

Devotion for Wednesday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent – 13 March 2013, Anno Domini



The Fourth Sunday in Lent.

The Collect.

GRANT, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

There is one very compelling reason that Christ continued in His ministry all the way to a humiliating death for you and me. That reason is all concerned with one quality which only comes from God – GRACE. Grace is a component of love, compassion, and mercy. Since grace comes alone from God, it is unmerited by us. There is an external kind of grace whereby world societies are tempered in their excesses by a general sprinkling of grace; however, there remains an INTERNAL grace whereby the heart of the sinner is touched by the Gospel, receives the truth into his heart, and the Holy Spirit draws that man or woman to Christ. Such sinners, being redeemed, become the possession of our Lord. Thus, that old free will which would have hanged us had we kept it, is surrendered for the perfect Will of God which we are bound to follow if we truly have Him as Lord and Master. Whoever heard of a servant running a household contrary to the will of its owner? So a love unspeakable drove Christ onward to that lonely and sin-scarred hill called Calvary. But that love was also alloyed with mercy and compassion for us. Altogether they constitute a grace that is beyond our feeble comprehension.

God is not only omniscient, but prescient as well, in all His works. I hope each reader will know that your name, if you are Christ's, was cut into the palms of His

Hands by the nails of Calvary. *Behold, I have graven(cut) thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.* (Isaiah 49:16) Pray tell how could those names have been cut into the palms of Christ if they were not known beforehand?. His omniscient Eyes looked down upon those who loved Him from the heights Golgotha. He saw, too, those who ridiculed and abased Him milling about. But His Eyes of God saw beyond the slopes of Golgotha from that vantage point to the countless multitudes of the those who would be drawn to Him in the intervening centuries of the ages. Somewhere, perhaps far in the distance, He saw you, and KNEW you! You, too, had your name cut into the palms of His hands if you believe; because it was YOUR sins, and MINE, that required Christ to be sacrificed if we would be saved!

Grace can never be earned or purchased else it ceases to be grace. Grace is forever without cost to its recipient even if it came at great expense to God the Father, and to God the Son. You have been caught, as the Woman taken in Adultery, in the very act of your egregious sins. You have been sentenced to death by the Law; yet, Someone has approached the prison gate with an offer of pardon. At what cost is this pardon offered? It will cost Christ His death for yours. If you are spared, it will be because Christ took your place on the rude Cross. You are not a whit different from the scoundrel and hopeless criminal, Barabbas. He was sentenced to die a death on the cross, yet, Christ took his place and Barabbas was set free. Barabbas did not a single good work to earn his freedom – it was a gift of Grace. The grace we receive is less earned, but more profound, than even that of Barabbas – for the Grace that has set us free is an unending freedom from death. We have done NOTHING to earn it.

Can a dead man do anything to resurrect himself from death? Not lately, but God, through Grace, has done just that: *But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.* (Eph 2:4-9) We did nothing at all to save ourselves for we were dead; but Christ, in His mercy, died for us that we might be made alive in Him. If we are still living in our own free wills, we are living apart from the Will of God, for we put on the Mind that was in Christ at our coming to Him through the power and drawing of the Holy Ghost. It was the Grace of God working in the organ of our heart that brought us out of darkness into light. We could not see to depart from our darkness, so the Holy Ghost placed a loving hook in our heart and drew us to Christ as a fish to the fisherman's pale. Martin Luther took this great truth as the convincing proof of God apart from the works-oriented fables of Romish religion.

Dr. Charles Spurgeon described grace in this way: *We believe, that the work of regeneration, conversion, sanctification and faith, is not an act of man's free will and power, but of the mighty, efficacious and irresistible grace of God. It is an Act of the Sovereign Will of God.* The blessed preacher of the Gospel, Jonathan Edwards, says this of Grace: *In efficacious grace we are not merely passive, nor yet does God do some and we do the rest. But God does all, and we do all. God produces all, we act all. For that is what produces, viz. our own acts. God is the only proper author and fountain; we only are the proper actors. We are in different respects, wholly passive and wholly active.* The theologian, Stephen Charnock, writes: *No man is an unbeliever, but because he will be so; and every man is not an unbeliever, because the grace of God conquers some, changes their wills, and binds them to Christ.*

As Article X (of the Articles of Religion) clearly stipulates, and is supported by many biblical proofs:

X. THE condition of Man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith, and calling upon God : Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing(enabling) us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.

See how the following Articles confirm the Grace of God consistent with the above:

XI. Of the Justification of Man, ("We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and, Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings : Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.

XII. Of Good Works, ALBEIT that Good Works, which are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's Judgement ; yet are ; they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of i a true and lively Faith ; insomuch that by ! them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.

XIII. Of Works before Justification, WORKS done before the grace of Christ, and the Inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ, neither do they make men meet to receive! grace, or (as the School-authors say) deserve grace of congruity : yea rather, for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin.

There is so much more of Grace that cannot be covered in a short devotion, but I hope you will resort the Wellspring of all knowledge and wisdom in seeking out the further dimensions of such beauty and power as that Grace described in God's Holy Word.

I will close this devotion with another quote taken from the writings of Dr. Charles Spurgeon:

The bridge of grace will bear your weight, brother. Thousands of big sinners have gone across that bridge, yea, tens of thousands have gone over it. Some have been the chief of sinners and some have come at the very last of their days but the arch has never yielded beneath their weight. I will go with them trusting to the same support. It will bear me over as it has for them.