Eternity Daily Bible Study No. 266

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TITUS 1:4

GRACE, MERCY AND PEACE

(TITUS 1:4) To Titus, a true son in our common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior.

Most of us want happiness and success but God gives us grace, mercy and peace. This can be very frustrating. As a faith missionary I do not own a house or a car or furniture. At the moment my wife and I are living in a small bedroom in the house of a relative. We are fifty years old. We are not alone in such a struggle, tens of thousands of pastors and missionaries, and faithful servants of God have nothing – especially in the developing world. It seems that faithful servants of the Lord often go unrewarded in terms of money or honor in this life.

On the other hand we have someone like Hugh Hefner - the publisher of Playboy magazine. Hugh Hefner has happiness and success. He is wealthy, surrounded by beautiful women and seems to enjoy it. But he does not have grace, mercy or peace - in fact Hugh Hefner is spiritually and morally bankrupt. Profligate sinners can have a lot of fun – but they cannot have Christ.

Lets ask a spiritual test question: “Would you rather be James Bond or the Apostle Paul? “ Do you want fast cars and fast women or do you want holiness, grace, mercy, peace and persecution? You may ask - What’s wrong with “a bit of both” – such as driving a red Ferrari while wearing a monk’s robe? (grin).

Sometimes we turn this into a justice issue “I have been a good boy, so where is my Mercedes? “ or something like that. Many a returning missionary has looked at their bank account and the struggle of buying a house and getting health insurance in old age and wondered if God has deserted them. It seems like the “reward” for service is a heavy financial burden in the last years of life. You can’t pay the bills with grace, mercy and peace. So is it unjust? In worldly terms it certainly seems that way. It only makes sense if you see life as a pilgrimage. When you are traveling you don’t take furniture.

If the case is that only this life matters and that “he who dies with the most toys wins”, then we are fools to serve Christ. Paul says as much in 1 Corinthians 15.
[13]If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. [14]And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. [15]More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. [16]For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. [17]And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. [18]Then those also who have fallen

asleep in Christ are lost. [19]If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. … [30]And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? [31]I die every day--I mean that, brothers--just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. [32]If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die".

However, if there is eternal life, and if Christ has been raised, and if what we have lost will come back to us a hundred fold…then we will not just inherit justice – we will inherit grace and a Kingdom! Jesus talks about the time of the Restoration of all things and says:

Matthew 19

[28]Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. [29]And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother[1] or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. [30]But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

Here is the great gamble of faith. Do we believe God or believe the world? Do we walk by faith or by sight? Do we bank on the resurrection? Do we count on the promises of God? Are grace mercy and peace enough or do we covet the Hugh Hefner lifestyle? Do we belong to Heaven or to Vanity Fair?

For many Christians life does not work out as expected or as promised.

Hebrews 11:13 [13]All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.

But life does work out well! "For God has prepared a city for them." (Hebrews 11:16)

The gospel does NOT promise wealth, health, riches, happiness and success in this life. It does promise persecution for all who live godly lives and "many troubles". (2 Timothy 3:12 [12]In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted) In the midst of the world, and in the face of this "evil and unbelieving generation" we can know grace, mercy and peace. We can be joyful pilgrims.

Some fine Christians may well have wealth, health, riches, happiness and success in this life – and that is fine, they are not more spiritual or less spiritual for it. But of these things "fill their lives" then a tragedy occurs (for we are meant to be filled with Christ).

I cannot drive a red Ferrari through "them pearly gates", but my wanderings are in God's book and my tears in his bottle (Psalm 56:8) and my faithfulness is recorded in heaven. We will leave the last word to the prophet Malachi.

Malachi 3:13-18 "You have said harsh things against me," says the LORD .

"Yet you ask, 'What have we said against you?'

[14] "You have said, 'It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty? [15] But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape.' "

[16] Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared

the LORD and honored his name.
17 "They will be mine," says the LORD Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him.
18 And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.

Blessings,

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