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The Tender Mercies Of God

by Edward Griffin

“I will mention the loving kindnesses of the Lord and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness towards the house of Israel which he hath bestowed on them, according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving kindnesses.” Isaiah 63:7.

The prophet, when he uttered these words, appeared to labor under an ineffable sense of the tender mercies and loving kindnesses of his God. He had been contemplating the wrath with which God would one day visit Edom when he should come to deliver his people from her oppressions. Immediately he raises an interesting contrast and sets before his eyes God’s “great goodness towards the house of Israel” in loosing their Egyptian bonds and conducting them through the wilderness. In this type as through a glass, he discovered the wondrous love which redeems the Church from more oppressive chains, and supports her in her journey to the heavenly rest. Under this view he seemed transported, and in his rapture exclaimed, “I will mention the loving kindnesses of the Lord and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness towards the house of Israel which he hath bestowed on them, according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving kindnesses.”

Though we should not raise our eyes to the exalted love which shines in the Gospel, still we should have abundant reason to mention the loving kindnesses of the Lord. Without any adviser or helper he introduced us to rational existence, and raised us to intellectual enjoyment. By his unceasing care, that existence is hourly supported. Our table is furnished and our raiment supplied by his benign hand. We are blest with pleasant habitations and possessions; we enjoy the delights of refined society, the blessings of friendship, and the life and happiness of our friends. Our health is sustained by a thousand minute and constantly repeated touches of his hand to the various parts of our complicated machine. All the pleasures of imagination, of memory, of hope, of sympathy, and of sense; all the magic charms which play on nature’s face, are the gifts of his bounteous hand. By his watchful care we are protected from countless visible and unseen dangers.

By innumerable impressions made on our animal spirits by his careful touch, we are put in tune to enjoy the objects around us. More numerous are his mercies than the stars which look out of heaven. On no section of our life,--on no point of nature's works,--scarcely on a circumstance in our relations to society, can we fix our eyes, without seeing "the loving kindnesses of the Lord." But when we lift our thoughts to his "great goodness towards the house of Israel," our souls faint under the labor of expressing the praise we owe. Redeeming grace most fully displays the richness and extent of his loving kindnesses; redeeming grace was the theme which transported the author of our text; and redeeming grace shall be the subject of this discourse.

To discover the heights or to fathom the depths of this grace, exceeds the power of men or angels; yet the view perhaps may be enlightened by some of the following reflections.

In purposing and planning the great work of redemption, the Eternal Mind was *self-moved, uncounselled, unsolicited*. No angel interceded or advised; no man by his prayers or tears excited pity. Before men or angels had existence, the purpose was fixed and the plan was formed by boundless love, unmoved, unasked, untempted by any thing without but the foreseen miseries of a perishing world.

This love was wholly *disinterested*, having no reward in view but the pleasure of doing good. What other recompense could God expect from creatures who have nothing to give but what they receive? What other reward could eternal self-sufficiency need?

This love is still more sublime considered as *acting towards inferiors*. When love is not the most pure, we daily see, it will overlook those who have no eminence to engage respect. On this account the condescending regard which some benevolent prince may pay to the poor and forsaken, is peculiarly affecting. What then shall we say when we behold Infinite Majesty descending to such tender concern for dust and ashes?

Redeeming love is still more wonderful as exercised towards *enemies*; towards those who could reject the offered salvation,--who were not to be moved by all the entreaties of heaven,--and who had malice enough to murder the Author of life in the very act of bringing it to them.

This love appears altogether astonishing when we consider *the greatness of the sacrifice* it made. That God himself, (infinite, eternal, and self-sufficient as he was,) should bring himself down to a mortal form; that he who made the heavens should descend from among the adorations of angels to assume the form

of a servant and to receive the spittings of Roman soldiers; that he should exchange the quiet of eternal repose for a laborious life, the abodes of inaccessible light for the degrading manger,--the society of the Father and Spirit for that of illiterate fishermen,--the heights of infinite bliss for the agonies of Gethsemane and Golgotha;--and all to atone for abuses which he himself had received from men; fixes angels in astonishment and rivets their eyes to him who still bears the prints of the nails and the spear. That this divine Sufferer did not recede, but remained immovable in his purpose in a near view of his agonies; that he did not strike and rivet his insulting murderers to the centre, but spent his expiring breath in prayer for their life; evinces, not love only, but love *unconquerable*.

The extent of redeeming love further appears in *the magnitude of the blessings* which it intended for a ruined race. It stooped to catch a falling world; to snatch them from eternal flames to the transports of immortal life,--from everlasting contempt to be "kings and priests" forever "unto God" --to raise them from the depravity of sin to the purity of the divine image,--from a dungeon to the radiance of heaven,--from the society of devils to communion with angels,--from the blasphemies of hell to the songs of paradise,--from universal destitution to inherit all riches,--to be sons and heirs of God, members of the Redeemer's body,--to live in his family and heart, and forever to expand in the regions of light and life.

This mercy is heightened by the fact that the Saviour is so *necessary*, *reasonable*, and *all-sufficient*. Intrusted with all the offices needful for man's redemption, he possesses powers fully adequate to the infinite work, and exerts them when and where they are most needed. It is his stated business to strike off the chains from wretched prisoners,--to administer balm to those who are wounded to death, food to those who are perishing with hunger,--eyes and light to the blind and benighted. He is the "shadow of a great rock in a weary land," -- "a hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest." In his prophetic office he brings out to view the secrets of the Eternal Mind: as a Priest he pacifies divine wrath by atonement and intercession: as a King he subdues the stubborn will, marks out the road to life by salutary precepts, defends from spiritual enemies, and renders all events subservient to the good of his people. As Captain of the Lord's host he will carry them through their warfare and bring them off victorious. As Physician of souls he will heal all their spiritual maladies and confirm them in immortal health. He is a most pleasant resting place from the perturbations of guilt, the vexations of care, and the anguish of affliction. Possessing inexhaustible life in himself, he is the source of unailing life to his members, who before were "dead in trespasses and sins." As "Heir of all things" and Distributer of the whole

estate, he has every necessary good to impart in this world and infinite riches in the world to come.

This mercy is still further heightened by the *patience and condescending tenderness* which he exercises towards his people. He calls them his friends, his brethren, his children, his spouse, the members of his body, the apple of his eye. In the character of a near and tender relation, he has become a mild medium through which they may look up into the insufferable splendors of the Godhead without dazzling or paining their sight. Although the awful God of majesty, he is not ashamed to own and befriend a poor race of unsightly outcasts and to take them into union with himself. With unconquerable patience he bears with all their provocations, and with unfailing faithfulness remains their friend during all their perverseness and ingratitude. Though their returns are such as would weary any other love, he is still engaged in pardoning their sins, subduing their corruptions, and conducting them to glory. As a tender shepherd he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them in his bosom. And O with what overpowering kindness does he speak to them when he holds communion with them, when he meets them in a happy hour as they are walking out like Isaac to meditate at the evening tide, and drawing aside the veil, shows the sweetest countenance dressed in celestial smiles; or when finding them bowed to the earth and drenched in tears, he gently raises them in his arms, and with more than a mother's tenderness wipes the sorrows from their cheeks and breathes ineffable consolation into their spirits. Ye who have known his love, can witness the ineffable sweetness with which he manifests himself at such seasons. In his providence he takes care to suffer no real evil to befall his people, to withhold from them no real good, and to make them the happier for every event. And when this trying life is past, he will receive them to his own presence, to a near and ever increasing union to himself, where love perfect and reciprocal shall hold immortal reign.

This wondrous mercy is further expressed in the gift of *sabbaths* and *sacraments*, and especially the *written* word. When we perceive the breathings of divine love in those precious Scriptures which were inspired by the Holy Ghost; when the soul lies at some divine promise, drinking in immortal refreshment, and filling itself as from some celestial spring, O how rich and vast does the love of God appear.

Fresh evidences of this love spring up at every review of his past *providence towards the Church*. "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them, and he bore them and carried them all the days of old." The preservation of Noah in the ark, the call and protection of Abraham, the deliverance of the Church from

Egypt, its support in the wilderness and establishment in Canaan, the numerous deliverances wrought for Israel, their restoration from Babylon, the establishment and astonishing growth of the Christian Church, its protection during the successive persecutions, and the continued efforts of the Spirit to preserve and enlarge it, are all monuments of amazing love and faithfulness. And when we cast our eyes down the slope of ages and behold the glory of Zion filling all the earth, how do we dance as in fancied visions and think the bliss too great to be real. And then, when we open the Scriptures and behold a “*Thus saith the Lord*” expressly to confirm our hopes, with what rapturous gratitude do we make our boast of him; “Lo this is our God, we have waited for him and he will save us: this is the Lord, we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

All these are the more affecting as being marks of *distinguishing* love. Redeeming grace passed by the fallen angels to bring salvation to men. The privileges of Gospel light and ordinances were taken from the heathen to be given to us. The blessings of personal holiness and divine communion are conferred on the people of God while withheld from the rest of the world. Our lives are continued in a world of hope while millions are called to their last account. While God was preserving the Hebrew Church and nourishing it with a Father’s care, Edom, Moab, and Ammon were given to the sword. And while angels sing only of the *goodness* of the Lord, the redeemed will shout “*grace, grace,*” and with higher notes and ecstasies chant the praises of redeeming love.

The grace of God appears still greater as being *abundant and free for all*. The language of divine compassion is, “Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”

Having drawn this outline of the mercies of God, I shall now present them as motives to holy feelings and practical godliness.

What *admiration* should possess our minds as we contemplate this wonderful love of God. Nothing in the universe is so amazing. Not an angel in heaven but lives in astonishment continually. And yet it is *infinitely* greater than ever Gabriel imagined. As the sublime intellects of the upper world expand, it will appear more and more amazing to eternity.

And while we wonder let *gratitude fill* our hearts. Of what avail is our admiration without our thanks? It would only bring us to the condition of those who gaze “and wonder and perish.” What are our hearts made of if they can lie under the weight of all these obligations and be unthankful still? Let us retain a sense of divine mercies always upon our heart, and not suffer them, after a

transient impression, to pass off into oblivion. Let not the blessings of former years be forgotten, but let them frequently be brought in review before us, that we may never cease to remember how much we owe to our Lord.

To lasting gratitude let lasting *love* be added. What infinite beauty and worth belong to Israel's God. And shall we be thankful for personal favors and not love the benevolence which embraces the universe? This would be only the contracted gratitude of a heart that can be engaged by nothing but the loaves and fishes.

Let it be our daily joy that the universe contains such a God,--a God whose happiness consists in doing good, and who is executing so vast a plan for the promotion of creature happiness, that he already realizes infinite blessedness in gratified benevolence. Let universal joy catch from heart to heart and circulate through heaven and earth that such a God lives, reigns, and is happy. Let this be our morning and our evening song. Let it break in like the dawn of day upon our gloomy hours; and like the sinking but recovered David, let us be transported with the thought, "But thou, O Lord, shalt endure forever, and thy remembrance unto all generations."

To such a God our highest *praise* belongs. He is the object of the incessant and rapturous praise of all the choirs of paradise, and shall men neglect their harps? In the warm transports of David's heavenly muse, let us invoke the sun and all the orbs of light, the earth and all the things thereon, the heavens and all their happy spirits, to praise the Lord,--to praise him in the heights and in the depths,--to praise him with the voice of song, and with all the varieties of instrumental harmony.

Let such a God be the supreme object of our *faith*, our *hope*, our *confidence*. On him let us place our *dependance* for every thing we need for time and eternity. Renouncing this delusive world and every idol which would rival him in our hearts, let us make him our *only point of rest*, our *only portion*. Let him be the object of our daily and cheerful *worship*. Let hypocrisy be banished from our religion, and let *sincerity* mark our worship of him whose friendship for man has been so sincere. Disclaiming all self-seeking, after his disinterested love to us, let us live only for him; and in duty to one who so greatly denied himself for us, let us largely practise *self-denial*. Henceforth let us consecrate ourselves to the *service* of him who served us in death; and by our *obedience* to all his commands attest the sincerity of our love and gratitude.

God forbid that we should be *ashamed* to confess him before men who was not ashamed to own and befriend us before his Father and the holy angels; or

that we should fail to speak to a listening world of his excellent greatness and his excellent loving kindness. It becomes us to imitate his devotedness to the glory of God and the happiness of men; to put on sincere mercy and kindness, forbearing one another in love, doing good to all as we have opportunity, especially to the household of faith; condescending to men of low degree, meek and gentle to all, affable, courteous, and obliging, ready to forgive injuries, given to hospitality, and generous in distributing to the poor the gifts of a generous God.

To the dominion of enthroned love it becomes us to *submit*; resigning all our interests to the divine disposal, and enduring with patience and not with petulance whatever such a God is pleased to impose.

Against such a God it is that we have been found in arms. O “tell it not in Gath.” Under the weight of all these obligations we have risen up to oppose unbounded love. Alas we knew not what we did. In vain might our tears and blood be applied to efface stains so ignominious and deep. Well may we go softly all our years in the bitterness of our soul. Let pride never again appear in natures capable of this. Let *humility and brokenness of heart* mark our future lives; and in sympathy with the publican let us smite on our guilty breasts and cry, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

And since our crimes are of so deep a dye that nothing but atoning blood can wash them out, and since such infinite pains have been taken to provide a Saviour for us,—a Saviour every way suited to our wants; let us gratefully *seize the offered salvation* and cast ourselves on him as the only ground of hope. And then, “though” our “sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool.”

Ah sinners, how long will you slight such endearing love and reject such heaven-astonishing mercy? How long shall infinite tenderness be grieved at your ingratitude? Why will you treat with abuse that excellence which angels adore? Why will you tread under foot that love which dissolves all heaven? When will you at length be wise, and for once, after so long a time, act like ingenuous creatures? Let the goodness of God lead us all to repentance, and let us spend our days in making mention of the loving kindnesses of the Lord, and in preparing to unite with the redeemed in singing, “Worthy is the lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.”

“Now, unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

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