

The Kindness of God

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[0:00] If you'd like to open your Bibles to Exodus 33.

! See, you say to me, bring up this people, but you've not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, I know you by name, and you've also found favour in my sight. Now, therefore, if I have found favour in your sight, please show me now your ways that I may know you in order to find favour in your sight.

Consider, too, that this nation is your people. And he said, my presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.

And he said to him, if your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I and your people?

[1:30] Is it not in you going with us so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth? And the Lord said to Moses, this very thing that you have spoken, I will do.

For you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name. Moses said, please show me your glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name, the Lord.

And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But, he said, you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.

And the Lord said, behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by.

Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen. The Lord said to Moses, cut for yourself two tablets of stone, like the first, and I'll write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke.

[3:10] Be ready by the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to me on the top of the mountain. No one shall come up with you, and let no one be seen throughout all the mountain.

Let no flocks or herds graze opposite the mountain. So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first, and he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone.

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 iniquities of the fathers on the children, and the children's children to the third and fourth generation. And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshipped. And he said, If I now have found favour in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.

This is God's word. Good morning, everyone. Good morning. Good morning. My computer is not coming to the party.

[5:08] There we go. It's all right. I'll make do. Please keep your Bibles open at Exodus chapters 32 to 34.

We're actually going to be looking at quite a few different Bible passages this morning, but most of the other ones will come up on the screen, but the Exodus part won't come up on the screen, and that's the section we'll be looking at most closely.

How we treat the poor and the weak and the vulnerable reveals something about our hearts.

It reveals the degree to which our hearts have been gripped by the love of God. That's a prominent theme in the Bible across both Testaments, Old and New Testament.

So, for example, are our acts of worship genuine? Are our acts of worship genuine? Well, the people in Isaiah's day, the prophet Isaiah's day, were very religious.

[6:13] They offered all the sacrifices. They observed all the ceremonies. But here's what God said to them in Isaiah chapter 1. What to me, I think this will come up on the screen.

Here we go. Yep, and we'll step through it. What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices, says the Lord. I have had enough of burnt offerings and rams and the fat of well-fed beasts.

I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who is required of you this trampling of my courts?

Bring no more vain offerings. Incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations. I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.

Your new moons and your appointed feasts, my soul hates. They've become a burden to me. I'm weary of bearing them. When you spread your hands, I'll hide my eyes from you.

[7:17] Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves and make yourselves clean.

Remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Correct oppression.

Bring justice to the fatherless. Lead the widow's cause. I mean, God's language here is very strong. They had religion.

But God says it was all meaningless. It was all empty. It was just a show. In fact, more than, worse than meaningless, it was offensive to God. Why? Because of the injustice of their lives.

Because their hands were full of blood. Because they did not seek justice. Because they did not confront oppression or defend the orphans and widows in their midst.

[8:21] Religion, God says, without care for the vulnerable is just an empty show. What about our faith? Is our faith in God genuine? Well, listen to James, the brother of the Lord Jesus.

In James chapter 2, he says, What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food and one of you says to them, go in peace, be warmed and filled, without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Verses 15 and 16 there are not just a mere illustration. They're a case study.

They're an example, James says, of the kinds of works that faith must produce if it's truly alive and not dead. Do we know God's love?

Well, listen to the Apostle John in 1 John 3. 1 John 3, Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.

[9:57] If we say we know God's love, if we truly have God's love abiding in us, then that must overflow in works of compassion and love towards others in need.

Are we actually God's saved people? Well, in Jesus' parable in Matthew 25, the parable of the sheep and the goats, what differentiates the sheep from the goats are acts of mercy and kindness shown to Jesus' brothers, to his people.

Do we give food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty? Do we welcome the stranger and clothe the naked? Do we visit the sick and help the prisoner? Do we see the poor and the vulnerable and the weak reveals whether or not we truly know God.

Now, today and for the next two weeks, we're taking a little break from our series in Romans for a mini-sermon series on God's justice and mercy.

Now, my plan for this series is really based around a single verse, which may be a familiar verse to you. It's Micah 6, verse 8. Micah 6, verse 8 in context is one of those passages, a bit like the ones that we just read, where the prophet is asking, or God is asking, what is genuine religion?

[11:28] What does God actually want from us? And this is how it reads, Micah 6, verse 8. He has told you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?

But to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God. What might it look like if we commit together, commit ourselves under God to doing justice and loving kindness with one another and in our wider community?

What would it look like? Luke wrote of the early church, in Acts chapter 4, he wrote of the early church that there was not a needy person among them.

It's not that there were no needs in the early church, it's just that they gave sacrificially to meet one another's needs. Could we be so committed to justice and kindness that there would not be a needy person among us?

Wouldn't that be a wonderful thing? What difference might it make in Glendale and Newcastle and Lake Macquarie if in our neighbourhoods and our workplaces and our schools and our community groups, we carry with us that commitment to justice and kindness into every place God sends us from Monday to Saturday each week?

[13:00] Well, brothers and sisters, there's no doing justice and loving kindness without walking humbly with our God.

And there's no walking humbly with our God without knowing our God. So the way I want us to approach this series is quite simple.

In this first talk, we're going to reflect on the kindness of God. In the second talk, we're going to reflect on the justice of God, that is two sermons helping us know God.

And in the third talk, we're going to think about doing justice and loving kindness, our response. My prayer is that this series will help us be ready individually and collectively for whatever works of justice and mercy God may put before us.

In fact, why don't we pray that now? Heavenly Father, we do ask that as we meditate on your word today and in coming weeks, you would help us to know you deeply and truly, to know your justice and your kindness.

[14:12] And so, fill us with wonder at who you are, that that might overflow in our works of justice and kindness for others.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, today we're going to reflect on the kindness of God. Now, there are many places in the Bible we could go to do this. For all who live after Christ, there is an obvious starting point.

But I actually want us to start somewhere else. In the Old Testament, with a moment that was for Israel both pivotal and foundational.

A moment when the Lord showed Moses who he truly is. In particular, showed Israel that it is God's glory that he is kind.

Now, the key text is in Exodus 34, verses 5 to 7. We've heard that already from Emma's kids' talk that she did a moment ago. To my mind, those verses that Emma covered in her kids' talk, that they are the high point of the entire book of Exodus.

[15:30] Now, that's a bold claim because the book of Exodus is full of seismic events. There's the burning bush where the Lord appeared to and spoke to Moses.

There are the ten plagues that God sent on the land of Egypt, culminating in the Passover. There's the parting of the sea, the Red Sea, so that Israel could pass through on dry land.

And then the sea came over and covered the armies of the Egyptians. There's the coming to Mount Sinai, the giving of the law, the Ten Commandments.

There's the construction of the tabernacle. So many major events in the book of Exodus, but I believe that these few verses are the high point because they follow the lowest point.

These verses are the zenith because they follow the nadir. It's one of the most important texts of the entire Bible.

[16:35] But before we look at those verses that Emma's already read for us in Exodus 34 and chairs as well in the Bible reading, we need to take in some of the context.

Exodus chapter 32 records a catastrophic failure on the part of God's people Israel. Look at the start of Exodus 32 with me. Exodus 32 verses 6 and 7. This won't be on the screen, but if you have Bibles open, it'd be great if you could see it and follow along.

Exodus 32 verses 1 to 6. I'm going to read, sorry. 32. When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, up, make us gods who shall go before us.

As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. So Aaron said to them, take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons and your daughters and bring them to me.

So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron and he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf.

[17 : 48] And they said, these are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it and Aaron made a proclamation and said, tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.

And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings and the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. Now for no better reason than that Moses was taking a while on Mount Sinai, Israel disobeyed the law they had just received and broke the covenant they had just made.

They engage in idolatry, the crafting of a graven image, in false worship, in blasphemy against the name of the Lord, in implementing novel sacrifices, an invented festival, and I think it suggested debauchery and they rose up to play in implying drunkenness and promiscuity.

If Israel had deliberately sat down and brainstormed how they could break as many commandments as possible in one fell swoop, I don't think, you know, they would have been hard-pressed to come up with a better scheme than this.

I'm a catastrophic failure. And God's response is devastating. Look at what God says to Moses in verse 7. And the Lord says to Moses, said to Moses, listen to God's words here, the Lord said to Moses, go down for your people whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves.

[19 : 44] See how God's just completely disowned Israel. Not my people, your people whom you brought out. And verse 10, he declares his intention to destroy them.

He says, God says to Moses, now therefore let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them in order that I may make a great nation of you.

God says, I'll wipe them out. I'll just start again with you, Moses. No more of this corrupt, rebellious Israel. Israel is on the cusp of complete and utter ruin.

And it raises the question for us, has everything that's happened before in the book of Exodus, all the events that have taken place, the plagues, the parting of the sea, the war, all of it, is it all just a complete waste of time?

Is it all pointless? Is it all utterly in vain? Is it all at this point, it would have been better off, Israel would have been better off if God had left them in Egypt than that he'd brought them out?

[21 : 05] There'd been earlier points in Israel's escape from Egypt where things had looked a bit shaky. But at each of those points, all Israel really needed was the power of God to rescue them.

The power of God to keep sending plagues until finally even hard-hearted Pharaoh was forced to capitulate. The power of God to confuse the Egyptian army, the power of God to part the sea, the power of God to bring water from a rock and provide food in the wilderness.

But the golden calf crisis was a crisis on a whole new level because now the power of God was not an ally to the Israelites but a threat to their very existence.

The Israelites had become Pharaoh and the Egyptians. They had made God into their enemy. Now, brothers and sisters, just imagine if we found ourselves in this place every time we sinned against God.

If every time we put idols before God, we found ourselves here, where the Israelites were that day.

[22 : 34] For example, let's say I'm feeling anxious or stressed about something. something's really troubling me.

And instead of praying, instead of turning to God, I turn to Netflix or alcohol or exercise or whatever it might be.

And I say, Netflix, you're the one who can help me deal with my worries. Exercise, you're the one that's going to save me from my troubles.

And that's the kind of thing we often do, isn't it? When we're anxious or worried or weighed down with something, we know instead of turning to God, we turn to these other things.

That may be less extreme than the golden calf, but it's not that dissimilar in terms of what we're doing. Imagine if any time we did something like that, God said, enough, I'm done with you.

[23 : 48] My wrath is burning against you. I'm going to wipe you out and start again. Which one of us would last even a day? Yet that's exactly where Israel found itself, through their own rebellion and idolatry.

Israel and with destruction hovering over Israel and about to descend, Moses interceded. Moses had this offer from God that God would wipe out the rest of them and start again with Moses, but Moses wasn't interested in that.

He refused to let himself be separated from Israel. He rather instead identified with Israel and he interceded for them. In verse 11 of chapter 32, he implored the Lord his God.

Now there are three stages to Moses' intercession. We don't really have time to go into all the details here, but I'll just try and fly through it a bit. Stage one is in chapter 32 verses 11 to 13.

First notice how he starts in verse 11. O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?

[25:04] Notice how he challenges God who had just disowned his people and says, no God, they're yours and you're the one who redeemed them. Verse 13, he calls on the Lord to remember his promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, calls on him to turn from his burning anger and the outcome in verse 14 is the Lord relented from the disaster that he'd spoken of bringing on his people.

So the Lord doesn't just wipe them out and destroy them. That's stage one of Moses' intercession. But there are still some questions unresolved.

You know, okay, God's not going to wipe them out, but what does this mean for Israel's future? So stage two comes in chapter 32 verses 31 and 32, where Moses confesses the people's sin to the Lord and asks God's forgiveness and even offers himself in their place.

And the outcome is that God reinstates their future. He says, verse 34, chapter 32, verse 34, now go lead the people to the place about which I've spoken to you.

Behold, my angel shall go before you. And it continues in chapter 33 verse 1, depart, go up from here, you and the people whom you brought up from the land of Egypt.

[26:33] He says, you can go to the land, I'll give you the land, verse 2, 33, verse 2, I'll send my angel before you, he'll drive out the Canaanites, verse 3, go to the land of flowing with milk and honey, they have their future, they have their life, they have their future, but look what God says at 33 verse 3, at the end of verse 3, so they have their life, they're not going to be destroyed, they have their future, they can continue and go to the land and God will give it to them, but they have forfeited their most precious treasure, the presence of God himself with them.

And so stage 3 of Moses' intercession comes in chapters 33 verse 12 to 16, which Ches read for us earlier.

And it begins chapter 33 verse 12, see you say to me bring up this people but you've not let me know whom you shall send with me. Yet you've said I know you by name and you've also found favour in my son.

Moses is appealing to the Lord are you going to come with us Lord? Verse 15, Moses said to the Lord, if your presence will not go with me, don't bring us up from here.

For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I and your people? Is it not by your going with us so that we are distinct? I and your people from every other people on the face of your earth?

[28:19] None of the rest of it matters, God, if you do not go with us. And so the outcome to this third stage of intercession, chapter 33, verse 17, and the Lord said to Moses, this very thing that you've spoken, I will do, for you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name.

So by three stages, God grants Israel their life, he grants Israel their future, and he grants Israel his presence with them.

And in 33, verse 18, Moses said, please show me your glory. Now there's two possible, you know, show me your glory, Lord. There are two possible reasons Moses is asking this, maybe it's just in his exuberance.

He's overcome with thankfulness. He wants to see more of God. Or perhaps secondly, maybe he's seeking reassurance. He's asking for a sign that God really will do what he's just said he'll do.

Either way, God's response comes in verse 19, I'll make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name, the Lord.

[29:38] notice that God's glory that Moses asked to see in verse 18 is God's goodness, which he says will pass before him in verse 19.

And both are connected to God's name, God's glory, God's goodness, God's name. God's God's God's God's face is a deeper revelation of who God himself is, of who God is.

Verse 20 to 23, God explains that Moses can't see God's face and live so great is the Lord that God will hide Moses in the cleft of a rock until he passes by so that Moses will only see the back of God. Nevertheless, God is revealing himself to Moses. His glory, his goodness, his name, they're interconnected. This is God's identity, this is his nature, his core nature.

And what did God reveal to Moses? The glory that God showed to Moses is that he is kind. 34 verse 5.

[30 : 59] 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.

Now, yes, there's more that follows and maybe we'll look at that next week. But I want us to focus on God's revelation here of his kindness.

Notice in verses 5 and 6, it's the Lord who is proclaiming his own name. This isn't what Moses is saying about God, this is what God is saying about himself.

God is making himself known, he is declaring who he is to Moses. And this revelation of who God is in these verses here as he passes before Moses is not incidental to what's happened in chapters 32 and 33.

Rather, as God declares his name, as he shows his goodness, his glory, his character, God is explaining what's taken place in chapters 32 and 33.

[32 : 33] God is explaining why when Moses interceded the first time, the Lord relented from the disaster he'd planned and did not destroy Israel.

He's explaining why when Moses interceded the second time, the Lord reinstated their future in the promised land. He's explaining why when Moses interceded the third time, the Lord even agreed that he would go with them.

Why he was willing to forgive their iniquity and transgression and sin. Now, there are three key words in Exodus 34 verse 6 that describe the kind heart of God.

Merciful, gracious and steadfast love. Now, I want to spend a few moments thinking about those words. Now, just about any words in any language will have a range of meanings.

If you look up in the Oxford English Dictionary the word merciful, you'll find three different meanings. Eleven different meanings for gracious and 24 for the noun love.

[33 : 42] So, words have a range of meanings. The same general principle that applies to English words, it applies to the Hebrew words that underlie these English words in our translations here.

So, at one level, what God's doing here as he speaks of being merciful and gracious and abounding in steadfast love is that he's kind of piling on synonyms or near synonyms for effect to show who he truly is.

It's a bit similar to in verse 7 when he speaks of forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. When God speaks of forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, those words, iniquity, transgression, they have different shades of meaning.

But what God's doing, he's not legislating three different categories of misdemeanor and saying I forgive this category and that category. Rather, he's piling up these near synonyms to show how expansive his forgiveness is.

No matter what your sin is or what kind of sin it is, forgiveness is available for you. So, I don't want to press the differences too much, but I do want us to spend a little time thinking about these three words because these are the big three when it comes to the kindness of God.

[34 : 59] There are other Hebrew words in the Old Testament that overlap with these. There are a couple of words that are often translated to pity or despair and there's others about forgiveness and so on. But these are the big three. I think these are the most important words in the Old Testament when it comes to the character, the word is compassionate.

Firstly, the word merciful, which is the other way it's commonly translated in Old Testaments is as compassionate. Here it's an adjective!

God is merciful! But this word also occurs as a verb to show mercy or to have compassion and as a noun mercy or compassion.

In fact, when it occurs in the noun form, it's always in a plural form, which is why some English translations will come across the expression God's mercies, plural.

So God's mercy, his compassion, this word refers, it can refer both to sort of an outward act of mercy, but also to the inner disposition of mercy and compassion.

[36 : 14] That God is merciful, that he's compassionate, means that it is in God's very nature that he is moved by the suffering of others.

God is not indifferent, he's not cold, he's not aloof, he's a God who cares, and because he cares, he acts.

What about the second word, gracious? Well, similarly with the first word, here it's an adjective, God is, the Lord is gracious, when it's used as an adjective in the Old Testament, it's only ever used of God, in fact.

But again, it can also occur in the Old Testament as a verb, translated as something like to be gracious, or to be generous, or to show favour, or as a noun, translated as grace or favour, or in some other ways.

So what does it mean that God is gracious? Well, to borrow an expression from James chapter 1, that God is gracious means that he gives generously without finding fault.

[37 : 23] It's in God's nature to give. He's inclined to be generous. He's inclined to bestow favour, even when doing so requires overlooking an offence.

he's gracious. What about the third, steadfast love? This one only really occurs, or commonly at least, only occurs commonly as a noun, hesed.

And it's usually translated in ESV as steadfast love, sometimes translated as in Micah 6 verse 8 it's translated as the word kindness. The New American Standard Bible translates it as loving kindness, which goes way back to the Coverdale Bible in 1535, one of the early English translations.

God's steadfast love, that God abounds in steadfast love, means that he is full of self-giving love, a love that is generous and bountiful and that will not fail.

It means that God pledges himself to others to be for others, to do good to others. He pledges himself to others with an unwavering commitment and that magnificent trio, merciful, gracious, abounding in steadfast love, that expounds the name of God.

[38 : 52] That is essential to his glory and his goodness. It is the glory of God that he is kind. God and this is who God shows himself to be in the aftermath of Israel's rebellion with the golden calf.

But this revelation of God's glory and goodness to Moses, that then echoes through the rest of the Bible, through the rest of the Old Testament, through the prophets, through the Psalms.

So the prophet Joel, for example, Israel was suffering a locust plague because of their sin, or maybe actually it was an invading army that's metaphorically described as a locust plague, but whichever it is, Joel calls on Israel to return to the Lord and the basis on which returning to the Lord would not be in vain is the revelation God had made of himself here to Moses.

Joel 2 verse 12 to 13, we read these words, yet even now declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning, and rend your hearts and not your garments, return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and he relents over disaster.

Do you hear the echoes of Exodus? King Hezekiah in 2 Chronicles 30 verse 9, when he's calling on Israel and Judah to return to God in the light of the looming threat of the Assyrian empire, again he hearkens back to this revelation of God in Exodus 34, for if you return to the Lord, your brothers and your children will find compassion with their captors and return to this land, for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful and will not turn his face away from you if you return to him.

[40 : 45] in the book of Lamentations when the traumatized survivors of Jerusalem which has just been destroyed by Babylon, this traumatized few that are left in the land are trying to come to terms with what had happened.

We read in Lamentations 3 these words, I mean I could multiply examples beyond these right?

Jonah when he complains about what God is like because Jonah doesn't want God to forgive the Ninevites, he again, he quotes Exodus 34 verse 6, so I know you'll like this God.

Nehemiah in Nehemiah chapter 9, this is when remnants returned from the Babylonian exile, they're living in Jerusalem, this small community and Nehemiah is confessing Israel's sin, in his prayer he clings on to God's mercy as revealed to Moses in exactly these words.

In the Psalms, in the prophets, this revelation of God's kindness in Exodus 34 became the basis for Israel's hope. And in particular we see this trio of glorious words extend in two related directions.

[42:11] See that God is kind means first that there is grace for the guilty. Consider David's prayer after his adultery with Bathsheba in Psalm 51 and notice the trio of words here, Psalm 51 verses 1 and 2, be gracious to me O God according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions, wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

Now that was David's prayer. prayer. Now when we sin, brothers and sisters, what hope do we have except that God is gracious and merciful and abounding in steadfast love?

Our only hope of forgiveness is because of who God himself is. Now you might respond, our only hope of forgiveness is in the cross of Christ and you'd be absolutely right.

But it's important that we have the order right in our understanding. The cross of Christ doesn't compel God to be gracious. Rather, the grace of God compelled Christ to the cross.

The cross doesn't make God love us. Rather, the cross demonstrates God's love. The cross doesn't force God to be compassionate.

[43:59] It expresses God's compassion. We would not be forgiven without the cross, but without the mercy and grace and steadfast love of God, there would be no cross.

This is a wonderful truth to take hold of. It means that for us forgiveness and salvation and the love of God, they all have their ultimate source in the nature of God himself, in his glory, in his goodness.

We have hope. Why? Because of who God is. we have a saviour. Why? Because of who God is.

And because of who God is, we have all those blessings that were restored to Israel in Exodus chapters 32 to 34. We have life. We're not consumed by God's wrath.

We have a future. There's a land he's promised to us, a heavenly home. and we have God himself, his presence with us forever, the sum of all blessings.

[45:19] There's the first direction the kind heart of God goes in the Bible, grace for the guilty. There's a second direction, compassion for the needy.

Now how often in the Psalms do we find prayers where an appeal for God's mercy accompanies an expression of human need? Consider Psalm 6 verse 2, but you can find it all through the Psalms. Psalm 6 verse 2, Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing. Heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled.

My soul also is greatly troubled. But you, O Lord, how long? Turn, O Lord, deliver my life. Save me for the sake of your steadfast love.

Now read the Psalms and you'll find example after example of this, side by side, an outpouring of the Psalmist's need and trouble and affliction and suffering and distress with an appeal to God for help that draws on one of more of that magnificent trio of words, the kind heart of God.

[46:36] The Psalmist presents his need and then he says, save me for the sake of your steadfast love. Brothers, sisters, we can pray like that because our need is a magnet for God's compassion.

When we pray like that, we're not testing God's patience. When we pour out our desperation to God, we're not testing God's patience. We're opening ourselves up to his glory.

Any trouble we face, any pain, any affliction is an opportunity to draw near to God and to ask him to be who he is.

What God desires of us is that we would love kindness. Jesus said in Luke 6 verse 36, be merciful even as your father is merciful.

If we're going to show God's kindness, we need to know God's kindness. The problem with the Pharisees who confronted Jesus, who objected to Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners, is that they were self-righteous.

[47:56] They didn't know God's kindness for themselves. Jesus said to them, when they objected, he said, go and learn what this means. Then he quoted Hosea chapter 6, go and learn what this means.

I desire mercy, not sacrifice. What blocks kindness is self-righteousness.

But if you're on one of the Titanic's lifeboats, it's ludicrous to think that you're on one of those lifeboats because you're more deserving than the people in the water. What blocks kindness is self-righteousness, but what builds kindness is knowing God's kindness to us.

You need to know God's kindness to you before you will see God's kindness through you. God's love God's God's love to you.

If our hearts are cold, the solution is to draw near to God himself, to draw near to the source of all grace and compassion and kindness, to recognize our need and to bask in God's goodness and so

be moved that we might be merciful as our Father has been merciful to us.

[49:27] Will you pray with me? Lord God, the creator of all things, the judge of all the earth, the one infinite in power and wisdom, you have shown yourself to be the God who is gracious and merciful and abounding in steadfast love.

There is not one need we have which you cannot supply out of your infinite goodness. grace. We thank you, Lord God, that it is your heart to be kind, that this is your glory.

We thank you that you freely forgive us for all our sins out of the grace shown to us through Jesus' death on the cross.

We thank you that every need we have we can bring before you knowing that you are a God full of compassion, that you care for us.

So, Father, we pray that you would overwhelm us with your love and kindness. Show your kindness to us, that you might show your kindness through us.

[51:04] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.