

God on Film: Boundless Grace
Sermon 6-25-17
Pastor Curtis Dehmey

Psalm 103 (specifically 10-12)

¹Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

²Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—

³who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,

⁴who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

⁵who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

⁶The LORD works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.

⁷He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.

⁸The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

⁹He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever.

¹⁰He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

¹¹For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

¹²as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.

¹³As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.

¹⁴For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.

¹⁵As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field;

¹⁶for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.

¹⁷But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children,

¹⁸to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

¹⁹The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.

²⁰Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, obedient to his spoken word.

²¹Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers that do his will.

²²Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul.

Message:

Today, we are going to watch a video clip from the movie “Les Miserable.” If you’ve never seen the musical or the movie, I highly recommend it. This movie takes place in 19th century France after the French revolution. Jean Valjean was a prisoner for 19 years because he stole a loaf of bread. After his release, he had difficulty finding work because he had to show each employer his parole papers from imprisonment. A priest saw Jean Valjean’s poor life and offered to give him a meal and bath him. A place to sleep for one night. Jean Valjean saw all the wealth the priest possessed and feeling trapped by criminal history, decided to steal again. He was caught. But the priest decided to have mercy on Jean Valjean and told the police that he gave Jean Valjean those stolen items. In this scene you are about to view, Jean Valjean is contemplating what to do with such mercy and grace. (Play Video at <http://www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/les-miserables-2012/another-story-must-begin>) What shall we do with our sins? The things that we do wrong. The guilt for hurting others. The pain we’ve caused. The disobedience we’ve exercised against God. What shall we do with it?

In April, I attended a Leviticus seminar. And as much as we all may groan at the boring read of Leviticus, one of the leading themes at the beginning of the book is essentially, “What shall we do with sin?” When we disobey God and each other. What shall we do? In the first few chapters of Leviticus, the writer meticulously outlines what sacrifice the people should perform for each particular wrong. And this is where many of us get bored because these practices are so foreign from our day and age. Sacrificing a goat is so foreign to our understanding of asking for God’s forgiveness. But there is something happening in this nomadic community that doesn’t happen in our day and age. When a person of the community would leave the tent of meeting after sacrificing they would usually be covered in blood. So imagine that you come out of the tent of meeting covered in animal blood and you have to walk through the village to your home. Everyone sees that you just sacrificed for your sins. Now, this has the potential for greater shame, but if each person in the community has participated in this act at some point or time, then they understand, more than judge, what that person just went through. It’s this sense of “I’ve been there too.” This sense of communally seeking the grace of God together. At least in the Israelite world they had practices for how to respond to sin. We increasingly live in an age where people don’t know what to do with sin. We increasingly live in an age where people don’t know what to do with sin. How can I move beyond my mistakes? We increasingly have new generations that have heard nothing of Jesus and what He offers for the human soul. People seem to harbor their sins and guilt. Leading them into unhealthy coping mechanisms such as alcoholism and drug addiction. Or even worse yet,

they compound their sins by reacting out of their sinfulness. For example, let's say I murder someone and get away with it. Because the guilt is so heavy on my spirit, I decide to drink until I don't feel anything. And then in my drunkenness, I decide to pick a fight or kill the next random person I meet. And so I keep going in this downward spiral building on my original sin. Or maybe more close to home is that I say something that hurts my spouse. I feel guilty for what I said. But my pride prevents me from apologizing because I don't want to appear weak or admit to fault. So instead I justify my hurtful words, further twist the truth and sling further hurtful words to build my right position. Doing further damage to the relationship.

What we forget and what many of us need to be reminded of are the words of the Psalmist and the saving grace of Jesus. The Psalmist says starting in verse 1, “¹Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. ²Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—³who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, ⁴who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, ⁵who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.” We are a forgetful people. We need to be reminded that God's grace is always available through His son Jesus Christ. All we need to do is to confess to our wrong doing. To pronounce to Jesus that we are in need of him. But unfortunately many of us will not do that because we are too proud. We are too proud to admit that we need Jesus. So which is greater? The guilt of our sins or the foolishness our pride? I don't know about you, but when I feel guilty for my sins, it doesn't feel good. It weighs on my soul and conscious. It eats away at my soul. So I'd rather choose God's mercy and grace over my pride. Do not forget the benefits of the Lord when you accept His mercy, grace and steadfast love. “...who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.” Bless the Lord, O my soul.

“⁸The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. ⁹He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever. ¹⁰He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. ¹¹For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; ¹²as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.” The Lord is slow to anger. Some Christians really like to focus on God's wrath. That when we sin, God becomes this mean, tyrannical and furious giant. And that in His wrath he will punish us. And that might lead us to believe that God is easily offended or is easily angered. But the Psalmist seems to be saying that that isn't exactly who God is. That it takes a lot for God to be angry. That He is slow to anger. And even when he does become angry, he doesn't hold on to that anger for long. And doesn't always deal with us according to our sins. Can you imagine if God punished us tit-for-tat for each of

our sins? We would be miserable on this earth. And there wouldn't be any resemblance of humanity. This is the limitations of understanding God as punisher of sinful behavior. Because as author, Claus Westermann, notes, "God's activity in wrath is limited; God's goodness knows no boundaries." So let's say that God exercises His wrath for every little sin that we commit, eventually it would lead to no humans on this earth. God would totally negate his creation. If God let's some things go. Understanding the natural cause-and-effect nature of sin. Sin is more often than not it's own punishment. When I steal from my neighbor and they find-out, it damages our relationship and possibly the relationship we may have with others in the neighborhood. So when you want to borrow something from your neighbor, they may not lend you anything in fear of it being stolen. It's a natural consequence of sin. And if God continues to be merciful and gracious, it gives more opportunity for redemption. So, if anything, God errs on the side of grace rather than on wrath and punishment.

But God has a conundrum of His own. He requires faithfulness and obedience, but offers grace and mercy. Starting in verse 13, "¹³As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him. ¹⁴For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust. ¹⁵As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field; ¹⁶for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. ¹⁷But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, ¹⁸to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments." Many of you parents may understand this all too well. In order to protect your children and to care for them, you need their obedience. To follow the rules you set-out for them. And they will be blessed if they adhere to those rules and obedience. Although they may not understand what a blessing those rules are until they choose to disobey and experience pain and suffering. And when they experience pain and suffering from their disobedience, are you going to continue to punish your child? Probably not. Because the pain and suffering they experience, because they disobeyed, is enough of its own punishment. What that child needs is grace and mercy. Some children have grown-up in families where they have received double the punishment. That may teach the child obedience through fear and trembling, but it doesn't inspire love. And I think more than anything, God wants us to experience His love and grace for us. What's more important with your child? Blind obedience or loving obedience? God wants a loving relationship of obedience, not just a relationship that stems from fear.

As you see, even in the Old Testament, God is not this tyrannical, easy to anger, God. God desires to have a loving relationship with us. Or as Jesus says in Matthew 7:11, "¹¹If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your

children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” Just as you would want to give good gifts to your children, God wants to give good things to each and every one of us. Bless the Lord, O my soul. God is benevolent. Even though you may sin and commit ungodly things, God wants to extend steadfast love, mercy and grace. Will not accuse you. He will not punish you further for admitting to your sin. God will show you grace and mercy. For as you and I both know, God’s grace is boundless and abundant. When God sacrificed himself on the cross in Jesus Christ, He did so at a great cost. As biblical scholar, Clinton McCann Jr. says, “...the cross indicates the great cost to God, and the cross demands our whole lives as well. Yet for us self-centered, sinful people who know that even our very best is not enough, our hope is finally not in our ability to measure up but in the immeasurable, incomprehensible excess of God’s goodness. We dare to profess that the ruling power in the universe is One who treats us like a loving father, a compassionate mother. Such love demands our soul, our life, our all.” God offers so many good things in our lives that we cannot possibly orchestrate or earn ourselves. And this kind of treatment deserves our devotion. Because we don’t deserve that kind of mercy and grace for our sins.

What I want you to hear today is that God’s grace is greater than your sin. God’s grace is greater than your sin. He will be slow to be angry with you. More often than not, God will choose grace over punishment. Because he wants to give you good gifts. When you decide to release your sins to God through confession, that’s when the redemption begins. That’s when the weight is lifted off your soul. Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables* started to experience great freedom in His life when he allowed for God’s grace to enter his life. And all throughout the movie, you see him continue to extend that same grace to others. Jesus wants to be a blessing in your life. If God extends you this kind of grace and mercy, where can you extend that same grace and mercy to those around you? Who can you forgive for sins that they know not what they do? Who needs your steadfast love that is only possible through Christ in you? Let us be the people of God by embracing God’s grace and by extending that same grace to those around us. Amen.