

Proclaiming the Name of the LORD

The passage I wish to put before us this morning is from Exodus chapters 33 and 34, and it is a portion of Scripture of no small importance. This is not my own judgment; it is the judgment of the Bible itself, through the sheer weight of repetition, that this passage is of great importance. When I have read through the Bible, or studied the psalms, over the past few years, I have been encountered again and again references to the words of God in Exodus 34:6 and 7. When the Holy Spirit, breathing out His Word through different men, reminds us again and again of the same words, they must be words worthy to remember, words worthy to reflect upon. Moses himself – who heard these words from God Himself - recollects these words in the years that follow. This passage strongly affected David in his psalms – David, as well as other psalmists such as Asaph – and every hymn we have sung this morning has drawn from such psalms, and the psalm which opened our worship is another such, through no planning on our part! Prophets such as Jonah, Nahum, and Joel knew it. Later, after them, it figured in corporate prayer of confession in the time of Nehemiah, in Chapter 9. It has been a joyful study. I pray that putting it before us this Lord's Day will be to the increase of our worship of our gracious LORD. Let us hear God's word, then:

¹⁸Then Moses said, "I pray You, show me Your glory!" ¹⁹And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion." ²⁰But He said, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!" ²¹Then the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock; ²²and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. ²³Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen."

¹Now the LORD said to Moses, "Cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered. ²So be ready by morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to Me on the top of the mountain. ³No man is to come up with you, nor let any man be seen anywhere on the mountain; even the flocks and the herds may not graze in front of that mountain." ⁴So he cut out two stone tablets like the former ones, and Moses rose up early in the morning and went up to Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and he took two stone tablets in his hand. ⁵The LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD. ⁶Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." ⁸Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship. ⁹He said, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, O LORD, I pray, let the LORD go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your own possession."

[Ex. 33:18 – 34:9]

[prayer.]

I. A Commendable Desire.

My focus this morning is on the proclamation of the name of the LORD that we find in Ex. 34:6-7, but how that proclamation comes is important. The passage I read begins with a petition:

¹⁸Then Moses said, “I pray You, show me Your glory!”

To which the LORD God responds:

¹⁹ . . . “I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.”

Moses’ request is seen to be a commendable one; it is neither rebuked nor denied, but is granted in what measure Moses can take it.

Where are we in Moses’ life, and in the history of redemption? Moses has stood barefooted before the burning bush and received the call to deliver his people. The ten plagues have been visited upon Egypt, and the Israelites at last have been freed from bondage in Egypt, led through the Red Sea, to the destruction of their enemies. As Ps. 103 puts it,

⁶The LORD performs righteous deeds
And judgments for all who are oppressed.

[Ps. 103:6]

And so He did. The Ten Commandments were given to them, but the law was quickly broken in their sin against the Lord, in their worship of the golden calf. Because of that sin, God had first threatened complete destruction, and said He would make of Moses a great nation – this, before Moses had come down off the mountain, seen the golden calf, and broken the tablets. But Moses’ humble heart is revealed in his rejection of the honor of being sole father of a nation, and being free of the people who were threatening him at worst and annoying him often. Moses had argued for the Lord to preserve the people – not because they deserved it (for they did not), but on the plea of God’s own faithfulness to the promises made to the patriarchs, and the hallowedness of His name before the heathen nations. All this, back in Exodus 32:7-14. But after that, God said that he would send an angel with them, but that He would not go with this obstinate people, no, not even for a moment, because he might destroy them on the way (Ex 33:3,5) – a “sad word”, a *disastrous word*, an *evil tidings*. Moses had already pled with the Lord to forgive their sin; now He prays for God’s presence to continue with the people – not just with him, with Moses, but with all the people. He does not desire a mere forgiveness, but God’s continuing presence with His people.

¹³Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, ***let me know Your ways that I may know You***, so that I may find favor in Your sight. Consider too, that this nation is Your people.”

[Ex. 33:13]

And so, God grants to Moses his request. As Ps. 103 says,

⁷He made known His ways to Moses,
His acts to the sons of Israel.

[Ps. 103:7]

So now God has said (verse 19) that He will proclaim the name of the LORD (His) before Moses.

To *proclaim* the name of the LORD, is to *declare* His nature, to *tell* of His character, to *publish* (that good King James or Geneva Bible word) His attributes, - it is to proclaim Who He is. The phrase is only used in a few places in Scripture, and, I think, twice in this passage, though the NASB only gives it once. It first appears in Ex. 9:16 (and Paul quotes it in Rom. 9:17), between the 6th and 7th plagues, the plagues of boils and hail, when God tells Pharaoh, through Moses, that this is the reason that Pharaoh has been raised up, to show His power, and to proclaim His name through all the earth. Here, proclaiming the name seems to signify telling of His omnipotence, His holiness, His judgment, His wrath. In Deuteronomy 32, at the beginning of the Song of Moses, we find another place where these words are used:

- ³ “For I proclaim the name of the LORD;
Ascribe greatness to our God!
⁴ “The Rock! His work is perfect,
For all His ways are just;
A God of faithfulness and without injustice,
Righteous and upright is He.

[Deut. 32:3-4]

His righteousness, justice, perfection and faithfulness all are a part of that proclamation, then, but I take the whole psalm to be a proclamation of His name, and so we see discipline and forgiveness there proclaimed as well – but we will have more to say about that from our text today. In the Messianic Psalm, Ps. 22 (quoted in Heb. 2:12), the risen Christ is pictured there, saying:

- ²² I will tell of Your name to my brethren;
In the midst of the assembly I will praise You.

[Ps. 22:22]

Psalm 102, that psalm of the afflicted, contains this phrase as well in verse 21, showing that the LORD sets free the oppressed that they might tell His name: the unchanging God delivers, provides. Above all these, is the high priestly prayer of our Lord. Jesus prays, confessing that in his work, life and words, He has made known His Father’s name to the disciples (John 17:26). Jesus makes the Father known, declares Him, proclaims Him, shows Him forth. Seeing Christ, we see the Father (John 14:7ff). The Only Begotten has declared, or explained Him (as the NASB puts it).

And so this is what we will have here: the character of God will be shown forth. The LORD God says that He will make all His goodness pass before Moses. And this is what Moses prayed for: “let me know your ways that I may know you. . . I pray you, show me Your glory!” Here is God’s favor shown to Moses, favor as shown by His abiding with them. Not all will be revealed, or can be revealed to Moses at that time (or to us at this time), but in compassion for all, He reveals to us what He can in consideration of who we are, but dust, and sinful:

- ²⁰But He said, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!” ²¹Then the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock; ²²and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. ²³Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen.”

So here is a desire commended by God: to seek to know Him, to desire to see Him. It will be rewarded. On this occasion it was rewarded by the revelation that follows, recorded for the

benefit of the Church under the old and new covenants. In our own lives, as we seek Him in prayer and in the Scriptures, He will likewise reward us, in the opening of these truths to us through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

II. A Revelation of God's Character.

So, returning to the narrative: the LORD commands Moses to cut two more stone tablets, and be ready in the morning, to hike up Mt. Sinai by himself. No other man is even to be on the mountain, not any flocks or herds before the mountain. This, Moses does. And then it says:

⁵The LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD.

[Ex. 34:5]

Virtually every other translation renders this not that Moses called upon the name of the Lord, but that He (God) proclaimed the name of the Lord. I go with the majority view here – but regardless, that is what happens: He proclaims His name. Think of this awesome and fearful scene. Moses and the people had come to this mountain, to a blazing fire, to a darkness and gloom and whirlwind, to the blast of a trumpet and to the sound of words so that those who heard, begged that nothing more be said. Moses later said, at the second giving of the law, that he was full of fear and trembling (Heb. 12:18-21). And now he is back upon this mountain, alone – this blasted, fire-scorched mountain. No pleasant wildflower hike, this; no, the situation more frightening than anything our firefighters are dealing with in the wildfires we have about us – for everything about this screams the Holiness of God which leaves a man, not singed, but undone, like Isaiah. Then the Lord passed by in front of Him and proclaimed: “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts.” (Is. 6:3) No, not that – wrong verse, wrong book. That is what we could have expected, - but everything all around Moses already proclaims that vividly. Instead, dear brothers, hear this unexpected word that is spoken:

⁶Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.”

[Ex. 34:6,7]

Selah. It is right that we pause to consider this proclamation of the gracious name of the LORD. The LORD, the LORD God – Moses had heard that name rendered in English as LORD (capital letters), Yahweh, I Am, when before the burning bush several years before – speaking of His self-existence, that He simply *is*, from everlasting to everlasting – a name to give to the Israelites he would be delivering. But here, much else about the LORD God is revealed. Let us take each part of this in turn.

Compassionate and Gracious. The LORD God is sympathetic to our suffering, whether because of our sin, or the sin of others, or because of the Curse. To the Christian who knows God as Father, and calls upon God as Father, this compassion is experienced as a most tender blessing, as David says in Ps. 103:

¹³ Just as a father has compassion on his children,
So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.

¹⁴ For He Himself knows our frame;
He is mindful that we are but dust.

[Ps. 103:13-14]

He is not only compassionate, but compassionate *and* gracious. We see this in what He does; His works show forth His character, His disposition toward us:

² Great are the works of the Lord;
They are studied by all who delight in them.

³ Splendid and majestic is His work,
And His righteousness endures forever.

⁴ He has made His wonders to be remembered;
The Lord is gracious and compassionate.

[Ps. 111:2-4]

That compassion is linked with His being gracious reminds us that this sympathy comes not at our deserving, but solely of the grace of the LORD God. He had already told Moses: “. . . and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.” This grace is a *sovereign* grace.

¹⁹ The LORD has established His throne in the heavens,
And His sovereignty rules over all.

[Ps. 103:19]

Slow to Anger. If the LORD does not seem slow to anger to us, the fault likely lies in how small our understanding is of how greatly we provoke Him to His face. The golden calf was not an isolated stumbling; it was the latest in a line of sins of the people, in which they were putting God to the test. The Israelites were angry at Moses because his initial confrontation with Pharaoh made their work more arduous in the short term; the people rebelled by the Red Sea, complained bitterly of the bitterness at the waters, grumbled because of food, then ignored the instructions regarding the manna they did receive, then grumbled because of thirst. More complaints lie ahead, more hunger, more disbelief that the Lord God who proclaimed His name, His power, through Pharaoh, could beat the so-called giants who lived in the Promised Land. [They] “have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice.” (Num. 14:22) These occasions are merely what is recorded – what hardness of heart has actually broken out into words and actions. How much more grumbings within the hearts, or even within the tents, was heard by the Lord? We also fail to account for how great a revelation of God’s power they had seen; remember that they had seen the sea parted, they had seen the pillar of smoke and the pillar fire. Thus, the patience of the Lord is great toward us, and why?

Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

[Rom. 2:4]

The Canaanites were allowed to remain in the land for the 430 years of Israel’s time in Egypt, and even thereafter, because their iniquity was not yet complete. Nahum (1:3) proclaims that the Lord is “slow to anger and great in power,” when some decades after their repentance at Jonah’s

preaching, they are still arrogant. Think of how many generations of wicked kings come and go in Israel, and then in Judah, and see God's slowness to anger. How many prophets have to be sent? Should not one have sufficed? His slowness to anger is writ large in the Old Testament. And so we would confess, with David in Ps. 103:

⁸ The Lord is compassionate and gracious,
Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.

⁹ He will not always strive with us,
Nor will He keep His anger forever.

[Ps. 103:8-9]

Abounding in Lovingkindness and Truth. The pairing of lovingkindness and truth is not original to this proclamation; we first encounter it in the words of the servant of Isaac, when He rejoiced at finding Rebekah.

He said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth toward my master; . . ."

[Gen. 24:27a]

Lovingkindness is rendered 'steadfast love' in the ESV, and is a translation of the Hebrew *hesed*, which denotes the covenantal love the Lord God has for His people. *Hesed*. Truth, clearly in this passage, as in Exodus, means personal truth more than a propositional truth, - hence what we might call truthfulness, or integrity - and can be translated as faithfulness (again, as it is in the ESV). The pairing of the two thus makes sense, as *hesed* is in lovely harmony and is strongly bound up with faithfulness - and both are tied to God's love.

Of all of the phrases in this passage, this is by far the phrase most often repeated. We had this love of God put before us this morning, in the 40th Psalm that was read - lovingkindness and truth, as well as the compassion of God. More than a third of the psalms refer to *hesed*, and 22 psalms refer to lovingkindness *and* faithfulness, another 8 only *implicitly* regarding His faithfulness. We have no time to go through these this morning - but it is enough that we see, by sheer repetition, how important this is for the saints of the Lord. That He should set His love upon a people, and continue in covenantal faithfulness toward His people, is the basis for all our confidence. As we heard from the psalm this morning:

¹¹ You, O Lord, will not withhold Your compassion from me;
Your lovingkindness and Your truth will continually preserve me.

[Ps. 40:11]

David will be preserved, continually preserved, despite the multitude of enemies without, and iniquities within. The first - that is understandable, for what is man but a breath? But the latter astonishes us - despite my blinding iniquities, I will be preserved, to praise God in the here and now and hereafter. Or from Ps. 103:

¹⁷ But the lovingkindness of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him,
And His righteousness to children's children,

¹⁸ To those who keep His covenant
And remember His precepts to do them.

[Ps. 103:17-18]

And keep His covenant we will, and remember we will, because of God's work in us, and the covenantal love He has placed upon us in Christ. For the Lord God

³ “. . . has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace. . . .”

[Eph. 1:3-6]

The forgiveness which we have through the blood of Christ leads us to that next phrase in the proclamation of the name of the Lord:

Who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin.

Here is the flower that comes in due time from the covenantal love that God has placed upon us from all eternity: there comes a point of forgiveness – what a precious blessing! Who can overestimate that worth of God's forgiveness of our sin – no, not just our sin, but our *iniquity, transgression* and *sin*. Our provocation of God is so hideous a thing one mere word does not capture all the facets of its ugliness. Knowing the death of Christ, His atoning sacrifice, His propitiation, we see what it cost to gain us that forgiveness – but on the other side of the cross, what must have been their thoughts, besides “with You there is forgiveness, that You may be feared”? (Ps. 130:4). Again, we read from Ps. 103:

¹⁰ He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him.

¹² As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

[Ps. 103:9-12]

This brings us to the last phrase in the proclamation.

He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.” How are we to understand this? It is an obvious reference to the 2nd commandment, but that likewise does not help us to understand its meaning. It does not mean that a man dies for his father's sin; it was a proverb in Ezekiel's time that ‘the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge’ – but the Lord was determined to remove that proverb from use. A man dies for his own sin. But our sins do have consequences, for us and for others. The sense is made clear in the very first time this proclamation of the name of the Lord is referred to, when Moses pleads for forgiveness for the people in their refusal to enter the Promised Land.

²⁰So the Lord said, “I have pardoned them according to your word; ²¹but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord. ²²Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me

to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, ²³shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it.”

[Num. 14:20-23]

They are pardoned, but there is a consequence: they will not see the Promised Land themselves. Moses was surely pardoned for his outburst, but as a consequence he dies, only seeing Canaan from afar. David is forgiven, but the child dies and the sword never departs from his house. This understanding is also clear from the prophet Jeremiah, where he applies that understanding to what will be happening in the exile:

¹¹ *‘For I am with you,’* declares the Lord, *‘to save you;*
For I will destroy completely all the nations where I have scattered you,
Only I will not destroy you completely.
But I will chasten you justly
And will by no means leave you unpunished.’

The pattern is established from the very beginning. Adam sinned, and all of us inherit a sin nature, and hence live under the Curse, and so find ourselves living in utter vanity under the sun:

¹⁵ As for man, his days are like grass;
As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.
¹⁶ When the wind has passed over it, it is no more,
And its place acknowledges it no longer.

[Ps. 103:15-16]

But why this seemingly dark cloud at the end of this bright passage? Because this is how He deals with men - in infinite wisdom, that He disciplines us. It is good for us to know this, so that when we feel the sting of His discipline, we would not be tempted to think that He has forgone His covenantal faithfulness, but rather that He is disciplining us, as He said He would. We can assure ourselves that He is disciplining us as sons, and that we are not as illegitimate children.

This is the LORD, the LORD God, brethren. Here is His name proclaimed, and it savors of gospel. It is like a peak into Mt. Zion from Mt. Sinai – as anything that speaks of forgiveness must. See how richly God blessed Moses for his desire to know the ways of God, and see how richly we are blessed by it as well.

“The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.”

[Ex. 34:6-7]

III. Resulting in Worship and Prayer

What comes from this revelation of God’s character? It elicits an immediate and heartfelt response from Moses, which we see in the last two verses we read this morning:

⁸Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship. ⁹He said, “If now I have found favor in Your sight, O LORD, I pray, let the Lord go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your own possession.”

[Ex. 34:8-9]

What we see is *worship* and *prayer*. This is what God calls forth from His people when His glorious character is revealed to them. *Worship* and *prayer*.

What Christian soul, knowing the God who is Light in whom there is no darkness, who knows his own soul apart from Christ, being Darkness in whom is no light at all, - what Christian can fail to worship when the character of this forgiving God is put before him afresh? Moses did well to make haste to worship, as the name of the LORD was proclaimed here for the first time, His compassionate, gracious, patient, loving, faithful, forgiving character was made known for the first time in such a clear way. The full force of this revelation in its first proclamation is awesome to consider – but we who know by what manner the LORD God is so forgiving have even greater cause to worship. Further, we who know the multitude of benefits that the LORD bestows upon His people when He forgives them have even greater cause for worship. As David would have us sing from Ps. 103:

- ¹ Bless the LORD, O my soul,
And all that is within me, bless His holy name.
- ² Bless the LORD, O my soul,
And forget none of His benefits;
- ³ Who pardons all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases;
- ⁴ Who redeems your life from the pit,
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion;
- ⁵ Who satisfies your years with good things,
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle.

[Ps. 103:1-5]

Not content with his soul alone praising the Lord – O most holy discontent, that desires that worship be multiplied! - that desires His Name be hallowed, His kingdom come, His will be done – not content, David ends this Psalm with these words:

- ²⁰ Bless the LORD, you His angels,
Mighty in strength, who perform His word,
Obeying the voice of His word!
- ²¹ Bless the LORD, all you His hosts,
You who serve Him, doing His will.
- ²² Bless the LORD, all you works of His,
In all places of His dominion;
Bless the LORD, O my soul!

[Ps. 103:20-22]

A truly worshipful soul desires that worship be multiplied. God is not worshipped enough. His benefits, too often forgotten.

So, it is not surprising that we could multiply examples of how this proclamation of the gracious name of the Lord is used in Scripture to the praise of God. The multitude of psalms that refer to this passage in one way or another, would keep us busy all day. I will be content with Ps. 145, from which we sung at the beginning of our worship time. This psalm, I am told, figured greatly in the worship of the Jewish people, and is a call to praise and precedes the last 5 psalms all of which begin and end with that Hallelujah – Praise the LORD! It praises the name of the LORD, brings to mind his mighty deeds (such as the Exodus, which pictures for the Christian the deliverance from sin by Christ) and in the core of that psalm says:

⁸The LORD is gracious and merciful;
Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness.

⁹The LORD is good to all,
And His mercies are over all His works.

[Ps. 145:8-9]

Just as the revelation of God’s character results in *worship*, it also elicits *prayer*. We see from the passage that Moses again *prays* to the Lord.

⁹He said, “If now I have found favor in Your sight, O LORD, I pray, let the LORD go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your own possession.”

[Ex. 34:9]

What could be the basis for such a prayer, by a man standing on such a mountain, without human companion, by the command of God; His awesome holiness, His separateness, proclaimed in the commanded and providential circumstances – except that proclamation *in words* of His compassionate, gracious, patient, loving, *forgiving* character? And that He would be faithful, true to His character? “Pardon our iniquity and our sin” – for You have said that You forgive iniquity, transgression, and sin – “and take us as Your own possession” – for You have promised that to the fathers before us, covenant being made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – and You abound in lovingkindness and *truth*.

These words of Exodus 34:6-7 thus form the basis for pleas for God’s gracious forgiveness throughout the Scriptures. In the book of Numbers, when the spies return from the promised land, most giving a bad report, and the people are disheartened and, in faithlessness, fear for the lives of their wives and children, the LORD’s anger is again aroused against the people, such that again the LORD speaks to Moses about dispossessing them, giving them over to pestilence, and making of Moses a nation greater and mightier than they. This people, who are speaking of appointing another leader to take them back to Egypt, and who are ready to stone the faithful spies, and one would assume, Moses and Aaron as well – who would not want to be free of them, and have a great name for oneself? I will tell who would not: Moses, who was faithful in all of God’s house (Heb. 3:2). Instead, his concern, raised in prayer to the LORD, is that God’s name will not be hallowed, and that the heathen will reason that the power of God was insufficient to deliver such a great people, so he prays:

¹⁷”But now, I pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared, [declared what? Declared His great power? No:] ¹⁸“The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the

guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.’ ¹⁹Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.”

[Num. 14:17-19]

Just as this gives Moses confidence in praying for the people, so too this gives us confidence in God’s calls to repentance. So, in the book of Joel, the people are taught of the coming Day of the Lord; famine, drought, invasion all form parts of the picture of gloom – already present, and yet to come. But in 2:12, hope is extended to the people, and so to us:

¹²“Yet even now,” declares the Lord,

“Return to Me with all your heart,
And with fasting, weeping and mourning;

¹³And rend your heart and not your garments.”

Now return to the LORD your God,
For He is gracious and compassionate,
Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness
And relenting of evil.

¹⁴Who knows whether He will not turn and relent

And leave a blessing behind Him,
Even a grain offering and a drink offering
For the LORD your God?

[Joel 2:12-14]

Here is His graciousness: to give us the means for worship: in repenting we are given hearts to worship him, so prayer and worship are tied together.

Being regenerate, having repentant hearts, we too have confidence in prayer. We have sung from Ps. 86, of David, before our time of prayer this morning. In that psalm, David in his affliction and need, prays for God’s mercy and graciousness – and on what basis?

⁵For You, LORD, are good, and ready to forgive,
And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You.

[Ps. 86:5]

And when faced with arrogant men seeking his life, his prayer for favor from God is prefaced by:

¹⁵ But You, O LORD, are a God merciful and gracious,
Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth.

[Ps. 86:15]

As we pray for forgiveness, our prayers must be broad indeed, and include our enemies, as we have received command to pray for blessings upon our enemies, upon those who persecute the church of God. Let us not follow the example of Jonah here, for when he preached judgment upon Nineveh and it repented, what was his response?

¹But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. ²He prayed to the LORD and said, “Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, *for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents*

concerning calamity. ³Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.”

[Jonah 4:1-3]

These are frightful words indeed – to take the proclamation of the name of the LORD, His gracious and forgiving character - and *resent it*. Should we, like Jonah, forget the raging sea that we were delivered from? Should we forget our sin, our transgression, our iniquity, in how we have fled to our Tarshish, practically denying that God is God by thinking there is a place beyond His presence, there is a place where His command can be safely neglected? Brothers, these words of Jonah are frightening indeed, even more frightful in how we say the same thing in our hearts. If we have hard hearts toward our enemies, let this be one more sin for which we beg forgiveness, and on no other basis than this: His compassionate, gracious, patient, loving, faithful, forgiving character as He revealed to Moses.

And so my prayer before the Lord for this day and this message, is, and it has been, that we be encouraged to know the Lord and His ways, and to seek His favor and His glory. Such a desire is rewarded. It will not, for us, be rewarded being placed on a mountain and hidden in a cleft, while all His goodness passes by. I say that because we have seen all His goodness pass by even more vividly in Christ, Who is Emmanuel and Jesus: God with us, and a God Who saves. And we have died and have been hidden with Christ in God, - with Christ Jesus, the spiritual Rock from whom we have drank, and from whom the Israelites in the wilderness drank (Col. 3:3, 1 Cor. 10:4). There is no other. The Son has proclaimed the name of the Lord, and in Him we have seen, tasted, benefited from, - God’s compassion, His sovereign graciousness, His patience and forbearance, His abundant lovingkindness and truth – His covenantal faithfulness -, His forgiveness, and His loving, sanctifying discipline of us. And I pray that be to the increase of our worship of Him, and be the substance of our worship of Him, and that in our prayers, this revelation of the character of God be the grounds for confidence in our prayers of repentance, and prayers for deliverance, and our prayers for others.

to be preached, Lord willing, November 20, 2016
All Scriptures NASB unless otherwise noted

[prayer.]

One further thing: we sang from Ps. 103 just before the sermon, and throughout this sermon, you may have noticed that I quoted from Ps. 103 quite a bit. In fact, in the sermon you have heard the whole of Ps. 103 in fragments, because David in that psalm, I think, preaches to us Ex. 34:6,7. I commend to you, this afternoon, reading that Psalm in order and in one piece, and rejoicing in the character of our LORD there, and in His faithful works done for us that flow from that character.