

Grace and Peace

Slide 1 – Jesus at the well

This week, I met a lady who visits one of our members and in conversation, she told me that 20 years ago, her life was going nowhere, she was, in her own words, living a sinful life and somehow she got to a prayer meeting and at the end there was a priest who offered to pray with her and she prayed a prayer of confession and asked for Jesus to come into her life and she said from that moment on, her life had changed; she gave her life to Jesus and received his gifts and blessings.

I shared with her that I was preaching about the woman at the well in Samaria and I could see that this resonated with her. She obviously made connections with the Samaritan woman, far from God, with no peace, and that day she encountered the grace of God, and has gone on with her faith, now writing hymns of praise to her redeemer.

A lovely story, a beautiful encounter.

We continue our thoughts from last week with Jesus meeting the woman at the well in Samaria. What was it that changed her life?

It was God's grace.

She was searching for grace and peace. She was thirsting after these things in her life.

Last week, we heard that she was searching for love, 5 husbands and the man she now has, is not even her husband. It would seem to me, that she had a great void in her life. She had a spiritual hole that needed filled. Only, only, the grace of Jesus could do this!

She was thirsty, not merely for physical water, but also for spiritual water and Jesus draws near. The blessing that came from heaven, meets with her, on that hot day at Jacob's well, and he gives to her something that money cannot buy; something that is out of this world, he blesses her with grace and peace from heaven. The Apostle describes this in Ephesians 1 "Praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

Jesus said to her, "everyone who drinks from this well – that is Jacob's well, will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give, will never thirst.

Indeed, the water, what I give, will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life." V13,14

She was blessed from heaven. That's what God gives to us when we take time to be with Jesus.

Slide 2 – Surely Goodness and Mercy shall follow me

But what is this living water?

In the village of Tarbert Lochfyne, there was a cattle market, and each Tarbert Fayre farmers would come from all over Argyll to sell and buy their cattle.

One particular year, there was a prized bull being sold. He was a magnificent fit young and powerful animal. The owner was very proud of him, but this day escaped, it jumped out of the pen, and started to make its way towards the village. The police were called and the bull was eventually rounded up and returned to the market. The farmer was questioned, "what happened?", he said, "I just gave the bull a bowl of water and suddenly it leapt over the fence". One old lady overheard the conversation and said, "Do you have any of that water left?"

I'm sure if there was such a thing, there would be a queue a mile long.

In our passage Jesus is speaking about living water.

What is that water? What makes it living?

We all need water, to survive, without it we would die but Jesus is speaking about something much more profound, he is speaking about God's Spirit in our hearts. His spirit, that is life giving and transforming.

How do we get this spirit?

We get it from Jesus.

Jesus called himself the Good Shepherd and those who follow him will be blessed.

The psalmist writes in Psalm 23, "surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forevermore".

These are beautiful words, someone once described goodness and mercy, to be like two sheepdogs following the shepherd and rounding up the sheep, keeping the sheep together.

That's a powerful metaphor for the Christian life, that God has his sheepdogs and they are called "goodness and mercy" and even when we wander they are on our trail. Do we know just how blessed we are?

Slide 3 – Grace and Peace sunset

The Apostle Paul writes to the church in Ephesus, "Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ".

Two words that underpin our Christian faith, they are the twin towers of the gospel. Grace and Peace. How beautiful they are and Paul encourages this church in Ephesus by telling them that God their father and Jesus his Son sends their grace and peace.

Those two words "grace and peace", are used often by the Apostle Paul in his letters to remind people of the important pillars of their faith; he uses them as greetings, but his letters go on to explain these words in detail.

Christians are people who are filled with God's grace and his peace. This is his living water. You want to know what a Christian looks like, well here it is! Their cup runs over with grace and peace. Two distinguishing marks of a Christian.

Grace is simply God's kindness overflowing in our lives. Grace is something that comes to us, that we do not deserve and which we can never repay. Grace stoops to where we are and lifts us to where we ought to be. Grace is powerful and transforms lives.

John Newton wrote,

"Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost and but now I'm found and blind but now I see."

He wrote these words from personal circumstances, he was the vilest of all men, he was an abuser, he treated slaves as his personal property, but God met with him on the slave ship, just like he met the Apostle Paul and he turned Newton's life around. John Newton gave his life to Jesus and followed him to his life's end. Living water was his in abundance – he was now a changed man!

Yes, for Newton, God's grace was amazing and from it came God's peace!

Slide 4 – Grace is free but not cheap

Yes, grace is free but it's not cheap. It cost Jesus his life.

Paul in his letter to the Ephesians writes,

“In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace, that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding” v7

Paul writes, we have redemption.

To understand redemption, we need to understand that we need redeemed.

The story is told of a young boy who lived by the sea.

So deep was his fascination for the sea that he, with the help of his father, spent months making a beautiful model boat, which he began to sail at the water's edge. Then, one day a sudden gust of wind caught the tiny vessel and carried it far out into the lake and out of sight.

Day after day, he would walk the shores searching for his treasure, but always in vain. Then one day, as he was walking through town, he saw his beautiful boat – in a store window. He approached the shopkeeper only to be told that it was no longer his, for the owner had paid a local fisherman good money for the boat.

So, if the boy wanted the boat, he would have to pay the price.

And so the youth set himself to work doing anything and everything until finally, he returned to the store with the money. Then, after buying the boat, he held his precious boat in his arms, he said with great joy, “You are twice mine now – because I made you and because I bought you.”

Redemption is not earned, it's given. It's God's great gift to us and it comes at a price!

He made us, and we got lost through sin and he bought us back through his Son's sacrifice on a cross, all because of his grace.

That is what the cross is all about – God coming to us, in Jesus and he redeems us.

Jesus made you for relationship, but sin made you no longer his. Yet, God sent his Only Son to buy our redemption. In Christ, you are forever His. He created you, we lost Him, and he bought you.

Praise the Lord for our Redeemer!

Slide 5 – He is our Peace – Ephesians 2 v11-22

The Apostle Paul writes, “He himself is our peace...for through him we have access to the Father.”

True peace is found in Christ, who made our peace with God our Creator. There is no greater peace than this. Through Jesus we have made perfect peace with God. When Paul says grace and peace from God the Father, this is exactly what he is conveying, that Jesus has made peace with His Father for us. Today, we gather to share in communion together. We can only do this because of what Jesus has done for us. We are responding to his grace and in responding we have his peace.

Slide 6 – Receive the Gift

Finally,

We are encouraged to receive his heavenly gifts. His blessings.

Let me finish with a prayer.