

The Clemency of God (2LCF 2.1i)

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Preacher: Dan Morley

[0:00] The Second London Confession of Faith, in chapter 2, paragraph 1, it describes the essence and the attributes of God. At the end of that paragraph, there are two statements that describe God's attributes, and it includes the following.

That God is most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, the rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and withal, most just and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty. This morning we're going to be considering the clemency of God, and that's a word that's probably not used very commonly today. Certainly it's not very common in my conversations or my vocabulary.

Before we more or less define what clemency is, I want to put it in the right category. Divine clemency is the expressing or the communicating of the love of God, and the love of God is the communicating of the goodness of God, of God's goodness.

Now, divine clemency itself, it refers to his merciful, long-suffering and gracious disposition in the face of deserved judgment, according to God's holiness and justice with the power to punish sinners worthy of punishment.

[1:39] So, in other words, divine clemency relates to God's mercy, but not mercy in the sense of dismissing or offending God's justice, but mercy that preserves justice.

Now, Richard Muller, in his Dictionary of Theological Terms, he defines divine clemency this way, that affection of the divine will related to mercy and long-suffering, according to which God is gentle and forbearing towards his creatures.

Now, in Exodus, we're going to be looking mostly at Exodus 34, verses 1 to 8, but I want to begin in 33, verse 18. So, if you'll follow along, starting in verse 18.

And he said, Please, show me your glory. Then he said, I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you.

I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But he said, You cannot see my face, for no man shall see me and live.

[2:56] And the Lord said, Here is a place by me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while my glory passes by, while my glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with my hand while I pass by.

Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back. But my face shall not be seen. And the Lord said to Moses, Cut two tablets of stone like the first ones, and I will write on these tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke.

So be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and prepare yourself to me there on the top of the mountain. And no man shall come up with you, and let no man be seen throughout all the mountain.

Let neither flocks nor herds feed before that mountain. So he cut two tablets of stone like the first ones. Then Moses rose early in the morning, and went up to Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him.

And he took in his hand the two tablets of stone. Now the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord.

[4:12] And the Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.

So, Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped. Now I want you to jump down to verse 29, I'll read 29 and 30. Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai, and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mountain, that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. So, when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. Our great God, we thank you for divine testimony, that we have the word of God written, that we have your proclaimed divine testimony, and I pray, Lord, for the work of your spirit, and your power here this morning, that you would illuminate your word to us, and that you would grow us in truth.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, in our text this morning, and specifically, in verses 5 to 8 of Exodus 34, what I want to draw your attention to, what's going on here, is that God shows his glory by communicating his goodness in the face of sin that deserves just punishment.

Okay, I don't want to miss it, so I'll say it again. God shows his glory by communicating his goodness in the face of sin that deserves just punishment. So we're going to reach back a little bit for the context, but I want to show three particular things from this text, and all of them will start with the phrase, behold your God.

[6:25] Okay, the first one will be, behold your God, idolatry. The second one is, behold your God, proclamation.

And the third is, behold your God, the word. So, first of all, behold your God, idolatry. Now, back in Exodus 34, in verse 18, Moses asks God, he says, please, show me your glory.

He wants to behold the glory of God. But what makes both this question and God's response so significant is what has just happened before it.

The setting or the context leading up to Moses being here with God and Moses asking God, please, show me your glory. But what Moses is asking for is to see, to behold, to look upon the glory of God.

But again, what's leading up to it? Now, we're talking about Exodus 34, but if we had time and could go back to Exodus 19 and read from Exodus 19 following, we would see that, well, first of all, God having delivered his people, having redeemed them out of bondage and slavery in Egypt and having delivered them from their enemies and they watch as he delivered and saved them and into the wilderness wandering.

[7:55] And at Sinai, Moses meets with God and this is what we read in Exodus 19. It says, Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to me above all people.

For all the earth is mine and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel. So Moses came and called for the elders of the people and laid before them all these words which the Lord commanded him.

Then all the people answered together, don't miss this, answered together and said, All that the Lord has spoken, we will do. So Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord and the Lord said to Moses, Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud that the people may hear when I speak with you and believe you forever.

So, the people are a treasured possession to God and they have confirmed that they will obey all that the Lord has spoken that they will do.

So, Moses then goes back up to receive law from God and God delivers law to Moses as a mediator for the people, a sinful people.

[9:17] So, it gets to the question of how does a sinful people be a treasured possession of a holy God? So, the law is given, which we don't have time to get into all the depth of it, but he's given the moral law and he's given Mosaic law and it's law.

And while this is occurring, well, Moses is meeting with God and receiving the law which they are to do, which they said, all that the Lord has spoken, we will do. So, while this is occurring, while Moses is receiving the law, what's happening down below?

What are the people doing? Well, by the time we get to Exodus 32, so Exodus 19 to 32 is Moses receiving the law, all that the people have confirmed, we will do.

But in Exodus 32, it shifts to see what's going on below of what the people are doing. Now, with Moses as a mediator, without him around because he's been up in the mountain, without him around, the people don't know what to do.

So, they want a God that they can see. They want to see, they want to look upon their God, they want to behold their God, but their mediator's not around, so they turn to Aaron and Aaron fashions for them a golden calf.

[10 : 39] They give him gold and he takes it and he fashions this golden calf for them and then he says, here, well, I'm paraphrasing, but essentially he says, here it is.

Here is your God. Behold, behold your God. Look upon your God. See your God. and this is the God which has saved you out of Egypt and then later they attribute it to being the Lord.

Hear what it says. Then they said, this is your God, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt. So when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it and Aaron made a proclamation and said, tomorrow is a feast to the Lord.

Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings and the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

When it says they rose up to play, it wasn't a game of capture the flag that was going on. And God, who is omniscient, while he's delivering the law to Moses, knows exactly what's going on down below and what people of Israel are doing and I can only imagine God having delivered them out of Egypt and then saying, behold your God, here's this golden calf that saved you out of Egypt.

[12 : 09] So Moses was receiving the law from a most holy God. If you remember a few weeks ago if you're here in the evening service, was the holiness of God. The people who in Exodus 19 are to be his treasured possession are breaking the first and second commandments that Moses is receiving from God.

In the Bible, idolatry is described as being spiritual adultery. It's cataclysmic betrayal of God.

And then after breaking the first and second commandments, it says they rose up to play, which would be further moral law violations. And it said that God's wrath burned hot against them.

Just as in adultery, a spouse's jealousy burns hot with anger, says God's wrath burned hot against them.

Now, we need to understand the use of descriptions in Scripture that God's essence, we cannot understand on a one-to-one level.

[13 : 24] We do not have a one-to-one understanding and knowledge of God. So, when Scripture makes reference to God's emotions, it's identifying his way of approach to human beings who otherwise could not understand him.

So, in other words, it's accommodating our creatureliness by describing it in ways which we can relate to to best understand what's going on. So, while God's holiness does not change, and people's actions change, as the people's actions become unrighteous, God doesn't change from being merciful to just.

God remains the same, but our subjective experience either brings us closer to understanding God's justice or brings us closer to understanding God's mercy, but God does not change. But we as creatures do.

So, we describe things according to our experience. Now, God's anger is the revenging divine justice that burns against sin.

And sin is repugnant and offends the honor and majesty of God, God who is the creator of all things, the governor of all things, the ruler of all of his creation.

[14 : 37] And sin wrongs his authority, sin wrongs his dignity, and sin abuses creation, seeking dishonorable ends from it.

God's everlasting anger is called by the apostles the wrath to come on the day of judgment. And scripture therefore also calls the day of judgment the day of wrath.

Now, divine mercy and avenging justice do not compete for one another. One does not overthrow the other.

It's not that God is just but then his mercy kind of nudges justice out of the way. There's no competition for his essence. His essence is undivided. There's not a change of emotion in God but his mercy is coherent with his constant purpose of punishing sin.

So again, as I said, God's holiness, God's justice, God's righteousness does not change but people change and as they change then they will more experience God's justice or God's mercy which does not change.

[15 : 52] Now, Edward Lee wrote, God by an eternal and constant act of his will approves obedience and the purity of the creature but abhors the iniquity and sin of the same creature and

shows the same by inflicting a punishment not less severe but far more just than men are wont to do when they are hot with anger.

So, behold your God in idolatry, the golden calf. Next, behold your God proclamation. Now, in Exodus 33, Moses asks God, please, please show me your glory.

and, and then 19, then he said, I will make all my goodness pass before you and I will proclaim the name of the Lord.

People of Israel wanted to behold their God and Aaron said, behold an image, an idol. Moses wants to behold his God and see what he says here?

He says, I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But he said, you cannot see my face.

[17 : 15] They wanted to see to behold their God but God said, you cannot see my face. So, in showing his glory he proclaims, for no man shall see me and live.

And the Lord said, here is a place by me and you shall stand on the rock so it shall be while my glory passes by that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and will cover you with my hand while I pass by.

Then I will take away my hand and you shall see my back but my face you shall not see.

Remember, what's the question? Moses says, please show me your glory.

It's to see God's glory but it's, God's glory is not to be seen with the eyes but the understanding by proclamation. And then jump down to verse 6 of 34.

And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, please show me your glory and the Lord proclaimed. So God shows his glory not by an image but by divine testimony, that is to say by his proclaimed word.

[18 : 27] And in God's proclaiming, in God's proclaimed word to show his glory, what does he proclaim? What's communicated that shows forth his glory?

Because remember, it's to see, to behold the glory of God. So what does God proclaim that will show forth his glory? It's both the severity of sin and undeserved kindness toward the sinner.

So, how do we reconcile two things here? There's those two statements in the confession, if you have the confession before you, it's the last two statements in paragraph one of chapter two.

They almost seem to be at odds at first glance. Because if God is, as the last statement says, most just and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty, how do we reconcile that with the previous statement that says he's most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving, iniquity, transgression, and sin.

He will by no means clear the guilty, but he clears the guilty. So, how do we reconcile these two things? How do we reconcile Exodus 34, 5-8, understanding the context have an understanding context of what's coming before that?

[19 : 58] So, how do we reconcile God's judgment against sinners? He will by no means clear the guilty with his divine clemency and forgiveness of sin, clearing the guilty. God forgives sins not based on the sinner's merit, not based on their guilt.

Because of their guilt, they're not cleared. God forgives sins not based on the sinner's merit, but through a mediator who offers himself as surety.

And in Romans 3, 23-26, it says this, For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All have sinned, all are guilty. He by no means clears the guilty. Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by his blood through faith to demonstrate his righteousness because in his forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed to demonstrate at the present time his righteousness that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Now, Petrus van Maastricht, he wrote this, Of severity I say by which he did not will to pass over sin without satisfaction, the violation of the law without death, the threat of punishment without fulfillment, for justice had to be satisfied or the sinner would die.

The sinner could not do it, and so a mediator promising an absolute surety had to take his place. So the first part was behold your God idolatry, second part behold your God proclamation, the third part is behold your God the word.

[21 : 56] Now first I want you to ask the question why is this encounter between God and Moses recorded in scripture for us today? Why is it recorded for us to read it?

What's going on here that's so significant? What's so significant about what's going on between this interaction between Moses and God? I want to take you now into the New Testament in Luke 24 if you recall on the road to Emmaus what occurs on the road to Emmaus as they're walking along the resurrected Christ is in their midst and he expounds to them the scripture now the New Testament hadn't been written yet so expounding to the scriptures the Old Testament and after after this encounter on the road to Emmaus do you remember how they described what occurred there when Jesus was in their midst said they said did not our heart burn within us while he talked with us on the road and while he opened the scriptures to us their heart burned within them while he opened the scriptures to them remember this occurred on the first day of the week which is Sunday so after the resurrection on Sunday the resurrected Lord was in their midst opening and expounding the scriptures to them and their hearts burned within them and then we can see that pattern continuing on the first day of the week on the Sunday the resurrected Lord was in their midst expounding of the scriptures and that continued and then after the Lord's ascension it continues first day of the week Sunday the Lord by his word and spirit we see in Revelation 1 7 is in the midst of the church there's the opening of the scriptures the expounding of the scripture now on the road to Emmaus when they what they later described as their hearts burned within them as he opened as he expounded the scripture to them what did he do what did he say that had the effect of having their hearts burn within them if you were to go back in verse 26 sorry verse 27 it says and beginning at Moses and all the prophets he expounded to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself the writing of Moses concerns

Jesus so his opening the scriptures Moses which includes Exodus he showed them how it speaks of him now the word Jesus isn't in there so he expounded to them how it speaks of him and it caused their hearts to burn within him so we know that all of the Old Testament all of scripture and all of the books of Moses the scope of it is Christ is Jesus so we know that Jesus is in in the Old Testament now going back to Exodus 33 Moses asked the question please show me your glory and of course you cannot see God and live but what did he do he said he said in verse 19 I will make all my goodness pass before you and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion but he said you cannot see my so it shall be while my glory passes by that

I will put you in the cleft of the rock Matthew 7 it says the wise man builds his house on the rock and in 1st Corinthians 10 4 it says for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them and that rock was Christ now we could even spend more time about how the rock when Moses struck the rock with his staff and they were to drink water out of it and then later on God told him to speak to the rock but instead of speaking to the rock he struck it and it was wrong that he did that because the rock is Christ and Christ was smitten only once not twice but anyways the rock was Christ!

[26 : 28] now in Exodus 33 it says this but he said you cannot see my face for no man shall see me and live and the Lord said remember it's wanting to behold the glory of God which is not by sight but by understanding right but the Lord said here is a place by me and you shall stand on the rock so it shall be while my glory passes by that I will put you in the cleft of the rock for the purpose of divine proclamation to show his glory and we see this language again somewhere else in the Old Testament where we see a glimpse of the church speaking to Christ in Song of Solomon the clefts of the rock and the secret places of the cliff let me see your face let me hear your voice for your voice is sweet and your face is lovely and speaking of

Christ in Exodus 33 18 remember the question Moses asks please show me your glory and in John 1 14 says and the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory the glory as of the only begotten of the father full of grace and truth the beholding of the glory of God is not by our senses by our sight of looking upon something but is by the understanding that comes when standing on the rock while my glory passes by that I will put you in the cleft of the rock the word or being being the word God the son manifest in the flesh he is both the offended God and also the mediator between the offended God and offending man so some concluding uses to draw out of this first of all to go back to the question is who is this rock in

Exodus 33 who is this rock when Moses asks show me your glory the glory of God is shown not through an image not through a golden calf but through the expression the communication the proclamation of his goodness by being hidden in the rock as a refuge from the holiness of God while his glory is shown in the wake of appalling wrath deserving sin cataclysmic betrayal against God and being hidden in the rock one is able to see the goodness of God to understand the

goodness of God having passed by the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory looking back now us looking back at the presence of God on earth having passed by God with us we see the glory of God as we understand by our understanding we see the glory of God we see the goodness of God we see the love of God communicating and making manifest Exodus 34 5 to 7 and the Lord passed before him and proclaimed the Lord the Lord God merciful and gracious long suffering and abounding in goodness and truth keeping mercy for thousands forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin by no means clearing the guilty this is where we make the sense of all of this how we reconcile that God will by no means clear the guilty but yet forgiving back to Petrus Van Maastricht again he said how splendid and blessed an appropriation of all these things befalls the dependence of this mediator his agony is their victory his condemnation their justification his anguish!

their rest his beatings their medicines his wounds their bandages his curse their blessings his death their life his shameful crowning their glorious exaltation oh how sweet the fruits of such a bitter root now if you remember I had you jump down to verse 29 and 30 and we read that when Moses came down from this encounter with God where he said please show me your glory and God's response was proclaiming his proclaimed word standing on the rock hidden in the cleft of the rock proclaiming the name of the Lord when Moses came down you remember what what was different about Moses Moses face shone at Sinai at the outset of the exodus now Jesus face shone at the transfiguration at the outset of his greater exodus and those who are in this rock Christ being the brightness of his glory those who are in

[31 : 43] Christ having believed by the light of faith having seen having looked upon having beheld the goodness of God in Christ they or we will shine from the love of God communicated through the proclamation of Christ and finally this helps us understand the reality the presence of sin because it asks the question why did God permit sin why why did God not just enable Adam to not sin and to have not sinned through the duration why did God allow sin why does God allow pain why does God allow suffering why does God allow sorrow in this life why does God allow death the extent

I should say this extent of the glory of God could not otherwise be shown and known apart from the clemency of God made manifest through being in this rock that is apart from being in Christ so true in this life we agonize over sin we are grieved over sin we are grieved over the brokenness of a sin cursed world and of sin's subsequent!

misery but the miseries the grieving the agony the pain of this life is but a mist compared to eternity this life being a mist compared to eternity that is compared to a state of glory where there is no sin where there is no pain where there is no sorrow where there is no suffering and where there is no death but being perfectly blessed for all eternity we will indeed behold the glory of God by an intellectual vision by the light of glory and we will not just see the glory of God and shine from the refracted glory of God but we will be resplendent of the radiance of the presence of the Lamb in Revelation 21 23 it says of the new Jerusalem the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it for the glory of God illuminated it the lamb is its light if you remember in Matthew 13 it says then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father let's pray you