



Sermon – 08/20/2017

1 Timothy 5:1 - 16

2 Corinthians 13:14

Ephesians 2:8

So 1925 there was a huge parade in Washington, D.C.; 30,000 people marched in the streets. The Washington Post praised it. Talked about how well it was done. There was some glitches, but all in all the Post praised those 30,000 people. Those 30,000 people were the Klu Klux Klan. They were in their robes, their hoods, and neither the culture nor the church said anything. Now I don't expect the culture to get it, but how could we not get it when the Bible clearly attributes the value of an individual, not to the color of his skin, but to the creation in the image of God. How do we miss that? And the horror for me is, having grown up in the South, I watched the culture direct the church. One of the great stratagems of the enemy is to make us miss what is a blatant truth in scripture.

Now we're going to look at a passage today that at first glance seems to have no meaning for us. But as I walked through it, there is a part of it, there are two parts of it you'll be OK with. There's a third part though that you will not like. You will consider it unfair, demanding, crass, and yet it is part of, binding part of scripture. And the reason we will struggle with it is because I fear we have come to a day where as surely as we missed the color of skin carrying value, we've now misunderstood grace. Before we go to 1 Timothy 5, I want to read you two passages: 2 Corinthians 13:13. Here's what it says. Talks about the Trinity. It says:

¹⁴The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of his Holy Spirit be with all of you.

So there are three things. I have God's love. I have the indwelling fellowship of the Holy Spirit, but both of those are rooted in the grace that comes from Jesus Christ. And that grace isn't a feeling that he has for me. It is the act that he did at Calvary where he died, his blood is poured out. Paul's written in 1 Timothy that he is a ransom payment for our sin and so Jesus' blood is a literal payment for our failure and that's the grace of God. Here it is. Listen again in Ephesians, the great Baptist verse that we claim, but listen to Ephesians 2:8. Now listen.

⁸For by grace you are saved through faith.

In other words, here's the grace of God. He comes to me and the Holy Spirit says, "Chris you're bad. Jesus wasn't. He died for you. Would you like to accept that payment?" Absolutely. That's what it was for me. I didn't go to church 8 times a day and God say, "You know, you've been a really good guy, I'm going to give you a shot at Jesus." His grace was an unmerited favor. He spoke to me through one sentence Billy Graham made in a sermon my junior year in high school and he spoke through that one sentence and he offered me, in his grace, the forgiveness of God. He gave it to me. Here's what he says.

and this is not from you; it is the gift of God,⁹ not by works, so that nobody can boast.

There's nothing you can do. That's what grace is. It is God loving you when you shouldn't be loved, letting Jesus die when he shouldn't die, and offering you the chance to be forgiven when he shouldn't. That's grace. However, there's one more statement. After he makes those two verses he says this:

¹⁰For we are his, literally the Greek, we are his poem, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

So here's what we have. God's grace, he loves me when he shouldn't, he speaks to me when he shouldn't, he died for me when he shouldn't, he offers me redemption when he shouldn't. There's the grace. Purpose of the grace is for me to become his *poiéma*, his poem. Now your translation is workmanship, but that's the whole idea. A poem is, it reflects an author's beliefs, values, and character. We are to reflect in the world, according to Ephesians 2:10, by our good works, whatever you want to call them, righteous and holy, whatever it is, we're to show to people we are God's poem so they see what he is, who he is, and what he's like by who we are, now listen, as a result of God's grace in our life. OK. So we're the house of grace. That's what we are. You can't be part of this house unless you've experienced God's grace. So there it is. Now go with me to 1 Timothy 5. Now we're looking at verses 1 – 16 which for me is about 8 sermons. So we're going to jump through this real quickly because there are really only a couple points. Now he's going to speak to the church, the house of grace. He's going to speak to the family about what they do with the grace they have. And he's going to talk to the widows. Now they, this is a weird verse, weird chapter. In Paul's day there was no Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, subsidized housing, there was no social safety nets, so if you were a widow and you had no family, you were in pretty dire trouble. And so the command look in, and really he talks about rebuking people correctly with grace. And then in verse 3 he says,

³Honor widows who are truly widows.

Here's the first things he commands to the church. They were to honor the widows who were truly widows, which we'll look at in a minute. But the church's response to being a house of grace, now listen, was to bring grace to widows who were alone. Now the way they did that in this chapter was a unique thing. If a widow was 60 years of age, he tells them you can't put a younger widow on this because they may get remarried again, so you couldn't do that. You had to make a promise that you would never marry again. You had to be 60 years of age. And they had, and we don't know how much money, we don't know exactly what was done, but they had a list. You came up and you signed on a piece of paper, you made the promise to them, and they

had a list of widows that they took care of. Now probably didn't pay for everything, but they gave them a huge supplement financially for their life. And it was good until they died. Once you got on the list, you got the supplement all the way to the end. And so the church had this responsibility as a house of grace. They brought, OK, they brought grace to their widows. Now that's what they were supposed to do. The widows who were part of the church, this is not a ministry to the lost, it's a supplemental subsidy to believing widows. In other words, the house of grace offered grace, now listen, to widows who had grace. Now so there's the first thing. The church did that.

Then here's the second thing. He speaks to the family of the widow. Look in verse 4:

⁴But if any widow has a child or grandchildren, I'm sending this to my grandkids once a year, they must learn first of all to bring godliness to their own household and to bring back recompense to their parents, for this is well pleasing before God.

Then look in verse 8.

⁸But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially his own household, he denies the faith and he is worse than an unbeliever.

I don't know how you get worse than an unbeliever, unless you're the owner of the Cowboys. But at any rate, so he's worse than an unbeliever. In other words, if he doesn't take care of his family, he's worse than somebody who does not have grace. So he says to the family, "You have a responsibility. We are not going to put her on the list if you're in the church because you have a responsibility to take care of her." I remember years ago my mother-in-law who was, I mean, I really considered her my mom. Just one of the sweetest, I mean, just so nice. And she came to live with us for a number of months when she had a surgery. And so she'd been here a while and she had a son in Florida and a son in Montana and daughter here in Texas. So I looked at Peg and I said, "Look why don't we ask her to live with us." Now she was at that time living in Cuthbert, Georgia. Now if you don't know anything about Cuthbert, Georgia it's an old kind of antebellum town in Georgia. But here's what the town's like, OK. It's a little tiny town, I'm not making this up. If she didn't show up at the grocery store for seven days, the grocer would call her. Say, "Ms. Procter you OK? Can I bring you anything?" You're not going to get that with H-E-B and Kroger. Don't even think about that. Now that's where she was growing up. It was her home. And so I, I will never forget this as long as I'm alive, I pulled her in, I said, "Ms. Procter, listen, we would really like you to come and sell your house in Cuthbert and live with us." I'm so proud of myself, you know. And she said this really sweetly, she looked at me and she said, "I'd rather die in Cuthbert than live in Bryan." "Peg! Gas the truck up. We're heading to Georgia." But the family has a responsibility to family. If you've experienced Grace, you deliver grace to those in your family that have grace. That's what we do.

Why is that so important to God? Because he doesn't want us to come to the end alone. We have all these late night pseudo-comedians; Colbert, Fallon, had Leno, Letterman. Years ago when there were only three TV channels there was a guy, Johnny Carson, who was a late night comedian. He was incredible and he was revered by millions in America, revered. When he died he died in a sterile hospital room alone; no friends, no family, no people. He died by

himself. And the reason it is so important that family is pulled into this thing of grace is because God doesn't want any of his children to die by themselves or come to the end by themselves. Glenn Campbell just died. Pop singer in the '60's and '70's. He spent his last years with Alzheimer's which, if you've dealt with that at all, it's horrific on the family. So he's coming in and out of thinking. He's in a concert or he's doing this or doing this. He was a son of a Baptist minister and he had a pretty tumultuous life. He had some trouble with cocaine, alcohol, but this last lady he married, Kim, was an evangelical Christian, and she brought him back to Christ. And so his last years in the dementia, she stayed by his bedside. She said it was like the Notebook. She said it was interesting because periodically in the middle of all that haze he would glance up, gain some lucidity, and look at her and say, "I love you, Kim." And then go back into that Alzheimer's abyss. That's why the family loves the family. Pastor comes in there, Campbell's not going to recognize him. Deacons come in, that's a wonderful ministry. But when the family comes in, it helps reduce the fog and it makes the end easier and God wants the end to be as easy as it can be.

Now we read those two we're OK, right. Family should take care of family. The church should honor the widows. I mean we're good with that, right. So you have a 60-year-old widow come up. She strolls up and she says, "I'm here. I'm 60. I'm not going to marry again. Don't have any family. I'm in need. I want to sign up." We got one last question. Verse 5.

⁵Being a widow and being alone, having hoped in God and giving themselves to petitions and prayers night and day,

Verse 10:

¹⁰being testified about in good works:

In other words, having a reputation for good works, here's some of them:

They raised their children, if they've been hospitable, if they've washed the feet of saints, if they've given care to those who are struggling, if they have followed along in every good work.

Here's what happens. If you're in the church you're on the roll, you show up in Ephesus, you're 60, no family, and you show up and you haven't lived well, you didn't honor your marriage, you didn't love your children, you haven't devoted yourself to prayers night and day, you haven't cared about the other saints in the church, you don't get on the list. The response then is, "Sorry. You're out of here." Now for most of us, honestly in this day, when we hear that it angers us. She's 60, she has no family, she's in need, she's in a culture where there's no subsidized housing, there's no Social Security, there's no Medicare. How could the church turn their back? It bothers us. In a sense, angers us. If most were honest, we're going to look at that passage and go, "You know, that's unfair. It's not right. It's not kind. It's not loving. It's not gracious." If it's grace, then we're going to give it to anybody. And that is the attitude. We had a widow just recently that we took care of with a good bit of financial help. Shortly after a widowhood, she began to live with another man. And we sat down with her and said, "Look that's not a Biblical position. We can't help you anymore." And I mean she went off on us on Facebook because her

statement was we're not loving, we're not caring, we don't understand grace, we judged her and condemned her. They would have said the same thing. Now listen. Because you're not going to like this. Because we misunderstood this deal and I don't want us to be where we miss it like we did in 1925. It's a house of grace dispensing grace where there's no family, a deep need, and the person requesting is demonstrating that they have experienced grace themselves. This is not for lost widows. This is not for widows that are not in the church, and obviously you can be on the roll of the church and not demonstrate grace. And if you've experienced grace it will show up in your life in what? You become his poem. She doesn't pray, she doesn't raise her family. She doesn't care about her husband. She doesn't care about hospitality. She doesn't take care of the saints. She doesn't wash anybody's feet. She's nowhere anywhere. Then she is not demonstrating the grace of God active in her life because if the grace of God becomes active in your life, you become a representative of who he is by the change that occurs as a result of the grace in the shed blood of Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the love of the Father becoming real in your home and in your life. We think, we think grace is an option to sin. This is what I hear all the time. I'll let you finish the sentence for me. I know what God says.... but if I don't do it he will, what, say it, he'll forgive me. His grace of unbelievable forgiveness in the shed blood of Jesus Christ is an option for me. And actually an excuse for me to ignore who he is. I've turned grace completely upside down. I've turned it on its head. Which is why we struggle. How dare this church demand that this lady coming in who is on the roll say that she's got to demonstrate the effect of grace in her life. How dare they say that! Grace doesn't demand that. Grace always executes holiness in a person's life who's experienced it in the reality of Christ. And when you use it so you can have an excuse for not being his poem, then we have it completely backwards and we've missed it. The point of grace is so I can experience his love so that I can be forgiven and so that he can transform my life. Romans chapter 8. Listen to this. This is absolutely what he's talking about. Romans 8:1.

¹Therefore now there is not any condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

So the Holy Spirit comes to me and he says my junior year in high school, "Hey! You're bad. Jesus is not. Would you like to be forgiven?" "Yes, sir." You know what he did at that moment? He declared that I was no longer a sinner. He made that declaration. That declaration still stands and it will stand until the day I die because it's made in the blood of Christ. And nothing can undo that. That's his grace. You know how you get into heaven? When you're as holy as God is. I can't be as holy as God is. Nope! But Jesus was and you will be declared as holy as he is by the act of Christ on the cross. There's the grace. Listen to what he says:

²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death.

What's the law of sin and death? Here it is. God put the law out there. I don't do what it says and that law says, "Hey! You're a sinner and you're going to die." But I've been removed from that law by Jesus Christ. I'm not under that law anymore. Do I still sin? Yes. Do I still fail? Yes. But I don't face the condemnation of law; I face the grace of Jesus Christ.

³For what was impossible in that law in that it was weak through the flesh,

In other words, the reason I couldn't keep the law is because my flesh won't let me. Watch this.

God having sent his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and concerning sin, he condemned sin in the flesh.

Here's the beauty, right. The law condemns me. The grace of the cross condemns my sin. I lose the condemnation that the law gives me because of the removal of the condemnation in the One who did live the law perfectly, Christ Jesus. Listen to the next verse:

The reason for all of this is in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be filled up in us who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

The purpose of not being condemned is so that his holiness can show up in my life. If I understand the cross really, if I understand that my sin made him bleed, if I really get that, I don't want in my life what made him bleed. And if I understand that the reason he was able to make a payment for my sin is because of his holiness, then I want that holiness in me if I really understand the grace of God in Christ on the cross. But the problem is we don't understand the cross; we disrespect it. We miss it because we use it to excuse our own rebellion against the Creator. And that singularly amazes me.

I've pastored now, this is my 40th year to pastor. I've done, oh man, I don't know how many funerals. Without exaggeration hundreds of funerals. I've done everything from the little baby that the family knew would live three minutes to 98-year-old people. I've done funerals where the entire family were believers. I've done funerals for people where the entire family basically weren't believers. I've done funerals for families that were torn apart and were angry at the guy in the casket. But you know what's interesting. In all those hundreds of funerals in the 40 years I've done this, you know what I've never seen? Ever. Ever. As pastor I have two responsibilities with the body and the casket. Number one I escort the body out of the church to the hearse. The pallbearers are behind, we take the body out, I stand there while the pallbearers lift the body and put it in the hearse. When we get to the graveside I have the responsibility to escort the body with the pallbearers to the grave site where we sit there and the pallbearers step back, they wait until the service is over, they take their boutonnières, they put it on the casket. You know what I've never seen in 40 years? Even when I knew that one of the pallbearers was furious with the guy in the casket, you know what I've never seen? Ever. I've never seen anybody, any pallbearer, disrespect the body they carried. Ever. 40 years. They've been solemn. They've been respectful. Even if they're angry at people in the family, they hold that casket well, they put it in the hearse with solemnity and respect, when they get to the graveside they carry it with respect to the grave. I've never seen a body disrespected. How is it we don't disrespect each other's bodies, but the body of the most Holy One who ever lived here we disrespect all the way to the grave by dishonoring why he died. We missed it in '25. We missed the image of God versus the color of skin. I hope we don't miss the truth of the grace of God and not a phony application of it that's all over our churches. Understand something today. His grace is free. It's not cheap.

Father, tough word from your text. And I think tough because we've lost our understanding. Father we have oftentimes been so behind simple truths in your word. Bring us back to your

love, fellowship of your Spirit, the grace of Jesus Christ on that cross. And Father don't let us in this room disrespect your son by using that grace to not be your poem in this world. Honor us and anoint us. In Jesus Christ name.