

GRACE, AND MORE GRACE
John 1:16

Intro: A couple of weeks ago I was reading my Psalm for the day when I came across these words in Psalm 84:

5 Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them.

6 Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools.

7 They go **from strength to strength**, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.

I was struck with the words, "from strength to strength."

As I thought about those words I was reminded that there are several verses in the NT which speak of going "from" something "to" to more of the same thing. For example, Romans 1:16, 17:

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed **from faith to faith**: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

And then I remembered 2 Corinthians 3:18:

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image **from glory to glory**, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

It wasn't long before one more verse came to mind: John 1:15, 16:

15 John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.

16 And of his fulness have all we received, **and grace for grace**.

There may be others that could be added to this list, and if any of you can think of one or more, I would be glad to hear from you. But tonight I want to take this four, link them together, and hopefully bring a message that will be a blessing to you.

Since the foundation of our relationship with the Lord is grace, let me begin with John 1:16. And so I invite you to turn to John 1 where we find that verse.

I. "GRACE FOR GRACE" (John 1:16).

I would like to read verses 15-18, but before I do let me make a comment or two about what we have here.

You can see from verse 15 that John the Baptist was speaking. How far his quotation goes, is left up to the interpreter. The NASB limits John's quotation to verse 15. The NIV does the same. I am going to take the liberty of disagreeing with the Greek scholars who worked on these translations because it seems to me that verses 15, 16, and 17 were spoken by John the Baptist at the same time. Probably he repeated this message over and over.

When the Apostle John wrote this chapter, it was late in the first century, many years after John the Baptist had been beheaded. And John realized then, and had probably known for many years, that the statement of verse 16 was one of the most profound truths to come out of the ministry of John the Baptist. In fact, it was a statement of theology which would be developed by the Apostle Paul in his letters to Ephesus and Colossians--the books from which my texts were taken this morning. And they help us to understand what John the Baptist said years before Ephesians and Colossians were written. Let me read what Paul had to say about the fulness of Christ.

Paul was speaking of Christ when he wrote in Col. 1:19,
For it pleased the Father that in him should all
fulness dwell.

If we have any doubt as to what Paul meant, that doubt
cleared up in Col. 2:9:

For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead
bodily.

This is one of the greatest statements in the NT on the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. It means that while we know that He was Deity before He became a Man, yet in His Humanity we know that He did not in any sense cease to be Deity. And this is a most important truth for us to know and to believe.

Now this makes Paul's prayer in Eph. 3 even more amazing than it otherwise might be to us. I am thinking of the reason for the previous requests in his prayer, as he concluded, "That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph. 3:19b).

And we can link to that what Paul said in Ephesians 4 about the goal of the work of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers:

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

John the Baptist said (or if I am wrong in saying that it should be a part of his message), then the Apostle John certainly declared, "Of his fulness," the fulness of Christ, "have ~~all~~ we received, and grace for grace."

What a statement to make! And it has to be true, as amazing as it is, because it is in our Bibles.

Now we know that we who know the Lord are not Deity, and that we will never be Deity. We are saints, but we are not God. And yet somehow, as Peter wrote, we are "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4), and the goal of our salvation is for us all to be made like our Lord Jesus Christ—never, I repeat, will we be Deity, but we are going to be made like our Lord.

Paul even wrote, "Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20).

What wonderful people we ought to be! "Partakers of the divine nature." "Predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son," God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now to this John the Baptist added, "and grace for grace." We have His fulness now, but the purpose of God is that through grace, and then more grace, and still more grace, and on and on and on, the fulness of Christ which is in us would be shown to be ours.

I think that this is what Peter had in mind when he wrote as his final words in Scripture, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). Or as Dr. Chafer used to like to explain this verse, "Being in grace, GROW!"

We have in John 1:16 the two main reasons that we can be assured that some day we will be like Christ:

- 1) Because we are the recipients of Christ's fulness.
- 2) Because our Lord keeps on adding grace, and more grace, as He completes His gracious work in us.

I will confess that such words go beyond my ability to understand and explain, but we can believe them and profit from them.

But let us go on to a second verse. It seems to me that Romans 1:17 should come next.

II. "FROM FAITH TO FAITH" (Rom. 1:17).

I imagine that you know that this expression, "The just shall live by faith," is a quotation from Habakkuk 2:4, and that it is also quoted in Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38. And it is interesting to consider just where in that statement the emphasis might be in those three quotations. (Explain.)

We are saved by faith, and we are exhorted in Scripture to

live by faith. This is the purpose of that long list of people in Hebrews 11, who have become examples for us to follow. They were not only saved by faith, but they lived by faith. Their salvation was just like ours. There is only one Savior, and never has been any other than our Lord Jesus Christ.

When we were first saved, we knew very little truth. We heard the Gospel, the Lord showed us our need, gave us understanding, and enabled us to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. However, since we have been saved we have learned more and more about the work of Christ. We have learned more about what our salvation cost Him, and what He actually did for us. And we are still learning! And we will always be learning! And whatever we learn, we learn by faith. It is like the writer of Hebrews said at the beginning of Hebrews 11, "Through faith we understand..."

In the book of Romans Paul has explained for us the great doctrine of justification, of what it means that we are righteous before God. And he also shows in Romans how righteous people are to live. Now, that which continues to open to us the precious truths of the Word of God so that we go deeper and deeper in our understanding is an endless supply of faith, not a faith which we generate, but a faith that is imparted to our hearts the more we are exposed to the Word of God, the more we search its sacred pages, and the more the Spirit of God opens our hearts to its wonderful truths. What was revealed to Paul so that he could write it, has to be made known to us by the Holy Spirit or we will never be able to understand what he has written. And so in our lives as Christians we not only go from grace to grace, from grace to more grace, but we go "from faith to faith," from a rather weak faith at the beginning to stronger and stronger faith as we get better and better acquainted with the precious word of God. We will never exhaust the grace of God because God continues to give it to us, and we will never run out of faith because God continues to give us the faith that we need to understand His Word. And so we go "from faith to faith," from what we know to more that is to be known, searching the great truths of our salvation by faith!

But I must hurry on to a third passage. And here I want to take you to Psalm 84.

III. "FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH" (Psa. 84:7).

One thing which we all need every day (among our many needs) is strength--strength to live, strength to overcome temptations, strength to victorious in our trials.

Notice what the Psalmist said in verse 5 of this Psalm. (Read.) This Psalm is full of blessing. See verses 4, 5, and 12. This is blessing which arises from intimate fellowship with the Lord, and it is blessing for the one who finds his strength in the Lord.

Do you know what "the valley of Baca" is? It is the Psalmist's description of this world. It is a valley of tears, a valley of weeping. But you and I who know the Lord have resources which the world knows nothing about. We have a sovereign, almighty God who leads us "from strength to strength." He gives us strength for today and its trials, and then we find more strength for tomorrow and its trials.

Do you remember what Paul said in Phil. 4:13? (Quote.) We need God's strength not only to endure testings, but we also need His strength in those times when blessings abound in our lives. And where does this strength come from? It comes from being in the house of the Lord, dwelling there.

Cf. also Isa. 40:28-31:

28 Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.

29 He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

31 But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

This is what the Psalmist was referring to. We go "from strength to strength" because the supply of God's power can never be exhausted even though the people of God have been drawing from it since the very beginning—not, perhaps, as much as we should, but drawing strength from an inexhaustible supply.

You and I need to make sure that we are getting our strength from the right place.

Finally,

IV. "FROM GLORY TO GLORY" (2 Cor. 3:18).

As you know, I hardly ever quote from the RSV, but the translation of this verse in that version is outstanding in my opinion. Let me read it to you as you follow me in your

Bible. This is how it goes:

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor 3:18, RSV).

I don't like the idea that it leaves out the reference to the "glass," or mirror, which is a reference to the Word of God (as James confirms in Jas. 1:22-25). That is where we see the glory of the Lord. And if we are missing the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ as we read the Word, we aren't reading it correctly. Christ is the key to all of Scripture--OT and NT. And what is happening to us as day after day we see the Lord in the Word? A change is taking place. We are growing and becoming more like the Lord. We go from one degree of glory to a higher degree of glory. And some day we will be glorified! We are going to be like the Lord Jesus when we finally see Him as He is, face to face with the Son of God.

But you see, we go "from glory to glory." We still have a long way to go before we are like the Lord. And we may not be conscious of any progress in our lives. But the Lord is! He sees what is taking place. He is not primarily concerned about the lessons we teach or the sermons we preach, or the service that we do (although these things are very important to Him). But what God is most concerned about with each one of us is how much we are becoming like His dear Son.

There was a glory about Adam and Eve before they sinned. It was their covering. But they lost it when they sinned. However, the glory that we as the people of God will have when we get to heaven will be far greater than the glory that Adam and Eve lost, because then we, who have received of His fulness, will display that fulness as never before when God has completed the work of salvation in our hearts.

Concl: "Grace for grace." "From faith to faith." "From strength to strength." "From glory to glory." These four expressions really trace the spiritual history over every one of us, and of everyone else who has ever, or will ever, know the Lord. But let us make sure that we depend upon His grace, that we look to Him for our "faith," and for our "strength." And that we always remember that, whatever progress we have made upon until now, there is always more glory for us day by day as we walk with the Lord.

In Paul's life, as well as in his ministry, he said, and we can say, too, "Our sufficiency is of God" (2 Cor. 3:5).