

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Things which accompany salvation: Grace and Discipleship

Welcome to *Truth for Today*, the Bible Explained. The title of the present series is: "Things that accompany salvation" and the title of this talk is "Grace and Discipleship."

Firstly, I want to make sure we all understand what salvation, grace and discipleship all mean and why they are linked.

Salvation is deliverance from sin and its consequences, which is brought about by faith in Jesus Christ.

Grace is God's unmerited favour toward man, which is something he does not deserve.

Discipleship describes a follower of Jesus Christ, one who is willing to serve Him and witness for Him.

What links them together? The grace of God is free and unconditional, received through repentance and faith which brings salvation. Once salvation is received, a Christian becomes a follower of Christ. Considering what Jesus Christ did for the Christian, he or she loves Christ and willingly wants to please Him and tell others about Him. I suppose we could say that discipleship is the response to grace.

Probably the best passage in the Bible that shows that grace and discipleship go hand in hand is Luke 18:35-43, where Jesus heals a blind beggar. Let me read the story to you. *"As He drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. They told him, 'Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.' And he cried out, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to Him. And when he came near, He asked him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' He said, 'Lord, let me recover my sight.' And Jesus said to him, 'Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.' And immediately he recovered his sight and followed Him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God."*

This story is a picture of an unsaved person coming to Christ. The beggar was blind; he could not see Jesus. The beggar cried out to Jesus for mercy. People tried to keep the beggar quiet, because he was an embarrassment to them. But Jesus came to where the beggar was and spoke to him directly. The beggar had faith and Jesus lovingly met his need and touched him by His grace. Notice that Jesus does not ask him to follow Him or be His disciple. The beggar, once he had received his sight, follows Jesus willingly, giving glory to God. The beggar became a disciple of Jesus Christ and others also received a blessing because of the faith and witness of the new disciple. The beggar was cast aside by society but, in grace, Jesus met his need and showed him kindness and favour. Jesus can do the same for you, my friend, right now just where you are. If you feel Jesus is speaking to you, call out to Him.

Grace

Now that we have pointed out the link between grace and discipleship I will try and explain grace and discipleship a little bit more. Grace is the love and mercy given to us by God, because God desires us to have it, not necessarily because of anything we have done or to deserve it. Grace, it can be said, goes further than mercy. The Bible is full of verses about God's grace, and even though it is not something we deserve, God is kind to us and wants the best for our lives. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for grace is "chen" which is mentioned about sixty times and means kindness and favour. For example; *"favour in Your [i.e. God's] sight"* or *"in the eyes of the LORD."* This concept first occurs in Genesis 6:8, *"Noah found favour in the eyes of the LORD."* Salvation, forgiveness and mercy are all linked in this first illustration of grace in the Old Testament. The rest of the references in Genesis all describe favour in the eyes of man; for example, Jacob begging for Esau's favour (see Genesis 33:10, Genesis 33:15). In Exodus 33:12-17 in the space of six verses it is said five times that *"Moses found favour in the eyes of the LORD"*, which means to find favour or be pleased with. Joseph (Genesis 39:4) and Samuel were others of whom it is said of that they *"found favour in the eyes of the LORD."*

When we come to the New Testament, the Greek word for grace is "charis" which is derived from a Greek word meaning "grace, kindness and life." Grace has an influence upon the heart; it brings joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness,

charm and loveliness. Grace is the loving kindness of God which keeps and strengthens Christians in their faith. Grace brings affection to Christ and kindles in the heart a desire to be obedient to Him. Perhaps the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32 is the most obvious example of grace. Grace is extended to the son who has no basis upon which to be shown grace, other than the fact that he has asked in humility and repentance to be shown it. Grace is the whole of God's activity toward man or can be as narrow as describing one segment of that activity. It is interesting to note that Jesus when here on earth never used the word "charis", but His teaching is full of the unmerited favour of God.

Grace is the means of salvation. Ephesians 2:8-9: *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing..."* We have all failed to meet God's standard of absolute perfection. You may argue that you are better than others, it is immaterial! Imagine trying to jump a deep chasm; if you are good enough to jump further than someone else but none of you reach the other side you are no better off than them. *"It is the gift of God..."* You can't purchase it, *"...not a result of works, so that no one may boast"* (Ephesians 2:8-9). Acts 15:11: *"But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."*

You are justified by His grace. Romans 3:23-24: *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."* The righteousness of God was established and in the death of Christ there was a complete and final settlement, upon a righteous basis, of every question which man's sin had raised.

Grace is the help through life. In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Paul writes, *"...but, He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness'. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."* Paul had a condition that induced bodily weakness. The thorn was a messenger of Satan, but the grace was Christ's. We must lay great stress in our minds upon the little word, **"my"**.

The Lord's reply to Paul was, *"My grace is sufficient for you"* (2 Corinthians 12:9). The Lord and His grace are infinite, sufficient for ten thousand times ten thousand of His saints - surely then sufficient for Paul, or for any one of us, no matter our difficulties! The thorn in the flesh, then, worked good in two ways:

1. It checked that tendency to pride that otherwise might have overcome Paul and wrought such mischief.
2. It cast him so fully upon the Lord that it became a medium through which abundant supplies of grace were received by him.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 8:9 we read, *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich."* How often verses like this are like sparkling gems lying embedded in the discussion of matters which seem very ordinary and even common-place! This is a case in point. The Corinthians had been quite ready to consider the making of this collection. They had willingly taken up the idea a whole year before, and yet they had so far failed to bring it to completion, and actually give the money. What would bring them to the point? What, but the fresh sense of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ?

This marvellous verse is an epitome of the New Testament:

"Though He was rich" carries us back into the depths of His Godhead glory before His incarnation, the glory that is unfolded in the opening verses of John's Gospel and elsewhere (see John 1:1-14).

"Yet for your sakes He became poor" opens out into the wonderful story of His life, sufferings and death, as recorded in all four Gospels.

"That ye through His poverty might be rich" indicates the wealth of blessing and glory into which every believer is introduced by Him and in Him, as unfolded in the Epistles and the Revelation.

And the whole story is the supreme expression of grace, which consists in the down-stooping of divine love to meet man's need, not merely according to the need that is met, but according to the love that meets it.

We now come to actions of grace. 2 Corinthians 8:7: *"But as you excel in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you, see that you excel in this act of grace also."* If our own hearts are filled to overflowing with blessing from God, we are bound to want to give to others. 2 Corinthians 8:8 shows that the Apostle did not wish to be understood as issuing a command on the subject. If we gave only because we were commanded of God to do so, our giving could no longer be spoken of as grace. It would be done under the compulsion of law. No, the forwardness and zeal of the Macedonians was to be a stimulus merely, and the giving for which Paul asked was to be an expression and proof of the sincerity and genuineness of their love. Love always

delights to give. The working of the grace of God in other Christians may act as a stimulus to us, but nothing short of the supreme working of the grace of God in Christ can supply us with the mainspring and motive we need, if we are to be characterised by the grace of generous giving of money and time. In 2 Corinthians 8:5 we read that the Macedonians *"gave themselves first to the Lord."* Oh, that we would all give ourselves to the Lord Jesus!

Discipleship

This brings us nicely on to discipleship. As I said at the beginning of this talk, discipleship describes a follower of Jesus Christ, one who is willing to serve Him and witness for Him. Once you become a Christian you may well be thinking: how can I learn to be a dedicated follower of Jesus? Which text book has been written for guidance on this matter? If you want to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, you must study the Bible and read what Jesus taught His disciples when He was here on earth and apply the same teachings to your own life. There are over 250 verses in the New Testament that mentions disciple or disciples. Most of the teaching is in the first four books: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

So, what does Jesus say about discipleship? In Matthew 5:1-16 and Luke 6:20-23 we read that Jesus takes His disciples up a mountain to a quiet place and teaches them the basics of how to live and what is expected of a disciple of Jesus Christ. We don't have time to study the passages in depth, but we will pick out a few examples.

A disciple should have a meek spirit (Matthew 5:5), what does this mean? A disciple should be characterised by patience, long-suffering, gentleness, humbleness, peacefulness and so on. Very easy to say, but not so easy to do daily throughout the various circumstances of life. Jesus was the great example of all these things when He walked in this world. A Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit who is our helper and through prayer and faith we can live out these attributes in our lives.

A disciple needs to have a pure heart (Matthew 5:8). A Christian's sins have been forgiven but the flesh continually fights against the spirit and we will sin. We read in Matthew 26:40 *"the spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak."* When we sin, then we must confess our sins immediately before the Lord so that all the impurities are forgiven.

A disciple must have the desire to be pure and untainted by this world just as his or her Master was. Again, I say it is not easy, but we have been given the help to do this. If we live as Jesus taught us to live, we will be true disciples of Him. You will be a witness without even opening your mouth in testimony. Christ will be seen in you.

But there is a warning! It will cost you to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ. You will be persecuted because of your desire to be righteous in a world where unrighteousness is rife (Matthew 5:11, Luke 6:22). Particularly in business being righteous in everything is quite a challenge. You may suffer loss in the short term but remember the promise of God *"he that honours Me I will honour."*

In Matthew 8:18-22 we are told that we must follow Jesus no matter the cost. This is a challenge particularly to those who suffer physically because of their faith in Christ. Christians please continue to pray for those who suffer for Christ in this way.

In Matthew 16:24-26 Jesus asked His disciples to take up their cross and follow Him. *"If anyone would come after Me, let Him deny Himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his own soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"*

A disciple is required to witness to others. Again, in Matthew 5:14 we read that Christians are *"the light of the world."* A true disciple of Jesus Christ is like a lighthouse shining out on the darkness of the night. Sometimes we are inclined to put a cover over our light sometimes out of fear, embarrassment or concern over what others will think or say. The Lord often told His disciples not to be afraid. The Lord was with them as He is with us today, so we must be bold, we must have faith. In Matthew 5:16 it is very clear what we should be doing: *"let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."* The Lord's commission to His disciples was to go and preach the Gospel to this world. Jesus told His disciples that the *"harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few"* (Matthew 9:37).

Discipleship is also seen in simple things. In Matthew 10:42, Jesus said that even giving a child a cup of cold water in the right attitude proves he or she is a disciple.

There is also great joy in service as a disciple. Remember when the disciples were to serve the loaves and the fish to the multitude (Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-17, John 6:1-14). They had the joy of being part of a great miracle. The Lord loves to use His disciples. Disciples also must show care for each other just as the Lord humbly washed His disciple's feet (John 13:1-17).

I want to leave you with four examples of people who were called disciples in the Bible:

1. Matthew 27:57, Joseph of Arimathaea. He begged for the body of Jesus and with loving hands took Him down from the cross and carefully wrapped His body in clean linen cloth and carefully laid Him in a new tomb which he had prepared himself. Joseph's love for his Lord was seen clearly in his actions.
2. Acts 9:10, Ananias. He was ready for service. When called he could say "*Here I am Lord.*" He was a bit reluctant when he was told what he had to do but can't we all be like that sometimes. The main thing was that he was ready for service and did that service.
3. Acts 9:36, Tabitha. It is said of her that she was a disciple full of good works and love. Oh, how I pray that others would see this in me!
4. Acts 16:1, Timothy. He was a well thought of disciple in the area where he lived and worked. Again, I pray that this could be said of me!

One of the keys to discipleship is seen in John 8:31-32, "*if you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*"

Thank you for listening to this *Truth for Today* talk, in the series, Things which accompany salvation, talk number 1086, Grace and Discipleship.

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