

GRACE APPEARING - TITUS 2:11-14

NEW YEAR, 2006

Hauling heavy suitcases all day during the hot summer months at the New York City's Pennsylvania Railroad Station is hard work for anybody. But it was especially difficult for a skinny 14 year old named Joey. Now Joey was a baggage handler in 1940, when the Pennsylvania Railroad Station was the hub of transportation activity for all of New York City. And Joey was by far the smallest of all the baggage handlers. But he was a hard worker and he hustled constantly. No one could say that Joey didn't carry his weight.

Joey had only been on the job a few days when he noticed an interesting pattern. It was easy to spot tourists who were coming to visit New York City. And Joey noticed that the veteran baggage handlers had two sets of fees - one for the locals and another for the tourists. It wasn't hard for Joey to figure out how much more money the veteran baggage handlers were making by their double standards, taking advantage of those people who didn't know any better.

When he got home from work that night, Joey told his father what some of the other baggage handlers were doing. His father didn't hesitate a moment. "If the other baggage handlers choose to operate that way, it's their business. But it's not right at all. They're paying you for an honest day's work. You do what is right and give an honest day's work, and you'll do just fine."

When Joey was interviewed by Reader's Digest recently, he went back in his mind to his job at Penn Station as the most important job of his life and the advice that his father had given to him that day as the creed that he has lived by

ever since. And that life of honesty and integrity has produced rich dividends in Joey's life. Nobody calls him Joey anymore. No, today, Papa Joe is one of the premiere college football coaches in our nation. His 49 years of coaching at Penn State spans the administrations of 10 U.S. Presidents. Joe has lead his team to more bowl victories than any other college coach in history. And this Tuesday evening, Joe Paterno will take his 3rd ranked Nittany Lions into the Orange Bowl to play the Florida State Seminoles in another Bowl Championship Series Game.

People who have made a significant difference in the lives of others in this world have consistently been people of great character. They are people who realize that what they say and what they do matters. They are people who have committed themselves to do what is right. To be people of honesty and integrity. And, consequently, they have been rewarded with the respect and admiration of others who see their commitment to character.

It is at this time of year that we all become quite introspective as we look at the way we are living. Having just finished another year of living, we naturally evaluate how we have lived in 2005. And a new year naturally gives to us the opportunity to commit ourselves to a course of action for 2006. Resolutions are usually made by people at this time of year. New directions and goals in life are often made at this time of year. And it is good for us to evaluate our course periodically and make adjustments that need to be made. Just as the captain of a ship periodically checks his route so that adjustments due to currents or winds can be made, so we all should examine the course of

our lives so that we can get back on course if we have drifted away from the goals and ideals that we know to be most important.

Happily, the Christian does not need to simply rely upon mere human wisdom and strength in running the course that God has set before. For God not only gives to us his standards in the bible that help to determine our goals and directions, but He also gives to us his wisdom and power necessary in the accomplishment of what He wants achieved. The word that the bible uses for God's empowerment for living is GRACE. Grace is a very general term that simply refers to God freely giving to us what is needed for spiritual and emotional and physical success in every way.

There are 3 appearances of God's grace that are found in a brief paragraph in Titus 2. These 3 appearances correspond with our natural tendencies at this time of year. There is the past appearing of God's grace - God's grace that has redeemed us. This corresponds to our looking back in celebration to Christ's coming and our redemption as we have done during the Christmas season and during our celebration of the Lord's Table. There is also the present appearance of God's grace - God's grace that reforms us. This is appropriate to consider as we evaluate the way we are living and make resolutions for the New Year. And, finally, there is the future appearance of God's grace in this passage - God's grace that rewards us. And this is most appropriate as we look forward to the new year of 2006 that lies ahead of us. Let's look at these 3 appearances of God's grace that Paul gave to Titus.

READ Titus 2:11-14

TIT 2:11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.
12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

1. Paul begins this section by saying, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." Titus 2:11.

We have already noted that the term "grace" indicates a gift that is freely given from God. During the past several weeks, we have been looking at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as the perfect gift from above. So we should really expect to find the word "grace" used often in connection with God the Father giving his one and only son as the Messiah to this earth. And it is true, not only in this passage where the grace that has appeared is an obvious reference to the Lord Jesus Christ, but also in other passages as well - grace is often connected with Christ.

*We know very little about the 18 so-called silent years of Jesus Christ from age 12 - 30. At age 12, we are told the story of his being separated from his parents following the feast of the Passover. Joseph and Mary were understandably distraught when they noticed that Jesus was not with their company on the road home to Nazareth. So they returned to find him teaching the religious leaders in the temple to their amazement. Then we read nothing more about Christ until his entrance to his public ministry being baptized by John about the age of 30. I recently read one writer's explanation of those

silent years. He said that Mary might have been so worried and concerned about losing Jesus after she and Joseph had left Jerusalem without him, that she just told him he was grounded for the next 18 years. Most parents who are pressed to the limit by children who are going through that period of puberty can understand that temptation. It sometimes would be nice to be able to ground a child from about age 12 to 20, wouldn't it?

But it is interesting that the verse that summarizes this period of silent years simply says, "And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the **grace** of God was upon him." Luke 2:40

*John likewise begins his gospel by reminding us that the "Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, **full of grace and truth.**" John 1:14

*And then just 3 verses later he continues by saying, "For the law was given through Moses; but **grace and truth** came through Jesus Christ" John 1:17

*The Psalmist prophesied of the coming messiah that when he opened his mouth, **grace** would pour forth from his lips. Ps. 45:2

*So it cannot be denied that the Lord Jesus Christ was the fullness of the grace of God when he walked upon this earth. He was God's gift to the human race. All of his acts were manifestations of God's grace. Every time he opened his mouth, grace poured forth from his lips. And this grace has appeared to all men, Paul writes to Titus. Christ did not perform his ministry in a vacuum, but

he rather walked and talked openly, so that he was open to public scrutiny.

Now it is very important for us to see this appearance of grace in the past first -- for the Lord Jesus Christ is the foundation for God's grace that appears to us in the present helping us to live the Christian life. For it was the Lord Jesus Christ who taught us how to live a life pleasing to God. And this brings us to our second point.

2. The present appearance of God's grace. It is God's grace in our daily lives that gives to us the power to live the Christian life. READ Titus 2:11,12

TIT 2:11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,

How does the past appearance of God's grace teach us to apply God's grace to our lives as we live our lives today?

a. Well, in the first place, we must never forget that one of the important purposes of Christ's coming to this earth was to model a life pleasing to God. 3 times it is recorded of Christ that God the Father's voice called out from heaven - "This is my son whom I love; with him I am well pleased.

You see, Jesus didn't have to live for 33 years in order to pay the atonement for our sins. He was just as much the sinless lamb of God when he was almost 2 when Herod was plotting to take his life as he was at age 33 when Pilate turned him over to the Jewish leaders for execution. But those 30 plus years were very important to God's overall program. It was during that time that Christ would demonstrate himself to be the spotless lamb of God publicly.

But it was also during that period of time that Jesus Christ would become a perfect example of righteous living so that each of us could have a human model of godliness to follow.

Peter realized the importance of this truth when he wrote, "to this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." 1 Peter 2:21. So in a very real sense, whenever we have a question about what we should do in any situation of life, we need only ask ourselves what the Lord Jesus Christ would do if he were in that situation. If we can find an analogous situation in his life, we can know for sure what behavior on our part would be pleasing to God.

b. But Christ did more than just live a perfect example for us. He also provided the empowerment that we would need to follow that example. You see, one of the very important aspects of Christ's death upon the cross of Calvary is the empowerment that it gives to us to live in victory over sin today. We often hear of the atoning work of Christ, paying the penalty for our sins with his shed blood so that we can be forgiven and cleansed in the eyes of God. And this is so very important and critical, for it is the foundation of our being restored in fellowship with God and dwelling with Him throughout all eternity in heaven. But many so often dwell on this aspect of Christ's death to the degree that they underemphasize or even completely ignore the present empowering ministry of Christ's death today.

The Bible makes it crystal clear that just as Adam sinned representing all of his descendents in the human race, so also Jesus Christ died as a

representative of all of his children, those who believe on him. Therefore, all of the overcoming power of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ is available to each and every one of God's children today. We only need appropriate that power into our lives in order to be freed from the bondage of present sin.

Believers down through the centuries who have understood and applied this truth have been able to live consistent victorious lives. Listen to what the Apostle Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Gal. 2:20

So, you see, it is because of God's grace appearing in the Lord Jesus Christ in the past that God's grace now appears in our lives in the present, enabling us to have a model of what godly living is all about and empowering us to be able to follow that model. This is how God's grace teaches us to say "no" to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.

The simple fact of life is that while millions of New Year's resolutions have already been made by Americans all throughout our land, 90 plus percent of them will be broken by the end of January. Resolutions to lose weight, resolutions to quit smoking, resolutions to curb the temper, resolutions to read more books - 9 out of 10 will be broken within weeks. And all these resolutions will be broken not because they were made in poor faith. It will not be because they were made insincerely or with bad intentions. No, the vast

majority of these resolutions have been made by sincere people and they would bring good results if they were maintained. But the simple fact is that the vast majority of these resolutions will be broken because the chains of the bad habit, whatever it might be, are so strong that there is not the power to break those chains. The human will alone will just not be strong enough. But God offers his grace to his children to empower them to live godly lives.

The word that Paul uses for "self-control" in verse 12 literally means to be of a sound mind, to be level-headed, to be reasonable, to have the body and bodily desires controlled by the mind so that there is a balance in one's life. Now everyone in the world wants that. There isn't a person who doesn't want to live a balanced, reasonable life that would be in his own best interests and in the best interests of others. But the secret is finding the power to be able to live such a life. The grace to live in the present is found in the person of the grace who appeared in the past.

3. Finally, let us note the future appearance of God's grace. READ Titus 2:13

¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

There can be no doubting the promise that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming back to earth one day to take his people home to heaven to be with him throughout all eternity. Of the 260 chapters in the N.T., there are 318 direct references to the return of Jesus Christ. That is one for every 30 verses. 23 out of the 27 books of the N.T. refer to this great event. 3 out of the 4 books which

do not mention it are single chapter letters written to individuals concerning a specific subject. Around this time of year, we often emphasize the many, detailed prophecies concerning Christ's first coming to this earth celebrated during the Christmas season. But we must never forget that for every single prophecy concerning Christ's first coming, there are 8 prophecies about his second coming.

God has told us about this future appearing grace so that we might live our lives in readiness for Christ's imminent return.

Imagine a man who has been away from his family on a business trip overseas for several months. Suddenly, the family receives an email. "My work is finally completed; I am coming home today." But when the man arrives at the airport, there is nobody there to meet him. And as he turns in the driveway of his house, there are no little noses pushing against the glass windows. On the contrary, as he steps up onto the porch, he hears turmoil and arguing from the inside. He opens the door to find his family debating about whether he is going to come in the morning or in the afternoon. He hears them arguing with each other about what mode of transportation he will use to get home – will he take a cab or a bus?. Can you even imagine such a scene taking place?

When the Lord Jesus Christ returns in the clouds for his own, he doesn't want to find his children debating over the time of his return or living apathetically in the world as if he weren't coming back at all. No, he desires to find his children waiting in expectant hope. He wants to find his children living

their lives in such a manner that they wouldn't be ashamed if he stepped right into the room with them.

And this brings us to the most foundational question that we each should ask ourselves as we enter 2006. Recognizing that the past appearing of the grace of God has brought redemption for us. And it is Christ's example and sacrificial death that is the empowering grace of God to enable us to live in victory presently so that our lives might be reformed and renewed. Are we in actuality living our lives now so that we would be unashamed if Christ were to return back at this very moment? The answer to that question should direct every resolution and decision that we make for this new year. If there is some habit that we would be embarrassed to share with Christ, then by God's power and grace, we ought to lay aside that weight that is hindering our spiritual growth. If there are priorities in our life that are inconsistent with Christ's imminent return, then by God's power and grace, we should change them. If there are relationships that would embarrass us if Christ were to suddenly appear, then by God's power and grace, we ought to correct them.

There is one fact that is without doubt. He is coming back. He has told us that He is coming back. When he comes, none of us should be surprised. The question is simply, will we be waiting and ready?