

Exodus 34:5-9 ⁵Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with [Moses] and proclaimed his name, the Lord. ⁶And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation. ⁸Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped. ⁹“O Lord, if I have found favor in your eyes,” he said, “then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance.”

Romans 5:6-11 ⁶You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! ¹⁰For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Luke 19:1-10 ¹Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ²A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. ⁵When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” ⁶So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. ⁷All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’” ⁸But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” ⁹Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

GREAT ENOUGH TO BE MERCIFUL

So, the two star general was called in to meet with his commanding officer. Orders were given regarding the upcoming campaign. During the meeting, a report came to the three star that the two star’s troops had run amok. There were breaches of behavior and discipline of every sort. It was said that there was hardly a combat ready soldier in the entire division.

The three star was furious. He was ready to issue 15,000 court marshals. But the two star said, “These men, I know them. They can be a little wild, Forgive them, and let me deal with them. We need them.” And in his own mind he was thinking, “That’s three-star generals for you! Always getting excited over the latest rumors. I know my men. They wouldn’t do that!” Having won his commanding officer’s confidence, the two star returned and found out—that all the rumors were true. Of the thousands, he could count on one hand the number of soldiers who saluted when he walked into camp. And now he let them have it. Restoring discipline was so difficult that there were even fatalities in getting things settled down.

After settling things at camp—and it wasn’t pretty—he went back to his superior officer and said, “I just don’t know what to do. It was just like you said. Discipline is terrible. Morale is low. Strategies aren’t working. I just don’t know how to move forward. I know you have told me all that I *need* to know. But is there some way you can tell me more; let me see the big picture. It sure would make me more confident!”

If this doesn’t sound like the US Army you know, that’s good, because it isn’t. The two star general was Moses. He was called up to see the Commander in Chief on top of Mt. Sinai. While he was up there, his troops, the Israelites, acted like fools. They abandoned God’s rules. They even built a statue of gold shaped like a calf and—if you can believe this—they bowed down to it. God wanted to destroy them, Moses pleaded for them. When Moses got back to camp he disciplined them harshly, even putting many to death. At this point Moses didn’t know if he could continue in his command. God wanted him to, but he just didn’t know if he could go on. And so, in that second briefing where Moses was given the marching orders for his ill-disciplined troops, Moses said to the LORD, “*If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.*’... ¹⁸Then Moses said, ‘*Now show me your glory.*’... ²¹Then the LORD said, ‘*There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock.*’ ²²When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.’” (Exodus 33:15-23)

God promises to honor Moses’ request. He would show Moses some small measure of his glory. So, if God is going to show Moses his glory, if the almighty

God is going to show Moses the most spectacular thing about him, what do you think he is going to show Moses?

Maybe the LORD will take Moses to the top of the Himalaya Mountains and let him see the grandeur of the greatest mountain range on earth. Maybe God will take Moses to Iguazu Falls, to hear the thunder of a mile-wide waterfall, surrounding Moses on three sides. Or maybe he will show Moses views of the universe like we now see with the aid of the Hubble telescope. Surely these things display the glory of God! Is that not God's glory? Like what we just sang in that beloved hymn, "How Great Thou Art": "O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder Consider all the works thy hand hath made, I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder, Thy pow'r throughout the universe displayed." Would those be worthy things to display God's glory to Moses?

But it isn't just Moses who needs encouragement. This world can be a discouraging place. Unless you have decided to live "off the grid", you have surely seen something of this year's race for the highest political office in the land. And regardless of which side you are on, the more you hear, the more demoralizing it has been to consider our nation's future. Yes, this world can be a demoralizing place. Who of us has not been dealt a body-blow by the death of one loved by us, whether in the last week or month or year? In your life, have the stresses of health care or personal finances been oppressive? Does it seem more and more difficult to have meaningful friendships, even as we supposedly get more and more connected? Or maybe it is not the world outside but the world within. Maybe it is your own struggle with sin or habit. Maybe it is your own feelings of inadequacy for a job. Maybe you realize your life with your family is not what it should be, that you have failed somehow.

Might we, like Moses, be slightly or greatly demoralized and say "Please, Lord, *show me your glory*," just let me see a little bit to give me hope? "*Show me your glory!*"

Yes, that was Moses' request. And in Exodus 34 God's shows him his glory: "***Then the LORD... passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, 'The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.'***"

God said, "I am going to show you my great glory, Moses" and what does he do? No pictures of far off stars and galaxies, no trips to the waterfalls or mountains. No. The LORD God simply points out, "This is my greatest glory: ***[I am] the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.***"

Do you know what the most misused word in the English language is? I have no way to prove it; this is a personal opinion. Back about 40 years, I remember a grade school English class. The class was about the words "like" and "love". "You *like* ice cream, you like your dog. But you cannot *love* ice cream or your dog." Yah, right. Try telling an eight year old boy he doesn't love his dog. But we used to reserve "love" for something very special. Now it is the most generic word there is.

The most misused word in the English language is "love". Yes, God is love. The Bible says so. But this verse defines God's love. God's love is *compassion* for the one who is weak in the face of a powerful and selfish world. God's love is *gracious*, a welcome even for the one who has nothing to offer God. God's love is *slow to anger*. He understands weakness of character and flesh and is patient. God's love is *faithful*. You don't have to hope that he is in a good mood on a certain day.

And God's love is *forgiving*. Isn't that last one the best? Perhaps forgiveness is not so important with people on your own level. But isn't forgiveness so very important from people greater than us? We can live with equals who don't forgive. It's uncomfortable, but doable. But with a boss who doesn't forgive? A commanding officer who doesn't forgive? A parent who does not forgive? These are crushing loads. Especially when we are wrong and they are right, when we feel the condemnation of our own guilt! We admire, dare I say, "worship" the person greater than yourself who is able to look beyond your failures, your flaws, your indiscretions and sins.

God's great glory to us is his forgiveness. Sure he is powerful. Sure he is holy and perfect. But best of all he is the forgiving God who calls the prostitutes and the tax collectors, the drug dealers and the corrupt. When people complained about Jesus fraternizing with Zacchaeus, he explained God's great glory, "*The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost*" (Lk 19:10).

When you can't count on forgiveness, you act completely different. We see this in the public space? When there are allegations of misconduct, the first thing celebrities and politicians and ordinary people do is deny it. And then, if allegations continue, double down on the denial. And then if there is proof, still deny. And if one must, he or she will admit to the absolute least amount of misconduct possible, and even then only with excuses.

That is the conduct of people who do not know a forgiving God. Who have never stood before God and confessed all that was in their hearts and realized their unworthiness, their worthlessness, and God's forgiveness. They are people who have never sung, "And when I think that God, his Son not sparing, Sent him to

die, I scarce can take it in, That on the cross my burden gladly bearing He bled and died to take away my sin. Then sings my soul, my Savior-God, to thee, ‘How great thou art!’”

When you trust someone to be forgiving, that completely alters your relationship. When you know a forgiving God, and when you have seen his forgiveness acted out in the life of Jesus Christ, who bled and died for me, then you can admit to your failures. You can go, confessing and regretting sin, yet also trusting in forgiveness.

And you can act that way in public too! We can admit failures, no we don’t enjoy doing that, but we can admit it. We can admit it because we know God will forgive. And we can trust Christians who have also known this greatest glory of God, and we know that they will forgive us. And even if the people of this world don’t forgive, we can learn to be ok with that because our God has declared us forgiven in Jesus Christ!

Yes, God’s great glory is his compassionate, forgiving love. And it changes not just our relationship with God, but our relationship with people.

II. But God did clarify one thing about his love. His love is not permissiveness. God is not indifferent to sin. He is not like a spouse who when cheated on, says, “It doesn’t matter to me.” God is gracious. He is forgiving. Yet when his gracious love is trampled underfoot, the LORD tells Moses that he will punish. This is because God’s love is valuable. It cost him something.

A certain boy mowed lawn for a neighbor. He got paid, but one year on his birthday, the neighbor gave him a baseball card—back when those were worth something. The boy looked at it amazed. “Wow, thanks! This must be worth a hundred bucks!” he said with a smile. “Oh, I have a couple hundred more like those. No trouble. It didn’t cost me anything.” All of a sudden this “wonderful” gift lost its value. Whatever it’s street value, when he said, “It didn’t cost me anything,” he just put a price tag on the relationship. And the relationship isn’t worth a plugged nickel.

God’s forgiving, compassionate love is so valuable because even he, even the infinite Creator God of all things, to whom all things belong, even he found a way to purchase our forgiveness at a price that cost him dearly. He insisted on paying for our sin and he made that payment. His gift to us is precious.

This is God’s warning to people who look at cheap grace. Yes, the Bible assures us that all sin is forgiven in Jesus Christ. But the Lord tells us this about those whose repentance is a sham, whose sorrow for sin is only a disguise for love of sin: ***“The LORD... passed in front of Moses, proclaiming,... ‘Yet [the LORD] does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.’”***

When people despise God’s gift of forgiveness, he will hold them accountable. May we never take his greatest glory for granted.

Yes, God is great enough, powerful enough to be merciful. And that is his great glory. May we live lives worthy of that forgiveness. Amen.

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POSSIBLE CHILDREN'S SERMON

Prop:

Truth:

Message: