

Jesus

Or, The Astonishing Love of God
19 - Walking with Jesus
Church on the Park I Sunday, 17 May 2015

Text: Exodus 34:6-7

Theme: God's love is kind and he wants to wrap you in the warmth of his faithfulness.

Intro: When I was a kid I only liked certain foods—hamburgers, hotdogs and sugary snacks. If my mom made anything gourmet, I'd run around the house yelling because I could not stand the smell. As I matured, I began to appreciate all different kinds of foods. In the same way, God wants you to value all of his distinctive attributes and ways, rather than just have a narrow view of God. Over the last few weeks, we've been looking at the multifaceted character of God—his compassion, grace and patience. Today, we will taste and see his lovingkindness.

1) In a world where loyalty is in low supply, God is committed to you and your offspring (Exo. 34:6-7).

- God revealed to Moses that he is, “**abounding in lovingkindness** (*hesed*) and truth, who keeps lovingkindness for **thousands**” (Exo. 34:6)
- **Hesed** is a beautiful and very **weighty** word in the Hebrew Scriptures. It often appears in the Old Testament, especially in **Psalms**.
- What does *hesed* mean?
 - *Hesed* is God's **loyal, faithful, kind and unfailing** love. A love that is **helpful** and **generous**. A love that **saves, secures** and **sustains**. A love that is **passionate** and **loyal**, that never gives up on you and your **children** (Deu. 7:9). A love that is based on God's ardent **desire** for you even when you fall.
 - “Refers to feelings of **loyalty** and **love** that motivate merciful and compassionate behavior toward a person.” (Lexham Theological Dictionary)
- As you know, there is an epidemic of **fatherlessness** in our culture. Fathers are often not committed to their children. But our heavenly Father is totally different, he does not abandon us.
 - Think about the story of the **prodigal son** (Luke 15)
- To help you understand God's lovingkindness and what it means, I've written a little story: *The Man and the Ant*

There was a man who daily sat in his backyard to bask in the sun. One day, he looked down and noticed an **ant**, an ant that was **slightly different** from the others. All the ants had a **reddish** color to them, but this ant also had a **black dot** on his back. This little demarcation was enough for the other ants to **harshly** treat him and make him **stick** out to **predators**.

After many days of observation, the man bent down to **talk** to the ant. The man said, “I'd like to **help** you and make a **covenant** with you.” “Thank you,” the ant replied, “I could use some assistance.” “Here's my **agreement** with you, if you are **willing** to accept it. I will **help** you and **protect** you from all the other ants. I'll also ward off your **predators**. I will always keep my **eye** on you. All I ask is one thing: bring me **one grain** of sand a day.”

The ant was delighted and **agreed** to the man's covenant, but he was a little **intimidated** by the vast size of the man. He began to bring him a grain of sand a day and he noticed that the man was taking **good care** of him.

But, one day the ant got **tired** and said to the man, "Why do I have to bring you a grain of sand a day? What use do you have for my sand? My **daily routine** is in the yard beside yours. It is very **inconvenient** to me to bring you a grain of sand every day. I don't like this agreement!"

The ant stopped bringing his master a grain of sand **every day**. But he felt quite **guilty** because the man had always been **kind** to him. So instead of every day, he brought him sand once a **week** and then sometimes once a **month**. As time passed, the little ant got **beat** up. Birds tried to **eat** him and other ants **rejected** him. He came back to the man **limping**.

"Why do you make me bring you a grain of sand every day? Why can't I just bring it whenever I want?"

The man **sighed** as he saw the ant and his heart was **pained** that he did not understand. "I asked you to bring me the sand every day so that you **stay close** to me. If you stay close to me and **build** your **nest** in my **yard** I'll be able to protect you. But if you live in the **old way**, far from me, how can I protect you and keep my eyes on you?"

The ant finally **understood**. He **changed** his **daily route** and set up camp right under the masters **shadow**. From that day on, he never limped again.

- My little story is an example of *hesed*. Why would God, a God who is **bigger** than the **universe**, want to make a covenant with you? He already has all he needs. But, he does it because he **loves** and **cares** for us.
- *Hesed* is that kind love where someone **greater helps** out someone **lesser**. It's also a loyal, helpful and unending love, that never gives up.
- The only reason why God **commands** you is so that you stay **close** to him and away from evil. It's not because he is mean, it's because he is kind.
- A lot of us think that God wants us to bring him a **mountain** of sand each day. Really, he only wants us to bring him something **small** yet much more valuable—**yourself**. Look at what John said about God's **commands** (**1 John 5:3**).

2) God's heart toward you is good, kind and loving. It's summed up in one name—JESUS (John 17:6)

- If you have any **other view** of God, it's **not** worthy of his name.
- This is the **foundational revelation** of who God is. If your understanding of God is not in agreement with this then you are missing the point and will experience much **needless suffering** and **mental torment**.
- You see, all the **attributes** that Moses is shown is **summed** up in **Jesus**, the name **above** all names (Phil. 2:8-11)
- Did you know that Jesus **means** Yahweh **saves**? Jesus' name fully captures Yahweh's **lovingkindness**.

- Jesus **explains** and lives out who God is. Jesus who heals, forgives, opens blind eyes, casts out demons, raises the dead, talks to the outcast and dies for sins, demonstrates God's lovingkindness (John 1:18).
- Let your **view** of God be **shaped** by the **Scripture** and the Holy **Spirit's revelation**, rather than your **background** and **opinions**.
- **Psalm 103** poetically gives us a portrait of God's lovingkindness
 - Do not forget his **benefits**, his **untold** of **blessings** toward you
 - He **forgives** all your sins
 - He **heals** all your diseases
 - He **redeems** your life from the pit of sin and death
 - He **crowns** your life with his lovingkindness and compassion
 - Picture the Lord putting a crown on you
 - He **satisfies** your desires with goodness so your youth is renewed like the eagles.
- In **Psalm 103** we see a **perfect picture** of **Jesus**

3) Let Jesus shower his lovingkindness on you (Romans 5:5).

- Look again at the **prodigal son** (Luke 15:11-32, esp. 20-24)
- Look at Jesus turning the **water** into **wine** (John 2:1-12).
- Walk through the Gospel of John Morning Thought: After a cold, dark night, God's multifaceted love and compassions are like the warmth of the morning sun, peering over the horizon. Drink in the glow of his grace and you'll have a brighter day. Lam. 3:21-25
- There is no higher concentration and frequency of the word 'hesed' than in the Psalms. This shows me that the true worshipper has a revelation of God's expansive, unfailing and relentless love.

Conclusion: Your God is helpful, loyal and kind. Today, let God crown you with his lovingkindness and compassion. Let him renew your mind with who he is.

END NOTES

LOVINGKINDNESS (Hesed)

- 698a** חֶסֶד (*hesed*) kindness, loving-kindness, mercy and similar words (KJV). (RSV usually has steadfast love, occasionally loyalty, nasb lovingkindness, kindness, love, niv unfailing love.)
- 698b** חַסִּיד (*hāsîd*) **holy one, godly, saint**. RSV faithful, godly one, loyal. niv, saint, godly.
- 698c** חַסִּידָא (*hāsîdâ*) **stork** (perhaps because it was thought to be kind to its young).

For centuries the word *hesed* was translated with words like mercy, kindness, love. The LXX usually uses *eleos* "mercy," and the Latin *misericordia*. The Targum and Syriac use frequently a cognate of *tob*. The root is not found in Akkadian or Ugaritic. The lexicons up through BDB and GB (which said *Liebe, Gunst, Gnade*, love, goodness, grace) are similar. KB however is the "mutual liability of those ... belonging together."

In 1927 Nelson Glueck, shortly preceded by I. Elbogen, published a doctoral dissertation in German translated into English by A. Gottschalk, *Hesed in the Bible* with

an introduction by G. A. LaRue which is a watershed in the discussion. His views have been widely accepted. In brief, Glueck built on the growing idea that Israel was bound to its deity by covenants like the Hittite and other treaties. He held that God is pictured as dealing basically in this way with Israel. The Ten Commandments, etc. were stipulations of the covenant, Israel's victories were rewards of covenant keeping, her apostasy was covenant violation and God's *hesed* was not basically mercy, but loyalty to his covenant obligations, a loyalty which the Israelites should also show. He was followed substantially by W. F. Lofthouse (1933), N. H. Snaith (1944), H. W. Robinson (1946), Ugo Masing (1954), and many others.

There were others, however, who disagreed. F. Assension (1949) argued for mercy, basing his views on the OT versions. H. J. Stoebe (doctoral dissertation 1951, also articles in 1952 VT and in THAT) argued for good-heartedness, kindness. Sidney Hills and also Katherine D. Sakenfeld (*The Meaning of *Ḥesed* in the Hebrew Bible, a New Inquiry*), held in general that *ḥesed* denotes free acts of rescue or deliverance which in prophetic usage includes faithfulness. For this historical survey and references see Sakenfeld pp. 1–13 (hereafter called Sak.); also LaRue in the book by Glueck (here called G.)

The writer would stress that the theological difference is considerable whether the Ten Commandments are stipulations to a covenant restricted to Israel to which God remains true and to which he demands loyalty, or whether they are eternal principles stemming from God's nature and his creation to which all men are obligated and according to which God will judge in justice or beyond that will show love, mercy and kindness.

On the meaning of our word *ḥesed* it is convenient to start, as G. and Sak. have done, with the secular usage, i.e. between man and man. Glueck argues that *ḥesed* is practiced in an ethically binding relationship of relatives, hosts, allies, friends and rulers. It is fidelity to covenantal obligations real or implied. Sakenfeld goes over the same material and concludes that indeed a relationship is present (love almost necessitates a subject-object relation) but that the *ḥesed* is freely given. "Freedom of decision" is essential. The help is vital, someone is in a position to help, the helper does so in his own freedom and this "is the central feature in all the texts" (p. 45).

Glueck certainly seems to find obligation where there is none. Stoebe gives an extensive treatment of *ḥesed* in THAT (pp. 599–622) and remarks (p. 607) that I Kgs is an instance where *ḥesed* is unexpected. Benhadad was defeated. He could claim no obligation. He hoped for mercy, kindness. Stoebe cites the men of Jabesh also (II Sam 2:5). Saul had died in defeat. The care of Saul's body seems clearly to have been a free act of kindness.

Also Laban's willingness to send Rebekah to Isaac was not from any covenant obligation (though G. cites the appeal to providence in v. 50). It was a kindness to a long-lost relative. He could easily have said "no." The beautiful story of Ruth is tarnished by considering Ruth's action as motivated by contractual obligations. The Lord had no obligation to get the widows new husbands in Moab (1:8–9). Ruth went with Naomi from pure love. Boaz recognized her action as goodness in 2:11–12 and calls it *ḥesed* in 3:10. Even Glueck inclined toward kindness here. The action of Rahab was kindness (Josh 2:12). Her loyalty would naturally and legally be to her king and city. The angels in Gen 19:19 were hardly bound by covenant obligation—or any obligation—to Lot. Indeed

the basis of their action is said in v. 16 to have been their compassion (cf. Isa 63:9). In Gen 21:23 Abimelech cites his previous *hesed* as grounds for making the covenant with Abraham which required further *hesed*. Glueck makes something of I Sam 20:8, 14, 15 where David and Jonathan swore friendship. This covenant, says G. was the basis of the *hesed*. Here, perhaps, is G's major mistake. He forgets that covenants arise on the basis of a relationship and that the obligations are often deeper than the covenant. Verse 17 shows that Jonathan's love moved him to make the covenant. When Jonathan died, David lamented for him out of love, not obligation (II Sam 1:26). David's *hesed* to Saul's house is said to be for the sake of Jonathan, not because of a legal obligation (II Sam 9:1, 3, 7). Glueck seems to miss the mark widely when he says it was neither grace nor mercy; it was brotherliness required by covenantal loyalty. Such a view has failed to see the depth of David's character. Stoebe calls it the spontaneous proof of a cordial friendly attitude (*herzlich freundlich Gesinnung*). Other examples must be omitted, but they are similar. All parties agree that in Est 2:9, 17 the word is used of favor, kindness, but some try to make this usage unusual being post-exilic.

When we come to the *hesed* of God, the problem is that of course God was in covenant relation with the patriarchs and with Israel. Therefore his *hesed* can be called covenant *hesed* without contradiction. But by the same token God's righteousness, judgment, fidelity, etc. could be called covenant judgment, etc. The question is, do the texts ascribe his *hesed* to his covenants or to his everlasting love? Is not *hesed* as Dom Sorg observed (see Bibliography) really the ot reflex of "God is love"?

A prominent early usage is in God's declaration of his own character: Ex 20:6 parallel to Deut 5:10 and also Ex 34:6–7. These passages are discussed by G., Sak. and Stoebe from the viewpoint of documentary division first. But aside from this Sak. emphasizes the freedom of God's *hesed*. in all these passages. She notes the proximity to words for mercy in Ex 34:6–7 and remarks that it is "this aspect of God's *hesed* (as his mercy) which takes on greater importance in exilic and postexilic writing"—of which she envisions a good bit—(p. 119). However, she considers Ex 20 and Deut 5 as in a "covenantal context" (p. 131) and holds that "those who are loyal (loving) will receive *hesed* while those who are disloyal (hating) will be punished" (p. 131). She is led into this covenantal emphasis by the prior idea that since secular treaties speak of love, brotherhood and friendship between suzerain and vassal, that therefore these are covenant words and show that a covenant was at least implied. This view forgets that love is a covenant word because kings borrowed it from general use to try to render covenants effective. They tried to make the vassal promise to act like a brother, friend and husband. It does not follow that God's love is merely a factor in a covenant; rather the covenant is the sign and expression of his love. McCarthy more acceptably says, "the form of the Sinai story in Ex 19–24 which is reflected in the text without later additions does not bear out the contention that the story reflects an organization according to covenant form." His view is that the power and glory of Yahweh and the ceremonies conducted effected the union "more than history, oath, threat and promise" (McCarthy, D. J., *Treaty and Covenant*, Pontif. Bib. Inst., ed. of 1963, p. 163).

The text itself of Ex 20 and Deut 5 simply says that God's love (*hesed*) to those who love him (*'āhab*) is the opposite of what he will show to those who hate him. The context of these commands is surely God's will for all mankind, although his special care,

indeed his covenant, is with Israel. That *hesed* refers only to this covenant and not to the eternal divine kindness back of it, however, is a fallacious assumption.

The text of Ex 34:6–7 is fuller and more solemn, coming as it does after the great apostasy. It was a tender revelation of God’s self to Moses. Sakenfeld is right here “that forgiveness must always have been latent [at least!] in the theological usage of *hesed*” even before the exile (p. 119). The association with divine mercy is surely patent in the words and in the context of the occasion of the apostasy. The word *rahûm* with its overtones of mother love, and *ḥannûn* “grace” combined with the phrase “slow to anger” all emphasize the character of God who is love. He is great in *hesed* and *’emet* (of which more later). He keeps *hesed* for thousands which is immediately related to forgiveness of sin. That all this simply says that God keeps his oath seems trivial. The oath is kept because it is the loving God who speaks the oath.

Sakenfeld nicely brings together the several passages dependent on Ex 34:6–7. They are: Num 14:18–19; Neh 9:17; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 145:8 (cf. 9 and 10); Joel 2:13; and Jon 4:2. Of these passages, only Ps 86:15 includes the word *’emet* after *hesed*. They all speak of the love of the Lord and some mention his forgiveness. None specifically ground the *hesed* in covenant.

The phrase *hesed* and *’emet* “truth” mentioned above is thought by some to argue for the concept of loyalty or fidelity in *hesed*. It occurs some twenty-five times with about seven more in less close connection. Most agree it is a hendiadys and one noun serves to describe the other. Therefore the phrase means “faithful love” or “true kindness” or the like. Kindness and faithfulness is a fair equivalent hendiadys in English. The combination hardly seems to further the idea of fidelity to a covenant in the word *hesed*. If the term already meant that, why would the qualifier “faithful” be added? Usually, as in the usage of *hesed* alone, there is no covenant expressed to which fidelity is due. It is alleged in I Kgs 3:3, but although God’s *hesed* to David in making his son king was indeed according to covenant; it was also according to his love which lay back of his covenant. The text does not ascribe it to covenant loyalty. Stoebe points out in Ps 89 that the covenant of v. 3 is based on the *hesed* of v. 2 [H 4 and 3] (THAT, p. 615).

Another pair of nouns is covenant, *bērit*, and *hesed* used seven times with some other instances of use in near contexts. The main instance is Deut 7:9, 12 which has echoes in I Kgs 8:23; II Chr 6:14; Neh 1:5; 9:32; and Dan 9:4. It itself is called by Stoebe (THAT, p. 616) a paraphrase of Ex 34:6. He remarks that Deut 7:8 already bases all God’s favor on his love. If this pair be translated “covenantal love” or “covenant and love,” it should be remembered that the love is back of the covenant. This point is illustrated by Jer 2:2 where the *hesed* of Israel’s youth is likened to the love of a bride. The love of a bride is the basis of the promise, not the result.

It should be mentioned that *hesed* is also paired about fifteen times with nouns of mercy like *rahûm*, e.g. Ps 103:4; Zech 7:9 (and cf. Ex 34:6–7 above), *ḥēn*, e.g. Gen 19:19; Ps 109:12, *tanḥûm*, Ps 94:18–19, etc. These instances usually stand as paired nouns not really in an adjectival relation. The implication is that *hesed* is one of the words descriptive of the love of God.

So, it is obvious that God was in covenant relation with Israel, also that he expressed this relation in *hesed*, that God’s *hesed* was eternal (Note the refrain of Ps 136)—though the *hesed* of Ephraim and others was not (Hos 6:4). However, it is by no

means clear that *hesed* necessarily involves a covenant or means fidelity to a covenant. Stoebe argues that it refers to an attitude as well as to actions. This attitude is parallel to love, *rahûm* goodness, *tôb*, etc. It is a kind of love, including mercy, *hannûn*, when the object is in a pitiful state. It often takes verbs of action, “do,” “keep,” and so refers to acts of love as well as to the attribute. **The word “lovingkindness” of the KJV is archaic, but not far from the fulness of meaning of the word.**

תִּדְרֹךְ (*hāsîd*). **Holy one, saint.** Whether God’s people in the ot were called *hāsîd* because they were characterized by *hesed* (as seems likely) or were so called because they were objects of God’s *hesed* may not be certain. The word is used thirty-two times, twenty-five of them in the Pss. It is used in sing. and pl. Once, Ps 16:16, it refers to the Holy One to come. The word became used for the orthodox party in the days of the Maccabees.

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R.L.H.

Seen in Genesis 19:19, Gen 24:12ff, Exo. 15:13, 2 Chron. 7:3

Lamentations 3:21-25

Your God is generous and abundant. He’s not stingy and unkind.

1 John 5:2-4 - God’s commands are not burdensome

This generous love that has made a covenant with you is seen in Jesus on the cross.

Why would God who has everything want us? It’s only because of his hesed.

Paul on love (1 Cor. 13:1-7)

“Love is patience, love is kind...”

His love extends to our children, our children’s children and their children’s children to the thousandth generation.

A Walk through John

The Miracle at Cana - Jesus shows his love by turning the water into wine. He didn't have to do this. He wasn't the host, he was only the invited guest. He was only being helpful, gracious. Here is God's hesed in action. In this he showed his glory.

What about the woman of Samaria? Jesus said, "Give me a drink." Did he really want a drink? Why was he asking? He wanted a conversation. He wanted to reveal himself to the woman. In this question he is also crossing boundaries. Then he says the woman should have asked him for a drink. And yet, for the woman to do this would have been absolute rudeness in their culture. First, because women do not ask men for drinks, and then second, because Samaritans and Jews don't help one another.

He showed kindness to the poor and the rich. In the next story, he heals the dying son of a royal official (most likely a Roman). So he shows kindness to the outcast adulterous woman and to the royal official.

How about the man on the mat? He couldn't do anything for Jesus. He did not even seek Jesus like the royal official and yet Jesus found him and healed him. So God shows kindness on the seeker and on the non-seeker. But notice at the end, he says, "Do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you."

Jesus the Good Shepherd

Jesus washing his disciples feet, the very feet of the ones who were just about to deny him and Judas who would betray him that very night.

Jesus' hesed shows us his humble nature. The humble and steadfast love of God.

The extravagant love of Christ (Eph 3:15-17, Message)