

A Sinful People and a Merciful God

4.25.10

“But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt.” Notice the first word. Notice the strong language that is used to describe their posture and behavior. This sets the tone for the entire passage.

P: The human heart is capable of unbelievable, irrational evil.

Do I know this? Am I surprised by the sinfulness that happens in a fallen world? Do I know my own sin?

“But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them. ‘Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, ‘This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,’ and had committed great blasphemies, you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night to light for them the way by which they should go. You gave your good Spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst. Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell. ” And you gave them kingdoms and peoples and allotted to them every corner. So they took possession of the land of Sihon king of Heshbon and the land of Og king of Bashan. You multiplied their children as the stars of heaven, and you brought them into the land that you had told their fathers to enter and possess. “So the descendants went in and possessed the land, and you subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hand, with their kings and the peoples of the land, that they might do with them as they would. And they captured fortified cities and a rich land, and took possession of houses full of all good things, cisterns already hewn, vineyards, olive orchards and fruit trees in abundance. So they ate and were filled and became fat and delighted themselves in your great goodness. Numerous reference to the Exodus events, wilderness wanderings and the fulfillment of His promise to put His people in the Promised Land.

P: Our God is merciful and gracious.

Mercy: He did not give them what they deserved.

Grace: He gave them what they did *not* deserve.

This is seen most clearly in the Cross.

Have I personally experienced these aspects of His character myself? Am I experiencing them regularly?

P: Our God is also ready to forgive, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

Again, this comes together most clearly in the Cross.

Do I have the full picture of the character of God? If not, which “side” do I need to fill in?

P: Our God does not forsake His people even when they forsake Him.

This is a truth to be accessed to moments of despair, not abused in moments of disobedience (Rom. 6:1-4).

Am I regularly accessing this truth? Am I abusing this truth? What needs to change?

P: Our God miraculously provides for His people and keeps His promises.

How have I experienced the miraculous provision of God? (Reflecting on this will strengthen your faith.)

“Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies. Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and according to your great mercies you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies. “But after they had rest they did evil again before you, and you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them. Yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you delivered them according to your mercies. “And you warned them in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules, which if a person does them, he shall live by them, and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.” The same pattern continues.

P: Disobedience always leads to discipline.

P: God’s discipline is always redemptive, purposeful and never the “final word” for His people.

Do I know these truths? Do I keep them before me when I am experiencing God’s discipline?

Hebrews 12:5-11 is a key text in our understanding of this concept.

These truths are at work in the lives of all Believers, but need to be especially active in the lives of parents seeking to biblically discipline their own children.

“Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day. Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly. Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings that you gave them. Even in their own kingdom, and amid your great goodness that you gave them, and in the large and rich land that you set before them, they did not serve you or turn from their wicked works. Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves. And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress. “Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests.”

P: True confession of sin is thorough.

P: When true confession happens, we take full responsibility for our sin.

Could these things be said of my confession of sin? If not, what needs to change?

P: Sin leads to slavery.

Where am I on the road to slavery in sin? Where am I already experiencing its enslaving effects?

The Gospel frees us from slavery to sin and makes us slaves to righteousness and shows us the perfect covenant God has made with us in Christ.