

Series: Psalms

Title: Immutable Grace to Chosen Sinners

Text: Ps 78: 38-42

Date: August

Place: SGBC, NJ

Psalm 78: 40: How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, *and* grieve him in the desert! 41: Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. 42: They remembered not his hand, *nor* the day when he delivered them from the enemy.

The stubborn and rebellious in Israel were unregenerate sinners. They are given to us an example and admonition to us not to do as they did but believe on Christ and trust his salvation. But we see in them a mirror of ourselves.

Psalm 78: 18: And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust. 19 Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? 20 Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?

But remember Moses's word as he prayed to God? Listen to Moses prayer to God. This is unbelief in the midst of prayer. This is doubting God as Moses prayed to God. This is sin mixed with Moses' prayer to God.

Numbers 11: 13: Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat. 14: I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. 15: And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness....18: And say thou unto the people, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow, and ye shall eat flesh: for ye have wept in the ears of the LORD, saying, Who shall give us flesh to eat? for *it was* well with us in Egypt: therefore the LORD will give you flesh, and ye shall eat. 19: Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days; 20: *But* even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you: because that ye have despised the LORD which *is* among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt? 21: And Moses said, The people, among whom I *am, are* six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. 22: Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them? 23: And the LORD said unto Moses, Is the LORD'S hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not.

Note the word "waxed." It signifies that Moses once thought the LORD's hand was mighty to save but that it had now shrunk. Moses essentially said the same thing the rebellious children said, "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" Even our prayer to God has sin and unbelief mixed with it. So we see a mirror of our own need for God to keep us and be merciful to us.

On this passage in Psalm 78, Robert Hawker said, "Had you and I been present when, at the lifting up of the rod of Moses, water issued from a dry unpromising rock, could we have thought it possible that Israel would have again doubted God's power or his love? Pause. -Are we better than they? What hath not Jesus done for you, for me, for all his church and people? And do we not find rebellious murmurings, unbelief, and a thousand instances of a corrupt heart, breaking out continually? Oh! precious, precious Jesus, what would become of me, or what should I do with this wicked heart of mine, had I not thy perfect righteousness to trust in, and thy blood to cleanse me?"

But we also see God's mercy toward his elect remnant.

Psalm 78: 38: But he, *being* full of compassion, forgave *their* iniquity, and destroyed *them* not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. 39: For he remembered that they *were but* flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.

God fulfilled to them every temporal promise though they kept not the covenant of works with God. They did not keep one commandment of God. Yet, God fulfilled every promise he made to these rebellious, unregenerate, hard-hearted children of Israel.

But if that was so toward an unbelieving people simply in temporal things, how much more is God's love and grace immutable, and his forgiveness sure, to his elect who God chose freely and who have been redeemed by Christ's precious blood and brought to believe on Christ?

Proposition: God's continual grace and forgiveness in Christ does not embolden us to sin but is the very Strength of Christ by which he makes us walk by faith trusting him alone.

THE ROOT PROBLEM—UNBELIEF

Psalm 78: 22: Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation...41: Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. 42: They remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy.

The children of Ephraim represent all the unregenerate in Israel. *Verse 9 says "The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle."* This probably refers to the battle with the Philistines. Later in the Psalm declares how the ark was stolen by the Philistines. Ephraim was the warrior tribe—mighty in battle—but in that battle Ephraim retreated.

Yet, each trial God put before them was a day of battle—the Red Sea, the bitter waters, the Amalekites, hunger and thirst in the wilderness. And in each case they looked to themselves and their carnal weapons. They looked to their own strength and wisdom rather than believing God and trusting his salvation. Therefore in each battle they turned back. But where did they get their carnal weapons? They got them from God. God destroyed Pharaoh and his army and gave them the spoils. That is where they got their weapons, from God.

Psalm 74: 12: God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters. Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness.

But they forgot God. They forgot God's works. That is what *verse 11 says, "And forgot his works, and his wonders that he had shewed them."* They not only forgot God's works in the next generation, not only in a few years and a few months, but as soon as they reached the Red Sea they forgot all the plagues and the deliverance they had seen God work for them. They immediately began to murmur and blame Moses and blame God.

God showed many more marvelous works. They all typify the marvelous works Christ has shown us in making his people the righteousness of God in him. We must not forget God but remember God. And love to brethren is to put one another in remembrance of God and his works. Let's see some of these works of God which they forgot and let's see Christ in them.

Psalm 78: 12: Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.

The Lord brought all the plagues upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians, conquering their enemies on their behalf. Believer, we are more than conquerors through Christ that loved us. Let's not forget that. In the face of every trouble remember Christ has conquered our enemies for us and for our brethren. Let's help one another to remember Christ.

Psalm 78: 13: He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and he made the waters to stand as an heap.

Their passing through the sea typifies the baptism God's elect. We were immersed in the judgment of God when Christ bore the judgment of God on our behalf on the cross. We died and rose again in Christ. He made us to pass through the sea of death to eternal life in him. Never forget that judgment has been settled

at the cross. The just thing for us to do toward brethren when they sin is to show them mercy even as God for Christ's sake has shown us mercy. Their judgment is settled in Christ. We need mercy. And for Christ's sake God continues to show each of mercy every day. But they forgot the works of God and turned back in the day of battle.

Psalm 78: 14: In the daytime also he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire.

The cloud and the fire were one pillar. Christ, by his Spirit, leads us by day and by night. Christ is the pillar that came between us and the enemy as he did between the children of Israel and Pharaoh at the Red Sea. Christ is Light to us and darkness to the enemy as he was to them. Christ will never leave us. He has promised to keep us and protect us all our days as we journey through this wilderness. May we never forget Christ's preserving, guiding work by the Spirit of God.

Psalm 78: 15: He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave *them* drink as *out of* the great depths. 16: He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers.

That Rock was Christ. Christ is the smitten Rock who bore the stroke of divine justice so that from him comes the water of life. The Holy Spirit of life comes as the water of life into our heart out of the Rock in abundance. Christ said, "If any man thirst let him come unto me and out of your belly shall flow rivers of living water." Wherever they went the Rock went with them. Christ says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Yet, because they forgot God's works, they lusted for what God had not given them.

Psalm 78: 17: And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness. 18: And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust. 19: Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?

Listen to what they said next. This is them speaking. They knew what God had done yet they put God to the test.

Psalm 78: 20: Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people? 21: Therefore the LORD heard *this*, and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel; 22: Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation: 23: Though he had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven, 24: And had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven. 25: Man did eat angels' food: he sent them meat to the full.

They lusted for Egypt and the meat they had in Egypt. Worst of all, they abhorred the bread God gave them from heaven. This is a picture of someone loathing Christ the Bread and lusting to return to bondage. That is what our sin is every day. They said,

Numbers 11: 5: We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: 6: But now our soul *is* dried away: *there is* nothing at all, beside this manna, *before* our eyes.

But God keeps his child hungry for Christ our Bread. Having Christ we have the Bread of Life. But beholding his great salvation why do we have so much unbelief concerning temporal provision? We behold Christ high and lifted up—we sing his praise and glory in him—then when trouble comes how easy we sink to the depths. We lust after that which God has not provided.

Will any of us boast that we are not like them? We will say that that will never happen to us? Are we so strong in faith that the same lusts do not overtake us? Remember, Paul's admonition concerning these examples in *1 Corinthians 10:12*, "*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*"

David was given the promises of God that he was God's anointed king. God delivered him time and again out of Saul's hand. God had given David grace two times to show mercy to Saul. As he was departing from Saul David said that he trusted God to show him grace and that God would deliver him out of all his tribulation. Then with the next breath David was filled with unbelief. He left Judah where God told him to

stay. He went a second time to the Philistines. They were the enemies of God and his people. Goliath was a Philistine. Yet, David went to them in an attempt to save himself by his own hand. He ended up the head of the king's body guard and was on his way with the enemy to wage war against his own people in Israel. Read about all of this beginning in the last 3-4 verses of 1 Sam 26 and read on until chapter 30. After a year and a half, God saved David out of that awful season of unbelief. God did it through much chastening. But the Lord would not let David go. He brought David to the end of himself. God did it! No man did it. David did not do it. God did it because of his unchanging love and sovereign grace.

It is easy for us to think we are stronger than we are. We can think we are wiser than we are. It is so easy to start leaning on the arm of the flesh. But it is the lust of our flesh. It is the lust to be our own provider, our own salvation. It is the lust of our sin-nature from which God must continually save us.

We must look to Christ alone—he is the Way of Escape in every trial.

1 Corinthians 10: 13: There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: BUT GOD IS FAITHFUL who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; BUT GOD WILL, WITH THE TEMPTATION, ALSO MAKES A WAY TO ESCAPE, that ye may be able to bear *it*.

We have no ability of our own strength. That is what God teaches us in the trial. The Lord will allow his child to see what we are in our sin-nature—helpless sinners. Then God saves us by the power of Christ our Redeemer. He renews us in our hearts to believe on Christ and trust Christ to deliver us. That is what Paul declared concerning his trial in Asia.

2 Corinthians 1: 8: For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: 9: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: 10: Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver *us*;

SAVED BY CHRIST ALONE

The Way of escape is Christ. “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation!” (Heb 2: 3). Christ is the Way! Christ is the Strength of those he saves. It is for Christ's sake that God shows us mercy and forgiveness.

It is Christ by whom we are *sure* God will show us sure mercies. God is just to show us mercy. We see a type of Christ in verses 58-64 of this Psalm. God poured out his wrath on the rebellious children by allowing the tabernacle and the ark to be taken by the enemy. But Christ bore that for his people so that God will never pour out justice on us a second time.

Psalm 78: 58: For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images. 59: When God heard *this*, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: 60: So that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent *which* he placed among men; 61: And delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand. 62: He gave his people over also unto the sword; and was wroth with his inheritance. 63: The fire consumed their young men; and their maidens were not given to marriage. 64: Their priests fell by the sword; and their widows made no lamentation.

Christ is THE Tabernacle—the Ark. Christ is God's Strength and God's glory. Christ willingly gave himself and was delivered into the enemy's hand and lifted up on the cross. He bore the fury of God's wrath in place of his people

Psalm 78: 65: Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, *and* like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine. 66: And he smote his enemies in the hinder parts: he put them to a perpetual reproach.

After bearing the wrath of God and satisfying justice for his people, Christ awaked out of sleep. He arose the mighty GodMan. He arose from the grave, having smote all our enemies, he put them to a perpetual reproach on our behalf.

Psalm 78: 68: But chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which he loved. 69: And he built his sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which he hath established for ever. 70: He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds: 71: From following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance. 72: So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands.

Christ is the Lion of the tribe of Judah arisen to heavenly Mt Zion. Christ and his people in him are the Mt Zion God loves. Christ built his tabernacle like high palaces—established forever. Christ is our King David. He feeds us and guides us with the skillfulness of his hands.

Christ has finished all. He paid the debt. He satisfied each claim of God's holiness, justice and truth. Alone Christ brought in everlasting righteousness. Christ trod the winepress alone. He conquered death, hell and the grave. Our Redeemer put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. The work was gloriously accomplished by him alone!

“Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord!” “The Lord will fight for you!” Omnipotence is your defense!

Romans 8: 35: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36: As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. 37: Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

Christ promises his child,

Isaiah 54: 17: No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.

It is for our blessed Savior that shows us continual mercy to our poor souls. Let us not sin against him. Let us not murmur against him. Let us be content with Christ the Bread. And though we murmur, his grace still abounds. Though we sin and forget him, he will not forget us and will not forget to be gracious. Though we fail in our love to him, our Savior does not fail in his love to us. Morning after morning, mercy still comes. Day after day, grace is sure! “For it shall come to pass, that before my people call, (he declares) I will answer; and while they are speaking, I will hear” (Isaiah 65:24).

Matthew Henry made this excellent comment as being the lesson of Psalm 78, “Let not those that receive mercy from God be thereby emboldened to sin, for the mercies they receive will aggravate their sin and hasten the punishment of it; yet let not those that are under divine rebukes for sin be discouraged from repentance, for their punishments are means of repentance, and shall not prevent the mercy God has yet in store for them.”

If we would escape the unbelief and sin of our flesh then we must look to Christ alone. The strength of our faith is not our faith. It is Christ himself. He is the Author AND Finisher of faith. Christ lets us see our inability and our sin and lusts. But then he chastens us. God our Father grants repentance and faith to look to Christ alone. He makes us see that God continues to forgive us and show us mercy with immutable love for his sake! This is his Strength whereby he sends the Spirit and makes us mortify our flesh.

Hebrews 3: 8: Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: 9: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. 10: Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. 11: So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) 12: Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. 13: But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. 14: For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; 15: While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. 16: For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. 17: But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? 18: And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? 19: So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Hebrews 4: 1: Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. 2: For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. 3: For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4: For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. 5: And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest. 6: Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: 7: Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. 8: For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. 9: There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. 10: For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. 11: Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. 12: For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13: Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. 14: Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. 15: For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. 16: Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Amen!