

**Theme: God's Grace to you this Easter.**

<sup>13</sup> Then Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, <sup>14</sup> said to them, "You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined *Him* in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him; <sup>15</sup> no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him. <sup>16</sup> I will therefore chastise Him and release *Him*" <sup>17</sup> (for it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast).

<sup>18</sup> And they all cried out at once, saying, "Away with this *Man*, and release to us Barabbas" — <sup>19</sup> who had been thrown into prison for a certain rebellion made in the city, and for murder.

<sup>20</sup> Pilate, therefore, wishing to release Jesus, again called out to them. <sup>21</sup> But they shouted, saying, "Crucify *Him*, crucify Him!"

<sup>22</sup> Then he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has He done? I have found no reason for death in Him. I will therefore chastise Him and let *Him* go."

<sup>23</sup> But they were insistent, demanding with loud voices that He be crucified. And the voices of these men and of the chief priests prevailed. <sup>24</sup> So Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested. <sup>25</sup> And he released to them the one they requested, who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison; but he delivered Jesus to their will.

<sup>26</sup> Now as they led Him away, they laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear *it* after Jesus.

<sup>27</sup> And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him. <sup>28</sup> But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. <sup>29</sup> For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed *are* the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!' <sup>30</sup> Then they will begin 'to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" ' <sup>31</sup> For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"

<sup>32</sup> There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death. <sup>33</sup> And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. <sup>34</sup> Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

And they divided His garments and cast lots. <sup>35</sup> And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God."

<sup>36</sup> The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine, <sup>37</sup> and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself."

<sup>38</sup> And an inscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew:

THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

<sup>39</sup> Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us."

<sup>40</sup> But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? <sup>41</sup> And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." <sup>42</sup> Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

<sup>43</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

<sup>44</sup> Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. <sup>45</sup> Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup> And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" Having said this, He breathed His last.

<sup>47</sup> So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, "Certainly this was a righteous Man!"

<sup>48</sup> And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned. <sup>49</sup> But all His acquaintances, and the women who followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

<sup>50</sup> Now behold, *there was* a man named Joseph, a council member, a good and just man. <sup>51</sup> He had not consented to their decision and deed. *He was* from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God. <sup>52</sup> This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. <sup>53</sup> Then he took

it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb *that was* hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before. <sup>54</sup>That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near.

<sup>55</sup>And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid.

### **Introduction.**

This year my Easter series is very short. I will teach two messages from Luke's Gospel which give us a very clear account of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Before we begin to discover what our passage teaches us, we need to understand something about the **writer of this Gospel and his intentions in writing it.**

To do this we need to go back to the beginning of the Gospel.

### **Luke 1: v. 1-4. (N.L.T.)**

Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. <sup>2</sup>They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. <sup>3</sup>Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write an accurate account for you, most honorable Theophilus, <sup>4</sup>so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught.

Luke was the only Gospel writer who didn't personally know the physical Jesus.

Luke was not present during the 3-year ministry of Jesus.

However, his sources for writing this Gospel came from eyewitnesses of these events.

Luke actually visited all the people who witnessed these events.

He wanted to write a very detailed, orderly account of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Luke wrote his Gospel specifically to **one person.** His name was **"Theophilus".**

It may be the reason why Luke focuses on **individual people in his Gospel.**

You could call Luke's Gospel, the Gospel **written to an individual, about individual people who met Jesus and experienced His love and Grace towards them.**

Therefore, today as we begin this Easter series, I hope that the love and Grace of Jesus will be felt in your heart.

In our Bible reading we encountered **4 individual people** who I would like to focus upon this morning.

**These are Barabbas, the thief on the cross, Jesus, and finally Joseph.**

As we learn about the situation concerning these individual people, it is clear that the **Grace of God shines through,** like the sunshine in Japan on a glorious Golden week morning.

### **1. The Grace of God to a criminal called Barabbas. – v. 13-25.**

To get the background to where we are in Luke's Gospel, I am going to read a few passages from Luke.

#### **Luke 1: v. 26-35.**

<sup>26</sup>Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name *was* Mary. <sup>28</sup>And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored *one*, the Lord *is* with you; blessed *are* you among women!"

<sup>29</sup>But when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. <sup>30</sup>Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. <sup>32</sup>He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. <sup>33</sup>And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

<sup>34</sup>Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

<sup>35</sup>And the angel answered and said to her, "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.*

So the God of the Bible produced a wonderful miracle and came into this world in the form of a baby. He had to come through a Virgin, because of the sin of our original parents Adam and Eve.

God created the first Man and Woman perfect and without any sin.

Through their disobedience to their creator, God punished them with "Death".

As a result of their actions, everybody is born into this world with a sinful nature.

It is not that mankind always wants to do wrong things. **It comes about because of our sinful nature.**

Originally we were created to live with God forever with a perfect nature.

God was now sending His own son, Jesus, to rescue mankind from eternal punishment.

Although Jesus came to God's chosen people, as a fulfilment of Jewish prophecies in the past, He was also going to be a **"light to the Gentiles"**. (Luke 2: v.32)

This means that the message of Jesus is for the **Japanese people too**, and also for **everybody in the world.**

Luke also tells us that when Jesus was 30 years old He began a teaching ministry.

Jesus chose 12 men to join Him as he went around Israel teaching about **God's Kingdom and what people needed to do to enter that kingdom.**

#### **Luke 4: v.14-21. (N.L.T.)**

<sup>14</sup> Then Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit's power. Reports about him spread quickly through the whole region. <sup>15</sup> He taught regularly in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

<sup>16</sup> When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. <sup>17</sup> The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written:

<sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,

for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,

that the blind will see,

that the oppressed will be set free,

<sup>19</sup> and that the time of the LORD's favor has come."

<sup>20</sup> He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. <sup>21</sup> Then he began to speak to them. "The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!"

In this passage Jesus claimed to be the fulfilment of a prophecy by the Jewish prophet called Isaiah. In order to support His claim that He was the long awaited Jewish Messiah, Jesus produced **many miracles and also cast out demonic spirits from people's lives.**

Luke tells us that Jesus even **raised the son of a widow from the dead.**

#### **Luke 7: v. 11-16. (N.L.T.)**

<sup>11</sup> Soon afterward Jesus went with his disciples to the village of Nain, and a large crowd followed him. <sup>12</sup> A funeral procession was coming out as he approached the village gate. The young man who had died was a widow's only son, and a large crowd from the village was with her. <sup>13</sup> When the Lord saw her, his heart overflowed with compassion. "Don't cry!" he said. <sup>14</sup> Then he walked over to the coffin and touched it, and the bearers stopped. "Young man," he said, "I tell you, get up." <sup>15</sup> Then the dead boy sat up and began to talk! And Jesus gave him back to his mother.

<sup>16</sup> Great fear swept the crowd, and they praised God, saying, "A mighty prophet has risen among us," and "God has visited his people today."

This miracle shows us that **Jesus even had the power over death.**

The final thing that we really need to know about Jesus is that **He forgave people their sins.**

The Jewish people knew that it was only God who could forgive sins, so this was a challenge to their thinking.

#### **Luke 7: v.36-50. (N.L.T.)**

<sup>36</sup> One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him, so Jesus went to his home and sat down to eat. <sup>37</sup> When a certain immoral woman from that city heard he was eating there, she brought a beautiful alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. <sup>38</sup> Then she knelt behind him at his feet, weeping. Her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing his feet and putting perfume on them.

<sup>39</sup> When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!"

<sup>40</sup> Then Jesus answered his thoughts. "Simon," he said to the Pharisee, "I have something to say to you."

"Go ahead, Teacher," Simon replied.

<sup>41</sup> Then Jesus told him this story: "A man loaned money to two people—500 pieces of silver to one and 50 pieces to the other. <sup>42</sup> But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?"

<sup>43</sup> Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt."

"That's right," Jesus said. <sup>44</sup> Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn't offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. <sup>45</sup> You didn't greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. <sup>46</sup> You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume.

<sup>47</sup> "I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love." <sup>48</sup> Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven."

<sup>49</sup> The men at the table said among themselves, "Who is this man, that he goes around forgiving sins?"

<sup>50</sup> And Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Jesus was a challenge to the thinking of the Jewish Religious leaders.

Therefore, these Jewish leaders conspired to discredit Jesus and claim that He was not who He said He was.

If Jesus was **not God in human form**, then **He would be able to be convicted for the crime of "Blasphemy"**.

The last passage we need to read is **Luke 22: v. 66- Luke 23: v.4. in N.L.T.**

<sup>66</sup> At daybreak all the elders of the people assembled, including the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. Jesus was led before this high council, <sup>67</sup> and they said, "Tell us, are you the Messiah?" But he replied, "If I tell you, you won't believe me. <sup>68</sup> And if I ask you a question, you won't answer. <sup>69</sup> But from now on the Son of Man will be seated in the place of power at God's right hand."

<sup>70</sup> They all shouted, "So, are you claiming to be the Son of God?"

And he replied, "You say that I am."

<sup>71</sup> "Why do we need other witnesses?" they said. "We ourselves heard him say it."

Then the entire council took Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor.<sup>2</sup> They began to state their case: "This man has been leading our people astray by telling them not to pay their taxes to the Roman government and by claiming he is the Messiah, a king."

<sup>3</sup> So Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

Jesus replied, "You have said it."

<sup>4</sup> Pilate turned to the leading priests and to the crowd and said, "I find nothing wrong with this man!"

Although this has been a lengthy introduction to our passage, unless you understand the background to our study, you will probably miss the point of my message.

I want you to understand what the God of the Bible desires that you hear today.

So the first person in our passage to receive God's Grace was a criminal called "Barabbas".

We are told that Barabbas was in prison for murder and rebellion.

He was a hardened criminal who did not deserve God's grace and mercy.

Pilate the Roman governor had the power to release a prisoner at every Jewish Passover every year. He offered to release Jesus as part of the deal.

However, the Jewish people decided that they wanted Jesus to be crucified and the murderer Barabbas to be released.

It doesn't seem fair that God's Son Jesus, who was 100% Holy and never committed a crime, **should be crucified on a cross, and a murderer be set free.**

On a human level, all of us would say, **"It is not right that a murderer should be set free and Jesus, God's son should be crucified, for no reason."**

However, the Bible is not a human book. It was written by the hand of God, through human men. (2 Tim. 3: v. 16)

The story about Barabbas is the story behind every Christian.

Even if it is not your story yet, it can be, through the Grace of God.

Barabbas deserved to be punished for his crime, and yet Jesus took his place.

It was through **God's GRACE**, which is **undeserved mercy**, that Barabbas was set free.

We may not have committed a crime like murder, or theft, or anything serious according to

Japanese Law, but according to **God's standard**, we have **sinned and fallen short of His Holiness.**

The Bible teaches us that we have all sinned and fallen short of God's Glory.

**(Rom.3:23)**

In God's eyes there is no difference between the sin of Barabbas, and your sin and my sin.

If Jesus can release Barabbas from the punishment of his sin, then Jesus has the power to release you for the punishment of your sin.

Jesus is in the ministry today of showing you God's grace towards your sin.

Today Jesus can release you from the burden of your sin.

Today Jesus can release you from the power of the sin that holds you back from enjoying God's goodness and plan for your eternity.

The problem that you have is understanding the seriousness of your own personal sin in God's eyes.

May God convict us all today of the seriousness of our sin, in His eyes.

## 2. **God's Grace to a criminal who understood his sin. – Luke 23: v.39-43.**

I am not sure that Barabbas ever felt sorry for his sin and trusted in God's Grace, but we do know that the criminal on the cross next to Jesus, not only understood his sin, but he also understood **who Jesus was and that He was innocent.**

**Luke 23: v. 39-43.**

<sup>39</sup> Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us."

<sup>40</sup> But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? <sup>41</sup> And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." <sup>42</sup> Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

<sup>43</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

Both of the criminals committed a crime and deserved their punishment.

However only one repented of his sin and was forgiven, but the other one refused the love of Jesus.

The question that you need to ask yourself today is which criminal on the cross represents your personal situation?

Are you represented by the criminal who understands their sin against God and have received His Grace and forgiveness through Jesus?

Or are you represented by the criminal who is refusing to acknowledge who Jesus is and refusing His love towards you?

Only you can answer that question.

## 3. **The Grace of God who allows us into His presence because of Jesus. – v.44-47.**

Before we can understand these verses we need first of all to understand how the Jewish people worshipped the God of the Bible, their creator God.

After God had rescued His chosen people from slavery in Egypt, through the leadership of Moses, God communicated with Moses concerning the building of a Tabernacle. (Exodus 25: v.1,2,8-9)  
This tent-like structure was a visual aid to teach God's people about the seriousness of sin, and the way of forgiveness for sin.

The Tabernacle was also the place where God communicated with His people.

(Show slide of the plan of the Tabernacle)

The structure of the Tabernacle allowed for a very private place, called the Holy of Holies, where only the High Priest could enter on the day of atonement, once a year, to make a special sacrifice for the sins of the people.

**The Holy of Holies was separated from the holy Place by a very thick curtain.**

**It was about 10 centre meters thick. (4 inches)**

This curtain separated a Holy God from sinful mankind.

If anybody went into the Holy of Holies, apart from the High Priest, on the day of Atonement, **they would die immediately.**

So God's system of forgiveness of sin consisted of the **sacrifice of an animal**, who would die, **instead of man dying for his sin.** The innocent animal was sacrificed in place of the guilty person.

When the Israelites got settled in the land God had promised them, they built a Temple on the same design to replace the tent-like Tabernacle.

**It also still had a very thick curtain to separate the Holy of Holies from the holy Place.**

The Jewish people understood that they must never enter into that special place or they would die.

**This area was designated as God's space where he dwelt.**

The only privileged person to enter that space was the High Priest, once a year, to make atonement for the people.

**Now we come back to v. 44-45.**

**(in N.K.J.)**

<sup>44</sup> Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. <sup>45</sup> Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two.

When God tore the curtain between the holy Place and the Holy of Holies, He was **speaking very clearly through this action.**

God was saying to mankind that through the death of His Son Jesus, He was creating a **"New Way"** of forgiveness and of entering into God's presence.

No longer were animal sacrifices needed. Jesus, God's Son, was the **once and for all sacrifice for mankind's sin.**

The Grace of God was now allowing mankind to be in His presence, because of Jesus.

This is an amazing thing that must have impacted the Jewish people in a very big way.

For about 1,440 years the Jewish people had worshipped God in a particular way.

They knew the seriousness of sin, because it cost the death of an animal to receive their forgiveness.

They knew that God could not be approached personally because he was 100% Holy.

**Mankind would immediately die if they tried to enter into His presence.**

Only the High Priest, once a year could enter into God's presence, and that was just to secure forgiveness on the day of atonement.

It must have been quite a shock for the Priests who worked in the Temple to see the curtain being torn in two.

Today, because of the death of Jesus, we can be forgiven for our many sins, and come into God's presence.

It is a personal decision that we need to make before a Holy God, our Creator, the God of the Bible.

There are four things that you need to do today if you want to know God's forgiveness and to be in His presence for all eternity.

**Firstly, you need to understand the seriousness of your sin.**

The God of the Bible hates sin and He must punish sin, and He will punish our sin.

Ultimately that punishment is our death, and eternal separation from our creator.

**Secondly, once you understand your sin, you need to ask Jesus to forgive your sin.**

In order to do this, you need to believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, 3 days after His death on the cross. Believing that Jesus is alive today will give you the confidence to speak to Him. Today, you can pray with somebody and ask Jesus to personally forgive you.

**Thirdly you need to promise to love and follow Jesus for the rest of your life.**

Being a follower of Jesus will mean doing things that other people may not like.

It will also involve changes in your life, as you obey the teaching of the Bible.

God's Holy Spirit will help you in your new life with Jesus.

**Fourthly you need to confess your decision to follow Jesus to other people.**

**Romans 10: v. 9.**

<sup>9</sup> that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

The last step is to test the sincerity of your heart.

If you want to take a step of faith today and enter God's presence, you can stay behind after the service. We have counsellors waiting at our "Lift Sign".

#### **4. The Grace of God, understood by a Jewish religious leader – v. 50-56.**

We are told in v. 50-56 that a man called Joseph, who was a member of the Council, but who had **not consented to the decision to crucify Jesus**, asked to receive the body of Jesus for burial.

It is clear from his actions that Joseph understood something of what God was doing, through the life of Jesus.

Joseph would never have invested in the most expensive burial process if he did not have faith in the person of Jesus. He must have believed that Jesus was God in human form. He must have believed in the resurrection of Jesus which had been prophesied many times by Jesus and also revealed in the Jewish Scriptures.

Only wealthy people could afford an individual tomb for a single person.

Normally there would be a family tomb with lots of people buried inside. It would also not be cut out from a lump of rock.

The slide shows what is possibly the tomb cut out of rock that Jesus was buried in.

**(show slide here)**

God was very generous in His grace towards mankind, and Joseph was very generous in providing the best burial place possible.

Joseph trusted in the words of Jesus and three days later he was not disappointed.

If you decide to put your faith and trust in Jesus and His words from the Bible, you too will not be disappointed.

**Why wait? Today is the day of Salvation!**