

The Rights of God and Grace

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing and accepting God's grace as essential for spiritual healing and fulfillment of His rights.

Scripture: Luke 4:18

Topics: "Grace", "Humility"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound message of grace as revealed in Luke 4, where Jesus proclaims His mission to bring hope and healing to the marginalized. He contrasts the acceptance of grace by outsiders like Naaman and the widow with Israel's pride and refusal to recognize their need for it. Sparks illustrates that grace is not a right but a gift, and it is through acknowledging our spiritual poverty that we can truly receive it. The sermon highlights the importance of recognizing God's rights and the necessity of grace in our lives, urging believers to remain humble and receptive to God's offerings. Ultimately, grace triumphs over rejection, demonstrating God's unwavering love and purpose.

Transcript

Reading: Luke 4:17-27.

"And there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.' And He closed the book, and He gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on Him. And He began to say unto them, 'This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.' And all bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, 'Is not This Joseph's son?' And He said unto them, 'Ye will surely say unto Me this proverb, 'Physician, heal Thyself:' whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Thy country.' And He said, 'Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elijah sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.'"

In Luke 4 we see how the Lord is on the side of the prophets. He is the Son of God, but concerning the rights of God He is the Prophet, as was Moses. He came to Nazareth. He was given the book of the prophet Isaiah. Everything that the prophet says finds a sudden living embodiment, but: "No prophet is acceptable in his own country" (v.24). He used the Word in regard to Himself. What separates Him however from the other prophets is the special message of grace.

Grace is the way in which God gains recognition for His rights. What a wonderful proclamation of grace!--

"He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor: He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (verses 18,19; RSV).

That is the grace of God. It is the grace of God in Jesus Christ. This is how He introduces Himself to the people. He brings God close to them on the ground of grace. He Himself and His presence are the grace of God. "The grace of God hath appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11).

But now grace has to be demonstrated. He has announced it, but those to whom grace has been offered, have to know what it means. He refers to Elijah and the widow, who was maintained with her son, and to Elisha and the cleansing of Naaman. What is grace? Israel thought that it had a right to God's blessing. They did not recognize that it was a question of grace. As long as we think we have legitimate claims, we are not on the ground of grace. In other passages we have pointed out how proud Israel was of its special election. That was enough for its downfall. Pride made it blind to the fact of its own need. Because Israel thought it had a legitimate claim to God's grace, it did not deem it necessary to ask for it.

How different with Naaman and the widow. They know their poverty. They know their need. They also recognize the rights of God and accept through grace that which is not to be had in any other way.

Is it not so? We also know quite well that real devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ is not compatible with the assertion of any demand. Grace is for those who are in need of grace. In Nazareth the people were 'religious'. Therefore the examples the Lord uses must make clear what is lacking in them. With Naaman and the widow God went beyond the borders of Israel. Was He repeating this strategy? Would He go to the Gentiles because Israel did not need Him? This is what He wants to show them. He wants to open their eyes to their need; to show them that they need grace. But they did not understand Him. They became filled with rage. They stood up and pushed Him out of town. Had it been in their power, they would have killed Him. The Lord however knew their hearts. The Lord knew that they would not recognize grace. But He offered it to them. He offers it to everybody. He sees to it that grace is accepted as grace, as that which we cannot earn through anything, which is not to be had in any other way than by taking possession of it as grace.

"And He arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house. And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought Him for her. And He stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them. Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them, and healed them. And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, "Thou art Christ the Son of God." And He rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that He was Christ" (Luke 4:38-41).

"And when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them, and healed them." These were those who had recognized the need for help and for grace's sake desired it. Demons were also driven out. That was grace in its triumph.

So we have four things standing closely together:

Grace proclaimed.

Grace demonstrated.

Grace rejected.

Grace triumphing.

Although the demons testified that He was the Son of God, the people, however, recognized Him as God's messenger of grace and accepted Him. Thus God came to His rightful position.

How clear grace is made to us in the case of the widow!-- Flour and oil, that do not run out during three and a half years become a picture of Himself. "I am the bread of life, which come down from heaven, to give life and to save the people from spiritual famine" (John 6). He does this in the power of the Holy Spirit. Does this not speak to our hearts? We are only saved from spiritual poverty through Christ giving Himself to us. We have no means to save ourselves from spiritual poverty. If we are left to ourselves, we must die as the widow would have died. But Christ in His grace has sought us out. He has become our life. Should we not give God His place, after having recognized our need for His grace!

And how about Naaman? He too was outside of Israel. And he was leprous. Of what use was his exterior position to him? Leprosy was consuming his life. But the grace of God is for this very leper who is outside of Israel. For him there was help. Christ wants to show us this. He wants to demonstrate that the Son of Man came to seek and save that which is lost. The grace of God in Christ Jesus is for sinners. They will thank Him and give Him the place He deserves, because of the greatness of His grace.

Israel failed to recognize its need to be freed from sin. Therefore the grace of God meant nothing to them. Those, however, that stood outside of Israel recognized it. God will always have His place where His grace is recognized most and where it is accepted gratefully.

The measure in which we recognize His grace will also be the measure in which we surrender to Him.

Wherever there is an incomplete picture of the grace of God, there is also an incomplete testimony. The more we live in His grace, the more we will also testify for Him and be effective.

This is a very simple message. It is the simple message of the grace of God. But what in truth is more suitable to give God His place in our hearts than grace!

The Lord keep us from the self-satisfied position of Israel and make us hungry for grace, that it may accomplish its full purpose in us.

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