

A Story of Grace/Notes/Week One

Why Grace? Why Jacob? Genesis 25:19-34, Genesis 27-28

Jacob may seem like the most unlikely person to be the recipient of God's grace. God, however, chose to demonstrate His power and His grace through Jacob. God always chooses differently than we would. (1 Corinthians 1:26-29)

WHY GRACE? *Grace* (charis, Greek NT) is defined as the absolute gift of the lovingkindness of God to mankind. God's only motivation is His love. God's grace is unearned and undeserved. Grace is not the "fluffy" side of God. He exercises His grace because He has the authority and the ability to exercise grace.

We access grace through faith (Ephesians 2:4-5, 8-9). Faith is trusting God enough to obey Him. It is more than simply believing. James 2:19 reminds us that the demons believe, but they do not trust God and they do not obey God. When Jesus uses the word *believe* in John 14:1, He is not speaking of mental agreement. He is telling His disciples (and us) to continue entrusting ourselves to Him. Remember! Everything about our relationship with God is a gift...even faith.

Grace stands in contrast to works. We cannot earn our relationship with God by anything we do. And we do not deserve a relationship with God. God's gift of grace is fully expressed in Christ. Only through the completed work of Jesus (His death and resurrection) are we able to have a relationship with Holy God. When we trust Christ, we are justified—a legal term meaning *the debt has been paid*. God declares us justified because Christ has paid our sin debt. (Justified=just if I'd never sinned). Instead of sinfulness, God sees the righteousness of Christ. All of these wonderful blessings are ours by grace through faith in Christ. No amount of religious works can do this for us. No penitence, no tithing, no church membership or attendance, no service...can bring us into a right relationship with God. Only Christ...by grace through faith.

Old Testament believers had a relationship with God based on His grace. We have somehow gotten the idea that salvation in the Old Testament is through the Law and in the New Testament, salvation is by grace. Not true!! **Grace permeates all of Scripture.** God chooses to have a relationship with sinful people based on grace. Faith is the response to His grace in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Romans 4:5 uses Abraham as an Old Testament example of righteousness based on grace. Abraham did not have the Mosaic Law, so the standard for relationship could not be the law. God chose to have a relationship with Abraham and Abraham trusted God enough to obey Him. God counted Abraham as righteous. But what about trusting Jesus? God knew Calvary was coming. Abraham knew God had a plan though he did not know all the details. God, in His grace and His authority, designed Calvary to reach back and cover every Old Testament believer who by faith trusted and obeyed God. *Read Hebrews 11.*

WHY JACOB?

The character of Jacob. Genesis 25:19 begins the story of Jacob. Isaac and Rebekah are unable to have children because Rebekah is barren. Isaac prays on her behalf and God answers. During her pregnancy, Rebekah experiences turmoil in her womb. She too prays and God answers. God answers with prophecy and a promise. In Genesis 25:23 God tells her there are two babies in her womb out of whom two nations will come. One nation will be stronger than the other and the older child shall serve the younger. The prophecy is alarming because culture dictates that the first born is always the leader, the one who

inherits a double portion of the wealth, and the one who one day will carry the responsibility of the family. Twin boys are born to Issac and Rebekah and they are different in every way. Esau is red and hairy. He grows into a hot-headed, impulsive man with little regard for God and the things of God. Jacob is born second, grabbing the heel of his brother. Jacob means “heel-grabber” It also means “supplanter”—*to take someone’s place often through scheming, trickery, or underhanded means, to defraud*. Jacob becomes a quiet man, remaining close to home. He is calculating and observant, and an opportunist. Interestingly, Esau is his father’s favorite son while Jacob is his mother’s favorite son.

It seems that the entire family knows God’s prophesy about Jacob and Esau. Favoritism, more than divine wisdom, guides the actions of Rebekah and Issac. The events that follow (especially chapter 27) reveal no inquiry of the Lord. Genesis 25:29-34 are insightful about both men (Jacob and Esau are grown men). Esau is hungry and dramatic, begging Jacob for stew. Jacob has been waiting for this moment a long time—a moment of impulsive weakness in his brother. Jacob asks that Esau sell his birthright for a bowl of stew. Without a moment’s thought, Esau agrees. Jacob, the younger, has schemed and gotten what God promised. **Faith, however, is living without scheming.** The encounter shows the faithless heart of Jacob. It also demonstrates the faithless heart of Esau who hated the responsibilities of his birthright.

Genesis 27 is a familiar story. Issac is old (but not near death) He cannot see well. He calls for Esau, his favorite son, asking Esau to go hunting so he can prepare his father’s favorite meal. Father and son will enjoy a meal together and then Issac will speak the blessing over Esau. An ancient blessing of father to son was an irrevocable last will and testament. The blessing Issac would speak is sacred, it is the blessing God had given to Abraham and Abraham was instructed to speak it over Issac. Issac knows the blessing belongs to Jacob. Issac is plotting to circumvent the will of God. He wants his favored son Esau to have the blessing.

Rebekah overhears the plan and concocts a plan of her own. She does not inquire of God. (Neither did Issac) Scheming, instead of trusting and waiting, has become the norm for this family. She tells Jacob to bring her two young goats for her to make a “savory dish” for Issac. Jacob is to serve the food to his blind father, pretending to be Esau. Rebekah deepens the scheme as she tells Jacob how to disguise himself as Esau. While Jacob seems to waffle, Rebekah insists (27:13). Jacob willingly participates. Verses 19, 20, and 24 are blatant lies Jacob tells Issac. Finally convinced, Issac blesses Jacob. The words cannot be changed. Esau comes back from hunting and cooking, only to learn his deceitful brother has taken the blessing. Listen carefully, the blessing belonged to Jacob, but the deceitful means of Rebekah and Jacob do not justify the end. Favoritism, faithlessness, and fraud cause a division that will never mend. The nation of Edom (Esau’s descendants) become a thorn in the side of the nation of Israel throughout the Old Testament.

Esau is so angry he threatens to kill his brother. Rebekah, again, comes up with a plan—never asking the Lord. She will send her beloved Jacob away to her brother Laban, 500 miles away. Her plan is to send for Jacob to come home when Esau’s rage subsides. Rebekah tells Issac they must send Jacob away to find a wife. Issac agrees and blesses Jacob before he goes. (Read Gen 28:3-4). Rebekah never sees Jacob again. Jacob leaves home, running for his life. He carries with him no evidence of the blessing he has schemed his entire adult life to obtain. He leaves with no wealth, no family, no comfort of home, no home-cooked meals, no promise fulfilled. He is alone and afraid. He runs 30 miles to an area called Luz. It is rocky barren area—much like Jacob’s soul. Exhausted, he rests his head against a rock and falls asleep.

The Character of God. God chose Jacob, by grace, before the foundations of the earth to be a part of God's redeeming plan. God chose Jacob, by grace, knowing every fault and flaw. God was not put off by any sinful season in Jacob's life. In His sovereign grace and for His sovereign purpose, God chose Jacob. That night, God revealed Himself to Jacob in a dream. Jacob knew *about* God but it seems that Jacob did not *know* God.

The scene in the dream and the words of the dream are significant, though there is much debate about the scene. Jacob sees a staircase descending from heaven down to where he is sleeping. Angels are ascending and descending the staircase. Jesus refers to this dream in John 1:51, but even Jesus' words are difficult to understand. It seems the dream is conveying the accessibility of a relationship with God. God's words, however, are clear. He is speaking the same blessing over Jacob, giving the same promises He spoke to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3, 15:1-7) Genesis 28: 13-15 are God's promise to Jacob. *Read them.* God is revealing His redemption plan for mankind. Jacob's descendants will become a nation who will bless all the families of the earth (bring forth God's Messiah, Jesus). God promises to be with Jacob, to protect him, to bring him back to the land God would give him, and God would accomplish all that He promised.

Jacob wakes up afraid and amazed. He knows he has encountered God. In the morning, Jacob establishes the stone he slept on as a memorial stone, a marker, to remind him and others of his encounter with God and the presence of God. He also renames rocky Luz, calling it **Bethel** meaning *house of God*. Jacob makes a vow. The words he speaks have been interpreted as a bargain. But to me, it sounds like immature faith. He believes God's promises, but his response is hopefully cautious rather than full-throated faith. But God.... God will remain faithful to His *plan*, His *promises*, and to the *person of Jacob*, *many times in spite of Jacob's lack of trust and lack of obedience..*

God is STILL faithful to His redemption plan. While Jacob inherited *a land*, we have inherited *a life* in Jesus Christ. We have everything in Christ that God has promised. He has redeemed us and given us every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:3). Furthermore, God is faithful to finish the work He has begun in us. Philippians 1:6 and 1 Thessalonians 5: 23-24 tell us God started the work of Salvation and He will complete it, mature it. He is conforming us to the image of Christ until we see Him face to face. He will never let go of us. God is faithful to His plan and His promises, and He is faithful to us because He loves us and He is our God of great mercy and grace (Ephesians 2:4-5, 8-9)

Bethel became an important place in the history of Israel. During the time of judges, it was where the Ark of the Covenant was kept and also a place where God's people could inquire of God. Later, when Israel split into two kingdoms, the northern kingdom built at Bethel a golden calf for perverse and false worship. God judged the northern kingdom, in part, for the sacrilege of Bethel.

For the remainder of Jacob's life, Bethel would be a place of remembering. A place where he met God for the first time. It was the beginning of his faith journey, no matter how weak that journey began. Bethel was a place of brokenness for Jacob, but God, in mercy and grace, sought Jacob at his lowest.