

## Pastor Jon's June 18, 2023 Sermon "Grace At Bat"

Based on Romans 5:1-8

Today I want to talk a little bit about God's grace. Grace is normally defined as God's unconditional love for us in Jesus Christ. You can't earn it. It is a gift.

To help us understand grace, I found a story this week called "Grace at Bat." By Craig Pullam

There was a baseball game that once took place. The Lord's team was playing Satan's team. Satan was a player coach and the pitcher of the opposing team. The Lord's team was at bat, the score was zero to zero. It was in the bottom of the 9th inning with two outs. The coach and the Lord stood by observing the game. As they watched, the next batter stepped up to the plate whose name was LOVE. Love swung at the first pitch and hit a single, because "love never fails." (I hope that's true for the Packers this year). The next batter was named FAITH, who also got a single because faith without love is nothing according to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13. The next batter was named GODLY WISDOM. Satan wound up and threw the first pitch to Godly Wisdom. Godly Wisdom looked it over and let it pass....ball one. Three more pitches and Godly Wisdom walked, because Godly wisdom never swings at the junk Satan throws. The bases were loaded. The Lord then turned to coach and told him His star player was coming up. Up to the plate stepped GRACE. Coach said, "Grace sure doesn't look like much." Satan's whole team relaxed when they saw Grace. Thinking he had won the game, Satan wound up and fired his first pitch. To the shock of everyone, Grace hit the ball harder than anyone had ever seen. But Satan was not worried, as his center fielder let very few get by. He went up for the ball, but he misjudged it. It hit him on the head and sent him crashing on the ground. Then the ball continued over the fence for a home run! The Lord's team won. The Lord then asked Coach if he knew why LOVE, FAITH, and GODLY WISDOM could get on base but could not win the game? Coach answered that he didn't know why. The Lord explained, "If your love, faith and wisdom had won the game you would think you had done it by yourself. Love, faith and wisdom will get you on base, but only GRACE can get you home."

Like in the Hymn Amazing Grace, Grace will lead you home.

In our second reading for today from Romans 5:1, the Apostle Paul reminds us that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And all this is a result of God's grace.

Paul says, even in the midst of the various trials and suffering you may be going through, we can still have peace... now. Here Paul is encouraging the early Christians in Rome to hang in there as they suffered persecution for sharing Christ with others. Paul uses big words like you are "justified"... or put in a right relationship with God through Jesus' work on the cross and in the resurrection.

Justification was a legal term. Justification is the restoration of a right legal status... to be put in the right. So, if we are justified by grace, even though we are guilty, God declares us not guilty. Today, we often try to justify ourselves or our own actions... especially when we get in trouble or get caught. We come up with excuses or want to blame others.

But the verb here for being justified in the original Greek indicates a completed action. You already are put in a right relationship with God. You already are enough. You already are precious in God's sight. There is nothing you can do to earn this right relationship with God. It comes through our baptism and faith in Jesus Christ and his work on the cross.

Also, Paul boldly tells us that our faith can co-exist with suffering. Paul says that their present trials or catastrophes can be catalysts for growth in character and hope. He says, "Suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope. And hope does not disappoint us." Paul even says you can boast in your sufferings because you already know the outcome of your faith.

If you already know the outcome of your faith, that you are saved by God's action upon us, we can live our lives differently. We can live a hope filled life now. Paul uses the image of God's grace as refreshment, of the Holy Spirit being poured into our hearts, like a freshly watered garden. Healing our parched souls.

As a result, we don't have to wonder if God loves us, or if we will ever be good enough. You don't have to be perfect to receive this grace. Christ died while we were still sinners.

Finally, the fruit is that we can live more thankful and generous lives now. You can live like every day is a gift. You can live with graceful patience for yourself and others.

But be careful that you don't treat God's grace as "cheap grace". I can go on sinning... living the old life... because I know I will be forgiven. Keep in mind that God's grace for us was costly. Jesus went to the cross.

Lutheran Pastor in Germany during Hitler's time, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, described cheap grace as preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without discipline, Communion without confession. Cheap grace is ultimately belief without obedience to Christ's teachings. God's grace for you should change the way you live and produce fruit for the world in need.

Grace is the gift that gives us peace with God and within ourselves... even when we suffer. And remember, grace will bring us home.  
Amen