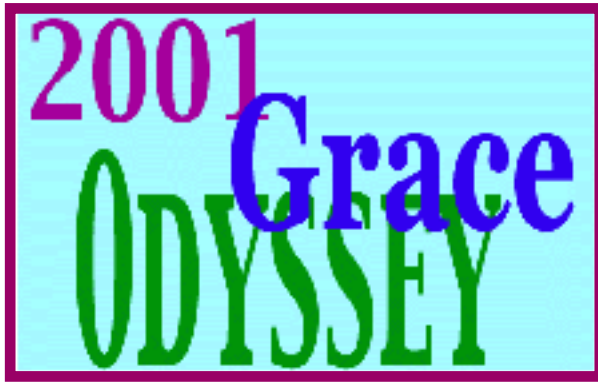


A detailed illustration of the Space Shuttle Columbia in orbit. The shuttle is shown from a low angle, with its external tank and solid rocket boosters clearly visible. The Earth's blue and white atmosphere is seen in the background, along with the dark surface of the Moon. The shuttle's name 'COLUMBIA' is visible on the side of the orbiter. The overall scene is set against the blackness of space, dotted with stars.

2001
Grace
ODYSSEY



Original weekend study material and notes

The full list of passages looked at by the various groups is below. The group time questions were:

- What did the person(s) deserve to receive/happen to them?
- What might they have expected?
- What was Jesus showing/saying about God's attitude towards us?

My thoughts on these passages follow on the following pages.

- Study 1** Your Parable is Matthew 18: 23 - 35 but especially concentrate on 23 - 26 'cos that's the bit about Grace. Your Miracle is Matthew 8: 5 - 13. Think not only about the grace of Jesus but also of the centurion towards his servant (probably a slave).
- Study 2** Your Parable is Matthew 20: 1 - 16. Can we work to earn more of God's goodness towards us? Your Miracle is Mark 3: 1 - 6. How can anger and grace go side by side?
- Study 3** Your Parable is Matthew 22: 1 - 14. Is God's grace for everyone? Why are some excluded? Your Miracle is Matthew 14: 13 - 21. Who were invited to this banquet?
- Study 4** Your Parable is Luke 10: 25 - 37. Your Miracle is Mark 7: 24 - 30. Do we have to beg for grace? What's Jesus getting at here?
- Study 5** Your Parable is Luke 15: 11 - 32. Concentrate especially perhaps on v. 20 for a picture of Grace.....and compare it with v 31. Your Miracle is Luke 8: 49 - 56.
- Study 6** Your Parable is Matthew 18: 23 - 35 but especially concentrate on 23 - 26 'cos that's the bit about Grace. Your Miracle is Luke 17: 11 - 19.
- Study 7** Your Parable is Matthew 20: 1 - 16. Can we work to earn more of God's goodness towards us? Your Miracle is Luke 8: 43 - 48.
- Study 8** Your Parable is Matthew 22: 1 - 14. Is God's grace for everyone? Why are some excluded? Your Miracle is John 2: 1 - 11.
- Study 9** Your Parable is Luke 10: 25 - 37. Your Miracle is Matthew 8: 1 - 4. See also perhaps Leviticus ch 14 to find out about the 'gift that Moses commanded'.
- Study 10** Your Parable is Luke 15: 11 - 32. Concentrate especially perhaps on v. 20 for a picture of Grace.....and compare it with v 31. Your Miracle is Matthew 9: 27 - 34.



The following pages are the notes produced for the booklet that accompanied the weekend, and were intended to read at home after each study had been done in a group. They are divided into notes on the five parables and then the five miracles used during the weekend

The Parables

Let's look at each one in turn together. There are five of them in these studies (I used them twice each).

Matthew 18: 23-35 *The Unmerciful Servant*

Jesus told this parable in response to Peter's question.....*how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?*

Jesus explains its not about quantity, but quality. That is, the number of times we forgive someone is not what counts, nor is the size of what we are forgiving.....what matters is that we are people who forgive, full stop.

In this parable the forgiving person is the king. He wants to 'settle accounts with his servants'. That means to make sure that there are no debts between them. Probably, given the nature of the king in this story, he was more concerned to make sure that *he* didn't owe any of them anything rather than to find out if *they* owed him anything.

Along comes this particular servant (let's call him Cedric) who owed him ten thousand talents. My NIV footnote says 'millions of pounds'. That's ridiculous! How could a servant ever get to the stage of owing millions of pounds to their master. I can think of only one way..... by fiddling the books or mishandling them unintentionally (remember the story of Nick Leeson who bankrupt Barings Bank by doing just that?). I have no doubt that Jesus expected his listeners to think when they heard this that "Cedric has had his fingers in the till!".

In those days, just for owing money, you could be jailed. If on top of that you had stolen the money you were probably up for execution. In any case, kings didn't get asked to give reasons, if they



wanted to kill someone they had no-one to stop them. Cedric had been found out and was in trouble. In fact, the king was fairly lenient.....he was going to sell the man and his family as slaves to get some of the debt back (I doubt they would have come to several million pounds worth though).

The servant begged for time to be able to pay (he would never have been able to pay that much back), and amazingly the king decided just to forget the whole thing. "What's a million or two pounds between friends, Cedric old bean?". The debt had been totally cancelled. That is a picture of Grace, and also one of mercy.

Now, I know the story gets a bit nasty after that. But I want today just to focus on the bit above. To me it is a picture of us coming before God. We are in debt. He is the King and the Judge. There is no-one higher than Him that we can appeal to. Trouble is, our debts are all to Him. And we owe Him far more than we can ever pay begin to pay back.

Jesus always paints God in a fairly harsh light in His parables. Actually we don't have to 'fall on our knees before Him' and beg as did old Cedric. We don't even have to ask!! He has already announced "I FORGIVE YOU". All we have to do is go up to Him and say "Thankyou for your forgiveness, I receive it". Yet Jesus tells it this way because He is then emphasising even more how big the Grace filled heart of God is.....you can just about believe a human king might have treated Cedric like this, but you wouldn't have believed it if the king had just said "cancelled" before Cedric begged.

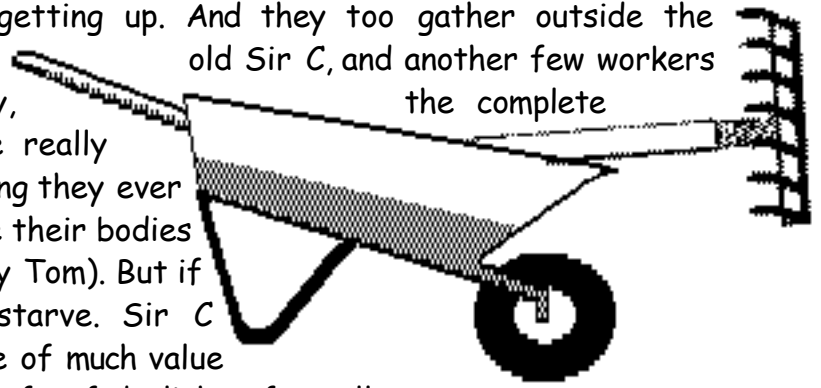
So, how was all this an answer to Peter's question? Of course, Jesus goes on to show that Cedric was a rat, and he wouldn't even let poor old Egbert off the fiver he owed him. If we are to be receivers of grace then we need to be dispensers of it too. And that means we need to be forgivers. All the time. We need to live lives which reflect the grace of Jesus....that way our lives become Grace Odysseys day after day.

Matthew 20: 1 - 16 *Workers in the Vineyard*

There were no Unemployment Offices in those days. You either had work or you didn't. Much of the work was seasonal and casual; harvest work like in this story for instance.

Down in the village they gathered, outside the Grainville Tavern. The rich landowner (*Sir Cumcised?*) knew where to look. First thing in the morning the keen ones were out there, waiting for work. He offered them a fair reward for a day's work, and off they went. But it was clear to Sir C that they wouldn't get it all finished in a day, and who knows how long the weather's going to hold for? So he goes for another stroll into town and picks up another gang, offering them the same pay.

By lunchtime the first lot of last night's drunkards are getting up. And they too gather outside the *Grainville*. Along comes dear old Sir C, and another few workers are added to the job. Lastly, the town dossers get up. These really are the wasters. The only thing they ever do that takes effort is pierce their bodies to look even more weird (sorry Tom). But if they don't work they will starve. Sir C knows they aren't going to be of much value to him, there's only an hour left of daylight after all, and this lot *working together* will pick about as many grapes in that hour as *one* of the first gang manages in ten minutes. But he offers them the same deal....*"go and work for me and I'll give you a day's wages."*



What's all this to do with grace? Surely its got more to do with work? No, look again. Sir C gave them all the same amount. It didn't matter how hard the first lot worked all day they could not *earn* any more. It didn't matter how little the last lot did they could not get any less. What God gives to us does not depend on us, we cannot effect it to earn more or deserve less. We get it because He wants to give it. All we have to do is to agree to follow Him (as these workers all did, away from the village and into the fields where the *harvest* was ready. God calls us to join Him in His work of gathering in the harvest. However hard we work at it is irrelevant to what we *get* from Him.....

If we put the two parables so far together we see that God is willing to give us 'millions of pounds', that is.....an amazing fortune in the Kingdom of Heaven, but we can't earn it.....its all by *Grace*.

As Sir C said*"I am generous!"*

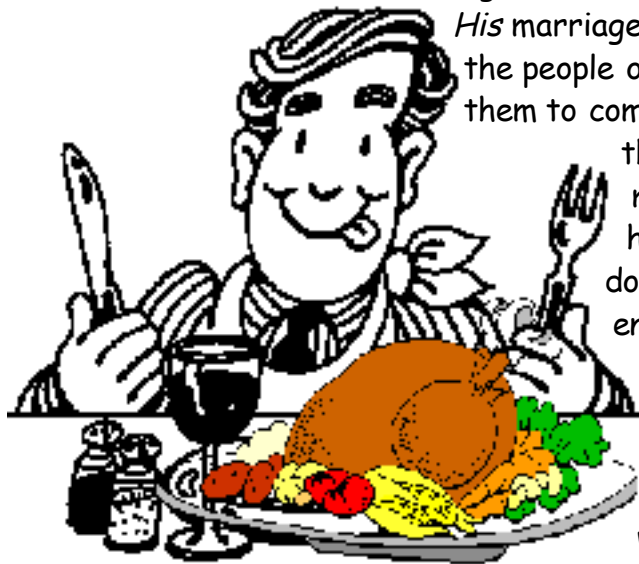
Matthew 22: 1 - 14 *The Wedding Banquet.*

Jesus is just a few days away from His trial and crucifixion. He is looking forward beyond those horrific events to the 'wedding feast of the Lamb'....when He will finally marry His bride, the Church (that's you and me!). But He tells a sad story about that day.....

The wedding is about to happen. The banquet is ready, the tables are laid but the guests aren't turning up!! Imagine what that would be like. It would be like the Millennium Dome and absolutely no-one going for a whole year (the Government were embarrassed enough that 'only' 6 million turned up!). It would be like an edition of *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* in which no audience or competitors came to the studio,

and Chris Tarrant was left trying to phone a friend to get them to come.

This king was preparing for his son's wedding and no-one was turning up. Imagine a wedding that no-one came to...what does that say about your popularity? The terrible thing is....Jesus is saying this about the wedding feast for



His marriage to believers. The first people invited were the people of Israel. Messengers were sent out to tell them to come back to the palace, to return to God. But they all made excuses. Worse...some of them made it very clear it wasn't just that they had something better or more important to do...they hated the king (v.6). The king was enraged.

God was enraged. In the parable the king destroys the people who blanked him. Does God do this? Grace says no....God always waits, looking, hoping (we will see this in the last parable). Again Jesus is painting God as the human king of the story in a deliberately bad light to contrast what a human would do in such circumstances with how God acts. But then again, ultimately, the end for those who reject God is not much different to verse 7...see Revelation 20:15.

But the wedding is about to begin!!! The music is playing. So the king sends out to get *anyone* to come. Were people invited because they were especially good? No. Were they invited because they were rich? No. Famous? No. Friends of the King? No. They were invited because the king wanted bums on seats. It had nothing to do with them, it was because of what *he* was doing. Grace says the invite is not because I deserve it, but because He is offering. *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.* (John 1:12). All anyone had to do was go to the banquet.

Well, not quite. Because one man went but wasn't dressed for it. Isn't that unreasonable? After all, if I'm wandering down the road in my scruffy jeans and flip-flops and get invited to go now to Buckingham Palace for a special banquet, I haven't got time to go home and get something decent to wear have I? So where is the grace here?

It's probable that the custom was for the *host* to provide the clothes. Its like me turning up in casuals and being offered a dinner jacket or suit and saying "Nah....I'll see Her Maj like this thankyou". Well, no I wouldn't. Because they would chuck me out of there straight away. This king not only provided a free meal....and what a meal!.....and an invite to the party of the century, but also the clothes to wear.

What's that got to do with us and God?

He offers us into His Kingdom and says come as you are. But He also then provides us with the clothing, or at least the means of washing our clothing (the white robes of righteousness in Revelation.....*These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. [Revelation 7:14]*). Where do we wash our robes (clothes)? In the Blood of the Lamb. How do we wash our robes? Through repentance. If we are not repentant we have no part in the kingdom of God, imagine how embarrassing it will be to think you have been a Christian and then find out you are kicked out of the kingdom.



Why will this happen....how can I be sure that I won't be kicked out? How do I get the white robes?

One word.....**Grace**. Look at what I said above. I was in Buckingham Palace and I said "I don't need your clothes, mine will do. I can see the Queen in my own way". Nope. I have to receive what is offered in the situation described above and accept that it is only in *her* way and in what she has provided that I can go in. With God, we will never make it by trying hard to do things to please Him, or expecting Him to just let us go



on as we are. We need to **receive** from Him what He has provided....the cleansing of our sins. We need to put on then the clean clothes of righteousness, the character of the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5: 19 - 26). And we can only do this by developing that relationship with Him day by day. We start out as a complete outsider, called in to fill space in the banquet and we end up as the very Bride in the wedding....Grace!

The man in the parable was chucked out because he was still covered in dirty rags, he had not received the ceremonial cleansing and/or the free wedding clothes. We need to receive the cleansing of our sins through repentance and enable the Holy Spirit to develop His character in us. If those are our aims in life we don't need to fear being chucked out! That will happen to those who have lived 'churchy' lives and think they are perfect Christians but who have never even considered spending time with God when others aren't watching.

Grace is not about being chucked out, its about being welcomed in. We need to *receive* it. A religious expert once asked Jesus how we can do this. His answer is our next parable.....

Luke 10: 25 - 37 *The Good Samaritan.*

You see....its all about relationship. **Love** the Lord your God. As you do this you will develop an attitude of love towards others too. The commandment says *love your neighbour*. "Who is my neighbour?" asked this expert. And Jesus tells this parable...

Love flows from God, and can only be truly expressed by those who are in God, who are lovers of Him. The sort of love we mean here is not sexual love (the Greek word is *eros*, we get the word *erotic* from that). This love is a love for all people....and that can only be truly expressed by those who allow the Holy Spirit to flow through them. If you look at people you will probably see they fall into about three categories relating to this sort of love:

- complete servant-hearted people such as *Mother Theresa*.
- complete selfish couldn't-care-about-others people such as *a drug baron*
- people who fluctuate between the two.

I'm going to suggest here that only Holy Spirit filled people fall into the first category because the Bible says *Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble* (1 John 2:10, you can argue with me later if you want). The second category are godless people (see 1 John 2:11), and the last category is filled with people whom God is calling to and need to hear His voice to be able to fully respond to Him....we need to reach them (some may well be Christians, probably most of us fall into this category! But many will not be 'saved' or even consider themselves Christian, yet they reflect some of the heart of God).

Its about time we took a closer look at the parable.....

Here we have a man (let's call him *Clarence* this time) going about his normal business when he is ambushed and mugged. The robbers were category two people, they didn't care about others, were only interested in material gain and had no regard for God or His ways. Clarence is left dying in the gutter. (*Ok, so they didn't have gutters then, stop being picky*).

Jesus illustrates his parable again using shock tactics. This time it isn't God who comes off badly, but His people. First there is the Priest.

Priests were the chosen of the chosen of the chosen. They had to be Israelis obviously. Then they had to be Levites (one of the tribes) and then they had to be from one particular family of Levites....Aaron's. Only Priests were allowed into the most holy parts of the Temple, and only one priest (the High Priest) was allowed right into God's Presence, and that only once a year. Jesus was saying that this guy was someone who should be reflecting God more than anyone else on earth. He was supposed to be category one for certain. But what did he do? He avoided the dying man because he

thought it would make him unholy and he wouldn't be able to do his priestly duties. These had obviously become more important to him than reflecting God's love for people. *People are more important than any other earthly thing we have or do or are.* That's what it means to love your neighbour...to put him/her in place of your own activities.

Then the Levite comes along. Still a special guy, his job would be to look after the things of God in the temple. To make sure it was all in order for worship. A worship leader, if you like, preparing the way for God to be able to speak through the Priest. Now worship leaders are supposed to be people who touch God's heart and please Him, but this guy had forgotten what pleases God and ignored the person crying in the ditch. Can a true worship leader be a category three person?

In another parable Jesus talks about the sheep and the goats, and when we help a person in need we are actually helping Jesus too (see Matthew 25: 31 - 46). Both the Priest and the Levite failed to help Jesus.

But now we come to the act of grace. When Clarence saw him coming he probably thought....*no hope here. This guy is an enemy, his lot hate us and we hate them. He might even kick me to death, or see if there's anything left to rob.* But grace is so often the unexpected. Sam comes over and looks at Clarence and starts to talk to him. He goes to his kit bag and gets out his first aid kit and begins to patch him up. Next he gives him a lift to the nearest hotel.

That's pretty good, don't you think? When they arrived Clarence was probably thinking he'd be dropped off, Clarence would have to find some way of getting money sent to pay for a night's rest. But no. Even more grace appears. Sam pays. Not just for a meal and a bed, but he pays the innkeeper to look after Clarence and get him better. And he says he will be back to check its been done properly and to pay anything else that needs to be paid.

Grace....the unexpected. God is on the look out for people left to die. He is ready to pick them up and put them back together, and to lavish good things onto them. We have nothing when we are in that condition, we can give nothing back. But God is going to pay the bills for us anyway!

But God is also looking for people who will act like Sam did and care for others at cost to themselves. We've gone from the first parable when Jesus taught us to forgive people over and over again.....that is, our reaction to people we know, because on the whole the people we need to forgive are people we know.....to this one where He teaches us to do good things to people out of the blue.....our reaction to total strangers.

I have told this story before, but its worth sharing it again. Back in the summer I was travelling home from Devon on a train. It was a peaceful journey on a Saturday evening. I had a paid a £3 upgrade to be in 1st class. At Woking a group of twentysomethings got on and sat on all the other seats around me, making a lot of noise, swearing and talking. It was fairly obvious they had not paid to be there (and may not have had any tickets at all!). My normal reaction in such a situation is to get annoyed and start thinking things like "I hope the conductor comes down and chucks them all off" but I foolishly started to think *What Would Jesus Do?* and I realised that when the conductor came He would say "Its ok, they are my friends, I'll pay for them". I then started to chuckle because I realised that this would be so unexpected that they would end up talking to me and asking why I did it and I would be able to share the gospel. Even though it saved me nearly 30 quid I was in the end a bit disappointed that the conductor didn't come back through the train before London.

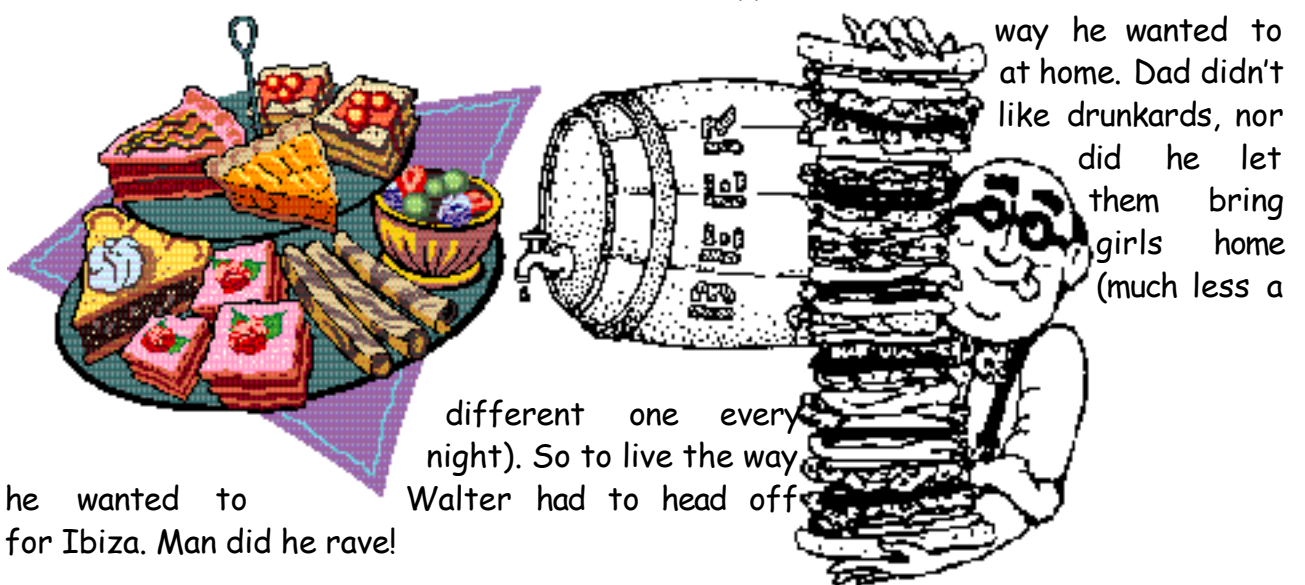
Who is my neighbour? Anyone God brings into your life today.....

Luke 15: 11 - 32 *The Prodigal Son.*

This is such a good picture of what we are like, and what God is like. The typical human reaction to God is "give me the good bits, but let me live life my own way". Whenever we try that we end up where this son did....in the pigsty. Life needs to be lived *God's way*, there are no short cuts or better ideas. You can't use God just as an insurance policy to get to heaven, whilst enjoying the 'fleshpots' of earth.

This parable makes that clear. To do it his way the son had to get a long way away from the father. Let's look at it more closely.

There'd probably been a family row. Mr Wheel agreed sadly to give his youngest boy Walter his inheritance and off Walter went. He couldn't live the way he wanted to at home. Dad didn't like drunkards, nor did he let them bring girls home (much less a



he wanted to for Ibiza. Man did he rave!

The first year was great, by the second he knew the scene well and the regulars knew him. They especially knew that after five pints and a few snorts he really lost it.....and would start paying for everyone. Of course, when he woke up the next day he could never quite work out where all the money had gone to, but there was always more in the bank.

Until one day there wasn't. Worse, he had already spent what he had intended to take out....so now he was in debt too. And worse still, that night he got drunk again and got even more into debt. And the next night. And the next.

And when the bills started to come in and he asked some friends to help him out.....suddenly his friends didn't turn up at the Tavern that night. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Meanwhile, back at home, his dad knew all this. Of course, he didn't actually know the details. But he did know the sort of thing that would be happening because he knew that once you reject God's way of life its a downhill slope. And so day by day he would look out for his son to be trudging home from the station....one day, soon, maybe, but *one day*.

The father knew the waste. The father knew the recklessness. The father felt the rejection. The father felt the humiliation. But he was ready. Not to say "I told you so". Not to get angry. But to love. And to celebrate.

Verse 20 is one of the strongest pictures of grace in the Bible. Read it:

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

That is what God feels about you! Whatever you've done, wherever you are, that's how God feels about you!

The son expected to live in the servants hut. he expected to have to work to get fed. he expected to be no more a son but a slave.

But grace is unexpected....he got back the position he'd had before, the love he'd rejected. The father even starts spending on him, even though everything the father had to give him had already been squandered!

What about the other son (let's call him *Ferris*)? The faithful one, the one who lived God's way all along.

Do you ever get envious when a new Christian seems to have more excitement about

their faith than you do? Yet God says (v31).....everything He has is there for us! Its not that He loves us less, but since we are living with him day by day He expects us to just use the things He has for us. After all, do your parents expect you to ask for permission every time you want a drink of water or to sit on the sofa? Of course not! Ferris's problem was that he had forgotten what was his by right and had become bogged down with work. He had forgotten he was a son too!

Both extremes are wrong.....to run from God, and to get so involved in God's work (the harvest field = the mission we have) that we no longer spend time with Him and receive/enjoy all the good things being with him bring.

It is amazing grace to think that everything that God has is OURS!! (verse 32).

Where are you right now?

◇ **Like Walter:**

- sitting having an argument with God and deciding to run away?
- miles away enjoying the lifestyle of the lost?
- recognising that you are bankrupt and need to go back to God?
- celebrating back in the Father's arms?

◇ **Like Ferris:**

- working hard for God but forgetting all about the relationship you have with Him?
- living a day by day relationship with the Father as you do His will in your life?

If you aren't where you want to be.....its time to sort it out right now!

The Miracles

Matthew 8: 5 - 13 *The Centurion's Servant.*

We've been talking about grace as the unexpected. But also there needs to be faith to be able to receive it. This centurion (*Major Need*) came to Jesus *totally expecting* a miracle. Why else would he come?



And notice too that it was his servant he was coming on behalf of. Now, Roman Officers were well trained, knew about war and death, and shouldn't really have been getting over attached to their servants. He was risking a lot too.....chances were this Jewish teacher would refuse to even talk to him, an unclean Gentile....and then he'd have

lost face in public, and if news of that got back to his superiors.....

The Major addresses Jesus as Lord.....the Jewish leaders didn't do that. Occasionally they might say *teacher* but never *lord*. This centurion had reverence for Jesus.

Having recognised Jesus as lord, and therefore more important than himself, he doesn't tell Jesus what to do "...go and heal my servant..." instead he just tells him the problem: '*he's paralysed and suffering*'. Jesus says He will heal him. Grace! All the servant was probably expecting was a lingering death, maybe to become a street beggar. Perhaps his master might go out and get a drug to relieve the pain. But now he is to be healed.

The Major did not want to waste Jesus' time....he knew Jesus did not actually have to be physically present. It is the Word spoken by God which accomplishes the work.

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.
(Isaiah 55:10,11)

And so we see grace mingled with faith....it is faith which makes it possible for us to receive grace. This is one of the greatest examples of faith in the Bible, very matter of fact. No begging or pleading, just "if You say so I believe it, thanks". I wonder how many people missed the works of grace that could have occurred in their lives as Jesus walked by, because they had no faith to receive it.

Mark 3: 1 - 6 A healing on the Sabbath.

Sometimes we know what we should do but don't do it because people are watching and they might laugh at us or call us names. this is an occasion like that. There were people in the synagogue that day who wanted to find reasons to get Jesus arrested.

But there was also a sick man (*Percival*). His hand was shrivelled. There was very little work in those days available to a person without the use of both his arms, so this man was probably a beggar. It was believed that beggars and others who were crippled were under God's judgment. Either they or their parents must have sinned in some way to need this punishment. It was a wrong view of God's character. Jesus was here to correct that wrong view.

Of course, He could have gone up to Percival quietly and said "come to the ministry room at the side, and I will pray for you". He could have sent Percival away healed and

no-one would have known what had happened. But Jesus wanted to demonstrate God's grace fully...not just to Percival but also to all the people who thought it was God's will that Percival was an invalid. So *even though* He knew it would give ammunition to those who wanted to get rid of Him, Jesus made a public spectacle of this healing. He gets him to stand up in the middle of the service....poor old Percival didn't know what to expect.....Grace brings the unexpected.

What had God said about the Sabbath Day? In Exodus 20, in the 10 Commandments, we read this:

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Fairly obviously this tells us that the seventh day (or the one day in seven) is to be holy...set aside for God. It also says we must not *labour* or do *our work*, or indeed any work. What exactly is work? That was the question Jewish scholars had argued about down the centuries, and come up with a quite ridiculous set of rules. It was ok, for instance, to walk about wearing clothes (necessary weight), but if there was so much as a pin attached to those clothes (unnecessary weight) then you were doing work and breaking the commandment.

But the commandment actually talks about work in the context of *labouring*. That is, the daily grind. Fishermen were not to fish, carpenters were not to carpent, farmers were not to farm, bakers were not to bake, etc. Instead, they were to cease their daily activity and devote the day to rest(oration) physically, mentally and, most importantly, *spiritually*.

Jesus was trying to make this point. In other places He says

You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? (Luke 13:15)

The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27)

If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." (Matthew 12: 11,12)

But they refused to listen to His teaching.

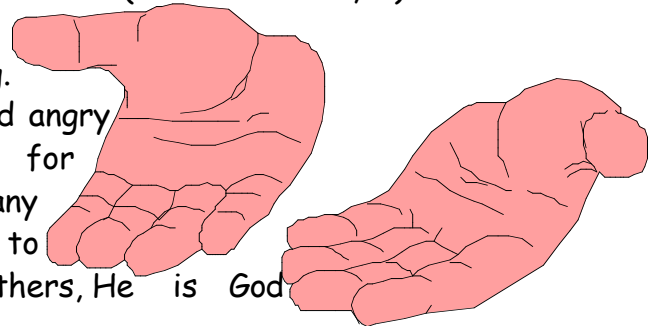
That is one thing which always makes God angry

He has painstakingly spelt it out for

people...the Good News of Grace. But so many

deliberately *refuse* to listen, let alone to

hear. But even though He was angry with others, He is God



of Grace, and grace poured out that morning in the synagogue. Percival felt a warm rush through his body, his hand uncurled and his arm became strong.

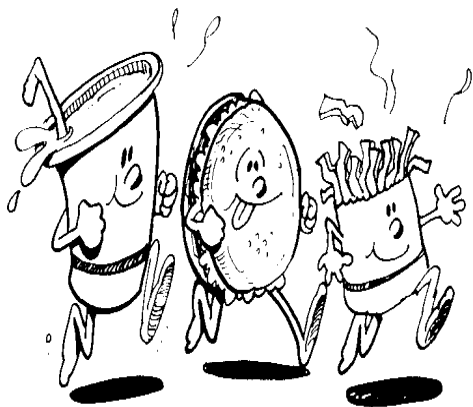
Did Jesus break the commandment? Can a man heal in this way? No! It was God's work, not that of a human being. Jesus was merely the channel through Whom God worked. (*Let's not get tangled up in Jesus is God but Jesus is human just here!*)

Matthew 14: 13 - 21 Feeding of 5000.



Did you miss it? At the beginning of this passage: *When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.* How many sick were in that crowd? We know there were 5000 men, besides women and children. Hundreds maybe. And Jesus healed them all. And all the Bible says is that one line; it was so *ordinary* for Jesus to heal that only a few special instances are recorded, and they are recorded in order to teach us something new. On this occasion, it wasn't the healings that God wanted to speak through. But they are nonetheless acts of grace.

At the end of the day what did the crowd expect? A long, weary trudge home with rumbling stomachs, crying children (and, boy, can hungry children cry!) and probably no time to make much of a meal before bed...its hard to cook when its dark. But Jesus is Lord of Grace and Truth, and He acted in grace to bring out another truth.



The Christian ministers said *send the crowd away before McDonalds closes.* But God said...*stay around, there's more.*

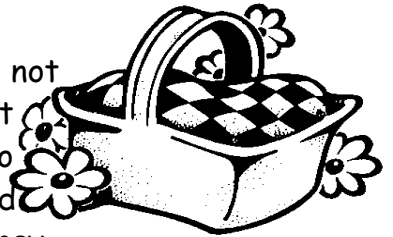
Jesus told Him disciples to feed the people. Simple as that, and its one of the great commands of the Bible. God wants us to feed the people, so that the people will know God cares. Sometimes that feeding will mean physical food (most of the charities looking after the homeless for instance are Christian ones), often it will mean feeding them with God's word and with love.

But what can I do? There's only one of me and there are so many homeless, so many orphans, so many drug addicts, so many

But Jesus shows us. We can gather together what we have between us and we can give

it to Him. He then uses it as we could never have expected. There's a story like that in the Old Testament, it actually seems quite harsh if you don't understand what God is saying through it. Read it in 1 Kings 17:8 - 16. In this story the woman announces she has only enough left for one meal for her and her son and then they will die. Elijah says something like "Sorry to hear that, give me the food". I don't know about you but I would have run him out of there and died angry and incensed, as well as sad and miserable. But this woman *did* give him the food...and then God blessed her through Elijah.

You see, when we offer God the little we have that could not possibly solve the problem, He blesses it and multiplies it and makes it possible for us to do what he has called us to do. And the disciples had more at the end than they had gathered together in the first place....they gave up what they had and they got far more back. That's a grace principle too. The seed that was sown in Matthew 13:8 produced a crop of up to 100 times more seed than was started with. Grace is extravagant!



Notice too that *everyone* was invited to this banquet....men, women, children, believers or not. There were probably some of the Pharisees out to trap Him in the crowd, but I bet that didn't stop them satisfying their hunger. God doesn't withhold grace from anyone. Jesus even washed Judas' feet at the Last Supper, remember.

Mark 7: 24 - 30 *Gathering under the Table.*

So if grace is for everyone, what's this story about? This woman (*Agabel?*) literally has to beg for a scrap of blessing, doesn't she?

Well, she *thought* she did, and so Agabel begged. But what would have happened if she had approached Jesus in the same way as the Centurion did in the earlier story? I expect He would have granted her request just the same. We think so often we have to beg God for grace, but that is ridiculous. What we have to do is to come to receive it.

But Jesus called her a dog!! That was ruff, wasn't it? Well, it wasn't as nasty as it would be today. All Gentiles knew that they were nothing as far as the Jewish religion went, and Jesus was saying that until the New Covenant came in, grace was on offer to the Jews. But notice He is saying "Jews first" not "Jews only". The day was coming when grace would be poured out for all, through the blood Jesus would spill.



Agabel effectively says "give me today the bread of tomorrow" which is a fairly literal translation of Jesus own words in the Lord's Prayer. And grace is pouring out

onto earth the riches of heaven....giving us today on earth what will be available in heaven.

As Agabel prayed in this way, so she received. Her faith met with God's grace and enabled the deliverance from the demon. It was a bold prayer, that would not take no for an answer.....because somehow she knew that Jesus would not be saying no to her, she had heard and learnt that He is God of Grace.

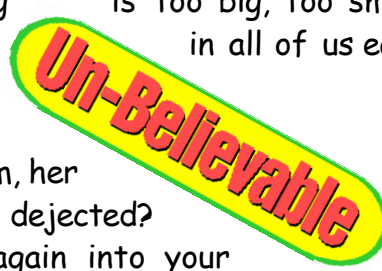
Luke 8: 49 - 56 *Jairus' daughter.*

Jairus was frantic. His daughter was dying, and he knew it. The doctors could do nothing. Maybe she was diabetic, today she would get insulin, but then there was nothing. He had pleaded at Jesus feet, and Jesus was coming, but then he'd been interrupted and got sidetracked on some old woman and surely He realised how urgent this was and that it was his only daughter and if You don't hurry Lord it will be too late and then someone comes and says it *is* too late and she's dead.

But Jesus doesn't take "too late" as an answer. There is never a too late with Jesus. Even if we repent on our death bed, we are received by grace into heaven. The fact that our life was wasted on sin is forgotten. This girl was dead.....but it wasn't too late for grace.

You see, grace is not a small word. Its big. Big enough to heal. Big enough to feed 5000+, and big enough even to raise the dead. And if you think about it, you will see that *raising the dead* is the main work Jesus came to do....to raise the spiritually dead to new life in Christ,

Your daughter is dead. Don't bother the teacher any more. "It's no bother" says Jesus. You can't bother God! Nothing is too big, too small, or too late to bring to Him. He wants to work grace in all of us each day. He wants to pour it on us moment by moment.



When Jesus walks into her room, her stands up. Are you down and dejected? spirit. Receive Him by faith again into your

spirit returns and she God wants to renew your life day by day.

Luke 17: 11 - 19 *Ten lepers.*

The religious leaders did not recognise Jesus' authority, but the sick did. Leprosy is used throughout the Bible as a symbol of sin and its effects..... it slowly creeps through the whole body, cuts a person off from others and ultimately brings death. These lepers were united in their illness, men from both sides of the border, Jew and Samaritan. If they were well they would never have been together, but sickness breaks

down some of the silly barriers we build up....if you are dying you will talk to anyone who will listen!

These men did not come close to Jesus. The bible tells us to draw near to God, but they stood their distance. Like so many others through history, they wanted what God could do for them, but weren't prepared to get involved with Him long term. Of course, as lepers they were supposed to keep away from other people anyway....but this story is in the Bible to teach us things, and one of the things it teaches is what happens to those who just use God for their own ends.

Jesus knew their hearts, and He recognised that they were not ready to respond to Him, they were only ready for what they could get *from* Him. Normally in such cases He did not respond, for all the miracles we read of there are others that did not happen. For instance, in John 5 there were a great number at the pool of Bethesda, but only one man was healed. Jesus saw his faith, and recognised that he was someone who was drawing near to God.

So why did Jesus heal these ten lepers? If they were just going to get a blessing and clear off, what was the point? Because Jesus saw that one of them had a heart for God, and needed a gentle touch to draw him into the kingdom. On this occasion His act of grace would include all ten of them, all ten were healed as they went to the priest. Even though nine of them would probably never draw near to God, and their healing then was only temporary lasting for this life but no longer, He still gave them that healing.

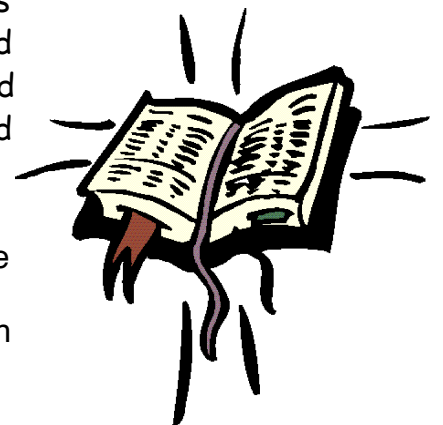
But one man, when he recognised the power of God at work in His life came back to thanked Him and worshipped Him. And because he did this Jesus said to him "your faith has made you well".

HANG ON A MINUTE! Didn't is say that *all of them* were healed. If only one of them had faith to be made well how were all of them healed? 'Fraid to say, its time for a little Greek lesson. English Bibles often don't get across the full strength of the original Greek. You probably read this in the NIV or *Youth Bible* translations....if you did you will see there *is* a difference between verses 14 and 19. The Authorised Version makes it clearer:

14: And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.

19: And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.

The Greek word for 'cleansed' (v14) is.....καθαριζω (KATHARIZO) and it means cleansed in the sense of washing, or even to be made clean



from sin. All ten of them were cleansed in this way. Because leprosy was considered to be a 'dirty' disease, this means that all ten of them had the leprosy washed from them and they were no longer suffering from it. A work of grace.

However, in v19 we are told the Samaritan was 'made whole'. This is σοζο (SOZO) and it means to be made whole physically, mentally and spiritually. Its the word used in the New Testament when the English bibles say 'saved'. Someone who is saved is "sozo'd". Jesus was saying to this one man....your faith has saved you. He had drawn near to God and he was now in the Kingdom. The way to receive salvation is by coming to Jesus with a thankful heart and worshipping Him, its the start of a new life. Your sins are forgiven (Katharizo); you worship Him and you are saved (Sozo). All you have to do is receive and be thankful.....the rest is grace.

Luke 8: 43 - 48 *The woman with long term bleeding.*

Many people say they can worship God in private. "Who needs to go to TFG or church? I can worship Him without anyone else knowing!". Well, no you can't. Because if we are truly worshipping Him then it will be a life changing experience, and you can't change your life without people noticing! This woman tried it, but Jesus wouldn't let her get away with it.

Jesus was in a crowd, a local celebrity called Jairus had got his attention, what hope was there now for a poor sick woman (*Emma Roydes*)? But she had heard about Him....if she could get close enough without others noticing, maybe she could receive her miracle after all.

She wasn't very strong. She had suffered for 12 years, probably since her youngest son had been born. It sapped all her energy... she'd spent all her money on doctors and their latest cures, but none had worked. Even her friends had deserted her "You must be some big sinner Emma, or God wouldn't have done this to you". She was lonely, miserable and desperate. But she was also nearly fainting with just trying to keep up with this crowd. Slowly she inched forwards, getting more and more bruised as she squeezed past the ones at the front. There He was! She reached out her hand and...nearly.....just.....a bit....more....GOT IT!

As soon as she touched his robe she leapt back as the shock wave went right through her. Somehow she knew she'd got what she came for and she turned and began to back out the way she'd come. She was grinning like a Cheshire Cat and felt she could run for miles for the first time in years. Then she heard Him.

"Who touched me?". Quietly at first, to those around Him then louder and louder. The crowd stopped chattering, shoving. They stood still. She froze. He knew! She turned slowly, the disciples were arguing with Jesus, Jairus was pressing Him to come

quickly.

His eyes locked on to hers. She burst into tears and told Him the whole story, the pain, the suffering, and her faith that just a touch was all she needed, not to trouble Him more than that. If she had known she had to do that she would never have come.... to stand in front of all these people and publicly give a testimony! And yet she wasn't scared now. As she had touched Him she had felt His touch. That power wave healed her, but it was also a wave of great love and warmth. Somehow she was safe telling Him everything, even in public. And He smiled. He declared her to be healed, to be whole (yes, He said *Sozo* again). She had reached for Him for healing and received the Kingdom. Her faith had saved her.

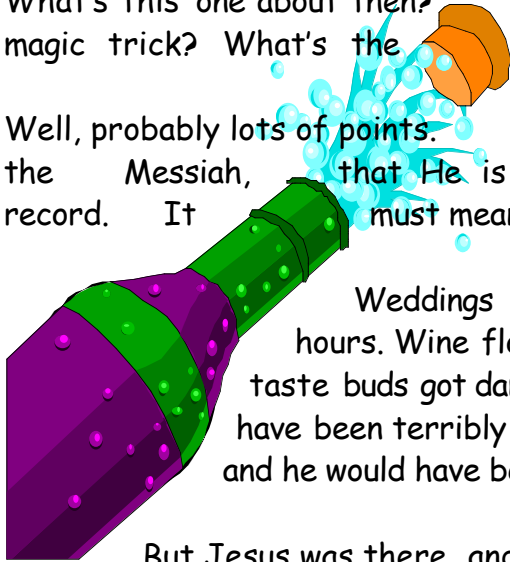


She expected a healing, grace gave her that and salvation too. And with that came something equally wonderful...12 years of worry and fret and ridicule and now Jesus granted her peace (a lovely Greek word....εἰρήνη.....eirene). Much more than she had bargained for!

John 2: 1 - 11 *The wedding feast.*

What's this one about then? Of all the miracles, isn't this one just a party magic trick? What's the point of it?

Well, probably lots of points. John wrote his gospel to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah, that He is God. This is the first miracle John chooses to record. It must mean something don't you think?



Weddings lasted a long time...the feast went on for days not hours. Wine flowed. The best wine first, then cheaper plonk as the taste buds got dampened. But on this occasion it ran out. That would have been terribly embarrassing for the host....an insult to the guests and he would have been called cheapskate.

But Jesus was there, and His mother had faith in Him already. Have you ever heard it said "Huh! Christians are boring. Christianity is a list of *thou shalt nots*...you can't have fun if you are a Christian"? Well, Jesus proves that's wrong. He is literally the life and soul of this party.....it would have ended if He had not been there. But He was....

The jars were full of water, and the water in them was used to wash peoples' feet when they arrived. It had been used to do that already..... Each jar contained about 20 to 30 gallons of water, there were 6 jars. We aren't talking about a couple of bottles of wine here!

For me the amazing thing is that the steward gave some of the water to the host to taste (would you have?!). Not just ordinary wine but the *best* wine. Jesus doesn't just do the ordinary. One day there is going to be a marriage feast in heaven. On that occasion Jesus is the host and the Bridegroom. It will be no ordinary party!

Where is *grace* in all of this?

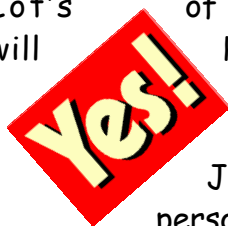
Jesus was concerned about ordinary events like weddings. He didn't want the party spoiled. He announces to the world "I am here and I am here to bring joy and life". That's *Good News* to a sad and dying world. The *Good News* we have is the news of *Grace*, available here and now....for free.

Next time someone says "Christians are boring" remember this miracle (or *sign* as John calls it).....and get *God* involved in the situation to bring *grace* to that person.

Matthew 8: 1 - 4 *Another leper.*

It's a similar situation to last time. Just one leper this time though (*Bertram*). But this time the leper comes right up close from the start. He recognized the need to draw near to *God*, and saw that this was *Someone* different, *Someone* you didn't have to keep a distance from whatever you were like. So he kneels at Jesus' feet and puts himself at Jesus' mercy. He had faith *You can make me clean* (*Katharizo*). He *knew* Jesus could do it. The question was, *would He?* Was Jesus willing to do it?

Let's of us suffer from that problem. We don't doubt that Jesus can heal....but will He? And would He do it for me anyway...I can believe it for someone else, but not for me.



Jesus says it clearly: *I am willing*. And He always is willing to meet the person who approaches Him in faith. We need to let Him do in us and with us what He wants to, but we also need to come to Him knowing that he is good and has only good things to give us and to do in us. That is *grace*. He will never hurt us!

Isaiah told us about Him:

A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory.

(Matthew 12:20)

Bertram was cleansed immediately; the ten were only cleansed as they went their way. Jesus never seems to repeat miracles in the same way. He does not want us to believe there is some magic formula, there isn't. You may have been told you have to pray "Come Holy Spirit" or hold their hand when you pray for them or only pray if someone

is standing or whatever but God does not work to formulas....He wants us to do what we see Him doing, and each time it will be different.

Bertram knelt before the God of grace, and received grace.

Matthew 9: 27 -34 *The blind and the dumb.*

The chief purpose of grace is to open our eyes to the Truth of Jesus, that we might see Him and glorify Him and live with him forever....He wants to be with us more than we ever want to be with Him. The healing of the blind is one of the main ways the Bible teaches us that God wants our eyes open to the Truth, so that the Truth might set us free.



These blind men wanted mercy....they wanted to see. In order to receive sight they had to believe. As believers, they were able to receive grace, in the form of healing.

Why didn't Jesus want them to tell others? Surely its good to get the message out to as many as possible? Surely its good to get publicity?

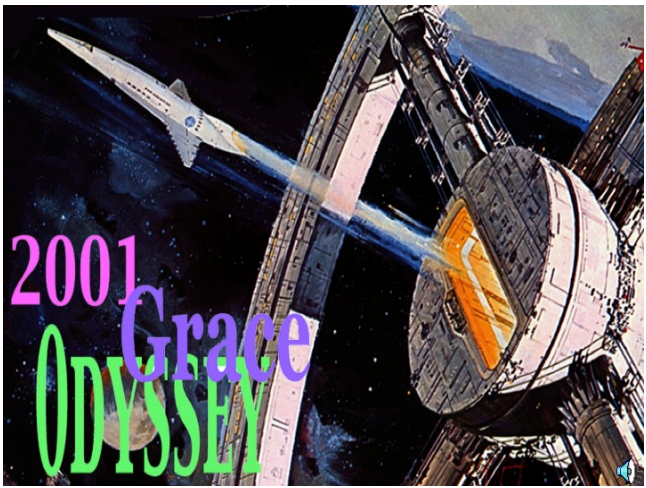
Only if its the *right* kind of publicity. Jesus never wanted publicity for miracles. He wanted the message to get out....love your neighbours....love God....repent. He didn't want people to come on a hunt for a thrill-a-minute miracle worker. He acted when He saw God's heart reaching out to people who were ready to receive grace, not just a miracle. The miracle was only an outward sign of *grace* working *inside* invisibly. I shudder today when I see posters saying 'come to a miracle crusade at....' because that's still not the message. Yes, miracles happen. Yes, there are amazing healings taking place today. But the message is still.....*repent, get saved (sozo)...receive grace.*



Jesus wants us to take the Good News of Grace and restoration to God to a hurting world. Not get them excited about miracles. The miracles might well *follow* the preaching (Mark 16:17, 20) but should never be the *focus* of the preaching.

The two men leave, their eyes blinking in the sunshine for the first time, and in comes a demonised man who can't speak. Jesus frees the man from the power of the devil, demonstrating that grace is more powerful than any other force on earth. The people were amazed....they'd seen demons driven out before, but not like this. They recognised the power present in Jesus. Power that was used for good, and to bring God's grace to people.

And that is exactly what God wants us to do today too. We are the Body of Christ, so we should also be people who bring grace to the lives of those around us. How can we do that? That was the focus of the Saturday evening talk: Thanksgiving/Forgiving/Giving



The talks from this weekend can be found on our Weekends Podcast stream which you can access from tfg.lumin.org.uk



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