

A reading from 1 Corinthians 15 v 1-10.NLT

Paul writes.

Let me remind you dear brothers and sisters of the Good News I preached to you before. You welcomed it then, and you still stand firm in it. It is this Good news that saves you if you continue to believe the message I told you. Unless of course you believed something that was never true in the first place. I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed onto me.

Christ died for our sins just as the Scriptures said.

He was buried, and was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said.

He was seen by Peter and then by the twelve.

After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive though some have died.

Then he was seen by James, and later by all the apostles.

Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time I also saw him.

For I am the least of all the apostles. In fact, I'm not worthy to be called an apostle after the way I persecuted God's church. But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favour on me- and not without results. For I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not I but God, who was working through me by his grace.

I wonder if you have come across or heard of a man called Fletcher of Madeley?

John William Fletcher, to be exact. He was a contemporary of John Wesley and a key interpreter of Wesleyan Theology in the 18th century. One of Methodism's first great theologians.

Well, I confess that although I think I may have heard his name, I didn't know anything about him, until a few days ago as I was preparing today's thought.

I have been thinking a lot about God's grace and what it means.

God's abundant, amazing grace,

Such a short word, but with a vast, never ending meaning.

To condense it into a "mere" thought for a day, is well, challenging, and really I am only making a very small offering.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, are words we often hear at the end of a service, as part of the blessing. And then we sometimes hear those who probably don't proclaim to be Christians, saying: "There but for the grace of God go I".

Insurance companies still use the word in relation to claims, and when in an appeal, they find no legal reason to pay out, they can, out of the kindness of their hearts, donate what is called "an act of grace". In Christian circles, the word has been defined in various ways, and doesn't mean exactly the same in the Old Testament as in the New. There are different flavours to the word, but its central meaning in the New Testament is that of unmerited favour, and is used freely in Scripture. Put another way, it means the unmerited loving kindness of God.

I would say it is difficult to think of anything more precious than the unmerited favour of God.

The apostle Paul claimed that he owed his whole existence to it.

v 10 of the reading from 1 Corinthians 15.

So what about Fletcher of Madeley, where does he come into these thoughts of grace?

As I said, he was a friend of John Wesley, who helped the government in a special way.

Anxious to reward him, for his work, the government sent a representative to his home, and hinting at their gratitude,

the government official asked if there was anything Mr. Fletcher wanted by way of a thank you gift.

His reply came as something of a surprise.

"I want nothing", he said. "except more grace".

There was nothing the British government held which Fletcher wanted.

All his longing was for more of God,

I wonder what our reaction would have been in a similar situation?

Would our hearts remain satisfied with a monetary or expensive gift, when we could receive an abundance of grace?

Fletcher of Madeley makes for interesting reading, not least as he was married to one of the first woman preachers authorised by John Wesley to preach in 1763..

He was known for his piety and generosity. John Wesley had even chosen Fletcher to lead the Methodist movement upon Wesley's death, but actually Fletcher died before Wesley.

Friends, as I said a brief thought about Grace.

In expectation, we are able to reach out and it is there, and when we absorb it, we can reach out for more. There is so much to have, and in taking all the grace we can use today, it will not leave God impoverished. If we use up the grace he pours into our hearts today, we can be assured-tomorrow there will be more..

A Prayer to close today's thought.

Heavenly Father, not only was your servant Paul, a debtor to grace, but we owe all that we are to it too.

Help us Lord to use what we have, so that we can receive more..

May the grace of God thrill your hearts and transform your minds.

May the peace of God flood your souls.

And may the love of God flow through your lives to the honour of his name,
Amen.

Song, Only by grace can we enter.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F21gQwATaac>