

Compassionate and Gracious Father (Exodus 34 5-7)

David Xu, 27 Nov 2016

5Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. 6And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."

Background

These verses are very important because God said these words at a very critical time. Jewish people just had been freed from Egyptian's slavery. They were about to enter the promised land. They didn't know what were waiting for them. They had been slaved by Egyptians for hundreds of years that they didn't know how to live as a free nation.

It had been long time since Joseph's time, most of them only heard the name of the Lord, but they didn't really know who he is. They don't know the real character of the Lord. So when Moses was spending time with God on Mt Sinai, they didn't know what to do, so they asked Aaron made an idol for them to worship.

God was very angry. As a matter of fact, God was so angry that he wanted to destroy Jewish people and start a new line from Moses. God had a reason to be angry, because these are the people, who witness the Lord's power. They saw God brought 10 plagues against Egypt, they saw how the red sea was divided, they ate Manna from heaven, they had seen so many miracles by the Lord and they still made an idol for themselves.

Moses pleaded God to have mercy and spare the lives of Israelites. ((Exodus 32:10-14)So God decided to give them another chance. "Then Moses said to him, "... How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?"

And the Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name."

Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory."

And the Lord said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." (exodus 33:15-19)

Now we come to chapter 34 verse 5 -7, the Lord proclaimed his name to tell Moses and all Israelites, who he is. What He likes, what he dislikes. It is so important for us to learn who he is and know his heart. Pastor Abri often said "very often it is the part of God we don't know that hinders our relationship with him."

1. "the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,"

First, Lord tells us is that he is compassionate and gracious, abounding in love and faithfulness. So what is compassion? "Compassion is the response to the suffering of others that motivates a desire to help. Compassion motivates people to go out of their way to help physical, spiritual, or emotional hurts or pains of another. Compassion is often regarded as having an emotional aspect to it."

Wow, our Lord is compassionate means he has a desire to help those who suffers, it means He goes out of his way to help you to heal your physical, spiritual, and emotional hurts.

Matthew 11: "28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

"When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick." (Matt 14:14)

Whenever Jesus saw people of blind, crippled, leopard, demon possessed, he had compassion on them, he laid his hand on them, he healed them. Dear brothers and sisters, remember God, who created heaven and earth, who put all plants and animals in this world, who created you, has compassion on you and me. And Jesus commanded us to do the same, to have compassion to those who need help.

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' (Matthew 25:37-40)

Our God is not far away from us, or hide in a temple waiting to be served. He has a passion for us, he wants to come to us, to heal our hurts, to comfort our pains. He has the power to change our hurts and painful past into blessing.

Movie "unbroken" tells the story of Louie Zamperini. A POW in WWII. He was brutally beaten and mal treated in POW Camp. When he went back to America after the war, his life was totally destroyed. He drank heavily, had nightmares. He dreamed killing his captors in the POW Camp. Then he was touched by God. God healed his pains and hurts. He was so much healed that he went back to Japan meeting camp guards who used to beat him and gave him hard time and hugged them, telling them that he forgave them. And some became Christians later. God's compassion healed him, so that he had the same compassion to pass the love to his enemies.

Grace is something we can't earn. Grace is given to us purely because of God's love to us. We don't deserve it but God gives it to us. Moses reminded the people: "The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt." (Deuteronomy 7:7-8)

Boli Zhang, a well known Pastor, was a university student in 1989, when Chinese government cracked down the student movement. He became a criminal, a most wanted man by government overnight. He started 2 year "catch me if you can" game with government. Please note this, he wasn't a Christian at that time, he had stayed in a Christian lady's house. It took great courage for her to do that, hiding a criminal in her house, if she was caught she could end in the prison herself.

In return for her help, Boli Zhang read Bible to her, because she couldn't read. That was all he knew about God. Later he ran across the boarder to then Soviet Union. It was winter, you can imagine how cold it is in Siberia. He was almost frozen to death, he knew he would soon die, so he prayed his first prayer "Lord if you let me see tomorrow morning, I will offer myself as living sacrifice." God not just saved him, he also makes him a pastor, the Lord uses his testimony touching many lost souls. He was in Auckland a few weeks

ago, hundreds of people committed themselves to the Lord after hearing his stories. This is grace. Even if you are not a believer, God still loves you. God has a plan for your life.

Dear friends, it is never too late to know Jesus. No matter how old or young you are, the moment you committed your life to Jesus, by his grace you are saved, and you can enter his eternal Kingdom.

2. "maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."

Because our God is compassionate and graceful so he is willing to maintain his love to thousands and forgive wickedness, rebellion and sin. What a comfort to know this fact.

A loving father is patient, he allows their children making mistakes. He allows his children to learn from mistakes. He even allow his children to complain about him.

After I became a Christian, things didn't always go the way I wanted. Lacking knowledge of how God works at that time, I very often complained about God in my prayer. I remembered most common complaints at that time were "why do you bring me to New Zealand?" "I would rather go back to China." "if you are really God, do this and that for me, then I will believe you." I even said to him that if he didn't do this or that, I wouldn't go to MBCC church. Now looking back, I knew that was childish. The way I spoke to God, was like a naughty child trying to get something from parents. Lucky, God is a faithful God, slow to anger and forgive rebellion and sin. He is very patient with me, he will be very patient with you. He uses his words and people around us to help us grow in him.

God asked Jonah to go to Nineveh to proclaim Lords' message. Jonah didn't want to go because Nineveh was a city of sin. He tried everything not to do what God wanted him to do. He wanted God to destroy Nineveh. In the end, Jonah went and the Lord spared the city.

The fact that God didn't destroy the city made Jonah very angry. Listen what he said "1But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. 2He prayed to the Lord, "Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. 3Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." (Jonah 4:1-3)

In Jonah's prayer, he didn't thank God saving many lives in Nineveh, rather he complained that God didn't kill all the people in the city. And he even threatened the Lord to take away his life.

Did God take his life away? No. "4But the Lord replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?" And God used a leafy plant explaining what his love is.

In this story, God demonstrates his compassion and grace. He loves us, even sinners, that he didn't destroy Nineveh. In this story, God also showed us how a loving and patient father he is. Even if Jonah disobeyed him, complained about him, threatened him, he still maintained his love to Jonah.

Many people feel they are not worthy to be a Christian, because they have done this and that wrong. What God wants you to know is that he is the God who "**7maintains love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin**". Do not doubt, many people here can testify to you that when they came to the Lord, they were far from perfect.

3. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.

The first half of this verse is easy to understand. If we did something wrong, we need to take the consequence as well. But many people find it is hard to take in the second half of the verse. why parents' sin should be passed to their children, to 3rd and 4th generation.

If we go back to Exodus 20 in verse 6 God said: "for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."(exodus 20:6)

Why didn't God tell Israelites that he shows love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments in this particular case?

There are a few times, I prepared to take my daughters for a movie, or some fun activities they like to do. I had everything prepared, I was happy, couldn't wait to have fun with them. Then they very often messed things up, they did something which I told them many times not to do. As a father, as much as I love them, want to have fun with them, I can't leave their mistake not being dealt with. So I had to cancel the activities and deal with their problems. Later when they learned the lesson, we can do the activities as usual.

So I think here, it is only my personal opinion, God didn't mention that he would love those who love him for thousand generations, is because 1) he said it before, 2) because Israelites just worshipped an idol, so he wanted them to learn a lesson, and warned them not to sin again. He had to deal with their mistake, and Israelites must take the consequence.

Yet there is another question here -- why parents' sin should be passed to their children, to 3rd and 4th generation? It seems so unfair, so wrong to let innocent children to wear parent's sin.

Well it is very hard to understand why the Lord said so. Let me give you a real story.

Bryan Jackson, His father tried to kill him by injecting him with HIV tainted blood when he was just 11-months-old to avoid paying child support. Do you see how a bad parent can destroy their children. How their sin can impact their children. At age of 5, Doctor said he had full-blown AIDS, he could live no more than 5 month. Well he survived till today. If the HIV was still in his blood, if he had children, it is very likely that his children would have HIV. You can see how this tragedy can pass down the family line. His life was totally destroyed, at least from human point of view.

But he was saved. God intervened his life. In an interview with Fox 2 news, he said "I think that there is salvation for everyone and I find myself sometimes praying for my father's salvation," He forgave his father. Now doctor can't find any HIV in his blood.

First half of the story tells us how a person's sin if he/she hates God and his teaching can do harm to his/her children, second half of the story tells us how God loves us, if we believe him how he can turn our sorrow, pain into blessings, and he will bless us for thousand generations.

So all Christians, we love God and his teaching, good news is, we are blessed by the Lord, and our children, and children's children, and thousands of generations down the line will be blessed by the Lord. What a privilege we have.