There but for the Grace of God, go I.

It has long been reported that a 16th century Englishman by the name of John Bradford who was imprisoned in the Tower of London for his Protestant faith, which was opposed by Queen Mary I of England. spoke the words, “There, but for the grace of God, goes John Bradford” as he watched his fellow prisoners being led to their executions.

It is further reported that this same John Bradford later died a martyr’s death, being burned at the stake. Before the fire was lit, he begged forgiveness of any he had wronged, and offered forgiveness to those who had wronged him. He subsequently turned to his fellow and said, “Be of good comfort brother; for we shall have a merry supper with the Lord this night!” – Wikipedia

There is a lesson for us in the derivative phrase “There but for the grace of God, go I” but it is a far deeper and more dreadful fate that we may avoid by God’s grace even than that of poor John Bradford. The wages of sin is death:

**Romans 6:23 (KJV)**

> 23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And that death which is meant is not physical, but rather, spiritual death. Eternal destruction from the presence of God:

**2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 (KJV)**

> 7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,
> 8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:
> 9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;
> 10 When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

Destruction from the presence of God, from whom comes every good and every perfect gift:

**James 1:16-17 (KJV)**

> 16 Do not err, my beloved brethren.
> 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

An eternal destruction from his presence, an eternity of torment with no hope of escape. Even though God is the provider of every good and perfect gift, He has already warned us what awaits if we refuse to follow his way, the very gospel that he had Jesus Christ bring to us.

God created man and woman:
Genesis 1:27 (KJV)
27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

And God planted a garden for them to live in:

Genesis 2:8-9 (KJV)
8 And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.
9 And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Yet all did not remain well with man:

Genesis 3:1-7 (KJV)
1 Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?
2 And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:
3 But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.
4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:
5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.
6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.
7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

As a result of man’s sin, physical death entered into the world:

Genesis 3:8-13 (KJV)
8 And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.
9 And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?
10 And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.
11 And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?
12 And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.
13 And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.
Genesis 3:19 (KJV)
19 In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

Genesis 3:22-24 (KJV)
22 And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever:
23 Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.
24 So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

Do not miss an important point in this narrative, that being the Devil, Satan, the accuser, LIED to Eve. We are told that he is a liar, and the father of lying, and we should expect nothing different from him. To God he will accuse us, as he did with Job, and to us, he will tell us such lies as “Oh you will have plenty of time to repent later” or “It will feel so good, or be so much fun” and he is still telling the same lie he told Eve: “You won’t die from it”!

So, through sin, physical death entered the world:

Romans 5:12 (KJV)
12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

Sin entered by one man, but all of us commit sin (the wages of which is spiritual death):

Romans 3:23 (KJV)
23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

Yet God knew this would happen, before he framed the world, and had already provided for it before the world began:

2 Timothy 1:9-10 (KJV)
9 Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.
10 But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:

Were it not for this grace, the grace of God, which gave us the gift of his son, Jesus who He sent to earth to die on a cross as the sacrifice for our sins, we would be destined for Hell, as are all those who will not obey.
2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 (KJV)

7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,
8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:
9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;
10 When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

God, through his grace toward us, has provided us with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and has made it possible for us to be bought back (redeemed) through the sacrifice of His blood. This gift was given to us, since we have nothing of sufficient value with which to redeem ourselves, yet this gift has been offered to us. It has not been forced upon us. We must accept it, and we must do so according to the terms by which it has been offered: our obedience to his commands, and our ongoing effort to live according to them.

It has been said that “No one will go to Hell unless he wants to.”, yet this is not true. The correct statement should be “No one will go to Heaven unless he wants to”. It is easy to go to Hell, one need only do whatever one wishes to do, need only follow his or her human nature, his desires, and he can go there with no effort at all. Consider the telling passage Matthew 7:13-14:

Matthew 7:13-14 (KJV)

13 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:
14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

I tell you again that going to Hell is easy. It requires no effort on our part beyond living in whatever way we wish. Going to Heaven requires effort on our part, but it has been made possible through God’s grace, if we will but follow the instructions he has given us through his son. And brethren, we HAVE been given the instructions. They are not kept secret, they are not hidden under a rock in a cave on some high mountain that requires us to travel six thousand miles, and climb fifteen thousand feet up sheer cliffs of crumbling stone, We have it at our fingertips! The bible, and more specifically the New Testament, are available in print, in audio format, on DVD, on the internet, if we have a smartphone, we can have a copy there, it is all around us if we will but open it and read it, and then apply the teachings to our lives!

So, in conclusion, when you hear the phrase “There but for the Grace of God, go I.” pause for a moment, and consider that the “There” that God’s grace keeps us from is Hell. For this, be thankful and praise him, but remember too, that God will not force anyone to go to heaven who does not show that they want to go there by obeying the instructions he has left us on how to get there.