Pentecost 2 2 Chronicles 30:1-5, 10-22
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Come Celebrate God's Amazing Grace!
I. The invitation extended.
II. The invitation rejected.
III. The invitation humbly accepted.

Dear Christian friends,

Some invitations are pretty INFORMAL. One friend says to another, "Come on over today for the **Packer game**." "OK, what should I bring?" **Some** invitations are VERY FORMAL. They **come** in a fancy envelope with **fancy** engraving and **fancy** language. "THE HONOR of **your presence** is requested…" Who talks like that anymore? **Some** invitations you receive and you wonder WHY you got them. You're **invited** to the wedding of the **son** of your second cousin twice removed whom you haven't seen or **talked** to in over ten years. What is that ALL ABOUT? **Looks** like they want a gift.

In **this reading** and the **gospel** reading we have invitations FROM GOD. They're not a SUMMONS from an **angry judge** but precious invitations from our DEAR FATHER. God won't force His invitation down anyone's throat. But boy, WHAT AN INVITATION this is! God's invitation reads, "COME CELEBRATE GOD'S AMAZING GRACE!" We **see here** 1)the invitation extended, 2)the **invitation** rejected and 3)the **invitation** humbly accepted.

I. The invitation extended.

These verses take us to TIMES OF TURMOIL and **crisis** for God's OT people. The **Jews** had long been divided into TWO SEPARATE kingdoms – the northern kingdom of **Israel** and the southern kingdom of **Judah**. The **northern** kingdom of Israel had just been conquered by the Assyrians. It would never rise again. In the **south kingdom** of Judah it was a TIME OF CHANGE and **hope**. A new king – **Hezekiah** – was reigning. Hezekiah was the exact opposite of his **ungodly** dad AHAZ. Ahaz had actually locked shut God's temple in Jerusalem and instead he has ***"set up altars*** (to idols) ***at every street corner in Jerusalem. In every town in Judah he built high places to burn sacrifices to other gods and provoked the LORD, the God of his fathers, to anger."***

By God's AMAZING GRACE Ahaz's son Hezekiah was a GODLY, DEVOUT believer. He's purified and reopened the temple. Now it was time to celebrate the Passover which ***"had not been celebrated in large numbers according to what was written."*** Hezekiah was a godly king concerned about the **souls** of his people – and not just them. Hezekiah REACHES OUT to the Jews still living in **what had been** the northern kingdom of Israel. ***"Hezekiah sent messengers to all Israel and Judah. He also wrote letters inviting Ephraim and Manasseh*** (the area of the northern kingdom) ***to come to the House of the LORD at Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover for the LORD, the God of Israel."***

The **Passover** was an OT celebration of God's AMAZING GRACE. It was an annual remembering and **celebrating** what God HAD DONE for the Israelites in the past. The Passover took them back to the days of bitter slavery in Egypt. It reminded them of how the blood of the **Passover lambs** smeared on their doorframes had protected their forefathers from the angel of death as it went through Egypt. The Passover recalled how God had rescued them from Egypt and brought them to the Promised Land of Canaan. That remembering and celebrating in the Passover FOCUSED the **people** on God's AMAZING GRACE. That remembering and **celebrating** was meant to strengthen their faith – **give** them comfort – peace – **hope** – **strength** as they dealt with the PROBLEMS and TURMOIL of **everyday life**. The Passover was meant to focus the people on their FAITHFUL GOD and His **amazing grace**.

Isn't that also the purpose of church **every week**? LIKE the OT Israelites we come to church BATTERED and **banged up** by life's storms and **struggles**. We come burdened with **sin** and guilt –

with fears and **failures** – with problems and **pains**. THEN WHAT HAPPENS in worship? With Scripture readings and **sermon** – with liturgy and **hymns** - we are focused on God's AMAZING GRACE. WE remember and celebrate what God HAS DONE for us **in the past**. We recall Bethlehem – the **very Son** of God born our brother, our Savior. We see again the **perfect life** Jesus lived for us and in our place. We gather again at the cross – the **sinless** Jesus punished for the sins of the whole world – Jesus' blood shed to ***"cleanse us from all sin."*** We look again at Jesus' empty grave – our REDEEMER LIVES triumphant over death and the grave! We see that font and recall all those PRICELESS BLESSINGS God gave us when we were baptized **so many years** ago – God forgiving our sins – making us His children – promising us heaven. We come and receive with **simple bread** and wine the very body and blood our Savior gave into death ***"for the forgiveness"*** of ALL our sins. Oh, HOW our God LOVES us! WHAT AMAZING GRACE! We are forgiven! **Trusting** in Jesus we are God's dear children – heirs of eternal life in heaven! That WEEKLY remembering and **celebrating** of God's AMAZING GRACE is meant to strengthen our faith – to give us comfort – **peace** – **hope** – strength – as we deal with life's UPS and downs. That WEEKLY worship is meant to focus us on our FAITHFUL GOD and His **amazing grace**. EVERY WEEK the invitation is extended, "COME, **come** celebrate God's AMAZING GRACE!"

The **invitation** is extended – but it's often…

II. The invitation rejected.

The proclamation went out ***"throughout Israel, from Dan to Beersheba"*** – from ONE END of the country to the other. As the ***"messengers"*** made their way through the FALLEN, NORTHERN kingdom of Israel ***"the people laughed at them and ridiculed them."*** You could almost have EXPECTED that. The northern kingdom had **pretty well** turned its back on the Lord and His temple in Jerusalem. They had chased after one idol after another – the **golden calves**, Baal, etc.

In AMAZING GRACE God hadn't given up on them. With TOUGH LOVE God put them through some **hard times** – war – famine – **defeat** – destruction. God was trying to knock some sense into their THICK HEADS and **hard hearts**. God was trying to show them HOW WORTHLESS – what frauds – their idols were. God was **trying** to get through to them, "You NEED Me. I'm HERE for you. Come back to Me." But they wouldn't listen. Their response was, "LEAVE us alone. DON'T BOTHER me." As they heard yet another invitation to **celebrate** God's amazing grace they ***"laughed and scorned"*** it as many bitter people do. "If God is SO GOOD **then why** is my life so **bad**?" They see the mess as ALL GODS FAULT and **not their doing**. God's invitation is REJECTED.

There's something else here. We didn't read the verses (vv. 6-9) but the invitation **Hezekiah sent** out was a CLEAR CALL to repent and **return** to God. They didn't want to do that. Their attitude was, "**No**, I'm not GOING TO CHANGE my ways – **change** my language – change my morals and **priorities**. No, I won't admit I've **sinned** – I was **wrong**." **Rather** than drop their SINFUL WAYS they dropped God instead. **Rather** than give up their **sinful ways** they gave up the ONLY REAL GOD – their only REAL SAVIOR and **hope**.

Jesus' parable in the gospel reading gave other examples of God's invitation rejected. ***"They paid no attention and went off – one to his fields, another to his business."*** Those are examples – WARNINGS! – of messed-up PRIORITIES. **Other things** were more important to them than God's AMAZING GRACE. **Other things** were more precious to them than God's forgiveness and **promises**. They saw worship and **God's Word** as a WASTE OF TIME.

God's invitation to celebrate His **amazing grace** is often rejected – but NOT BY everyone! We also see God's…

III. Invitation humbly accepted.

"Nevertheless, some men from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. In Judah the hand of God was present to give them one heart to follow the command of the king and the command of the officials, in agreement with the word of the LORD." Note well that this accepting God's invitation was ALL GOD'S DOING – ***"the hand of God was present to give them one heart to follow the command of the king."*** That anyone accepts God's invitation – that WE believe in Jesus as our Savior and have come to church today – that's ALL GOD'S DOING. ***"No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' but by the Holy Spirit."***

God's invitation was accepted in HUMBLE REPENTANCE. ***"They quickly removed the altars*** (to the different idols) ***from Jerusalem. They took away all the altars for burning incense and threw them into the Kidron Valley"*** (the garbage dump for Jerusalem). The people backed up their WORDS WITH ACTIONS. They got busy cleaning up – GETTING RID – of **anything** that would GET IN THE WAY of their worshiping their **Savior** God and celebrating His **amazing grace**.

As we celebrate God's **amazing grace** we are to ALSO DO SO with **humble repentance**. We are to back up our WORDS of faith and **praise** with LIVES of faith and **praise**. WHATEVER could come between us and our Savior **needs to be** hauled out to the garbage dump. Check your life out. Are you IN NEED – does God say you/I need an attitude adjustment – need our priorities **readjusted**? Does your language need to be **cleaned up** – the way you treat or **talk about** other people need to be straightened out? Are there sites on the internet you need to **stop visiting** – some music or movies we should **junk**?

"The people of Israel who were present in Jerusalem observed the Festival of Unleavened Bread for seven days with great rejoicing. The Levites and the priests praised the LORD day by day with loud instruments for the LORD." They humbly accepted GOD'S INVITATION and they joyfully celebrated God's **amazing grace**. WHAT'S NEAT is how this whole thing ends. The Passover was a ONE DAY festival immediately followed by the WEEK-LONG **celebration** of ***"the Feast of Unleavened Bread."*** After all that the people still weren't ready to GO HOME. Verse 23 tells us, ***"The whole assembly then agreed to celebrate the festival seven more days; so for another seven days they celebrated joyfully."*** FOCUSED on God's amazing grace and mighty deeds and **promises** – look at THE CHANGE in their hearts – their **lives** – their attitude!

I'm not suggesting we **have church** for TWO WHOLE WEEKS without a break. But church every week – and those daily devotions at home during the week – WHAT A DIFFERENCE they can make in our hearts and lives. **How** they help keep us focused on God's AMAZING GRACE – His mighty deeds and **promises**. Come – come CELEBRATE God's **amazing grace**! Amen.

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