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SERMON TITLE: A beautiful Picture of Grace
SCRIPTURE: Acts 26:1-32
DATE: July 24, 2022
Online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Before reading the sermon read Acts 26:1-11.

Sean laid the backstory for our Scripture this morning. Paul describes himself as a man filled with malice which he directed toward people who believed in Jesus. It was now fifteen years or so after Jesus left the earth and his movement was denounced everywhere. (Acts 28:22)

Paul displayed the antithesis of grace. He was cruel, harsh, hard, vengeful, seeking revenge—the most severe he could get. He denounced Jesus and his followers. He chased them down, even to foreign countries. He tried to make them curse Jesus. He was living in darkness.

The very opposite of Paul would be the man of grace.

What difference does grace make?

Grace –

- Giving thanks for your meal
- Giving favor or honor, especially by a superior. The mayor graced us with his presence.
- Disposition to or an act of kindness or mercy. Jesus was full of grace and truth.
- Treating someone better than they deserve
- Overlooking glaring mistakes
- Heals, like pouring salve on a wound
- Changes lives and brings hope

Paul was on trial before Caesarea's newly installed procurator, and Festus got with it on Paul's trial. Because he was the newly appointed governor, King Agrippa and his wife Bernice visited him. They were there several days, so Festus shared Paul's case with King Agrippa, and the king wanted to hear Paul himself. They both sat for his hearing. He shared all that Sean read earlier: his cruelty, his harshness, his hard attitude and his vengefulness toward the Christians. He shared his darkness.

Isaiah talks about people reacting to Jesus in this way. Isaiah describes peoples' resistance to God as resistance of the heart. It goes like this:

- Their hearts were calloused;
- They could hardly hear with their ears;

- They could not see it because they had closed their eyes (Isaiah 6:9-10)

The point is they were stubborn and rebellious. They were biting the hand that feeds them.

That was who Paul was. Can anything change that man?

Paul was educated
He excelled in knowledge
A top student – successful
He was religious, or so he thought

But he could not hear anybody who believed in Jesus. He was blind to it. He had one vision of life and it was crooked. He was rebellious and bitter. He looked at Jesus and determined he was a menace to the world. His followers needed to be done away with.

John Calvin wrote, "Paul was so puffed up with pride that he thought he would conquer Christ."¹

The Bible describes such people:
Though seeing, they do not see;
Though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

The result of such bitterness is a loss of wisdom, understanding and perception. This person's heart has become calloused and they simply become imprisoned by their unwillingness to change.

God says, if they could or would turn, I would heal them.

This is depressing! Paul lived in a dark place of bitterness, stubbornness, rage, and revenge. His training and expertise blinded him to the truth! How does God handle this? Let's read the testimony. READ Acts 26:12-23

You would think God would have been done with him. God would judge him, or curse him or certainly God would not reach out to him! You know there are some people who just cannot change! Not you, of course! 😊

No, Paul could not change himself.

But God ignored his opposition. God overlooked his glaring mistakes. Jesus disregarded his radical behavior; his unbelieving heart; his rage; his oppression of others; his dark offenses against him. This is amazing! Instead, Jesus personally intervened in his

¹ John Calvin, "Acts" in The Crossway Classic Commentaries, series ed. Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995), p. 391.

spiritual blindness, making him physically blind so that he could see! That's amazing! That's love!

He caused him to look at the brightest light—Jesus' own resurrected presence, so bright it blinded him. Jesus' living, physical presence was so powerful that Paul could not stand before it. There was no doubting the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. Paul saw Jesus.

Calvin says that the thought that our physical bodies can be renewed after death, "after we have been reduced to nothing" is a mystery far beyond our understanding. But we "should remember how far God's infinite power reaches, and not what we comprehend." But often we do not want to see that power at work—it is scary, and so we limit our faith and our prayers to what we understand.²

Jesus caused Paul's closed ears to hear the truth. "Why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to fight against deity.

Paul was fighting God! Paul was going to lose the battle because God is full of grace!

Everything showed that Jesus was deity, and that Jesus was resurrected.

Paul couldn't change himself but Jesus had intervened into his spiritual deadness, and changed him. His new mission? He would turn utterly around and do the opposite. "He would open Gentiles' eyes (that's us!) so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then they receive forgiveness for their sins and are given a place among God's people who are set apart by faith in Jesus" (Acts 26:18).

And so in that courtroom that day, Paul was not so concerned with his own imprisonment. He was so grateful he told everyone about this grace from God. He testified to those highest officials in the region, and his witness caused this response. READ Acts 26:24-32

Paul expressed grace. Do you struggle to express grace? Would you like to express grace in your relationships? Jesus can change you.

How do you see the concept of grace? **Grace is . . .**

- Having the disposition to act in kindness or mercy toward others.
- Treating someone better than they deserve.
- Overlooking glaring mistakes.
- Grace heals.
- Grace changes lives and brings hope

Grace reflects the unmerited mercy of God. For as God exercised incredible grace toward Paul, God exercises that same grace toward you. God's goal is for you to share in the power of the resurrection. Those who draw close to Jesus will not only be saved, but will be able to give it, just like Jesus.

Or, are you waiting until another day, like King Agrippa?

"As it is said, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.'" (Hebrews 3:15). The reward—the grace—is too great!

AMEN

² Ibid.