

**Shine ... Graciousness**

# ***You Gotta Have It to Give It***

**May 29, 2016**

**PRELUDE – Come Thou Fount**

**Worship Songs – Whom Shall I Fear/ Made New  
Feature – If We're Honest**

## **Introduction**

**Video clip: Woman caught in adultery**

In the book of the Apostle John, we read the following:

**“From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John 1:16-17 (ESV)**

Nowhere else in the bible do we find a better illustration of grace and truth of Jesus Christ than we do in the story of the woman caught in adultery. As we saw in the video clip, the scribes and Pharisees came into the women's court of the

temple and threw a married woman before Jesus seeking to entrap him.

"Teacher," they said. "This woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now the Law of Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" We could spend some time discussing the evil motives in the hearts of the Scribes and Pharisees as they posed this question to Jesus, but instead I want to focus on another aspect of the account. I want to focus on a question that's so rarely asked when this story is read.

The question is this:

**Who is the woman in this story? The answer may surprise you. She's you. And she's us.**

We have all been "caught" in our sins. All of us, men and women alike, are on the same moral level. We all have the propensity to sin. All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. None of us is righteous, according to the Bible. None of us truly seeks after God. Therefore we are all sinners in need of a Savior just like the

adulterous woman. If we would have eyes to see this truth, we would be able to humbly eliminate all self-righteousness that so often plagues our hearts.

But let me pose another question concerning the video we just watched.

**Who are the Scribes and Pharisees? Again the answer may surprise you. They are us. They are you and I.**

That same judgmental attitude of the Scribes and Pharisees lives in the hearts of many of us here today.

Earlier, I read a bible verse about how Jesus was “full of grace and truth. And from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace.” But what I have found to be true of myself and many other well-meaning Christians is that we pretty much get the truth part. We get the “thou shalt not” part, as far as it is related to what we or other folks should or shouldn’t do. For example, we get the

fact that “adultery (along with a thousand other bad behaviors) is sin. Or at least we think we do.

But what we don’t get nearly as well is the “grace” part. As amazing as grace is, it’s equally as astonishing and amazing that we have trouble believing it. And because we have trouble believing this kind of grace, we have trouble living out of it. And because we have trouble living out of it, we have trouble sharing it with and extending it to others.

And sadly, this is why for so many Christians (including more than just a few in this room) following Jesus has become a joyless drudgery marked by judgmentalism and condemnation of self and others. You see, we are just like Scribes and the Pharisees.

So if we are honest with ourselves, we know that we are sinful and self-condemning like the woman caught in adultery, and we are self-righteous and judgmental like the Scribes and Pharisees. We have met the enemy and the enemy on both sides is us.

And once we realize we are this way, we have a tendency to either beat ourselves up when we fail, or work to cover and hide our sin, or justify and compare ourselves to others. But on the other hand, we also tend to beat other people up when they make mistakes, all the while judging theirs to be “bigger” sins.

But what if it could all be different? Imagine what it would be like if we could be open and honest about our lives without fear and condemnation? What if we could create an environment where you and I could admit to each other that we are a mess without the threat of judgment? What if we were able to build a community characterized by graciousness where you could bring your brokenness and I could bring mine knowing that we would be treated with truth and grace like the adulterous woman?

According to the song just sung, it would change our lives. It would set us free. And not only that, we would “shine like bright lights in this crooked and perverse generation” as the bible says. So what’s it going to take for this to happen here?

That's what we are going to talk about today as we begin Series 2 of our Shine series of messages.

## **New Series Intro**

As you know from Rick's previous messages, we have embarked on a series of series, called "SHINE". These messages are an attempt to flesh out what Jesus meant in the Lord's Prayer when he said, "May your Kingdom come...may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We are all familiar with this prayer, but we may not be clear on its meaning. This part of the Lord's Prayer wasn't a desperate cry for us to escape, as if we were pleading, "God, get us out of this dark world and take us up there." Rather, Jesus was asking us to pray just the opposite.

**"Father, may the way You live, become how we live. May the way Heaven operates become the way we here on earth operate."**

Far from the idea of escaping this earth, Jesus wanted his disciples to ask that God's kingdom in heaven to be replicated here on earth. So it's only

natural to ask, “What would it look like for individual Christians and churches like NHCC to be conduits of “up there” to “down here”? What “light- shining-in-the-darkness” winsome attitudes and behaviors would really stand out in our current culture?

These are the questions that provide the basis for our SHINE series of messages. And as Rick mentioned a few weeks ago, for us down here to experience the way heaven up there operates, five characteristics must be evident in our lives and the life of the church.

Those five characteristics are:

**generosity, graciousness, goodness, God-centeredness, and Gospel-driven.**

When these five characteristics are present and operational, we will begin to see the fulfillment of Jesus’ vision of “up there coming down here”.

The last three weeks we have focused on the first characteristic, Generosity. You can watch, listen or read about what it means to be a generous

person by going to the message archive on the website or the app.

But today, we are going to look at the second of the five distinguishing characteristics. Today we are to look at the characteristic of graciousness. As we all know, we live in an increasingly mean-spirited world. But imagine if we could change that somehow... if we could treat ourselves and other people differently – with grace?

Now what it actually looks like to be a gracious person to others won't be the focus for today . We'll be talking about that in the weeks to come. However, the bible says that in order to be a gracious person, you have to be experiencing God's grace to you.

What I am simply saying is this:

**You gotta have grace in order to give it.**

You can't give away what you don't have. So the key to being a truly gracious person is



understanding and experiencing God's grace in your own life.

## **Types of Grace**

If the key to being a truly gracious person is to experience grace personally, then we need to understand what grace is and how it's incorporated it into our lives. So let's start by defining grace.

### **Saving Grace**

When I talk about grace in this message, my focus is going to be on how it applies to a person's relationship with God ... which is the most common understanding of it, at least from the Christian perspective. So with this perspective in mind, the first type of grace I want to define is what I'm calling saving grace.

**Saving grace is “God doing for you what you do not deserve and cannot do for yourself – with no strings attached.”**

It refers to favor that God freely gives without expecting anything in return. It is God treating us better than we deserve but not because of anything we have done (or promise to do) and not because of anything God desires to get from us.

With grace, there are no strings attached.

Grace is the opposite of karma. Karma is all about getting what you deserve. With Karma, whatever you do comes back to you. But that's not how grace operates. Grace is getting what you don't deserve, like God's forgiveness and mercy, and not getting what you do deserve, like God's wrath and punishment.

Now, whenever Christians think about grace, it is almost always in context of our need for forgiveness and salvation from sin, which the bible defines as "falling short" of God's design for our lives—through our disbelief and rebellion.

In that context, grace means God saving us without us having to do anything whatsoever (or promise to do anything whatsoever) to make amends for all of our failings.

The classic scripture passage that describes saving grace is Ephesians 2:8-10:

**God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece.**

**Ephesians 2:8-10a (NLT)**

When a person works an eight-hour day and receives a fair day's pay for his time, we call that a wage. When a person competes against an opponent and receives a trophy for his performance, we call that a prize. When a person receives appropriate recognition for his long service or high achievements, we call that an award. But when a person is not capable of earning a wage, cannot win a prize, and deserves no award—yet receives such a gift anyway—we call that grace... God's unmerited favor with no strings attached.

Suppose I want to give you \$20, with no strings attached. Before I hand it over, I want to ask you some questions. Who worked for this money? You would say Ladell. Is it a wage I'm paying you? You would say no, because you didn't earn it. Is it a prize? You'd say no again because it's not based on your performance. Is it an award? No, because you did nothing to achieve it. Is it a gift? Ah yes. It's simply yours for the taking, with no strings attached. Friends that's how God's saving grace works. Jesus did all the work. He died on the cross for our sins and he took all of our shame. And now, he's standing on his throne, just like I stand on this stage, freely offering the gift of salvation to all who are willing to receive it. Come as you are, he says, with all your past mistakes, and simply take my gift of salvation as token of my great, great love for you. That's the essence of saving grace.

So let me ask you, "Have you received God's gift of saving grace? Have you accepted Christ's gift of salvation?" If not, this is the first step to becoming a gracious person because you gotta have grace in order to give it. You'll never be

truly gracious like Jesus if you've never experienced it.

## **Enabling Grace**

Now there's a second type of grace we need to understand. Not only do believers in Christ experience saving grace, but they also experience enabling grace. What is enabling grace?

**Enabling Grace: God suppling us with the power and ability to live Christ honoring lives and to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.**

Enabling grace helps us to fulfill our various callings and honor Christ with our lives. It's called enabling grace because without it, we'd be unable to experience all that God has for us in the Christian life. The classic scripture that describes enabling grace is Philippians 2:13.

**For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.  
Philippians 2:13 NLT**

Let me demonstrate how enabling grace works.

Today I brought a handy glove. As you know, you can use this glove to point; to roll down a window; to throw a stick for your dog; to shake hands; to wave goodbye to a friend; to pat someone on the back... you name it. This glove is amazing isn't it?! Of course not. This glove is entirely useless unless my hand is inside it. What gloves do is directly related to what is inside them, right? You could say it this way, "Whatever possesses the glove, determines what the glove performs," or "Whoever activates the glove, determines the activity of the glove." It could also be put another way, "The occupation of the glove depends entirely upon the glove being occupied." For without me, this glove can do nothing! Sound familiar?

Jesus Christ said these same words in John, chapter 15, verse 5, "for apart from Me you can do nothing."

And that's the truth about enabling grace. You and I can't do anything that pleases God apart from him enabling us to do so. We can try to do things in our own strength but that's like a glove

trying to pick up this bottle of water without the hand enabling it. The glove must rely on the hand to accomplish anything and we must learn to rely on the Holy Spirit of God in order to live God honoring lives.

So let me ask you: “Have you learned to rely on the Holy Spirit for your power to live the Christian life or are you trying to live life on your own strength?” That’s the second step to becoming a gracious person. Because you gotta be enabled by grace in order to give it out on a daily basis. Without enabling grace, you and I are as powerless as an empty glove.

So to summarize, Saving grace is God doing for us what we do not deserve and cannot do for ourselves, forgiving us and accepting us in spite of our sin – with no strings attached. Enabling grace is God supplying us with the ability to live a Christ honoring life through the power of the Holy Spirit within.

### **What Makes Grace Amazing**

Now it’s one thing to talk about the saving and enabling grace of God. But when you look even

deeper into this idea of grace, you find that it's even more amazing than you ever dreamed it could be. Let me show you two amazing things about God's grace that you might find surprising.

The first amazing fact about grace is...

**Grace is exactly the opposite of how “religion” works.**

In his book, *The Abolition of Man*, C.S. Lewis listed eight commandments that are common to all world religions.

- **Don't harm others in word or deed.**
- **Honor your parents.**
- **Provide for your children.**
- **Be honest in your dealings with others.**
- **Don't steal.**
- **Don't have sex with another person's spouse.**
- **Care for those who are in need.**
- **Do the right thing even if it costs you.**

In addition to all major religions saying the same basic thing about how people ought to live, Lewis observed that all major religions also say that we



don't. Every major world religion acknowledges the gap between what we are and what we ought to be. And because there is a gap – because we don't live up to the standard – every religion says that we humans are at odds with God (or the Universe or whatever transcendent being or force the religion believes in).

And every religion, Lewis pointed out, prescribes a similar way to deal with the gap and to make peace with divine justice ... every religion except for one: Christianity.

**In every religion except for Christianity, salvation is something that is attained by human effort.**

In Christianity, salvation comes by grace – by God doing for us what we do not deserve and cannot do for ourselves, with no strings attached. And that's amazing. However ... many Christians are confused about this or, as I said at the beginning, believe that it's too good to be true. Many Christians will sing about grace and claim to believe in it but, in reality they live according to a “grace plus” plan. They say they believe it

God's unconditional grace, but they live as though they need to do "their part" as well in order to receive salvation.

But that belief is wrong. The belief is not what the Bible teaches us. The bible says that

**Our salvation is not based on Jesus plus good works, or Jesus plus baptism, or Jesus plus speaking in tongues or Jesus plus anything else.**

Our salvation is based on Jesus plus nothing, or else it's not grace. It's simply religion. So the first amazing thing about grace is that grace is exactly the opposite of how "religion" works.

But there is another fact about grace that's just as amazing.

**Grace can't be exhausted.**

Question: What if you knew you could sin and get away it? Would you? Now before you think I'm crazy for saying what I just said, I'm simply paraphrasing the words of Paul in Romans 6. Paul says,

**“Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace?” Romans 6:1 NLT.**

You might find Paul’s words more acceptable than mine, but my paraphrase is simply trying to get us to see the implications of grace. When I say, “what if you knew you could sin and get away with it?” I don’t mean that it would go unnoticed by God or that it wouldn’t have earthly consequences. What I mean is: “What if we could sin and God wouldn’t punish us for it?”

I know that for some of us that seems like radical statement but here’s what you need to know.

Paul’s question in Romans 6:1 “Should you go on sinning so God can show more grace?” comes on the heels and in response to his scandalous proclamation a few verses earlier in Romans 5:20 that says just that...”when we sin God gives more grace!” Look at Romans 5:20:

**God's law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned**

**more and more, God's wonderful grace became more abundant. Romans 5:20 NLT**

God doesn't punish Christians like some people think. We know that because the more you sin, the more grace you are offered. What Paul is saying in Romans 5 is that you can't out-sin the grace of God as a believer in Jesus Christ. Whenever you sin, you'll find even more grace and forgiveness.

A few years ago, author and Christian talk show host Steve Brown had a syndicated radio show that was based on the statement, "Christians aren't perfect...just forgiven." On the show he would try to present examples of flawed Christians who loved Christ and remained committed to him. One of the most controversial things about the program was his policy to give away "free sins". When someone called the first time, they got three free sins. If they called on their cell phone, they got six free sins. Finally, a woman called in and was irate about this "free sin" giveaway policy. After she and a number of callers expressed their anger, the producer of the program, Erik, made this

statement:, “It’s a joke people..Lighten up! Steve can’t give away free sins. Only God does that.”

Steve Brown, in his book *Scandalous Freedom*, recounted this incident by saying, “Well it wasn’t a joke. Or at least the joke had a serious point. I, Steve, can’t really give away free sins, but God can. Jesus took care of my sin on the cross and because of that, all of my sin is forgiven. In that sense, all sins are free.”

Now you may have to wrestle with this idea that you can’t exhaust grace, but the implication is this: if you are a Christian, God will never be angry at you again. God has turned away his wrath from you forever because he has credited you with the righteousness of Christ. And once you have been proclaimed “clean in Christ”, it cannot be reversed. Therefore, from now till the day you die, when God looks at you, he sees Christ. No matter what you did wrong today or tomorrow or in the future, God sees Christ’s righteousness and not your sin. Therefore, he cannot be angry with you. That’s why Paul proclaims in Romans 8:1:

**There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Romans 8:1 NIV**

No condemnation means that when we sin, we are forgiven. Period. His grace toward you is inexhaustible. And if that’s not amazing, I don’t know what is.

### **Conclusion**

So let’s push pause for a second and simply ask: What does all this talk about grace mean?:What is the implications for those of us who have accepted God’s saving grace and enabling grace? What difference does it make when I believe that God’s grace is exactly the opposite of the way religion works or that it can’t be exhausted? Here’s the bottom line to all of this: Once you realize that God has given you so much grace, then you can turn around and do the same for others! As we said from the start of this message: you gotta have it to give it. But once you’ve tasted grace and drank deeply of it, you will never be the same. And because you will never be the same, you will begin to relate to others with the same

amazing grace that God has shown you. And just to be very clear: being gracious to people doesn't mean downplaying their sin. Jesus told the women caught in adultery: "go and sin no more" but he preceded that by telling her, "No one is left to condemn you and neither do I". We can love and show grace to others because he first loved us. But until we get a grip on the grace that God offers us, we'll never have the ability to truly extend graciousness to others. You cannot give away what you do not possess.

In conclusion, let me just say that when we truly understand grace—when we see that God only owes us wrath but has provided Christ's merit to cover our demerit—then everything changes. We will begin to see God's grace operating all around us...in everyday and mundane things of life as well as in our sorrows and in sweet experiences of victory. But not only that, we'll also start to become gracious people. People who offer unconditional love and acceptance to others and ourselves whenever we make mistakes. Let us grab a hold tightly to the grace of God because it truly is amazing. Let's pray.

## **Closing Comments**

- Shine Generosity project starts June 5
- Offering at the door.
- Classes sign up on table in commons or online.