

Abounding Grace (Rom. v.20)

by Seth Rees

God's grace is able to save even the most abandoned and ruined sinners, and will restore what sin has ruined.

Scripture: Psalm 51:7, Romans 5:20, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 2:8, Titus 3:5

Topics: "Gods Grace", "Redemption Power"

Description

Seth Rees preaches about the abundant grace of God that surpasses the depth of sin, using powerful illustrations from nature to demonstrate how God's redemption transforms and strengthens even the most broken and wounded souls. He emphasizes how God chooses the most unlikely individuals to accomplish His greatest works, saving and sanctifying the vilest sinners to become powerful witnesses of His grace. Rees highlights the transformative power of the gospel in restoring lives, homes, and communities, illustrating that where sin abounds, God's grace abounds even more, offering hope and redemption to all.

Transcript

"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Romans v. 20).

The primary truth set forth in this text is beautifully illustrated by a law of nature, which is a sort of a symbol of the glory of the redemption. When a boy, and passing through the woods, as I often did, I cut a deep wound in a living tree, and passed on. Returning that way some years later, I found the wound all healed over; not by uniting of the old fibers, but by a much stronger material. I found the new fibers interlaced and tangled into a sort of complex mass, which I was quite unable to untangle, and the tree was tougher and stronger at the place of the wound than anywhere else.

I am told that a broken bone in healing becomes stronger than the natural bone, as if nature meant to fortify herself against a second attack. We see an illustration of this same truth in the formation of the pearl. A little grain of sand works into the sensitive side of the pearl oyster; instinct prompts the little creature, not to retaliation, for that would inflict a greater wound, but to throw about the intruding element a crystalline liquid, so that out of the wound comes beauty and victory, and the value of the little creature is enhanced a hundred fold by the very thing which threatened its destruction.

The Holy Ghost had some such thought as this, relative to the plan of salvation, when He summed up His splendid antithesis between Adam and Christ, sin and salvation, the fall and the redemption; for He teaches us that out of the dreadful attack which hell has made on this world will come the victory which shall prove the triumph of the ages. Out of the awful catastrophe that threatened the eternal destruction of

man, God has evolved a new creation transcendentally greater and more glorious than the old, and out of the ocean depths of sin He has brought the pearl of greatest price, the Church which is to shine with a heavenly luster, reflecting the image of His Son during all the roll of the centuries. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." The truth of my text is illustrated in the salvation and subsequent usefulness of the most abandoned and ruined sinners that ever walked this earth. God seems to choose the worst material for the accomplishment of some of His greatest achievements, and He has saved some of the vilest wretches that ever crawled through the cesspools of iniquity; He has not only saved them, but He has turned them back from the saloon and the brothel and the dance hall to preach the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

The Lord has always chosen some of the worst material for His most glorious triumphs. When He wanted a man to head the patriarchal period, He chose a man whose very name suggested that he was crooked, that he was snaky, that he was slimy; his name was "Supplanter." When He wanted a man to head the kingly period, He took a man who became not only a murderer, but an adulterer; but He saved him and sanctified him wholly, and made him mighty in behalf of his kingdom.

God saved Manasseh after half a century of bloody crimes. When He wanted twelve men to found the New Testament Church, instead of going to the Sanhedrin or to Jerusalem or to Rome, He went down along the shores of Galilee among the fishermen's huts, and selected men with broad, brawny hands, undisciplined and unschooled, and He saved and sanctified them, and made them foundation stones upon which He has built the New Testament Church. You and I would have gone to Rome, for Rome ruled the world. Or we would, perhaps, have gone to Jerusalem; she was in the height of her glory and splendor. Ecclesiasticism of this age would have gone to the Sanhedrin; but the Son of God went to the shores of Galilee. I may not be able to explain why, but, if for no other reason, that the truth of our text may be illustrated that, where sin ran riot, where sin was without restraint, "where sin abounded, the grace of God did much more abound." No difference how hard the heart, no matter how strong the aggravation, nor how long the season of impenitence, God has a gospel that will break men's hearts, that will turn back the rising tides of iniquity, that will cancel your record, that will save you from the power as well as from the guilt of sin, and make you burning and shining light to His glory. He saved the wicked Bunyan; He saved the sinful Newton; He saved the polluted, drunken Jerry McAuley. Yes, and many a woman, whose name though not found on the tablets of fame, God has written on the palm of His hand, stands up out of the slums today as a shining light for God, and as the living illustration of the truth of my text. Glory to God! No difference how ruined and weak the life, no difference about the condition of the home, we have a gospel that will redeem them; we have a gospel that will restore them; we have a gospel that will reconstruct them.

I entered into a home. A pale emaciated wife met me at the door. There was no carpet on the floor; there was no fire on the hearth; there was no bread on the table; there was not a whole piece of furniture in the house; there were old hats in the windows; the children were frightened at the footstep of their father; everything presented a picture of despair. But as we went in, the gospel entered, and conviction came down. It was followed by an old-fashioned conversion; and when the father was saved, the children got saved, the brokenhearted wife took courage, and the whole thing changed complexion. When we came back to that home a little later, there was carpet on the floor; there was fire on the hearth; there was bread on the table; there was color in the wife's cheeks; the old hats had disappeared from the windows; the old broken chairs and stools were gone and new furniture had come; and we knelt down in that home and thanked God! Oh, there is nothing else that will do it! Signing a pledge will not do it; reforms will not do it;

you White Ribboners can not do it. It takes the mighty power of the Holy Ghost; it takes the full application of my text to do the work, and then, in that home where sin had abounded, the grace of God just "runs over."

We have a gospel that will do this, and yet they are trying to turn us aside from it! Do you think we are going to turn aside to preach science and philosophy, when we have a gospel that will do the business like that? And I want to tell you something else: there is nothing that will do that but the full gospel. There is nothing that will reconstruct a home like that but holiness, the second blessing; for that home can never be saved against the wiles of the devil until that man has had the second work of grace in his heart. Oh, you folks that want us to preach something else besides holiness! We will wait until you furnish us something that turns out better goods than ours!

There may be a little reproach connected with this gospel; but we will share it, and we are glad to be identified with a kind of truth that will enter a man's home, and enter his heart, and enter his life, and reconstruct him, and make him an angel instead of a devil. And that is what our gospel does; that is what holiness does.

My brother, no difference how far you have gone in sin, God can save you. He likes to get hold of a tough stick now and then just to reveal His power, just to show three worlds what He can do. There is no reason why you should be discouraged; and if you are the wife of a drunken husband, I want to say to you that there is hope for you. There is an up-look to heaven; you can touch a button that will thrill the wire to the upper skies, and bring a blessing that will enter your home and save it from sin.

Beloved, if you have unsaved loved ones, do not be discouraged about them. We have a gospel that will reach the lowest of the low, as well as the highest of the high, and make us feel that "one is our Master, even Christ, and all we are brethren." And do you know, beloved, that we Christians ought to be ashamed of ourselves that we do not have more faith in the power of the gospel to do the work in difficult cases? We ought not to give folks up as we do. We ought not to despair about people when they backslide. We ought to hold on to God for them. We ought to pull them through the fire, until the grace of God has prevailed, and they are brought to a place of perfect joy. God help us! We are too timid, too unbelieving; we are too faltering.

This gospel is not so much to refine the naturally good, as it is to save and sanctify those who are awfully and confessedly bad. This gospel is to convert a selfish soul into a bundle of self-sacrifice and self-denial. I know that a great Brooklyn preacher said once that he was tired of helping "men in whom there was no good blood," but how different with our gospel! The Lord seems to go around and pick up folks that other people have gotten through with. He took me in when every one had turned against me, and even my own friends were discouraged about me; then the Lord took me in. Glory to God! The truth of my text is again illustrated. God's grace is able to save the best of sinners. Of course, so far as God is concerned a sinner is a sinner, and according to His estimate a man in the slums of Fifth Avenue is just as vile as a man in the slums of "the Bend." But God is amply able to save the sinners of, what the world terms, "high life."

A distinguished New York lawyer and his wife were invited to attend the meetings of a Mission downtown in order that, as church members, they might see for themselves what God was doing among the submerged and desperate classes. At the close of the address by the leader of the meeting, an invitation was given for all who wished to be saved to stand up. A "dead beat" stood up over there, a harlot, rose to her feet yonder, and a common sneak thief stood not far distant, while on the platform, back of the leader,

stood the lawyer and his wife. The preacher, supposing that the visitors had misunderstood his words, said: "I want only those who want to be saved to stand up." The lawyer and his wife remained standing.

Nothing else could be done but go on with the altar service. "Let all sinners who will, come to the altar!" The tramp came, the harlot, the thief, they all came, and to the surprise of everybody, the two wealthy visitors began to come, too. In mission work all decent people are usually placed on the platform to avoid the vermin. So, as the visitors began to join the seekers at the altar the leader put out his hand as if to stop them, and said: "This is just for sinners!" "But we are sinners, too, and we want salvation!" was the answer. They were both happily converted, and God has used them since to the reclamation and salvation of thousands. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

I remember that at one time I was holding a meeting in a mission and there were a great many spectators -- people who did not care for anything for themselves especially but who had a curiosity to see the riff-raff of society saved.

When I made the call a number of hard, low cases came forward, and with them the sister of a former President. "Shall I allow her to seek with these desperate individuals?" I said to myself. The Spirit whispered, "Certainly!" and down on her knees went the fashionable lady to find salvation with people far below her socially. Oh, God can save all classes. This text is having hundreds of illustrations: "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

Then, beloved, the truth of our text is illustrated in the sanctification of souls from tendencies and appetites and propensities most unholy, so that the heart, where there has been a whole nest of sin, is now sanctified to God. There was anger, and it developed one day, and made you say something you would give this world if you could take back. You have wept bitter tears over it; but the loved one to whom you said it is silent in the grave, and you can not take it back. Oh, the scalding, bitter tears that are shed over hasty words in respectable homes, in homes in highlife, in the drawing room, unkind words and unkind looks, the products of anger in the heart.

There was a word of impatience -- Oh, mother, you would give the world if you could take it back. Only three weeks before scarlet fever came to your home and took that child away, you were impatient, and you said things and you did things that you would give the world if you could take back; but the child is gone; your opportunity has gone. You were impatient; you remember it.

Oh, the pride of these times! How it is abusing people. How pride is making people do things that are awfully mortifying and awfully disastrous in their final results! It is pride that ruins many a home. It is pride that breaks many a man up financially. It makes you attempt to live so that you can keep even with your neighbors when your income will not warrant it. Many a man has jumped into the river because his family insisted on living up to the scale of some one else when his income would not warrant it. The determination in these days to dress better and live better than you can afford is caused by pride.

God save us from this ungodly strutting, from this peacock vainglory, that makes us go around strutting with a suit of clothes on that is being paid for on the installment plan! Women strut around just after Easter with dead birds and rag flowers that have not been paid for! What a story the milliner might tell about her unpaid bills! It is pride that is puffing people up, and making them strut around when they have not paid their debts! We have something in our discipline against living above our incomes. The Lord give us a good dose of discipline if we will not take religion, and swing us back to common decency, so we will do unto people as we would have them do unto us!

But the heart where anger, and malice, and strife, and impatience, and pride, and all these things have their nest even a heart like that can be sanctified wholly, and made as clean as heaven, that where sin has abounded grace may much more abound. The second blessing; Pentecost; the baptism with the Holy Ghost does this. The fire of God burns up proud flesh, and burns out jealousy and super-sensitiveness, so that when you see two people with their heads together you will not suspect that they are talking about you. You are everlastingly thinking people are talking about you! Beloved, you are too self-important. The fact is that people talk by the hour and never mention your name, and they have things to think of with which you are not connected at all; and it is time we got to the place where we get saved from this jealousy that makes us so sensitive and so suspicious. This gospel will save a man, until when he is put out of office he will feel relieved. You know that is not the case ordinarily; you know that usually when we change officers at the end of the year the man that goes in feels better than the man that goes out. God help us, and give us a salvation that will save us from seeking leadership, and from seeking position, and from wire pulling for a place, and from thinking that we are better qualified for the place than anybody else! In all cases our offices in the church ought to seek the men, and not the men the offices. I dare to say that if there is a man who is qualified for a position it is the man who is not seeking it and is not wanting it. I would not vote for a man for any position if I thought he was wire pulling to get it. There are lots of people who would not wire pull; who would not scheme to be superintendent of the Sunday school, but who have a secret desire in their hearts for it. In fact, we are all made on the same last, and until we get sanctified wholly there is something in us that wants a place, and until then, the best one of us feels sort of good when people say nice things about us. But when a man is sanctified wholly, it not only mortifies him for people to praise him, but it makes him feel like getting down on his face before God.

This grace would save us from all fretfulness and all stewing and sputtering in the church. The stews are not all in the kitchen; there are stews in other places. I used to help my dear wife put up fruit, and we would can it, and put it down cellar, and the next day, if we heard something sputtering and sizzling, we knew we might just as well go down and get that can and open it and cook it over. If this were not done, in a few days we would have some spoiled fruit on our hands. Lots of people claim to be sanctified; but we hear them sputtering and sizzling, and it is because the fire was not hot enough; there was gas there. Better be boiled over; you did not get fire enough. The Lord give us this second blessing that "where sin abounded, grace may much more abound."

Again, beloved, the truth of our text is illustrated in the fact that grace not only saves people and sanctifies them wholly, but it counteracts the influence of sin, and destroys even the scars of it. Many a poor fellow thinks, and many a sermon helps him to think, that though he is saved from sin, he has to "suffer the consequences of sin," and the text is quoted, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." I want to tell you that we have a gospel which will "restore the corn that the caterpillar has eaten"; one which will enter a man's soul, and heal his body from the effects, for example, of licentiousness and lust, and make him a well man physically. Say what you like about Divine dealing, we that have been in the slums, and worked in the slums, know that many a man is not fit for respectable society until his rotten body is healed. We must have a gospel that not only proposes to save people, and cure them in their souls, but will touch the body and save it from disease.

There was St. Augustine; you have loved to call his name. He was one of the Christian fathers; but at twenty-one, that man found himself an awful sinner, with every drop of his blood poisoned from sin, and God saved him and sanctified him, and healed his body, and gave him almost half a century of unparalleled usefulness, and we call him "St. Augustine."

We ought to know what God does do, and what He is willing to do; and that what He will do for one He will do for another. Do not tell me that He is a respecter of persons. Do not tell me that He will do wonderful things for some people and deny others. Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, today, and forever"; and we have a gospel that will touch man, and heal him at every point where the virus of hell has touched him. We have a gospel that will save men from all that sin has brought, and God does not mean to let go of us until He gets us to that place. God seems to love to contradict human opinions, and the thing we say is impossible, God likes to do.

There was a time when philosophers and learned men proved logically and conclusively that no steamship could ever cross the Atlantic. Of course, like people nowadays, they could not leave the question alone, but met from time to time to go over the matter and see if they were right. So one day, in an upper room in Liverpool, they were going over the whole thing to see that they had made no mistake, and, finally, just as they were concluding again that they were right, that it was an utter impossibility (and yet all the time there were cranks that were trying to find some way of doing it), they looked out of the window and saw the first steamer that ever crossed the Atlantic, coming into the harbor. And just when people prove that we can not be sanctified, we tumble in and get sanctification; and just when a preacher, with a tall hat and white cravat, has proved to his congregation that nobody can be sanctified, the servant frying his batter cakes in the kitchen has received the blessing! And that is not all. Just about the time he does his very best, and presents his strongest argument against it, his very best church people go to a camp meeting or a tent meeting somewhere and get sanctified, and they perplex him until he is moved off from that charge.

Once more, and I think I am through. The truth of my text is going to be illustrated again. The time is coming when we will have an exhibition that will beat the World's Fair. The time is coming when people will assemble, and God is going to put on exhibition His samples of salvation-- when out of the slums and out of the lowest walks of life He will select a company of people who will come up and go on exhibition, and unitedly illustrate the truth of my text forever and forever. Our day is coming. In numbers we are in the minority. I confess that this world is drifting hellward; I confess the church is denying the Holy Ghost, and trying to turn the holiness people out, and they are being sent to tents and woods. But our day is coming, and we can afford to wait for it. Holiness is not always going to be in the minority. Holiness is not always going to be kicked about without a place to live. The time is coming when Jesus will appear in the clouds of heaven, and those who have been true to Him, and walked with Him down here, will be welcomed to His side to reign with Him forever. When He steps out on the portico of heaven, the law of gravitation will be reversed, and you and I will be drawn to Him. But that is not all: we are not only going to attend the marriage of the Lamb, but we are going to come back to these old battlefields where we have fought for God, and rule and reign over five, ten, twenty, or more cities, according as our reward shall be.

You need not prepare if you do not want to; but, by the grace of God, I will. In this great time that is coming we are going to exhibit the goods that Divine grace has manufactured, and show to all the galleries of heaven and all the pits of hell what Christ's salvation can do for man. Then the preacher who has preached against this sweet truth -- God pity him! The Official Board that turned you out of the church, with its tall steeple, and plush cushioned pews, and thundering pipe organs, are going to wish in their souls that they had what you have. Holiness is going to be in demand then; every one will want it. Too late! too late! God has it to give away now; but you eject it now, and He will reject you then; you deny holiness now, and it will deny you then; you fail to identify yourself with God's people now, and you will not be permitted to do so then.

There is coming a time when things will be straightened up. The time is coming when you and I are going to see the exhibitions of Divine grace, when we will see what God has done and is doing, and how He will reject those who rejected Christ. He has not much more place in many churches now than when He came before. Folks do not want Him. If he went into the temple now, He would drive out the money changers. I am not abusing anybody; my heart is full of tenderness; but God raised up the shrinking Jeremiah to be a reprover of kings, and I am going to rebuke sin whether it is in the pulpit or in the slums, no matter where it is.

The truth of my text is soon to be illustrated again. The time is coming when we are going up. I feel a great deal like it now. I walk the streets of your city, scarcely pressing the pavements; I only touch a little here and there, just enough to let me know that I am still in Cincinnati; but my soul is walking around in the clouds, and I am rejoicing that I do not belong to this country, that I am not a Yankee or a Buckeye; God has a city in the upper skies, and I am going in just as soon as I get through down here.

I come back to you from the border lines of eternity. For weeks I have stood where I could almost hear the gates swing on their hinges; I could almost see those shining streets. I have come back to you, and tell you that this we are preaching is the truth. I said to my wife, when she was standing in the River, "Thee knows we have been accused of being radical, of preaching more than was true, and now I would like to know just how it is;" and she said, "It is all true, and more;" and if she said that when she was in the River, I am determined to preach the gospel with stronger conviction and more courage than ever before.

We are coming in at last, not like an old battleship, with masts and sails torn away and flags all in ribbons, drawn across the bar by an old tug; not thus; but with our flags all flying, with our pennants in the wind and our sails swelling in the gale of heaven, we will come sweeping in. And then, when we disembark and go up the streets of light, the angels of heaven are going to take off their hats to us. They will stand up to see the sight; and as we march up Central Avenue, they will look at us and at each other and then down to where we were, and then up to where we are, and, lost in wonder, will exclaim, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound!"

This truth will echo throughout all eternity. We will sit down above the angels; for when man was created, he was made a little lower than the angels; but when he is redeemed he is made above archangels; we are going to sing the song of redemption, and entertain angels, telling them about the battles down here. They will want to know all about these things. O, it will be glorious to tell them the story about the Battle of the Wilderness, of Gethsemane, of Calvary, of Waterloo, of Gettysburg, of Cincinnati; to relate how, although the wicked forces of this city were against us, God saved souls at the altar, and brought them up to shine for ever and ever.

I will be glad to tell the angels in those days the story of a gospel that reached the worst people; that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. The thought of it makes me feel like a victorious warrior. We ought to feel encouraged, and have an upward gaze looking straight into heaven. Every one who has this second blessing know what I mean. If you do not have it, you can receive it now, if you will. Will you?

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