

1. God Brings Charges Against His Unfaithful People

- a. Hear!
- b. Arise and let me hear your case!
 - i. Speak up and tell me of how I have broken my covenant
 - ii. Present your evidence as to how I have abandoned you and been unfaithful!
- c. Heaven and Earth as Witnesses to this case
 - i. Mountains as witnesses
 - ii. Foundations of the earth as witnesses
 - iii. Recalls the covenant given in Deuteronomy (4:26; 30:19; 31:28), that set before the Israelites life and death, blessing and curse
- d. God prepares His case before Creation
 - i. Unless the mountains could be rooted up and torn down, there would always be a witness of God’s covenant faithfulness
 - ii. “If these walls could speak” is the idea, for the mountains know the truth and bear witness of God’s enduring and covenant faithfulness to rebel Israel.
- e. For the LORD has a case against His people and He will be lodging a charge with them
 - i. This is the language of covenant breaking: somebody didn’t keep their word and were unfaithful to their vows
 - ii. The language of intimacy, personal passion more like unto a husband and wife or a father and child than a mere judge.
 1. “This is the plea of a loving God, whose heart has been broken by His people’s rejection of Him.” David Prior

2. God Reminds His People of His Grace

- a. Note the intensely emotional “O, my people!” used in v3
 - i. God is not dispassionate towards His people, even when bringing a judgment against them
 - ii. He is deeply and personally involved with us, longing for our righteousness, our good, and delighting in our trusting loving obedience
- b. Questions – What is your accusation against Me?
 - i. What is your grievance with Me?
 1. What more could I do than what I have done, yet you reject Me?
 2. Explain to Me my unfaithfulness in this “marriage”? How have I been unfaithful to my promise?
 - ii. This is a good question to ask when you feel angry with God?
 1. What is it that we are really upset about?
 2. What is our accusation or grievance against Him?
 3. Is this grievance in the light of the entire picture of God’s dealings with us, or is it shortsighted and blind, having forgotten our forgiveness of sins? (2 Pet 1:9)
 - iii. Israel was acting as if God had let her down, and God is requiring the evidence of such faithlessness
 1. They had grown tired of God and of His expectations, like a spouse who had grown emotionally distant and blamed the other for their grief
 2. So, the Husband asks, passionately and gently: What have I done to you? Tell me before these witnesses!
 3. Yet, Israel was silent before the Faithful God
 - a. Thus it will be on the final day, when all men are asked why they have rejected God: silence before the Maker
 - b. God has revealed Himself, and Mankind has spurned Him and His grace in order to live autonomously...wanting to be like God, but not the way it is supposed to be
- c. History – Evidence of God’s Faithfulness

- i. Remember my redemption
 1. I brought you up out of Egypt
 - a. redeemed you from slavery – from the mud pits of Egypt and the oppressive hatred of your enemy
 2. I sent leaders to you for your good
 - a. I provided faithful preachers, committed leaders, and people bent on your good
 - b. I raised them up! I provided them for you! They were not a burden to you, but a blessing.
 - c. I wonder if our lack of spiritual leadership today is because of our forgetting of God’s sovereign grace towards us?
- ii. Remember my intervening faithfulness
 1. Balak and Balaam's attempt to curse ended in a blessing b/c of YHWH (Num 22-24)
 - a. Balak wanted to curse God’s people, but the LORD would not allow it, intervening for His people with a promise
 - b. “You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed.” (Num 22:12)
 - c. God emphatically blessed His people, showing Balaam that He is completely and utterly for them and will raise them up to glory because He is for them
 2. This coupling of Israel's sin at Shittim and the memorial of God's grace at Gilgal goes to emphasize YHWH's incredible faithfulness, patience, and *intervening* grace towards His faithless people.
 - a. Shittim is where the Israelites "whored" with Moabite women (Num 25) and Balaam was there causing it (Num 31:16) so that the LORD plagued Israel
 - b. Shittim is also where Israel crossed the Jordan River and the LORD dried it up for them
 - c. Gilgal was where the memorial stones were set up as the people crossed into the land of Canaan after the LORD saved them from Egypt (Josh 4:19-24)
 3. God’s point here seems to be to show that He would not let anything stand in the way of His people’s good even after their redemption from Exodus

3. God is Approached by Humble Trust, Not Extravagant Gifts

- a. What gift could a person bring to God?
 - i. What do you get somebody that has everything?
 - ii. “With what shall I come before the LORD?”
- b. Not empty religiosity
 - i. Israel had forgotten that their salvation, their redemption from Egypt and their protection from Moab’s King Balak was not due to their sacrifices, but due to God’s grace
 1. He redeemed them and brought them out of Egypt BEFORE the sacrificial system was established
 2. He redeemed them and loved them BEFORE they had done any good works
 3. Now they were acting as if their sacrifices, the quality of them and the abundance of them, was what built their covenant relationship with the LORD
 - ii. Israel was wealthy and could provide the sacrificial animals easily
 1. Not that it was cheap: a year old calf had to be invested in for a year
 2. And a burnt offering was entirely consumed by fire, so there was no “return” on such a gift
 - a. Unlike many of our “donations”, which actually give us something in return (tax write-off, comfortable building, etc.)
 3. But the idea was that by bringing such a requirement, they could then sin boldly, for they believed that God only wanted their sacrifices, their good works of religiosity performed in the Temple
 - a. Like today, they thought God just wanted them to “go to church” and pay their tithes

- b. “What more do you want, God?”
 - iii. Neither the quality (my firstborn) nor the quantity (thousands) of sacrifices delight the LORD
 - 1. Micah takes the argument to the absurd here to make a point:
 - a. just as there was an animal given to the LORD as a substitute for the firstborn, what if I gave my actual firstborn? Would that be enough for you, God?!
 - b. What if I gave thousands upon thousands of sacrifices and brought thousands of streams of oil? Would that be enough to get you off my back?
 - 2. Israel was dedicating their best offerings to the LORD, but using these gifts as a “payoff” so that they could keep their hearts from Him and follow their own desires
 - iv. Thus, they simply went through the motions, rather than exacting the real sacrificial change of humility, hearts crying out for righteousness in them and through them
 - 1. They could give every animal they had, every bit of wealth to the LORD, but if they withheld *themselves* it was fruitless, empty religion
 - 2. The people had brought everything they owned, but they had withheld that which the LORD truly desires: their own hearts in love and covenant fidelity to Him!!
 - a. Just like Jacob when he returned to Esau, sending everything he had across the river hoping that his brother would forgive him
 - i. He sent all his wealth, his family, but he did not send himself
 - ii. Only after he had wrestled with the LORD and given himself to the LORD, did he find peace
 - 3. Israel had forgotten her former sins, had forgotten God’s sovereign grace in her redemption, had forgotten God’s gracious and unilateral protection and provision in the wilderness and had come to believe that extravagant gifts were the means to her salvation from Assyria.
 - a. “Profound unbelief in god’s gracious character and actions induces such spiritual blindness, and as a result it debases the covenant of grace, based upon unilateral love, in to a non-loving, bargaining contract...Blinded to God’s gracious character and acts, [Man] reasons within his own depraved frame of reference: he need not change, God must change.” – Bruce Waltke
 - b. How like us, O Man! We, who, rather than repent and humble ourselves in total dependence, assume that God can be bought off rather than coming undone and trusting completely in His Son, Jesus, substituting our own gifts, instead. Such an approach will never suffice.

4. God Requires True Faith

- a. He has already shown you what is good, what He requires:
 - i. Deuteronomy 10:12-13
 - ii. One could not claim ignorance here, for the LORD has revealed the covenant relationship that He requires
 - iii. The LORD never allowed ritual or law to usurp loving dependence and trusting obedience as the means to the covenant relationship where sin must be atoned for.
- b. Do justice - what is right
 - i. What is “good” is further defined as “righteous” – the way it is supposed to be
 - ii. What is “right?”
 - 1. It is that which God has revealed to be consistent with His character, that which we are created to image
 - 2. It is summed up by Jesus: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matt 22:37-40)
 - iii. Love God with ALL of you, and love your neighbor as yourself:
 - 1. Rather than bringing grand gifts to God, how are you treating your brother?
 - 2. “First, be reconciled to your brother. Then, come and offer your gift.” (Matt 5:24)

- c. Love kindness –
 - i. First, “love” is the language of covenant spiritual commitment
 - 1. It is not a mere feeling, but a deep spiritual commitment to something that is rooted in the affections and desires of the heart
 - 2. To love is to show oneself faithful to its object, to respect her and honor the one to whom his love has been set.
 - ii. Second, “kindness” is an extraordinary word, *chesed*,
 - 1. It is an important covenant word with a multi-faceted meaning of faithful, loving, covenantal love - what God has towards His people
 - 2. It is the word most commonly attached to God’s covenanted love for His people and describes well the nature of this covenant: love, mercy, grace, and kindness, with all its spiritual obligations suited to it
 - iii. This idea of covenant kindness has attached to it a particular love toward the weaker: God’s *chesed* love toward His people should be imitated in His people’s *chesed* love toward the weaker
 - 1. In fact, it is often used in deliverance, where the weaker party has no power to effect his circumstance or situation and the stronger party may show grace or mercy to alleviate the dependent party
 - 2. It is, therefore, closely related to “justice”, for whereby the weaker party has no power to deliver himself, the “*chesed*” of the stronger party moves him to act “justly” and deliver the oppressed
 - 3. So, “justice” is the action of delivering the oppressed weaker one, and “*chesed*” is the attitude of gracious merciful love behind the just action of deliverance
 - a. Israel had not shown justice or *chesed* toward their brothers
- d. Walk humbly with your God
 - i. “humbly” is actually “carefully” or “circumspectly”
 - ii. The idea is this: given the grace that God has shown to you in His covenant love, walk with Him in that light
 - 1. With all the obligations that come with His grace towards us
 - 2. Walk humbly, recognizing and treasuring Him as the gracious deliverer, the faithful provider, and your glorious protector
 - 3. Extend the same grace toward your brother, as you are supposed to, being made in the image of God
- e. These things exemplify and summarize what true faith in the LORD looks like
 - i. True faith does what is right, what God has proclaimed is the way it’s supposed to be
 - ii. True faith loves kindness, both shown towards him by God, and given by him towards his brother
 - iii. True faith walks in the light of God’s grace, gratefully and joyfully acknowledging God’s salvation and giving such gracious deliverances to others so that God is glorified

Conclusion: In this passage we see the loving God, crying out to His people to remember His sovereign grace and to walk in the light of such salvation. What is it that pleases the LORD? It is not the superfluous extravagance of our gifts, but the faithful exclusive love of our hearts that reveals itself in bearing His glorious image rightly. To do what is right, as He does, to love that faithful covenant kindness, as He does, and to walk with Him in the light of His sovereign grace toward us so that we are humbled before Him, ever dependent upon Him, and knowing His righteous works most poignantly and powerfully extended through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we might walk in the newness of such life, giving honor to Him in all things. For such we were made, to such we are called, and by His sovereign grace, such we will be now and forever as we fix our eyes upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.