**New Hope Sermon -- Empowered by God’s Free-Flowing Grace** 12/ 22 /21

**Introduction**

At Christmastime we celebrate that Jesus, the Messiah, the Incarnate One came “full of grace and truth.” (John 1:12) And when we know Him, His grace becomes ours as well. It is what plugs us into the nature and power of God. In 2 Tim. 2:1 Paul tells Timothy to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The Passion Translation of this is:

**Live your life empowered by God’s free-flowing grace which is your true strength, found in the anointing of Jesus and your union with him.** (2 Tim. 2:1)

This holiday season, with all the emphasis on material celebrations and presents and the hype about happy families that may or may not be the case for millions, I want us to go deeper into what God’s grace can mean to us as we draw from this amazing well of God’s love.

**Grace Awakening**

Check Swindoll speaks of “Grace Awakening” in his book by that title. He believes God wants each Christian to be more “grace conscious,” “grace aware,” experiencing a “grace awakening,” so we become “grace-full.”( C. Swindoll, *Grace Awakening*, pp. 197–98.) The gift of the Holy Spirit in each believer’s life is for this very purpose: to lead each Christian deeper into the meaning and experience of His grace.

Philip Yancey describes what that awakening looked like in his own life:

Grace comes free of charge to people who do not deserve it and I am one of those people. I think back to who I was—resentful, wound tight with anger, a single hardened link in a long chain of ungrace learned in family and church. Now I am trying in my own small way to pipe the tune of grace. I do so because I know, more surely than I know anything, that any pang of healing or forgiveness or goodness I have ever felt comes solely from the grace of God. I yearn for the church to become a nourishing culture of that grace. Philip Yancey, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* Zondervan, 1997, p. 42.

This year it is likely that people in many parts of the world will come, to this season, because of Covid, broken, disillusioned, lonely, grieving and desperate to experience the touch of God’s grace. When God’s people can “pipe the tune of grace”, in Yancey’s words, it will offer those around them a glimpse of God’s “healing, forgiveness and goodness” in a way they may never have understood before.

The beloved Western Christmas carols which are the bedrock of the gospel story all celebrate God’s grace in the birth of Christ and the gracious offer of salvation he brings. “Joy to the world” is an example:

Joy to the world! The Lord is come; let earth receive her King. Let every heart prepare him room and heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing and heaven and heaven and nature sing. . . No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found, far as, far as the curse is found. He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove the glorious of his righteousness and wonders of his love and wonders of his love and wonders, wonders of his love. (words Isaac Watts, music George Frederick Handel)

The theology of grace is woven through such carols and far outweighs the message of the secular songs of Christmas like “Santa Claus is coming to town,” “Jingle Bell Rock,” “Blue Christmas,” “Have yourself a merry little Christmas.” “I’m dreaming of a white Christmas” or the newest pop songs I don’t even know. May the truth and wonder of the traditional Christmas carols never be lost.

However, with grace as our theme this day, I want to include two other hymns to the traditional line up of O Come All Ye Faithful, Mary Did you Know?, Angels We have Heard on High, Silent Night etc. These are “Amazing Grace” and “Grace Alone”. Many people know the words and tune of “Amazing Grace”. It was written as a personal testimony by former slave trader John Newton. It tells of the transformation grace brought in his life – from being blind to being able to see, from fear to faith, from despair to hope. And all this happened because Jesus came to earth and brought salvation. This well-loved hymn globally is not normally used as a Christmas carol, but it could easily be.

The same could be said about another hymn “Grace Alone”. The words of this hymn need to be sung out-loud in our Covid-stricken, broken world – all because of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – the One who came “full of grace and truth.” Life and hope and healing and comfort are available to all who turn to Christ in faith. In fact, the words to the hymn are so profoundly applicable this year, I want to submit it as the Christmas carol of 2021. The words describe how to be “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”

Grace Alone:

Every promise we can make, every prayer and step of faith, every difference we will make is only by his grace. Every mountain we will climb, every ray of hope we shine, every blessing left behind is only by his grace. Refrain: Grace alone which God supplies, strength unknown he will provide. Christ in us, our cornerstone, we will go forth in grace alone.

Every soul we long to reach, every heart we hope to teach, every where we share his peace, is only by his grace. Every loving word we say, every tear we wipe away, every sorrow turned to praise, is only by his grace. Refrain. (words and music: Scott Wesley Brown and Jeff Nelson)

**Conclusion**

May the fullness of God’s grace revealed in the Christmas story make you “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim.2:1) since every believer has been given “every spiritual blessing in in Christ” (Eph.1:3). May we find our strength in His free-flowing, abundant grace. As the suffering and tragedy mounts through Keith’s descent into the belligerence and irreversibility of Alzheimers continues, this is certainly what I need. You each have your own area of suffering and hardship as well. For Christians and not-yet Christians alike living in God’s free-flowing grace is the only true source of hope, peace and good will. Lord, help us live this out this year by the power of Your Spirit. Amen.

 Dr. Mary Lou Codman-Wilson, Pastor

 New Hope Global Fellowship Christmas 2021