TITLE: An amazing 5 Letter Word

TEXT: Ephe. 2:8-9; 1 Co. 13:13; Ro. 5:6-8; Pro. 9:10; Jn 3:16; Mt. 10:28

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about an amazing 5 letter word. Possibly the most amazing five letters in our alphabet. Our alphabet contains 26 letters, all of them important to the structure of our language but there are 5 that really stand out when combined in the appropriate way.

 These amazing letters are A-C-E-G-R. As standalone letters, these are not any more amazing or significant then the other 21 letters of the alphabet but when arranged in the proper order they become very significant and even pretty amazing.

One thing I found amazing about these specific letters is, that as I was playing around with them to see how many words I could get out of them by placing them in different orders, I could only find one arrangement that actually spelled out a word!

A synonym for this amazing word with an equal amount of letters would be J-E-S-U-S! JESUS is a synonym for this amazing 5 letter word that we are going to talk about this morning!

A Synonym is a word or an expression that serves as a figurative or symbolic substitute for another.

 So, what word would be a synonym for Jesus that contains the letters A-C-E-G-R?

How about GRACE!

The dictionary defines grace as:

1. Seemingly effortless beauty or charm of movement, form, or proportion.
 A characteristic or quality pleasing for its charm or refinement. A sense of fitness or propriety. A
2. **.** A disposition to be generous or helpful; goodwill. **b.** Mercy; clemency.

A favor rendered by one who need not do so..

A temporary immunity or exemption; a reprieve.

Closer to the Biblical definition…..

**a.** Divine love and protection bestowed freely on people. **b.** The state of being protected or sanctified by the favor of God. **c.** An excellence or power granted by God.

**Ephesians 2:8 - 9 (NIV) 8For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9not by works, so that no one can boast.**

**8For it is by grace you have been saved,**

*khar'-ece*

From G5463; *graciousness* (as *gratifying*), of manner or act (abstract or concrete; literal, figurative or spiritual; especially the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life; including *gratitude*):—acceptable, favour.

 As used in Ephe. 2:8 Grace speaks of acceptable favor!

 The grace being referred to in Ephe. 2:8 is God’s grace or a grace that originates from God Himself!

**8For it is by grace you have been saved!**

 If we likened Scripture passages to mountain ranges, I think “by grace you are saved” would be the Himalayas! This passage towers above all others because it contains the highest biblical truth---by God’s grace we are saved!

The Apostle Paul has this to say in:

 **1 Corinthians 13:13 (NIV) 13And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.**

 Paul said that among faith hope and love that the greatest of the three is love. I believe that if Paul had included grace in this list grace would have topped the list!

 But Paul didn’t include Grace to this list because he was talking about things that “abide”, things that have always been within Gods creation.

 Grace does not abide! Grace has not always been a part of God’s creation nor will Grace always be necessary! Grace did not exist before Adam & Eve fell to sin because grace was not necessary before man sinned-- and grace will not exist after the final judgment! There will be no grace for those in hell, and those in glory, in heaven, will have no more need of it!

 So today is the age of grace!

So, sense this is the age of grace let’s look and see what is so amazing about grace.

Grace first and foremost is a gift of God!

**8For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9not by works, so that no one can boast.**

Grace, as well as our faith, our ability to embrace grace, is a gift of God!

**8For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God!**

Grace is a gift of God and so is our faith a gift from God! Neither originates within ourselves but both originate with God!

 Now that is amazing! God gifts us, not only with His grace but God also gifts us with the faith needed to receive and embrace that grace!

Both grace and faith are God given!

 Neither originates within us!

**8For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God!**

 Another thing about grace that is truly amazing is that we don’t deserve it, there is no way that we can earn it, but it is something that is offered to all of us freely as a gift from God!

**it is the gift of God— 9not ( obtained) by works, so that no one can boast.**

 Another amazing aspect of this grace that we have been given is revealed to us in what may very well be the second greatest revelation of Scripture….

**Romans 5:8 (NIV) 8But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us!**

We can best understand this concept of grace, I think, through illustration.

 This one, as limited as it is, still brings part of the point home.

 About 145 years ago in czarist Russia a story is told of a Russian nobleman and his faithful servant who traveled by dog sled across a vast expanse of frozen wasteland. They had traveled for several hundred miles and their home lay only 20 miles ahead. After such a long and treacherous journey, they looked forward to some hot food and a warm bed.

 Suddenly, a pack of hungry wolves appeared behind them, apparently having caught their scent. Despite their dogs attempt to pull the dog sled as fast as they could, the wolves started to close in. The situation seemed hopeless---they had no place to hide and no protection to run to and no chance of out running the wolves.

 Suddenly, the old servant threw himself backward off the dog sled. The wolf pack stopped and attacked the servant killing him but sparing the nobleman’s life.

This is visualization, an earthly example of God’s Grace!

Grace involves sacrifice! True grace involves self-sacrifice!

The greatest act of grace this world has ever seen is revealed to us in Romans 5:8-

**But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us!**

The expanded context of this passage says this….**Ro: 5:6 - 8 (NIV) 6You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.  7Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.  8But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

What an amazing aspect of grace! **While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

Do you know what this would be like?

Try to picture this…

 You come home from work late one night and catch a masked man coming out of your house. You apprehend him and call the police, and he is arrested. When you inspect your home you find that you have been robbed and that your wife and your children have been mercilessly killed by this man.

 The man is tried by a jury of his peers, found to be guilty beyond a shadow of a doubt and you live in a death penalty state.

 As the man is brought before the judge for sentencing, about to receive the just penalty for his crimes against you, death…You, as the victim of his crimes are allowed into the courtroom and just before the judge pronounces his sentence against this man you ask to approach the bench.

 When you get there, you ask the judge to let this man go free and that you want to stand condemned in his place!

 That you want to take the judgment and the just penalty for the crimes this man has done against you, upon yourself!

You want to die for this man’s sins so that he may go free!

 This may sound absurd. Surely no one would ever do this, go to this extreme for someone who has sinned so grievously against them…

Yet that is exactly what Jesus did!

For while we were yet sinners Christ died for us!

All sin is against God! Yet it was God who reduced himself to mere humanity through the incarnation for the specific purpose of coming and paying the price for your and my sin! To take the just condemnation of our sin upon himself.

The one sinned against coming and willingly paying the ultimate price and penalty for the very ones who sinned against Him!

Think of the greatest sin of your life, the thing that you are most ashamed of ever doing…

And then realize this… Jesus came and died for that specific sin knowing that you would one day do it!

 His love for you is so great that from the foundation of the world He looked upon your life and saw all the sins that you would commit, and his heart broke with compassion for you and even then He planned to come and take the penalty of your sin upon himself so that you wouldn’t have to bear that penalty yourself!

That is an amazing grace!

 This amazing grace has affected countless millions who have embraced it over the centuries and still does so today!

 One such man, John Newton, was raised by a devoted Christian mother who dreamed that her only son would one day become a preacher. But she died when John was only a young child, and he followed his sea-captain father to a sailor's life.

 John didn't care for the discipline of the Royal Navy: he deserted ship, was flogged, and eventually was dishonorable discharged.

 He then headed for regions where he could "sin freely," and ended up on the western coast of Africa, working for a slave trader who mistreated him.

 Newton's life during that period bore the appearance of a modern Prodigal Son's: "a wretched looking man toiling in a plantation of lemon trees in the Islands--clothes had become rags, no shelter and begging for unhealthy roots to satisfy his hunger."

 After more than a year of such treatment, he managed to escape from the island, in 1747.

Newton then served as captain of a slave ship for six years.

 He was engaged in the despicable practice of capturing natives from West Africa and selling them around the world. But one day the grace of God put fear into the heart of this wicked slave trader through a fierce storm that came upon him at sea. Greatly alarmed and fearful of shipwreck Newton read a book by Thomas Kempis called “The Imitation of Christ” and it was during this voyage that he had a genuine conversion experience and accepted Jesus as the Lord and Savior of his life.

 He gradually came to abhor slavery and later crusaded against it.

 John Newton became greatly influenced by George Whitefield and John and Charles Wesley. He married his long-time sweetheart and began studying for the ministry. He was ordained within the Anglican Church, and in 1764 he took a pastorate in Olney, England.

 Newton felt dissatisfied with the traditional hymns of his day and began writing his own, many autobiographical in nature. Of the hymns that John Newton wrote possibly the greatest and best loved is one entitled “Amazing Grace”.

 A hymn that bore personal testimony to the amazing work of God’s grace in his own life.

Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me…

I once was lost but now am found…Was blind but now I see!

There is a great theological truth contained in the second verse of this great old hymn….

Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved…How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!

Here we find two more amazing things about grace!

#1. It is grace that teaches our heart to fear!

**Proverbs 9:10 (NIV) 10“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,     and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.**

**The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom!**

Do you realize that it is an act of God’s grace that brings us to the place of fearing the Lord?

Do you realize that it is actually healthy to fear the Lord?

If there is a blight upon the Church today that is hindering the work of the Lord in our world and keeping us from becoming all that God has for us to become as His earthly body, it is probably a lack of Godly fear!

 We love to embrace the concept of God’s Love. We quote John 3:16 as if it were the only relevant verse within the Bible.

**John 3:16 (NIV) 16“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**

We say, God is a God of love, and a God of love would never send anyone into hell.

With this personal theology about God many reduce God to their “genie in a bottle” who is there for nothing more than to meet their every demand.

 God help me with this.. God deliver me from that..

Settling for a personal “God theology” that is based upon half and partial truths.

God is a God of love! But God is also a God of Justice and righteousness and holiness!

God is the embodiment of love, but He is also the embodiment of justice.

And His justice demands that sin, all sin, be judged.

I have heard people say that you shouldn’t scare people into salvation.

 Just tell them about the love of Christ and let love bring them to Christ.

After all God is a God of love.

Fine and dandy but the problem is some people will not respond to the love of God unless they first experience the fear of God.

 What is wrong with someone coming to Christ because they fear hell? Especially if just the promise of Heaven isn’t enough to tip the balances for them.

Scripture doesn’t say that the fear of the Lord is the end of wisdom, it says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. In other words, we are to fear the Lord first not last.

Jesus Himself tells us it is healthy to fear the Lord and why..

 **Matthew 10:28 (NIV) 28Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.**

To fear the Lord doesn’t mean to walk around in terror of Him.

To fear the Lord means that we should have an awesome amount of reverent respect for Him.

EXAMPLE: How many of you are afraid of policemen?

 If you are going down the highway at 80 MPH in a 65 MPH zone and see a patrol car in the distance or coming up behind you, how do you react? Do you keep on driving at 80 mph or do you feel this sudden rush of slight anxiety and slow down?

 If you do it doesn’t mean that you are terrified of policemen, but it does means that are respectful of them, respectful of the authority that they represent.

 You realize that they can give you a ticket or even revoke your driving privileges! So, if you are smart you will fear them. Not fear as in terror but fear as in respect for the authority that they have and what they can do to you if you do wrong!

Grace teaches us to fear God. Not with the terror of Him but having an awesome amount of respect for Him and the authority that He possesses.

 Jesus said:

**28Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.**

Hear is the last amazing thing about grace that I want to talk about this morning.

Grace teaches us to fear God and it is this same Grace that relieves our fears of God.

 John Newton shares his person testimony with us, what he has experienced about the Grace of God in his hymn “Amazing Grace”.

“Grace has taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved”! How precious did that Grace appear the hour I first believed!

Grace not only taught his heart to fear God but the same grace, once embraced relieved his fear of God.

Sound like an oxymoron, Like a contradiction in terms.

 It’s not at all! It was the fear of the Lord that was the beginning of wisdom for John Newton.The fear of having to pay the price of his own sin. The fear of hell, the just punishment of God that brought him to a place of embracing Christ for the forgiveness of his sins so that he could advert that penalty. This fear was a first work of God’s grace within his life.

 After being fearful of the just punishment of God for his sins, this same grace offered him the means of forgiveness whereby he could advert this just judgment of God.

So, he says: Grace has taught my heart to fear and it was this same grace my fears relieved!

 In his old age, it was suggested that John Newton retire because of bad health and failing memory. He replied, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior!"

What was it that John Newton remembered at this last stage in life where all the other memory was passing away from him? He remembered Gods Amazing Grace!

 I remember but two things: That I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior!"

Are you thankful for the amazing grace of God this morning?

 Have you truly embraced this amazing grace for your life?

When all of life is said and done, when all life is boiled down, what remains is the wonderful truth of God’s grace.

 Two things I know….I am a great sinner and Christ is a greater Savior!

 God’s Grace is truly a wonderful and an amazing thing, but we will only see it as wonderful and amazing when we personally embraced it and applied it to our life….

We embrace and apply this amazing grace to our life one way and one way alone… And that is by coming before the Lord repentant and sorry for the sins that we have committed against Him and surrendering whatever life that we may have left to Him! Then and only then will God’s grace become the amazing thing that it is, to us.

Have you done what is necessary to realize this amazing grace of God in your life This morning?

Have you surrendered your life to Jesus?

Have you come to recognize God grace for the amazing thing that it really is?

Close with Amazing Grace…..