

## HEARTS BOUND BY GRACE

I want you to do a couple of things with me this morning to help get into this lesson. The first thing is to look at a couple of passages of scripture that we will let marinate in this morning's lesson. First of all, open your Bible to Psalm 103 (this is the Psalm where David reminds us that God "*does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.*" It is also the Psalm where he says "*as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.*" But I want you to read with me, **verses 1-5**

*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

And then if you will, turn over in your New Testaments, and read with me from **James 1:17-18:**

*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

The second thing I would ask you to do is to open your hymnbooks to #226. Here is a song that could easily serve as a commentary to those two scriptures. *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing* written by a man named Robert Robinson at the ripe old age of 22!

*"Come, Thou fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing Thy grace."* Do you know God as a blessing God? It breaks my heart that everyone doesn't know Him that way. Isn't it sad that people live their lives, day after day, year after year with little appreciation for all that God has done for them, and is doing for them? It wasn't just luck, much less their wisdom and work. It was a million gifts all from the SAME WONDERFUL PERSON—the fount of every blessing!

I was talking with a young woman, really just a young child because of the stunted growth of her mind, but she was telling me that there had better be bowling alleys in heaven. When I tried as gently as I know how to assure her that we

won't be needing bowling alleys when we get to heaven, she said, with a bit of disgust in her voice, "*Well, we have to do something up there, Don! We can't just sit around and sing all day!*" Maybe we have all had thoughts like that but not only CAN we do that, my guess is that once we come into the presence of God, we won't want to do anything but that! To lift our voices in unrestrained praise will thrill our souls greater than anything we've ever known in this world! So yes, dear fount of every blessing, "*tune my heart to sing thy praise!*"

I think Robinson was on to something, don't you? If God has been and if He really is to us, the fount of every blessing, then it is true, "*Streams of mercy, NEVER CEASING, call for songs of loudest praise.*"

Would you look at the third stanza in that wonderful hymn? I suspect, I don't know of course, but I suspect this is the reason why this song has been a favorite of so many for over 250 years.

O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!  
Let Thy goodness like a fetter bind my wandring heart to Thee.  
Never let me wander from Thee, never leave the God I love;  
here's my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for Thy courts above.

(Don't you wish you could write like that? Don't you wish you could think like that? Don't you wish you could pray like that?)

Of course it isn't grace to which we are in debt; it is the God of grace, the gracious, eternal Father. The fount of every blessing isn't a fount! The fount of every blessing is an eternal being whose very nature is alive with grace and goodness. Because of Him, kindness and mercy, patience and forgiveness, grace and love are more real than hydrogen and helium and oxygen, the three most common elements in the universe.

Think about it, think about all of the blessings and grace that God has poured into your life every day, week after week, year after year! Talk about, "*O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!*" You are helplessly in debt, aren't you? We have no hope of every paying that debt off, and God is okay with that.

Robinson, at 22 understood that! He said, “*Let Thy goodness like a fetter bind my wandering heart to Thee.*” Do you know what a fetter is? It is any kind of device used to bind or restrict someone; handcuffs for example, or chains, or ropes. In effect, Robinson was asking that all of those blessings he had received to become a way of binding his heart to God; that all of those blessing might keep him from ever wandering away from God.

That’s what I want to talk about this morning; hearts bound by grace. I’m talking about trying to be faithful; about how to do that. I’m sure you know as well as I do that it isn’t easy to be faithful. A lot of people enter the race, but not everyone finishes. People become Christians for a myriad of reasons, and sometimes the motivations that bring people Christ are not altogether pure. And life has a way of testing our hearts; hearts that anyway are prone to wandering! Hearts that are so easily discouraged, so easily led astray. Hearts that are weak and yielding to so many other loves, some of which are ungodly; all of which are inferior to His love! Hearts that too many times are unlike God’s heart, they are unloving, unkind, impatient, deceitful, selfish, filled with bitterness. Hearts that grow weary even in well-doing, that are fearful and anxious and filled with doubts. Hearts that have lost their song, lost their joy, lost their hope!

Hearts bound by grace. I would hope all of us want that, hearts that are faithful regardless of whatever happens in life. I really believe that’s one of the reasons why God calls us together every week like this. He wants us to have a song in our hearts! He wants us to be filled with joy! He wants us to face every day, right up to our last day with hope. We aren’t here just because there is some command to be here—there is but that’s not the only reason. We are here, at least in part, because if we are going to be faithful, our hearts have to be renewed. They have to remain close to Him who is the source of all faithfulness; the fount of every blessing.

Having hearts bound by grace means that it is God’s grace, His goodness, the generosity of His provisions to us that give us the strength and energy to be faithful. Our hearts are bound to His by every good and perfect gift that comes to us from above. Having hearts bound by grace means that it is His goodness that makes us who we are, that constrain the way we live. Those are the things that shape our thinking and speaking, not just in theory but in actual practice.

To live a life in which the heart is bound by grace to God is to live free of all the fears and insecurities and temptations that cause people to become unfaithful. Jeremiah is called “the weeping prophet” because of all the tragedy and sorrow he witnessed and experienced. In **Lamentations 3**, after lamenting all of the things he has been forced to see and experience, Jeremiah confesses that he had almost lost all hope. Then in **verses 21-25**, he says:

*But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.*

Think about it brothers and sisters; is that how you feel? Can you say, *the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases*? Have you experienced the never ending mercies of God? Do you think you really had a right to wake up this morning? Or have you just not thought about that? Do you find God’s mercies *new every morning*? If that’s the God you know, think about it, if that’s the God you came to worship this morning why would you ever want to leave Him? Why would you want to wander from a God like that?

When I was younger I wanted to know why people remained faithful. As a young preacher, I had seen, and been discouraged by a lot of people who gave up their faith. So, sometimes when I found a person who seemed to be a strong, faithful Christian, I would ask them “Why have you remained faithful, at least up to this point?” Of course I had no way of knowing that they really had been faithful, but at least at the time I thought they had. I know of those people later on became unfaithful. Let me share with you some of the reasons I’ve observed for why people at least seem to be faithful for a time.

Some people I’ve known appear to be faithful because they are honoring their father and mother’s faith? It is good to honor our mothers and fathers, but when our faith and Christian life honor our parents more than God, something is lacking. We would not want someone to keep on believing something wrong simply because their parents believed. We would not want someone to continue doing something that was wrong just because their parents did it. There are many Christians who do not know why they believe certain things. They just believe it because it is a part of what their parents handed down to them. There

are many Christians who have no idea why they do what they do. It just what their parents did and it was passed on like a family heirloom.

Some people appear to be faithful because they are fearful of the judgment. It is good to fear God, **Proverbs 9:10** and **Psalms 111:10** says so: *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”* We know what **Ecclesiastes 12:13-14** says: *“To fear God and keep His commandments is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”* It is good to have a sober appreciation for the power and righteousness of God, but in my experience, fear of God, even fear of judgment did not work very well as a fetter. My heart kept wandering. That is why the love of God is a better motivator, a stronger bond if you will, than the fear of God. In **1 John 4:18** the apostle tells us that *“perfect love casts out fear.”* In other words, the love of God is stronger, more enduring than the fear of God.

Some people appear to be faithful only as long as things are going their way. They are faithful until they encounter some difficulty or problem. Someone or something upsets them, and so they quit. Now they will tell you they didn't quit loving and believing in God. They will tell you they may have quit the church but they didn't give up their faith. They can say what they will but when you quit being faithful, you have quit the faith. Sometimes members of the church get upset about something. Most of the time, it isn't anything that amounts to a hill of beans, but because something didn't go their way, or because someone hurt their feelings, they quit. Sometimes they decide to go somewhere else. They persuade themselves they are justified, that they are not giving up their faith, but beloved, it's a serious thing to break fellowship with God's people, even if they have upset you, or done something that you didn't think was right. Doesn't God tell us how to solve problems between brothers and sisters when they arise? And if we choose not to do things God's way, can we still say we are being faithful?

Sometimes it isn't something or someone in the church that disappoints and discourages people into giving up. Sometimes it is simply the bumps in the road. It might be a health problem or a financial problem, or a family problem. It might be just the busyness of life. I guess some people have the notion that once you become a Christian everything is supposed to go like clockwork! If God doesn't solve their problem, and do it pretty quick, then they are out. We talked about this last Friday night, but someone has said, *“Discouragement is the anesthesia*

*the devil administers just before he cuts your heart out!*” Be careful, brothers and sisters, that you don’t let difficulties and troubles, in or out of the church, cause you to lose your faithfulness.

Sometimes it is the case that people are faithful because they are really lonely. They embrace the Christian faith and become members of the church because they need and long for the relationships that Christian fellowship offers. It’s sort of the spiritual version of Cheers.

Sometimes you wanna go...  
Where everybody knows your name  
And they’re always glad you came.  
You wanna be where you can see,  
The troubles are all the same.  
You wanna be where everybody knows your name.

I guess the question we need to ask is this: “What is it that drives our faithfulness?” What is it that keeps us coming back to God and to God’s Word, and to God’s people, and to God’s work? Is it fear or family or friends or guilt; or is it faith, a faith built up and sustained by the goodness of God?

The truth is we all have hearts that are prone to wander. Romans 7 describes the spiritual struggle for faithfulness experienced by every person who seeks to find and know God.

- We want to love God with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength, but too often portions of our heart and soul and mind and strength are expended on other things.
- We want a faith that is strong, but too often it is weak.
- We want to be humble, but become upset when someone makes us feel like a nobody.
- We want to serve and do a great work for God, but can find a thousand excuses for not now, not here, not this.
- We want to put sinning behind us but find that it is never far from us.

Think about it brothers and sisters! How can we ever become truly faithful? Maybe we never really can; we can only keep on trying. But what is the one thing that has the greatest chance at binding our wandering hearts to God? It is His grace and goodness isn’t it? If our hearts cannot be bound by His grace, they will

never be bound. If the goodness shown to us by the Lord can't do it, it can't be done. It isn't our knowledge of His goodness, though realizing it is essential. It isn't even our appreciation for His goodness, though we do need to be thankful. As we read in Psalm 103, "*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.*" It isn't our knowledge and appreciation for the goodness of God; it is the reality of His goodness! We are always saying, "God is good!" And that is true. And because it is true that "God is good all the time, and all the time God is good" His faithfulness in showing His goodness to us can become a source for our faithfulness as well. And so, with Robinson we sing and we pray...

Come Thou Fount of every blessing, tune our lips to sing Thy grace  
Streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise;  
Teach me ever to adore Thee, may I still Thy goodness prove,  
While the hope of endless glory, fills my heart with joy and love!

Here I raise my Ebenezer; hither by Thy help I've come  
And I hope by Thy good pleasure safely to arrive at home;  
Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandring from the fold of God,  
He to rescue me from danger interposed His precious blood.

O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!  
Let Thy goodness like a fetter bind my wandring heart to Thee;  
Never let me wander from Thee, never leave the God I love,  
Here's my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for Thy courts above.

- Are you tired of wandering?
- Would you like to come and bathe in the fount of every blessing?
- Would you like to feel and know His goodness, like streams of mercy, never ceasing, binding your heart more and more firmly to His?
- If you haven't been as faithful to Him as He has been to you, and want Him to know you want to try to do better about that,

If you would like for God to be your God, really ... your God, you are invited to respond during the singing of this next song. One of our elders will meet you, please come as we stand and sing!