

This Week's Theme: Whoa to Legalism, Go to Grace

This Week's Memory Verse: *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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.*
2 Corinthians 12:9

Monday, June 9

Scripture Reading: Luke 10:25-37

Sunday we looked at Jesus' harshest rebuke of the Pharisees and scribes. The subject of His rebuke was legalism and the lack of grace. Jesus was the embodiment of God's grace, and came to extend that grace to all who would receive it. If Luke 11 was the teaching, then Luke 10 was the picture. In one of his most famous stories – the good Samaritan – Jesus' topic, once again, was legalism vs. grace. This week we will look at different characters in the story to learn more about the legalism of man and the grace of God.

There is no story without the man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. This 17 mile road was rocky and treacherous and known for being a place where robbers attacked people. But, if you were going from Jericho to Jerusalem (a common trip) it was a road you must travel. The man in the story is robbed, beaten, stripped, and left for dead. Two priests pass him by for fear they will come in contact with blood, making them ceremonially unclean and unable to fulfill their tasks at the temple. Then a despised Samaritan comes by and renders aid to the man, saving his life. Legalism led to death, grace led to life. Just like Jesus said it would.

How do we relate to the man who was robbed? Grace. We need grace. We need grace to live. Without the grace of God in Christ, we get what we deserve – death; but God's free grace gift is eternal life through Jesus (Rom.6:23). We need God's grace, and we need the grace of others. None of us are perfect and often find ourselves in need of forgiveness and help. What about those days when you feel beat up and left for dead? And don't think those days won't come. Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble." (John 16:33) What do you need most on one of those days?

Grace. Life. Hope. Someone who loves you no matter what. Someone who will help and listen and encourage no matter what it costs them.

Sound a lot like Jesus, doesn't it?

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Tuesday, June 10

Scripture Reading: Luke 10:25-37

Just like there would be no story here without the man traveling on the road, there would also be no story without the robbers. They are the antagonists who drive the action of the story and set up the plot. They are the initial bad guys in the story who are often overlooked in our haste to cast blame and shame on the priests who passed by. But let there be no mistake: these are robbers and thieves and murderers. These are bad men.

No one roots for the bad guys, and no one wants to be identified with the bad guys. And yet, there is definitely one way we can connect with the bad guys in this story. We might not like it (I hope not!), but we can relate. How?

We can be the reason someone is in need of grace.

We can inflict some horrible blows by what we say and don't say. We can tear up some people by rebuking, ignoring, judging, excluding. We can be the legalist, holding someone up to our standard and berating them when they fall short. We can put conditions on our love and affection and support. We have the ability to rob someone of their life and joy, and then leave them on the side of the road in need of someone to stop and help them put the pieces back together.

No one wants to be the bad guy in anyone's life. I have yet to meet the person who wakes up in the morning setting out to make another's life difficult. But it happens all the time. The question is not if I can be the bad guy, but rather how can I keep from being the bad guy. And how can I do that? I think it is all about diet. We need more fruit; specifically, more fruit of the Spirit.

Check out the menu in Galatians 5:22-23. The more of God's fruit we receive, the more of God's fruit we will share. And those who share fruit give life. Bad fruit creates bad guys; good fruit creates good guys; and God's fruit creates God's guys.

Which team are you on?

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Wednesday, June 11

Scripture Reading: Luke 10:25-37

If you were stranded by the side of the road in an unfamiliar place, who would you want to stop and help? My guess is that if someone stopped and said, "I am a pastor. I saw you were in trouble and wanted to help," you would feel tremendous relief. You would feel safe and secure.

How interesting in Jesus' story that it was the pastors of His day who didn't even "pull over" and offer to help. Of course, they didn't stop for some very righteous (or perhaps self-righteous) reasons: namely, if they came in contact with blood they would become ceremonially unclean, unable to perform their duties. They didn't help a person in need so they could "serve the Lord," not realizing the ultimate way to serve the Lord is to help another in need.

Charles Swindoll would say that the priest and the Levite in the story have "no" faces. In describing "No" faces, he writes:

*They have never given themselves permission to be free. Still imprisoned behind bars of petty concern and critical suspicions, they have learned to exist in a bondage that has hindered their ability to see beyond life's demands. Lacking grace, they have reduced life to rules and regulations essential for survival. Their God is too small, their world is too rigid, and therefore their faces shout "No!"**

It's amazing how many mistakes we can make for all the right, righteous reasons. It's also amazing how much spiritual growth we can stunt with a "No" face. That's why Jesus came to let us know what is most important: Love God and love people. If our obedience takes away from those loves in any way, then our obedience is misdirected. It's not the one who knows the most Scripture or has the most sophisticated explanations that honors God the most. It is rather the one who loves and serves the way Jesus did.

*Charles Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening* (Dallas: Word), 1996, 5.

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Thursday, June 12

Scripture Reading: Luke 10:25-37

Today we finally reach the hero of the story: the Samaritan. One fact that gets lost on us today is how radical the idea of the Samaritan being the good guy was in Jesus' day. Samaritans were the offspring of Jews who had intermarried with pagan nations. They were viewed as unfaithful half-breeds, and were viewed with extreme contempt.

A Jew in Jesus' day embracing a Samaritan would be like John McCain being the guest of honor at the Democratic National Convention. It was a radical, unthinkable act to have a Samaritan be the hero of a story, especially in contrast to a Jewish priest and Levite. Why this extreme contrast? To better make the point. Actions speak louder than words. Love God and love people. All people. All the time.

If the priest and Levite were the "no" faces, then the Samaritan was the "Yes" face. Once again, Charles Swindoll writes:

*Freedom gives people a "Yes" face. I am confident Jesus had a "Yes" face. I have never seen Him, but I've determined from what I've read about Him that this was true. What a contrast He must have been! He was surrounded by lettered men, religious, robed, righteous, law-quoting, professional men whose very demeanor announced "NO!" Pious without, killer within . . . yet none of their poison seeped into His life. On the contrary, He revolutionized the entire direction of religion because He announced "Yes" while all His professional peers were frowning "No." That has intrigued me for years. How could it be? What was it that kept Him from getting caught up in their grip? In one word, it was grace. He was so full of truth and grace, he left no inner space for their legalistic poison.**

The Samaritan saw the same situation the priest and Levite did, and he said "yes;" and that made all the difference.

*Charles Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening* (Dallas: Word), 1996, 6-7.

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Friday, June 13

Scripture Reading: Luke 10:25-37

So who is left? We talked about the man on the road, the robbers, the priest and the Levite, and the Samaritan. Who is left? The innkeeper, of course.

I know that the innkeeper is only mentioned once, in regard to the Samaritan paying him back for any expenses incurred during the man's recovery. He is certainly not a major player in the story by any stretch. So why single him out?

The innkeeper got to watch this tremendous act of grace unfold before his eyes, everyday for several days.

I imagine him at the coffee chop every morning, talking about this Samaritan and what he was doing. I can just hear him: "You won't believe what he did yesterday. He changed his bandages, fed him soup, and got him some very expensive medicine. He told me last night he would have to leave in a couple of days, and - you're not going to believe this - he wants me to keep a running tab of expenses until this guy can leave. He says he'll settle up with me when he is coming back through next week. And you know what? I believe him!"

Grace stands out. Grace is not the norm. Grace makes people talk. Anyone can do what is expected. But acts of grace stand out. They are truly unbelievable. And they make people talk. Some might think those full of grace are heroes; some might think they are crazy; but people talk about exceptional acts of grace.

We can't control what people are saying, but at least we can get them talking - talking about grace. Who knows the lives that might be changed because people can watch an act of grace unfold before their very eyes. But more on that tomorrow.

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Saturday, June 14

Scripture Reading: Luke 10:25-37

Just one more thing . . .

This story was told in the context of Jesus being addressed by an expert in the Law, probably to test and confound Jesus. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" he asked Jesus. In His usual fashion, Jesus answered the question with a question: "What is written in the Law?" The expert, of course, answered correctly with, "Love the Lord and love your neighbor." He then asked a follow-up question: "And who is my neighbor."

Jesus then told the story, and ended it with a question of His own: "Which of these three was a neighbor?" The expert said, "The one who had mercy," and Jesus concluded the encounter by saying, 'Go and do likewise.'

"Go and do likewise." He didn't explain the story. He didn't tell his audience to go home and think about it or reflect on it, or even to tell the story to others. He said go and do what you just heard. Do it. The way you love your neighbor, the way you show him or her mercy, is to go and do grace; to go and do mercy. According to this story, grace and mercy are something you do, not something you feel.

So go and do it. You know the story, you know the truth, you know what to do. So, go and do it. Find a neighbor, a friend, a family member, a co-worker, maybe even a stranger, and do mercy. Find that someone in need and do grace.

Who is the neighbor? You. Who is the one in need? Whoever God brings you to. And don't worry, He'll bring them. Once you've got the neighbor and the one in need, then all you need to do to recreate the story is an act of mercy and grace. Then you'll have your own life-changing story.

You've got everything you need. So go and do it.

Sunday, June 15

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.

John 15:9-17