

Thoughts From Other Minds:

THE GOODNESS OF GOD. (continued from last Lord's Day)

d. The mercy of God. Another important aspect of the goodness and love of God is His mercy or tender compassion. The Hebrew word most generally used for this is *chesed*. There is another word, however, which expresses a deep and tender compassion, namely, the word *racham*, which is beautifully rendered by "tender mercy" in our English Bible. The Septuagint and the New Testament employ the Greek word *eleos* to designate the mercy of God. If the grace of God contemplates man as guilty before God, and therefore in need of forgiveness, the mercy of God contemplates him as one who is bearing the consequences of sin, who is in a pitiable condition, and who therefore needs divine help. It may be defined as the goodness or love of God shown to those who are in misery or distress, irrespective of their deserts. In His mercy God reveals Himself as a compassionate God, who pities those who are in misery and is ever ready to relieve their distress. This mercy is bountiful, Deut. 5:10; Ps. 57:10; 86:5, and the poets of Israel delighted to sing of it as enduring forever, 1 Chron. 16:34; 2 Chron. 7:6; Ps. 136; Ezra 3:11. In the New Testament it is often mentioned alongside of the grace of God, especially in salutations, 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:1; Titus 1:4. We are told repeatedly that it is shown to them that fear God, Ex.20:2; Deut. 7:9; Ps.86:5; Luke 1:50. This does not mean, however, that it is limited to them, though they enjoy it in a special measure. God's tender mercies are over all His works, Ps. 145:9, and even those who do not fear Him share in them, Ezek. 18:23, 32; 33:11; Luke 6:35,36. The mercy of God may not be represented as opposed to His justice. It is exercised only in harmony with the strictest justice of God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ. Other terms used for it in the Bible are "pity," "compassion," and "lovingkindness".

e. The longsuffering of God. The longsuffering of God is still another aspect of His great goodness or love. The Hebrew uses the expression *'erek 'aph*, which means literally "long of face," and then also "slow to anger," while the Greek expresses the same idea by the word *makrothumia*. It is that aspect of the goodness or love of God in virtue of which He bears with the froward ['perverse'] and evil in spite of their long continued disobedience. In the exercise of this attribute the sinner is contemplated as continuing in sin, notwithstanding the admonitions and warnings that come to him. It reveals itself in the postponement of the merited judgment. Scripture speaks of it in Ex. 34:6; Ps. 86:15; Rom. 2:4; 9:22; 1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 3:15. A synonymous term of a slightly different connotation is the word "forbearance."

Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 70-71

Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Pastoral Charge

22 January 2017

Sermon: "The goodness of the Lord and the future # 4" (text: Psalm 118:1-29)

Scripture: Psalm 118:1-29

Sermon Notes

Introduction: We are preparing for an uncertain future by affirming that God is good (Ps. 119:68); Trouble, evil, sickness and death make it hard to believe that God is good; so we must be strong in faith that he is good! His goodness overflows to us in mercy; our salvation is an act of mercy from his great love for us (Eph 2:4-5).

Our psalm for today (Psalm 118) begins and ends with the Lord's goodness and mercy; it also opens with a threefold call to the Lord's people to 'say' that 'his mercy endures forever'. The psalmist is more in earnest than our English versions show, for he uses a word of entreaty, 'please': 'Let ... please say, 'His mercy endures forever.'

1. Mercy to the psalmist

He was in earnest because the Lord had shown mercy to him (v. 5). He (David) had been deeply distressed: all nations surrounded him, like bees (v. 10, v. 12); the Heb. text of v. 13 is vivid: "Thrusting thou didst thrust at me, so that I might fall"; was it Saul? He thought he would die, but the Lord did not give him over to death.

Even the Lord's chastening (discipline) is a mercy, for it is a sign of our sonship 'If you are left without discipline ... then you are illegitimate children and not sons.' (Heb 12:8); but mercy also brought him out of discipline into triumph, from where he could lead his people to victory and security (vs. 5-9).

Some read the Hebrew future tense verbs (vs. 10, 11 and 12) 'I will destroy' as past tenses to match the past tense verbs earlier in each verse; but it makes good sense that David, having received mercy, anticipated further victories; also, the Hebrew text has 'surely': 'I will surely destroy them' - pointing to the future.

2. Mercy to the people in David

David begins by calling on all God's people to say 'His mercy endures forever', for Lord's mercy to David was also his mercy to Israel. David has been speaking—but from this point on in the psalm there are different speakers; firstly the effect of the Lord's mercy to David on 'the righteous', those who were for him (vs. 15-16).

David testifies to the Lord's mercy to him (vs. 17-18) and asks for admission (v. 19). Many think these 'gates' were the gates of the Temple, but if David is correct, the Temple hadn't been built then; I think they were the city gates; David seeks admission as their king; the people welcome him, he praises God for mercy (v. 21).

The people also respond to the Lord's goodness; they celebrate his goodness to them in giving them a king to lead them to victory over their enemies (vs. 22-23).

Saul had rejected David and tried to kill him; even after Saul had been killed in battle the people of Israel had taken seven years to receive him as their king (2 Sam 5:2-3).

The people sing of his 'day' as the day of salvation, and pray for salvation: 'Save, now, please, O Lord; O Lord, please send now prosperity.' They greet David as coming with blessing, and bless him, and trace their blessings to God and offer sacrifices of thanksgiving; David ends with praise and acknowledgment of God's mercy.

3. Mercy to us in Christ

God's goodness and mercy to Israel of old helps us anchor our faith in his goodness and mercy to us because his giving them David is a picture of him giving us Christ Jesus to be our king, to lead us to victory and to heaven. Christ is the rejected stone which has become the chief cornerstone (Matt 21:41, Acts 3:8-12).

The Lord's goodness and mercy to David help us prepare for an uncertain future because they point us to the goodness and mercy we have in Christ Jesus.

In him we have a better Saviour; David was a great king, but Jesus is infinitely greater (Rom 1:3b-4). United to Christ Jesus by faith in him we have a better salvation; David saved his people from hostile nations; Jesus saves us from our sins and the power of Satan and the wrath of God, from eternal torment in hell.

He is the 'greater than David' who single-handedly met our great enemy in the wilderness and in Gethsemane and routed him for us; he is the blood-spattered warrior of Isaiah 63; he is the King who must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet', even death (1 Cor 15:24-27).

So the stone the builders rejected has indeed become the chief cornerstone and this is 'marvellous in our eyes'; it vindicated his claim to be the Son of God and ushered in for us the day of salvation. How could we not rejoice in such a salvation? What criminal, pardoned from death row, would not rejoice? (cf. Phil 4:4).

Probably 'the day of salvation' is the 'day' or 'age' of salvation ushered in by the Saviour—but many see it as connected to the Lord's Day; certainly, the Lord's Day is a picture of salvation; of rest from our works to salvation by grace, a day of delight in the Lord and in fellowship with his people, of offering sacrifices of praise and thanks.

Our attitude to the Lord's Day says much about our spiritual health; how can we be in good Christian health if on the Lord's Day worship with other believers takes second place to other things? To maintain spiritual health we must 'rejoice and be glad in it', for to neglect its duties and blessings is to starve our souls.

The prayer of verse 25 reminds us that prayer is necessary if we are to receive mercy; the Lord works through means, and those means include prayer (v. 5). Could it be that we have little 'salvation prosperity' because we do not pray for it? If we believe that God is good, we will pray (Matt 7:11); only extraordinary divine mercy will meet our circumstances; God sent revival when old ladies prayed in the Hebrides; we can't command mercy by praying, but we won't receive it if we don't.

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My Notes:

Questions for Reflection:

1. Read and reflect upon Eph 2:4-5; Rom 9:15-18; 1 Tim 1:13, 15; 1 Pet 1:3, 2:10. One definition of mercy is 'mercy is when God doesn't give us what we do deserve'; is this definition true to these texts of scripture? If not, why not? What aspect of God's goodness to us does 'mercy' emphasise?
2. How do the Lord's goodness and mercy to the author of psalm 118 (David?) help us anchor our faith in God's goodness? (reflect on Matt 21:41, Acts 3:8-12, 1 Pet 2:1-10).
3. What did the psalmist discover about the Lord through finding mercy from him in his time of need? (vs. 8-9); what should this mean for us?
4. The psalmist represents the people of God as saying 'this is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it'; what two 'days' might this refer to, and, in each case, why are they 'days' of rejoicing?
5. While the Lord is sovereign in his having mercy (Rom 9:15-16) what means does he use in bestowing mercy, and what responsibility does that give us? (cf. Ps 118:5, 25).