

MOSES AND THE WAYS OF THE LORD

Psalm 103

Intro: One lesson every child of God needs to start learning right after he or she is saved, is that God's ways and our ways are different. I say, "start learning," because we never stop learning the ways of the Lord. The Lord said long ago through the prophet Isaiah,

8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9).

You will notice that verse 8 begins with the word for. This means that it is explaining what was said at least in the preceding verse. What does the preceding verse say? It says,

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon (Isa 55:7).

This is a Gospel verse. The Lord was revealing that the only possible hope that the wicked and unrighteous man would have to find pardon for his sins in turning to the Lord, was that the Lord's thoughts and the Lord's ways are not only different from man's thoughts and ways, but higher and better -- infinitely so!

One of the first thoughts that a sinner has when he is under conviction for his sins, is that he has no right to expect God to forgive him, that he is not worthy of forgiveness. And he is right! We cannot forgive ourselves for our sins when we really see how terrible any sin is. And so we are hesitant about turning to the Lord because we think that He will treat us the way we would treat ourselves. But God not only has mercy for the guilty and repentant sinner, but he abundantly pardons! "Abundantly" means that His forgiveness will exceed our greatest expectation. What can this mean but that God forgives, and cleanses, and forgets! We can't even do that. It is all because He is a God of mercy.

All of us have to admit that such mercy and such abundant pardon for our sins is more than we ever thought we could expect when we first considered coming to God. This is not because God has decided to overlook our sins, but because the Lord Jesus, from Isaiah's standpoint, was going to everything necessary for the forgiveness of any sinner who turns to God through Christ.

So the Gospel itself illustrates how different God's thoughts and ways are from ours.

However, after we are saved, we continue to learn that God's thoughts and His ways are different from ours. That is why we find David praying this prayer over and over:

4 Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths.

5 Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day (Psa. 25:4-5).

Or listen to what David wrote in Psa. 27:11:

Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.

Another example is in Psa. 86:11:

Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name.

David did not naturally know the ways of the Lord. He needed to be taught, and knew that he needed to be taught, and so this was often the burden of His prayer.

Years ago in my Bible reading I came across a verse in Isaiah which has been a favorite verse of mine ever since. It has a great deal to teach us why the Lord most often keeps us waiting when we are seeking some blessing from Him. The verse to which I am referring is Isa. 30:18. Listen to it as I read it to you. Look it up if you care to do so. This is what it says:

And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him.

This verse tells us much about the ways of the Lord. It tells us much about the Lord. He waits so that He can exercise His grace. He waits so that when He answers us, we will exalt Him, glorify Him, and not take credit for anything ourselves -- even for our prayers. And because He is a God of judgment, our greatest blessing comes when we wait for Him. "Judgment" in this verse does not mean condemnation; it means that He is a God of discernment and infinite wisdom. He knows when and where and how to answer us, and so the part of wisdom for us is to wait on Him.

Perhaps we don't pay as much attention as we should to the way the Lord used one of His earlier servants to teach those who were later, but we can see evidences of this way of the Lord in Scripture. I want to focus our attention tonight on Psa. 103:7. (Read.) What does this verse tell us?

It tells us that David was acquainted with the way the Lord taught Moses. It also tells us that although the Israelites were with Moses all of the time that God was teaching Moses, they did not learn what Moses learned.

— Further, it tells us that the Lord was Moses Teacher. And we see that Lord made known to Moses what He wanted Moses to know. The children of Israel were aware that God was doing many things for them, but, as a nation, that is as far as their education went. Moses, on the other hand, was learning about the ways of the Lord. This is what makes the record of his life so valuable to us even today. And we can add David to the list of those who have helped us to understand the Lord's ways -- along with many others whose story is told in Scripture, not only in the OT, but also in the NT.

However, we learn from God's dealings with us, too. And what makes all of this so important is that, as we learn God's ways, we are learning to know Him -- and this is, or should be, the greatest of all desires in our hearts. David said in Psa. 9:16a, "The LORD is known by the judgment which he executeth." This is another way of saying that the Lord is known by the way He leads us, and by what we see Him doing. In other words, the better we know the ways of the Lord, the better we know the Lord. He makes Himself known to us by His ways with us.

— But tonight we are thinking about what Moses taught David about the ways of the Lord. Now they couldn't possibly have known each other because they lived 500 years apart in years. Moses lived about 1500 B. C.; David, 1000 B. C. Moses did not know David, but David knew Moses. You can be sure that David studied the story of the Exodus with the keenest interest -- the same way that you and I should study our Bibles. David wanted to know more than just what the Lord did; he wanted to learn more that the children of Israel learned who were with Moses. David wanted to find out from the life of Moses more about the ways of the Lord.

One way to do this is to study Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. But we don't have time for that tonight. What I do want to do is to take a few of the following verses in Psa. 103 because I believe that David had not only the Lord in mind as he wrote, but that he was thinking about what he had learned from Moses about the ways of the Lord. Let us look at what David wrote, and I trust that this will open the ways of the Lord to us in greater detail so that we, too, can know the Lord better.

— **I. THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE LORD (Psa. 103:8).**

How could anyone possibly miss these characteristics of the Lord when we read the life of Moses. They are apparent in God's dealings with Moses, and they are apparent in God's dealings with the children of Israel not only in Egypt, but after they left Egypt.

Mercy and grace are the words that stand out in this verse. It was often the unbelief of Moses as well as the unbelief of Israel that caused them to be miserable. But time and time again the Lord manifested His grace and His mercy. How else could you explain what the Lord did when He called Moses out of the burning bush? And how else can we explain what the Lord said about the unbelief of the children of Israel when He reminded them that after all of the times the Lord had revealed His glory to them in Egypt, and then showed them His miracles, "ten times" they had tested the Lord and had refused to obey His Word. See Num. 14:22. Each incident called for the amazing mercy and grace of God.

But that is not all that there is to God, and those who do not see all of the character of God will do things that they should never do. Look at Psa. 103:9.

II. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD (Psa. 103:9).

This is one of God's attributes that we often overlook. Some of the more recent translations use the word strive in place of "chide." It reminds me of what was said about the world in the days of Noah. God said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man" (Gen. 6:3). God waited in Noah's day for one hundred and twenty years. His patience and His longsuffering are amazing, as amazing as His grace and mercy. But the story of Moses and the children of Israel in the desert teaches us that there is a limit to the forbearance of God, a time when He acts in judgment against those who continue to defy Him. Do you remember this verse in Proverbs 29:1:

He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

God is certainly a God of grace and mercy and love, but He is also a righteous God, and there is a limit to His patience. The history of Israel in the desert shows that God's judgments can be devastating when they come. It is a serious matter to continue to tempt the Lord.

And yet David soon remembers some other truths about God that he had learned, probably first, from the life of Moses, and then was to learn from his own sins. Where Psalm 103 comes in relation to Psalm 51, I don't know, but we can get the point anyway.

III. THE LORD DOES NOT DEAL WITH US AS OUR SINS DESERVE (Psa. 103:10-12).

Verse 13 may belong with this point, but I want to deal with it separately.

This is one of the most amazing truths that we have to learn about the Lord's ways with us. And it is a point which makes it hard for us to really understand His ways. We are always quick to think that God is dealing with us in some harsh way because of sins which we have committed in the past -- like Joseph's brothers, even after Joseph died! But God never does this. He may have to deal with us for some sin we refuse to give up, but if the Lord gave us the judgment we deserve for each sin we have committed, none of us would be around tonight. And here David resorted in verse 11 to words which Isaiah may have borrowed from him some 300 years later. (Read verse 11.)

In fact, David can't say too much about the mercy of God. He seems to be telling us that the journey of Moses and the Israelites through the desert was one long experience of the mercy of the Lord. Instead of matching His judgments with our sins, the Lord has removed them so far from us that we will never see them again, and neither will He! The old slogan of the early days, "Go west, young man, go west," was encouragement to do something that no young man could ever complete. This is because as far as you go west, you can always keep going. You never arrive at the west, and so you will never find your sins.

What a wonderful God we have, but remember that God's grace and His mercy and His love have come to us because God did place our sins upon His Son, and it is the Lord Jesus Christ Who has taken the penalty for our sins in full so that we could be forgiven, and our sins forgotten!

Let me give you one more point before I close.

There is a title given to God in the NT which is one of the most precious titles God carries. But it is rarely mentioned in the NT. It is the title, Father! Unfortunately with many people the title father does not carry any happy memories. In fact, twice, from two different sources, I have heard of people who have said that if God is a father like their father then they don't want to have anything to do with Him. But let us think about this title as revealing to us some of the ways of God, and helping us to know Him better.

IV. GOD'S PITY FOR US IS LIKE A FATHER'S PITY FOR HIS

CHILDREN (Psa. 103:13, 14).

If you had an unhappy childhood because your father was not good to you, I hope you will realize that God is the ideal, and most fathers do feel about their children the way God feels about those of us who are His children.

One of the most wonderful truths the Lord ever taught His disciples was when they asked Him to teach them to pray, and He said to them, "When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven" (Luke 11:2).

Thank God, most of us can enter into this, not only because of the fathers we had, but because, having our own children and grandchildren, we know how we feel about them.

I have to remember this often when I come to the Lord with my needs. And what comfort this gives me. He is my heavenly Father. David is one of the first to think of God as our Father, and he seems to have learned this from his acquaintance with Moses and the children of Israel. The Spirit of God confirmed it to him.

And let me say that when this truth grips our hearts, it will revolutionize our praying. It means that when we pray we are not just talking to our Lord and our God, but we are talking to our heavenly Father. And when we look at our circumstances and our trials we can see that our heavenly Father has ordered these things for us. What peace this brings?

Concl: But now in conclusion, let me point out that we each need to make the application to our own hearts and to our own lives. Go back to verse 8 and think, not about Moses, and not about David, but about yourself. And as you do, apply verse 8 to yourself, and then verse 9, and then verses 10 through 12, and then verse 13. And remember that what the Lord was to Moses, and what He was to David, He still is to you and to me today -- because He never changes.

We need to know the ways of the Lord, too. And remember that He reveals Himself to us in different ways -- through the Word, through the Lord Jesus, and through His ways with us. Let us ever be learning more about His ways so that we can enjoy that perfect peace He has promised to those whose minds are stayed upon Him.