to God and sought His pardon through Jesus, then this step will bring you into the family of God! If you are already a Christian, you already know the blessing of closeness with God and want that back again.

In David’s case, the theocratic anointing was at stake. He did not want to be cast off from his role as leader in Israel like Saul was before Him (1 Samuel 16:13-14). This ministry of the Spirit has *nothing* to do with whether the person was saved or not, for Saul was not a true child of God while David was. Yet both had some ministry of the Holy Spirit working on them to help them lead the nation. That ministry could come and go. It left Saul and went to David. This says nothing about the Spirit coming or going on people who were true believers in the Old Testament.

5. Deliverance from guilt, v. 14. This guilt was the “guilt of bloodshed.” That is a heavy guilt—not primarily a feeling but rather an objective state of guiltiness in the courtroom of God. Many sins can bring a similar heavy guilt and feeling that goes with it. To be delivered from guilt is another act of God’s mercy, and it happens because when you trust in Jesus, God transfers your sin and its guilt to Him, does not hold it against you any longer. That is forgiveness. He also grants you righteousness in place of a situation of condemnation.

C. The Psalmist then requests some things that would impact others.

1. That he would be a testimony for God, v. 13, 14b-15. Sin in your life, and especially unconfessed sin, severely dampens your

usefulness for God toward others. Graciously, God permits us to serve Him even in our remaining sinfulness, but our effectiveness is heavily damaged. God calls for holy ministers. Broadening from the idea of “ministers” to church members, I cannot recount the number of situations that I have seen where people are living in sinful behaviors, not trusting in God, doubting God’s goodness, etc. and this paralyzes them from doing good. This is just where Satan and the world want them—bound up in their own miseries and sinning that way so that they cannot make an impact for God.

2. That God would be pleased and honored by His work in Jerusalem and by the righteous sacrifices of others. In his case, David could once again take a leading role in worship as he should do as an example to the nation. Before, he was unable to do so because he was in such sin—and at least some in leadership knew what was going on. His worship and speaking of the things of God would be scoffed at, and he was in an ineffective place spiritually. Now, he could lead by example, as he should.

After the sinner has confessed and been cleansed, he is much better able to impact other people for God.

Conclusion

Psalm 32 explains the results of confession and cleansing that are experienced by a sinner. Meditate on this Psalm sometime soon as part of your spiritual improvement (continuing education). May what we have learned from Jeremiah and the Psalms challenge us to forsake sin and be grateful that we have such a merciful and forgiving God as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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