

(The Lord - Merciful and Gracious) 1. Oh! What a God!

by Roy Hession

God's character is revealed as merciful and gracious, demonstrating his willingness to forgive and show mercy to those who repent and seek his face.

Duration: 55:06

Scripture: Exodus 34:6, Psalm 103:8, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Mercy Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher reflects on the character of God as described in the Bible. He emphasizes that God is merciful and gracious, as proclaimed by Jehovah himself. The preacher shares a personal story of a young father who loves his son deeply but would not sacrifice him for others. However, he contrasts this with God's love for humanity, as God willingly gave his only son, Jesus, for the salvation of the world. The preacher also mentions Moses' experience on Mount Sinai and how God's anger was aroused when the Israelites turned to idolatry, but Moses interceded on their behalf.

Transcript

I want you to turn this morning to Exodus chapter thirty-three, Exodus chapter thirty-three, and I'm reading and seeking to speak from the authorised version. We hope that that won't be too much of a confusion to you. If you are reading these days one of the later versions, the newer translations, and that's the one you have before you, if hearing the stately words and style of the authorised version is a little confusing, I would suggest you cease to try and follow it in your own version and listen to the magnificent English of the authorised version.

I still continue with the authorised version, not merely because I belong to a generation that was brought up under it, but for many, many other solid reasons, which I'm not going to go into now, they're not relevant to our study. But all I can say is, if you do use another version, and why shouldn't you if you find that helpful, do not finally discard your authorised version. It's built into the English language, it's part of the English culture, that is not a very big reason for continuing, but it does mean you will lose so much in so many ways.

So when you have your various times of study, I suggest, whereas your main version will be such and such, you spend at least some time, one period in the day or one occasion, when you do read from this,

the basic version. I've just come back from seven weeks in the United States, and wherever I've been I've found that America is still the land of the King James Version, as they call it. And I just mentioned that, so feel free, well you may find it better just to listen, though you can, if you like, read and compare, but that's another mental process that may go on in your mind and distract you from the message that we shall be reading.

Moses has had a tremendous experience in these passages. He spent no less than 40 days, that is nearly six weeks, without eating or drinking, in Mount Sinai, receiving the great law of God and the ceremonial that was ordained for them. And when he did come down, it was to find that they'd got weary with waiting for him, and alas Aaron had let the side down and led the people back into idolatry, and they made that golden calf and said, these be thy gods that brought thee up.

It was a terrible sin, and God's anger was roused against them, and he told Moses, you see I'm going to destroy them and make of you a greater nation. But although that might have appealed to the self in Moses, that he should be the one, he knew God's honour was at stake. And having come down and reproached and chided the people and called them to repentance, he then went back for a further 40 days, no less than 80 days pretty well, with that brief time down in the valley, this time to pray for God not to destroy them.

If someone's got to be destroyed, he said, let it be me. And Moses blessed his heart, said if not, if you can't forgive them, then block me out of thy book. And instead of being the only one to survive, he asked God that he might be the only one to die.

And what a time it was he had with God in the mount, six weeks. And he prevailed on the part of Israel. He stood before God in the breach, and Israel was spared.

And towards the end of that great period of time, he went into great depths and heights. And he says in verse 18, and this is where we're going to read, and he said, I beseech me thee, show me thy glory, chapter 33 verse 18, show me thy glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee.

And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. And he said, thou canst not see my face, for there shall no man see my face and live. And the Lord said, behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock, and it shall come to pass that while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by.

And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts, but my face shall not be seen. Verse five of the next chapter. And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord.

Now this chapter is turning out to be one of the most foundational and important chapters in the Old Testament. It's referred to again and again. It is a chapter where God himself proclaims what his character is.

He proclaimed the name of the Lord, and that that means the character of God. Here's God himself telling us what he's really like, and what a revelation it is. And I remind you that in the King James, in the authorised version, when you have the word Lord, all in capitals, in the Hebrew, it's God's first name, his private name, Jehovah.

In Hebrew, as perhaps you know, there are no vowels, only consonants. And you have to put in the consonants, the reader has, who understands Hebrew, which I don't. He has to put them in with the vowels which are obviously intended, though there is room for deviation there.

And those who've been to seminary, they come out talking about not Jehovah, but Yahweh. Well, it's the same consonants, but they put different vowels in. And it is thought, but only thought, and can't be proved, that in those days it was pronounced Yahweh.

But inasmuch as the King James version, on four occasions, if not five, actually does use the word Jehovah, I myself prefer to use the word Jehovah, it's the traditional one. Not important, but inasmuch as the other version can't be proved, I stick by what we've been used to. And what I mention is this, that this word Jehovah, the first name of God, was regarded as so sacred that the Jews hated to pronounce it.

I mean to say, you wouldn't go up to some important person and call him Jim. And so they felt they couldn't use the first name of God. And so whenever Jehovah appeared in their scriptures, they always used the word Adonai, which means Lord, out of respect.

And the translators, nearly all of them, have respected that reticence. But the King James version, the authorised version, to let you know what it really is in the original, puts the word Lord, L-O-R-D, all in capitals. So if you really want to read it correctly, where you read Lord all in caps, you can read Jehovah.

Or if you've been to seminary, Yahweh. As I say, on four occasions, if not five, the authorised version breaks its own rule. And if you look at the four occasions when it doesn't put Lord in caps, but puts Jehovah itself all in caps, you will see why they simply had to use that first name.

I have been greatly helped, and many a passage has meant new things to me. I don't always read it Jehovah, but I always know it, think it Jehovah. It's given me a wonderful concept of the God who's mine.

Because Jehovah is the great name of grace. You can see that by the very serious context in which it's used. And the very name Jehovah means I am.

It's an unfinished sentence. I am whatever my people need. And here is Jehovah going to proclaim to Moses his character.

And therefore it makes this passage one of the most important ones. And the Lord and Jehovah descended in the cloud, and stood within there, and proclaimed the name of Jehovah. And Jehovah passed by before him and proclaimed, Jehovah, Jehovah, a God merciful and gracious, long-suffering, which means slow to anger, and abundant in goodness and truth, I've been a bit occupied with that word goodness.

Does it mean just straight moral goodness? No, we sing God is so good to me, so generous. That's the meaning of that word goodness so often in various scriptures. And this God, this Jehovah, is a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in goodness.

Again and again Israel took up the refrain, give thanks unto the Lord for he is good. Ours is a good God, abundant in goodness, and gives his people abounding cause to sing God is so good to me. Abundant in goodness and truth.

That means faithfulness. He never varies in his promises. Keeping mercy for thousands.

Now you've got to refer to other passages akin to this in Exodus 20, to get what I'm going to say. I'm not telling you the references. It means keeping mercy for thousands of generations.

In Deuteronomy and further in Exodus, that's how the similar parallel passage is put. Keeping mercy for thousands of generations, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, and finding his greatest glory in so doing. And there will be no means clear the guilty.

Now here I have a problem text. If he's the one who forgives transgression, iniquity and sin, how come that it says he will by no means clear the guilty? I'm the more confused because I know one guilty man whom he's cleared at least. And that's me.

And then I see in my authorised version the word guilty is in italics. Now this is another little thing you need to know. In some other versions this same principle, the same help is carried over.

The authorised version is the most word for word translation that we have. But there are some cases where the Hebrew doesn't put the word in, they just leave it to you. But with the translators, whoever they are, have to put a word in to make sense.

That will by no means clear what? Well, they put the guilty. But in as much as it's in italics, my insight could be as good as the translator's. So I said, did they put the right word in? And for me this text could well have read, that will by no means clear the impenitent.

He's a holy god. He glories in forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but only as you could confess and repent. But he by no means clears the man who's unwilling for that.

And then he goes on to say, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the children's children, and to the third and fourth generation. Now that's another difficult one, and this, the otherwise most important verse, doesn't sound very merciful and gracious, to visit the iniquity of the children, of the fathers upon the children, to the third and fourth generation. But if you turn back to the Ten Commandments in chapter 20, it talks about God being a jealous God.

And it says the same thing. Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and to the third and fourth generation of those that hate me, but showing mercy to thousands of generations of those that love me. And so judgment only extends to the third and fourth generation, in the case even of the impenitent.

I mean, it's a fact of life, that families get involved and get troubled by, and suffer because of the sins and follies of a father or even a mother. But even so, God sees that it doesn't extend any further than the third and fourth generation. But when it comes to mercy, that extends to thousands of generations.

Streams down the generations from Calvary, even beyond that, for mercy was always a part of God. And you are in the enjoyment of God's great salvation, because that mercy extends to thousands of generations. This is my contribution, for what it is worth.

To a verse that is so sweet and wonderful, but has those two puzzling things, that by no means clear the impenitent, and that whereas sin does affect in the outwardness a family, grace goes further. Grace affects thousands. That is my contribution.

I won't claim for it any more than that. So this is the passage we've got before us. Now as I've been reading, and Pam and I have studied our Bibles, and inasmuch as there's much more Old Testament than

New Testament to get through, we find ourselves spending a lot of time in the Old Testament.

And it's not wasted! I'm not going to say I prefer the new to the old. I find Jesus so fully and richly in the old as in the new. And we get quite excited about it.

By the way, on this point, are you a reader of Daily Light? Will you please watch the way in which Daily Light handles your Old Testament? So if anybody asks me, Roy, what's your theology? I say, I've got it all written down, A to Z. Apart from the Bible, of course. And what's that? Daily Light. If you want to know what is the message for which this conference stands, you'll find it all written down for you every morning, every evening, in Daily Light.

And I love the way they handle the Old Testament. And sometimes the leading text is an Old Testament one. You can't say, what in the world's that going to mean? But they put all those other texts in.

And it's portraying the same glorious Lord Jesus. Well now, as we've been going through, we've found in the Old Testament two pairs of words that are all, each pair, they're always as a pair, and they proliferate. And it keeps on coming again and again.

The first pair of words relates to the character of God. The second pair of words relates to the condition of man. And we're going to look at these two pairs of words and see how they relate to one another.

And we shall see that what it says about the character of God exactly fits what it says about the condition of man, like a hand inside the glove. And the first pair of words is the one we're going to look at this morning. Whether we should get through it all this morning, I'm not quite sure.

But it's lovely to feel five messages. Usually the preacher, the most he can preach is for an hour. Maybe you don't often have that experience.

Well, those that listen to me have it. But not at Southwold. You know, we're more disciplined with regard to time at Southwold than anywhere else.

But when I go to America, my people are driven 100 miles to the meeting. And they don't mind what time they get back. Anyway, I don't know how we got on to that.

Well, here we have the first pair of words. And it's contained in this scripture. The pair of words that describes the character of God.

Uttered by Jehovah himself. Verse six, And Jehovah passed by before him and proclaimed, Jehovah, Jehovah, a God merciful and gracious. And that's the first pair of words we're going to spend the rest of our time this morning on.

Merciful and gracious. This is what God says he is. He says, I'm a merciful and gracious God.

Now, when Israel was being made a nation at the exodus of her bondage under Pharaoh, being brought out of Egypt, they had to learn the God who was their God. They had to know what the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was like. Every nation had gods of various sorts.

And Israel had a God too. Wherein did their God differ from every other God? They had to learn it. And they did.

And they did so especially at the exodus. The first thing they learnt there was that God was sovereign. That their God was sovereign in a way no other heathen deity was.

He could bring down the greatest empire of the day. He could reduce the mighty Pharaoh to a whimper. And overthrow a whole nation and a whole army and drown them in order to set his people free.

So much so that when at last they got back out into the wilderness and Moses told his Gentile father-in-law the story of all that the Lord had done for them, Jethro said, now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods. Jehovah is greater than all gods. For the thing wherein they dealt proudly, he was above them.

And they realised that Jehovah their God was utterly supreme and could bring down the mightiest empire that there was on behalf of his people. And then you remember, having got out of Egypt, they were led to Mount Sinai. And they remained there for no less than 12 months in camp beneath that mountain.

And it was there that God came down upon the mountain in fire and cloud and thunder and spake with his people. Actually, they heard him speak audibly. Moses himself said in Deuteronomy, did any people hear the voice of God speaking out of the cloud as you have and live? Ten times they heard that voice.

Ten times they heard thou shalt, thou shalt not. And then Moses spent that first period of 40 days up in the mountain, six days, receiving the law of God in detail. It was divided into two.

There was the moral law. The Ten Commandments summarised it. There were much other additional things that Moses received.

The moral law of God. And there was also the ceremonial law of God. And as they listened to what was told them, the people realised a second thing about their God, in which he differed from every other God that had ever been known.

Their God was not only sovereign, he was moral. Moral! He was concerned about moral issues. He loved righteousness, but he hated iniquity.

Who in the world had ever heard of a Philistine God who bothered about moral issues? Indeed, they provoked the most terrible orgies and immoralities very often. Not so Israel's God. And that gave them a heightened sense of awe before him, a sovereign God, but a holy moral.

My friend, don't miss up on the moral issues of the Christian life. Your God is moral. Not merely to comfort and to sing about.

He's moral. He loves righteousness. He hates iniquity, even among his redeemed.

But then they learnt a third thing about their God. They sinned as grievously as they did, when Moses was receiving this wonderful law and ritual. And they turned back in their hearts to the gods they used to sacrifice to, and they made that golden calf and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

And oh, it was a terrible thing. After all God had done, and all he'd promised, was this the way he was being requited? And he said to Moses, I'm going to destroy them. And if I've made promises for a nation to come out, I'll keep them, but I'll keep them by destroying them and making of you the nation.

And Moses turned down that offer, not only because he loved the people, but because he was concerned for God's honour. What would the nation say? And he told the people, he showed them, he made them smash those idols to powder, to straw them in the water, and then they had to drink the water and much else. Now he says, I'm going to go back again.

You don't realise, you're in the very throes. You're almost at the point of extinction. Had not Moses, it says in the Psalms, stood before him, and for six weeks he was with God on behalf of the people.

And if one's got to die, he said, let it be me. No, says the Lord, those that have sinned shall die. And therefore he pleaded with God, brought forth arguments, potent arguments, wonderful scriptures.

And at last God said, I pardoned according to thy word. In fact, you've touched me. Someone has said that mercy is God's weak point.

And Moses managed to touch God on his weak point. And he decided not to destroy them, but rather to forgive them. At first he said, I'll send my angel.

Oh, that's not enough, we don't want an angel. If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence. All right, says God.

Have it your way, I will. And the people learnt that their God was not only sovereign, he was not only moral, but he was gracious. Gracious.

And when God did declare what he was, as we've just read, this is what he said he was. Jehovah, our God, merciful and gracious. They didn't deserve it.

But they got what they didn't deserve because that's in the very character and nature of God. The merciful and the gracious. Mercy is pity and compassion for those in distress.

How merciless we can be in our judgment of one another and of other people outside our acquaintance. Not so God. He's merciful.

And if you demonstrate an unmerciful attitude, you're out of fellowship with God, because Jehovah is merciful. Merciful to those in misery. But he was not only merciful, he was gracious.

Merciful and gracious. And grace is for those that don't deserve it. Mercy for the undeserving.

The whole meaning of the word grace, it's undeserved. Sometimes you have an argument with a company and they say, well, let's settle it. We'll make a payment over this disputed point, but understand it's ex-gratia.

We don't acknowledge any obligation to do it. We don't have any obligation. It's ex-gratia.

And grace is God doing things for us, ex-gratia. We've got no title to them. We've got no right for them.

If we had, it wouldn't be grace, it would be a wage. And God is not only merciful, but gracious. It's so easy to think that whereas you can see God is greatly, wonderfully merciful to people in their miseries.

Please turn the cassette over now. Do not fast-wind it in either direction. And God is not only merciful, but gracious.

It's so easy to think that whereas you can see God is greatly, wonderfully merciful to people in their miseries. If, however, they've brought them upon themselves, and they're to fault in the matter, they can hardly expect much from God. So you think.

And, of course, it's common procedure with our charities. They have funds for the disbursement for people in grave need in one way or another. And when they meet to decide on the grants they're going to make, I know there's one thing they almost always ask themselves as they turn the papers and look at the applicants.

Is this case a deserving case? If it isn't, they're unlikely to get much help. Not so our God. He's mercy.

But even your wrongs don't disqualify you for the mercy he's got for you. He's merciful and gracious. And Israel discovered that in the way they were so gloriously forgiven iniquity, transgression and sin in the matter of their grievous sin at Sinai.

Mercy, then, is for misery. Grace is for guilt. I used to feel when I was criticized, if I had a good case, I could look to God, that's okay, Lord.

But I so often couldn't find I got a perfectly good case, and therefore I couldn't look to God to come in and help, because my case wasn't right. I saw God was merciful, but not when the man concerned wasn't really right. But it isn't true.

If the man concerned is wrong and confesses that wrong, he only becomes a candidate for this great quality in the Godhead, grace. There's a difference between love and grace. Love can be for those that have some degree of loveliness about them.

But grace, to be really grace, is for those who've got nothing. Wouldn't be exactly a compliment to your wife to say you have a gracious attitude toward her, because she doesn't really deserve it. But that's how God is.

This is the God we adore, merciful and gracious. And this was the great revelation given to Israel. And it began with Exodus 34.

And the prophets and the writers of the Old Testament go back to this passage again and again, and again and again this revelation of Jehovah being merciful and gracious is alluded to. There are eleven cases, at least, where there's a clear-cut quotation of this. And any other number of allusions to it.

I'll just show you one of the very many. If you've got a concordance, you can see the whole list of them. This is reiterated, merciful and gracious.

Merciful and gracious. Psalm 103, verse 8. We start at verse 7. He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. The Lord is, here you have it, merciful and gracious.

David, where did you get it from? Oh, well, I got it from Exodus 34. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. And then he amplifies it a little.

He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger forever. If he's slow to anger, he's quick to have mercy. And though sometimes we suffer under his disciplines for our good, they're never forever.

His anger is but for a moment, his mercy for a lifetime. And so here's one of the many places where you see the merciful and the gracious occurring. Now, this was Israel's unique knowledge.

If Israel differed from no other nation, it differed in this, that they knew that their God, not only sovereign, not only moral, was gracious. This was her riches. This was her great deposit.

And you even find pouting, rebellious Jonah admitting that. I want you to look at that. If you don't understand the book of Jonah, and you probably don't understand it, who really does? You certainly won't understand it until you read chapter 4. And when he saw that God had changed his mind with regard to destroying Nineveh, it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

And he prayed unto the Lord and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish. He wasn't chicken. He wasn't afraid to denounce a sinful city.

This was the reason. Therefore I fled, for I knew, I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and is so quick to repent of the evil, of the disciplines, the chastenings that you sought to do unto people. I knew you were like that, and that's why I didn't want to go, because they were our enemies.

I didn't want you to have mercy on them. But he knew it. How did he know it? Why, it was the common knowledge.

It was the common knowledge. It's what made them. And I would say, if there's a distinction between one Christian and another, it's simply this, that some Christians really understand and live in the good of the fact that theirs is a merciful and gracious God.

That's all it is. It's going to see you out of every situation. And here it is.

Jonah quotes it. And I turn to my daily light in July 17th in the morning. The leading text is simply this third word.

Thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth thee of the evil. You would think that that was a sort of quotation from the Psalms. It isn't.

It's a quotation from a rebellious evangelist who didn't want God to have mercy on the Ninevites. It was their common knowledge. And what a knowledge.

Whenever Israel was in need and suffering under the discipline of God, as when they were taken captive into Babylon, the godly in Israel, when they prayed, the Israel in her distress always went back to this. For thou art a merciful and gracious God. You remember when Moses once again had to pray for Israel, this time at Kadesh Barnea, when they refused to go into the land, and God's anger was as aroused against them as it had been at Sinai, and God made the same proposition then as he did at Sinai, I'll destroy them and make of you a greater nation.

Moses once again went into bat on their behalf. One of those wonderful prayers. And in that prayer, he says, O Lord, what will you do for your great name? In any case, what have you said about yourself? Now I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great.

According as thou hast spoken, saying, the Lord is long-suffering and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity, transgression of sin. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of thy mercy. Where is he quoting from? He says, you said you forgive transgression, iniquity and sin.

You said you're merciful and gracious. And so there's one at least, who when he prayed for Israel in their hour of need, went back to this one great, glorious revelation. And there are other cases.

There are three great national prayers of repentance in the Old Testament, especially when the worst had come to the worst, and they'd been taken captive. Daniel prayed for them. Ezra prayed for them.

Nehemiah prayed for them. Strangely, the thing that links them up is Daniel 9, Ezra 9 and Nehemiah 9, and we may look at those toward the end of our series. And they all said, but Lord, you've declared yourself to be God, ready to pardon.

We're in this dire strait. We've sinned. We've done wickedly.

You're right. We're wrong. But Lord, you yourself have said you're ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness.

This was always the thing. Happy the man who has this as his treasure. There'll be days when the hand of God may be upon him, when he may be made perhaps to suffer a salutary chastening, which is needed not to punish him, that's not the issue, but to educate him, to promote him in the path of sainthood.

But it's nonetheless hard. Oh, then is the time, if you know your God revealed in Jesus to be this God, you go back to this, the merciful and the gracious. Oh, it's meant so much to me, when I had that accident and suffered afterwards.

God, I made this my crown, my prayer, as Daniel did and Ezra did and Nehemiah did. Ready to pardon, merciful and gracious. This is your God.

And as I say, this was their common knowledge. By the way, it's rather interesting if you're a preacher, have a go on Jonah's pouting word about God being merciful, and entitle your sermon, The Gospel According to Jonah. He didn't intend to, but he gave some hope for sinners.

He accused God of being too merciful. He can't be too merciful, too gracious, that's what I need. There's a nice sermon for somebody, The Gospel According to Jonah.

Furthermore, whenever the prophets came, as they did to Israel, in their disobedience, in their deviations, in their idolatries, and called them to return to the Lord, the great inducement that they used to get the people to repent was this. This is certainly the case in Joel. What a great revivalist was Joel.

He called the people back. His was the revival message. We would have him on this platform the moment he appeared, because he is par excellence, the revival prophet of the Old Testament.

Joel chapter 12. He says here, Yet even now it's not too late, saith the Lord. Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, with weeping, and with murmuring, and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God.

Why, Joel? Have you got any help for us here? Have you got any inducement? I've got every inducement in the world. For, for, he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness and repenteth him,

he's quick to take his hand off you in chastening. And it was this lovely revelation of Jehovah, merciful and gracious, that was used to induce the people.

And I know nothing that induces me to repent. Why are you so slow to repent? Why are you so slow to admit you're wrong? Why are you so slow to put things right with your husband or wife? Why? Nothing's going to happen to you, man, except you're going to be forgiven. Return to the Lord, for he's gracious and merciful, and there's no situation beyond him, no matter what a mess it's in.

He's merciful and gracious. Years ago, I was called up for a jury, to be in the jury for a case, and I looked forward to it because I discovered that in my work as, uh, itinerant work I was largely moving only among Christians, from Christian home to Christian home. But here for two weeks, I had to keep company, all day long, with the other members of the journey, jury, who were, as far as I could tell, men who didn't know the Lord.

And they asked me to be the foreman. I suppose I was the only man on the jury who was wearing a collar and tie. I tell you, I liked those fellas.

I enjoyed it. I enjoyed being with them. Just as when I was in a ward, I really enjoyed being with young converted.

I loved them! And I can't understand why. I didn't do any big preach, I can tell you. I just let them know I was a preacher and loved the Lord.

But more than that, I didn't do. I never heard a bad word. I never heard an unclean word.

When I was in those two wards. I don't know what the answer is. Is that why it was? Was it the respect for the nurses? Or did they think we've got a preacher among us? I don't think it was.

I don't know why. Well anyway, once again, how do we get on to that? Oh yes, it was this law court. And I was the foreman.

And we had, well it was at least interesting, the rascals that we had brought before us. Accused of all sorts of things. And I never heard one man repent.

And then they all pleaded not guilty. And if occasionally a man did plead guilty, it was only because he was told that his sentence might be less if he did. But there was no repentance.

And the reason was obvious. We weren't there to dish out forgiveness. We were there to execute justice.

And if a man had repented, it wouldn't have made a real difference. He would have been sentenced nonetheless. But in heaven's court, it's not a court of justice.

It's a court of mercy for those who confess their wrong. And as we could only see that, there'd be a movement to the sinner's place that we'd never known before. That's what happens in revival.

Why are people repenting as they are when God moves in a greater way? It's because somehow the news has got abroad that our gods are forgiving God. And I remember sitting in a fellowship meeting in Uganda years ago, and some of us are hoping to go at the end of this month. And God gave me a thought.

I was thinking of that verse from one of the psalms, in Israel, God is known for a refuge. And I said, in Uganda, God is known as a forgiving God. Even the wicked man, even the man doing their dreadful things, he knows he's sinning against a God who's ready to pardon.

That's the reason why there's revival. And you talk about people being saved. You don't talk about them so many people believed.

In those areas in Africa where they hadn't known as yet a deep moving of conviction of sin, as has been known in East Africa. When I went there, so many people believed. But in East Africa, so many people are repenting.

Oh yes, faith is taken for granted, that comes, yes. But only in the soil of penitence. And nothing provokes us, induces us to take the sinner's place, as knowing that our God's merciful and gracious.

Gracious and kind art thou when sinners call. Lastly and most important, it was because he was the merciful and gracious that he ever sent Jesus. Thank you, God, for sending Jesus.

We didn't deserve it. If nothing in the world tells me that you're merciful and gracious, the fact that you did not spare your only son but gavest him for a world undone, assures me you're merciful and gracious and that with him you'll freely give me all things. Years ago, Stanley Volk and I were in California in a very unusual young people's rally in a great music hall, it had been used as, now it was used for the preaching of the gospel.

And it's for the young people and the place was packed. And we were there just to learn and enjoy and appreciate this presentation of the gospel. And a young man, I don't know, heard much of him since, McGee, I think his name was, after lots of singing and much else, which everybody seemed to appreciate, he came to the rostrum to give his message.

He said, young people, as I've been sitting down there, I said, oh God, help me to love these people. Help me to love these young people. I can't preach without love.

He said, young people, I love you. And then he switched off and told us about his son. He was a young father, he'd got one son as yet.

And he told us of his joy and this boy and his ambitions. And he was quite sure that one day he was going to be what they called an all-American footballer. And oh, he would love that boy, he was so proud.

And then he said this, but though I love you, I don't love you enough to give my boy for you. In fact, I think I'd rather kill you than let you touch him. I don't love you enough to let you injure, take my son.

But he said, God did. God did. He so loved the world that he did not spare that only son.

Gave his son that whoso believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. And oh, in that context, that familiar text, loom large. I don't love you enough to let you take my son, but God did.

One of the new translations, I don't know which it is, has made a very helpful, significant change, and absolutely true to the Greek. God loved the world so much that he gave his only begotten son. I like that.

He loved the world with his back to him so much that he's willing to do what no earthly father would be willing to do for another. And it's only because he's merciful and gracious. He saw man in his miseries.

He saw, moreover, that those miseries were caused by his own fault. But that didn't stop mercy being available to them. Because he's merciful and gracious, and Jesus was the supreme gift, the undeserved gift of God for us.

Jehovah, merciful and gracious. And yet, holy too. And the wonderful thing about Calvary is not only is there love and mercy, grace and mercy there, but justice too.

He was set forth as a propitiator through his name to declare God's righteousness, that whoso believeth on Jesus might be saved, that God might be just and the justifier. There's that lovely hymn beneath the cross of Jesus, one line of which says, O safe and blessed shelter, O refuge tried and sweet, O Christy place, where heaven's love and heaven's justice meet. And Psalm 85 says, Mercy and truth are met together there.

Mercy that would save the sinner, truth that would condemn him, but they're met, they become reconciled in the blood of Jesus Christ. Righteousness, which we don't seem to possess, and peace for the sinner have kissed. The Christy place where heaven's love and heaven's justice.

And so this is the first pair of words. Man, you're going to need him, merciful and gracious. Happy the man who's learning how to touch God on his weak point and become a candidate for mercy, yes.

But for grace too, isn't it almost unbelievable that your wrongs, the things in which your conscience accuses you, have not disqualified you for the mercy that flows from the cross? It's all been satisfied there, justice has received its due, and now there's mercy and grace for the sinner. Doesn't this give us every incentive to take the sinner's place? This is what produces repentance. The goodness of God leads men to repentance.

He's not the God with the big stick. The stick's already been laid on the back of his son in mercy and grace, and what you think is a big stick, what you think is some threatening dispensation or something or other, is but arms beckoning you to come back. Put yourself in the wrong.

Grace is only for wrong ones, then put yourself in the wrong. Give up this justification of ourselves and present ourselves in these days as candidates indeed for the merciful and the gracious. That's the first pair of words.

Never forget them. Amen. Amen.

Let us bow our heads. I want you to sing with your head bowed. The greatest thing in all my life is knowing you.

An African once said, I never saw Jesus till I saw him through my tears, through my sins. That's it, till I saw him through my sins. I saw he's got something good for sinners, and I was one such.

Already you know many areas about which the Spirit has been convicted you. What an inducement to take the sinner's place before the merciful and gracious one revealed at the cross. Let's sing it then.

The greatest thing in all my life is knowing you. The greatest thing in all my life is knowing you. The greatest thing in all my life is knowing you.

David said, I love Jehovah because he's heard my cry. He's proved himself the merciful and gracious. And that's going to be your testimony if it isn't already.

In measure it is, but there's a greater measure perhaps. Sing it once again. The greatest thing in all my life is knowing you.

The greatest thing in all my life is knowing you. I want to know you more. I want to know you still.

Let's say the grace together. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

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