

GRACE
Dr. Jerry Nelson

I have a question for you this morning?

My question sounds like a Sunday School question but it isn't.

It sounds like it calls for a Sunday School answer but it doesn't.

My question is this: "Does God love you?"

Please be thoughtful in your answer!

I said I'm not looking for a S/S answer.

A S/S answer is an answer based on what you think you ought to say whether you understand or believe it or not.

The Bible says:

God has such great love for people that He gave His only Son

God demonstrated his love for us in that while we were yet sinners - Christ died for us.

At Christmas we celebrate Jesus' coming to earth:

We speak and sing of God's love as demonstrated in Jesus.

And we exchange gifts with one another as a reflection of the greatest of gifts: God's gift of his son to us.

But I have to wonder how many people go through all of the motions without remembering or possibly even knowing this CORE truth?

Parties, happy faces, gifts, charity all done in the "Spirit of the Season" - but with no real understanding or experience of the truth at the core.

Last Friday evening several small children were at our house and I watched the "Grinch that Stole Christmas" with them.

As I came to the end of it I was struck not with what was said but with what was missing:

The best reason Dr.Zuess could come up with for Christmas was that "Christmas will always be as long as we have 'we'".

Christmas to him is a celebration of togetherness. Or more likely in our culture it is a celebration of celebration.

It's the "spirit of the season" but with no content and no definition.

No wonder Christmas loses its luster for so many adults: They finally admit the fact that Christmas is empty - it's just hype - no substance.

Christmas has lost its core unless you understand that at its core its an answer to the question: "DOES GOD LOVE YOU?"

What is the most pervasive theology and philosophy in the world?

What concept of the relationship between God and people crosses all national boundaries,
pervades all languages and people groups,
and composes the core of all man-made religions?

It is this:
Good things happen to those who do good
and those who do bad - get what they deserve.

And God's job is to make certain that happens!

That is what most people in this world, including many of you, believe.

It doesn't matter whether the religion is called
Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, or most perversions of Christianity - they
all believe the same thing about God's relationship to people - You get
what you deserve!

I can recall Julie Andrews in THE SOUND OF MUSIC. She is reveling in her
good fortune and she sings: "somewhere in my childhood I must have
done something good".

That theology seems to work for people as long as things are going well.

As long as the relationships are basically in tact,
as long as we have a job,
as long as we have events or ambitions to look forward to,
then we are feeling fairly good about life -
God must be smiling on me

Too bad about those others who don't have it so good right now - it must be
tough to be down on your luck - I wonder where they blew it?

But even in the good times there is a fear deep seated in this theology: What if I blow
it?

What about the things that I've already done that I know are no good - will those catch up with me?

And if there truly is a God who judges according to each person's deeds - are mine good enough to tip the scales in my favor in the end?

How many are there, even among those who call themselves Christians, who live their lives in fear that they might not be good enough for God.

How many live in fear that they might blow it and all of the good things they are now experiencing in life will be taken away?

Living in fear that somehow they won't do it right and they will lose?

But the message of God at Christmas is a whole different story!!

God's grace is a completely different concept!

God loves you today not because you deserve it because you don't and not because you have earned it because you can't -

But God loves you today because He has chosen to and in Jesus Christ you may accept that Gift, revel in it, and be grateful for it.

To understand that GRACE this morning I want you to hear a story.

Dick please join me.

Dick Kruschke like me is a man who is on a journey -
a journey on which he is learning of the love of God.

But to hear the beginning of the story you'd never guess that.

** Dick, I'd you to begin by telling us about those early years of your life.

Home, abuse, insecurity.

I said that I grew up in a home where I never doubted that my Father and Mother loved me - never doubted that they would be there - never doubted that they would stay together.

You went to church early in life? What did you learn?
Theology?

Grew up with nothing good happening - therefore I must be bad. I must have angered God somehow.

** When you came back from the military you tried to put your life together - you went to college, got a job, bought a home, you had it all - what happened?

Trying to hold it all together
Feeling the pressure
drugs and alcohol to help
cracking under the load
feelings of inadequacy
bailed out

** As long as eight years ago you began to attend SGC on occasion what was that like?
drive past and feel compelled to come in
sit in that pew and curse you out loud
couldn't stand the guilt and shame heaped on
already knew that I was in trouble.

(Jerry: I was talking mostly to the self-righteous trying to get them to realize their need
when you already knew that you were guilty and just wanted to hear how to get
relief.

** When did things begin to change for you?
For many in AA God is simply that "higher power" or "God as you know him" -
Who do understand him to be?

** Dick, does God love you?
"amazing grace"
Rock of Ages
Jesus loves me