

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

“Hear then His voice today. Perhaps you are made aware of the necessity of a change of heart and life, at some future period, in order that you might die safely. Such a change is equally necessary if you wish to live comfortably now. As long as you are unfit to die, you can have no true enjoyment of life. It is an easy thing to prove that procrastination is highly dangerous. Do you consider how many uncertainties you must presume upon? Are you sure that you will not be suddenly cut off by an unexpected stroke, or visited with fever? Tremble lest such be your end, if you are trifling with God, who is now calling you by His Gospel to seek Him today.” [John Newton]

www.sermonaudio.com/crc

www.unholycharade.com (blog)

www.lightfordarktimes.com (blog)

Christ Reformation Church – YouTube Channel (Light for Dark Times)

Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners

March 9th, 2025

Sermon Text: Romans 5:20-21

Scripture Reading: Romans 6

This past week in our Romans study we considered the last two verses of chapter 5-

Romans 5:20-21 Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, (21) so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And in particular we spent some time looking at that phrase – *grace abounded all the more*. This is such a vital doctrine that I wanted to do a kind of follow up on it so that all of us might give very careful and thankful consideration to a truth which John Bunyan was so struck with that he titled his biography from this phrase – *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*.

In order to illustrate this subject, let's read the parable of the Prodigal son which the Lord Jesus told. The setting is this:

Luke 15:1-2 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. (2) And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

And so, for the comfort of the sinners and for the rebuke of the Pharisees and scribes, the Lord told 3 parables –

- The Lost Sheep
- The Lost Coin

- The Lost Son

Luke 15:11-32 And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. (12) And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them.

(13) Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. (14) And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.

(15) So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. (16) And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

(17) "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more

than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!

(18) I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. (19) I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants." (20) And he arose and came to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. (21) And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

(22) But the father said to his servants, "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. (23) And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. (24) For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." And they began to celebrate.

(25) "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near

to the house, he heard music and dancing. (26) And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. (27) And he said to him, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound."

(28) But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, (29) but he answered his father, "Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. (30) But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!"

(31) And he said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. (32) It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found."

The Apostle Paul, like John Bunyan, regarded himself as "the chief of sinners." He had zealously

persecuted Christ by persecuting His people. He intended to stamp out what he considered to be this new blasphemous heresy, and in doing so he acted “ignorantly in unbelief” because he thought he was serving God.

Acts 9:4-5 And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” (5) And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

Paul came to realize that his Pharisee religion had it all wrong. The OT scriptures which he thought he knew so well, much of which no doubt he even had memorized, turned out to be a closed book to him before Christ removed the scales of unbelief from his eyes. Literally everything he had believed, everything he practiced, his whole world – was wrong. But now -

Matthew 13:52 And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house,

who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

What an earth-shattering, world-shaking, mind-blowing and explosive event this must have been for this one-time Pharisee and enemy of Christ! *He had had it all wrong! He was not serving the Lord, he was persecuting Him. He was not a servant of Yahweh, he had been an enemy of Yahweh.* And so, for instance, when Paul says things like this:

Romans 5:10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

Colossians 1:21 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds...

...he includes himself. “Once your enemies, now seated at Your table...” – as that hymn puts it.

NOTE: This realization, this radical re-boot of the mind in the new birth, is something which is

not unique to Paul. To some degree, lesser or greater, a real Christian knows something of this. Having been reborn, re-created by Christ, he or she understands that they had it all wrong. That they had been the enemy of God, enslaved to the devil, hostile toward God's Word. Now they see everything in an entirely new light. Do YOU know anything about these things? Saul of Tarsus became Paul the Apostle. Have you been born again?

Here then once again is our text for this morning:

Romans 5:20-21 Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, **grace abounded all the more**, (21) so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Grace abounded all the more. Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

If you watched the mid-week study video on this text, you will recall that we looked at this word which is translated by the phrase "abounded all the more." What abounded? *Grace*. Unmerited favor from God. His saving love even for the chief of sinners. *Grace in Christ which ALWAYS abounds over sin for the believer.* [This is not license to sin as Paul will demonstrate in chapter 6, but actually a powerful motive for holiness].

The word which Paul used here is:

"huperperisseuo"

You recognize that highlighted prefix here – "huper" – which is like our "super" or "hyper." The word it is prefixed to – *perisseuo* – by itself means "to be in great plenty, abundance and fullness." But that was still insufficient for what Paul is trying to tell us here, so he put this "super/hyper" prefix on it. It means: *to be very high on a scale of amount, to be in great excess and abundance.* It occurs here and in just one other place in the New Testament –

2 Corinthians 7:4 I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am **overflowing** with joy.

“Where sin increased, grace superabounded, much more abounded, abounded beyond measure, overflowed, engulfed so as to drown out everything else.”
(credit to Lloyd Jones for these synonyms)

Paul states the same concept elsewhere, using different words:

Ephesians 1:7-8 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, **according to the riches** of his grace, (8) **which he lavished** upon us, in all wisdom and insight

Knowledge of this is the thing that kept Paul going. If he had not been enabled by the Lord to understand this super-abounding quality of God’s grace in Christ, Paul would have been paralyzed, frozen in

guilt and shame, a prisoner to the memory of his sin-blackened past.

And I suggest to you that to a greater or lesser degree many Christians are stuck in their sin-blackened past because they have never seen what Paul is telling us here:

Where sin increased, graced abounded all the more.

Grace has drowned out the beleiver’s sin, engulfed it in an overwhelming flood and washed it away.

Psalms 103:10-12 He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. (11) For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; (12) as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

Do you understand this? I propose to you that none of us comprehend

it fully and that perhaps even some of us are paralyzed in shame.

And this brings us back to the Prodigal son –

Luke 15:18-19 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. (19) I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.””

Is that you? It certainly at times is every Christian until we remember –

Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

Are you a child in the Father’s house? An heir? A beloved son? Or do you regard yourself as just a servant who uses the back door entrance so as to avoid eye contact with the Master?

It is not arrogance to realize that we are children of the Father, heirs of His promise in whom He delights.” It is reality. And all the glory for it goes to the Lord.

Think again of this prodigal son. His sin was indeed great. Very great. He arrogantly made demands upon his father and then wasted his inheritance on vile, evil living. He was *profligate* which means-

“completely given up to dissipation and licentiousness : shamelessly immoral”

And worse than all of this, he had betrayed his father’s love, despising all the benefits he had enjoyed at home. He set off into the world, going to a “far country” so as to separate himself from his father as much as possible. This sad story continues to play itself out in families today.

And what does a prodigal receive from that world, in the end. The pig pen. Abandonment by so-called “friends” when they can no longer benefit from the prodigal’s money. And do not miss this:

“This account of the Prodigal son coming to his senses and repenting, returning home in contrition, is not the norm. It is absolutely rare.”

Most prodigals never come to their senses and many of them die in a ditch somewhere – all die in their sins and receive hell as their wages. The wages of sin is death.”

This, then is a miracle. It is the Lord – no doubt in answer to the father’s prayers – it is the Lord who brings this foolish son to his senses – even the pigs were eating better than him. So he begins to think of his father and the home he had left. He knows that he deserves nothing at all – that surely his father would never again own him as his son. But perhaps he could just be a servant there. He decides to go home and ask to be a servant.

This is true repentance. Do you know anything of this? The father in this parable is of course, God the Father. The prodigal is US. WE have gone to the far country in our sin. The sinner wants nothing to do with God, except for provision and funds to pursue sin. YOU were born into this world in *a far country-*

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins (2) in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— (3) among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Have these things ever been brought home to you by the Holy Spirit? Have you ever realized that your life apart from Christ is like wallowing in a pig pen of wickedness? That you deserve nothing at all from the Lord except hell?

But...if you are born again, if you were drawn by the Father back home, *what did you find when you arrived there, knowing you deserved nothing, perhaps only to be a servant? What did you find?*

Luke 15:20-24 And he arose and came to his father. But while he

was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. (21) And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ (22) But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. (23) And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. (24) For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.

THIS is what the Apostle Paul is telling us here in Romans 5 –

“Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”

Super-abounding grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love. You were met with a great celebration and the embrace of the Father:

Luke 15:7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over

ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Luke 15:8-10 “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? (9) And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ (10) Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Isaiah 1:18 “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

In Christ, Christian, you are as white as snow – even if your past is as bad or worse than the Prodigal or that the sins of Saul of Tarsus. In Christ and because of Him, your sins have been washed away – as that old little Sunday School chorus goes – *buried in the deepest sea.*

Do you know this? Do you really know it?

I recommend that every Christian listening today read this Scripture – memorize it even – and thoroughly digest it in application to yourself:

Luke 15:21-24 And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ (22) But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. (23) And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. (24) For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.

Are you a servant, or a son? When you finally grasp this –

Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more

-then you will really begin to understand what our Father in heaven has done for us in His Son.

For others listening who might still be dead in sin, over in that far country doing all you can to distance yourself from God – *do you think that your sin is too great to be forgiven? That you are too vile to ever be received by the Lord and welcomed into His house?* Then you are believing a lie. John Bunyan was the chief of sinners – the worst sinner in town. The Apostle Paul was another chief of sinners. So was Martin Luther and countless others. Yet when they came home they were met with the Father’s super-abounding grace. You will be no exception. Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.