

Study Two

Grace and Jesus Christ



Transfiguration of Jesus, Armando Alendar Ara, 2004

Starter

Grace:
Is there a word beginning 'R'
that speaks into your faith,
or understanding of God?

Key Verse

'For all have sinned and fall short of the glory
of God, and all are justified freely by his grace
through the redemption that came by Jesus
Christ'
(Romans 3:23,24)

God's promise of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ

(Read John 1:14-17, 2 Timothy 1:8-10, Ephesians 1:3-8)

The Gospel of John opens with 'In the beginning was the Word', a picture of timelessness given the age of the universe. We are then told that the Word 'became' flesh (the incarnation) as Christ took on human form through the gateway of birth, taking up residence in a corner of this world.

The phrase 'made his dwelling' means 'to pitch a tent', a temporary home. As the incarnate Son of God, he revealed the nature and person of the Father. John tells us that 'We have seen his glory', a reference perhaps to the disciples' presence at the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-8). He adds that

'Out of his fullness, we have all received grace in place of grace already given'. God's grace is a never-ending supply.

In his letter to Timothy, Paul also refers to the timeless nature of Christ, and how the grace of God has been present since the beginning of time, and revealed to humanity through the Son. It's a personal testimony of how God's timeless grace has been working in and through his life since Paul's encounter with Christ on the Damascus Road.

Writing to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul tells them it had always been God's plan to embrace and adopt them as His children.

Paul is full of praise for all that Jesus Christ has done, and all that is found in him.

Writing as a Jew, Paul presents this passage as a Jewish blessing. In the Old Testament, blessings are often material,

whereas God's blessings to us in Christ are mainly spiritual. All are worthy of our praise and thanksgiving.

Q) John brings us a picture of Jesus 'pitching his tent' in the world. Could it have been any different from a temporary dwelling, and what does it say about his own needs?

Q) Paul tells us we have been called to a holy life and enabled to do this through God's grace. How would you describe a holy life in a modern world?

Q) Paul touches the subject of predestination while writing to the Ephesians. Do you see this as being a chosen few who receive this amazing blessing, or being available for all who choose to accept it?

SAMPLE

Grace expressed through the ministry of Jesus

(Read Matthew 9:35-36, Mark 2:13-17, Luke 18:15-17)

In Matthew's story, we find a very busy Jesus. Everywhere he goes, there are crowds of people wanting to get close to him and receive healing.

There are also Pharisees and synagogue leaders listening in. The religious leaders criticise what Jesus does and says as simply wrong, blasphemous or from 'the prince of demons'.

Jesus focusses his attention on the ordinary folk, suffering under Roman oppression and, like harassed

sheep, lacking the spiritual care they should be receiving. It is to the gathering crowds that Jesus' compassion is freely poured out.

Opposition to Jesus was always there, and quick to raise its head. Mark brings us Jesus' second conflict with the religious leaders, as he calls Levi the tax collector. Again, the crowds are gathering, and Jesus is keen to draw to him those thought of as outsiders, such as tax collectors working on behalf of the ruling power in Rome.



Brooklyn Museum, *Suffer the Little Children to Come unto Me*, James Tissot, c1890

And here Jesus tells us that a doctor ministers to those who are sick, not to the healthy. He has come to call and touch the lives of those considered sinners, alienated from God, rather than those thought 'righteous' (or in this context, self-righteous).

In the Gospel of Luke, we find people bringing babies and young children to Jesus. His response to the disciples,

who are asking him to shoo them away, is that age is not the issue. However, childlike qualities such as trust, openness, and a lack of the self-righteousness of those who oppose him, are essential for receiving God's grace.

Q) Bearing in mind the reactions that Jesus received during his ministry, he still achieved so much. Does fear about local reaction to church mission impact on whether it happens at all?

Q) How should Jesus' priorities become ours in our interactions with the world outside our church walls?

Q) Having commended young children as an example for those wanting to receive God's grace, what might it be that makes adults harder work, then and now?

Grace shown in the Cross

(Read 1 Peter 1:3-5, Romans 3:21-24, 1 Tim 1:12-15)

Peter is extolling the greatness of God the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead so that all believers can be born again into this same resurrection life. With this gift comes the hope that one day they will experience the fullness of life in God's kingdom.

Peter describes this hope in v.4 as an 'inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade'. It is eternal, full of glory, and secured forever. Even in our suffering as children of God, we have every reason to rejoice. The idea of inheritance is one of the major Biblical themes, stressing family connection and gifts.

Paul extends this message with the emphasis on the worldwide nature of the Christian message. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, he

tells us, because all are in the same place regarding sin and 'all fall short of the glory of God'. There is a universal need for God's forgiveness and grace, demonstrated through Jesus Christ and his sacrifice for us.

Writing to Timothy, Paul gives thanks to God for appointing him to his apostolic role even though, in his ignorance, he had been a blasphemer, persecutor, and violent man. All that separates him from all the other false teachers is the grace of God, and Paul emphasises the importance of knowing that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners just like him.

Q) What is the importance of the cross in your personal journey of faith?

Q) Where do you see God's grace exhibited in Jesus' life?

Q) Paul is quite open about his own faith journey, but how easy do you find talking about your own, and are there ways of making this easier?

SAMPLE

To Ponder and Pray

So many people in this world are trying to engage (in various ways) with the 'spiritual' side of their life, and not seeing the established church as the place for them. Pray that the connection might be made, and a loving welcome found.

' It is grace at the beginning, and grace at the end. So that when you and I come to lie upon our death beds, the one thing that should comfort and help and strengthen us there is the thing that helped us in the beginning. Not what we have been, not what we have done, but the Grace of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. The Christian life starts with grace, it must continue with grace, it ends with grace. Grace wondrous grace. By the grace of God I am what I am. Yet not I, but the Grace of God which was with me.'

- Martyn Lloyd-Jones

'My worth is what I am worth to God; and that is a marvelous great deal, for Christ died for me. Thus, incidentally, what gives to each of us His highest worth gives the same worth to everyone; in all that matters most are we equal.'

- William Temple