

Grace...

Titus 2:11–14 (ESV)

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Grace?

Tonight, we focus on the phrase of St Paul 'The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people'. It would be beneficial to define Grace. Often the church is accused of using special 'church' words that we don't define or explain. We use the word but when challenged we don't know what it means or understand why we use it. I'm sure this is not just a 'thing' in the church, it happens in all specialized fields. It's only when someone new comes along, or someone gets up the courage to ask a question that we stop and think, now what does that mean?

We hear the word, Grace, everywhere. We say Grace before meals, we hear it proclaimed before the sermon, Grace is even used as part of the reformation motto, Grace alone, faith alone, scripture alone, Christ alone. But do we know what it means?

I went looking in my theological dictionaries, not because I didn't know the answer but because dictionaries usually give a neat and concise answer to start with, and maybe I thought I might pick up a new aspect. Off I went into the depths of my electronic library, only to find that theological dictionaries don't always give good answers.

It reminded me of a board called Taboo, in the game you player has to get the rest of his team to say the word written on the card, without using a part of the word or several of the words that are excluded. For instance, the team has to guess 'Yearbook' but you can't use the words Photo, Class, Sign, Memories, or School and you can't say year or book, or any work containing year or book.

Here is the first definition of Grace I found: to show kindness to someone, with the implication of **graciousness** on the part of the one showing such kindness¹

If you don't understand the word Grace, how are you supposed to know what graciousness is?

And many of the other dictionaries did the same, so I went for a basic google search

"the free and unmerited favour of God, as manifested in the salvation of sinners and the bestowal of blessings."

The first part is probably good, and understandable, but Manifested, Salvation and bestowal might start to make this definition tricky.

But I found another definition in my Lutheran Study Bible

'God's generous mercy toward undeserving people. God's free and undeserved favour toward sinful humanity is demonstrated in Christ's work of redemption. It is an unearned and undeserved gift, a weighty teaching in Paul.'

I think this definition makes it clear, Grace is God's mercy, generous mercy toward us who are undeserving!

It is a free and undeserved favour in God's eyes.

When humanity fell into sin, in the garden, God banished humanity from his presence, he sent Adam and Eve out so that he did not destroy them. They were no longer welcome in his presence because a Holy God cannot be near sinful humans. All of us are tarnished with this sinful nature and God who tells us that the 'wages of sin is death',

¹ Louw, J.P. & Nida, E.A., 1996. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*, 1, p.748.

would be justified in destroying all of humanity. But God doesn't destroy us. Instead, he looks kindly on us he shows Grace to an undeserving world. He shows Grace as he shines into the world, especially in the nativity.

He shines.

- through his creation – that star pointing the wise men on their way,
- through the angels – who bring the news of Jesus birth to Mary and Joseph,
 - and announce his coming to the Shepherds in the fields.
- through all of his interventions into human history
- but most importantly he shines as he appears on earth.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.

Not since Adam and Eve hid from God in the garden has humanity been so aware of God appearing on earth as he does in the nativity. He doesn't just appear to one person (like he did with Moses) he doesn't just appear to one nation (like he did with the Israelites), he appears to bring salvation to all people.

The Grace of God appears, as a person, as a baby. That is God's favour toward us, who don't deserve it, his mercy toward us, all contained in one person. We are celebrating the appearance of God's grace on earth, God's grace personified that is made a person in the person of Jesus.

We are celebrating that appearance and not just for the sake of celebration but because his appearance means the world has changed. Before Jesus' birth, the world was waiting for a saviour, now he is here, he has come. The saviour who is also the creator has entered his creation! Yes, we are now waiting for the return of the saviour. But he has already appeared and completed his work. As Paul says we are; waiting for our blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

He has appeared once and in that appearance his grace flows to all people by what he achieved in his death, resurrection, and ascension and now we await his return, his appearing again.

As you celebrate make sure you are celebrating his birth and be reminded of the eternal significance of God being found on earth 'For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.'

Amen