Abounding Grace

Fourth in the summer 2019 series “Amazing Grace”

# Scripture: Ephesians 3:7-21; 2 Cor. 9:8

# Key Thought: When we live by grace, we have access to God’s abundant resources.

# Intro:

I was reading in the internet news that the Fertile Crescent of the Middle East of which Israel is a part has been experiencing a long-term drought that has produced severe shortages of water. Israel, however, has responded by becoming a leader in desalination technology. They have several large desalination plants which now combined with natural sources, produce more than enough water for the nation’s needs. They are even exporting the technology to places like California.

As I thought about this, I thought about the Bible’s prophetic picture of Israel in the day of the Messiah’s return. There is a curious feature of that prophetic picture, curious because it seems so improbable.

On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; it shall continue in summer as in winter. Zech 14:8 NRSV

But even now, Israel is becoming posed to be a source of water for its neighbors because of this new technology.

I would like to use this as a parable about our own lives. Especially during the difficult times in our lives, we sometimes feel like our energy is dried up. The circumstances of our lives seem like a desert – devoid of green, with little life and a place we don’t want or stay. David likened such times to times when he needed God.

You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you;
I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you,
in a dry and parched land where there is no water. Ps 63:1 NIV

But just as abundant water is now available in Israel where before it was dry, so God offers to us abounding grace, more than enough to help us in every circumstance of our lives.

Remember how Paul faced a very difficult problem; we believe it was a physical malady of some kind. He had prayed for it to be removed. It was not, but instead God gave him the promise that has been an inestimable comfort to millions of Christians.

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Cor 12:9 NIV

This morning, I would like us to think together about how we can access that abundant, abounding and all-sufficient grace for our daily needs too.

# Spiritual energy depends on our focus.

In Paul’s writing to the church at Ephesus, he has some perspectives that will help us immensely to tap into the grace that God has made available to us.

## Paul’s circumstances

To begin, we wonder about Paul’s circumstances when he wrote the book of Ephesians. There is a hint in Eph. 3:13 where he speaks about “my sufferings” that this was not an easy time for Paul. In 3:1, we learn that when he wrote this he was a prisoner. Think about the circumstances of a first century prison. This was not a rosy time in Paul’s life.

Yet Paul writes to us with such hope and encouragement. He tells us that God is “able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to [God’s] power that is at work within us.” Such optimism and faith amid such discouraging circumstances surprises us.

## Paul’s focus

But one key reason that Paul can remain encouraged despite his suffering is his focus. His mind and spirit are not dwelling on his troubled circumstances or his physical suffering. His thoughts are fixed on God. He is practicing spiritual disciplines even amid difficult times.

The lesson for us can be expressed as a change in perspective, a change of focus.

* By faith we can escape being held prisoner by our circumstances as we fix our thoughts on Jesus!
* By faith we are not limited to the things that are seen because they are temporary; but we can catch a glimpse as Paul did of the things that are unseen which are eternal!
* By faith we remember that God is near even when we feel like he is absent.
* By faith we focus on God’s ability rather than being held back by our fears.
* By faith we can think on God’s abundance rather than hesitating because of our limitations.
* By faith we concentrate on God’s unsearchable riches rather than despairing over our poverty.
* By faith we reach out to take hold of the resources of heaven!

# Our standing in Christ gives us confidence to pray for help.

There is a second helpful hint that I see in this passage. Let’s ask key question.

## Key question: What is the basis of Paul’s confidence?

But, I can almost hear you object already, “That is Paul; this is us!” In other words, it is hard for us to connect and understand. Maybe Paul could be faith-filled and hopeful in a time of great trial. But can we? We usually associate joyful optimistic views with times of blessing and prosperity in our lives. We would not view it as possible when we were in prison. So, on what does Paul base his confidence? What is the ground for his optimism? Can we really catch this attitude?

## In Christ’s work we place our confidence

### Our status is also “In Christ”

There is a key expression used often in the New Testament for our status. We are described as “in Christ.” This status was not just true for Paul, it is also true for every one of us who are Christians today. It was one of the reasons for Paul’s assurance and confidence.

 “In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.” Ephesians 3:12 NIV

Paul’s seeming redundancy makes a point. The phrase, “in Christ” is very important in Paul’s writings. It is “in Christ” that we are a new creation as we learned last month. At the beginning of the book of Ephesians, we learned that we are blessed with “every spiritual blessing in Christ” (1:3). Think of it as the spiritual location for our blessings. By our conversion we were transported from the kingdom of the enemy into the kingdom of God’s Son. We are now located in the area of Christ’s rule. The phrase “in Christ” speaks of our status as children of God, members of the body of Christ, baptized disciples of Jesus. In this spiritual location, we also are blessed to have access to abundant grace, just as Paul was.

### We operate by faith in Christ’s continuing supply

The second phrase of Ephesians 3:12, “through faith in him,” speaks of our continuing need to operate in faith in order to receive the grace that God continually makes available. Our confidence is not in ourselves; it is in the completed work of Jesus. If our confidence is in what we can do, it is not in God’s grace. I learned from reading E. Stanley Jones that Christians need to be constantly in the receiving mode. A living faith is a receiving faith. This is one of the reasons why we often pray with our hands out like this with palms up, open and receptive. It is a body language that says immediately both we need God’s help, and that we are anticipating God sending his help in answer to our prayers.

**Paul is teaching us as well that when we operate in Christ and in faith in Christ we also can have confidence.**

 “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.” Heb 10:19-22 NIV

### We have the confidence of closeness

The word translated freedom in Eph. 3:12 means that we can speak freely, we can tell all to God. Think of our own personal relationships. There are some relationships in which we feel very guarded about our conversation. We are very careful about what we talk about with those people. There are other relationships, those with our best friends, in which we feel very free to talk. We don’t worry about whether we are putting our best foot forward. We can just be ourselves. We can be honest about how we feel. We can share the problems we have. Paul is saying, that is the kind of confidence we have in our relationship with Almighty God. Even though He is so great, and He is perfectly holy; even though He is to be feared, because of what Jesus has done, we can feel at home to share our deepest secrets and speak honestly with him. We can come to him with confidence about our relationship.

# We can expect to receive abundantly.

## Super-abundant grace

There is an amazing phrase in Eph. 3:8, in the latest NIV it is translated “boundless riches.” It refers to an abundance that is so deep, so rich that its limits can’t be measured and found out. My mind immediately goes to 2 Cor. 9:8 which is my favorite verse and I memorized it in the 1984 NIV

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 2 Cor 9:8 NIV(1984)

In that verse, there is a 7-fold blessing of God’s sufficiency. In the original language, Paul in this one verse uses a form of the word “all” five times plus a verb meaning “to abound” twice. I think he might be trying to get a point across, do you think? He is emphasizing a seven-fold sufficiency, an ideal abundance of God’s grace. God can give to us all the grace we need.

In the Ephesians passage that we read, Paul concludes with an amazing doxology of praise to God which affirms God’s ability to come along side Christians and help them.

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us…”
Ephesians 3:20 NIV

This verse reminds us of the comprehensive capacity of God’s grace to come to our aid in our time of need and to enable us in our time of challenge.

### In all things; At all times

Stop for a moment and reflect on all the different specific kinds of blessings of grace that the NT has referred to when speaking of God’s grace.

* **2 Cor. 12:9 – My grace is sufficient – dealing with physical issue**
* **1 Cor 15:10 - grace for Paul to carry out his Christian calling**
* **Eph. 2:8,9 - grace for forgiveness and salvation**
* **2 Cor. 9:8 – grace – God’s supply for our needs, especially financial, material needs.**
* **2 Cor. 8:1 Grace given to the Macedonian churches that enabled them to be generous with others in need**
* **2 Cor. 8:9 - grace given to Jesus enabled his self-giving for us**
* **Colossians 4:6 – daily speech filled with wholesomeness**

Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Col. 4:6 NIV

### All that you need

Let’s continue to explore the comprehensiveness of Paul’s statement about the grace that is available to us. “Need” is a key word in 2 Cor. 9:8. In some areas of our lives, especially finances, we desire that God would supply our wants, but he doesn’t promise that. But he does say he will supply our needs.

### Every good work

This phrase, “every good work,” reminds us that God’s supply of grace for us is always purposeful.

It’s not for comfort alone, though it does comfort us.

It is not for enjoyment in itself, though it provides for our enjoyment.

It is not just to make us happy, though it contributes mightily to that as well.

It is primarily for “every good work.”

Grace is to help us with the “good works prepared in advance for us to do.” Eph. 2:10

Grace helps us fulfil “that for which Christ took hold of you” to personalize Paul’s words in Phil. 3:12. God’s provision of grace for us is especially oriented toward helping us to do the work that he has called us and gifted us to do. These works include caring for our families, earning a living, assisting in charitable ministries, helping others, being generous with what God gives us, and using our talents to assist in the work of the kingdom of God through the church. The greater the challenge, the greater is God’s provision of grace. One person put it this way, “Where God’s finger points, his hand will make a way.” That’s the grace of God in action.

What a joy and privilege. God is at work in us and through us! To energize what he is doing, he offers us his all-sufficiency!