The Beautiful Grace of God

When this life is over and you are standing before God, what will be your reason for getting into heaven? This question has been asked throughout the history of mankind. In the story “A Good Man is Hard to Find,” Flannery O’Connor tries to indirectly move the reader to think on this question. The title of the story invokes us to wonder what the standards for being a good man are. We see in the story that these standards are set by humans and, more importantly, by God. The story is set in the South where tradition and religion have always played a huge role in setting the moral standards. Every human is born with a sinful nature, but in “A good Man is Hard to Find,” we find out everyone can be redeemed.

A human’s morality is steeped in tradition, religion, and personal convictions. The character’s names and actions in the story are meant to represent these foundations for morality. The grandmother bases many of her morals on tradition. The reason the grandmother dressed up extravagantly for the car ride was that “In case of an accident, anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady,”(O’Connor 365). Her concerns to look good even in death shows that she believed outward appearances were a way to determine someone’s goodness. Her belief probably arose from an upbringing which taught that higher class people were good just because of their outward appearances. The girl’s name, June Star, represent the standards set by society. She parallels with society in that she cares greatly about appearances and being entertained. We see her twisted desire for entertainment when she is screaming with
excitement about having an accident, and then she follows that up with “But nobody’s killed,” (O’Connor 369) in a disappointed manner. The boy’s name, John Wesley, represents religion as a basis for morality. We get a look at what he represents when he is asked what he would do to the Misfit and he simply says “I’d smack his face,” (O’Connor 364). He doesn’t say much but when he does we see that he is straight to the point and methodical. The representation of religion is inferred because John Wesley is the name of the founder of the Methodist church. John Wesley is known for living a life that consisted of “a regimen of personal discipline and ordered living,” (Biography 2012). A person who bases their morality on religion decides between “good” and “bad” by the standards of a higher power or leaders of the religion. The religion that is used in “A Good Man is Hard to Find,” is Christianity. Christian morals come from the Bible, which is believed by Christians to be the word of God spoken through man.

A “Good Man is Hard to Find,” points to the Christian belief that all humans are sinful. This belief is hinted at when the grandmother tells Red Sam “It isn’t a soul in this green world of God’s that you can trust, and I don’t count nobody out of that, not nobody,” (O’Connor 367). This quote is used to magnify the Christian belief that no one is excluded from being sinful. A Bible verse that Christians base this belief on is Romans 3:23, “for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (“Romans”). Humans are prone to sin because they are in earthly bodies. Therefore, we struggle to avoid giving into the sinful temptations that result from the weakness of our earthly bodies. The grandmother has a misconception of her own goodness. This misconception is especially seen when she tells the kids “in my time children were more respectful… people did right then,” (O’Connor 365), and then immediately after she says this she calls a black boy on the side of the road a “pickaninny,” (O’Connor 365).
It is vital for humans to know their sinful condition and its consequences. The grandmother comes to terms with her imperfect ways when she sees the misfit start to break down for what he had done. When she sees him break down, she says to the misfit “Why you’re one of my babies, you’re one of my own children!” (O’Connor 374) This statement shows she has finally realized that she is in the same conditions as the misfit. When a person understands they are sinful, they then need to realize the consequences of their condition. Due to the fact that God is perfect and just, he cannot tolerate sin. In Romans 6:23, we learn that “The wages of sin is death…” (“Romans”). This part of the verse tells us that our sinful lives will lead to death. The death spoken of in this verse is eternal separation from God in hell. With this earth-shaking thought in mind, the ending of Romans 6:23 adds, “…But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our lord” (“Romans”). Flannery O’Connor suggests the beautiful act of grace overcoming sin in the story when the story says, “the trees were full of silver-white sunlight and the meanest of them sparkled,” (O’Connor, 365).

After hearing about the problem all humans are facing, let’s look at the solution that everyone needs in order to fix their condition. The misfit agreed with the grandmother that praying to Jesus would help him, but when ask why he wouldn’t do it he said “I don’t want no hep, I’m doing all right by myself,” (O’Connor, 372) The misfit talks about his knowledge of what Jesus has done, but refuses to accept it. One of the most well-known Bible verses, John 3:16, states “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (“John”). This verse shows that no one is excluded from the opportunity of redemption. The redemption of a person is solely based on whether they accept Jesus as their personal savior. The Misfit seems to be moving closer to realizing who Jesus is when he says “Jesus was the only One that eve raised the dead,”
(O’Connor 373). He started to believe that if Jesus could revive the dead, then Jesus could rescue him from what his life has turned out to be. Unfortunately he allowed his doubt in what Jesus has done to get to him, and doesn’t put his faith in Jesus for salvation.

The sinful condition that everyone has is a horrible fact of life, but we can miraculously be redeemed from this condition. The morals in a person’s life come from different life experiences, the way the person was raised, and their own intuition. From the Bible we see that we are all in a wretched condition because of the sin that each and every one of us have. People urgently need to hear about this awful condition they are in and its consequences. They need to hear about it, so they can see a need for something to save them from their horrible situation. When a person realizes the need for something to save them, they can then be lead to the one person who can save them which is Jesus Christ. As we have seen, the way to be freed from the consequences from sin and the ability to enter in to heaven is through faith in Jesus Christ. The important question now is what will you do with this important truth put before you?
Works Cited

“Biography of John Wesley.” Christian Classics Ethereal Library.
http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley?show=biography. 15 October 2012

