

EARTH, SEA, and SKY

Ps 36:4-7

1

4 He plans wickedness upon his bed; He sets himself on a path that is not good; He does not despise evil. 5 Your lovingkindness, O Lord, extends to the heavens, Your faithfulness reaches to the skies. 6 Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; Your judgments are like a great deep. O Lord, You preserve man and beast. 7 How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings.

There is a sad truth in man's pursuit of God a true understanding of God and His attributes are beyond the comprehension of man. That said, man has often turned to the things he sees and understands in the world around him to try and describe his creator. That is what we see here in this passage, a description of the divine nature of God's attributes that is compared to the things that man sees around him.

2

Loving-kindness that is so far reaching it encompasses the heavens, a faithfulness that is so great it touches the sky, a righteousness that is a foundation more secure than the mountains God created, and judgments are as deep as the depths of the oceans in their wisdom and understanding.

I find it interesting that the Psalmist prefaces this analogy of the divine nature of God with a discussion of the man who doesn't despise evil, the implication being that he loves evil, planning wickedness in his sleep. The Psalmist then goes right into his discussion comparing God's nature to the magnificence of the things he can see and understand, or at least somewhat come close.

The impact of the thoughts here are what would be the hope of the wicked, the sinful, which we all are, if we could not see the hand of God in His creation all around us and rest assured in His power and promises.

There may be another reason for this contrast between the godless man and the revealed God. The true test of the life of a man is its ability to bear the light, the scrutiny, of these attributes of God revealed to us in His standard. How do we look when measured by His standard, His word. If, all at once, a window in heaven was opened, and God looked in at us, what would He see? The righteousness of God can overcome the most wicked of man, if man will but choose to come to Him in faithful obedience and allow His righteousness to work.

In this lesson we are going to look at the ways the Psalmist uses to describe the nature of God and how His nature serves us. The first part of the text illustrates for us God in the depth and boundlessness of His loving nature, and the second shows us man sheltering beneath God's protective wings. In our text in Psalms, His divine nature is broken up into what are called attributes. The Psalmist talks of His mercy, faithfulness, righteousness.

There are some thoughts I see in this that I think profitable to pursue for a bit. What the Psalmist saw in God...

3

- 1) Your loving-kindness, O Lord, extends to the heavens.
- 2) Your faithfulness reaches to the skies

3) Your righteousness is like the mountains of God

So then our first thought...

4 1) Your loving-kindness, O Lord, extends to the heavens.

The word loving-kindness here comes from the Hebrew...

5 **Checed** OT:2617,

It is translated as "loving-kindness; steadfast love; grace; mercy; faithfulness; goodness; devotion." This word is used 240 times in the Old Testament, and is especially common in the Psalms. The term is one of the most important in the vocabulary of Old Testament theology and ethics as it speaks to the compassion of God towards man.

The Septuagint nearly always renders "checed" with "eleos" ("mercy"), and that usage is reflected in the New Testament. Modern translations, in contrast, generally prefer renditions closer to the word "grace." KJV usually has "mercy," although "loving-kindness," "favor," and other translations also occur. RSV generally prefers "steadfast love." NIV often offers simply "love."

As we can see from the translations the ideas in the word speak to the things, His grace and mercy, God gives to us even though we are both undeserving and unworthy.

In general, one may identify three basic elements of the word, which always interact:

6 A) Strength

7 B) Steadfastness

8 C) Love

Any understanding of the word that fails to suggest all three, inevitably loses some of its depth of meaning. "Love" by itself easily becomes sentimentalized or universalized apart from the covenant. Yet "strength" or "steadfastness" suggests only the fulfillment of a legal or other obligation. The word refers primarily to mutual and reciprocal rights and obligations between the parties of a relationship (especially in context between Yahweh and His people). But "checed" is not only a matter of obligation; it is also of generosity. It is not only a matter of loyalty, but also of mercy. The weaker party seeks the protection and blessing of the patron and protector, but he may not lay absolute claim to it. The stronger party remains committed to his promise, but retains his freedom, especially with regard to the manner in which he will implement those promises. "Checed" implies personal involvement and commitment in a relationship beyond the rule of law.

That is what Peter writes in...

1 Peter 2:9-10

9

9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; **10** for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

Peter expresses the ideas that Vines puts forth, that of Love, Strength, and Steadfastness. The love that God offers to those who don't deserve it, the strength He gives in forgiveness, and the steadfastness of His righteousness and love.

It becomes easy to see that the mercy or loving-kindness the Psalmist writes about is comparable to New Testament "Love", or maybe even better a combination of Love and grace. Taken together, they can be understood as meaning an active love that communicates to those that have no right to expect any better, the opportunity to rise above their sin.

10 2) Your faithfulness reaches to the skies

Next to mercy the Psalmist cites God's faithfulness. God's faithfulness is probably best understood as His adherence to His promises. It implies, in that sense, a spoken or revealed revelation, and a definite commitment from Him pledging Him to a certain line of action.

Num 23:19

11

19 "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"

God keeps His promises, He is faithful to His word, and He can only be faithful to His word if He has revealed that word to man. He will not waiver from His word or use deception to say one thing and do another.

Not only do His revealed promises bind Him, but so also His past actions. He is always true to these; and not only continues to do as He has done, but discharges every obligation which He has committed to. He is a faithful Creator. Creation brings obligations with it; obligations for the created and obligations for the Creator. If God is indeed a loving creator, then He is bound to provide for the created. His past actions in caring for His creation, as well as His promises, bind Him to certain conduct in His future. God's consistency and His faithfulness should teach us that He is reliable and loving...

Ps 119:101-102

12

101 I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word. **102** I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me.

His faithfulness is the expression of His unchangeableness.

Heb 6:13

13

13 For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,

There is a foundation to be seen in these two attributes, loving-kindness and faithfulness, a foundation that our lives can be anchored to. Mercy might be transient and arbitrary, but when you braid in faithfulness along with it, it becomes as certain as the very foundations of heaven, and as

unchanging as God Himself. When we are absolutely sure of God's faithfulness, we can lift up our voices in praise and thanks to Him, because His mercy is forever.

14 3) Your righteousness is like the mountains of God

Righteousness, in this context is to be understood as God has a law that He has established, a covenant that He has agreed to, and to which He conforms, and that whatever things are fair and lovely, and good, and pure here on Earth, those things are fair, and lovely, and good, and pure in Heaven, and that He is the embodiment of all excellence, the ideal of all moral completeness, and that we can know enough of Him to be sure of this, that what is called right He loves, and right is what He practices.

Prov 10:25

15

25 When the whirlwind passes, the wicked is no more, But the righteous has an everlasting foundation.

Solomon writes that righteousness is an everlasting foundation. Unless the child of God has God's righteousness for the very foundation of their thoughts of God, they have no foundation to rest on. Unless we feel and know that the Judge of all the earth does right, and is right, and law and righteousness have their home and origin in His bosom, and are the expression of His innermost being, then what can be trusted?

These three attributes of God, Loving-kindness or mercy, faithfulness, and righteousness all speak to what God does for us. That's what the Psalmist talks about in the second part of the verse...

16 6 Your judgments are like a great deep. O Lord, You preserve man and beast.

God's judgments are rooted in His wisdom and justness and in the application of those judgments towards man, man is dependent upon the loving mercy, faithfulness to keep His promises, and His righteousness to be able to partake of His grace.

This idea of judgments does refer to just the acts of God's punitive justness, retributions that destroy evildoers, but is talking about all of God's decisions and acts in regard to man.

Rom 11:33-34

17

33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR?

Paul, in referencing this passage adds, "Who has known His ways?" The judgments of God are such that man cannot comprehend or know how God arrives at them. That includes all that men call, in a narrower sense, judgments, but it includes, too, all the acts of kindness and loving gifts that God gives to us. God's judgments are the expressions of His thoughts, and these thoughts are righteous, promoting good. God's judgments towards man are the ultimate manifestation of His divine attributes.

The second part of verse 6 shows the result of partaking of the attributes of God, being preserved. Job talks of this preservation in...

Job 10:12

18

12 'You have granted me life and loving-kindness; And Your care has preserved my spirit.

Job gives a great summation here of the thoughts we have been discussing, that God grants life through His loving-kindness which then preserves our spirits.

Notice what Paul says in...

1 Thess 5:23-24

19

23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **24** Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.

This then brings us to verse 7 of our text...

20

7 How precious is Your loving-kindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings.

The Psalmist illustrates beautifully the proper relationship between man and God. He begins with what God does for us. He gives His mercy, He is faithful to keep His promises, and He offers His righteousness as the foundation for man to build his life upon. God bases His judgment upon that righteousness to determine how man measures up against the standard of that righteousness, while at the same time preserving man with that righteousness.

The loving-kindness of God offers to man the only opportunity for preservation, for salvation, from coming under God's wrathful judgment, truly, how precious is His loving-kindness?

When man recognizes the mercy of God and the grace He offers he takes refuge in the shadow, the protection, of God's wings.

Do you see the wonderful circle of God's wisdom?

21

1) God's loving-kindness encompasses all creation

22

2) God's faithfulness seals His love for and His promises to all men under the sky

23

3) God's righteousness, that should be the foundation of life

24

4) God's judgments, that are based on that righteousness

25

5) The preservation of eternal life, that comes through and from His righteousness

26

6) God's loving-kindness that covers man in a protective cloak of grace and mercy

What is your protection from the coming judgment? Are you counting on the things of this world? Are you counting on your own intelligence and wisdom? Or are you looking to shelter in the protective cover of God's loving-kindness, under His wing of righteousness?