

Text: 2 Samuel 9:1-13¹

Title: Grace Is For Those Who Need It

Date: November 22, 2009

Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

Last week we spent time together thinking about Paul's word to Timothy in 1 Timothy and the key word that held everything together for us last week was the word "grace." Paul wrote to Timothy...

“the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” 1 Timothy 1:14

We talked about Paul's life as a persecutor of the church of Jesus Christ and his life-long wonder and amazement at God's great mercy and grace in forgiving him all his sin and in making him His servant to declare the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Everything that Paul experienced was due to God's great, amazing grace.

I've had several conversations with folks this week about God's grace that got me thinking. In addition, I was very impressed by the theme of God's grace in the songs that Josh picked for us to sing this morning. As he and I talked about what song to end with today, I asked him to lead us in a song that I introduced to us last week entitled "Grace Unmeasured."

As I thought about God's grace this week I asked myself, "Why is it that we begin our walk with God with 'Grace Unmeasured' but somewhere along our journey with God we move from celebrating 'Grace Unmeasured' to depending upon our own human effort? Let me illustrate how easily we slip from the doctrine of God's grace into human effort. There's a song that has been troubling me in recent weeks. It's received a fair bit of play; we've even sung it here during worship. The song pictures us at the end of our lives, taking stock of our lives and it says...

**“When it's all been said and done,
There's just one thing that matters...”**

Let me stop there. What do you think the "one thing that matters" is? Would you like to know what Paul thought? Here, according to Paul, is the "one thing that matters"...

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I

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**delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...” 1
Corinthians 15:1-4**

According to Paul, the “one thing that matters” is that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again. The “one thing that matters” is God’s mercy and grace poured out upon us in Jesus Christ.

Would you like to know what the song writer thought was the “one thing”? This is how the song continues...

**“When it’s all been said and done,
There’s just one thing that matters,
Did I do my best to live for truth,
Did I live my life for you.”**

“Did I do my best...” “Did I live my life...” Those are important questions but they are not the “one thing that matters.” Yes, God wants us to live lives for his glory and for his truth but the “one thing that matters” is what God has done for us, not what we do for God! Grace is what matters and grace is what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. This song represents to me how easy it is to loosen our grip on grace as we travel the road of faith with God. But sadly, small missteps like this can lead to unnecessary grief and trial along the way.

There are three major sections on **the Christian road**.

The first part of the road is **salvation** or **becoming a Christian**. Salvation is when we come into a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Our sin is forgiven and we become members of God’s “forever family.”

The second stretch of the road is **sanctification** or **being a Christian**. Once we have become Christians through faith in Christ, we are called by God to live in obedience to Him. Our lives are to increasingly reflect the character of Jesus Christ as we live in obedience to God’s Word empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The final stretch of the road is **glorification** or **becoming like Christ**. The Bible tells us that when we see Jesus face to face, we will be made like Him. We’ll experience complete transformation of our characters and our bodies and it happens the moment we see Jesus, either when we die or when He comes again.

We’re pretty clear that **salvation** is a work of God’s grace from beginning to end. To be completely forgiven of our sin even though we only deserve God’s judgment is an act of His grace and mercy – no question!

And we're pretty clear that **glorification** is a work of God's grace is also a complete work of grace from beginning to end. The supernatural transformation into the eternal likeness of Jesus is something only God can accomplish – no question!

But it's middle stretch of the road – **sanctification** – that causes us the most trouble when we think about grace. We quickly acknowledge that **becoming** a Christian is an act of God's grace, and we even say that we believe that our live by grace, but the tragic reality is that we tend to act as if **being** a Christian is a combination of a little divine grace and a lot of human effort. What we end up with is a Christian life of performance. When we live with this perspective we end up thinking that God's gifts to us – His grace and blessing – are things that are given to us as a reward for our spiritual performance.

Let me give you an example.

Jerry Bridges is an American Christian writer. Several years ago he was scheduled to speak at a church and he had prepared a message on "the challenge to discipleship." When he got to the church that Sunday morning, about 15 minutes before the service, he learned that a member of the pastoral staff had died suddenly the day before. The congregation was in shock and grief.

Bridges knew that the message he had prepared wasn't appropriate for that situation. The congregation needed comfort and encouragement, not challenge, that day. He quickly prayed, asking God to bring to mind a message that would be appropriate. This is Jerry's account of what happened next:

"Then I began to add up my merits and demerits for the day: Had I had a quiet time that morning? Had I entertained any lustful thoughts or told any half-truths? I had fallen into the performance trap.

I quickly recognized what I was doing, so I said `Lord, I don't know the answer to any of those questions, but none of them matters. I come to You today in the name of Jesus and, by His merit alone, ask for Your help.' A single verse of Scripture came to my mind and with it a brief outline for a message I knew would be appropriate. I went to the pulpit and literally prepared the message as I spoke. God did answer prayer." (Jerry Bridges, Transforming Grace, p. 18)

Have you ever found yourself in the spiritual performance trap? Let me ask you about two versions of performance-based living.

First, if you're believer in Jesus Christ and you have **doubted that God will answer your prayer** because **you just aren't good enough**, then you've been in "the performance trap." You've been experiencing sickness or a lack of success in school or difficulty in business or problems in your relationships and

you believe it's because God is holding back his blessing to get you to perform better. It's a common trap.

Second, let me throw another version of the performance trap at you. If you're a believer in Jesus Christ and you think that **God should answer your prayer** because **you've done your best** to honour Him, then you've been in the performance trap. You're expecting blessing in your schoolwork or your health or your business or your family because you've been a faithful servant and witness for Jesus. It's a common trap.

Brother and sisters, these aren't hypothetical situations. In this church I've heard sincere believers express both of these views during the eleven years that I've been here. More than that, I've thought these same things myself! Performance-based expectations rather than grace-based spiritual living is a real issue that affects your life, as it does mine.

There's a story in the Old Testament that beautifully portrays God's grace in action. It's found in 2 Samuel chapter 9. It's the story of God's grace shown through King David to a man by the name of Mephibosheth.

Let me give you a bit of background on what we're about to read. David had been locked in battle with King Saul. He had defeated him and was now king of Israel. But it was a war that David had not sought. David was a faithful military commander to King Saul but Saul became jealous of David's popularity and so he determined to kill him. David had been good friends with Saul's son, Jonathan, and the war between David and Saul had put David and Jonathan on opposing sides, but it had not destroyed their friendship. During the war, however, Jonathan was killed. After the war, David solidified his kingship over Israel and then he looked for some way to honour his dead friend, Jonathan.

2 Samuel 9:1 David said, "Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" ² **Now there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba, and they called him to David. And the king said to him, "Are you Ziba?" And he said, "I am your servant."** ³ **And the king said, "Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?"** Ziba said to the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet." ⁴ **The king said to him, "Where is he?" And Ziba said to the king, "He is in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar."** ⁵ **Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar.** ⁶ **And Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, son of Saul, came to David and fell on his face and paid homage. And David said, "Mephibosheth!" And he answered, "Behold, I am your servant."** ⁷ **And David said to him, "Do not fear, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father, and you shall eat at my table always."** ⁸ **And**

he paid homage and said, “What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?”

⁹ Then the king called Ziba, Saul’s servant, and said to him, “All that belonged to Saul and to all his house I have given to your master’s grandson. ¹⁰ And you and your sons and your servants shall till the land for him and shall bring in the produce, that your master’s grandson may have bread to eat. But Mephibosheth your master’s grandson shall always eat at my table.” Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. ¹¹ Then Ziba said to the king, “According to all that my lord the king commands his servant, so will your servant do.” So Mephibosheth ate at David’s table, like one of the king’s sons. ¹² And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Mica. And all who lived in Ziba’s house became Mephibosheth’s servants. ¹³ So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate always at the king’s table. Now he was lame in both his feet.

I want you to carefully notice the wording of verse 3. Notice the words:

“Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?” 2 Samuel 9:3

David is setting us an example, not just of human or kingly kindness. He’s showing us what God’s grace is like.

To whom is God is looking to be gracious?

Mephibosheth was the son of David’s friend, Jonathan. Although David had been in a contest for the throne of Israel with Jonathan’s father, Saul, David and Jonathan were deep friends. They had sworn a covenant of friendship with each other that they kept, despite the hatred that Saul had for David. Jonathan had sworn to help David evade his father’s vengeance and asked David to remember his descendants with kindness. He had asked David...

**“If I am still alive, show me the steadfast love of the Lord, that I may not die; and do not cut off your steadfast love from my house forever, when the Lord cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth.”
1 Samuel 20:14-15**

In the pitched battle for the throne, Saul and Jonathan were killed, and all of Saul’s potential heirs were also killed – all except one, Jonathan’s five-year-old son, Mephibosheth. When Mephibosheth’s nurse heard that Jonathan and Saul had died in battle, she fled with Mephibosheth, fearing that he would be killed, too. As she fled, she dropped him, and he was injured in both feet, causing him to be lame for the rest of his life.

We pick up the story in 2 Samuel 9, many years later. Mephibosheth is now old enough to have a son of his own. (Verse 12) I want us to notice several things about Mephibosheth as an object of David's kindness and the lessons those things teach us about God's grace.

First, he is the grandson of David's enemy, Saul. Notice the words:

“Is there not still someone of the house of Saul...” 2 Samuel 9:1, 3

David didn't ask: “Is there anyone left of the family of my friend, Jonathan?” David wants to show kindness to the descendants of his enemy and remember, he's modeling God's grace in doing so. What that tells us is that

God is looking to show His grace to His enemies.

So much for the idea that we've got to be in God's “good books” in order to get him to be gracious to us! God's grace and mercy comes to us even when we are at war with him. Grace is unmerited favour and God shows it to whomever He wills. The Lord said to Moses:

“I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.” Exodus 33:19

Second, Mephibosheth is physically handicapped and dependent on others.

“There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet.” 2 Samuel 9:3

Being crippled in both feet meant that he was unable to provide for himself. Mephibosheth was totally dependent on the goodness of others. When David eventually restored his lands, it wasn't Mephibosheth that worked the land, but Ziba, his grandfather's old servant, whom David ordered to do Mephibosheth's work.

God is looking to show His grace to the helpless

So much for the idea that grace is “God helping those who help themselves.” Grace isn't that little extra that tops up our efforts. Some people believe that God calls us to do our part and then He comes along to make up the difference with His help. But grace is really all from God and none from us.

Third, Mephibosheth is dispossessed and without property.

“He is in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar.” 2 Samuel 9:4

As Saul's successor, David took control of all of Saul's lands and property. That left nothing for Mephibosheth. He was living in someone else's home because he didn't have one of his own. He was bankrupt!

God is looking to show His grace to the bankrupt

So much for the idea that grace is God's expression of approval on our service for Him. As it says in the old hymn, Rock of Ages:

**“Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling...”**

It's our spiritual bankruptcy that makes us ready for His grace. How bankrupt are we? This is what Paul wrote:

“All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” Romans 3:12

Our hands are empty. Our spiritual bottom line is zero!

Fourth, Mephibosheth was full of fear. When he is finally ushered into David's presence, David can see the fear etched on his face and gripping his twisted body. He speaks peace to him:

“And David said to him, ‘Do not fear...’” 2 Samuel 9:7

God is looking to show His grace to the fearful

Mephibosheth had been in hiding in Lo Debar on the other side of the Jordan River. He was living under the protection of Makir son of Ammiel, a man who was not only wealthy but powerful. Later, when David was on the run from his son Absalom, Makir came to his defense and helped to rout Absalom's forces. But now Mephibosheth stood in David's court, defenseless.

In a poem entitled, Grace in a Barren Place, Julie Martin has captured the amaze that must have gripped Mephibosheth's soul:

***“I was that Mephibosheth
Crippled by my twisted pride and hiding from you in a barren place
Where You could not find me
Where You would not give me what I deserved.
But somehow You found me and I don't understand why
But You gave me what I do not deserve.
You not only spared my desolate life
But You made it bountiful
And here at Your table
I will thank You, my King.”***

(as quoted in Swindoll, The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart, p.?)

So much even for the idea that God's grace comes to us because of we turn to him. Even fearful people, people who hide from him, receive His kindness.

Finally, Mephibosheth saw himself as nothing short of contemptible. When David declares to him his desire to restore his fortunes, Mephibosheth replies:

“What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?” 2 Samuel 9:8

Dogs are animals that many of us love. Sometimes we wonder why we love them, but they are “family” to many of us. That was not the way in the ancient world. “Dogs” throughout the Bible are filthy objects of contempt and revulsion. And to be a “dead” dog, only served to amplify the disgust. Mephibosheth might as well have said, “I’m a stinking pile of maggots – why should you care about me?”

God is looking to show His grace to the despised

In his final novel in the Chronicles of Narnia, The Last Battle, British author, C.S. Lewis, recounts an encounter between the fictional characters, Emeth and Aslan. Aslan, the Lion figure of the Narnia series, is a character that Lewis used to represent Christ throughout the stories. Emeth had been an enemy of the forces of Aslan, but he finally comes to seek out Aslan, the Great Lion. Emeth was fearful of meeting Aslan, the one against whom he had fought. He feared Aslan's wrath, “but,” Emeth, wrote...

“the Glorious One bent down his golden head and touched my forehead with his tongue and said, “Son, thou art welcome.” ... Then he breathed upon me and took away the trembling from my limbs and caused me to stand upon my feet. ... And since then, ..., I have been wandering to find him and my happiness is so great that it even weakens me like a wound. **And this is the marvel of marvels, that he called me Beloved, me who am but as a dog.**”

(The Last Battle as quoted by Scotty Smith, *The Reign of Grace*, p. 9-10)

“Marvel of marvels,” “Wonder of wonders,”... Mephibosheth knew the wonder at being shown a kindness undeserved. Do you? Do I? Do we really understand the incredible wonder of grace? Grace is undeserved kindness.

What Kind of God Shows Grace Like This?

David's kindness to Mephibosheth not only shows us the kind of people to whom God shows kindness, but David's behaviour models that of God Himself. There are some key behaviors that the writer of 2 Samuel highlights by repetition.

First, we're taught that...

Our God relentlessly seeks out people to whom He can show His grace

Twice David asked, “Is there anyone left ... to whom I can show kindness?”
(v.1,3)

It was years after Jonathan’s death. Time had passed, but David never forgot his promise to show kindness to Jonathan’s family. He searched out Mephibosheth, sending emissaries to bring him to Jerusalem from his place of hiding. And that’s exactly what Mephibosheth was doing – he was hiding from David. He was afraid that David would finish the job of wiping out Saul’s descendants. But that wasn’t David’s plan and it isn’t God’s plan, either.

Second, we’re taught that...

Our God desires to show grace more than judgment

Three times David declares that he wants to show kindness to Saul’s descendants (v.1,3,7.) **Twice** we’re told that David would restore Mephibosheth’s hereditary lands. (v.7, 9) **Four times** we’re told that it was David’s plan that Mephibosheth would eat at his table for the rest of his days. (v.7, 10, 11, 13) The message is clear: David is going to lavishly bless Mephibosheth!

For a king to be so gracious was hard for Mephibosheth to believe. After all, he could claim David’s throne as Saul’s rightful descendant. David’s kindness was overwhelming!

It can be hard for us to believe in God’s desire to show us kindness – but it’s the message He wants us to understand more than anything else!

Don’t get me wrong, one day God will show wrath against sin, but His great longing is to show grace to those who will approach Him for mercy:

"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin." Exodus 34:6

His desire is to welcome home to his table all those who will come to Him.

This story of David’s kindness to Mephibosheth is an Old Testament version of Jesus’ Parable of the Prodigal Son. In Jesus’ parable, the Father welcomes the lost son into his home and returns him to the status of his son. Notice what David did for Mephibosheth...

“So Mephibosheth ate at David’s table, like one of the king’s sons.” 2 Samuel 9:11

God wants us to sit at His table and receive His kindness – that’s the kind of God He is!

Finally, we’re taught that...

Our God shows His grace to us for the sake of Another

Twice we’re told that David’s desire was to show kindness to one of Saul’s descendants “**for Jonathan’s sake.**” (v.1, 7)

When God shows us his kindness, it’s because of Another. It’s because of Jesus. Paul wrote in Ephesians:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ... according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.” Ephesians 1:3,5-6

I began by telling you about Jerry Bridges’ experience of “the performance trap.” I told you that God answered his prayer that morning.

“Why did God answer my prayer?” Bridges wrote. “Was it because I had a quiet time that morning or fulfilled other spiritual disciplines? Was it because I hadn’t entertained any sinful thoughts that day? No, God answered my prayer for only one reason: Jesus Christ had already purchased that answer to prayer two thousand years ago on a Roman cross. God answered on the basis of His grace alone, not because of my merits or demerits.

One of the best kept secrets among Christians today is this: **Jesus paid it all.** I mean all. He not only purchased your forgiveness of sins and your ticket to heaven, He purchased every blessing and every answer to prayer you will ever receive. Every one of them – no exceptions.” (Transforming Grace, p.18-19)

What is our one claim on God’s grace? It’s **NEED!** The rest of that verse from Rock of Ages I mentioned a moment ago goes like this:

**“Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked come to Thee for dress,
Helpless look to Thee for grace;
Foul I to the fountain fly,
Wash me Savior or I die.”**

We need His kindness and mercy in our lives because without it we are worthless hopeless and doomed! Are you like Mephibosheth?

- At odds with God – you aren't really even a friend. God wants to show you His kindness and welcome you as His friend.
- Helpless – you don't have the strength to help yourself. God wants to care for you.
- Bankrupt – you have nothing to offer Him. God wants to bless you with His riches.
- Fearful – you are afraid that God will smack you instead of be kind to you. God wants to “surely show you kindness.”
- Despised – you feel like nobody and worthless. God doesn't think that way about you.

If you are any of the above, you are a candidate for God's grace. He wants to pour it out on you, to bless you richly and all because of Jesus.

Will you let Him?

- **Invitation to prayer during the final song**
- **Final Song:** Grace Unmeasured
- **Benediction**