

## Grace to U2 – and You, Too

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Grace makes beauty out of ugly things. That is a biblical principle, and we see it in Ephesians 2:8,9 – “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” People who are dead in their sins (and dead people are not pretty) are made alive by God’s grace; they get what they do not deserve and the result is beauty. Grace makes beauty out of ugly things. Not only a biblical principle, that is the closing line from U2’s album from October 2000, “All That You Can’t Leave Behind”. Bono and his bandmates were very intentional about the last words they wanted to ring in their listeners’ ears: *Grace, she takes the blame / She covers the shame / Removes the stain / It could be her name / Grace, it's the name for a girl / It's also a thought that changed the world / What once was hurt / What once was friction / What left a mark / No longer stings / Because Grace makes beauty / Out of ugly things. Grace makes beauty out of ugly things.*

In the recent book, “Bono: In Conversation with Michka Assayas”, U2’s front man and main songwriter says this about faith and grace: *Along comes this idea called Grace to upend all that "as you reap, so you will sow" stuff. Grace defies reason and logic. Love interrupts, if you like, the consequences of your actions, which in my case is very good news indeed, because I've done a lot of stupid stuff...I'd be in big trouble if Karma was going to finally be my judge. It doesn't excuse my mistakes, but I'm holding out for Grace. I'm holding out that Jesus took my sins onto the Cross, because I know who I am, and I hope I don't have to depend on my own religiosity... The point of the death of Christ is that Christ took on the sins of the world, so that what we put out did not come back to us, and that our sinful nature does not reap the obvious death. That's the point. It should keep us humbled...It's not our own good works that get us through the gates of heaven.*

A couple of weeks ago I went to a worship service on a Sunday night. That might not be too unusual, but in this case, my daughter and I were with 20,000 other people (not all of whom were worshiping God) and the venue was the Bradley Center in Milwaukee. As the evening ended, U2 played “All Because of You” from their most recent album, and it goes like this: *I was born a child of grace / Nothing else about the place / Everything was ugly but your beautiful face / And it left me no illusion / I saw you in the curve of the moon / In the shadow cast across my room / You heard me in my tune / When I just heard confusion / All because of you / All because of you / All because of you / I am... I am.*

They followed with “Yahweh”, a song of prayer and praise that includes these words: *Take this soul / Stranded in some skin and bones / Take this soul / And make it sing / Take these hands / Teach them what to carry / Take these hands / Don't make a fist / Take this mouth / So quick to criticize / Take this mouth / Give it a kiss / Yahweh, Yahweh / Always pain before a child is born / Yahweh, Yahweh / Still I'm waiting for the dawn.*

The show closed with the psalm of praise that is “40” and Bono sang: *I waited patiently for the Lord / He inclined and heard my cry / He brought me up out of the pit / Out of the*

*miry clay / I will sing, sing a new song / I will sing, sing a new song / You set my feet upon a rock / And made my footsteps firm / Many will see, many will see and hear.*

Grace – getting what we do not deserve, both from God and from others – makes beauty out of ugly things. It's a message from Bono, the Bible, and this Baptist preacher. Grace and peace to you, too.

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Bible verses are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV).