

We have seen in previous notes that Israel forgot their Redeemer and Savior-God, turning to the golden calf (Ps 106:19) and then to the idols of the Canaanites whom they were to destroy but did not (Ps 106:34-36). The result was their utter defilement, and the wrath of God poured out upon them (Ps 106:39-40). Moreover, God gave them over to the surrounding nations and eventual captivity (Ps 106:41-46).

What joy belongs to God's people, then, when God gathers His people back after seventy years of exile. But before turning to the joyful time at the end of Ps 106 and into Ps 107 we must turn back to the great sins of Psalm 106. There the depth of God's steadfast love for us as sinners is magnified.

Monday: Read Psalm 106:46 - 107:3; 1 Chronicles 16:1-4 & 34-36

Grace Shining in the Dark

God's grace shines forth even in the worst of our days of darkness. Even in exile, God moved in the hearts of His people's captors (Psalm 106:46) so they had compassion on the Hebrews. One doesn't have to look far to see proof of such divinely inspired good treatment: Joseph found favor in the eyes of Potiphar; then in the eyes of the prison-warden and finally in the eyes of Pharaoh - so that his captors entrusted to Joseph the day-to-day running of their houses and lands.

In His heart of compassion for His own, God brought Israel back from exile to the Gentile nations. This was His consistent response from the days of Judges all the way up to the exile into Babylon. How? Leaders of the Jews such as Ezra and Nehemiah found favor in the eyes of their captors so that the king of Medo-Persia sent all the people back to the Promised Land! Even in a foreign land, God's people could still sing as they did five hundred years earlier, knowing that God again would gather His own out of exile to Himself!

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever!
Say also: "Save us, O God of our salvation,
and gather and deliver us from among the nations,
that we may give thanks to your holy name
and glory in your praise.
Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting!" (1 Chronicles 16:34-36)

Meditate and Pray: Just as David wants to use the note of joy contained at the beginning and at the end of Psalm 106 to sum up the great celebration of joy that accompanied the return of the ark of the Lord to its resting place (1 Chronicles 16:34-36), so we are to "bracket" each day of our lives with "hallelujahs" to our God and King. His faithfulness is real when the day dawns, full of the light of hope and expectation, and that same steadfast love is to be depended on even when our days darken, drawing near to our end on this earth. Charles Spurgeon's great statement bears repeating:

This Psalm begins and ends with Hallelujah - "Praise ye the Lord." The space between these two verses of praise is filled with mournful details of Israel's sin, and the extraordinary patience of God; and truly we do well to bless the Lord both at the beginning and the end of our meditations when sin and grace are the themes ... While we are studying the Psalm, let us all along see ourselves in the Lord's ancient people, and bemoan our own provocations of the Most High, at the same time admiring His infinite patience, and adoring Him because of it.

Tues/Weds: Read Psalm 106:1-8 & 43-45**Half-forgiveness is Man's Forgiveness**

The divine engine for His continual rescue of His own from the calamity caused by their willful sinning is God's "steadfast faithfulness" (ESV) or, in the KJV: "God's mercy." In Ps 106:1, the Psalmist speaks of God's *steadfast love* enduring forever. The word for such enduring love is "hesed," the famous Hebrew noun for God's covenant mercy. Such "hesed" is rooted in God's unchanging character as "The Lord:"

The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, **keeping steadfast love** for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

Exodus 34:5-7 emphasis added

Here, God's "steadfast love" (hesed) is guarded by God, meaning He is very zealous to maintain His commitment to His own people – trapped so often in sin as they are. In short, He will not give the glory of His hesed love to any other. Though the surrounding nations may (and indeed, did) scorn God's choice of such a hard-hearted people for His own, He will nevertheless persevere in His amazing, gracious patience with His sinful people – for He has staked His Name and reputation on His willingness to forgive – compare Exodus 34:5 with Psalm 106:8, "yet He saved them for His name sake."

Meditate and Pray: Give thanks for God's unchanging character of grace towards sinners, and confess that *this forgiving grace is the first thing we forget when we depart from His ways*. Use John Owen's exposition of Psalm 130:7 concerning God's great Name as "a God of abundant forgiveness."

So it is with many who desire to be made partakers of forgiveness. If it be possible, they would be pardoned; but they do not see it possible. Why, where is the defect?

(They answer) "God has no pardon for them, or such as they are; and so it will be that they finally come short of pardon."

(Owen responds) What! Because God *cannot pardon them*? – it is not possible with Him? Not at all; but because they cannot, they will not believe, that the forgiveness that is with Him is such as that would answer all the needs of their souls, because (in their unbelieving eyes) it lacks the infinite largeness of His heart ...

(But Owen goes on to warn us against such a *belittling of God's forgiving grace*):

God does not take it well to be limited by us in any things, especially in His grace ... When He pardons, He will "abundantly pardon." Go with your half-forgiveness, limited, conditional pardons, with reserves and limitations; go to the sons of men; it may be such a small forgiveness will become them, it is like themselves; - but that of God is absolute and perfect, before which our sins are as a cloud before the east wind and the rising sun.

John Owen, *Works*. Vol.VI pg. 502

Thurs/Fri: Read Psalm 106:19-33; Exodus 32:9-14; Job 9:32-35**In the Breach**

The most infamous example of sin in the Old Testament was the sin with the golden calf (Psalm 106:19-23). This sin was so vile that God in holy wrath *had every right to respond by destroying His people*, as He says to Moses (Exodus 32:10). At the same time, to show His grace and its ability to *meet His justice head-on with prevailing intercession*, the Lord raises up and inspires Moses to be a Mediator and to plead for God's grace to cover over even this sin (Exodus 32:11-14). God is determined that there would be a living intercessor placed between His people and His well-deserved, all-consuming wrath. The longing for someone to "stand in the breach" (Psalm 106:23, compared with Job 9:32-35) is recognized throughout the Old Testament – particularly on the part of those closest to God, such as Moses, Abraham and Job.

In order for the all-gracious "hesed" love of God the Father to be expressed towards undeserving sinners like us and His Old Testament people, there had to be one that could repair the breach. God's holy law demanded that His blessing would rest only on "those who do righteousness at all times," (Ps 106:3) but in this His people abjectly failed.

Unfortunately, even Moses, "the meekest man on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3) found the sin of God's people went *beyond his patience and willingness to forgive* (Psalm 106:32-33). In fact, such patience towards sinners *is beyond any mere human strength to endure*.

Meditate and Pray: There is a great Old Testament longing for One who could indeed, "*stand in the breach*" (Psalm 106:23) for God's people in their sin. Until He appeared, there was only the dim foreshadowing of this hope. Praise God, there is One who has now come to be that Mediator, and He is the only One, who is mighty enough to save through His mediatorial sacrifice and prayers. "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

Saturday: Read Psalm 106:34-45; Genesis 22:6-14; John 3:16**Standard of Care**

Perhaps the most bitter and trying example of a godly man *who learned the impotence of his religion without a Mediator* was Abraham. Unable to intercede for the life of his beloved son of promise, Abraham by faith raised his hand to slay him (Genesis 22:10). At just that moment, the Lord answered Abraham's faith. "The Lord provided" a sacrifice (a ram) in place of Isaac. Then God says something very significant to Abraham in Genesis 22:12. God says that there is no longer any question of Abraham's love towards his God, because he was willing to offer up his only son. So, throughout Scripture, that becomes the standard of loving commitment – a sacrificial love willing to offer its most precious son in sacrifice.

Sounds familiar, doesn't it? This is how God the Father commends His love to us: He "so loved the world that He gave up His only Son." This is the definition of love in the Bible, "not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:10)

Meditate and Pray: Sing about God's sacrificial love and His raising from the dead that Great Mediator, to live and plead His merit and blood in Heaven for our sakes, using these hymns:

1 Sweet the moments, rich in blessing,
which before the cross I spend,
life and health and peace possessing
from the sinner's dying Friend.

2 Here I rest, in wonder viewing
all my sins on Jesus laid,
here I see redemption flowing
from the sacrifice he made.

3 Here I find the dawn of heaven,
while upon the cross I gaze,
see my trespasses forgiven,
and my songs of triumph raise.

4 O that near the cross abiding,
I may to the Savior cleave,
naught with him my heart dividing,
all for him content to leave.

(Trinity Hymnal # 258)

1 Who is this so weak and helpless,
child of lowly Hebrew maid,
rudely in a stable sheltered,
coldly in a manger laid?
'Tis the Lord of all creation,
who this wondrous path has trod;
he is God from everlasting,
and to everlasting God.

2 Who is this, a Man of Sorrows,
walking sadly life's hard way,
homeless, weary, sighing, weeping
over sin and Satan's sway?
'Tis our God, our glorious Savior,
who above the starry sky
now for us a place preparing,
where no tear can dim the eye.

3 Who is this? Behold him shedding
drops of blood upon the ground!
Who is this, despised, rejected,
mocked, insulted, beaten, bound?
'Tis our God, who gifts and graces
on his church is pouring down;
who shall smite in holy vengeance
all his foes beneath his throne.

4 Who is this that hangs there dying
while the rude world scoffs and scorns,
numbered with the malefactors,
torn with nails, and crowned with thorns?
'Tis the God who lives forever
'mid the shining ones on high,
in the glorious golden city,
reigning everlastingly.

(Trinity Hymnal # 239)