

Praise God's Christmas Compassion

✦ **Abounding in faithful love (vv.5-7)**

✦ **Forgiving Your inheritance (vv.8,9)**

In the name of Jesus, God's great **Compassion**, wrapped up in a Baby bundle, dear children of God:

It was not like the time in the kitchen when my favorite coffee cup dropped on the floor. Broken, yes, but the first stone tablets of Ten Commandments shattered because Moses hurled them on the rocks. He ground them to powder, mixed the crushed rock in the water and made the Israelites drink it. Do you know why? The golden calf! It took only forty days for the Lord's prophet to be gone, and the God-swearing Israelites started worshiping other gods. High priest Aaron, Moses' brother, made the idol from their gold jewelry. God wanted to destroy them and make Moses into a new nation instead.

If Mom walks into the kitchen and drops her favorite mantel clock, something is wrong. If Dad lifts his new HD TV high overhead and smashes it in the driveway, he's got everyone's attention. When God heard Moses' pleading but still told the Israelites, "***I will not go with you [to the Promised Land], because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way,***" everyone was devastated. Talk about distressing! We get depressed even when God promises to be with us. How would you feel if God were angry enough to say, "I'm done with you"? Under God's broken Law that's what we deserve. But when God relents and comes with us, we **Praise God's Christmas Compassion**. Christ comes...

✦ **Abounding in faithful love (vv.5-7)**

One of the worst problems of our human condition is that our love is as fragile as old Christmas ornaments. Squeeze too hard or let one slip, and broken glass is everywhere. We might go a few weeks in the best of times, but soon our love dries up like the needles on the tree in spite of all our watering. A little adversity, and human love flickers out like the bulb that kills a string of lights. It's especially bad when we think we're so bright, only to discover we're as dim witted as the Israelites. We have our golden calf relationships and possessions. And when we love them more than God, we shatter His Law.

How does God put up with us? What we do to each other is nothing compared to the way we treat Him. When I was a child, my parents had to make me come to church. As a seminary student, I sometimes did assignments just to get them done. Still today I find myself more excited about movies or hobbies than spending time in Bible study and prayer with my God. How does He put up with me?

"The LORD struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made." (32:35) Sometimes we leave the LORD no choice but to discipline us severely for our stubborn refusal to listen to His warnings through parents and teachers. Maybe He has to put you down hard on a gym floor minus your front teeth to calm your anger. Maybe He has to take a loved one whom you love more than God. Maybe when you come to rest with your car bent around a tree, your parent's warnings will make more sense. If you and your friends can walk away, **Praise God's Christmas Compassion**. Sometimes it takes hard times for us to see a tiny fraction of our sins against God.

More amazing than God's anger or His painful discipline is the way He wants to bless us instead of punish us. When the Israelites stripped off their jewelry to show how sorry they were, the LORD noticed. Moses thought he could make everything right and atone for their sins. But God would have none of that. ***"Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book."*** (32:33) In next Sunday's Bible Class on predestination we will hear Paul say something similar wishing he could be ***"cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of"*** his fellow Jews. (9:3) Maybe your parents once wished they could suffer in your place. But God has a better way as He showed Moses and Israel on Mount Sinai.

With new stone tablets Moses climbed the mountain again. God had granted his wish not to make the Israelites go home alone. He gave them the greatest Christmas gift when He promised them the companionship of Christ: ***“My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”*** (33:14) That’s what we heard last Sunday from the children quoting Isaiah: ***“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” – which means, “God with us.”*** (Matthew 1:23 NIV) Jesus said it in the Great Commission before He ascended into heaven: ***“Surely I am with you all the days until the gathered goal of the ages.”*** (Matthew 28:20 TPA) God showed Moses the same glory we see in the manger when God’s own Son was born to be our Savior.

God puts up with us because He is who He is. ***“The LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with [Moses] and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.”*** All those who hate God (Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 5:9) and continue in the sins of their parents will suffer God’s punishment ***“to the third and fourth generation.”*** But look what God prefers! He guards and protects his faithful love (חסד) to a thousand generations of those who give love back to our faithful God. However great our trespass, whatever we have been, He gave His Son to live and die and live again in our place. God truly is abounding, because He keeps multiplying His ***“love and faithfulness”*** by giving us children, nephews and nieces, grand and great grand children – then forgiving them too. O God, we praise Your **Christmas Compassion** because you keep...

✦ **Forgiving Your inheritance (vv.8,9)**

Was Moses gutsy or insane? Was there something else that made Moses use the same words which angered God before? ***“Stiff-necked...wickedness...sin....”*** Then such an odd question: ***Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped. “O Lord (אֲדֹנָי), if I have found favor in your eyes,” he said, “then let the Lord (אֲדֹנָי) go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance.”*** Why would God want us for His ***“inheritance”***?

You can figure this out because it’s right there in our own experience. Couples can’t enjoy earthly wealth and success if they never have each other. You might buy your grandson some nice toys only to find he really enjoys drumming on plastic containers while everyone claps. What is that one thing we want from each other? What is that one thing that God wants from us? How do we give to God when He owns everything? I only have one more breath and heartbeat if God give it. When a child colors a picture that Mom and Dad can’t recognize, what makes it so precious in those tiny eyes? What is it about those little arms reaching “Up” for a hug and a kiss that melts big men into gentle giants?

Remember the old cowboy in *City-Slickers* who kept creeping out Billy Crystal? Old Jack Palance kept holding up his finger, saying what life’s all about: ***“It’s one thing.”*** He would stop, and Billy Crystal kept asking, ***“What is this ‘one thing’?”*** But Palance died without saying. The rest of the movie shows again how Hollywood will never get it. They can’t see past the tinsel and the lights or even the faces of family and friends to see that the ***“one thing”*** is really the same for everyone. It’s in the Name the LORD proclaimed to Moses on Sinai. It’s in the ancient Jewish Proverb: ***“What a man desires is unfailing love.”*** (19:22 NIV) What each of us needs, what God wants from us is ***“unfailing love.”***

The little drummer boy’s song may have sounded like noise to most. But the King of all Creation born in the manger loves to hear God’s children sing no matter what their age. He who made all things wants only one thing from you. When your eyes flash open, home at last, when sorrow is finally forgot and loves purest joys restored (CW 415:4), that one thing will be yours forever and a day. Looking into the eyes of God you will ask, ***“This is what it was all about?”*** ***“This is it,”*** says your Father as Jesus smiles with the Holy Spirit. All together they will say, ***“I just wanted you.”*** What else can you lay beside the Babe in His manger bed? ***“To Thee my heart I offer, O Christ-child sweet and dear.”*** (CW 43) Amen.

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