TITLE: An Abundance of Grace

TEXT: Ephe. 1:4-7 & 2:8-9; Jonah 1:2-3,16 & 2:1-9 & 4:1-4, 9-11

INTRODUCTION: Have you ever just sat back and contemplated the Grace of God? The richness and fullness of it?

**Ephe 1:4 (NIV) In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will--**

**6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.**

**7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.**

God has not just given us Grace but it says here that God has lavished us with His Grace!!

Lavished=

**4052 perisseuo {per-is-syoo'-o}**

**1c1) to be abundantly furnished with, to have in abundance, abound in (a thing), to be in affluence**

**2a*)* to furnish one richly so that he has abundance**

There is an old saying: *good things come in small packages****.***

It is one of my favorite old sayings because it is true! (Just look at me).

This morning I want to go to one the smallest books in the Bible...The book of Jonah, a mere four chapters in length and small chapters at that....

But don't let its smallness fool you because in this

small package we find in abundance the greatest of all Gods truth's that His Word has for us.

The truth of God’s Grace.

If one word were used to describe the book of Jonah it would have to be Grace!

The book of Jonah starts out with the Word of the Lord coming to a Hebrew prophet named Jonah--

God tells Jonah--**v2. Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because it's wickedness has** **come up before Me..**

From the very firstparagraph of this book we find God’s Grace.

Nineveh was a gentile city. It was a city of sinners. God uses similar terminology here that He did with Abraham when speaking to him about Sodom & Gomorra----**It's wickedness has come up before me!**

Yet, God , who is rich in grace and mercy, extends that grace and mercy to Nineveh!

He tells Jonah to go to them with a message of their need to repent..He offers them His Grace…

Now listen to the response of Jonah to Gods request-

**Jona 1:3 (NIV) But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.**

What was Jonah's problem? God tells him to go to

the city of Nineveh and preach a message of repentance and Jonah takes off in the opposite direction!

The problem was that Jonah was not just a prophet of God, he was also a patriot of Israel.

The city of Nineveh was an Assyrian city and the Assyrians had for a long time been a thorn in the side of Israel.

The fact is that Jonah was afraid that if he went and preached a message of repentance to them that they might just repent and God would spare them.

That was the last thing that Jonah wanted to see happen.

He would much rather see them go up in a big ball of flames, so, rather than be used as an instrument for Nineveh’s possible salvation**,** he runs in the opposite direction.

Problem is---when it comes to God, you can run but you cannot hide.

Jonah gets on a boat headed for Tarshish and the Lord sends a great wind upon the sea...

The sailors call out to their gods with no avail so they turn to Jonah and find out that their dilemma is caused by Jonah's attempt to flees from His God.

Jonah gets thrown out of the boat--the sea is calmed---and God sends a big fish to swallow up Jonah.

(Not as a divine punishment for his disobedience but for his salvation--to save him from a sure death by drowning).

So in this first little bit of the book of Jonah we see God wanting to pour out the fullness of His saving grace upon a undeserving people, and pouring out His saving grace upon an unwilling, disobedient prophet.

I think this book very closely parallels our lives today as far as our relationship with God and how we often respond, or fail to respond, to His grace.

First off--

We, like the city of Nineveh, are sinners. And our wickedness has risen up before God and our just penalty for the wickedness that we have done is destruction and eternal separation from Him....

But God, because He loves us and it is His will that none should perish but that all would come to eternal life with Him, He has extended to us His saving Grace just as He did to the city of Nineveh.

Had Nineveh done anything to deserve God’s Grace to be bestowed upon them? Had they done anything to deserve such love and concern from God?

NO!!

God’s Grace was freely, undeservingly, bestowed upon them.

God was giving them one more change. A chance that they didn't deserve but because of God’s love, He gave it to them anyway.

We like the Ninevites, have had this same Grace extended to us.

We all have sinned against God. Our wickedness has risen up before Him, yet He who is rich in Grace and mercy has mightily bestowed that Grace and mercy upon us when He sent us Jesus Christ to be an atoning sacrifice for our sin.

Do we deserve it? No!

**Ephe 2:8 (NIV) For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--**

**9 not by works, so that no one can boast.**

As great as this grace is though, the grace that God lavished out upon the Ninevites, it is not the prominent grace that we find in the book of Jonah.

Let’s go back to Jonah---

He has been cast out of the boat and instantly God calms the sea.

As soon as Jonah hit the water and the sea was calmed, it says:

**Jona 1:16 (NIV) At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.**

These men were idolaters, they worshipped other gods, yet God bestows His saving Grace to them and they accept it! They make the God of Jonah their God. It says that they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and **made vows to Him!!**

Again we see the abundance of grace being poured out to the undeserving....

Yet even this isn't the greatest example of God grace that we see in this book!

The greatest example of Grace that we see is the grace that God bestows upon Jonah!

Remember who Jonah was? He was a Israelite, one of God chosen. He was a prophet of God.

In short--Jonah knew all about God. He had experienced the saving grace of God in his life.

He knew full well who God was and what He was capable of doing, yet, he chose to disobey a direct command of the Lord.

What we need to see from the book of Jonah is that Jonah is not an essential player here.

There were other prophets.. God could have used someone else.

When Jonah ran from the Lord, The Lord could have got someone else who was more obedient to go to Nineveh.

When Jonah was thrown into the sea God could of let him drown.

Yet what does God do? He sends a fish to swallow him up to spare his life. God extends His grace to a very undeserving Jonah.

Jonah's response is typical to ours when we get off track with God and find ourselves going through hard times because of it....

Jonah's prayer while inside the fish----

**Jona 2:1 (NIV) From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God.**

**2 He said: "In my distress I called to the LORD,**

**and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry.**

**3 You hurled me into the deep, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers**

**swept over me.**

**4 I said, `I have been banished from your sight;**

**yet I will look again toward your holy temple.'**

**5 The engulfing waters threatened me,**

**the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head.**

**6 To the roots of the mountains I sank down;**

**the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God.**

**7 "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.**

**8 "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.**

**9 But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good.**

**Salvation comes from the LORD."**

From inside the belly of a great fish Jonah recognizes the grace of God that has been extended to him and he responds to it.

**8 "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.**

**9 But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good.**

**Salvation comes from the LORD."**

God is faithful! He has the fish (kjv) **vomit** Jonah up on dry ground!

Example: vomit something distasteful!

Jonah obeys God this time and goes to Nineveh with the message that God had called him to deliver to them....

God’s Grace has prevailed!

The sailors have come to God, the Ninevites, from the king all the way down to every last man, woman and child repent of their wickedness and come to God.

Everything turns out ok in the end.

Well not exactly….

What is interesting is, God’s grace prevails with the heathen sailors. It prevails with a heathen city.

But it doesn't prevail in the life of the prophet Jonah!

Jonah was the only one that went into this situation saved and he is the only one that when all is said and done loses out..

Sure he finally obeys God and goes to Nineveh but his heart is still not in it..

KJV says that Nineveh is a three day journey in extent... It would literally take three days to walk from one end of the city to the other.

The indication is that Jonah waits until he is a day into the city before he gives the proclamation... and then notice how he says it?

**v.4 Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed!**

Do you notice anything that was left out?

How about---**Repent or!!**

Jonah still wanted to see them become crispy critters!

God sees that the people of Nineveh repent of their sin so He has compassion on them and spares them.

He relents from the destruction that He was prepared to do.

Notice Jonah's prayer in v 4.

**Jona 4:1 (NIV) But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry.**

**2 He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.**

**3 Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."**

God responds to Jonah---

**Jona 4:4 (NIV) But the LORD replied, "Have you any right to be angry?"**

Jonah goes out to a hillside east of the city and sits down to see what would happen...He is still hoping that God will change His mind and destroy Nineveh.

God throws even more grace to the prophet.. God tries to teach Jonah an important truth. He tries to get Jonah to see a fault that he has that if not corrected will make him all but useless for kingdom work.

As Jonah is sitting there in the heat of the day God causes a vine to grow and shade him and it says that Jonah was very happy about the vine.

But at dawn the next day God provides a worm to eat the vine and He sends a scorching east wind and when the sun rose it blazed on Jonah's head... It says that Jonah became faint and wanted to die because of his misery....(what a whiner--every time Jonah doesn't get his own way what is it that he says?--It is better for me to die than to live.)

The book closes with this little conversation between God and Jonah.....

**Jona 4:9 (NIV) But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?"**

**"I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die."**

**10 But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight.**

**11 But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"**

Paraphrase

Jonah, you have more concern, more compassion for this stupid vine than you do for a city with 120,000 small children in it!

Jonah, you know Me! You know what kind of God I am! You said it yourself--I am a gracious, compassionate God who is slow to anger and abounding in love...

Should I not be concerned about this great city?

I am concerned about it and so should you be!

The sailors on the boat experienced the Grace of God and allowed it to change their lives....

The city of Nineveh experienced the Grace of God and allowed themselves to be changed by it..

Jonah experienced the grace of God in a mighty way yet he didn't allow it to effect change in his life..

Jonah allowed his prejudices to stand in the way of God's Grace doing a real sanctifying work within his life.

The sad thing is that everyone benefited from the Grace of God except the one whom God used to administer that grace.

The lesson of Jonah folks is a lesson to you and I, the Church....

What are we doing with the Grace that God has bestowed upon us? What are we doing with the Grace we have been given in Jesus?

Are we allowing it to effect change in our life?

And are we joyously extending that grace to the world around us?

Or are we, like Jonah, because of our prejudices, withholding the grace that God wants us to bestow to others?

EXAMPLE: I have shared before how that when I was in the Grocery retail business I had developed a real distaste for those who were caught up in the drug lifestyle.

They would shoplift and write bad checks to support their habits. A fellow store manager was killed by a knife wielding man on drugs over a couple cartons of cigarettes he was attempting to steal.

It was not by accident or coincidence that among my first ministry opportunities was with people on drugs, my personal Ninevites.

God brought a man named Clifford into my life who was caught up in a drug lifestyle and even though at first I responded just as Jonah did to the Ninevites, God finally got to my heart and allowed me to see “but for the Grace of God that be me”.

Later I was asked to be chaplain for the Bridge, the local chemical dependency treatment center. And then chaplain at the Madison County Jail where in the last 5-6 weeks I have had a half dozen men Come to Christ and receive Gods amazing Grace for their own lives.

It doesn't matter how saved or sanctified we may be, if we ignore the Grace of God in our life we will be the one that will lose out.

You see, it is grace that transforms us in to the image and likeness of Jesus.

Are you allowing Grace to do its work within you this morning....

Are you, am I, willingly and joyfully administering the Grace that we have been given to others--

Are we joyfully administering the Grace of Jesus to the world around us--even to the Nineveh's, the places and people of this world that we may see as distasteful?

Are we allowing God's Grace to change our distaste to love?

Are we allowing God’s Grace to transform us into the men and woman that He wants for us to be?

Last words are important… The last words of a dying man who knows he is dying are important because he knows they are the last he will ever speak.

The last words of God’s Word to us are recorded in:

**Reve 22:21 (NIV) The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.**