

No List, No Checking It Twice
Acts 9:1-9
7th In Series Of Great Themes Of The Bible
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Today, we continue our review of some of the great themes found throughout the Bible.

We have looked at Creation and concluded God did it, all of it.

We have asked about Sin and what was sin before the Law was given—and we concluded that sin was anything that separated us from God—and it usually had a component of selfishness and self at its core.

We asked how can we know it's really God in action when we read of great acts in the Bible—and the answer is look for water, that symbol; of life and providence.

We wondered why Israel was chosen as a people, only to realize God chose them for a job and sent them to a chosen place—the promised- land.

We looked at God's intent about us from the beginning, that we were always to be in relationship with God and that we were to love our neighbors. And, we saw how God has never stopped trying to get us back together, as it was in the beginning.

We considered the fact that God did not make us robots but gave us free will, meaning we have to choose.

Themes found early in the Bible!

Themes that continue throughout, making it impossible to separate the Old Testament from the New.

Themes that are parts of one book, one gift, meant to be taken and understood together.

Today, I want us to consider the theme of grace. None of what God has done for us has been earned. We do not deserve it, yet God has showered us with an abundance of riches, that never end, gifts that just keep coming to our awareness.

Who knew about penicillin before the 1930's?

Who used uranium for anything before the 1940's?

Who knew about a computer or an electric car or a rocket to the moon?

Yet, it was all here, waiting to be discovered, waiting to be used. God's providence is overwhelming. God put so much here and haven't begun to find it all.

And, we did not earn one piece of it, and we do not deserve it. It is a gift. God loves us, and God can't help it. Just think how you shower loved ones with gifts. And then compare your abilities to give with God's. Grace—God's gifting us, God's giving to us, God choosing us, God enabling us, God blessing us. All gifts!

Today, we are going to study this idea of grace through two men. Each was given an unbelievable, incomparable gift by God. Neither deserved it. One was a murderer and in hiding,

hoping he wouldn't be caught. The other was on a tear against Jesus, chasing Jesus' people to foreign countries, arresting them and bringing them to trial and death just because they followed Christ, just because Christ didn't fit his image of what a messiah ought to be.. Neither one sounds like a candidate for God to do something great through, but that's the beauty of God. He can take flawed people, damaged people and turn them and restore them and use them for great things. Even you! Even me!

Let's listen to both stories. You'll know the people and you'll know some of the story, but have you heard this part of their story lately? Let us listen for God's word for us.

Exodus 3:1-12

- 1 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.
2. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.
3. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."
4. When the Lord saw that he had gone over to the bush, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am."
- 5 God said, "Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals for the place where you are standing is holy ground.
- 6 The God said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.
- At this , Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.
- 7 The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.
- 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.

- 9 And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me; and I have seen the way the Egyptians
are oppressing them.
- 10 So now, go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.
- 11 But Moses said to God,
"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"
- 12 And God said,
"I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

The Word Of The Lord!

That was the story of Moses—in hiding —way away from Egypt, married into the family of Jethro, the Midianite, tending his flocks. The next story is of another familiar man. Let's listen again.

Acts 9

1. Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.
He went to the High Priest,
 2. and asked for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.
 3. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.
 4. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, why do you persecute me?"
 5. "Who are you Lord?" Saul asked.
 6. I am Jesus whom you are persecuting," he replied.
"Now, get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do."
 7. The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.
 8. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus.
 9. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.
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15 But the Lord said to Ananias,
"Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles
and their kings and to the people of Israel.

17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it.
Placing his hands on Saul, he said,
"Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were
coming
here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.
18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again.
He got up
and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

The Word Of The Lord!

This time the man was Saul, before he became Paul—he was the persecutor of the early church—out to get those he thought believed wrongly, out to purge the Jewish church of infidels, at least he thought they were according to his expectations. After all, they were damaging the church he worshipped, which was not the God of all. How could Saul miss that God had come to him, had stood right in front of him, had preached to him. Hardly a worthy candidate to be given a great gift by God, but he was.

And did you notice the one thing both had in common—neither man earned it.

Moses became the greatest leader Israel ever had. He rescued Israel from slavery, he trained God's people, he brought them to God and he brought God to them, he even led Israel for 40 years to the very edge of the promised-land. He was given a job, he was called to it, he was given the tools and wisdom necessary to do the job, and God walked with him, every step of the way. What Moses got on the edge of the world in Midian was a gift, it wasn't earned. Moses was favored by God, and the favor was freely given. Same thing with Saul, God's greatest evangelist ever. Suddenly accosted on the road, freely chosen, freely gifted, highly favored by God. But he didn't earn it.

We hear these stories and we know what the Bible teaches about grace, but do we believe it? Do we practice it ourselves? What do we tell our children about Christmas? Or, the Easter bunny! Santa's first words at Miller & Rhoads were: Have you been good? AS if being good had anything to do with gift of Christmas! Somehow, we dreamed up the idea that If you're bad, coals and ashes are all you will get. That's grace redefined as something earned--works. It isn't. It can't be. We can't make God do what

we want God to do. Let's get Christmas straight: we give gifts because we love so much, not because anyone was good or bad. And we have developed the myths of Christmas, like Santa, to have a concrete way to show our young ones what grace is, how it works, that it's a gift given for no reason other than you love the person you gave the gift to. In time, when our young ones can understand ideas and concepts, we are supposed to sit with them and explain that what we were doing was to teach them about grace, to show them in a concrete way what all the fuss about Christmas is really all about. And, if we don't have that talk teaching the wee ones what Christmas is really all about, then it is no wonder they doubt the other parts of our faith and leave the church—we have put a lie in their hearts and we have watered down the greatest thing God ever did, giving us life through his son.

From beginning to end the Bible is a story of God's showering of grace upon us:
in the creation,
in the providence that never ends,
in the forgiveness of everything we do to separate ourselves from God,
in our salvation where God even came to us and allowed his son to be
our sacrifice that we might live,
in establishing and paving a road to be walked into eternal life.

Grace is living with God in us, so we can stand anything that comes. Grace is being chosen, grace is being called and tasked, grace enables us to believe and to become one with God. Grace is the only thing that justifies us to God, not our works. Grace enables the receipt of spiritual gifts and the Holy Spirit so that we can use the gifts we have been given. Grace is being forgiven and encouraged, and helped up when we have fallen. Grace is Christ walking with us, showing us the way, keeping us in the light, opening us to the truth of God, Grace enables the life that can be so special. Grace brings us peace, knowing that nothing can ever separate us from God's love of us. Grace is God waiting for us when this life is over. Grace is our gift, everyone's gift, if we will but say yes when Christ passes by.

Today, in this moment, in this room, through your computer, Christ is passing by again! Make this gift of grace personally yours, today! You can say no, or you can tell God, I'll catch you later, and the grace-train might not stop at your station. And it may not come by again. Don't let this time pass. The kingdom of God is passing by—right now.

This concept of grace, freely given, reminds me of a story I have shared with you before. Once there was an old woman who lived by herself. Each year her family and friends showered her with presents. Beautifully wrapped! Bright ribbons! One day I

went to see her. There were presents everywhere. I asked about them—why haven't you opened them. Her answer: I have all I need. she just shrugged her shoulders and went on to something else. Presents, just sitting there, unopened! The one thing we can never buy or make or earn is God's gift of grace. It has been given, but we can be like my old friend and let the gift just sit there, unopened, unused. All she had to do was open the present, but she had all she needed. Not really! God's gifts of grace, of life, of forgiveness, of a second chance, of new hope sits all around us, waiting to be opened. God will never stop trying, but there are only so many days. Won't you open the gift?

I entitled this sermon: No List, No Checking It Twice—Got it?

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