

“My grace is sufficient for you”

2 Corinthians 12:2-10

In response to Paul’s prayer, his pleading, that God would remove the thorn in his flesh, whatever that may have been, God, the Lord, said to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Six words – “My grace is sufficient for you.”

Tom Wright suggests that this is one of the most comforting, reassuring, healing and steadying “words of the Lord” ever recorded. And I believe it would be, if we paused a while and took time to explore and understand what these words mean, and what these words might mean for us.

First, what do we understand by ‘grace’?

We may think of Grace as a girl’s name – and it’s a popular choice too, especially in the last 15 to 20 years, being the most popular girls name in 2006. In it’s Latin form Grace is gratia, meaning thanks, especially for God’s grace. And it can mean elegant, refined, charming, or graceful.

We may think of grace as something we say at mealtimes. At home, especially if Julia and I are sitting at the table for lunch or dinner, we say grace; we give thanks for what God has provided.

We may think of grace as one of those words, but we’re not sure what it means, that we hear in church. At the start of our services we are often greeted with “Grace, mercy and peace – from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ – be with you.”

The Apostle Paul, at the start of each of his 13 letters that are in the New Testament, has a greeting that includes “grace and peace”, and in his two letters to Timothy he also includes “mercy”. Peter uses a similar greeting in his two letters – I particularly like Peter’s greeting: “Grace and peace be yours in abundance.”

So, what is meant by grace?

Simply, grace means undeserved kindness. Grace is God’s undeserved kindness. It’s unmerited. It’s unearned. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, that we have done, are doing or can do, to earn or deserve God’s grace. It is freely given. And it’s freely given because grace, or kindness, is an aspect of God’s character.

When, in Exodus 33, Moses asks to see God’s glory, the Lord replies, “I will make my goodness pass before you.” Goodness? Not greatness, or almighty power?

‘And God passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate (*or merciful*) and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love for a thousand (*generations*), forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.”’

Grace is different to mercy.

Mercy – is not getting what we deserve – *In God’s mercy, he forgave our sins.*

Grace – is getting what we could never deserve – *Through God’s grace, he saved us, he adopted us, he made each of us a co-heir with Jesus Christ.*

It is why Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no-one can boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

“My grace is sufficient for you” is “God’s grace is sufficient for you.” God’s kindness, which is undeserved, is sufficient for you.

Is God’s grace, is his kindness sufficient?

Think of God’s grace as his loving kindness. Paul, again in his letter to the Ephesians, tells them that he is praying that they will “grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ” (Eph. 3:18). This is God’s love in four dimensions. I’ve heard it described as follows:

First, how wide is God’s love? God’s love is wide enough to be everywhere. There is no place where God’s love isn’t, no place on earth, and no place in your life, no place in my life, where God is not. God’s love is wide enough to include everyone. Do you feel alone? God is with you; his love is with you.

How long is God’s love? God’s love is long enough to last forever. Human love wears out; we suffer compassion fatigue. But God’s love never wears out; he is abounding in love. God will never, never, never ... never, stop loving you. He made you to love you. God loves you with an everlasting love.

How deep is God’s love? God’s love is deep enough to handle anything. No matter what pain, or problems, or hurt, God’s love is deeper still. Do you feel as though you are in the pits, have you hit the bottom, in the pit of despair? God’s love goes deeper than your problem. There is no pain, problem hurt or pit too deep for God’s love.

Finally, how high is God’s love? God’s love is high enough to overlook your sins, your mistakes, your faults. Because of Jesus Christ God is able to overlook your sins, your mistakes, your faults. God offers forgiveness through the cross because of his love. He offers a fresh chance to start over.

Again, Paul, writing to the Ephesians, says, “we have forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” and hear this “that he lavished on us...” (Eph. 1:7). God’s grace, his loving kindness, is lavished on us. Generous heaps of grace. Piled high and running over.

Is God’s grace sufficient? Absolutely!

What is the context of these six words? Paul, here, is writing to the Christians in Corinth. The Corinthians had a problem with self-reliance and boasting. To make a point Paul tells them here (and in the previous chapter) that despite his upbringing, his training, his experiences, he has nothing to boast about except his weakness. His weakness, his thorn in the flesh, whatever that may have been, makes him realise how much he needs to rely on God.

What about us? When we hear these words, what is our response?

Perhaps we consider we’re doing alright. There’s nothing we need. We’re self-sufficient, self-reliant, independent. Or are we pretending that everything is okay, we’ll get through in our own strength and ability, just as we have done before. But don’t we really want God’s grace in our lives? God’s power and human power are not the same thing; often the second must be knocked out of the way altogether for the first, God’s grace, to shine through as he desires and intends.

Perhaps we consider that we are totally unworthy of God’s grace, which of course, we all are. But we struggle to accept that God can love us, forgive us, adopt us into his family, make us a co-heir with Jesus Christ.

If that is you, then stop struggling. Accept that God loves you. His grace, his undeserved kindness, is sufficient for you.

Grace be yours in abundance. Amen.

James Parsons, Tidenham – 4 July 2021