

Grace Abounding

by A.B. Simpson

God's grace is greater than our sin, and He can take our worst mistakes and turn them into something beautiful.

Scripture: John 10:10, Romans 5:20, 2 Corinthians 9:8, Galatians 6:7, Ephesians 2:7, Ephesians 3:20-21, Philippians 1:9, 1 Thessalonians 3:12, 1 Timothy 1:15, 2 Peter 1:5-8

Topics: "Redemption", "Grace"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the overwhelming power of grace in his sermon 'Grace Abounding,' illustrating how God's grace surpasses sin through various natural and biblical examples. He explains that just as a tree heals stronger after a wound, God's grace transforms the most sinful into vessels of His glory, exemplified by figures like Paul, who was once the 'chief of sinners.' Simpson encourages believers to recognize that no sin is too great for God's grace, which not only forgives but also restores and empowers for greater usefulness. He concludes by urging the faithful to embrace the abundant grace available to them, which can counteract the consequences of sin and lead to a life of victory and purpose.

Transcript

"Where sin abounded grace did much more abound." Rom. v: 20.

We find in nature a beautiful approximation to the truth declared in this verse, a sort of parable and symbol of the glory of redemption. It is this. Go into the woods and cut a wound in the side of a living tree, and then go back again a few years later and see how the tree has endeavored to heal its wound and restore the breach by a very beautiful reproductive force. The notch in the trunk is all grown up again. Not, however, with the old fibres, but with far stronger materials; and you will find the grain of the wood interlaced and twisted across the old fibres in a sort of tangle, which all your efforts would frequently be found unable to cleave asunder. In fact, the healed breach is much stronger than any other part of the tree, and nature has not only made good the loss, but far more abundantly brought good out of it.

So, it is said, a broken bone heals much more strongly than the natural bone, as though nature were determined to fortify herself against a second attack, and to turn to account, in double strength, the assault made upon her.

Very beautifully is this illustrated in the formation of the pearl. A little grain of sand or a piercing thorn in the sensitive side of the pearl oyster, irritating its nerves, provokes him, not to retaliate and thus inflict upon himself a greater wound, but to throw around the intruding element a crystalline liquid and to bury it out of

sight in a smooth and beautiful gem; so that out of the thorn and the wound come beauty and victory, and the value of the little mollusk is enhanced a thousand-fold by the very incident that threatened his destruction.

This is what the apostle means in a sublimer measure when he sums up his splendid antithesis between sin and salvation, Adam and Christ, the fall and the redemption, with the magnificent declaration, "where sin abounded grace did much more abound." Out of the terrible attack which the powers of darkness hurled against the world, the wisdom and grace of heaven have brought the victory which is to prove the triumph of the ages. Out of the catastrophe which threatened man's eternal destruction, God has evolved a new creation transcendently greater and more glorious than the old. Out of the ocean depths of sin, Christ has brought the Pearl of Great Price, the church, which shall shine amid the glories of eternity with a lustre reflecting His own. Let us endeavor by the help of God to realize a little more fully this elevating and transporting truth.

It is illustrated in the salvation of the most abandoned sinners and the grace which is often so magnified in their conversion and subsequent usefulness. God seems to love to take the worst materials for His greatest triumphs. He chose a Jacob and a David in the Old Testament, both weak and wicked men in many a terrible sense and measure, to become the respective heads of the patriarchal and the kingly periods. He saved a Manasseh after half a century of bloody crimes. He took a Rahab from the slums of Jericho, to be a mother in the line of the Messiah's ancestry. And when He would choose His most illustrious apostle to found the glorious work of the gospel among the infamous Gentile races, He took "the chief of sinners." There is no doubt that Paul's calm estimate of his own wickedness, given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was not exaggerated. Moral though he was, yet even his own testimony leaves sufficient evidence of the atrocity of his religious crimes. Not satisfied with insulting the name of Jesus and abetting the murderers of Stephen His faithful martyr, he devoted himself to exterminating the followers of Christ; and with a fiendish excess of cruelty he feared not to destroy their souls as well as their bodies by committing the most fearful crimes and compelling them to blaspheme the Name of Him on whom they believed. He must have known full well the awfulness of the crimes he required of them, and that although they might even be mistaken in their faith, yet to sin against their conscience by profaning the name of Christ was, to them, the height of impiety, and on his part the very extreme of refined and Satanic cruelty.

And yet he, "the chief of sinners," tells us that he obtained mercy for this very purpose, that he might become the pattern of the principle on which God was to act in the economy of grace, namely, to "show forth all long-suffering unto them that should hereafter believe on the name of Jesus Christ to life everlasting." And this does not merely mean that God will save the most guilty, but that He will take peculiar pleasure in making more of their redeemed lives just because of their former wickedness. And so Paul can say "the grace of God was exceeding abundant towards me, with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." "Where sin abounded grace did much more abound," not only in forgiving the sin but in making the sinner a vessel of the riches of divine grace and love, and an instrument in the hands of God for greater usefulness than ever was permitted perhaps to a mortal.

So still, through all these succeeding centuries has He loved to take the thorn and the thistle and turn them into the fir tree, and the myrtle and make it unto himself "for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." And, therefore, a wicked Bunyan, a degraded Newton, a contemptible, thieving Moorhouse, a polluted and criminal McAuley, yes, and many a woman whose name is written upon His hands, if not on the tablets of Christian fame, has been in like manner made an especial monument of this cardinal principle of

divine redemption, "where sin abounded grace did much more abound."

Oh, is there a soul reading these lines that conscience and the tempter have conspired to discourage on account of aggravated sin? It matters not how great the sin, how strange the aggravations, and how long the story of impenitence and even of unbelief. To you is this message spoken and you may echo back to the throne of grace the deep petition which inspiration long ago breathed from the lips of David, "For thine own sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great."

But we, the people of God, must also fully realize this principle if we would stand prepared to fulfill the purpose of our Master. In this age the messengers have passed out with the last invitations to the gospel feast. No longer are they to be chiefly addressed to the first invited guests, but it is from the highways and from the hedges and from the streets and lanes of the city that they are coming in today in great multitudes, and not only coming, but becoming the brightest trophies of redeeming grace and the most useful and honored instruments in the salvation of others. Shall we, beloved, fully realize the significance of this truth that the more lost, degraded and hopeless the soul may be to which we bring this precious gospel, the more willing is our Master to welcome it and the more glorious may be the issues of the redeemed life? As our faith in man decreases, thank God our faith in God rises to sublimer heights, that "where sin abounded grace shall much more abound."

This text is illustrated in the sanctification of believers and especially in their sanctification from qualities and tendencies naturally the most unholy and contrary to their new and sanctified lives. Still it is literally true in the deeper life of the soul that "where sin abounded grace much more abounds." It is not that God will make the good better, but that He will make the bad good, and the utterly and hopelessly bad divinely pure and holy. Sanctification is not the refining and elevating of the naturally pure, but the transforming of darkness into light, a selfish soul into a living sacrifice of love, and a heart all steeped in corruption into the glorious counterpart of Christ's own holiness. In the work of grace God takes peculiar delight in contradicting natural probabilities and tendencies. He took a shrinking Jeremiah to be a bold and courageous reprover of Israel's prophets, priests and kings. He took a cowardly Peter to be the courageous and defiant apostle of Pentecost. He took a Son of Thunder to be the gentle, loving disciple of love. He took a raging persecutor to be the long-suffering apostle who could say, "I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ." He can make the weakest things in you the strongest, the worst things in you the occasions for the grace which will magnify in you the best and divinest qualities of the Christian life.

Beloved, shall we therefore cease to think and speak of the Christian life as a mere matter of education, and fully realize that it is all a new creation and a miracle of infinite and omnipotent grace? All that God requires in each of us is an opportunity to show what He can do, and to prove over and over again that "where sin abounded grace shall much more abound."

The text is illustrated in the fact that divine grace not only saves and sanctifies but counteracts the consequences of his sins and more than triumphs over the sad and hurtful effects of the sin. Many a poor fellow thinks, and many a sermon we fear has helped him to think, that though he has been forgiven and saved yet he need never expect to be delivered from the fruits of his life in harvests of sorrow and shame. He must not expect the consequences to be obviated but cheerfully endure them in patience and humility, thanking God that he has been saved from so much, and counting this but a reasonable reminder of the past and a very small retribution compared with what he deserved. He quotes, or others quote to him, a passage in Galatians vi: 7. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap," and so they expect to reap

in their bodies the physical infirmities and diseases which are the legitimate fruit of a life of dissipation and sin. They expect that their social and secular life may be embarrassed and impeded by the issues of their past, and that only after a long and patient endurance can they expect to recover themselves from the entanglement of the sins of their youth which encompassed them about.

Now we believe that grace is able to do something better than this, and that our blessed Lord has borne the bitter fruit of sin as our Substitute, and that His atonement has power to cancel all the effects of sin and even turn the curse into a blessing. The great Augustine, one of the fathers of the Christian Church, found himself at his conversion a physical wreck in his early youth. Every drop of his blood was poisoned by the virus of sin, and his frame was literally dropping into corruption through every abominable excess. But the grace of God not only saved his soul, but restored his body and gave him nearly half a century of almost unparalleled usefulness in physical health and strength and glorious service for his Master and the church.

Many a redeemed drunkard today can tell the same story of physical forces perfectly restored and every trace of a degraded life removed, not only from the physical energies but even from the very countenance. And so the grace of Christ can take the social life and counteract the innumerable currents of evil that have gone forth from us to return in our own life in entanglements and embarrassments and to work their lasting influences in the lives of others. In proportion to our faith, God can undo these influences and give us back all that we have lost and more. "I will restore to you," He says, "the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm and the caterpillar, my great army which I sent among you." Sometimes the very life that the sinner has lived in the service of Satan is made an opportunity for greater usefulness, as he is enabled to reach classes to which the moral and respectable cannot even have access. And so God is constantly taking men out of the dives and slums, out of the saloons and dance-halls, out of the great lost world, that He may send them back again to their own former sphere as messengers of redeeming love. Fear not, then, poor trembling disciple, that you shall be drawn into the vortex that your own past life has created. Reckon yourself dead indeed unto it in all its issues, and go forth claiming the full redemption of your risen Lord and walking with Him as though you were not even the same person who once lived the life of sin and misery.

The text is illustrated most sublimely of all in the work of redemption. In a word its deep significance is simply this, that the work of Christ's redemption has more than counteracted and will ultimately transcend all the effects of the Fall. We believe that it has brought more glory to God than if the human race had kept their first estate. It has led to a new revelation of the divine character, which, but for sin, might never have been known. Creation revealed God in His power, wisdom and purity, but only redemption has revealed Him in His attitude of grace, that is, divine goodness dealing with the sinful and the lost. Had man never fallen, God would certainly have been known as a holy Being, through the terrible retribution which He visited upon the angels which kept not their first estate; but the wreck of the human race has exhibited Him in the most beautiful and attractive of all attitudes, as the God of mercy and love to the unworthy and wicked. Heaven would often have heard the song, "Alleluia! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth," even if Christ never had died, but only redemption has given the key-note of the new song, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!"

But it is not only an exhibition of His love and grace, but of that transcendent wisdom that could still vindicate His righteousness and guard the sanctity of His holy will, and yet devise a way by which mercy could have free exercise and God could be just and yet a Saviour. The cross of Jesus Christ becomes a monument of God's infinite wisdom, righteousness and love, and through all the ages to come will exhibit "the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us by Jesus Christ." Take out of the coming

eternity the song of redemption, the millennial kingdom, the glory of Jesus and the prospects of His redeemed people, and heaven will seem annihilated and the universe a dreary waste, while even God Himself shall become enveloped in clouds of thickest, darkest and remotest distance, and the Bible will be obliterated from existence.

The benefits that come to men are still more manifest and deeply interesting. The redemption of our fallen race brings us to a far higher place than the first creation ever gave us. Unfallen man was only a creature made in the image of God, but a little lower than the angels. Redeemed man has been raised above the rank of angels to partake of the very nature of God, to be a joint-heir with the Son of God and to share eternally the throne of his Creator and the attributes of the eternal Son, our glorious Head. Redemption is therefore not the restoration of Adamic holiness, happiness or honor, but it is the uniting of man with the Son of God and the exalting of the redeemed sinner to kindred fellowship with a higher Being, so that, eternally like his Lord; the redeemed man shall be, not only a man, but a man united with God and possessing in the depths of his being the very spirit and nature of the eternal Jehovah.

This is so sublime that we would fear to boldly state it, had we not the unmistakable language of the Holy Scriptures. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is," "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature." "Your life is hid with Christ in God, but when Christ, who is your life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory." Yes, the day is coming when Satan shall gaze upon the consummated work of the Great Restorer and see everything his hand has touched transformed into a monument of the grace and power of the Redeemer, and even he shall bow the knee and bitterly confess like one of his ancient disciples, "Oh, Nazarene! Thou hast conquered."

We may not be able to understand all sides of this great problem. Of course it would not be right to say that God intended or desired the sin and fall of His creatures and the sad train of still greater sin and misery that has followed. But we can surely believe that while He discountenanced the disobedience of Adam, as He does all disobedience, while He desires His children to walk in His will in holy obedience, and while He still is deeply grieved with every transgression and something is lost by it inevitably, yet the resources of His grace and power are such that, being committed, He has ample expedients to counteract its effects; and while all the consequences are not averted, yet enough good is brought out of it to result, in the end, in a higher aggregate of blessing, to turn the evil to the best possible account, and to show that God's all-sufficiency is more than a match for every emergency that can ever arise.

For ourselves, surely, the practical lessons are not hard to find. If there be a discouraged life within reach of this message, if there is a heart that has been held back by the iron fetters of the past and to whom Satan has been whispering, "There is no hope, but we will go on in the imagination of our hearts," oh, beloved, surely we have seen enough in this passage to answer the unworthy thought and ignoble fear, and to encourage us just because of the extremity of our situation, to claim more boldly the interposition of our Almighty Friend and the over-ruling power of His grace and love. The very hardest case is the one which He most loves to take. The most hopeless situation is the one through whose relief He is most glorified. If everything in your life seems against you, and if, worst of all, you feel that you alone are to blame for everything that is against you; if it has been, not only sorrow but sin, and every aggravation of sin-beloved, the grace of Jesus Christ was prepared for you and such as you. Only prove its all-sufficiency and you shall be among all that we have already specified, the crowning illustration of this most blessed

truth, that "where sin abounded grace did much more abound."

God's great ultimate purpose for His redeemed people is the key to all the "exceeding great and precious promises." This, and this alone, explains the strong language in which He speaks to us of the provisions of His grace for our needs. These promises are out of all proportion to our importance or worth, and it is not strange that naturally we should hesitate to accept such boundless and stupendous assurances of love and care, and that our faith should be as narrow and paltry as it often is. It is not strange that the beggar child should be content with rags and crumbs, and almost think it is mocked when you talk to it about palaces and offer it the costly robes and the princely treasures of royalty. The truth is, we are the children naturally of low and shameful birth and spiritual destitution, but we have been adopted into a higher rank, nay, we have been born into a heavenly life and a divine sonship, and we are destined, as the very children of God, to share the exceeding riches of His glory through all the ages to come; and, therefore, we are recognized by Him now and treated in the manner befitting our future glory. We are like the children of wealthy parents who are at school in a foreign land, not having yet come into their inheritance, but being supplied by their father, even in their minority, with boundless wealth for every need. And so, although we have not entered upon our eternal inheritance, yet God has given us a cheque book on the bank of heaven, and on the back of every cheque He has Himself endorsed the vast and illimitable guarantee, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Jesus Christ."

And so this word "abound" has come to be a sort of a keynote to the New Testament promises. Even of His promises He says, "God willing MORE ABUNDANTLY to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel confirmed it by an oath" (Heb. vi: 17). His word is abundant, His promises boundless, His loving, faithful heart struggles to express in ever ampler language and larger utterance, the immeasurable and unspeakable fullness of His love, so that His great promises are like mountains piled upon mountains until His faithfulness truly reacheth unto the clouds.

So, again, His mercy and grace to the sinful are as abundant. "The grace of our Lord," says the Apostle, "was EXCEEDING ABUNDANT with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." And again in Rom. v: 17, he speaks of those who "receive ABUNDANCE OF GRACE and the gift of righteousness, who shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." The life that Jesus brings to us is not only life, but "life MORE ABUNDANTLY" (Jno. x: 10). Redemption and forgiveness are declared in Eph. 1: 7, 8, to be "according to the riches of His grace wherein HE HATH ABOUNDED toward us in all wisdom and prudence," that is, in all the variety of the love and care that adapts and adjusts His mercy and His grace to every shade of guilt and need, and which anticipates every future emergency; for this is the meaning of "prudence," literally, foresight and providence.

His purpose in our salvation is that "in the ages to come He might show the EXCEEDING RICHES OF HIS GRACE in His kindness toward us by Christ Jesus" (Eph. ii: 7). All the dispensations of His providence are destined to give occasion for still larger manifestations of His grace, "For all things are for your sakes that the ABUNDANT GRACE might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God" (2 Cor. iv: 15). Even in our deepest sorrows He has made provision for such overflowing abundance of comfort and joy that the sorrow shall be lost in the joy, for, "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our CONSOLATION ALSO ABOUNDETH by Christ" (2 Cor. i: 5). The provisions of grace for our Christian life and work are equally boundless, for "God is able to make ALL GRACE ABOUND toward you that ye always having all-sufficiency in all things, MAY ABOUND to every good work" (2 Cor. ix: 8). And like a mountain-top, high above all the rest and lost in the clouds, it is all summed up in the sublime hyperbole, "Now unto Him that is ABLE TO DO EXCEEDING ABUNDANTLY above all that we ask or think, according

to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph. iii: 20, 21.)

This is the divine measure of redeeming grace, and, so on our side we are called upon to meet God's high measure with corresponding fullness. We are to abound in faith. "Rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, ABOUNDING therein with thanksgiving" (Col. ii: 7). We are to abound in love. "And this I pray, that your LOVE MAY ABOUND yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment" (Phil. i: 9). "And the Lord make you to increase and ABOUND IN LOVE one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you" (1 Thess. iii: 12). We are to abound in holiness. "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye WOULD ABOUND MORE AND MORE " (1 Thess. iv: 1). We are to abound in joy. "That your rejoicing may be more ABUNDANT in Christ Jesus" (Phil. i: 29); and in hope, "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may ABOUND IN HOPE, through the power of the Holy Ghost" (Rom. xv: 13). We are to abound in liberality, even in the depths of poverty. "The abundance of their joy and their deep poverty ABOUNDED unto the riches of their liberality." "Therefore as ye abound in everything, in faith and utterance, in knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye ABOUND IN THIS GRACE ALSO" (2 Cor. viii: 2, 7).

And our spiritual experience is to be not a strained but an ample one, ever growing in breadth, depth, height and symmetry, through the abundant grace of the divine nature in our heart. "And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you, AND ABOUND, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. i: 5-8). And finally if we thus enter into His abundant grace we shall have His glorious recompense in like proportion, and "So an entrance shall be ministered unto you ABUNDANTLY into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Beloved, shall we so receive "His fullness, even grace for grace," and so enter in at last, not like a battered ship, with masts and sails all gone and banner torn to shreds, and slowly drawn by some old tug boat across the bar into the harbor or the dry-dock; but shall we rather, with flags all flying, and sails swelling in the gales of heaven, and myriads on the shore waiting to welcome us, shall we have an entrance ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, while wondering angels, looking back to the past and gazing in amazement on our present glory, shall turn to each other and say, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

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