

he does. What we cannot deserve or earn, we can receive because he gives freely and fully through his Son, Jesus Christ.

When the old woman left the judge's courtroom, her debt had been paid in full. The courts had no further claim on her. And she also went home carrying an undeserved and unexpected small treasure. So it is with God's grace. Despite what most people believe, we aren't asked to contribute as much as we can, so that God can "top off" our efforts to meet the basic requirements; God's grace comes as a full payment. We are saved completely by grace; it is a gift of God and we can do nothing to earn it (Ephesians 2:8–9). At every stage of life, with all of its challenges and difficulties, God's promise is that his grace will be both sufficient and available (2 Corinthians 12:9).

And that is only the beginning. We don't just "get in" by grace, we live by it. Imagine a person who finally has scrimped and saved to realize her dream of going on a cruise. But she has almost nothing left to buy food on board the ship, and so

she fills her suitcase with crackers. After a few days her hunger is growing, so she approaches a ship's officer to ask if there is some work she can do in trade for food. She then hears the amazing news: "Ma'am, don't you understand? Everything is included with your ticket. You can eat all the food you want!"

So it is with God's amazing grace. It is always there, whatever our need. From first to last, the Christian life is all about the amazing grace of our gracious God.

That is why the Bible says of Jesus, "from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace" (John 1:16). There is an inexhaustible fountain.

This grace is offered freely to you. You can find rest and hope today because of Jesus Christ. Forgiveness for sin is available—you no longer do you need to carry the weight of it. The Bible says, "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). Trust him today.

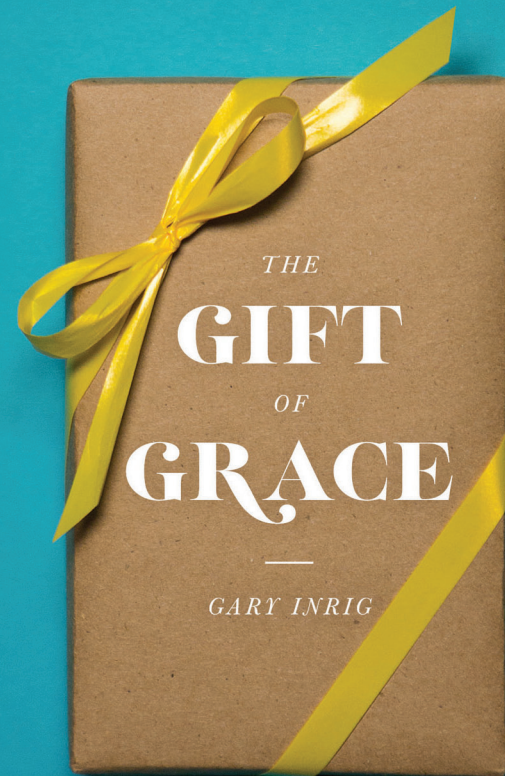


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## *THE STORY IS TOLD OF A JUDGE PRESIDING AT A COURT IN THE POOREST SECTION OF A CITY.*

It was a bitterly cold night during the hardest years of the Great Depression. A haggard, shabbily dressed old woman was brought before the judge. Charged with having stolen a loaf of bread, she made no attempt to deny the charges. Her daughter's husband had abandoned the family, she said. Her daughter was sick, and her two grandchildren were starving. However, the victimized shopkeeper refused to drop the charges. He felt he needed to set an example for a bad neighborhood.

The judge let out a deep sigh. Looking at the woman, he told her the law left him no alternative. She was guilty, and the penalty was ten dollars (an impossible amount for the woman) or ten days in jail. But, as he pronounced her sentence, he pulled out a ten dollar bill and gave it to the bailiff to

pay her fine. Then, with a bang of his gavel, he declared that he was fining everyone in the courtroom fifty cents for living in a city where a poor woman had to steal bread to feed her starving family. Within minutes, the overwhelmed woman left the courtroom carrying \$47.50—collected from petty criminals, traffic violators, on duty police officers, and even the irate grocer!

When we hear the word grace, we may think of the judge's actions. Or we may picture attributes of elegance, charm, or beauty. But when Christians talk about "grace," they mean something much more significant. God is completely holy and without sin, and he requires that we also be holy. However, we are all sinners and can never meet his perfect standard. But God is a God of grace and that changes everything.

God sent his Son Jesus—who is without sin—to pay the debt for our sin. Because he died and rose again, people who deserve God's penalty for their wrongdoing can receive the very opposite—forgiveness and life that never ends. All who accept

Jesus' payment for sin are declared perfect and holy and can now enter into a relationship with God.

The Bible says it simply: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). The Lord Jesus, God's eternal Son, was rich beyond imagining. Yet he willingly left heaven and set aside the privileges that were rightfully his to embrace the poverty of our humanity. As a man, he lived as an ordinary working person, surrounded by poverty and suffering. Most of all, he died a cruel, violent, unjust death at the hands of evil people.

Nothing was further from the wealth of heaven than his ugly death on the cross.

Yet that painful death was the very reason he came from heaven to earth. By his death, he paid the penalty of human sins. He was not a helpless victim. He died in the place of all who would put their faith and trust in him. That his death was no ordinary one was confirmed by his

triumphant resurrection. That is how we become rich through his poverty. Through his death, those who believe are fully and freely forgiven, brought into the family of God, and blessed with countless spiritual blessings.

In most cases the world works on a very simple principle: "I worked for it; I earned it; I deserve it." But the grace of God is something radically different. We can't do enough to earn God's favor, not because he is hard to please, but because our sins always bring us short of God's holy standard. Grace is God taking the initiative to solve the problem. It comes as an amazingly personal gift. It isn't an impersonal force or a commodity he dispenses. Grace is God giving himself because of who he is, not because of who we are, and despite what we've done. He is under no obligation to treat us with grace. Yet

