The Power of Grace

“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, have an abundance for every good work.” (2 Corinthians 9:8)

Way back when, shortly after dinosaurs left the planet, but before cell phones, I was on my way to Nogales, Arizona for a series of meetings. The church there had a fine young couple pastoring and they felt, for some unknown reason, that my presence would be of benefit to them and the church they pastored.

I am always a bit cautious when I travel to speak, knowing that I am not, by brilliance or by gifting, all that some assume I am. I know the truth. They do not. I know that I am just another human, traveling the paths of finite reality in a tumultuous and uncertain world. I know that I have nothing to offer that they could not find from another source, usually in themselves.

As I traveled in my trusty Dodge pickup, I began to hear something. It was faint at first, then grew louder and grew to a screech I could not ignore. So, I stopped, got out and smelled that terrible smell of burning metal and walked around the truck feeling of the wheels, suspecting that it was a wheel bearing going out. Sure enough, as I touched the left front wheel, it was hot to the touch.

I looked around, and discovered, as I already knew, that I was between North Nowhere and South Nowhere, in the middle of Nowhere. I knew two things: 1. I could not make the final 250 miles to Nogales without repairs, and 2. The Dodge dealership in the middle of Nowhere, did not exist.

I had not passed through a town for hours and my map told me the same awaited me if I continued on. Remember now, this was before cell phones, so I was sort of stuck. I did see a couple of buildings in the distance ahead so I decided that I would limp on and hope for the best.

As I neared the buildings, one was an old gas station with a lunch counter to the side. It was not in good repair and no one seemed to be around. But it was my last chance for some resolve, so I drove in beside the café and went in. I asked the lady at the counter if they did repairs, and she assured me that her husband was a fine mechanic but he was not there at the moment. He had gone to town for provisions and a few things. He was probably close to being there by now and should be back in about four hours.

I explained my plight and ordered a hamburger and soda. She shook her head and said it would probably be tomorrow before he would be able to do anything, but I was welcome to park there and sleep in the truck. They had no extra beds.

Then I did the unthinkable. I asked if I might look through the garage and see if perchance they might have a stray wheel bearing. She laughed and said that I should help myself but they probably had nothing of the sort.

I finished my sandwich and she offered to show me the repair shop. It was similarly old and somewhat scattered, with old parts, tools and debris here and there. Cob webs also spoke of inactivity and probably shouted that this was not a major profit center for the couple. But I walked around and there were a few parts in shelves, but nothing resembling a wheel bearing.

I opened a couple of drawers and discovered nothing more than loose tools and some miscellaneous boxes. Then I spotted one that might be the right size and pulled it out. A nearby rag helped me wipe away the dust and sure enough it was a wheel bearing. I was excited, but what were the chances that this lone old dusty part was the right one, out of thousands of possibilities, in the middle of Nowhere, Arizona. It had a part number on it, but it, of course, did not describe the vehicles it would fit.

So, I asked the kind lady if she would mind if I used their jack and a few tools and take the wheel off and see if, perchance, this would fit. She again laughed and told me to help myself. So, I jacked up the truck, pulled off the wheel, took off the hub and found the old wheel bearing frozen to the axel. I made a search of the piles of scattered tools and, yes he did have a wheel puller, and it was the right size and off came the bearing. It was badly damaged, but part numbers were still vaguely visible on the side. I wrote them on a scrap of paper and then opened the old box. Yep, it was the only one there, and it was the right one. He problem then was obvious. If I put this bearing onto the axel on the old damaged race, I was doomed to break down again in short order. So, I started looking. Nothing – except, there was another box in the same drawer as the bearing, but smaller and also dusty to the point of oblivion. But the old rage did its job and I opened the box and sure enough, it was the matching race for the bearing.

I lubed them up, put them on and then decided that I should do the same for the right bearing, just in case. Within about a half hour both sides were greased and ready for the road. I clean my hands and then went back inside to find the nice lady busy in the tiny roadside café kitchen. I told her I was repaired and ready to roll and asked he how much I owed her.

Again, she laughed, “Willy don’t usually charge our friends and neighbors out here and we seldom get a repair job, so I have no idea what to charge. You bought a sandwich, that’s good enough.” I argued that I had found the parts I needed and that this had saved me a lot of time and it was worth whatever she felt to charge. She resisted. She was content that I had found the part and fixed the truck and she was delighted that they were of some service. We entered a politeness contest for a few seconds and then I got out my wallet and put some money on the counter and left. I knew it would pay for the part, but I also knew that there were places along the road that would have charged me more than I had in hand and I needed to bless these fine congenial people.

I arrived in Nogales several problem-free hours later and met with the pastor and his wife and begun our getting reacquainted and preparing for the weeks services.

Grace is not just forgiveness. It is not God’s turning a blind eye to our failure and our humanity. It is the present possibility of the eternal creator God to work for us and through us as an extension of Himself. Grace is God with us. Grace is God through us. Grace is more than a doctrine, it is the active provisions of the Father to those He loves.

I suspect that we, to some degree, have stripped Grace of its meaning by rote recitations of definitions without recognizing the practical power of God’s grace to us and through us. Grace works to abound for us. Grace is sufficient for our need. Grace is the power of the present Creator, working for us, to provide a Divine compensation for our need.

Is it possibly, that we experience the Grace of the Eternal thousands of time a week or a day, without ever recognizing it? Is it possible that He is working for our benefit all of the time but we only recognize it when we are between North Nowhere and South Nowhere – in impossible situations?

I think so. OK, I know so!

Pastor Dave