

March 2nd 2014 1 Peter Series #11 "Agents of Grace" 1Pet 4:7-11

Sometimes as a preacher, I turn to a passage of Scripture and straightaway there is a verse or a phrase that jumps out at me crying, Preach Me. Such was the case with 1 Peter 4:10

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms

Here we are being instructed as believers, To be faithful stewards of God's Grace in all its various forms, to others....What an amazing privilege!

Think with me for a moment about the meaning of this instruction. **Whose Grace are we talking about?** God's Grace. Not mine, not yours, but God's.

Whose responsible for distributing this grace in all its various forms to others? Stewards commissioned by God to do so faithfully.

Who then has God commissioned to be those faithful stewards? Just Pastors, or Elders, or deacons, or spiritual A graders? Every single believer from children upwards. Every believer is to be, and can be, an Agent of God's Grace. **But what is this Grace we are to be stewards of?**

We have sung a bit today about the saving grace of God.

Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

Wonderful grace that gives what I don't deserve, pays me what Christ has earned, then lets me go free.

There's nothing I can do to scare your grace away. No foolish thing I do, no foolish thing I say. Under the shadow of a cross, under a shower of grace; I feel the Father's healing hands and touch His smiling face.

But that is the Grace that only God can give us, for it is the Grace that Christ won for us on the cross. It is that special Grace that changes both our heart and our future forever. We can talk about that Grace and point people towards it, but the HS is the Agent of Saving Grace.

But as well as that Grace there is the grace which is the kindness and goodness of God poured out on all people in so many ways, and that is the grace that is more in mind here. We see it in the beauty and provision of

creation in all its great variety. And we also see it in the way God delights to touch the lives of all with happiness, comfort and joy through His children using their gifts to bless the lives of others. This grace that Peter is speaking about here is the loving touch of God's hand upon some person's life as given through the words, acts, attitude, prayer, or compassion of one of God's children.

Just recently I have been blown away by the thought that God delights to bring joy into the hearts of all people, and not just those who acknowledge Him. Last year Judy and I were on a whale watching cruise out of Exmouth and there was only a small group of us on the boat but there was a large number of humpbacked whales about. And I looked at the faces of those around me who were staring at the water waiting for a whale to emerge, and when one launched itself out of the water there was a burst of joy expressed by everyone. Who caused that joy? The creator of the whale of course.

At times I watched as someone has taken that first bite of a perfect peach and I've known by the expression on their face that it was just beautiful. And the pleasure it gave was a gift of God.

In both cases you could say that these were agents of God's Grace to human beings in a simple way. And God desires that those who are His children are Agents of His Grace to others too. That we have this overwhelming desire to bring joy to others, to help others, to comfort others, to encourage others, because our Heavenly Father is the giver of Grace and we are His stewards.

And in doing this we want God to somehow gain the glory. That's our hope. And the bridge to that hope being fulfilled is our trust in God to do it. We don't know how God will turn an act of kindness on our part into a proclamation of His love to someone, but we trust Him to do that.

I know this Pastor who heard of someone who was very sick in hospital and seeing that person had visited his church at Easter and Christmas and because he felt prompted by God to do so, he visited her. Their conversation was OK and after he had gone the person thought to themselves, 'Well that was very nice but I can't really work out why he thought he should come to see me.' But God had other cards to play and a little while later God caused her to become a Christian and then she was able to tell that Pastor when she saw him next, 'Now I know that it was God who sent you along to my hospital bed that day'.

I know of a Christian lady who was on a train and she saw a fellow passenger who just looked alone, and a little lost. So she started to chat with her and found out that she was fairly new to the country and had yet to really settle down here. They exchange telephone numbers and sometime later that lady attended church with her new friend and discovered Jesus.

For us to be agents of God's Grace we simply set out to bring some joy into the situation of another—it may be by being a friend to someone, or taking bread to them after the service, or caring practically for another Christian—and we trust God to bring what He wishes out of it.

But there is a time limit on these instructions that Peter gives. He begins in v7 by saying: "The end of all things is near". Christ could return very soon, and therefore you need to be Agents of His Grace now. And of course that applies even more to us today. We need to use the days we have been given, and we need to use them well.

It's interesting to note that the word Peter uses here for steward:

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms

Is the same word Jesus used in the following parable that he told in response to a question from....guess who.....Peter. Luke 12:42-46(NKJV)

And the Lord said, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?" ⁴³ Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁴ Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. ⁴⁵ But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, ⁴⁶ the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.

Strong words which basically said that God has given believers a task to do and we must do it well

And doing it well says Peter involves:

1. A clear minded and disciplined prayer life. We need to pray regularly for God to use us and very definitely for those that we are seeking to be Agents of God's grace to.
2. Loving others deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins. If we are working at loving others within the church and outside the church then we can expect it be hard at times. People will let us down, reject us, and take advantage of us. But deep love continues because it forgives a multitude of wrongs done against us. Jesus loved Paul the Apostle and kept on loving him enough to pursue him on the Damascus road, despite the way Paul was treating believers and rejecting Jesus. That's the example of deep love we are to follow.

Peter then mentions offering hospitality to others as a practical example of how believers should be Agents of Grace. 'It might be hard for you to open your home and offer a meal to others' he says, 'but put yourself out and do it without grumbling'. Do it as a steward of God's grace to others.

This being Agents of God's grace can take many forms and that is why it is a task that is open to every believer. It can be speaking. It can be service. It can be offering hospitality. It is usually setting out to give someone a taste of joy and doing it as an Agent of God's Grace. And the most wonderful thing is that it usually gives us as much joy back as we give out.

Last Thursday I told the Over 55's group of an opportunity that very morning to be an Agent of God's Grace to a young fellow who comes to our breakfast club.....

Yet the one major thing I have discovered as I have watched so many Christians setting out to be Agents of God's Grace to others is the fundamental need to hand our lives over to God so that He can use us. To say to Him in the words of our final song this morning:

Take my life and let it be
Consecrated Lord to Thee
Take myself and I will be
Ever only all for thee.

When we do that first and then seek to live for Jesus, I believe we will be amazed at all the opportunities God puts before us to be His Agents of Grace to those around us.

