

BIBLE STUDY – “Worshipping our Gracious God”

I. Introduction

A. Psalm 103:8; II Chron 20:7 ff.

B. In Psalm 103:8-18 we have one of the most beautiful pictures of the Person of God in perhaps all of Scripture.

- Something we can always return to; God comforts our hearts when we have fallen into sin and then return to Him; He encourages us in our human frailties & difficulties.
- Spurgeon says this Psalm is the highest peak in the chain of mountains of praise in the Psalms.

II. What does it mean, God is gracious/full of grace?

A. Key O.T. word: Chesed – found 237 times in O.T.; 127 times in Psalms – Psalm 107:1; 136; 138:8; Lam. 3:22.

1. Synonyms: love, lovingkindness, mercy, kindness, goodness, compassion.

2. Root concept: to be discovered in God’s covenant relationship with His people, His pledge of faithfulness to His chosen people. God chose Israel to be His people and made a covenant with them – pledged/swore that He would be loyal to this covenant/promise.

- First found in the story of Abraham – Gen 17:3 ff; then repeated again and again.
- It was a two-way promise: God also required His people to express their loyalty to Him.
- The covenant expressed God’s bond of belonging-ness to His people.
- This faithfulness and love of God expressed itself in His continuing mercy & help & faithfulness to His people. He refused to wash his hands of His wayward people.

3. This helps us to understand the N.T. word, grace – The God of the Bible, from the very beginning, is the God of grace. We shouldn’t fall into the trap of thinking that grace is a N.T. concept, and law is O.T. concept.

B. What then is grace?

1. Quotes:

- J.I.Packer (p.146, Knowing God) – “The grace of God is love freely shown toward guilty sinners, contrary to their merit and indeed in defiance of their demerit. It is God showing goodness to persons who deserve only severity, and had no reason to expect anything but severity.”
- A.W.Tozer: “Grace is the good pleasure of God that inclines Him to bestow benefits upon the undeserving.”

2. Illustration: Grace is more than just unmerited favour. If a beggar would call on me and I feed him, that is unmerited favor but not grace. However, supposing that he had robbed me first and I should still feed him, that then is grace.

- Grace is favour shown where there is definite demerit in the one receiving it. (meaning of demerit)

3. N.T. teaching on grace: always related to Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice. Three major aspects (Packer) ---

a. Grace is the source of the pardon of sin:

- Grace: foundation of His decision to give His Son – Rom 3:24 ff; Eph 1:7.
- Because of God’s grace He spared not His Son but delivered Him up for us & our redemption.

b. Grace is the motive of the plan of salvation – Eph 1:3 – 2:10:

- The believer’s salvation is no accident – it was worked out before he had fallen and is God’s eternal plan to bless men with the free gift of salvation from sin;
- Because God is sovereign, this plan will reach its consummation triumphantly.

c. Grace is the guarantee of our eternal salvation – I Peter 1:5. By God’s grace alone we were led to place our faith in Jesus Christ, and that same grace will keep us true and believing to the end.

III. What does it mean to praise God for His grace? (Ps 103)

A. Verses 8b and 9 – We praise Him that He is slow to anger and does not harbour His anger forever. Cf. I Cor 13:5.

1. He doesn't keep a record of our wrongs – Is 43:25.
 - Is this opposed to II Cor 5:10 – that we will give an account of all our actions on the Last Day?
 - When we deliberately oppose God's will and chose a path/way or even a doctrine that isn't according to God's way and Word, this is what's meant by I Cor 3:10 ff – building with materials which won't hold or stand the test.
 - If we confess and return to God, He will forgive and heal – II Chron 7:14; I John 1:9. He is compassionate, He forgives completely and doesn't keep a record of our wrongs.
2. Many Christians live with guilt – refuse to believe that God has forgiven them – cannot forgive themselves, so live in the horror of guilt.
3. So important in our understanding of God – both for us and also in our ministry – NOT to have a picture of God who accuses and condemns, wanting to get back on the Christian who has disobeyed. BUT to understand God as the compassionate God who forgives and forgets when we confess and repent. Psalm 130:3,4.

B. Verses 10-12

1. We praise Him not only for what He does for us but also for what He does NOT do – doesn't treat us as we deserve.
2. Appropriate synonym here: kind and good.
3. How often since we have become Christians have we experienced this truth – we have fallen into some sin and have expected God to strike us down – in fact, we have anticipated God's judgment. But God's grace is beyond our understanding. What we have expected has not happened. In fact, God has often displayed in both small and big ways that He is a most loving Father to us. Cf. children accidentally breaking something we consider valuable.

C. Verses 13-14

1. We should praise our gracious God because He is not only compassionate to us in our sinfulness but also toward our physical beings. Cf. Psalm 103:3. E.g. lays us aside for needed rest or quietness.
2. Among some Christian workers there is an unbiblical way of thinking toward "Christian work" which is couched in spiritual language: "Being busy all the time is being more spiritual." OR: "Our Christian work is our top priority."
 - If a person becomes worn out or experiences a breakdown in Christian work, it's considered a mark of spirituality!
 - Cf. Matt 11:28-30; Mary & Martha (lacking joy in the Lord's service)
 - Leslie Brierley (formerly WEC, UK): "Lord, help me to do a little less a little better."
 - Wayne E. Coates, Baptist pastor, in his book, Confessions of a Workaholic: " defines a workaholic: "He is a person whose need for work has become so excessive that it creates noticeable disturbance or interference with his bodily health, personal happiness, and interpersonal relations, and with his smooth social functioning."

D. Verses 15-18

1. Here we discover the emphasis upon the believer's responsibility to fear God, to be faithful to God (i.e. "showing Chesed toward God")
 - This implied that "making a decision for Christ" means in other words, "entering into a covenant-relationship with God, similar to the marriage covenant. It must include committing oneself to follow Christ no matter what the consequences; and to obey His precepts.

2. We could summarize these three points:
 - We are called to praise God and glorify His Name by displaying towards others the same gracious, compassionate ways of God which He has manifested in His dealings with us:
- a. Slow to anger – not, no anger at all.
 - Patient with the errors of our fellow-Christians, including our co-workers; not holding grudges but forgiving freely & forgetting.
 - Cf. Col. 3:12-14.
- b. Showing by deliberate acts of kindness and love that we repay “good” for “evil”, not just forgiving others in the heart.
 - Cf. Rom 12:14, 17 ff, 21.
 - Very important principle: we should not react to the actions of others, but rather respond in love to their deepest need.
- c. Manifesting an understanding, gentle and non-judgmental spirit towards others with whom we labor and serve.
 - Cf. Rom 15:7; Matt 7:1 ff.
 - As God in His grace has accepted us just as we are, despite our many imperfections and rebellious ways, so we must be gracious and “big-hearted” in accepting others with all their differences – e.g. educational background, different non-Christian principles due to family upbringing and society, etc.

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