

“...walk worthily...” from the Book of Philippians

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| Scripture Block: | Pp 1:1-11 |
| Theme: | GOD’S EXPECTATION OF FRUITFUL SERVICE |
| Life verse: | Pp 1:9-11 |
| Today’s passage: | Pp 1:2 |

Notes

Interpretation

As we saw in our last study, the Christian’s points of contact with God are grace and peace. How amazing it is that the holy, sovereign power of the universe reaches out to us via these two avenues. Peace, or the “wholeness” of our restored relationship, is the simpler of the two concepts (although often so hard for us to fully grasp and believe). Grace is a more complex and abstract idea—one that Christians often add to their vocabulary without really knowing what it means. To help reinforce the wonderful concept of grace, I would like to develop an illustration and then make application.

First, the illustration—let’s investigate the believing thief who was crucified along with Jesus. (You can find a description in Lk 23:39-f.) I have a number of questions I would like you to consider regarding this individual.

- **What was his past?** He is presented to us as a criminal—in essence he doesn’t have one. In fact, Mk 15:32 tells us that just a few minutes prior to the passage in Luke, this thief had been hurling insults at Jesus.
- **What was his present?** He was being crucified—suffering the ignominious death of a criminal.
- **What was his future?** He had none—his body destined to be thrown on a garbage heap and mauled by wild animals.
- **What did the thief deserve?** Punishment!
- **What did he realize about his ability to help himself?** There was nothing that he could do to address his situation. He was in a predicament in which he was absolutely helpless.
- **What did he realize about the Lord Jesus Christ?** He saw the Lord as able to act on his behalf. Look carefully at Lk 23:41-42. You can see that he recognized the Jesus as innocent, divine and a king. Verse 43 makes it clear the thief had exercised saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Application

In order to become a Christian—a member of God’s family, we must have arrived at the point where we see ourselves in the place of the thief, for as lost members of the human race we are in exactly the same predicament. For we also had a past of no account before God, “for in Adam all die.” As for our present, “we were dead in our trespasses and sins.” And the future holds nothing but eternal separation from God in a place of unending suffering.

Now here is where much of the human race becomes confused. What can mankind do about their awful predicament, with respect to relationship with God? Why they can find enlightenment, follow the pillars, do good works—the lists of religion go on and on. This is tantamount to telling the thief to address his needs by any of a hundred religious practices. The problem is, he was tied to the cross—completely helpless to do anything to help himself. Christianity is absolutely unique, and I believe the sole source of truth, with respect to an answer regarding our hopeless estate. On the one hand, we can do absolutely nothing to help ourselves. On the other hand, God has done everything to rescue and save us through the work of his Son, Jesus Christ! The work that God requires of us is to simply trust in what he has accomplished and provided (Jn 6:29). This is what grace looks like—God does all of the work, and we receive the blessing through faith.

Here’s the really hard part for most of us—grace also applies to the Christian Way of Life, i.e. our call to holiness. More on that in the next lesson.