

It's All About Grace

October 23, 2005

Ephes. 2:1-10 (NKJV)

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, [2] in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, [3] among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. [4] But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, [5] even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), [6] and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [7] that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. [8] For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, [9] not of works, lest anyone should boast. [10] For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Last Monday night most of the people who live in this city were watching the Astros play the Cardinals in game five of the National League Championship Series. The Astros were leading the series three games to one and they only needed one more win to play in the World Series for the first time in the history of the franchise.

When the game began everyone knew that it would be hard to beat the Cardinals four games in a row. The good news was that we only needed to win one out of the next three games and we would go to the World Series!

Our hometown hero **Andy Pettitte** didn't look real sharp as the game got underway. He hit the first batter and walked the second one but then he got the next three batters out.

The Astros didn't score in the first inning
The Cardinals didn't score in the top of the second inning but the Astros were able to score a run in the bottom of the second inning.

Then the Cardinals scored two runs in the top of the third and were leading by the score of two to one.

The score remained two to one until the bottom of the seventh inning when **Lance Berkman** hit a home run with two men on base and all of a sudden the Astros were leading four to two.

The fans went nuts! The players went nuts! Everybody was thinking, “They’re going to do it! We’re going to the World Series! All we’ve got to do is get six more outs!”

Pitcher **Mike Gallo** got **Walker** to ground out and **Dan Wheeler** got the next two batters out. Three up and three down! All we needed was three more outs and “**lights-out Lidge**” was going to pitch in the bottom of the ninth. **Lidge** is the best closer in baseball. He’s only lost one or two games all year!

Lidge struck out the first two batters. All we needed was one more out!

Eckstein got a single. **Edmond** walked. Now there were two men on base and **Albert Pujols**, the best hitter in baseball, comes to the plate.

Everybody is holding their breath. Whatever you do, don’t give him anything to hit! Walk him! Don’t let him beat you!

Pujols swings at the first pitch and misses. Then it happened!

Lidge threw what is normally his best pitch, a slider, and it didn’t do what it normally does. It hung up right over the middle of the plate and **Pujols** hit it almost to San Antonio!

The ecstasy suddenly turn to agony. The cheering turn to silence. The hero suddenly became the villain.

I yelled, “What are you doing? You put it right down the middle. What’s wrong with you? Are you nuts?”

Then I thought about how bad the Astro players must have felt and especially how terrible **Brad Lidge** must have felt at that moment.

Brad Lidge has been our hero all year and because of one bad pitch everybody was ready to tar and feather him.

He's the best closer in baseball, and yet on Monday night he made a mistake and people were yelling at him.

After the game he said, "I wish I had that pitch back....He hit a mistake."

Brad Lidge made a mistake.

Have you ever made a mistake? Have you ever done something that you wish you could do over again?

I have! Several times! Let me tell about one of them.

In the summer of 2004, I took my family on a cruise. We were having a great time. We went to one of the shows, which happened to be a sword-swallowing act. The performer put all sorts of knives and swords down his throat. When he got the sword down his throat he would gesture with his hands wanting everyone to applaud. Then he would remove the sword and take a bow.

Finally, he came to the grand climax of his act. He was going to swallow a sword that was curved. The announcer told everyone how dangerous it was and told everyone to be perfectly silent while this particular act was being performed. He said the performer could be seriously hurt if he didn't do it just right.

The problem was, I wasn't listening and didn't hear him say not to applaud until the man had removed the sword.

So when the man swallowed the sword and had it all the way down his throat, I started clapping.

My wife turned to me and said, "What are you doing? Didn't you hear the man say not to clap?" It seemed like everybody in that theater was looking at me and that they were thinking, "What's wrong with that nut? Didn't he hear the man say not to applaud?"

Man, I wanted to go somewhere and hide. It was the most embarrassing moment of my life. I wanted a second chance. If I could have just had a chance to do that over again I would have done it differently.

Life is like that! We need a second chance! We need forgiveness. We need grace.

That's what I want to talk about today. I want to talk about grace.

God's grace is such a wonderful thing. Because of His grace He loves us even when we do stupid things.

The Bible says that it is only by God's grace that any of us are saved.

Because we've all sinned. We've all made a bad pitch. We've all done something we wish we could do over again but once we did it there was no undoing it. We have to face the consequences of our actions.

God's grace is something that you and I need. And though we do not deserve it, God gives it to us anyway.

Brad Lidge made a bad pitch. He knew it. Everybody in the crowd knew it. Everybody watching on television knew it. He wanted to hide. He wished he could get that pitch back. But there was no getting it back. The game was over. The damage was done. He was guilty.

When you think about it, that's a picture of all of us. We've all sinned. We've all been guilty of doing things we wish we had not done. We deserve God's wrath.

But what does God do?

He loves us anyway. He pursues us because He knows we need Him.

Romans 5:8 (NKJV)

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

He could walk away from us and be done with us but he doesn't. He could take us out of the line-up but he doesn't.

He deals redemptively with us. By that I mean He uses those things to teach us and to help us to grow.

Romans 8:28 (NKJV)

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

When Albert Pujols hit that homerun it was a great moment in his life but it was a low moment for Brad Lidge.

But you know what? Both of those men need to learn something from that experience. Brad needs to learn that he needs to be more careful in a situation like that and not make that mistake again. Albert needs to savor the moment but also realize that next time he might be the one who looks foolish swinging at a bad pitch.

Life has a way of keeping us humble.

2 Cor. 12:7 (NKJV)

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

God knows what is best for us. He allows us to be humiliated at times to keep us humble.

He sees our faults and yet He also sees what He wants us to become.

It is His grace that saves us and His grace that keeps us and His grace that enables us to do what He has predestined for us to do.

Grace is the undeserved generosity of God. It is given to us. We do not deserve it that is true but He gives it anyway. Grace is always adequate and inexhaustible and limitless and abundant.

Someone has said, “Grace is a kind of shorthand word for everything God is and does for us. It’s shorthand for all the nobility, beauty and opportunity He brings to us.

Paul said.....

2 Cor. 9:8 (NKJV)

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

I need His grace. We all need His grace.

I must realize that it is because of His grace that I have accomplished anything.

I must also stop judging others.

When someone fails or commits a sin and I feel like telling them off, I must remind myself that “But for the grace of God that could be me.”

Matthew 6:14-15 (NKJV)

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. [15] But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Because of God's grace to us we must be gracious to others.

Paul was a man who understood the importance of God's grace.

He began all of his letters with something like this.....

Ephes. 1:2 (NKJV)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he ended all of his letters with something like this....

Ephes. 6:24 (NKJV)

Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.
Amen.

All of the letters of the Apostle Paul begin and end with a statement about grace. Paul never forgot what grace did for him and what grace can do for all who receive it.

You are here in this service today because of God's grace.

Some of you have really messed up. If you could just do it over again you would do it differently. You made a mistake. You said something you shouldn't have said. You did something you shouldn't have done. You've disappointed your family. You've disappointed yourself.

You deserve to be punished. You know that.

But God offers you His grace.

He says to you, "I love you. I forgive you. I have not given up on you. I created you for a very special purpose. You are my special masterpiece." and if you will let me I will give you another chance. I will help you become the person I created you to be.

Listen to these wonderful words again written by the Apostle Paul...

Ephes. 2:4-10 (NKJV)

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, [5] even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by **grace** you have been saved), [6] and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [7] that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His **grace** in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. [8] For by **grace** you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, [9] not of works, lest anyone should boast. [10] For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

It's all about grace!

Because of God's grace we are saved.

Because of God's grace we are forgiven when we ask for it.

Because of God's grace He has a wonderful plan and purpose for our lives.

Because of God's grace He doesn't disown us when we mess up.

We are His workmanship. He created us for good works. He has already prepared beforehand that we should succeed. He wants us to walk in the way that He has prepared for us to walk.

Are you doing that? Are you walking in the way that God has prepared for you to walk or are you doing your own thing?

You may think that you have messed up so badly that God doesn't love you anymore. Nothing could be farther from the truth. God loves you with an unconditional love. He loved you even before you were born. He knew everything you would ever do and yet He still loves you.

Romans 5:8 (NKJV)

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Accept His grace today. Stop punishing yourself for mistakes you have made. Allow Him to forgive you and to help you to become the person that He created you to be.

I love that old hymn that says....

Grace, Grace, God's grace. Grace that will pardon and cleanse within.
Grace, Grace, God's grace. Grace that is greater than all our sin.

Blue hymn book #38.

Give invitation.