

¹⁴ “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,
¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

Text: John 3:14-17 A 6-15-25 Isaiah 6:1-7 Romans 11:33-36 Psalm 25 Resp. Ps.: 116
Hymns: 778, 373 (1-4), 373 (5-7), 371

GOD’S GRACE IS AMAZING!

By grace I’m saved, grace free and boundless; My soul, believe and doubt it not.
Why stagger at this word of promise? Hath Scripture ever falsehood taught?
Nay; then this word must true remain: By grace thou, too, shalt heav’n obtain.

By grace! None dare lay claim to merit; Our works and conduct have no worth.
God in His love sent our Redeemer, Christ Jesus, to this sinful earth;
His death did for our sins atone, And we are saved by grace alone. (TLH #373:1-2)

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

We say that we’re saved by grace. What does that mean, and what does that mean for us?

God’s people had complained about Him again. Two million plus of them along with their livestock had been traveling through the desert. Imagine providing food and water for all of them out in the desert for forty years! But God did. He sent the manna – the miracle bread – providing their food each day. He provided all the water for them to drink, more than once making it come out of solid rock. But many of them were ungrateful. They longed for ‘the good old days’ in Egypt when they had a variety of things to eat and drink. (They didn’t mention that they were slaves back then....)

The Bible says, “*The Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly*” (Lam. 3:31-33). God is very loving and patient and merciful toward us and all people. God is also just. Again the Bible says, “*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap*” (Gal. 6:7). Many of the people out there in the desert complained against God, something which they had often done. So God in His justice sent poisonous snakes among them. Some of the people were bitten, and died.

The people cried out to Moses, who cried out to God on their behalf. God had Moses make a brass snake and put it on a pole. Anyone who was bitten and who looked at the brass snake on the pole was cured. There was nothing else the people had to do. They were cured simply by God’s grace and mercy.

That was a well-known story among the Jews. Jesus referred to that story to a Jewish man named Nicodemus, a Pharisee. Jesus then made the point, “*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the*

wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” Jesus was comparing the snake up on the pole to Himself when He would be lifted up on the cross. Jesus’ crucifixion hadn’t happened yet, so Nicodemus didn’t know exactly what Jesus was referring to. But Nicodemus was listening to Jesus, and he wanted to understand what Jesus was telling him. Later when Jesus was crucified and then rose from the dead, we can tell from what the Bible says about Nicodemus that Jesus brought him to faith.

Jesus then says that “*God so loved the world.*” “*The world*” is everybody, so each of us can say, “God loves me.” What a great comfort when the devil and our conscience try to make us wonder, “Does God love me?” The answer is right there in God’s Word. God loves “*the world,*” so God is telling me that He loves me, too. It’s also a great comfort if someone asks us if God loves him or her. We can assure that person, “*God so loved the world,*” so God loves you, too.”

Jesus says that God shows us how much He loves us: “*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.*” Someone willing to sacrifice his life to save someone else’s life is showing great love for that person. But would we be willing to sacrifice someone we love to save someone else? God loves us that much. The only way we could be saved is if Jesus died for our sins. God loves us so much that He was willing to sacrifice His only Son for us. 1 John 4:9 says, “*In this the love of God was [clearly shown for] us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.*” Jesus loves us so much that He was willing to be sacrificed for us. Ephesians 5:2 says, “*Christ ... [loves] us and [gave] Himself for us.*”

God’s grace – God’s underserved love for us sinners – is amazing! We couldn’t ask, we couldn’t hope, for a more gracious God. Abraham was willing to sacrifice his only Son, Isaac, but didn’t have to. God was willing to sacrifice His only Son, Jesus, and did! God willingly saved the lives of the undeserving sinners who had been bitten by a poisonous snake. God willingly provided salvation for us undeserving sinners who have no way of saving ourselves.

Jesus died for us on the cross. When we look at what Jesus had to do to save us, we realize that what we had to be saved from is really bad. Jesus died to save us from our sins. The fact that it took nothing less than the death of the Son of God – death by crucifixion – shows us how bad our sins are in God’s eyes. We’re told, “*...that whoever believes in Him should not perish....*” Perish where? Perish in hell. Jesus will tell the unbelievers on Judgment Day, “*Depart from Me...*” (Mt. 7:23). Hell is being eternally separated from God. Right now even those who don’t believe in God nevertheless enjoy many good things from Him: rain, sunshine, patience, and so much more (Mt. 5:45). In hell the unbelievers will be separated from God and His goodness and mercy forever. What does that leave them? Think about that. Jesus says that in hell “*their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched*” (Mk. 9:48). Hell is dying forever without finally being dead. Hell is suffering forever.

Jesus rescues everyone who believes in Him from hell: “*...that whoever believes in Him should not perish.*” We can’t do anything to be saved. We don’t have to do anything to be saved. Jesus did everything, Jesus suffered everything, Jesus paid for everything for us already. We’re saved just by believing in Jesus. “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His*

Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” If God wanted to condemn the world He would have sent a flood or a fire or some other such thing. But God wants to save the world, so He sent us Jesus. Paul and Silas were asked, “What must I do to be saved?” They answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved....” (Ac. 16:30-31)

How do we get faith? *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” – Ephesians 2:8-9.* God gives us faith as a free gift. All of our sins are forgiven, and we are saved as a free gift from God? Yes. Even our faith is a free gift from God? Yes. God’s grace is amazing! *“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” – Romans 10:17. “No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” – 1 Corinthians 12:3.* Through the Word of God spoken at our baptism, and through the Word of God we continue to hear, the Holy Spirit brought us to faith in Jesus and keeps us in our faith in Jesus, and we are saved.

That is humbling, and reassuring. God’s grace is humbling because we don’t deserve it. In fact, we deserve God’s anger and punishment. But just as God saved the lives of those bitten by poisonous snakes who didn’t deserve it, so God saves us who don’t deserve it. God’s grace is reassuring because we truly are saved just by believing in Jesus. *“Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” – Romans 5:20.*

“...that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Ponce de Leon searched for years to find the Fountain Of Youth, and couldn’t find it. But who wants to live forever in this sinful world with bodies affected by sin? God gives us everlasting life with perfect peace, perfect health, and perfect happiness with Him in heaven.

GOD’S GRACE IS AMAZING!

By grace! O, mark this word of promise
When thou art by thy sins oppressed,
When Satan plagues thy troubled conscience,
And when thy heart is seeking rest.
What reason cannot comprehend God by His grace to thee doth send.

By grace! This ground of faith is certain;
So long as God is true, it stands.
What saints have penned by inspiration,
What in His Word our God commands,
What our whole faith must rest upon,
Is grace alone, grace in His Son. Amen. (TLH #373:3, 5)