**GRACE (#3)**
***Acres of Grace***

From 1870 to 1920 Russell Conwell went on a speaking circuit to tell a simple story with a powerful moral lesson. He called it “*Acres of Diamonds*.” He is said to have given this speech over 6,000 times. He was perhaps the first true motivational speaker in America. He inspired thousands of common people to believe in themselves and become entrepreneurs, many of them becoming millionaires. He himself became a millionaire from his speeches and used that wealth to found Temple University and build a hospital in Philadelphia. The Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary is named after him. I have read his story, and his speech, many times and never grow tired of it. The reason I return to it often is not to make money (which by now should be obvious) but to find grace. Let me explain.

Mr. Conwell had served in the Civil War, rising to the rank of Captain. After the war he left his atheism behind and became a passionate religious man, soon becoming the pastor of a Baptist church in Philadelphia. In 1870 he made a trip to the Middle East and there, while on a trip down the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, was told a story by an old Arab guide from Bagdad. The story was about an ancient Persian named Ali Hafed who owned a very large farm and was wealthy and content. But then a Buddhist priest told him about the worth of diamonds and how it could make him exceedingly rich. Suddenly, Ali felt very poor and wanted to be wealthy beyond his wildest dreams. He was told by the priest that if he found a river with white sands on its shore he could then find diamonds. So he sold his farm and went off in search of diamonds. Over time he failed to find any diamonds, eventually becoming broke and starving to death. He then committed suicide.

Pitiful story, huh? Until you hear the rest of it. The man who bought Ali Hafed’s farm led his camel to a garden brook to drink. He noticed a black stone sparkling from the sunlight. An old priest came to his house and saw the small black stone and knew it was a diamond. They rushed out to the brook again to investigate and soon discovered many such black rocks. What they had found was later to be called The Diamond Mine of Golconda, the greatest diamond mind in the world! Those Golconda diamonds have ever since decorated the crowns of monarchs and queens. Ali Hafed had acres of diamonds in his own backyard!

The same story is then told about the man who lived in California in 1847 who owned a ranch. He heard there was a possible gold strike in southern California and immediately sold his ranch to a man named Sutter and went off hoping to make his fortune in gold. Mr. Sutter’s daughter one day brought some sand in from their property to look at it near their fireplace. A visitor saw some sparkling grains in that light and soon discovered it was gold. The famous Sutter’s Gold Strike in 1849 changed America as tens of thousands of people hurried west to make their fortune. That rancher had acres of gold in his own backyard.

Do you see the moral of this story as a Christian? No, it is not to dig into your property in hopes of finding oil, gold or diamonds. When my kids were at home and we had dogs all I ever discovered from their diggings was my yard had acres of grubworms. At least it was cheap to go fishing with all that free bait.

The lesson I learned from this story is that disciples of Christ far too often see the five-talent saints and dream of “what if.”

What if God had only blessed me with:

1. A better family life (better parents, better spouse, better kids, etc) – I would be able to serve God so much more.
2. A Christian husband / wife – I would be able to do so much more for the church and could be so much happier in life.
3. A better education – I would be able to study my Bible more diligently and therefore teach others better.
4. A better singing voice – I could lead songs and serve in public worship for God.
5. A better speaking skill – I could be a gospel preacher and save lots of souls.
6. A better a job – I could give so much more to the Lord’s work.

You can see where this is going. We all play the “what if” mind game, wishing we had more talents to use for God’s kingdom. But, like Ali Hafed, and like the California rancher, we need to realize we all have Acres of Grace in our own God-given talents we already possess.

Remember, the self-centered Corinthians played “What if I had the gift of tongues” wanting to be somebody special for God. They did not realize that the Holy Spirit “*distributed to each one individually as He wills*” (study I Cor. 12:4-11). Every Christian was given the exact talents God intended in order to edify and strengthen the whole church. God’s grace was freely given to each member to bless the entire body if only they would each use that talent(s) as God meant.

I Peter 4:10-11 is our Acres of Grace.

*10 As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another,* ***as good stewards of the******manifold grace of God****. 11 If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

Don’t spend your life day-dreaming that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. “What if” I could be him, or her, is a foolish game which wastes your life in looking for blessings “out there” which can easily be found right inside you with what God has already given. You have a “*gift*” (worth far more than diamonds or gold) which you can “*minister*” (serve) to others. If you will stop looking outside yourself for what you do not have, and focus inwardly on “*the ability which God supplies,*” then God will be glorified! That, dear brother, is all that matters in this life.

Share God’s grace with others today. *Freely you have received, freely give* (Matt. 10:8).

I love you. – Rick