

GOD!  
Message 20  
Scripture: Exodus 34:1-9

INTRO: We have just finished the subject of God's attribute of love. After this message we will only be looking at two more attributes: God's faithfulness and truth. With regard to His love I defined it as rational, not emotional. And you may well say, "Well, if agapee love is rational; if it is a mind thing, is there no positive emotion in God?" Well, we have come to a word that is, as I understand it, based on emotion. It is God's mercy.

We had read for us this morning an incredible passage, Exodus 34:1-9. Let me reread verses 5-7 (read). "Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.'" "

Now you could write books about that passage. As a matter of fact, I called Dr. Herb Sturhaan to ask him for a definition of one of the words used in this passage because he used to stress this word to students in Bible school. And he said something like this, "Oh my, books have been written about that word." That is the word 'chesed'. But chesed is only one of the several very important words in that passage and one of those is the word translated 'mercy', and this is our topic for this morning.

We want to briefly cover two attributes this morning since they go together so often and those are grace and mercy. The passage that was read for us said God is gracious and merciful.

## 8. Gracious

Let me begin by reading three NT verses from Paul's introductions to three separate epistles.  
1 Timothy 1:2 "To Timothy, a true son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord." 2 Timothy 1:2

"To Timothy, a beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." Titus 1:4 "To Titus, a true son in our common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior."

In these passages we have three key related concepts and they are grace, mercy and peace. We begin then with the attribute of God's grace. God is gracious. Let me say first of all that a teaching I received as a young Christian which I have come to regard as an error is the teaching that the OT is a book of law and the NT a book of grace. The OT was a time of law and the NT is a time of grace. That is an error. God is a God of grace and He is immutable and cannot change. Furthermore, the word in the OT most closely associated by the word translated grace in the NT occurs 67 times in the OT.

It is sometimes viewed that people were saved by keeping the law in the OT but it was a faulty system so God changed it in the NT and now people are saved by grace. There never has been but one way of salvation and that is by grace through faith. That was true in the OT and is true in the New. Bishop Trench says the OT word most closely related to grace is the Hebrew word 'chesed'. If that is so, this word occurs 261 times in the OT!

In the NT, the word 'charis', translated grace, occurs 147 times. 117 of those are in the epistles. So we see the stress on grace in the NT and especially in the Church age.

So, just what is grace? Bishop Trench says that the Greek word was destined for glorification in the NT from its meaning. Then he says, "These lay in the fact that already in the ethical terminology of the Greek schools *charis* implied ever a favor freely done, without claim or expectation of return - the word being thus predisposed to receive its new emphasis, its religious, I may say its dogmatic significance; to set forth the entire and absolute freeness of the lovingkindness of God to men. Thus Aristotle, defining *charis*, lays the whole stress on this

very point, that it is conferred freely, with no expectation of return, and finding its only motive in the bounty and free-heartedness of the giver."

When we speak of grace in the NT sense, we usually refer to how salvation is received. There are several ways of receiving things one desires. One might steal them, work for them, or they may be given to one. If one works for something and then receives it, that is not received by grace. If one receives something as a gift, it cannot be worked for, or else it is no longer a gift. This is most clearly pointed out in Romans 11:6 (read).

From this, Christians have become very familiar with Ephesians 2:8-9 which says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." So the God of the Bible is a God of grace. He loves to give. He is a giver. That is one of His attributes.

I would like to point out that though we need God's grace to receive salvation, we need His grace just as much to live the Christian life. Let us go to a very important verse on this subject (read Hebrews 4:16). The context here is that of discouraged Christians who need to be encouraged to move on. As I wrote this sentence I was reminded of someone and I picked up the phone and called him. I knew he was discouraged and so I encouraged him to walk the narrow and difficult path.

Hebrews 4:16 informs us that God's throne is a throne of grace. It is a throne of grace because here grace is dispensed. And when we speak of grace in this way, grace stands for that which is received without earning it. In this verse, grace is spoken of as 'help in time of need.' That help comes as a gift. And how often do we need help? Somehow it seems to me that the older I get and the more I learn to know God the more help I need.

Now it is very important to understand that God's grace is not some way in which He overlooks our weaknesses and failures and sins. He gives us the strength to overcome and that strength comes as a gift.

## 9. Merciful

So let us consider the word 'mercy'. Hebrews 4:16 says we are to come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain *mercy* and find grace to help in time of need. So, just what is mercy? When I defined agapee love I said it was not a love based in the emotions but a love based in the mind, the mental faculties. It is a rational attachment. That is abundantly clear from the fact that we are instructed to love the Lord our God with all our heart (Matt. 22:37). In the Bible, in both Testaments, the heart speaks of that which we call the mind. The OT says, "As a man thinks in his heart so is he." Thinking is done in the heart. It is not the place of the emotions as we have so wrongly been taught.

But when we come to the word 'mercy', now we have a word, as I see it, clearly based in the emotions. It is such an emotional word that the Stoics thought it should not be used of God. In the Bible, the emotions are not ascribed to the heart, but to the bowels. I know this is very foreign to our way of thinking. Imagine what this could do to Valentine's Day in our culture!

I suppose some of you will say, "Are you absolutely sure about that?" I am going to read a number of passages from the NT and I want you to listen carefully. I must read from the KJV because it is one of the very few translations that has translated these verses literally:

Philippians 1:8 For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ (NKJV affection).

Philippians 2:1 If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if

any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies (NKJV affections).

Colossians 3:12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering (NKJV affection).

Philemon 1:7 For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother (NKJV heart).

Philemon 1:12 Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels (NKJV heart).

Philemon 1:20 Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord (NKJV heart).

1 John 3:17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? (NKJV heart).

Now the NKJV had to help God out and put His words into English thoughts. But they have reaffirmed the English mind that the affections or emotions reside in the heart, and that is a biblical error. Here, in each passage the affections are likened to the bowels. Now which is right, to liken the mind to the heart or the affections? Well, the Bible is right. Put a man under a great deal of mental stress and it will affect the heart. Put a person under long emotional stress and it will affect the bowels.

Now I want you to listen to Philipians 2:1 and note the connection between the word 'mercy' and the bowels: "If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies." Now listen to Colossians 3:12: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering (NKJV affection)."

So, what is mercy? Vines describes mercy in its verb form as, "to feel sympathy with the misery of another". I define it as that feeling of pity that arises when we see someone in need or in misery. In Plautdietch we have a phrase and a word that describe mercy. There is 'met feeling'. That is to 'feel along with'. Then we have the word 'Jaumahoat'. Like our English, it ascribes these feelings to the heart, but it is a 'pitying heart', a heart that feels pity. You talk about a word loaded with emotion, it is this word. And God is merciful, very merciful.

Now the feeling of mercy comes when we see or hear about others who are in misery. We do not feel any pity for those who have good things happening to them. And when that feeling of compassion or mercy sets in, it causes us to want to reach out and help those who are in misery. When we help those in need or in misery, the Bible calls it 'showing mercy'. And that which they receive comes by grace.

To illustrate this from the Bible, turn with me to Luke 10. You know the story. Jesus is in conversation with a certain young lawyer who is testing Jesus about how to inherit eternal life. And Jesus said, "Well, what does the law say?" And so the lawyer rightly reduced the whole law into its two major parts: Love God and love your neighbor. And Jesus said, "Right. Now just go do this." But the lawyer then wanted to have a good description of who qualifies as a neighbor. And so Jesus gave the parable of a certain man who was going to Jericho and he fell among thieves and they clobbered him and robbed him and left him lying on the road half dead. And a priest came by, and if there was a feeling of pity or compassion in him, he did not show it but passed by leaving him there in his misery. Then a Levite came and his response was the same.

But along came this despised Samaritan, let us read verse 33 (read). It says he had *compassion* on him. Now the original word is *splanchnizomai*. Now that is the word 'bowels' turned into a verb.

The translation 'compassion' indicates the translators understood of the emotional aspect of this word. Years ago the English word compassion was used in verb form and it would read like this: "He compassionated him."

Now I want to show you how the emotion of compassion and the word bowels are related to the word mercy. In verse 36 Jesus asked the lawyer which of these three men had been a neighbor to the man who fell among thieves. And the lawyer said, "He who showed mercy on him."

Next, we need to see that there is a difference between 'feeling' mercy, and 'showing' mercy. One can 'feel' mercy without doing anything about it. But when we have strong enough feelings of compassion or pity, it moves us to do something if we can. In the NT several times it says of someone that they were 'moved with compassion'. Look at Mark 14 (read 13-14). Again, it is the word 'bowels' turned into a verb.

Now there is something in man that triggers this emotion for others and it is seeing someone in misery, such as at a time of the loss of a loved one or any such thing. If that feeling is strong enough, it moves us to try to do something if at all possible. But if that person responds in a bad way to the offer of help, we might have no further interest to help. The response by the receiving party must be right.

What triggers God's mercy for man is man's state of sin and all that that brings. But in order for God to show mercy, the response by man has to be right. For example, God may feel great pity for the miserable state of someone who is worshipping some false god, but as long as that person worships that false God, God will show him no mercy with regard to the sin that is causing his misery. Man's miserable state triggers God's pity for him, but what triggers Him to show mercy, to favor such a person with His grace? We want to see what that is.

In this series we already spoken briefly of Romans 9:15 (read). God says that He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy and He will have compassion on whom He will have compassion. Now the words translated 'compassion' we have not met yet in this message. It comes from the word 'oiktos' meaning to pity, and thus a synonym of the word mercy. But God says He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy. Since God is entirely good, His choice on whom to have mercy will always be in line with that which is good.

But we ask now, on what basis does the feeling of mercy in God turn into action? Why does He choose to show mercy to some, and not to others? Well, we have seen this before, but let us be reminded again. We turn first to Exodus 20:4-6 (read). Here we find that God is a jealous God. So, He may greatly pity those who are going to hell, but they may be falling down before false gods and God not only will not show them mercy but He hates that. His pity is great for these people, but He is in no wise moved to show mercy. But verse 6 tells us that He shows mercy to thousands, and then He tells us to whom He wills to show mercy. It is to those who love Him and keep His commandments!

When that godly young woman, whom God chose to be the mother of His Son, met Elizebeth who was then also with child, she gave a poem that is rich in theology. And in Luke 1:50 she says, "And His mercy is on those who fear Him." So when man worships false gods and seeks his own welfare, God's mercy remains closed up. But when man learns to know about God and he responds in faith and obeys and fears Him, God's mercy opens like a flower to the sun.

Now I want to make one other point about God's mercy and that is the order in which it takes place to grace and peace. The order in which these words occur in Paul's introductions is grace, mercy and peace. But in Hebrews 4:16 where we are encouraged to come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.



What is the order here? Well, we come and present our state of misery to God and His mercy sets in. And when His mercy sets in, then, if we meet His conditions, He extends grace, or that which we need. So it is mercy, grace and then after receiving grace comes peace. That is the divine order.

But from man's perspective, say with regard to the misery brought by sin, man's guilt must first be taken care of. That comes by grace. Then his misery is taken care of, that is mercy, and then peace comes. This is the order in human experience. So Paul writes in his introductions to several letters, grace, mercy and peace to you from God the Father. Bishop Trench says, "... His love demands that the guilt should be done away, before the misery can be assuaged; only the forgiven may be blessed. He must pardon, before He can heal; men must be justified before they can be sanctified." So for man, grace comes before mercy. With God, mercy comes before grace is extended.

Surely we must say with Solomon in Lamentations 3:22-23 that, "*It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.*" If it were not for the Lord's mercies and compassion every day, we would be consumed in a moment! Great is the faithfulness of God!

CONCL: Let us conclude by reading Deuteronomy 34:5-7 once more: "Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.'"

There we have God's own brief description of Himself. We have focused in on two of those attributes listed, His

graciousness and His mercifulness. Someone has defined grace by the acrostic: God's Riches At Christ's Expense. That is a very accurate definition. His riches come to us by grace. Grace is the means by which His riches are given to us. His riches are all those things we need, either to become a Christian or to live the Christian life victoriously. It is not His overlooking our sins, it is His overcoming power over sin.

Then we considered that God is merciful. Mercy has to do with compassion. Sometimes I hear the crude expression of something that was 'gut wrenching'. That is what mercy does. And it causes us to want to help. We saw the gracious invitation in Hebrews 4:16. Verse 15 tells us that our High Priest, who is Jesus Christ, sympathizes with our weaknesses because He was tempted in all points as we are. And for this reason, because He has feelings of compassion for us, we are invited to come boldly to the throne of grace that we might obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

When we present ourselves with our needs before Him, His mercy causes Him to desire to help us in our time of need. When we seek Him in humbly by faith, He responds by granting us what we need by His grace. May He find us people of humility and faith, with a healthy fear of God, then we will find Him a gracious and compassionate God.