

Faith and Grace

Welcome to Harvest Community Church

Series: Epic Faith

Text: Ephesians 2:8-9

Stories of great faith are also stories of great **grace**. The Bible is filled with broken and imperfect people who had made costly and sinful mistakes but chose to trust in the mercy of God. Their breakdown became a set up for a turn around. Every one of us who accept Christ as our Savior do so by faith, believing that we can trust God's grace. One of the great Hymns of the church reminds us of what happens when our faith meets God's Grace. "Grace, grace, God's grace; Grace that will pardon and cleanse within."

If you look through the Bible, God used imperfect people to bring about His **prophetic** promises. The very lineage of Jesus from Adam to Joseph is filled with people who were changed by grace. People like Abraham, Jacob, Judah, Tamar, Rahab and David. **Matthew 1:1-3**

~ Samuel Chand – One of the most enduring and endearing truths in the Bible is that God is more than willing to use flawed men and women to accomplish his purposes. That's a good thing because none other kind is available.

It is interesting to note that Jesus is the Lion of the Tribe of **Judah**. Of all of Jacob's (Israel's) 12 sons only Judah is mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus. In Genesis chapter 38 we find out that Judah winds up unknowingly sleeping with his daughter-in-law, Tamar, who had disguised herself as a harlot. (A harlot is not just a prostitute they are a cult-prostitute.) So Judah had disguised his sin to the people around him as worship. His was not only an act of adultery but of idolatry. When Judah discovered his daughter-in-law was pregnant, he became self-righteous. **Genesis 38:24-26**

Just like Judah, all of us have sinned and if left to our own devices, we all could self-**destruct** in a matter of moments with one wrong choice. **Romans 3:10, Isaiah 53:6 Romans 7:18**

God has given us a very clear understanding about our moral standing with Him. Unfortunately, we are very good at condemning others for the very things we do. **Romans 1:28-32** For the Christian, our faith recognizes the vital importance of grace. Grace helps us to see **ourselves** for what we were and who we are now because of the goodness of Christ. Grace causes us to stop passing judgment on others and to do a better job of looking at our own heart. We must never lose sight of why God includes stories like Judah's ugly sin in the Bible. The New Testament message we are called to proclaim is the amazing grace of God to change and **redeem** soiled people. **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**

The devil's specialty is to overwhelm people with guilt and condemnation. He does this to make them feel unworthy. Satan wants to hide the fact that the **mercy** of God is for everyone who has messed up.

James 2:13 (NKV & NLT) God's specialty is taking failures such as Judah and weaving them into the ancestry of His own son Jesus. This does not give us a license to keep on sinning but to know that, where there is much sin, there is much grace. **Romans 5:18-6:7** The genealogy of Jesus continues through Judah to his illegitimate son Perez, Tamar's child. God wants us to know that not only does He forgive mess ups, but He can touch them and heal them and put them in a line that leads to Christ.

May God deliver us all from self-righteous judging and make us **broken** carriers of Christ's salvation and freedom. **1 Timothy 1:15-17** The more humble we are the more we listen to God, the more broken we become, the better the relationship with our spouse is, the better our family is, the better our church is and the better our witness to the world becomes.

~ John Fisher- Real Christians are marked by sincerity- the whole truth about themselves and the whole truth about God. Real Christians stand before people the way they stand before God- Transparent and vulnerable. Anything less is a dressed up gospel.

Grace never sees anyone as **hopeless** or worthless. Forty years before the story of Rahab, God's people made a fateful decision that left them wandering the wilderness for four decades. In unbelief, they decided not to follow God in obedience to enter into His promise because of giants in the way. God allowed all the doubters to die before He entered a new generation into His goodness. God used a prostitute to become a conduit for His deliverance for God's people and her family.

Joshua 2:1-21, 6:20-25

Rahab was one of the most unlikely people to change the course of history. This harlot (a cult prostitute) was new to trusting in God. Her faith helped her to receive God's grace. Many people miss one of the most precious elements of this story; the **scarlet** cord. Just like the blood the Israelites placed on the threshold of the door, the scarlet cord reminds us of the saving power of the blood of Jesus. There was such a massive turn around in her life that she married an Israelite and become the great, great grandmother of King David. Rahab was the mother of Boaz and a mother-in-law to Ruth. Boaz was successful and Godly because the grace of God transformed a brave, faith filled former prostitute. Rahab had trusted the truth that she had been given and God flung open the doors of heaven to bless her and her family.

Rahab teaches us several important lessons about faith and grace:

- Rahab did not allow her **past** to dictate her future. She had been abused by men in her life. She made a good living but she was not looked at well by other women. Many people are paralyzed by fear and resentment because of what they have suffered. They develop a victim mentality and can be filled with anger and hurt that becomes a corrosive influence that erodes their life. Rahab's story is filled with hope and courage. She saw a way out and took it. She was an outcast but she became child of God.
- We begin to **see** people through God's eyes. How often do we walk past people who are morally or physically dirty because we don't want to touch them? We walk by wounded, ashamed and dirty people every day. We need eyes to see the Rahab's around us and believe that God can heal, transform and save them.
- Compassion will **cost** us something. Compassion is good, right and noble. We have to realize that caring for people always has a price tag that is worth it. Stopping to mend broken hearts and shattered lives requires an investment of time and other resources. Many Christians do not want to pour themselves into people that are unclean.
- We gain by **giving**. **Matthew 16:24-26** We rise by bowing to serve and we are filled when we pour ourselves out to God and others. Augustine captured what becoming like Christ really means when he said, "True transformation happens when powerful people become humble and timid people become bold". Those who experience God's forgiving grace are changed forever.