

Title: “The Scandal of God’s Grace”

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Luke 4:24-27

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Service Readings: Neh. 8:1–3, 5–6, 8–10; 1 Cor. 12:12–31a; Luke 4:16–30

Jesus challenges our expectations of the scope and breadth of his grace. It is available to all who believe, even those we ourselves find offensive and even radical in their earthly actions. We are challenged to proclaim this message of grace and mercy to all the world – we should exclude no one.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

²⁴And he said, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. ²⁵But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, ²⁶and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. ²⁷And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.”

It was a scandal! Jesus was supposed to be just like them, no different than anyone else in his own town. And yet he claimed much more. He claimed to be the one that the great prophet Isaiah had foretold. But that wasn’t the scandal, that was the marvel. It’s what gathered them together for they had heard about his miraculous works and they wanted to see for themselves the power he seemed to possess. No, that wasn’t the humiliation at all. It was something much worse. It concerned them! *They* were the scandal! They, and all of Israel, were rejecting Jesus as the Messiah. And according to him, because of their rejection God was turning his attention to the Gentiles! What a scandalous message. And when they heard that, they wanted to kill him.

What a scandal! The cross was supposed to enable the oppressive rule of Rome over its citizens. It was supposed to be a tool for control and obedience, one that inflicted indescribable pain and anguish to those subjected to it. The cross was to be a symbol of power and judgement. To those who were pierced with nails and affixed to it, they’d experience the wrath of Roman justice poured upon them like an overflowing cup. That is how the cross was *supposed* to be used. But when Jesus was nailed to it, when his body, broken and beaten was prepared for this same Roman wrath, that worldly justice paled in comparison to the spiritual justice Jesus experienced as God poured out *his* wrath. The cross, meant for the punishment of one man’s worldly iniquities was being used for the punishment of all mankind’s. The cross, meant to punish one who sinned was being used to punish one who knew no sin.

What a scandal! God had created. And his creation was good. And man had been created in his image, after his likeness.

²⁸And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” ²⁹And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food...” ³¹And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

It was very good. And man was very blessed. And man had everything. But man wanted more. He wanted the throne of his creator. And so in spite of all that he had been given, he sinned. He rebelled against God,

considered him an enemy, one to conquer and control. He counted nothing as God's blessing, and yet, even then, God continued to send man an abundance of blessings: life and all that a life needs – all that man needs to continue to rebel against the one who sustains him.

What a scandal! Man had sinned; man still sins. And just as man is to have dominion over the earth, man was to have dominion over his own self. He was to be responsible for his actions, responsible for reparations he inflicted. He was to pay for his own sins. But he had no desire to pay. He had no *ability* to pay and so the punishment reserved for him was death. The sentence, an eternity absent from God. The judgment, justified because sin is rebellion against a holy and infinite God. So the penalty must be proportionate to the offense. God's justice demands that sin be addressed, for to overlook it would be to deny God's own righteousness. And yet, even though man deserves this judgement, God is full of infinite mercy. And in his mercy he provided a sacrifice, a substitute that would endure the punishment on our behalf. And even though he suffered and died for all, so few receive what he earned and still offers on our behalf. "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown."

It is all such a scandal. Man sins against God, but God continues to bless man, even sending Jesus to "make propitiation for the sins of the people."

But Jesus didn't *just* preach condemnation to the people that Sabbath day. He preached God's mercy. He unrolled the scroll and taught of himself:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

This is the year of the Lord's favor. It is the time when Jesus, enduring the punishment we deserved, rose from the grave as proof of the victory he won. Resurrected he proclaimed liberty, not to those who earned it, but to those who have been held captive by sin – sinners like you and like me. It is the year of the Lord's favor, a time of undeserved grace, where the guilty are forgiven, the blind are given sight, and the poor are made heirs of his kingdom.

Jesus proclaimed that the year of the Lord's favor was upon them, but it wasn't just a historical event – it is a reality that continues even today. We, too have rejected God in our sin. We too have turned away from him. And yet, in his divine scandal of grace, Jesus bore our sins upon the cross. The justice we deserved has been satisfied in Him, so that we might be forgiven and made heirs of his kingdom. This still is the year of the Lord's favor and we still receive the blessings and grace that continue to flow from him.

This is the divine scandal of grace, and it is made available to us, today. Will you receive this scandalous grace, this gift of everlasting life, that Christ offers to you, today?

Please pray with me.

Heavenly Father, what a scandal it is that You would love sinners like us, that You would send Your Son to bear the punishment we deserved and to offer us forgiveness and life. Thank You for Your boundless mercy and the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Open our hearts to receive Your grace with faith, and empower us to live in the freedom and hope that Christ has won for us.