

The first two verses of the 15th chapter of Luke’s Gospel describe for us the scene which led to Jesus’ telling of the Parable of the Lost Sheep, the Parable of the Lost Coin and the Parable of the Lost Son. Throughout each of the Gospels we find Jesus at odds with the Pharisees and teachers of the law primarily because of how they viewed and valued the “sinners” that Jesus sought to serve.

The way in which Jesus offered grace to sinners offended his opposition. His opponents wanted Jesus to respond with judgement rather than grace. His compassion irritated them. Have you ever found yourself diminishing someone else because of the abundance of their compassion and grace? Why might this type of behavior be seen as dangerous to our spiritual health?

Given the Pharisees behavior, how do you think they understood God and God’s character?

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This scene comes at the end of a long day of teaching for Jesus in Jerusalem. With that in mind, we should note that perhaps one of the extraordinary aspects of this story is that it was recorded at all. This “poor widow” represented one of the many living during the time of Jesus struggling through abject poverty. Where others saw a statistic, Jesus saw a woman of remarkable faith.

How does an appropriate understanding of God’s grace guard our hearts against being blinded to the needs that surround us every day?

We often think of a group of people like the poor and disenfranchised as those we might be tempted to overlook. Sometimes it is a specific person who may have wronged us or caused us pain. Is there someone who God wants you to see and value in a new way?

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Looking at Hosea 2 last week, we talked about the common misconception that grace is a concept unique to the New Testament. Today’s reading from the book of Leviticus, which contains the law given to the descendants of Abraham following their rescue from Egypt, addresses another common false notion that love of neighbor was a “new teaching” presented by Jesus. Rather, we discover that the care of the “alien” living among the people of Israel was of high importance according to Jewish law.

Throughout Leviticus we find God reminding Israel that they had been rescued from slavery. In this section, God essentially says, “Treat others as I have treated you.” Do you believe that remembering who you once were helps you in learning to love others? In what way?

How does the memory of our own life-change enable us to live in grace with others?

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Writing to Christians located throughout Asia Minor, I Peter addresses an audience dealing with religious persecution. Peter describes his intent near the end of the letter in 5:12 by saying, “I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.” In the midst of their struggle, Peter reminds the recipients in chapter 2 that, “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.”

Peter implores these Christians suffering under persecution to “not be frightened” and to “be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

How would you describe the hope that you have in Christ? How has your understanding of God’s grace helped to grow and strengthen this hope in your life?

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