

**When God's Grace Invades My Space**

**John 5:1-10**

February 18, 2007- Sunday, 11:00AM - Dr. David H. McKinley

**[Dr. McKinley, message, When God's Grace Invades My Space]**

*...toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." And, Lord, for this we give You thanks. We thank You for a grace that is sufficient to meet every need, to fill every heart, to forgive every sin, to heal every brokenness. And Lord, I pray that grace would be poured out in great measure in this place through the Spirit of God and the Word of God in these moments that we share together. In Jesus' name. AMEN*

Would you be seated? Todd, thank you so very much... choir, orchestra, vocalists, Tina... Ah... what a wonderful, wonderful time of worship we have shared this morning. And I am so reminded of the fact that worship is at the very heart... ah... an expression of praise so often seen and felt through music.

Music is at the core of what we do when we gather corporately to worship. And ah... we are so blessed time and time again to have the finest of music here and songs that are chosen appropriately to prepare our hearts for the word of God and to give expression to the work of God in each and every one of our lives. And having the appropriate song at the appropriate time, and using hymns of the faith, and songs and spiritual songs makes such a difference in our lives. And when the right song is sung at the right moment it just makes all the difference.

Sort of like, you know, if you take the hymnbook you learn that there are songs for all kinds of special occasions. You know in the medical community the dentist have a hymn: it's called "Crown Him with Many Crowns." [laughter] I don't know if you know that, but... And then there's the tailor's hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy." [ha] [laughter] There's the teacher's hymn... "When the Roll is Called Up Yonder". [laughter] Of course, today's NASCAR day across America and at the Daytona I understand that some have been known when they're passing 180 miles an hour to be singing "Nearer My God to Thee" [laughter] and so that's one. And, of course, this time of year the IRS hymn is one of the favorites... "I Surrender All" [laughter]. And many of you relate to that. But of all the hymns that we sing and all the hymns that we share, "Amazing Grace" is at the top of the list. And we love this great song of praise and of reflection.

You know "Amazing Grace" is a really marvelous piece of music because it on the one hand, expresses great joy, and on the other, a tremendous sense of remorse. It's a song... it's a hymn of gratitude, and yet one that can often be shared and distributed in a time of sorrow. It's a hymn of release; it's

a hymn of hope; it’s a hymn of triumph. And of all the pieces of music that have touched human hearts, this one has collectively touched so many. It’s been listed time and again as being the favorite hymn of so many of our presidents. It was sung at the funeral of Richard Nixon and Sonny Bono and Barry Goldwater, Joe DiMaggio, John F. Kennedy Jr. And so time and again when seen this expressed in a public arena ah... and used as tool of... of encouragement and of ministry. As I understand it, there are at least 972 arrangements of “Amazing Grace” in existence today. And it’s been recorded some 3200 different times on 1100 different albums.

And all of this started in 1773 when John Newton, attempting to write a hymn of praise to be shared at a New Year’s service, penned the words of his own testimony. Newton had been a slave trader; he’d been a man who knew the darkness of the human heart and had lived a life filled with bitterness, with prejudice and with anger. But there was a day in his life where John Newton was touched by the grace of God. And so transformed was his life that he spent the rest of life giving testimony to God’s amazing grace. And so he penned these words to reflect, even after he lived in the light, what had been the darkness of his life and the captivity of his heart in his sin.

And that which Newton expressed and touched that congregation on that day, and many congregations throughout the generations there after, we have expressed today because so many of us know that everyone of us in this place needs grace.

Can I ask you a simple question this morning? What is grace... what is grace? If I took the microphone and walked down here on the front and said, “Would you give me a definition of grace... First of all they’re all thinking, “I knew I shouldn’t have sat on the front row this morning.” [laughter] But if I asked you, how would you define grace?

And while we could give a definition of it, sometimes it’s good to look at the term *grace* in comparison with other terms that we often use and that we often think about. In fact, I want to describe 3 different terms this morning: justice, mercy and grace.

Justice. Justice is important, isn’t it? We all want to know that we live in a world and a society where we can have some measure of justice. Justice is a sense of common good, of equality and well-being and standing, of equal protection, and of fairness in life. And everyone wants to live with a sense of fairness, and ultimately justice. That if something or someone is wronged, that things are going to be made right.

And so, therefore, if we talk about justice, what we’re talking about is getting what we deserve. Justice is getting what you deserve in life. And many people live with a strong sense of justice, wanting to know that they and others get what they deserve in life.

But we all know that there are times in life where when we deserve one thing [ha], we would like to have something else... we’d like to have something called mercy. And sometimes we need mercy.

It’s sort of like the photographer that I heard about who had been called and asked to take a photograph... a glamorous shot of a very well known and very prominent woman. But the problem was she was very difficult to please. And time and time again they would have a photo shoot and they would get together and he would do his best to try to capture the essence of this woman’s life, and then would bring her back and put it on display so that she could see it. And on the third time she came back and she looked at him and she said, “Sir, I don’t know what to say. You’ve done all these photographs, you keep taking pictures, but none of these do me justice.” And he looked at her and said, “Madam, you don’t need justice; you need mercy.” [ha] [laughter]

Mercy... what is mercy? Mercy is not getting what I deserve. Mercy is not getting what I deserve. If justice is getting what I deserve, then mercy is when I don’t get what I deserve.

But then there’s grace, and what is grace? If justice is getting what I deserve, and mercy is not getting what I deserve, grace is getting what I don’t deserve. It’s when love, it’s when mercy are mingled together and in my life I not only have the restraint of mercy, I have the expression of a love that gives me favor and care even when I don’t deserve it.

R. P. C. Hanson said it this way: “Grace means the free, unmerited, unexpected love of God and all the benefits, delights and comforts which flow from it.” It means that while we were sinners and enemies, we have been treated as sons and heirs.” That is grace! And grace is how God has responded to you and God has responded to me.

And while it is a wonderful thing to know the song “Amazing Grace” and doubtless, almost everyone in this building either knows the tune or some portion of the lyric, the greatest question that I have for you this morning is not do you know the song, but have you experienced the reality of God’s grace in your life? Do you know that measure of grace? And when you sing of it, is it more than just a song of reflection and expression? Is it a song of reality and of experience in your life?

Well, I want to take you to a grace place in the Scripture this morning. I want to invite you to open your Bible to John chapter 5... the Gospel of John, chapter 5, and I want us to read and reflect on an incredible picture of God’s amazing grace. In fact, I’m calling this message this morning: “When God’s Grace Invades My Space.” Because God’s grace touched the life of a man at a point of need, even as the grace of God is extended to you at a point of need in your life this morning. And I want us to see and I want us to be able to celebrate this grace in a wonderful way together. John chapter 5, beginning in verse 1. The Bible says:

1) After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2) Now there was in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool in Aramaic called Bethesda, which had five roof colonnades. 3) In these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame and paralyzed. 4)..... 5) One man was there who had been an invalid for 38 years. 6) And when Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already been there for a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be healed?" 7) And the sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I'm going, another steps down before me." 8) And Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed and walk." 9) And at once the man was healed and took up his bed and walked. Now the day was the Sabbath.

The Bible says there was this place there inside the walls of Jerusalem, inside the city, just inside the Sheep Gate that many people would come and gather. According to all that we know, both by tradition and archeological excavation, this was a very beautiful place, the place called Bethesda.

I brought for you a little map today to give you some sense of where it is in relationship to the Temple; because this man, after this event went up to the temple but it was there just outside the Temple Mount area but inside the Sheep Gate. And they've excavated today down deep to the ground level and where the pools would have been in that day and in that time. I was just there a few months ago with a group from our church as we were touring in Israel. I always love to go there and to have the opportunity to walk around this place.

But this place was a place of 5 colonnades and multiple porches. It was a multi-tiered area and it appears as though there may have been some natural springs that were down underneath that would fill these reservoirs. And there was a saying... a tradition that said that the... that the springs would bubble up and when the water would bubble many believed... (In fact there were some apparent amazing things that had happened there)... that an angel would stir the water and that the result would be anyone who got in the water would be healed. And so in this beautiful place people would gather.

I have another picture of it down at that level and... and there were the colonnades and there were all the patios and the porches. But for all the beauty that was there in the construction and in these pools and reservoirs, the Bible simply says that it was a place where lay a great multitude of people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting.

Here in this beautiful place there was a marketplace of human brokenness and human wares in all the ugly... ugliness of... of distressed bodies and feeble people were laid around these porches. And it was a scene of beauty, and yet, a scene of tragedy.

And the Bible says that Jesus walked in through this Sheep Gate... (Jesus, the Lamb of God through the Sheep Gate) ...came to this place where all these people were laying and there He began to look over the people that were there. It's almost as though we have a camera that is panning, and you just

begin to see this scene and these masses of people, and while on the one hand there’s the water and the beauty, there’s this hope... this desperation that somehow they might be there in that moment when the water moves and, as though it were, they believed the angel creates healing, and they would get down in the water.

But as I see Jesus standing in that place, I’m reminded of a marvelous truth this morning. It’s a marvelous tru... truth of God’s grace that I want to share with you today, and that is simply this, that God knows and cares about every human being.

It wasn’t just an accident that Jesus happened to come through that gate that day. Jesus stepped into that place because of the heart of grace, the heart of God. And as the very heart of God was beating in the human flesh, in the Person of Jesus Christ, He stood in that place, looking upon that place. And He reminds me of the fact that He sees and He knows about every human need. He loves you, He cares about you and about me. And while this morning all that I can see with my eyes are people who’ve come to church, beneath the surface when God looks at this mass, at this arena that I’m looking at today, I want you to know that God knows and God cares about you and about your needs. Nothing’s hidden from His eyes. He sees, He knows, He cares.

But just as this passage gives this unfolding panorama of all these people and all these needs, verse 5 simply says “one man”. It’s almost as though the camera goes from a pan of the crowd to just zeroing in on one man who’s right there. One man who’s been in the same place, in the same space on and off for 38 years; a man who was there so desperate for God to do something in his life; and yet he felt that the only way he would ever experience a miracle would be if he could somehow get into the water. But now instead of him getting into the water, Jesus... the Son of God, the One who one day walked on water... literally stepped up and stepped into the place and the space where this man was.

I think about that... I think about this great network that has been developed today called *myspace.com*. So many people are finding it to be a... a network of life. It is a social network where friends are able to connect with one another and keep up with each other on a regular basis. It’s a multitude electro... electronically of people connected together through personal profiles and photos and blogs, where they’re able to stay in touch with one another. And yet for all the masses that are out there... In fact it said that there are 154 million “MySpace” accounts in existence right now. There are 230,000 being added every single day... 230,000 everyday! Why? Because people want to have their face on “MySpace”. They want their spot. They want people to see them, to know them, to know about them. And we live in a world that is so craving the attention of others and feeling that we are important, that we try to broadcast information as though it were about ourspace... ourselves.

And so here we have God, as though it were, looking at all the different people, and zeroing in on one person’s personal profile. And what is the profile we get of this man? He’s been lame for 38 years. And the tragedy of his life has been that he believes. But not only has he lived with this limitation but that this limitation in his life has had injury added to it, because every time he had an opportunity to be healed getting in the water, someone else stepped over him. And so his life is nothing more than a life of broken... of a broken body and broken dreams. And he feels that he’s captured, that he’s enslaved, that he is limited in life.

Every time I think of this passage over the last week, I kept... I kept thinking about (Don’t think badly of me) of American Idol. Yeah, I’m watching in the sixth season. Here I am involved in it, just like many of you. And... and ah... I’ve had a hard time finding any favorites at this point but... One of the things that happens with American Idol is that it starts with masses and it gets down to individuals. And I believe that the reason that so many people in America have loved this show is not because they discover recording arti... artists, but because they are brokers in the ranks.

Time and again we’ve seen people who live in very limited and inhibited life experiences, have a break... an opportunity to get a new start in life. And we find someone who comes from a limited education or from economic depravation... someone who’s had a struggle in their life of one form or another... maybe a series of breakdowns in their family. But it just seems that they’ve had a bad deal in life. And the result is that finally they get their break and their opportunity to audition on American Idol. Now, of course, some of those auditions are horrific. Some of them are annoying. Some of them, you know, you just... you just think, “My goodness!”

But time and again there’s someone there that touches your heart. You hear their story and you see something happening with them and you know they have a talent and you begin to see it come to the surface and you think, “You know, I’d just like to see that person get an opportunity for a new start in life.” And sometimes they’ll begin to advance and they’ll begin to move up in the rankings. But then comes that day, that moment, that time, when finally, if not Randy or Paula, certainly Simon looks at them and says, “That’s it; you’re done.”

And many of them get mad and storm out. Often they look dejected. Sometimes tears come. But one of the saddest moments is when that person walks out that door and walks on to the street and begins to walk away, and you realize that’s the end of dream. Somebody else stepped over them. They’re not going any further.

And the reason that comes to mind is that’s such a portrait of human emotion, and human dejection, and human limitation, and human frustration. And how many people even listening to my voice this morning are living with a sense that something you thought would give you hope... something you thought that would be a breakthrough... something you thought that would be

the answer, ended up being for somebody else and not for you. That’s where this man was. He’s there, he’s caught.

But the beauty of this picture is seen in this: not only that God knows and cares about human need, but that God comes and invades our space through His grace and love. And God, the Son, Jesus Christ came and invaded this man’s space. And as He stepped in, He began to speak to this man’s need. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, looked at this man and said to this man, **“Sir, do you want to be healed?”**

Hello? Why do You think the guy’s here? What’s he been hanging around these waters all these days for? Surely Jesus should have known that.” But you see, Jesus wanted him to speak to it. Jesus wanted him to admit it. Jesus didn’t want to hear the reason why he hadn’t been healed. Jesus wanted to call him to the moment where he could be healed! And Jesus Christ got this man’s attention and He looked at him, and He said, **“Sir, do you want to be healed?”** And then He said, **“Rise, take up your bed and walk.”**

I love that. With the spoken word, instantaneously, suddenly, miraculously a man who had had an issue for 38 years was suddenly changed. He didn’t come into the meeting that day with a backache or a headache. Everybody knew this guy had been there and been in that space for 38 years. But on this day and in this moment, when Jesus, the Son of God, spoke the word, the same voice that spoke the world’s into creation, who looked at this man and said, **“Rise, get up, take up your bed and walk.”** This man suddenly was healed and the grace of God touched his life.

What a moment it was! That this man was able to stand and certainly people all around began to gasp and to imagine what’s happening, something’s changing! And not only did He tell him to... to get up. He said, **“Take up your bed.”** I love what the ah... commentator G. Campbell Morgan said about this. He said: *“Jesus told him to take up his bed because He was saying, ‘I don’t want you to make any provision for ever having a relapse. I don’t want you to come back here anymore. I don’t want this to be a place for you. I want you to get all the stuff out of here, cause you’re not going to live like this any longer.’”*

That’s what happens in the Christian life. When Jesus speaks the Word of God to your heart and the grace of God begins to change you, you begin to believe that you don’t have to live the same way anymore! You’re not caught by the same old habits and limitations! Jesus begins to empower you to live a new life and to have a breakout and a breakthrough, and then you begin to walk!

Do you know what the whole Christian life is all about? Walking with Jesus! How many times in the Bible... in the New Testament do we hear the Christian life described as a walk... and how we are to walk in life and walk in love and not walk according to the flesh? That’s why when someone’s baptized as you heard a moment ago, we always say: Buried with Christ in baptism unto death, and then we are raised (If you know what we say, say it with me)

raised to walk in newness of life. You see, the whole Christian life is about walking and living in newness.

And this man on that day not only was one of the multitude whom God saw, but he was the one man who experienced the grace of God as it invaded the space of his life. What a moment! What a celebration! He definitely could have stood... stood to his feet and said, “My chains are gone! I’ve been set free!” Just as we sang a moment ago.

It just seems that the grace of God is all over this passage. That is, it’s everywhere but one place, because at the bottom of verse 9 it says: “Now the day was the Sabbath.” And then in verse 10 it said:

10) *So the Jews said to the man who was healed, “It is the Sabbath; and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.”*

[Ha!] What? You mean it’s against the law to get healed? What’s this all about? But here they are, a group of religious zealots, a group of people who had a form of religion but didn’t have the power of that religion in their lives, the people who lived by a list, people who kept the rules, people who measured others by their own goodness, but people who knew nothing of the grace of God.

In fact, so great was this issue that the Jews began to use this issue as a means to oppose Jesus. Look down just a few more verses, down into verse ah... Let’s begin in verse 16. The Bible says:

16) *And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing things on the Sabbath. 17) But Jesus answered them, saying, “My Father is working until now; and I am working.”*

And that is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God! You ever heard anybody say, Jesus didn’t claim to be God? Well, the Jews sure thought that He did. And in this place and in this moment, instead of seeing the wonder of God’s grace, this group of legalists... this group of rule-keepers began to suppress the work of God.

Jesus had looked at this man and with His power and authority He said, “Rise, take up your bed and walk!” But you’ll notice if you read the text, every time the Pharisees repeated it, they left off the first word rise, and they just said, “Who told you to take up your bed and walk?” Totally obsessed!

It’s been said that in tradition... Jewish tradition that there were 39 specific things that you were not allowed to do on the Sabbath, and that meant there were 39 things that were to restrict you and in particular you were never to carry anything. So they saw this man as carrying something on the Sabbath, and it created a conflict.



But when I read that and when I reflect on that, I’m reminded of the fact that there’s nothing that brings a more sickening stench than human self-righteousness when we substitute it for the grace of God. In fact, my pastor, Dr. Adrian Rogers, growing up, once made this statement and I’ve remembered over and over: “The worse form of human badness is human goodness when it becomes a substitute for the new birth... The worse form of human badness is human goodness when it becomes a substitute for the new birth.”

The thing that makes a difference in this ministry today is that we are constantly calling people to recognize that they are sinners who need grace; not that we are coming together to try make each other better by living on our own list! And these Pharisees had tried to create a sense of right-standing before God of their own effort, rather than recognizing how desperate they were and in need of God’s healing, God’s mercy and God’s grace.

But you see, that’s why Jesus Christ came. Jesus came into the world in order that He might forgive sinners, in order that He might take away our sin; in order that He might offer to us forgiveness and freedom and hope in life! And that’s where the grace of God not only touched the space where that man occupied that day, but it is speaking to you in this place in the space that you occupy today, because God wants to do a work of amazing grace in your life. Jesus said it here in chapter 5 and in verse 17. He said:

*17) My Father is working until now, and I am working!*

May I be so bold as to say to you this morning that God is working in this place today? And the same Jesus who by His grace touched that man’s life that day, is speaking to you, to your heart, to your life, to your need today, and God wants to set you free. God wants you to embrace! God wants you to experience the wonder of eternal life in Jesus Christ.

In fact, that’s the fourth observation that I would make to you this morning, and it is simply this: That God extends His grace gift of eternal life to you today! To each and to every one of us in this place! And there is an extension of a gift made possible through the work of the death, the burial and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it is a gift called eternal life. It’s what Jesus talked about here.

You say, “Well, where did Jesus talk about eternal life?” Just keep looking down... John chapter 5, beginning in verse 24. He says:

*24) “Truly, truly, I say unto you, whoever hears My word and believes in who sent Me has eternal life! He does not come into judgment, but he has passed from death unto life.”*

The Bible doesn’t say eternal life is something you get when you die. Eternal life is something you get right now when you believe and receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior! And the great message of the grace of

God is that no matter who you are, or where you are, or what has happened in your life today, that this grace is touching the place where you are... the space of your life, and God is saying to you, “I offer to you this wonderful gift of life, of hope, of forgiveness and of peace.”

It was the grace of God that changed that man at that pool at Bethesda. It was the grace of God that changed John Newton, the writer of that song that we’ve sung this morning. It’s the grace of God that’s touched and changed many lives in this building today. And many of you could give testimony to the reality of this grace. I was fourteen when the grace of God changed my life. But today... today I stand as a living testimony of God’s amazing grace. [music begins and soloist sings Amazing Grace]

From cover to cover the story of the Bible is the story of God’s amazing love and amazing grace. And God’s word is filled with an invitation... an invitation that requires a response. In fact in the very final verses of the book of Revelation the Bible says [Revelation 22:17]:

*17) Whosoever will, let him come and take of the waters of life freely.*

Jesus says to you today, “Do you want to be healed? Do you want to be changed? Do you want grace to transform your life? Then you must be willing to believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; to repent, to turn from yourself and your sin and all props that would hold you up; and to give your life to Jesus Christ.”

In just a moment we’re going to pray and then we’re going to stand and sing a song of invitation. It’s an invitation to respond to the grace of God. God will give you the grace. I know there are many people in this building and it’s easy to be intimidated, but I want you to know this is a house that is filled with grace.

You know, Bethesda actually means house of mercy, house of grace? And this is a grace place today. And today if you want the grace of God to touch and change your life... if you want to walk out of this building knowing that you are going to heaven when you die... if you want to live your life, walking in newness of life, you can begin that journey today by saying yes to Jesus Christ.

Others of you have already experienced that touch of grace in life. But you need to publicly declare the commitment of your faith in Christ, 1) by making that known in a service like this, but 2) by following Christ in baptism. Baptism doesn’t save us; it doesn’t wash our sins away. But baptism is an expression... an outward expression of an inward reality.

It’s like a wedding ring. I wear this ring for every one to know that I belong to a lady by the name of Connie and I committed my life to her. And whoever sees me and knows me will know that this is commitment in my life.

Baptism is that outward expression. And many of you need as an expression of the grace of God in your life to follow Him in baptism.

Others of you need to become a part of this ministry. I pray that God will give grace to men and women, boys and girls, and families today.. to say, “This is the place where I want to be connected and committed to living out my life and my faith for Jesus Christ.”

We do not want to encourage you just to be a spectator. You’re always welcome here, but this is not about spectating. This is about serving Christ and ministering His grace and mercy and love to people in need. And we invite you.. in fact, I urge you to be the first to step out and to come today, and to sort of take off the edge of intimidation to others and to say, “We’re going to make a stand here for the grace of God, and thank God for the grace that He will minister to us in this place.”

So after we pray, our ministers.. our pastors will be standing right here at the heads of each aisle with me, and if you’re in the terrace or here on the lower floor, I’m just going to ask you to step out and come. A friend with a friend, a family, boys and girls, men and women, students, single adults coming to Christ, coming into the fellowship of the church.

There in the balcony.. you don’t need to come down here. I know we look like we’re a long ways away, but you know what, we’re not. Actually a whole group of our ministers are standing right there around the front of the balcony and they’re waiting to receive you. Just go speak with them and tell them that God has touched your life today and you want to respond to His grace.

*Father, thank You for the ministry of mercy and grace in this place. Thank You for the wonder of Your love. Lord, we hear you calling us to come, and I pray right now that You will be glorified in this place as people respond to Your grace. In Jesus’ name. AMEN*

Look up and stand up. I ask that no one be leaving. Look up, stand up, be coming, be praying! But let this be the moment where the grace of God changes your life. Come right now. We’re praying, we’re waiting, we’re trusting and we’re celebrating the work of God. [singing begins]