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**OUTLINE**

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To find our way in the darkest night

- I. Let Your light shine on us
- II. Let Your grace fall on us
- III. Let Your love come over us

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**INTRODUCTION**

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We did not get to finish last week. We said that God's attitude toward mankind is seen in three ways; first in His **light** to guide us, second in His **grace** to give us joy and pleasure, and third in His extravagant **love** for us. We talked about light but did not have time to talk about His grace and love for us.

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**GRACE**

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In the online Wikidictionary the word grace as a noun has several definitions.

1. Elegant movement; poise or balance.
2. Free and undeserved favor, especially of God. Unmerited divine assistance given to humans for their regeneration or sanctification.
3. Divine assistance in resisting sin.
4. Short prayer of thanks before or after a meal.
5. An allowance of time granted for a debtor during which he is free of at least part of his normal obligations towards the creditor. The repayment of the loan starts after a three year grace period.

That same dictionary shows Grace as a verb.

1. To grace; to alight, to land, to appear. For example one could say he graced the room with his presence.

God's attitude is seen in His **Grace**, which gives us pleasure and Joy.

The Greek word for...

Grace *means* to rejoice. Grace, particularly that which causes joy, pleasure, gratification, favor, acceptance, for a kindness granted or desired, a benefit, thanks, gratitude. *Grace is* a favor done without expectation of return; the absolutely free expression of the loving kindness of God to men finding its only motive in the bounty and benevolence of the Giver; unearned and unmerited favor. CWS-NT

Look at the words used to describe this Greek word for grace:

- Rejoice
- Cause joy
- Cause pleasure
- Gratification
- Favor
- Acceptance
- A kindness granted
- A desire granted
- A benefit
- Thanks
- Gratitude

When we think about the Christmas season it should be important that we think about it in the context of the **grace** of God brought to mankind. Think about grace as described above as we read the account of the Angel's announcement to the shepherds.

Luke 2:8-14 (NIV)

[8] And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. [9] An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were **terrified**. [10] But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. [11] Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. [12] This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

[13] Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, [14] "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

This was not just an announcement of fulfilled prophecy but this was the announcement that God has come to earth to share...

- God has come to earth to share His rejoicing at the thought that once again He can have full fellowship and relationship with mankind who He created to share His love with.
- God has come to earth to share His joy.
- God has come to earth to share His pleasure.
- God has come to earth to share His gratification.

- God has come to earth to share His favor.
- God has come to earth to share His acceptance.
- God has come to earth to share His kindness toward mankind.
- God has come to earth to share His desire for mankind.
- God has come to earth to share His benefits with mankind.

When we look at the end result of God's coming to grace us, we see a cross and a grave. In these we see all the suffering and pain that anyone has ever gone through and God did that because He loves us. Through the cross and the grave God shows us the resolve of his love and desire to give us grace. But there was also a resurrection, an empty tomb, and in these the grace of God has become possible. In these symbols of pain and humiliation relationship and fellowship have been restored. In these symbols are the true meaning of pleasure and joy in our lives. The trimmings of the tree and happiness of the Christmas season are only a temporary reminder of the possibility of a joy and pleasure that can be everlasting. God's love can never be solely seen in these temporal things.

C.S.Lewis said, "God allows us many pleasant inns, but we must not consider them our final destiny. God allows for visions of sugar plums to dance through our heads, but He would not want us to imagine we were born simply for those transient moments of contrived pleasure. He intends something far more satisfying, enriching and fulfilling."

So what are our hearts focused on this Christmas season of 2008?

Go to court some day and sit in on a criminal trial. In some cases you will see how a seemingly act of love can be turned into a terrible crime. Look at the trial of Jesus and the cross He endured and you will see a terrible crime become an act of love. Sometimes the bad things in our lives are revealed as acts of love from God, but at the time we go through them they seem terrible. Later on though we see His love for us.

Before the Christmas season as we know it had been developed there was a much deeper meaning to the Christmas season. To see it though, we must go back to the very beginning.

Luke 1:26-33 (NIV)

[26] In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, [27] to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. [28] The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

[29] Mary was **greatly troubled** at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. [30] But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. [31] You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. [32] He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, [33] and he will

reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”

A bit later when Mary realized what was happening to her she gave one of the most expressive descriptions of God’s grace that has ever been given.

Luke 1:46-55 (NIV)

[46] And Mary said: “My soul **glorifies** the Lord

[47] and my spirit **rejoices** in God my Savior,

[48] for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me **blessed**,

[49] for the Mighty One has done **great things** for me— holy is his name.

[50] His **mercy** extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.

[51] He has performed **mighty deeds** with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

[52] He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

[53] He has **filled the hungry** with good things but has sent the rich away empty.

[54] He has **helped** his servant Israel, remembering to be **merciful**

[55] to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.”

Look at the words she uses to describe her joy as she considers the grace of God that has come to her.

This came from a young woman who had her first child in a manger with the cold wind, the stench of animal droppings, and no help except from the rough hands of a carpenter. Yet it was the greatest moment of her life. Why? Certainly not because of any of the trimmings we might think we need to have pleasure and joy. She was filled with such joy because the grace of God touched her life. That same joy would soon be available to all of mankind but it had to come through desperate circumstances, torture, pain, death and a grave. God’s grace is seen, not in the trimmings of life that bring us temporary and temporal joy. God’s grace is seen in the price He paid because He loved us. That price is seen in the forfeiting of His divinity to become a mere man. That price is seen in the everyday circumstances of living a normal life here on earth. That price is seen in the cross. The cross was not just an instrument of sacrifice, judgment, and appeasement. The cross was the grace of God endured to bring an end to all suffering and pain. God loves you and I more than we could ever imagine. He waits for us, not to become perfect, but to run to Him as a helpless child in trouble. He does not condemn or judge us, He only loves us.

The source for any grace in our world comes from Jesus Christ.

John 1:14-17 (NIV)

[14] The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of **grace** and truth.

[15] John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'"

[16] From the fullness of his **grace** we have all received one blessing after another.

[17] For the law was given through Moses; **grace** and truth came through Jesus Christ.

There is the possibility for grace in our lives here on earth. You mean to tell me that we are supposed to have pleasure and joy in our lives? Yes but the world has convinced us to go about seeking pleasure and joy in a wrong way. The world would have us seek our own way to find pleasure that temporally satisfies our emotions and feelings. The world has taught us that the things of this world are what give us pleasure and joy, but in my experience I have discovered that they only give temporary pleasure and joy. The only things in life that have ever given me lasting pleasure and joy are the meaningful relationships I have had. And when I lose something or it grows familiar with time or wears out I do not miss it. But when I lose a relationship it hurts beyond description. Relationships are the most meaningful and valuable things in life, they are the things that give us true pleasure and joy. That brings us to Love.

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## *LOVE*

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God's attitude is seen in His **Love** for mankind. We could say that **Love** shows the divine attitude.

Matthew 1:21 (NIV)

[21] She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

In the announcement to Joseph the Angel proclaimed that this baby that Mary would have, would save people from their sins. Little did Joseph and Mary know what that really meant, for some 33 years later Mary would witness the deepest pain of her heart, and the greatest expression of Divine love, when she would witness the torture and death of her baby boy, Jesus. Does God have an attitude of love toward sinful mankind? Oh yes He does, for He paid the ultimate price. He gave up His divinity, became a common man, was despised and rejected by all of mankind, was tortured and died on a cross, and was buried in a grave. But He went through this painful expression of His love for us so that we could be free from the penalty and grip of sin in our lives. You see after being in the grave for three days, He came out of that grave and ascended into heaven.

God did that, not to condemn or judge us, but to show His incredible love for us. He loves us and calls us, not into some conformity to rules and regulations, but into a loving relationship where He guides us through life. We need only to believe in Him and enter into relationship with Him. To understand this relationship we need only

look at the actions of the life of Jesus here on earth. Look at how He treated others; look at how He bids us to treat others. That's the relationship He wants.

The parable titled the Prodigal Son is one of the best portrayals of the love of God the Father that we can find in the Scriptures. We often look at it from the perspective of the two sons and their relationships with the father but there is a different way to look at it. Read it some time this week. It is found in Lk 15:11... In it you will see the Father's Love for you.

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## *CONCLUSION*

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I love the Christmas season. I am the first in my neighborhood to get my decoration up and I make sure they are up before Thanksgiving so that there is a reminder of the greatest thing we have to be thankful for is represented in my front yard. You see the greatest thing we have to be thankful for is the Incarnation. I spend hours decorating my house each year and I make sure that those decorations show those who see my house, that this is not just some holiday; this is a celebration of the incarnation of Almighty God. This is the season to celebrate the possibilities of what God can do in our personal lives, in our families, and in our world if we will let Him. The Christmas season is always special because it shows us God's attitude toward mankind. God's attitude toward you and I is seen in His Light to guide us, in His Grace to give us pleasure and joy in life, and in His incredible Love for us.

Listen carefully to the words of the song our quartet sang for us last week.

### SHINE ON US

Lord, let Your light, light of Your face shine on us.  
That we may be saved, that we may have life;  
To find our way in the darkest night,  
Let Your light shine on us.

Lord, let Your grace, grace from Your hand fall on us.  
That we may be saved, that we may have life;  
To find our way in the darkest night,  
Let Your grace fall on us.

Lord, let Your love, love with no end come over us.  
That we may be saved, that we may have life;  
To find our way in the darkest night,  
Let Your love come over us.

There is an underlying itch not satisfied with christmas presents.