

GRACE AND MERCY

The scourge of sin is universal. Some say there is no accountability for those who do not know God, but Jesus' command to His disciples teaches otherwise. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). If there is no accountability without the gospel, why not leave people alone?

God created man to be with Him, but man chose not to walk with his creator. The lusts of his heart soon turned him away from God, and man began to serve the creature rather than the creator. We marvel at the sun and moon and stars, but there is nothing in them that demands worship. Only God is worthy of our adoration, for the rocks and trees and gold and silver, even when carved or molded into the likeness of some created thing, can neither hear nor see nor speak. The gods of man are therefore incapable of helping in the least of trouble.

Darkness fell on humanity when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. Before long, man learned to love darkness more than he loved light, and God became sorry that He had created man. In spite of God's setting eternity in man's heart, man chose to walk the low road; he chose death over life with God (Ecclesiastes 3:11; Deuteronomy 30:19). The problem of sin soon escalated so much that God determined to destroy man from the face of the earth. But in the midst of all the evil God saw one man that stood apart from the crowd. The Bible says, "Noah found favor in the eyes of Jehovah" (Genesis 6:8). Through that man others heard the plea of God to turn back to Him. As a whole, they did not listen, for in the day when God commanded Noah to enter the ark, only seven others went with him.

Surely it broke God's heart when man so corrupted himself. We cannot imagine what God felt when He commanded Noah and his family to enter the ark. When God closed the door, He opened the windows of heaven and broke up the fountains of the deep. It was as though heaven was weeping and earth was wailing! Water met water, and the earth God had so carefully created was swept clean of man's filth. Forty days and forty nights it rained. The mountains were covered; everything that breathed God's air died, all except those in the ark, God's place of safety.

As God broke up the fountains of the deep, the earth must have trembled. We can imagine the wind howling, the lightening flashing, and the thunder rolling, but all of this is speculation, for the Bible is silent on what it was like. We wonder if Noah and his family heard and felt what was going on outside their shelter? Were they afraid? Surely they thought of friends and family members left outside. They knew, however, that man rejected God, and God destroyed those who stubbornly resisted His plea.

The wonder of all of this becomes keener when we begin to understand the holiness of God. No one was worthy to enter God's ark, not even Noah. It was then as it is now: "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is the gift of God*" (Ephesians 2:8). *Grace* is used but thirty-nine times in the Old Testament (KJV). However, its effects are noticed on page after page of those thirty-nine books. It is obvious to any Bible student that only by God's grace and mercy did mankind make it to the time of the cross. Anyone who denies that God extended His grace to people who lived before Jesus Christ and then died on the cross, does not understand mercy. Man deserves nothing God gives him!

Despite the insults of man toward God, because of His love for man, God is not willing that man perish. He provided the only way for man to escape His wrath, laying on His Son the sins of the world. Isaiah said, "He shall see the travail of his soul, *and shall be satisfied*" (Isaiah 53:11). Can we comprehend what God did when He sent His Son to the cross? Never in this lifetime, for the sacrifice has nothing to which we can compare it. No angel, no animal, and none among man could pay the price for our pardon. So God stepped in and provided for our redemption. The Word became flesh, and through Jesus Christ we have hope (John 14:6).

In light of these things, is it not foolish to reject God's offer of salvation? Every person is headed for God's judgment. Whether or not the precise day is set, as some insist it is, matters

not. Whenever it is, we will be there! Today we are able to get in the right path and walk with God. Through faith in God and His Son, and through obedience to His plan our sins are washed away. Like the earth of old was cleansed by the flood, so the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from the filth of the past. Then as we continue to walk with God, that same blood keeps on cleansing us so God can always look on us as though we had never sinned. That's justification.

Are you walking with God today? Do you believe in Him and His Son? If you are convinced that Jesus is the Son of God, allow that conviction to turn your heart from sin and to God. Confess your faith in Him and be immersed for the remission of your sins. God will wash you from your sins in the blood of His Son Jesus (Revelation 1:5). Be faithful unto death, and you will have eternal life with God.

If you are a child of God, but you have turned away from Him, know that He still loves you. God wants you to return to Him. The beautiful story of the prodigal son clearly teaches this. May we help you?

Dale E. Andrews