

Blog



Grace

Do we treat people with grace?

“Grace is God's best idea. His decision to ravage a people by love, to rescue passionately, and to restore justly - what rivals it? Of all his wondrous works, grace, in my estimation, is the magnum opus.” (Max Lucado)

To receive grace is an amazing experience. To be have been foreknown, predestined, chosen, called, justified, redeemed, forgiven, cleansed, accepted, adopted, celebrated and lavishly loved without having earned it - well, there's nothing like it.

But to give grace is perhaps not so easy. Treating others based on merit rather than grace feels a lot more reasonable. Yet we are called to extend grace to all. “Freely you have received; freely give.” (Matthew 10:8)

When Jesus sat down at Jacob’s Well and met a woman from the nearby village, it was a test of grace. As a woman of poor reputation she appears to have gone to the well at a time when she could avoid meeting those who might criticise and look down on her. Yet Jesus was quite happy to engage her in conversation. He treated her no differently to any other person he met. Grace.

Just then his disciples came back. They marvelled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you seek?” or, “Why are you talking with her?” (John 4:27)

The disciples were surprised to find Jesus talking to this Samaritan woman. Although they never commented out loud, internally they were bemused. Something was not right with this picture. They were about to get a lesson in grace.

Grace and religion

“Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” (John 4:20)

Grace and religion. The Samaritan woman was from a different religion. From a Jewish perspective she was from the wrong religion. Yet grace overcame the religious obstacle. The gospel is for all, and especially for those who need it most. Jesus didn’t reject or oppose her because of religion. Grace regarded her as someone thirsty and in need of living water. Religion will always undermine grace. But a time has now come when anyone may worship the Father in spirit and truth. Grace.

Grace and race

“You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) (John 4:9)

Grace and race. The woman was from a different race. From a Jewish perspective she was from the wrong race. Jews and Samaritans despised each other. Yet grace overcame the race obstacle. Jesus was as kind to this Samaritan woman as he would have been to his own Jewish mother or sister. Moreover, he had deliberately headed into Samaritan territory in order to publicly display grace towards this woman. Grace knows not racial division. The gospel is for people from every nation, tribe, people and language. Grace.

Grace and gender

Just then his disciples came back. They marvelled that he was talking with a woman. (John 4:27)

Grace and gender. This Samaritan woman was... well, a woman. From a Jewish perspective it was inappropriate for a rabbi to be talking to her. The morning prayer from most Jewish men was to be thankful they were not born a woman. Yet, as with all women in the New Testament, Jesus treated this lady with respect and dignity. Grace overcame the gender obstacle. With regard to the gospel, “there is neither male nor female.” (Galatians 3:28) The gospel is good news for women. “Oh, what endears the Christian religion to my heart is what it has done, and is destined to do, for my own sex.” (Catherine Booth) It was through the testimony and ministry of this woman that an entire town was brought to Christ and believed. Grace.

Grace and morality

“The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband.” (John 4:18)

Grace and morality. The woman was living an immoral life. According to the teaching of Scripture she was living a sinful life. Yet grace overcame the morality obstacle. Religion is for saints, but the gospel is for sinners. “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Mark 2:17) Grace reached out to a soul few others would associate with. “I may be a great sinner, but I have a greater Saviour.” (John Newton) Through the story of such a woman, the Samaritans came to know that Jesus really is the Saviour of the world. Grace.

Grace found a way to find us when we were beyond reach. Grace found a Samaritan woman two thousand years ago. Grace found me when when I was still a boy. Grace is reaching out to you today, and through you to those in greatest need. “I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world; but still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am.” (John Newton) Grace received can become grace given. Grace.