

Pentecost 9 / July 30, 2023

Deuteronomy 7:8

“It is because the Lord loves you.”

Do you ever wonder why? It is a characteristic of human nature to wonder why. We wonder about all kinds of things, like why the sky is blue and the sun is yellow. Apparently sunlight is actually in the green spectrum. It appears yellow because of the earth's atmosphere, which also affects the colour of the sky. If we stood on the moon the sky would be black. Just in case you ever wondered. We wonder why things happen. When bad things happen, we wonder what we have done to deserve this. We wonder why good things happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people. A Rabbi name Harold Kushner wrote a book called, “When Bad Things Happen to Good People.” Life provides us with many occasions to wonder why bad things happen, but how often do we wonder why good things happen to us?

Kris Kristofferson had a hit song, called “Why me Lord?” Contrary to common usage, the singer asks why good things happen. He sang, “Why me Lord. What have I ever done to deserve even one of the pleasures I've known?” That's a good question. It speaks to our relationship with God, Israel's relationship with God and our text this morning. What have we done to deserve God's blessings and love? Moses' answer in our text is “nothing.”

We do nothing to deserve God's blessings. He gives them because of Himself. God is love! He gave good things to ancient Israel, not because of their number, or glorious history. Certainly not because of their faithfulness! He gave good things because of His love. He gives good things to us, because of His love. It is because the Lord loves you. We value most highly physical comforts, but the greatest good that God gives is forgiveness and life through faith in Christ. No matter what bad we experience or good we receive in time, the greatest good in time and eternity is Christ as our Lord and Saviour. God gives Him because He loves us.

It can be difficult to clearly discern the role God plays in the bad things in life. Sometimes bad people receive good things and good people receive bad things. Although there is a spectrum of good and evil in humanity, we all are sinful in comparison to the holiness of God. Some sins cry to heaven for justice. Not everyone sins to the same degree as the most infamous criminals, yet we all sin and fall short of the glory of God. God judges us not in comparison to the sins of others, but in comparison to His righteousness. The condemnation of sin is death. Death comes to every one, because all are sinners. Death will come to all of us.

But that's not the whole story. God is righteous, but God is also love. God expresses His righteousness in love. God gives the greatest expression of His righteousness in love in giving Jesus to share our humanity and bear our sins on the cross. The greatest good is not wealth, good health and pleasure. The greatest good is forgiveness and life in Christ. It is not something we earn or in any way deserve. It is the gift of God. It is a gift God wants all to receive. It is a gift God gives freely to all who believe in Christ as Saviour. God gives the gifts of faith and forgiveness because He loves us.

We have the innate desire to assign credit and affix blame. We take credit for good things. We deserve them. We affix blame for bad things. Other people cause or deserve them. But its not so simple. Humanly speaking, sometimes good things happen to people who don't deserve them. Sometimes bad things happen to those who don't deserve them. The book of Job is about a man who received good things and who also experienced great suffering. That's life. People assumed Job received good things, because he was good person. When bad things happened, they presumed he wasn't as good as he appeared and that he was being punished for hidden sins. Actually, it was because of neither. In experiencing good things and in suffering evil, Job was loved by God. In all things God loves us and works for our eternal good.

The book of Deuteronomy is Moses' last words to the people of Israel, the children of those he led out of slavery in Egypt. Moses would soon die. Israel would shortly afterwards cross the Jordan River and take possession of the land the Lord promised their ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He reminded them that the Lord's love was the cause for all the blessings they had received and for every blessing they would receive in the Promised Land. The Lord delivered them from the mighty king who had enslaved their ancestors. The Lord would dispossess nations more numerous than they and give them the land. The Lord would do this for them, not because of their strength or numbers, but because He loved them. The most important thing for us to know is that the Lord loves us. We know He loves us, because He gave Jesus to redeem us from sin, captivity to the devil and from the condemnation of death. It is because the Lord loves you!

Moses said, “*You are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.*” Why did the Lord choose Israel to be His people? Was there some innate spiritual quality that made them more worthy than any other nation to be chosen as the people God loved? Moses says “no.” The Lord chose them and their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, because He loved them. It sounds like a circular argument. It makes no logical sense. The point is that God’s love is not based upon or influenced by the object of His love. His love is based on His nature. God is love. He loves not because someone is loveable. His love makes us loveable. He loved Israel and the patriarchs. He promised and gave them the land of Canaan, because of His love.

God’s love is based on His nature and being. It doesn’t change. It isn’t affected by negative behaviour, as is our love. We might love someone today and tomorrow find their behaviour so deplorable that we hate them. Human love seeks an object worthy of love. When the object is no longer worthy, it becomes an object of wrath. Israel sinned greatly against the Lord. His love never failed, because it is based on His nature as love and His righteous being. God doesn’t love us because we are lovable. God’s love makes us loveable. St. John writes, “*In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to make atonement for our sins.*” Because love is the nature of His being, God’s love is not subject to change as is human love. God’s love is everlasting. It is because the Lord loves you.

Israel and the patriarchs were no more loveable than any other people. God’s love made them loveable. His righteousness made them holy and righteous in His sight. In His foreknowledge the Lord knew a vast majority of Israel would turn from Him in disbelief and worship idols. He knew that if He sent prophets to foreign nations they would turn from their idols and embrace Him as their God and Saviour. He knew the hardness of Israel’s heart, but still He chose to love them. Despite their constant backsliding, He persisted in loving them. Why? Moses says it is because, “*the Lord your God is the faithful God.*” God did this to show Israel and through them the world, the nature of His being as love. It is because the Lord loves you!

Love and faithfulness are God’s nature and the essence of His being. We can come to Him in our sins for forgiveness. God has demonstrated His love in giving Jesus to live as one of us. We know He is with us in the both good and the bad things of life. He will work all things in our lives for our eternal good. God gave Jesus to die for our sins. He won’t give up on us. He will continually call us back to Himself. God raised Jesus for our salvation. When we turn to Him in repentance, He will receive us as children. Good and bad happen to everyone in this world of sin and death. The greatest good has happened for all people. God gave Jesus to be our Saviour. He gave Jesus, because He loves us. May the Lord open our hearts to receive His love in Christ Jesus! May the Lord bless us to live in His love in time and eternity! In Jesus’ Name. Amen