

*'Hesed...A God Abounding in Lovingkindness'*

Based on Exodus 34:1-7 and other passages

Delivered on Sunday, July 5, 2020, Absecon Presbyterian Church by Lisa Whitaker

Just a heads up as I start . . this is just going to be the tip of the iceberg in sharing what I am about to share . . . I hope it sparks your interest enough that you will do some investigating yourself!

Last spring, I had been reading in Isaiah and the Psalms and noticed the number of times that the word "lovingkindness" appeared. I was over to Ocean City Tabernacle last June to a Michael Card concert. As Michael was sharing in between songs, he comes out with this statement, "I have been looking into a Jewish word HESED, that is most often translated lovingkindness in the Old Testament." I let out a low shriek and sat up in my chair. Later I found out that he had written a whole book just about this one word.

I started reading Michael Card's book, *"Inexpressible - Hesed and Mystery of God's Lovingkindness"* and I started investigating this word. What I found was: this word is used 246 times in the Old Testament. It's the term used the most to describe the character of God throughout the Old Testament.

The problem is, it is a difficult word to translate into another language because we don't have one word that means exactly the same as Hesed. So, translators have used different words and combinations of words, to try to make the point.

I understand this a bit because of learning a second language and living in the culture of that language. When I lived in Russia, I soon discovered that there are Russian words that just don't sound or mean the same when you translate them into English, and the same is true from English to Russian.

Example: the Russian word "Gulat" . . . walk ,without a purpose (wander, meander, stroll) But on SUNDAY, if you went out on the main street to "gulat," then you would get dressed up, put on your high heels and SLOWLY walk up and down the main boulevard, with friends, stopping at a bench to rest and chat. It was a whole event that took the entire afternoon. If I were to say to an English speaking friend who just learned the word - and they were to look up the textbook definition . . .they would miss so much of the nuances and other aspects of the word "gulat."

This is how the word Hesed is. It means so much more than a textbook translation. Most translations use anywhere from 10-15 different words to try and capture what Hesed means in the different contexts it is used. Eugene Peterson, in the Message translates it 46 different ways, trying to specifically capture the meaning in each context. That is how loaded, complex and rich this word is.

I want us to look at a story in Exodus where this word is used. God uses Hesed twice, when He is describing Himself in Exodus 34:1-7. The story is that Moses is on Mt. Sinai waiting to receive the 10 commandments for a SECOND time, because he broke the first tablets when he came down from the mountain and found the children of Israel worshipping a golden calf. So, he made a second set of tablets to replace the first ones. Moses says to God, we do not want to go forward without Your Presence . He then say to God, I want to see you. God says, I will hide you in the rock and I will pass

by you and then Moses asks God who are you, or what is your name/ character and this is where God uses the word Hesed – two times.

Exodus 34:6,7 - God says to Moses . . . “Yahweh, Yahweh God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in HESED (lovingkindness) and truth, who keeps HESED (lovingkindness) for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin, yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of father’s on the children and the grandchild to the third and fourth generations”

God starts off with what in our Bibles say LORD, LORD - and LORD is in all caps which means in the English Bibles, that the Hebrew word they are translating is Y-H-W-H ! What we commonly pronounce Yahweh. There is so much more we could say about that and I’m sure Pastor Drew could explain this a lot better than I can, but the short version is that Yahweh is spelled with just four consonants Y-H-W-H, because ancient Hebrew was written with just the consonants, no vowels. Those who knew the language, understood what was being written by filling in the vowels as they read.

We do not know for sure how to pronounce Y-H-W-H but the most common way it has been pronounced is Yahweh. Ok, so back to the text – Exodus 34:6,7, God says to Moses, “Yahweh, Yahweh God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in HESED (lovingkindness) and truth who keeps HESED (lovingkindness) for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin, yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of father’s on the children and the grandchild to the third and fourth generations.”

What I want us to consider this morning is . . . when God speaks about His own character. He says, “Yahweh is my name . . . I am compassionate, gracious, slow to anger . . . ABOUNDING IN HESED, who KEEPS HESED for thousands. (some versions say, abounding in Hesed and maintaining Hesed).

What does it mean that we love and serve a God of lovingkindness? In the Psalm today, number 145, verse 8 ,David is quoting the Exodus passage, but here are a few other verses you may know but didn’t realize that HESED was a part of them.

Psalm 23:6: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. It says, “Surely goodness and HESED shall follow me all the days of my life.”

Psalm 107:1: Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, His LOVE (or Hesed) endures forever, then Hesed appears 5 more times in that Psalm.

Psalm 136: Hesed is in every verse, 36 times, in all 36 verses this word is used. Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, His HESED is everlasting.

Lamentations 3:22: The Lord’s lovingkindness (HESED) never ceases, for His compassions never fail, they are new every morning, great is thy faithfulness.

Hosea 6:6: For I delight in loyalty (HESED) rather than sacrifice.

Micah 6:8: He has told you what is good and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness (HESED) and to walk humbly with your God.

These are just a few of the times Hesed is used. Hesed/lovingkindness is a key aspect of Who God is. God expresses Hesed/lovingkindness toward us. Because we are made in the image of God: We are to express Hesed/lovingkindness toward God and we are to express Hesed/lovingkindness toward one another. We are even to express Hesed/lovingkindness toward those to whom we consider our enemies.

Two examples of Hesed: Last year, an offering for some young women in North Africa. The offering fed them through the quarantine a tangible expression of God's lovingkindness. I expected a small donation when I asked, but people came through with enough to feed these women throughout this difficult time.

Then there was the caregiver Isabelle, who helped with my mom, who as you may know, passed away last month. She was the secretary here for many years, so many of you know her. Isabelle's Hesed toward Mom was singing over her. My mom had heard her beautiful voice and asked her to sing for her. In the last meeting Isabelle had with my mom, she sang "Because He Lives" in her native language over my Mom when she was in her last few days here.

We receive Hesed (lovingkindness) from God and from others. We express Hesed (lovingkindness) to God and to others, even to our enemies. We do this because we are made in the image of God, we are live with the same character that God shows. Awaken your spirit to God's Hesed or lovingkindness toward you. Awaken your spirit to how others are expressing Hesed/lovingkindness toward you.

Seek out opportunities to express Hesed to others, especially those to whom you would not normally express lovingkindness to. If you are looking for some rich summer reading, not junk food, but a surf and turf meal. Try reading these two books: Inexpressible by Michael Card and God Has A Name by John Mark Comer.