

The Surprisingly Generous God

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[0 : 00] Our Father, we pray that you would help us as we study your word today. Please teach us of yourself. Father, we thank you for the gifts that have been given this morning.

We pray that they might be used in the service of the Lord Jesus in order to make him known. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Friends, I want to start this morning's Bible talk by telling you that I do often teach people to preach.

And when you're introducing people to preaching, you often tell them about rules that they should not break. One such rule is you should never begin a sermon with an apology. The other rule is that you should avoid using original languages.

Well, today I'm going to begin by apologising for breaking my own rules. I am going to introduce you to a Hebrew word. It's my favourite Hebrew word.

And I'm going to show you what it means. And we're going to see what it means by looking at this passage in Jonah. Now, I need to tell you just a little bit about that word. So there are a few things I need to do.

[1 : 13] First of all, this word begins with a guttural H. It sounds like this. And basically, you have to say it as far back down your throat as is possible.

So sort of round about here somewhere you've got to pronounce it from. And so the word is this word. Chesed. Okay. So with a guttural H.

And in order to explain this word, I need to give you the context. Imagine the book of Exodus. At the beginning of the book of Exodus, God's people are in slavery and in Egypt.

They cry out to God for help. God hears their cry and he sees their grief. And with great and powerful acts, you remember that he rescues them out of Egypt.

Eventually, they meet God at Mount Sinai. In an amazing revelation, he gives them his law and comes near to them. In Exodus 24, he then invites Moses to ascend the mountain of God, Mount Sinai.

[2 : 15] And he tells them that he will give them tablets of stone that he himself has written. So Moses does that. He ascends the mountain. He stays there for 40 days and for 40 nights.

And while he's there, the people of God grow impatient. They ask Aaron to make gods to lead them. And Aaron listens to them. He crafts out a golden calf out of their gold ornaments and trinkets.

And they engage in feasting and revelry. So you can imagine the scene up on the mountain. Moses meeting with God down the bottom of the mountain. The people turning to a different God, as it were, or at least worshipping something they've crafted out of gold.

And God sees them. He tells Moses what's going on. And he threatens to wipe out the whole of the nation in righteous judgment. Moses intervenes.

He begs God to change his mind, to relent concerning disaster. In Exodus 32, verse 14, we're told that the Lord listens to Moses.

[3 : 19] He does the incredible. He changes his mind. He relents from sending disaster. He doesn't bring upon people that disaster that he had promised to bring them. But he does say that he's not going to go with his people because they are stiff-necked and he might destroy them on the way.

Anyway, the people hear that God's not going to go with them. They are absolutely devastated. And Moses intercedes again. And again, God relents from this disaster of not going with them.

In Exodus 33, verse 14, he tells Moses that his presence will go with the people. Now, what God does in these two chapters is he demonstrates this word that I want to tell you about.

He demonstrates chesed. He acts in surprising, unobligated, overwhelming love. He does not have to relent.

He would be within his rights to walk away from Israel. They had entered covenant willingly with him, said every word you say we will do. And yet they broke the first two commandments while God was delivering the whole ten at the top of the mountain.

[4 : 33] He had every right to walk away. But he doesn't. He has no, he does not have to change his mind. He has every right to act with fierce judgment and in anger.

But he refuses. He will not wipe them out. He will not act in judgment. Instead, his mercy will triumph over judgment.

Now, in the Old Testament, this disposition of God is called chesed. And when God reveals himself to Moses in Exodus 34 verses 6 to 7, he uses this exact word to describe himself.

God passes before Moses and he proclaims that he is the Lord, the Lord, the gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in chesed. And faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

The thousands probably means a thousand generations. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third or the fourth generation. Can you hear the comparison?

[5 : 41] Three or four generations may be. But thousands of generations he will show mercy to. Hear the comparison. That's the God of Israel.

He is the God of chesed. Chesed lies at the very core of God's being. And it's that word that sits under the surface of the whole of the book of Jonah. It's mentioned twice within Jonah.

And one of those times is within this chapter. You might like to just breeze through the chapter and see if you can spot it. It's this word that sits under the whole surface of this chapter and this book.

So let's now go back to Jonah. Remember where we were. Open your Bibles. It's page 925. Let's take a quick look through chapter one again. Jonah's story began on that faithful day when the word of the Lord came to him.

In other words, God spoke to him. God called him for a task. Jonah heard God speak. He knew what God wanted, but he couldn't handle God's word or God's will. And so he fled.

[6 : 41] He ran away from the presence of the Lord to a place where he thought was the only place to go. He disobeyed God. And by so doing, he invoked God's anger. And he put others at risk.

As a result of his disobedience, the disobedience that he exercised before the God of all the earth, innocent sailors are put at risk of losing their lives. But as we saw last week, that didn't stop Jonah.

He still failed to respond. You see, he doesn't pray. He doesn't turn back. He refuses to give up his right to before the God of all the earth. He chooses his own way.

He deems it to be better than God's way. And therefore, he leaves the sailors with only one choice. They must get rid of him. Reluctantly, they do it. In chapter one, they throw him into the sea. And then God acts again.

He provides this great fish to swallow Jonah. And that brings us to chapter two. Chapter two takes us into Jonah's mind in the belly of the fish.

[7 : 38] It expresses what he thought and what he felt while inside the fish. Let's have a look. First of all, he records the feeling of sinking and drowning. Look at verses three, five and six.

Now, I want you to notice the impact of what Jonah is saying.

Ask yourself, who does Jonah regard as being responsible for his situation? Who cast him into the sea? Was it the sailors or was it God?

Well, verse three makes it clear God did it. The sailors were merely agents of his anger. Justice, the fish is merely an agent of his rescue. But let's check out how Jonah felt.

Chapter one told us he wanted to flee from God's presence. Verse four tells us there's another side of the story. Can you see it there? Verse four. I said, I've been banished from your sight, yet I will look toward your holy temple.

[8 : 56] Can you hear what Jonah is saying? In other words, he's saying he wanted, although he wanted to flee from God's presence. He cannot bear the thought of what that might be like.

So he looks to the place that represents the presence of God, the temple of God. You see, there are two sides to Jonah's feelings about God. On the one hand, he wants God to leave him alone and he wants to flee as far as he can from the presence of God.

But on the other side, that is a prospect he simply cannot bear. And he longs to be back in the presence of God. I wonder if any of you have ever felt this. Found yourself telling God you don't want to have anything to do with him.

But in that very act, you have run to him. Look at verse seven. When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.

You see, this is the crucial verse in Jonah's experience. In the Hebrew language, to remember something doesn't just mean to recall it. Now, when you remember something in Hebrew, you recall it and act on it.

[9 : 59] And that's what's meant here. You see, Jonah had tried to flee from God's presence. He knows God is everything to him. So in the belly of the fish, he brings God back into focus in his life, remembers God, and he acts.

How? By calling upon this God. And his prayer comes into the very presence of God. But what about God? What does God do with his recalcitrant prophet? Does he keep on judging him?

Does he keep on being angry toward him? Well, Jonah chapter two tells us what he does. He answers Jonah's prayer for deliverance. Look at it. In my distress, I called to the Lord and he answered me.

From the depths of the grave, I called, cried for help. And you listen to my cry. But now once you look at verse nine, it tells us why God answers. He answers because he is a God who is into deliverance and rescue.

He is a God of deliverance. Salvation belongs to him. That is, it's at the core of who he is in one sense. He saves. So there's the story.

[11 : 07] Now, what I want to do now is to return to the word we learned at the beginning. Do you remember? Chesed. Do you remember what it means? It means God's, it means God's spontaneous, unexpected, undeserved, surprising love.

It's what God does when you do not expect him to. It's what he does when you've been like Jonah and suddenly remembered him. All of a sudden, he does the unexpected and gives you his spontaneous kindness.

Now, the word chesed is actually used in verse eight. Let's read it. Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them. Let me read it to you in the older version of the NIV.

Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. The word grace here represents that Hebrew word chesed, just like it did back in Exodus 34.

So we could translate it this way. Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the chesed that might be theirs.

[12 : 20] Think about what Jonah is saying. He's reflecting on his own experience. And he's saying, there's a temptation you see for people in relation to God. The temptation is that when things get hard, we desert the worship of the true God and run after other gods or perhaps no God at all.

What Jonah is saying is that when we do this, either of those options, we desert our only hope. You see, our only hope is a God who treats us better than we deserve.

Our only hope is a God who is chesed. A God who is surprisingly, spontaneously, graciously, kind, full of grace and love.

Our only hope is a God who is chesed. That is what lies under the rescue of Jonah. In my mind, that's why he turns back to God, even though he doesn't like the command of God. He longs for his presence.

He knows God is chesed. He knows if he leaves this God, he leaves chesed. He knows to forsake this is to forsake the richness of knowing this God.

[13 : 30] For at the core of God's being, God is gracious, kind, merciful and loving. Now, that in mind, I want you to notice the similarities between this chapter and the chapter we looked at last week.

Did you notice them? The experience of Jonah is very similar to the experience of the mariners, the sailors in chapter 1. Both face a crisis, peril at sea. Both cry to the Lord and acknowledge his control over his world.

Both are saved. Both then respond in praise and sacrifice. You see, the point is that God's chesed is not discerning. That is, God saves all who call upon him, Jew and Gentile alike.

And that's what verse 9 is about. Salvation belongs to the Lord. You see, because he's chesed, he's a rescuer. Because he's chesed, salvation belongs to him.

Understanding his desire to save and rescue is a fundamental, that arrives out of a fundamental disposition of his character, which is toward spontaneous, surprising, unexpected, unearned grace and kindness.

[14 : 43] Now, that in mind, I want to make some observations from the New Testament. When we come to the New Testament, the Hebrew word chesed, I think, is translated to a different word.

Because they're not Hebrew speakers, they're Greek speakers. What is it? Well, I think it's grace. Perhaps mixed with love as well.

You see, grace or chesed is the very guts of God's nature. His nature is to have mercy. To act in generous, spontaneous, surprising generosity.

And in the New Testament, we're told about that one event where his nature to act in this way is displayed most clearly. The New Testament tells us that God sent his son into the world to die the just for the unjust.

This is grace, isn't it? This is chesed. God acted beyond obligation. He did chesed. He acted according to his nature.

[15 : 55] In other words, look at Romans 5 with me. In your Bibles, we looked at this last week, but it's worth looking at again. In your Bibles, Romans chapter 5. If you're looking for a page number 1130. So page 1130.

Paul says this. You see. At just the right time. When we were still powerless. Christ died for the ungodly.

Now, look. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person. Though for a good person, someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love. In this.

While we were still sinners. Christ died for us. The word of God is clear here, isn't it? God's view is that we were like Jonah disobedient toward him.

But God did what he did with the sailors and with Jonah. He acted in surprising, unobligated, unexpected love and grace by sending his son.

[16 : 58] Later on, the same author makes another point. Which is also made in the book of Jonah. So flip over now to Romans 10. Verses 9 to 13. Page 1135. Paul says.

As the scripture says.

Anyone who trusts in him. Will never be put to shame. For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. The same Lord is Lord over all. And richly blesses all who call on him.

For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord. Will be saved. You see. If God's disposition is said. It will be undiscerning. Because it will be surprising for everyone. Stiff neck Jews.

Or hard hearted Gentiles. There are no exceptions. Keshed belongs to him. It will reach everywhere. And therefore deliverance or salvation.

[18 : 03] Will be for all. You see. The Jews should have known this. When it came to the Gentiles. For if God is keshed.

It will go everywhere. That is the great thing that God has done in Jesus Christ. It is the very core of the Christian message. So I want to close today. By speaking to those of us here.

Who are Christians. By the way. Our letter writer earlier on. Knew it. Didn't she? She did not want her uncle to die.

And knew that his keshed. Would stretch out to him. And told him. You see. She knew the heart of God.

Friends. I want to close today. By speaking to us. As I said. Who are Christians. I wonder if you can see the implications. Of what has been said today. You see. If God is this. If God is grace.

[19 : 09] And love. Then God's heart. Will invariably. Invariably. Be directed. Towards salvation. And if we. Have experienced. That salvation. That is.

If we have been. Overtaken. By this keshed. Then we too. Will have hearts. Directed. Toward the salvation. Of the world. Won't we? As our letter writer.

Did. We too. Will long. For people. To know. And love. The Lord. Jesus Christ. Christ. And we will know. When they come to him. What they will get from him. They will get keshed.

Friends. God's heart. Is what energizes evangelism. And it's what energizes. Christian mission. And it should be. What energizes. You. And me.

I want you in your Bibles. To flip over. To 2 Corinthians. Chapter 5. This is 14 to 21. Page 1160. 2 Corinthians 5. 14 to 21.

[20 : 07] And I want you to look at. Listen to. What Paul says. Hear it. For Christ's. Love. Compels us.

You see. He's taken on the heart of God. Hasn't he? For Christ's love. Compels us. Because we are convinced. That one died for all. And therefore all died. And he died for all.

So that those of us. Who live. Should live no longer. For themselves. But for him. Who died for them. And was raised for them. For from now on. We regard no one.

From a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded. Christ in this way. We do so no longer. Therefore. If anyone is in Christ. Well. They're a new creation. The old has gone. The new has come.

All this is from God. Who reconciled us. To himself. Through Christ. And gave us the ministry. Of reconciliation. That God. Was reconciling the world. To himself.

[21 : 03] In Christ. Not counting men's sins. Against. Against them. And he has committed to us. The message of reconciliation. We are therefore.

Christ's ambassadors. As though God. Were making his appeal. Through us. We implore you. On Christ's behalf. Be reconciled to God.

God made him. Who had no sin. To be sin for us. So that we might become. The righteousness of God. Friends.

Are you aware. That those who do not know. Jesus Christ. Have forgotten. The cassette. That might. Be theirs. Those who do not know.

Jesus Christ. Have forsaken. The cassette. That might. Be theirs. Have you been gripped. By God's overwhelming.

[22 : 01] And surprising. Love in Jesus. And do you know. That the world. Out there. Is forsaking. Something. That might be theirs. If they only turn.

To Jesus. And does that. Move you. Has it gripped. Your heart. Does the world's lostness.

And God's overwhelming. Love. Compel you. Does it drive you. To prayer. For those who don't know. His love. And grace. Will you let it drive you.

To everything. You might do. To make that love known. Will you let it.

Eject you. From your small ambitions. And fill. Your heart. And your prayer life. And your money bags. And.

[23 : 01] Your ambitions. With that great ambition. Of making this Christ. Known. Wherever. He's not known.

You may not be able. To go yourself. But you can help others. You can pray for them. Friends. God is a God of. Kessed. Of grace. And mercy.

And kindness. And love. And he has ensured. That salvation. Is available. For all. We cannot. Keep this. A secret.

We cannot. But give. Our lives. That others. Might. Know. God's. Kessed. Compels us.

Let's pray. Our father. We thank you. For the great. Privilege. That you have. Given us. Of knowing.

[23 : 57] Your. Love. In the Lord. Jesus Christ. Father. Please help us. Help us.

Help us. Not to keep. This a secret. But to give. Everything that we might. That others. Might. Know as well. Father.

We. Thank you. For. The letter. We heard. Earlier on today. And we. We thank you. For the disposition. In the heart. Of the person. That wrote it. We pray.

For her. Prayer. For the man. She wrote it. To. We pray. That you might. Hear it. And we. We pray. Father. That you might. Hear. Our prayers.

For all. That do not. Know. And love. The Lord. Jesus. And we. Particularly. Bring. Before you. Today. Those. That we've. Been. Praying. For. For years. Perhaps.

[24 : 55] Those. In our families. Extended. Families. Our friends. Our neighbors. And we. Bring them. Before you. Again. And father. We know. That to forsake.

Jesus. Is to forsake. The. Kessed. That might. Be theirs. So we pray. That you'd. Turn their hearts. This day. And we pray. For our missionaries.

Who bring. The knowledge. Of Jesus. To others. Around the world. That you'd. Help them. To do this. This day. As well. We pray. All these things. In Jesus name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.