

Glorious Grace

Jonathan Edwards
(1703-1758)

Zechariah 4:7 And he shall bring forth the headstone thereof
with shouting, crying, Grace, grace!

The mercy of God is that attribute which we, the fallen, sinful race of Adam, stand in greatest need of, and God has been pleased, according to our needs, more gloriously to manifest this attribute than any other. The wonders of divine grace are the greatest of all wonders. The wonders of divine power and wisdom in the making [of] this great world are marvelous; other wonders of his justice in punishing sin are wonderful; many wonderful things have happened since the creation of the world, but none like the wonders of grace. "Grace, grace!" is the sound that the gospel rings with, "Grace, grace!" will be that shout which will ring in heaven forever; and perhaps what the angels sung at the birth of Christ, of God's good will towards men, is the highest theme that ever they entered upon. In order to understand the words of our text, we are to take notice that the scope and design of the chapter is to comfort and encourage the children of Israel, returned out of their Babylonish captivity, in the building of Jerusalem and the temple: who it seems were very much disheartened by reason of the opposition they met with in the work, and the want of [the] external glory of the former temple before the captivity, so that the priests and the Levites, and the chief of the fathers, wept aloud as the rest shouted at the sight, as you may see in Ezra 3:12, "But many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice, and many shouted aloud for joy." You may see a full account of their great oppositions and discouragements in the fourth and fifth chapters.

The prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, were sent on this occasion to comfort them under those discouragements, by foretelling the glories of the gospel should be displayed in this latter house, which should render the glories of it far beyond the glories of the former, notwithstanding it was so far exceeded in what is external. In Hag. 2:3-9:

Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong,

all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts: according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts: The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.

See also, in the third chapter of this book, at the eighth verse, "Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at; for behold, I will bring forth my servant, the Branch." And the same subject is continued in this chapter, even the glorious grace of the gospel, which was to be manifested by Christ in this temple, particularly in our text, "and they shall bring forth the headstone with shouting, crying, Grace, grace unto it." The headstone is that which entirely crowns and finishes the whole work, signifying that the entire gospel dispensation was to be finished in mere grace.

This stone was to [be] brought with repeated shouting or rejoicings at the grace of God, signifying the admirableness and gloriousness of this grace.

Doctrine

The gospel dispensation is finished wholly and entirely in free and glorious grace: there is glorious grace, shines in every part of the great work of redemption; the foundation is laid in grace, the superstructure is reared in grace, and the whole is finished in glorious grace.

If Adam had stood and persevered in obedience, he would have been made happy by mere bounty [and] goodness; for God was not obliged to reward Adam for his perfect obedience any otherwise than by covenant, for Adam by standing would not have merited happiness. But yet this grace would not have been such as the grace of the gospel, for he would have been saved upon the account of what he himself did, but the salvation of the gospel is given altogether freely. Rom. 11:6, "And if by grace, then it is no more works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace; otherwise work is no more work."

That we may give you as full explication of this doctrine as we can in a little space, we shall first, show free grace shines forth in the distinct parts of this wondrous work of redemption; second, speak a little of the gloriousness of this grace.

[1.] But as to the first, every part of this work was performed of mere grace. First. It was of free grace that God had any thoughts or designs of rescuing mankind after the fall. If there had not been an immense fountain of goodness in God, he would never have entertained any thoughts at all of ever redeeming us after our defection. Man was happy enough at first, and might have continued so to all eternity, if he would; he was not compelled to fall. If he had not willfully and sinfully rebelled against God, he would never have been driven forth, like an unworthy wretch, as he was. But although God had been so overflowing in his bounty to him as to make him head over the lower creation and ruler of all other creatures, and had planted a garden on purpose for his delight, and would have fixed him in an eternal happiness only on the reasonable condition of his obeying the easy commands of his maker; but yet notwithstanding all, he rebelled and turned over, from God to the devil, out of a wicked ambition of being a god himself -- not content in that happy state that he was in as man -- and so rebelled against God's authority.

Now who but a God of boundless grace, would not have been provoked, after this, to leave him as he was, in the miserable state into which he had brought himself by his disobedience; resolving to help him no more, leaving him to himself and to the punishment he had deserved, leaving him in the devil's hands where he had thrown himself, not being contented in the arms of his Creator: who, but one of boundless grace, would ever have entertained any thoughts of finding out a way for his recovery?

God had no manner of need of us, or of our praises. He has enough in himself for himself, and neither needs nor desires any additions of happiness, and if he did need the worship of his creatures, he had thousands and ten-thousands of angels, and if he had not enough, he could create more; or, he could have glorified his justice in man's eternal destruction and ruin, and have with infinite ease created other beings, more perfect and glorious than man, eternally to sing his praises.

Second. But especially was it of rich and boundless grace that he gave his only Son for our restoration. By our fall, we are cast down so low into sin and misery, so deeply plunged into a most miserable and sinful condition, that it may truly be said, although all things are infinitely easy to God with respect to his omnipotency, yet with respect to God's holiness and justice, God himself could not redeem us without a great deal of cost, no, not without infinite costs; that is, not without the expense of that, that is of infinite worth and value, even the blood of his Son, and in proper speaking, the blood of God, of a divine person.

This was absolutely necessary in order to our redemption, because there was no other way of satisfying God's justice. When we were fallen, it was come to this: either we must die eternally, or the Son of God must spill his blood; either we, or God's own Son must suffer God's wrath, one of the two; either miserable worms of the dust that had deserved it, or the glorious, amiable, beautiful, and innocent

Son of God. The fall of man brought it to this; it must be determined one way or t'other, and it was determined, by the strangely free and boundless grace of God, that this his own Son, should die that the offending worms might be freed, and set at liberty from their punishment, and that justice might make them happy.

Here is grace indeed; well may we shout, "Grace, grace!" at this.

The heathens used to reckon that an only son slain in sacrifice was the greatest gift that could be offered to the gods. It was that, that they used sometimes to offer in times of great distress, and in some parts of the world it is constantly at this day performed. But we have a stranger thing than that declared to us in the gospel; not that men sacrificed their only sons to God, but that God gave his only Son to be slain, a sacrifice for man. God once commanded Abraham to offer up his only son to him, and perhaps the faith and love of Abraham may be looked upon as wonderful, that he was willing to perform it --there are few that would do it in these days -- but if you wonder at that, how wonderful is it that, instead of Abraham's offering his only son to God, God should give his only Son to be offered for Abraham, and for every child of Abraham. Certainly, you will acknowledge this to be a wonder not to be paralleled.

And beside, God did not do this for friends, but for enemies and haters of him. He did not do it for loyal subjects, but for rebels; he did not do it for those that were his children, but for the children of the devil; he did not do it for those that were excellent, but for those that were more hateful than toads or vipers; he did not do it for those that could be any way profitable or advantageous to him, but for those that were so weak, that instead of profiting God, they were not able in the least to help themselves.

God has given even fallen man such a gift, that He has left nothing for man to do that he may be happy, but only to receive what is given him. Though he has sinned, yet God requires no amends to be made by him; He requires of him no restoration; if they will receive His Son of Him, He requires neither money nor price; he is to do no penance in order to be forgiven. What God offers, He offers freely. God offers man eternal happiness upon far more gracious terms since he is fallen than before; before, he was to do something himself for his happiness; he was to obey the law: but since he is fallen, God offers to save him for nothing, only if he will receive salvation as it is offered; that is, freely through Christ, by faith in Him.

Third. It was of mere grace that the Son was so freely willing to undertake our salvation. How cheerfully, yea how joyfully, did he undertake it, although he himself was the very person that was to suffer for man. Though He himself was to bear his sin and be made sin for him, yet how cheerfully doth He speak: Ps. 40:7-8, "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O God." He says, in Prov. 8:31, that his "delights were with the sons of men," for so did he love them that it seems he himself was willing to die in their room, rather than that they should be miserable. He freely undertook this out of

mere love and pity, for he never was and never will be, repaid by them for his blood. `Twas only that we might be happy.

Fourth. The application of the redemption of the gospel, by the Holy Spirit, is of mere grace. Although God the Father has provided a savior for us, and Christ has come and died, and there is nothing wanting but our willing and hearty reception of Christ; yet we shall eternally perish yet, if God is not gracious to us, and don't make application of Christ's benefits to our souls. We are dependent on free grace, even for ability to lay hold on Christ already offered, so entirely is the gospel dispensation of mere grace. Eph. 2:8-10, "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." That is, we shall [be saved] freely and for nothing if we will but accept of Christ, but we are not able to do that of ourselves, but it is the free gift of God: "not of works, lest any man should boast, for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

II. We shall briefly speak to the gloriousness of this grace. As the grace of the gospel is altogether free, so it is glorious; the angels stoop down, with eyes full of wonder and joy, to look into, and shout for gladness and admiration, at the sight of it. How did the multitudes of heavenly hosts shout at the birth of Christ, crying, "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace and good will towards men!" Well may the topstone of this house be brought forth with shouting, crying, "Grace, grace!" to it.

All the attributes of God, do illustriously shine forth in the face of Jesus Christ: his wisdom in so contriving, his power in conquering, death and the devil, and the hard and rocky hearts of depraved men; his justice in punishing sins of men rather upon his own dear Son, than let it go unpunished; but more especially, [in] his grace, that sweet attribute, he has magnified his mercy above all his names.

The grace of God, exhibited in the gospel, is glorious,

First. Because of the greatness of it. Every circumstance of the gospel, grace surprisingly heightens it; let us look on what part we will, we shall see enough to fill us and all the angels in heaven with admiration forever. If we consider it as the grace of God the Father, and consider his greatness, his holiness, his power and justice, immensity and eternity; if we diligently consider how great a being he is, who took such pity and compassion on mankind, it is enough to astonish us. Or, if we consider ourselves, on whom this great God has bestowed this grace, we are nothing but worms, yea less than worms, before God; and not only so, but sinful worms, worms swollen with enmity against God. If we consider him by whom we receive [grace], the Son of God who made heaven and, by his almighty power, [is] equal with the Father; if we consider the greatness of what he did -- he died most ignominiously and painfully in our nature --it all infinitely heightens the grace of the gospel.

Second. Because of the glorious fruit of this. No less than salvation and eternal glory are the fruits of this grace of the gospel; adoption, union with Christ, communion with God, the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, the heavenly happiness, the pleasure of the eternal paradise, the new Jerusalem, the glorious and triumphant resurrection of the body, and an everlasting reign with Christ in the height of glory, and pleasure and happiness: no less than these things are the effects of this marvelous grace.

What a vast difference is there between a poor, miserable sinner, full of sin, condemned to hellfire, and, a saint shining forth in robes of glory, and crowned with a crown of victory and triumph; but `tis no less difference than this, is made in the same man by the grace of God in Christ.

Application

I. Hence we learn, how they dishonor God and the gospel, who depend on anything else but mere grace. The gospel is far the most glorious manifestation of God's glory that ever was made to man, and the glory of the gospel is free grace and mere mercy. Now those that will not depend on this free grace, they do what they can to deprive the gospel of this glory, and sully the glory of God therein shining forth; they take away the praise, glory, and honor, that is due to God by his free grace and mercy to men, and set up themselves as the objects of it, as if their salvation at least partly, was owing to what they have done.

This must needs be very provoking and highly affronting to God. For miserable sinners, after they are fallen into such a miserable estate that it is impossible they should be saved by any other means than pure grace, and God is so gloriously rich in his goodness, as to offer this free grace unto them out of pity to them: how provoking must it be to God for these miserable, helpless wretches to attribute any of their salvation to themselves!

It is not an opportunity to buy and procure our own salvation that God offers, but an opportunity to lay hold on that salvation which is already bought and procured for us; neither are we able to [do] this of ourselves, it is the gift of God.

There are some, that hope to be saved quite in another way than ever the gospel proposed; that is, by their own righteousness, by being so good and doing so well, as that God shall take their goodness as sufficient to counterbalance their sin, that they have committed, and thereby they make their own goodness to equal value with Christ's blood. This conceit is very apt to creep into the proud heart of man.

Some openly profess to be able to merit salvation, as papists. Others hold that they are able to prepare and fit themselves for salvation already merited, or at least are able to do something towards it of themselves, and it is to be feared that

many that don't openly profess either their own righteousness or their own strength, do very much depend upon both. By this doctrine, how much they dishonor the free grace of the gospel!

II. Let all be exhorted to accept the grace of the gospel. One would think, that there should be no need of such exhortations as this, but alas, such is the dreadful wickedness and the horrible ingratitude of man's heart, that he needs abundance of persuading and entreating to accept of God's kindness, when offered them. We should count it horrible ingratitude in a poor, necessitous creature, to refuse our help and kindness when we, out of mere pity to him, offer to relieve and help him. If you should see a man in extremity of distress, and in a perishing necessity of help and relief, and you should lay out yourself, with much labor and cost, out of compassion to him, that he might be relieved, how would you take it of him, if he should proudly and spitefully refuse it and sniff at it, instead of thanking you for it? Would you not look upon it as a very ungrateful, unreasonable, base thing? And why has not God a thousand times the cause, to look upon you as base and ungrateful, if you refuse his glorious grace in the gospel, that he offers you? When God saw mankind in a most necessitous condition, in the greatest and extremest distress, being exposed to hellfire and eternal death, from which it was impossible he should ever deliver himself, or that ever he should be delivered by any other means, He took pity on them, and brought them from the jaws of destruction by His own blood. Now what great ingratitude is it for them to refuse such grace as this?

But so it is: multitudes will not accept a free gift at the hands of the King of the World. They have the daring, horrible presumption as [to] refuse a kindness offered by God himself, and not to accept a gift at the hands of Jehovah, nor not his own Son, his own Son equal with himself. Yea, they'll not accept of him, though he dies for them; yea, though he dies a most tormenting death, though he dies that they may be delivered from hell, and that they may have heaven, they'll not accept of this gift, though they are in such necessity of it, that they must be miserable forever without it. Yea, although God the Father invites and importunes them, they'll not accept of it, though the Son of God himself knocks and calls at their door till his head is wet with the dew, and his locks with the drops of the night, arguing and pleading with them to accept of him for their own sakes, though he makes so many glorious promises, though he held forth so many precious benefits to tempt them to happiness, perhaps for many years together, yet they obstinately refuse all. Was ever such ingratitude heard of, or can greater be conceived of?

What would you have God do for you, that you may accept of it? Is the gift that he offers too small, that you think it too little, for you to accept of? Don't God offer you his Son, and what could God offer more? Yea, we may say God himself has not a greater gift to offer. Did not the Son of God do enough for you, that you won't accept of him; did he [not] die, and what could he do more? Yea, we may say that the Son of God could not do a greater thing for man. Do you refuse

because you want to be invited and wooed? You may hear him, from day to day, inviting of you, if you will but hearken. Or is it because you don't stand in need of God's grace? Don't you need it so much as that you must either receive it or be damned to all eternity, and what greater need can there possibly be?

Alas, miserable creatures that we are, instead of the gift of God offered in the gospel's not being great enough for us, we are not worthy of anything at all: we are less than the least of all God's mercies. Instead of deserving the dying Son of God, we are not worthy of the least crumb of bread, the least drop of water, or the least ray of light; instead of Christ's not having done enough for us by dying, in such pain and ignominy, we are not worthy that he should so much as look on us, instead of shedding his blood. We are not worthy that Christ should once make an offer of the least benefit, instead of his so long urging of us to be eternally happy.

Whoever continues to refuse Christ, will find hereafter, that instead of his having no need of him, that the least drop of his blood would have been more worth to them, than all the world; wherefore, let none be so ungrateful to God and so unwise for themselves, as to refuse the glorious grace of the gospel.

III. Let those who have been made partakers of this free and glorious grace of God, spend their lives much in praises and hallelujahs to God, for the wonders of his mercy in their redemption. To you, O redeemed of the Lord, doth this doctrine most directly apply itself; you are those who have been made partakers of all this glorious grace of which you have now heard. `Tis you that God entertained thoughts of restoring after your miserable fall into dreadful depravity and corruption, and into danger of the dreadful misery that unavoidably follows upon it; `tis for you in particular that God gave his Son, yea, his only Son, and sent him into the world; `tis for you that the Son of God so freely gave himself; `tis for you that he was born, died, rose again and ascended, and intercedes; `tis to you that the free application of the fruit of these things is made: all this is done perfectly and altogether freely, without any of your desert, without any of your righteousness or strength; wherefore, let your life be spent in praises to God. When you praise him in prayer, let it not be with coldness and indifferency; when you praise him in your closet, let your whole soul be active therein; when you praise him in singing, don't barely make a noise, without any stirring of affection in the heart, without any internal melody. Surely, you have reason to shout, cry, "Grace, grace, be the topstone of the temple!" Certainly, you don't want mercy and bounty to praise God; you only want a heart and lively affections to praise him with.

Surely, if the angels are so astonished at God's mercy to you, and do even shout with joy and admiration at the sight of God's grace to you, you yourself, on whom this grace is bestowed, have much more reason to shout.

Consider that great part of your happiness in heaven, to all eternity, will consist in this: in praising of God, for his free and glorious grace in redeeming you; and if you would spend more time about it on earth, you would find this world would be much more of a heaven

to you than it is. Wherefore, do nothing while you are alive, but speak and think and live God's praises.

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