

Titus 2:11,12,15 **The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people. It trains us to reject ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the...glorious appearance of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ....Keep telling people these things.** (EHV)

Grateful citizens of Christ's kingdom and this great nation:

What is a wage? Fair pay for honest work. What is a prize? Compensation or something you win for doing better than the competition. What is an award? Recognition for one's exemplary service or high achievements.

But, when a person is not capable of earning a wage, can win no prize, and deserves no award -- yet receives a benefit anyway -- that is a picture of grace. Grace is God's undeserved, unmerited love.

Certainly neither you nor I as individuals, nor our nation as a whole, deserves God's grace. Even if we would get rid of our shameful abortion laws (for every 100 live births in our nation in 2017 there were 18 of our most defenseless citizens put to death in the womb); even if we would get rid of all cases of injustice, all our materialism, prejudices, immorality, and vulgarity from within our nation's borders, we would *still* not deserve God's grace. He loves us only by his own volition in spite of our personal and national sins, and not because he sees anything loveable about us.

This week as we celebrate the independence of our nation, flawed in many ways yet great in many ways, we pray to God as we do in the song, "*O Beautiful, for Spacious Skies*" (AKA "*America the Beautiful*"): **God Shed His Grace on Thee!** (1) ***By his fruitful gospel***, (2) ***By his sustaining providence***, (3) ***By our being a blessing to America***.

## 1

In his letter to Titus, the Apostle Paul tells us that God's Word does 2 very important things for us: (1) It shows us God's gracious salvation, and (2) It motivates us to live our lives to his glory in grateful love.

Back around 1900 a young man named Ben went west to make his fortune. He wasn't rich, but eventually accumulated some good land and built a nice farm house and barn on it. He raised crops and managed a nice herd of cattle. He decided that now was the time to get married. So Ben placed an ad in a newspaper out east that asking if any young woman might want to be a pen pal and perhaps, down the line, consider marriage and life on the ranch. Before long, he began receiving letters from a certain "Molly." After a time of correspondence, she decided to come out west to meet Ben. So Ben went to the Kansas City train station and waited to finally meet her.

When the train arrived there were lots of people, including single women, getting off. Suddenly he waved and yelled, "Molly, over here!" She looked his way, walked over to him, smiled and asked, "How did you know who I was?" He replied, "From your letters." "But there were no pictures in them," she said. "Oh yes there were!" he replied. "There are lots of pictures...in your words!" He had spent countless hours poring over every word -- looking for every little clue that would tell him who Molly really was. He had fallen in love with her words -- words that had painted her portrait.

God's precious Word paints a vivid portrait of who he is. When we read them carefully and fall in love with his **words**, then we fall in love with their **author**. What we hear is the most beautiful message of love ever spoken or written; the love of a perfect God who came to help and save his imperfect people, who spared them from the punishment they deserved by not sparing his own Son who willingly paid for every sin. Yes, ***God Shed His Grace on Thee*** in the person of Jesus, the living Gospel.

How blessed we are to have that Gospel. Through it, what God desires -- our spending eternity with him -- has borne fruit!

## 2

But while we are still here, God continues to take care of us until he calls us home to heaven.

A drive across our nation reveals stunning beauty: the purple mountains majesty, the amber waves of grain, the fruited plains, the gleaming alabaster cities. How often aren't we moved to say, "What beautiful things God has made!" and "This is no accident. This grandeur is by God's gracious hand!"

On this 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend each one of us needs to take some time to thank God for the nation he has granted us. We are blessed beyond measure...in spite of all our national complaining. God waters our crops, fills our grocery stores and cupboards, grants us talents, abilities, and jobs, and has allowed peace within our borders.

And more than anything, in his providence, the Lord has allowed us the freedom to worship as we please. In many countries churches like this are illegal. But you and I can waltz right in here every week, be filled with God's Word, and be reassured that, through Word and Sacrament and the power of the Holy Spirit, ***God is shedding his grace on thee and me!*** May we not take this great privilege of freedom to worship for granted by neglecting it. Jesus shed his blood to save us. And many fellow Americans shed their blood so that we could freely worship Jesus.

### 3

But this grace of God isn't just about me. Others need to know about God's grace too.

God has blessed our nation. He wants you and me, his people, to be a blessing to our nation. We can do many things to bless others. We can be good citizens, vote responsibly (using the principles of God's Word as our guide), pay our taxes, obey the laws of the land, respect our leaders, etc.

But here is what we can do that will truly make a difference in the lives of others: **(1) Pray** for them. Pray for our leaders rather than complain. Pray also for those who do not know Jesus and his forgiving love. Pray that their hearts will become open and receptive to the gospel of God's grace. **(2) Live** before others, as Jesus would live, so they can see his love and want to know more about the Savior and the life he gives. Paul says, "***Reject ungodliness and worldly lusts and live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the...glorious appearance of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.***" When we were brought to faith in Jesus by the Holy Spirit we automatically signed up to be his ambassadors. **(3) Take the Word of God to others.** Reach out and speak the gospel to others with passion! He says, "***Keep telling people these things.***" We have more than weather and sports to talk about. Season your conversation with Jesus and his Word.

You and I are the recipients of God's gracious blessings. Now we can be a blessing to our nation:

Pray to Jesus.

Live for Jesus.

Proclaim Jesus.

America, may God shed his grace on thee!

Amen.