

The Year of Grace

by T. Austin-Sparks

Reading: Luke 4:16-29, 42-43.

"To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (v.19). "All ... wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of his mouth" (v.22).

It may interest you to know that that word 'acceptable' and that word 'grace' are identical in the original. Verse 19 ought really to be translated *"to proclaim the year of grace of the Lord"*. These were words of grace which were proceeding out of His mouth.

We are brought back to re-emphasize that word 'grace'. For some reason the Lord is stressing that note at this time, and this whole chapter is a chapter which circles round that one thing — grace.

It introduces the whole of this age, this dispensation, from the coming of the Lord Jesus in the first place to His coming again, which may not be long. Between those two comings is the year of grace. It is a long year, but it is the year of grace. It is therefore the acceptable year of the Lord. This particular time in which we live is peculiarly the age of grace. I think we ought to be profoundly grateful that we are born and are living in the age, the day, of grace, and that the Lord keeps strictly to the nature of grace in this dispensation. That is something for which to be very thankful and something which we must not violate in our hearts. If we do, we do so at our peril and to our loss, and we can only really glorify God — this is what comes out here — and please God and be in the way of the light of His countenance, His blessing, when we really do come into perfect harmony with the note that He has struck for any given time, and we are attuned to that keynote. If we ever get on to any other line than that of grace, things will begin to go hard with us; there will very soon be discord and friction, but so long as we remain on this line of grace, we are in oneness with Him, we are in tune with Him.

Now the day was introduced, the acceptable year of the Lord came, with the Lord Jesus as the Anointed, the Spirit of the Lord upon Him for this very purpose — to announce that the day of grace had come. The Holy Spirit rested upon the Lord Jesus for the purpose of introducing the day of grace. The Holy Spirit is working in relation to the Lord Jesus right through that day according to the nature of the day, that is grace. Well, it is announced.

Then it is demonstrated, and from the Old Testament two incidents are taken, in order to bring the nature of grace home to this people. *"There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah ... and unto none of them was Elijah sent, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon"* — a woman outside Israel — and she was a widow. And that is grace. The incident is taken in order to bring home this, that in Israel in those days the attitude of heart and mind was such as to make it impossible for the Lord to meet them in terms of grace. They were, perhaps, regarding things as their rights. They were Israel and as Israel they had a right to things. They were within the covenant and they were standing upon the ground of legal right. Or perhaps some other mood was operating in Israel, hurt pride, offendedness with God and His ways, rebellion of heart, stiffneckedness, something which made it impossible for them to meet the Lord on the ground of those who recognized the grace of God, and God had to go outside to one who, when the Lord did do something for her, would at once recognize she had no rights, that she stood in no legal relationship for claim and that this was the unspeakable grace of God to her.

That is what the Lord brought home to these people of Nazareth. Evidently they were in a state like that, and the Lord read their hearts and saw quite well that in Nazareth there was no condition which would mean that they took the goodness of God in sending His

Son as an expression of His grace. They were taking everything as their Israelitish rights, they were on some other basis.

Then the second thing taken from the Old Testament was that of Naaman. There were many lepers in Israel, and all lepers have this in common, that they are desperately in need. Somehow or other, in Israel, the lepers being just as much in need as any other lepers, were not in a condition to be dealt with in grace. We may be in as desperate a need as anybody, perhaps a greater need than anybody else, yet the Lord cannot meet us because we are in some frame of mind that just exits the ground of grace from under our feet. Maybe we are offended, we are hurt, we are aggrieved with the Lord, something like that that just puts up a barrier between us and the Lord and He cannot meet us. So the Lord says, "*There were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet: and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian*", someone outside the boundary who had none of the legal rights and claims in Israel; he was healed.

To the woman outside and to the man outside, grace was a very real thing, and grace is always grace to the outsider, to the one who knows he or she is an outsider. We can be an insider and an outsider at the same time. I mean, in our hearts we may know that it has got to be all of the grace of God. In spirit, in mentality, we can be outsiders in that way and find the grace of God.

Well, here are two great examples that the Lord gives. Here there are no claims, no rights, no ground whatever of merit. There is nothing here that can set up a situation that puts God under an obligation to do something. Here is a state and position which, if anything is going to happen, it is going to be the grace of God.

The Lord brought that home to the people at Nazareth and it got home. It was a nail in a sure place. It stung. They saw the point. You people here are demanding, are claiming as your rights: you have no due sense of your utter unworthiness or need, your undoneness, your dependence upon the grace of God. Here God sends His Son in grace right into your midst, He has been brought up in your midst, but you have not a sufficient sense of the need of the visitation of God in grace to open your hearts to His Son! It brought it home and they were wrath with Him. So grace was introduced and grace was demonstrated and, so far as they were concerned, pride of heart meant the grace was rejected. They were not going to get down, let go. They were going to hold to their rights, hold to their ground. We can do that in many ways and shut the door to the Lord by not letting go, and they rejected the grace of God. Well, He departed, and that is how it is. Grace goes, and we are shut up to the outworking of a position in which grace no longer operates. God forbid that that should be true in any case here or in any way.

But the story, thank God, does not end there. They rejected; they said, Go, get out, we do not want you! But when He came into this other region they said, Stay! This multitude said, Do not go! (Luke 4:42). Here is grace triumphant, and when some close the door, there are always those who recognise the need of grace and say, Don't go, stay! — in whom grace triumphs. The line of the Lord's fullest blessing is the line of our most conscious need of His grace. That is the way of the light of His countenance, and it is not necessary for us to take the position of working to merit salvation or of purely legalistic lines in order to rule grace out. There are many ways in which we can get a condition of heart which shuts the door to divine grace. The only thing to know the grace of God, the unmerited favour of the Lord, is to realize all the time that it must be all of Him and that we in no way have any claim upon Him at all.