**GRACE (#7)**

***Grace and The Golden Touch***

I just finished reading a few stories from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s book for children called *A Wonder Book For Girls and Boys* (published 1852). There are six stories in it which take ancient legends and retell them in simple language that would fire the imagination of a child. Mr. Hawthorne (1804 – 1864), one of America’s greatest novelists, who wrote such masterpieces as *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and *The House of Seven Gables* (1851), created some of his best work writing for children.

For example, many of you have heard of the legend of King Midas, the man with “the golden touch.” The Phrygian king had done a good deed for a Satyr and was therefore granted a wish (much like Aladdin) by the wine-god Dionysus. The greedy Midas desired to be filthy rich and so asked that everything he touched be turned into gold. Given his wish, against Dionysus’ advice, he excitedly began to run about touching everything. First an oak twig … gold! A stone … gold! Roses in his garden … gold! He was delirious with joy. But then he grew hungry and asked for his meal. Touching his food it turned into gold. His drink was changed to golden ice. Suddenly he realized the foolishness of his greed. His daughter ran to comfort him and upon embracing her father was, like Lot’s wife into salt, turned into gold.

He prayed to Dionysus, begging to be delivered from this curse. Dionysus heard his prayer, and consented; telling Midas to wash in the river [Pactolus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pactolus). Then, whatever he put into the water would be reversed of the touch. He quickly did so, rushing back to transform his daughter, then to transform the damage caused to everything else. He had learned his lesson about “fool’s gold.” He had been the fool.

My guess is that most all of you who read this know the following quote: *“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows”* (I Tim. 6:10). Greed is not just the problem with a fictional king from ancient times. The love of money is a curse that has plagued most all of us from time to time, perhaps even to this very moment. That is why it is critical to see “mammon” for what it is, a potential god that can cost us our soul. Jesus said, *“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon”* (Matt. 6:24).

I’ve titled this article “*Grace and The Golden Touch*.” The reason I’ve done so is to help us all look at money through the eyes of God. Bills and Coins are but a commodity to exchange for something we want or need. The old timers who had no money would simply barter some valuable they owned, or even some talent they possessed, in exchange for something they needed. Jim might trade a bushel of corn to Jack for a hand-sewn blanket to keep his child warm at night. Joe might build John a barn in exchange for a needed mule to plow his field. The trade was meant to be a win-win for both parties. One family needed to eat that night, the other needed to be warm. The exchange of goods was equal in value for both men.

When Jesus asked, “*What would a man give in exchange for his soul*?” He was asking what you would barter in this life that would be of equal value in the next life? (Matt. 16:26). In other words, if Satan is bartering with you, offering “*the kingdoms of the world and their glory*” (Matt. 4:8) in exchange for “*the pleasures of sin for a season*” (Heb. 11:25), would you do it? Millions, even billions, do it every single day.

But we need to see money, or bartering, through the lens of God’s grace. The most powerful study of money is found in a text that never once mentions it. Curious?

Then read 2 Corinthians 8-9. It will forever change the way you see money.

As you read just take a highlighter and look for the word *grace*. Depending on your translation you will probably see the word at least six times in English (like my NKJV). But if you look it up in a Lexicon (Greek dictionary) you will see it ten times. CHARIS is seen as “*grace*” and “*gift*” and “*thanks*” in 2 Corinthians 8:1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 16, 19; 9:8, 14, 15. In most of these verses it is referring to how the Macedonians, and hopefully the Corinthians, would see their giving as “grace money.”

But look even deeper. Grace just explodes off the page as we see other words and phrases that reveal how these Macedonians (saints in Berea, Thessalonica, Philippi) felt deeply God’s love and grace and wanted to “pay it forward” to their needy brethren in Jerusalem. Get that highlighter again and mark through “*abundance of joy*” (8:2), “*wealth of their liberality*” (8:2), “*fellowship of ministering to the saints*” (8:4), “*abound in grace*” (8:7), “*the sincerity of your love*” (8:8), “*a readiness to desire it … a completion*” (8:11), “*a willing mind*” (8:12), “*your abundance may supply their lack*” (8:14), “*gathered much… gathered little*” (8:15), “*the same earnest care*” (8:16), “*to show your ready mind*” (8:19), “*the proof of your love*” (8:24).

Then in chapter 9 keep going. “*the ministering to the saints*” (9:1), “*your willingness*” (9:2), “*your zeal*” (9:2), “*your generous gift*” (9:5), “*a matter of generosity*” (9:5), “*sows bountifully*” (9:6), “*purposes in his heart*” (9:7), “*a cheerful giver*” (9:7), “*abundance for every good work*” (9:8), “*multiply the seed you have sown*” (9:10), “*increase the fruits of your righteousness*” (9:10), “*enriched in everything for all liberality*” (9:11), “*supplies the needs of the saints*” (9:12), “*abounding through many thanksgivings to God*” (9:12), “*for your liberal sharing with them and all men*” (9:13).

I don’t know about you but I’m sitting here crying. Only a hard heart would fail to be emotionally moved by this powerful display of GRACE RECEIVED – GRACE GIVEN.

From the moment Paul responded to that Macedonian Call to “*come over and help us*” (Ac. 16:9-10) these poverty stricken saints had felt God’s grace and wanted to give back however, whenever and wherever they could. Lydia, the Jailer, the noble Bereans, and all other converts in this region had felt God’s amazing grace. It is as if God (not Dionysus) had granted them a wish and they had asked for an opportunity to give back to others what He had given to them. God granted their wish. They received “The Golden Touch.” Everything they touched turned to Grace, even the “gold” (money) they put in the collection basket.

Grace Received / Grace Given. That has forever changed my view of money. This Sunday God will offer me one wish. I know what I’m going to ask for!

I love you. - Rick