

A Blessing

Jude 2

Preaching is such a varied thing. So many things to say, so much ground to cover. So many subjects. So many applications. And good preaching, I believe, is to be found in that variety. Some sermons are heavy on practical applications. Some are very personal, for they touch upon very personal matters. Some address the mind a bit more, challenging you be transformed by the renewing of your mind. And some focus upon the greatness and the glory of God, for ultimately it is that glory of God alone that must be sufficient to sustain your hope and your life.

Some sermons focus upon the call to faith and repentance that must be proclaimed to unbelievers. Some sermons emphasize the duties and responsibilities of those believe, true Christians. And some sermons focus upon the promises of the gospel that are given to us in Christ. All of things are necessary for any effective ministry of the word of God, and they must be presented in just the right balance for the benefit and well-being of God's people. So preaching is much more of an art than a science, a matter of personal engagement and personal interaction rather than an exact, scientific study of propositional statements.

In that art of preaching, there certainly has to be a relevance to the practical matters of life, and with that, specific application. But there must also be a clear and unmistakable foundation of the grace of God that is presented to us in the gospel. Our focus this afternoon is just that, for our text is the pronouncement a blessing. The benediction of Jude wishing his readers well. But it is, of course, this is not simply the well-wishing of a kind and benevolent man. It is the declaration of the blessing of God.

What greater good could we ever wish for someone else. In a very shortened form, that blessing might simply be, "Godspeed." It might be a bit more fully, "God bless you." Or as it is often stated today with obvious brevity, just, "Blessings."

For Jude, the blessing was specific. And quite familiar. Many other books have similar blessings. Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon all include this blessing,

Rom. 1:7 "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

That's the blessing I often utilize as we approach God at the beginning of our corporate worship services. Peter alters that form a bit, more like Jude,

1 Peter 1:2 "May grace and peace be multiplied to you."

Jude then emphasizes three of God's infinite, eternal and unchangeable attributes,

v.2 "Grace to you and peace be multiplied."

That blessing is our focus this afternoon. So perhaps, I might say at the outset, sit back and relax. By that I mean that today's sermon is part of the foundation of your faith and knowledge of the goodness of God by which you are redeemed, rather than the particular applications that might also be very edifying and appropriate on other occasions. Today the focus is upon the refreshment of God's grace as it is promised to us in Christ. And that refreshment is intended to be the motivation and stability for the warmth of your devotion to God.

So my goal today is to stimulate that warmth, to stimulate that devotion, to stir your hearts to love and good deeds, but this edifying emphasis on the graces of God which he promises to his

people by way of a blessing, a benediction. People of God, believers in Jesus Christ, “May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.” And may they be multiplied to you today by means of this exposition of God’s own word. We’ll begin with,

I. THE BLESSING OF MERCY.

The Greek word translated mercy has a very definite meaning, one that is easy to explain and very important for you to understand. The idea is of God’s goodness and kindness as it is shown to those who are in misery! So the focus of God’s mercy is the reality of our misery. That’s the blessing, that God is merciful! Let me encourage you with this sampling of Bible references:

Eph. 2:4 “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)…”

Titus 3:4 “But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.”

Both of the passages have the same context, namely the deadness of man in sin. In that deadness, extreme and obvious sinfulness.

Eph. 2:1 “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and

were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”

That’s the context for understanding God’s mercy—your own sin. Same with,

Titus 3:3 “For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.”

So mercy is established in this context of a great contrast. Here we are, dead in sin. Here we are, living in sin. Here we are, by nature children of his wrath, enemies of God, alienated from God by our own sin. And God looks upon us with kindness. With love. With mercy.

Mercy is not a response that you earn, nor one that you deserve. Mercy is not a response of God that corresponds to anything in you. It is kindness and a benevolence that is the practical outworking of his own grace. Indeed, in Paul’s writings, mercy and grace can often be hardly distinguished from one another.

Mercy is often translated as compassion. It is the attitude and motive of the heart of God that looks upon us in the misery of our fallen state, and causes God to do us good! Mercy is what causes God to do us the ultimate good, to redeem us from our sins. So writes Peter,

1 Peter 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

Paul expresses our response to God’s mercy, perhaps best, when he describes his own sense of sinfulness and God’s call as an apostle at the same time,

1 Tim. 1:12 “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, 13 although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. 14 And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 15 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. 16 However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.”

That is the testimony of every true Christian, “I obtained mercy.” And as we are invited to pray to God upon his throne of grace, we are promised that same mercy.

Heb. 4:14 "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

And all of that magnifies,

A. The compassion of God.

Beloved, this is the God whom we serve, whom we worship. He is a God of mercy, a God of compassion.

Ps. 103:8 “The LORD is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. 9 He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. 10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; 12 As far as the east is from

the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. 13 As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him.”

“Pity” is the old-fashioned English word we now read as compassion, and the modern usage of pity has a condescending sense of superiority to it. Pity, in that sense, is not usually received as a good or helpful response, because it leaves you feeling rather worthless. Not loved, but despised, insulted. God’s compassion is nothing of the sort. God’s mercy is that tenderness of love that looks up misery of your life and responds with compassion, with an earnest, genuine and sincere willingness to help. And rather than a sense of superiority, true mercy, true compassion, is that sense of joining in the experience of misery with those who suffer it.

So the blessing of God’s mercy comes to us because of,

B. His awareness of our misery.

Surely, in that context, “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

And we do have a time a need, don’t we? We all understand the experience of misery. In the broadest sense, that misery is our own fault, for in Adam, we all sinned. We fell with Adam as our representative head. And we now live under the curse which God pronounced at the fall. Ultimately, it is the curse of death.

We also add our own sins to that original sin, we contribute to our own misery by that sin. And still, God has mercy! “He does not deal with us according to our sins.” That’s mercy.

If you could choose one book that most fully describes that

misery of mankind, it might well be the book of Lamentations, whose title defines our ordinary response to the misery of life. But right in the middle of that lamentations, these great words jump out,

Lam. 3:19 “Remember my affliction and roaming, The wormwood and the gall. 20 My soul still remembers And sinks within me. 21 This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. 22 Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. 23 They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. 24 “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “Therefore I hope in Him!” 25 The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, To the soul who seeks Him. 26 It is good that one should hope and wait quietly For the salvation of the LORD.”

Great is your faithfulness! That’s our cry of worship, isn’t it? “His mercies never come to an end.” “His compassions fail not.” Isaiah gives us words to sing as well.

Is. 63:7 “I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD And the praises of the LORD, According to all that the LORD has bestowed on us, And the great goodness toward the house of Israel, Which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies, According to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses. 8 For He said, “Surely they are My people, Children who will not lie.” So He became their Savior. 9 In all their affliction He was afflicted, And the Angel of His Presence saved them; In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; And He bore them and carried them All the days of old.”

That promise of mercy is also at the heart of the invitation of the gospel. So if you are still separated from God because of your sin, if you do not yet believe in Jesus as the sacrifice for your sin, if you have not received the gift of the grace of God which is offered to you in the Bible, then you are still dead in your sins. But here is the invitation of the gospel, an invitation that

recognizes the misery of those who are without hope and without life.

Is. 55:1 “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. 2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. 3 Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you—The sure mercies of David. 4 Indeed I have given him as a witness to the people, A leader and commander for the people. 5 Surely you shall call a nation you do not know, And nations who do not know you shall run to you, Because of the LORD your God, And the Holy One of Israel; For He has glorified you.” 6 Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.”

If you are not a Christian, then today, I urge you, seek the Lord while he may be found. Confess your sins and return to the Lord, that he might have compassion upon you and forgive you your sins! And so, all of you, this is the blessing I wish for you. This is the blessing from God I declare to you. “May [God’s] mercy...be multiplied to you.”

Then, peace.

II. THE BLESSING OF PEACE.

Peace with God!

And what is this peace with God all about? It is about the forgiveness of sins. The atonement for sins, removing those sins

from us as far as the east is from the west, so that God will never again hold them against us. Peace means that our enmity with God is removed, that the wrath and judgment of God is turned aside.

And all of that, as Paul puts it in Romans 5, because of justification.

Rom. 5:1 “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Theologically, then, peace flows from justification. And we could focus on that idea with great encouragement and edification. But today, the focus is not upon the legal declaration of justification, as important as that is. But our focus today is upon the motive of God, the heart of God, if I could put it that way in human terms. In that context, peace is,

A. The blessed result of mercy.

Because of God’s mercy, because of God’s compassion, we have peace with God. Not because we earned it. Not because we deserved it, but because God is merciful!

Remember all those verses I have read thus far, with the context of our sin and misery. If you are a Christian, if you have been saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, then you have peace with God. And that peace is the consequence of God’s mercy!

The blessing of peace comes to those who have already received the blessing of God’s mercy. And please understand what that blessing is all about. Perhaps the best word to describe peace with God is the word reconciliation. And the blessing of peace is nothing less than,

B. Reconciliation accomplished.

Reconciliation with God. The enmity caused by your sin is removed. The alienation caused by your sin is ended. The condemnation your sin deserves is eliminated.

Rom. 8:1 “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.”

That’s peace! No condemnation. Instead, citizenship in the kingdom of God! And membership in his family. Peace is nothing less than reconciliation with God. Never is that made more clear than in,

2 Cor. 5:17 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. 18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. 21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

So I implore you today, be reconciled to God. And there is only one possible way for that to be accomplished, to trust and to believe in Jesus. Because Jesus became sin, Jesus become the offering to atone for sin, that we who believe might be declared righteous. “[Having] been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This is what we know about Jesus,

Col. 1:19 “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness

should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. 21 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.”

Jesus has made peace for you. Jesus came to earth to reconcile you to God, “making peace by the blood his cross.” That was the price that peace demanded. That was the price that peace required. The shedding of his blood, his death. His perfect sacrifice, once and for all. And with that sacrifice, reconciliation with God is accomplished, and the blessing of peace is yours. And so I would declare to you this blessing, “May...peace...be multiplied to you,” you who believe in Jesus!

I hope you realize how the whole of this is nothing but the outworking of God’s love.

v.2 “Mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.”

There is so much there with that third blessing, the blessing of God’s love, that we will look at that all by itself next week.

Please don’t ever underestimate the benefit of God’s blessings, nor ignore the encouragement they would offer to your soul. And don’t ever miss the opportunity to receive that blessing as it is pronounced at the conclusion of every worship service. The benediction, God’s blessing. So as Jude would write, “May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you,” let me end this sermon with a more full declaration of that same blessing of God upon his people as the recipients of his mercy and peace. Listen to this blessing, and receive it, by faith. Believe it, and receive it as a blessing from God, for the encouragement of your soul and

for the delight of your heart.

Num. 6:24 “The LORD bless you and keep you; 25 the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; 26 the LORD turn his face towards you and give you peace.”