

Kindness

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Date: 18 December 2022

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[0 : 00] Okay, for a few moments today we're going to look at this just a stand alone sermon we had for a number of months really, looked at the work of the Holy Spirit and we're looking tonight at one of the particular characteristics of the Spirit of God in our lives.

Last Sunday morning, we were looking at the prayer of Zechariah, the song of Zechariah when we were looking at the songs of Advent.

We finished by talking about what He was talking about, which was beauty. He talked about the loving kindness and joy and grace of God.

And we finished our sermon thinking about that great beauty that emanates from the person and character of Jesus.

And what I want to do just for a week while this evening is think about that characteristic of beauty in practice through kindness.

[1 : 03] One of the, through the Spirit that's mentioned here in Galatians chapter 5 where really what's happening is Paul's reminding that Galatian church that when they follow and serve and love Jesus, it makes a difference to their demeanor, their character, their hearts, their lives, and it changes them entirely and completely and forever.

So that is what we're going to look at for a moment. Someone might say to James that there is a room through there that they will be a bit more comfortable if rather than going out the back court, which is colder and a bit less welcoming.

So it's a really incredibly attractive characteristic and we know and forgive me for pulling one out of the rest of the characteristics, but it's amazing that they are all fused together in many ways.

But when we see this particular gift of kindness, there is a little bit of a, in fact, when they're all fused together obviously, but particularly when we think of kindness, it does give us a taste of a better world, a taste of heaven.

And it reminds us when it is missing, we long for a better world. We long for a better sense of relationship and a better experience of what it is to be human.

[2 : 29] And I think it's an underrated and underplayed characteristic of the living God. It's the power and beauty of God's Spirit as it's manifested in our lives as Christians.

I believe today, probably, ma'am, maybe not more than any other day, I don't know, we always say that, don't we, today more than ever, but maybe not. But certainly in today's world that we live in, I think it's one of the most powerful apologetics there can be for the gospel.

And it's motivated by our experience of God's kindness in our lives. Grace for all the men here is not a sign of softness, it's a sign of strength.

It's intentional grace. And as men we should be kind men. And as women you should be kind women as well. So we're going to think about it just for a few minutes. What is the word is *krestos* in the Greek, and it just means usefully good, usefully pleasant, tender concern, it can be translated different.

It's a kindness that comes out of our heart in the way we act towards people. So it comes from the inside out, and it's revealed in a benevolence towards other people.

[3 : 52] So it's more than just an attitude, it's something that becomes an action. So in 1 John 3, verse 8, when we looked at 1 John over the last number of months as well, John says that we are to love not with words or tongue, but with actions and truth.

And that's very much what kindness is, it's acting with kind words and truth, with actions and truth rather than simply with words or tongue.

So it's a very active word that we see, and we'll see particularly who it's to be focused on. But it's a God characteristic. I don't want you to forget that because kindness is a word we use, but it's a word

sometimes that is just a human word and a word that's used in the world a lot. But this is seeing kindness from God's point of view, okay? And the Bible speaks about the kindness of God, the kindness of God which appeared in salvation, Titus 3, verses 4 and 5. And we experience as believers the greatest act of kindness, and the cross is the greatest act of kindness. So it becomes our motivation. The gospel with the cross becomes our greatest motivation.

[5 : 07] And we experience through the cross and through trusting in Jesus the riches of His kindness, and it's His kindness which leads us to repentance.

So we find that this amazing characteristic of God is revealed to us in Jesus through the cross, which is the toughest, most brutal act in the history of humanity. And yet it's the kindest act. And that kindness which we experience leads us to repentance, to live like that ourselves. It's linked to the whole idea of God's covenant grace and His commitment to His people.

That great Old Testament word that the translators of the NIV was the last word that they translated because it was so hard to translate the *chesed* of God.

They translated beautifully as loving kindness, loving kindness. Such a great word. And that's exactly what the covenantal grace of God is. It's loving kindness.

[6 : 09] It comes from His heart and it acts on our behalf. Stemming from His character, stemming from His God being, the God of love. There's that great picture of it in Ezekiel 16, that amazing picture, the allegory of His love for Israel, His covenant people, where that baby was born but was rejected by its mother and thrown out into the desert to die with its umbilical cords still hanging, the brutal picture of this bloody child left out in the desert to die.

This baby girl and the king comes and says, live. He takes her up and he washes her and he clothes her in a princess' gear and takes her to himself and she becomes His bride.

Then she prostitutes herself against Him but He takes her back in kindness and remembers her and embraces her. It's that great characteristic.

So it's particularly revealed by God and in our lives towards the needy, towards the helpless, towards your enemy, towards those who can't or won't repay to those who have no time sometimes for your kindness, to those who are thankless.

Remember God's, in general revelation and in general grace, He allows His reign to fall on the righteous and the wicked. It gives life to all.

[7 : 48] So what we remember about God's great, God's kindness, it is not *quid pro quo*. It's not something for something. That's how we barter.

That's how we live. I'll be kind. They've been kind. I'll be kind back. There's nothing wrong with that, of course, but that is not primarily the kindness of God.

The kindness of God is a kindness where we give not expecting or looking for anything in return. It's not a deserved kindness, as it were in many ways.

We see it as well, don't we? And we've, Corey's preached in that a couple of times here. Maybe I've preached in it as well, but David and Mephibosheth, how David showed incredible kindness to the last of Saul's family, who he had every right to reject and take his life because he was in some ways a threat to David.

Yet this crippled young man or man who'd grown up, David said, who can I show kindness to from Saul's family?

[8 : 58] Saul who? Chest after him. He said, who can I show kindness to? It was raging with anger against David and who sought his life. And David eventually says, who can I show kindness to?

Saul, the Lord's anointed and he takes this crippled man Mephibosheth into his home and it to the king's table and eats with him every day of his life.

That's kindness that we see. So God characteristics reflected in the Old Testament. It's also something that Jesus lived. So we talk a lot about Jesus' salvation.

It's hugely significant. I think sometimes we underplay his example as well as if, because we're afraid of moralism that we just want to follow Jesus' example.

We know we can't ultimately that we need grace and we need the Holy Spirit. But nonetheless, his example is the perfect Son and the loving Son and the obedient Son is there for us.

[9 : 58] And we see that in his life. We see his tender concern for others. He is so often God's visual for us that expresses, for example, the fruit of the Spirit.

He showed great kindness to his disciples, didn't he? When he's so often rejected or misunderstood or couldn't see, he was patient and he was kind.

Kind to the Samaritan woman. Kind to the lepers. Kind to the boy with seizures. Kind to Jairus and his child. Kind to the children whenever they came to him.

Kind to the poor and to the rejected. And then kind, you know, just before his own ultimate sacrifice on the cross, which is the pinnacle of his kindness, having been betrayed or in the midst of betrayal and denial by his friends with a baying crowd and the smell of sweat and blood around him, where Peter cuts off Malchus' ear, Jesus just takes the time and kindness to heal that enemy that he faced.

A very visual picture of reaching out and doing what was unexpected to someone who was his enemy who wanted the worst for him, touched him and healed him.

[11 : 21] I always wonder what effect that had on Malchus. Funny, there's lots of big people in the Bible whose names we don't get, but we get this guy's name, Malchus.

And I wonder how he responded. I wonder what the rest of his life was like, what that kind healing act, how it brought about change in his life.

So we see kindness in these ways. And can I just say briefly, as I kind of interlude here, that we also, we see its reflection in the world in which we live today.

Its shadow does remain because God is graceful and good and He allows kindness still in the world in which we live, even when He's left out, even when He isn't the motive.

We do see it. The best things in our life's experiences are often acts of kindness. You hear about random acts of kindness, website random acts of kindness.

[12 : 21] When we share a positive news story with someone, when you send someone a real letter, my word, that's an act of kindness. When you read a book to a child, when the Japanese fans pick up all the litter at the end of the World Cup game that they've played and even though they've been beaten, when you pay forward a coffee, these are random acts of kindness that we see in this world.

And it's paradoxical to see these things in a world that can't explain kindness. It can't explain kindness particularly to those who don't deserve it or who can't repay.

You can maybe argue for a quid pro quo kindness in a secular world where there is no ultimate meaning or reason behind doing things, but to show kindness to someone who is weak or needy or who can't repay is inexplicable unless we see it as a shadow of the living God.

So we do see it in our world and we should rejoice and give thanks for that. But we recognize it here as the fruit of the Spirit.

And like all the other fruit of the Spirit, it's something in which we are to grow and be nurtured and share and learn. It's uniquely Christian.

[13 : 47] It's uniquely God's gift to us. It's rooted in God. And so if we are to live kindly and live with kindness, we need to recognize that it comes from God and from His nature, and it's a specific gift of the Spirit of God who lives in us as we trust and as we relate and as our roots are being fed from the water of life that is God.

It looks like God. It looks like God.

It's much more than just the glimpses of natural kindness. You might be a kind person, or someone might be a kind person naturally, and that's a great thing. But it's different to being kind as a fruit of the Spirit, because a fruit of the Spirit, the motivation comes from the kindness that's been shown to us in Jesus Christ and in grace.

But it's very much focused, so, and this I'll just move on to briefly, it's very much focused on how we treat other people. So if you think of kindness this evening, it's focused very much not on really yourself, but on how you treat other people.

Actions and words in many ways as well. One John 3 which we looked at speaks about the importance of these things that we love with words, with actions and truth.

[15 : 27] And so we're finding that kindness is a mellowing of our natural reactions, and its motivation is the glory of God, is not to get anything in return.

It begins with those closest to you and works out from there. It is how loving kindness, the hessed of God, acts in our lives, sensitivity to the needs of others, persevering, generosity of spirit, self-sacrificial, even to the ungrateful.

Being kind when you're tempted to be horrible. It's forgiving, like Christ, kind and compassionate.

How we act towards others, but also how we speak towards others. Finding truth into their lives, weighing up what we say.

Thinking about what you say and how it will affect somebody else. Thinking the best of other people. Being kind in judgment, careful not only when we speak to people, but particularly when we speak about people.

[16:47] It's a huge diffusive gift. We can change the atmosphere in a room, in a church, in an office very quickly with kind words.

It can make a beautiful environment where previously there has been an ugly one, because it involves us changing our own hearts before we seek the change of character or behavior in anyone else.

So we see that in actions and in words, we are to show kindness as believers. Something beautiful. Something that I think, again, as I mentioned at the beginning, a powerful apologetic for the gospel. It's strong, it's not weak. It is powerfully sensitive. We do know, of course, that it can be counterfeit. We recognize that. Even as Christians, we can be counterfeit in our kindness. We can be kind in order to be seen by other people.

[18:01] We can be kind for praise. We can be kind to unconsciously seek to earn favor with God.

We can do a kind act with a bad attitude. We can be selfish in our kindness. We can be self-righteous in our kindness.

We can show only to those who we feel deserve our kindness or those who'll be kind back. But our motive, we seek it always to be for the glory of God and because of the mercy that's been shown to us.

So you'll go from here and live kindness and show kindness. The opposite of kindness is in that brutal list that we read in Galatians chapter 5.

Unkindness is reflected in all of these attitudes just as kindness is fused with all the fruit of the Spirit.

[19:12] Works of the flesh, sexual immorality and purity, essentiality, idolatry, sorcery, unity, strife, jealousy, fits of rage, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orges and alike acts of unkindness.

So lastly, very, very briefly, how do we get this kindness in an ongoing way? Well remind ourselves, a constant reminder to ourselves that this kindness is a gift of God's Spirit and the fruit doesn't fall far from the tree.

So we keep going back to the source. We keep going back to the roots. We keep going back to the living God. We keep in step with the Spirit.

This whole passage is about keeping in step with the Spirit. It's the outworking of our faith in Jesus Christ. It's always based on that relational walk that you have and that I have with Jesus Christ. It must be. We must constantly, in terms of the Spirit of God, be aware of resisting or quenching or grieving the Holy Spirit.

[20:21] We're in that relationship with Him. So when we're talking about the ascension of Jesus that He gives us His Spirit and we're in relationship with the Spirit, and it's His gifts, we keep going back.

It doesn't matter where you feel or not that Jesus is there or that God is there or that you're changing. We keep going back for this great fruit that transforms our lives and also recognize the importance and the significance of repentance on a day-to-day basis.

That's why we read the Scriptures. That's why we look to the Bible. That's why we find our standard there, as it were. And Romans 2, 4 says, Do you not presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? So there's... If we understand God's kindness, it will be reflected in our life that is repentant constantly because Christ is the mirror into our souls.

And we face that tension, don't we, of always falling short, yet of being forgiven and being empowered to change. We just don't ever use, and we don't ever use God's grace and God's sovereignty and God's forgiveness as an excuse not to change because we are now alive by His Spirit.

[21:45] We're now empowered to change. We don't have any excuse not to change because we're empowered so to do. And we're to be those who clothe ourselves with kindness, colossians.

And 12 speaks about that, about being clothed with the kindness of God. Now, who puts on your clothes in the morning if you're well and you're fit?

You put them on yourself. It's deliberate. You do it. It's intentional. So it must be with kindness. It's something that is deliberate and intentional.

It's something we must do. We must put on the clothes of the fruit of God's Spirit in our lives. We must be covered in His righteousness and live our life in His strength.

And there's that intentionality. We probably don't think that much about putting on... Well, I don't think that much about putting my clothes on. Maybe some other people are much more intention about the kind of clothes they put on.

[22 : 52] But it's something we almost do instinctively. We don't think a great deal about it, but we do it. And that is a great parallel to the Christian life.

There's a sense of it is intentional, but it almost becomes instinctive for us to bear and live the fruit of the Spirit and also pray.

Lord God, help me to be kind this week. When I'm tempted to be unkind, when I'm tempted to be selfish or self-centered or self-absorbed, make me a kinder person.

Help me to see how much Your kindness has transformed me through the most sacrificial act that this world has ever seen.

And Lord, when I come to a crossroads this week and I have the opportunity to show the kindness of God or to go my own way, Lord, please help me to choose the way of kindness.

[23 : 57] Sam Cook, he wrote about his longing for love to be reciprocated and if it was what a wonderful world this would be. I think if we displayed kindness as the realized gift of the Holy Spirit rooted in grace, rooted in our church, family, and in the world in which we live, I think it would be a more beautiful place as well.

So as we celebrate the Lord's Supper this evening, just think about and meditate on how kindness can be a characteristic along with the other fruit of the Spirit, increasingly in our lives, how we act and how we speak particularly.

Amen. Lord, God bless us, we pray, we thank You for the opportunity we have to be together tonight to worship and now also to celebrate the Lord's Supper and the beauty of that as we do it together at the end of the year.

We rejoice in that privilege. Amen.