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“Embrace God’s Grace”

Acts 13

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Did you know that being a “good person” is not good enough? The Bible tells us that the human condition is broken and sinful and therefore we need a Savior—Jesus. We can’t do or say enough good things to overcome our broken condition. But here’s the good news—God offers us forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus and what He did on the cross when he died for our sins. That act of kindness and mercy is God’s grace. In this teaching from a sermon that Paul delivered in Acts 13, we will learn to embrace God’s grace and receive the forgiveness we all need!

1. **Acts 13:1-3, 13-15** - *“Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. ... Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem. But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, ‘Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.’”*
2. The Holy Spirit called Paul into ministry
 - a. Following his conversion, Paul spent about ten years in preparation for God’s calling on his life
 - b. While Paul was serving in Antioch, The Holy Spirit spoke—most likely through a word of prophecy—and announced that Paul (along with Barnabas) was ready for ministry
3. Paul’s first missionary tour

- a. Took about two years to complete (ca. AD 46-48)
 - b. He sailed from the island of Cyprus to several cities in Asia Minor (Turkey) and then back to Antioch in Syria
 - c. Barnabas accompanied Paul and they were later joined by John Mark (who wrote the Gospel of Mark)
 - d. In total, they traveled around twelve hundred miles
 - e. Paul's first convert was Sergius Paulus, the proconsul (governor) of Cyprus
4. Paul preached faith over works
- a. In each place Paul went, he would first visit the synagogue before preaching to the Gentiles
 - b. The Jews prided themselves on their obedience to the law
 - i. Faith had become secondary to obedience in Jewish culture
 - c. We are accepted through faith in Jesus Christ, not obedience to the law
 - i. **Genesis 15:6** - "*Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*" (1984 NIV)
 - ii. **Romans 3:10b** - "*There is none righteous, no, not one.*"
 - iii. **Romans 3:23** - "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*"
 - d. Paul reviewed Jewish history, reminding them that Jesus was a descendant of David, and introduced them to the message of grace
 - i. **Acts 13:23, 38-39, 43** - "*From this man's seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior—Jesus ... Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. ... Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.*"
5. Grace
- a. Scripture explains grace as God's unmerited favor and His undeserved kindness
 - b. The word *grace* (or some form of it) appears 185 times in the Bible
 - c. The first time the Bible mentions grace is in Genesis
 - i. **Genesis 6:8** - "*But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.*"
 - d. The last time the Bible mentions grace is in the last verse of the Bible
 - i. **Revelation 22:21** - "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*"
 - e. Grace is one of the key attributes of God
 - i. **Psalms 145:8** - "*The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy.*"
 - f. Grace is personified in Jesus

- i. [John 1:14, 17](#) – *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. ... For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”*
 - g. Grace is the basis for our salvation through faith in Jesus Christ
 - i. [Ephesians 2:7-9](#) – *“...that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”*
6. Grace does not mean the law of God is without merit
- a. The moral code is still intact
 - b. There is a purpose of the law
 - i. It explains God’s righteous standard
 - 1. [Romans 7:7b](#) – *“...I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’”*
 - ii. It exposes our sinful condition
 - 1. [Hebrews 4:12](#) – *“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”*
 - iii. It expresses our need for a Savior
 - 1. [Galatians 3:24-25](#) – *“Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”*
 - 2. *Tutor* translates to **pedagogue**, which was a person tasked with caring for a child, including walking the child to school—pedagogues connected children with educational instruction as the law connects our hearts to the heart of the Savior
7. Amazing grace
- a. Being a good person does not save us
 - b. We are saved through a personal relationship with Jesus
 - c. John Newton, a former slave trader who found redemption in Christ and wrote the hymn *Amazing Grace*, near his death said, “My memory is nearly gone, but two things I remember: One, I am a great sinner, and two, God is a great Savior.”

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Acts 13:1-3, 13-15](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Read [Genesis 15:6](#), [Romans 3:10b](#), and [Romans 3:23](#). On what basis are we, as sinful human beings, accepted by Christ? (See #4c above)
3. Read [Acts 13:23, 38-39, 43](#). Why was Paul's message of faith over works so radical to the Jews? (See #4b and #4d above)
4. How does Scripture define grace? (See #5a above)
5. Read [Psalm 145:8](#) and [John 1:14, 17](#). Where do you see grace in God's character? How does Jesus personify grace? (See #5e and #5f above)
6. Read [Ephesians 2:7-9](#). What role does grace play in salvation? (See #5g above)
7. Read [Romans 7:7b](#), [Hebrews 4:12](#), and [Galatians 3:24-25](#). What is the purpose of the law? (See #6b above)
8. Have you ever attempted to earn God's favor through "being a good person"? Why doesn't this work?
9. Discuss a specific time when you clearly saw God's grace in your life.
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)