

BEING THANKFUL FOR THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD

Although the holiday known as “Thanksgiving” has come and gone, I hope our attitude of thankfulness has not “come and gone” with it! We have much to be thankful for, don’t we?

1) We can—and should—be thankful for the **gifts God gives us** like family, friends, food, and forgiveness! **James 1:17** reminds us: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”

2) We can—and should—be thankful for the **things that God does for us**. For years I have been intrigued by **Psalm 40:5** “Many, O Lord my God, are **thy wonderful works** which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: **they cannot be reckoned up** in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.”

I look at this verse as a challenge to “count your blessings”—**in the order** in which they have occurred! But “they cannot be reckoned up in order”—and “they are more than can be numbered!” You would label something God did for you as **the first blessing in your life**, but while thinking of the second, you would remember something that happened **before** the first and consequently would have a “**new**” first!

So we should be thankful for **what God gives**—and we should be thankful for **what God does**. What I felt led to talk to you this morning about, though, is from a third “category”—for lack of a better word. What is that?

Being thankful for **who God is!** Theologians suggest there are anywhere from 15 to 32 attributes—characteristics—of God. Without the Bible, we would know—with a **very limited understanding**—only 5 or 6 of them! But **because of the Bible**—this wonderful gift **from God** where He has declared to us both **His thoughts and His heart**—we have the entirety of what God **wants us to know** about Himself!

Don’t misunderstand what I just said. As mentioned last week, the Bible doesn’t give us **everything there is to know about God**. **Heaven cannot contain God**—so a book cannot possibly contain everything there is **to know about God**. But...it can—and does—contain everything God **wants us to know**—and everything we **need to know!**

The attribute we will be looking at this morning is the **longsuffering of God**. **What is** the longsuffering of God? It literally means “long-tempered.” It carries the idea of God patiently “putting up with us” when what we really deserve is judgment. **Why look** at the longsuffering of God on Thanksgiving? Two simple reasons. **Reason 1):** Because all of us here this morning **have experienced** God’s longsuffering—whether we realize it or not! **Reason 2):** Because we should be thankful that God **is** longsuffering! And I believe we **will be** if we spend some time thinking about it. That is what we will be doing this morning.

1. The longsuffering of God in the days of Noah

Please turn to Genesis 6 and follow along as I read verses 1-8. Did God exercise longsuffering in the days of Noah? He certainly did! How do we know? Because the Bible says as much!

A. The declaration of God’s longsuffering

I Peter 3:20 “Which sometime were disobedient, when once the **longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah**, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.”

Let’s look again at Gen 6:3. Commentators are not in 100% agreement as to what this verse means, but we know from what we read a few minutes ago that the people were wicked (vs 5), God was going to destroy them (vs 7), and that Noah had found grace in the eyes of the Lord (vs 8).

My take on verse 3 is this: God was bringing judgment, but His longsuffering would give them 120 years. His Spirit—meaning, I believe, the Holy Spirit—would convict them and work on them through men like Enoch and Noah. **Barnes** put it like this: “Justice said, ‘Cut them down;’ but mercy interceded....” And so Noah and his sons—and possibly others—built an ark.

That's not all, though. In II Peter 2:5, the Bible says that Noah was a "preacher of righteousness." He preached judgement was coming—and that they needed to repent.

B. The demonstration of God's longsuffering

Back to Gen 6:5. A question commonly asked regarding this verse is: "Just how **wicked were** these people that moved God to put an end-date on His longsuffering?" Answer: "We don't know—at least not exactly!"

I believe it was **way more wicked then**—than it is now—for these 2 reasons:

1) **Every** imagination of the thoughts of his heart was **only evil continually**.

Is that true **now**? Is every thought...of every person...only evil—all the time? I don't think so!

We have "religious" people that try to do good. They have **thoughts of God** and try to do right—even though they try to please Him the **wrong way**. In Acts 10, we read the account of God sending Peter to Cornelius—**an unsaved man**, but certainly not a wicked man by the standards of the world.

2) There are **more than 8** righteous people in the world right now! In fact, I believe we have more than 8 righteous people—those who personally know Jesus as their Savior and are born again—here in this church!

But there were only 8 in Noah's day—him, his wife, 3 sons, and their 3 wives.

C. The termination of God's longsuffering

Did God keep His Word? Did He bring about the judgment He had declared? He did, didn't He? God's desire was for them to repent—and He gave them a timeframe to do so. But they failed to repent, and judgment came—just as God said. We see that in Gen 7.

--In Gen 7:1, God tells Noah to come into the ark

--In vs 4, God tells Noah it will rain in 7 days

--In vs 7, we see Noah and his family going into the ark

--In vss 8-9, we see the animals going into the ark

--Now vs 16. If I'm understanding it right, Noah **went in and sat**—for 7 days—until **God shut the door!**

--In verses 17-20, the flood is described.

--Now vs 21. Animals died—and every man!

Before we move on, I want to consider one last thing... D. The application of God's longsuffering

What is it that God wants us to know about His long-suffering? There are several; here are two:

1) That God is exercising longsuffering **right now**.

2) That God's longsuffering **has an end-date**—and we don't know when that is!

Take your Bibles and turn to II Peter 3, beginning with verse 3. In the last days, **there will be scoffers**.

--In vs 4, we see **what the scoffers say**: "Where is the promise of His coming?" Who's coming? Jesus' coming! A scoffer, then, is someone who **mocks the idea** that Jesus is coming back to judge the world!

--That's not all. A scoffer is also someone who **denies that there was a world-wide flood**. We see that in the end of vs 4 and vss 5-6.

--In vs 9, we see **the reason** for the delay of Jesus' return—He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

--Just as in the days of Noah when God **waited 120** years before He brought judgment, God is longsuffering and delaying judgment now.

--And just as God had Noah and his sons and probably Enoch "**sounding the alarm**," God has people now that are warning others to flee from the judgment to come.

--And just like God provided **the ark** as a way to escape judgment in the days of Noah; God now **provides Jesus** as a way to escape the coming judgment for our sins.

So...are you in the ark? Have you trusted Jesus as your Substitute...your Savior...the One who can keep you safe from judgment because He died to pay the penalty that you deserve? Important question, isn't it?

Did **other people** see Noah and his sons **building** the ark? Yes, they did! Did just **seeing the ark built** do them any good? No, it didn't! In the same way, it doesn't do any good for us **just to know about** Jesus.

You need to personally **come to Him** and **receive** Him and **put your trust in what He did** on the cross to save

you—not on your efforts to get rid of your sin and save yourself! Have you come to Christ? If not, you need to!

Many of us have come to Christ, though. Many of us are **in the ark**, so to speak. But I wonder how faithfully we are “sounding the alarm.” Are we like Enoch—and Noah? Are we warning people that judgment is coming? I’m glad the Lord is long-suffering for **their** sake—but I’m also glad He is long-suffering for **our** sake!

Next let’s consider.... **2. The longsuffering of God in the wilderness**

So where do we learn about God’s longsuffering towards His people when they wandered in the wilderness? In the book of Exodus...and Leviticus...and Numbers...and Deuteronomy! But since 4 books would be impossible to cover in the hour we have left 😊, I want us to turn to Psalm 106. Psalm 106 gives **somewhat of a recap** of the wanderings of God’s people in the wilderness.

As we go through some of the examples found in this Psalm, I am going to make some applications to us as believers. Please know that **the church**—meaning those of us who are born again and are God’s children—have **not replaced** Israel. God has a future plan for the literal nation of Israel in the Promised Land!

But some of the ways **God dealt** with His people then, **He deals with us now**. And some of the ways that the nation of Israel **failed God** are similar to how **we fail God** now. We will be looking at 4 in this chapter.

A. Didn’t remember what God did

--mid of vs 7 “they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies”

--1st part of vs 13 “They soon forgat His works...”

--vs 21 “They forgat God their Saviour, which had done great things in Egypt”

--God’s people forgot the bondage and slavery and hopeless condition they had been under in Egypt.

--They forgot the plagues that had come upon the Egyptians—but did not touch them!

--They forgot how God had parted the Red Sea for them—and drowned their enemies in the same sea!

What about us?

--We were under the penalty of hell because of our sins, without God and without hope.

--We were unable to free ourselves from the penalty—and needed someone to deliver us.

--But then we learn that God in His mercy sent Jesus Christ to **pay our hell for us** and that all we need to do is **receive Him**. So we call on the name of the Lord and God saves us, just as He promises He would.

--He removes our filthy garments and clothes us with the garments of salvation—the robe of righteousness—and we experience the joy of knowing that God loves us and forgave us and calls us His own!

--But **then we forget**...and leave our first love. We “get over” the wonder of it all! We stop enjoying and appreciating the mercy that God showed us.

What does God do in response to our forgetfulness? He **ought to** deal harshly with us, but He doesn’t!

Instead, God is longsuffering and “puts up with” our forgetfulness and ingratitude.

B. Despised what God gave

We see that in the first part of vs 24: “Yea, they despised the pleasant land...”

How pleasant—how good—was the land that God had given them? It was a land so fruitful that the cluster of grapes they brought back had to be carried by two men using a pole (Numbers 13:23)! It was called a land that “flowed with milk and honey” because there was an abundance of grass for the cows to feed on—and an abundance of crops for bees to pollinate and produce honey.

And yet, **they despised it!** They knew the land was good because some of them saw it first-hand when they checked it out, but they **were also giants** in the land! There were **battles and hardships and trials and work** that they would have to do to get there, and they decided that **it was not worth it**.

What about us? Certainly, we **wouldn’t despise** our Promised Land—**meaning heaven**—would we? Certainly, the descriptions of heaven in the Bible are **enough to encourage us and motivate us** and keep us fighting the Lord’s battles, aren’t they? Aren’t the promises of God wiping away all tears from our eyes...and going to a place where there is no more death and no more sorrow and no more crying and no more pain enough to keep us marching to Zion? Isn’t the promise that we shall behold God—face to face—enough?

Sadly—for many of God’s children—those promises don’t seem to be enough! We **delight in the here and now so much** that we despise—or **at least treat lightly**—what God has in store for us in the future.

C.S. Lewis put it like this: “... [we are] like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.”

What does God do about our ingratitude and our despising of what He gives us? Does He **take it away** from us? No; He doesn’t! He continues to be longsuffering—and is **still preparing** a place for us. Aren’t you thankful that God is longsuffering?

There’s a 3rd thing we learn from the wandering in the wilderness. They... C. Doubted what God said We see that in the second half of vs 24 “...they believed not His Word.”

Not surprisingly, their doubt of God’s Word is connected with the Promised Land mentioned in the first part of the verse. The 12 spies had gone into the Promised Land on a 40-day recon mission. As mentioned just a little bit ago, they came back with a mixed report. The land **was good**—just as God said it was—but there were **giants in the land!** But God had promised them earlier that He **would give them** the land.

Exodus 23:20,23 “Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and **to bring thee into the place which I have prepared.** ²³ For **mine Angel shall go before thee,** and **bring thee in** unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: **and I will cut them off.**”

And Moses had sent out the spies because God told him too!

Numbers 13:1-2a “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, ² Send thou men, that they may **search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel.**”

But even though **God said** He would send an Angel that would go with them and that He would **drive out the inhabitants** of the land, they did not believe Him—even after all they had seen Him do to the Egyptians!

Again, I must ask, **What about us?** We **don’t doubt** what God has said, do we? Sadly, we do—way more often than we care to admit! **We know** God promises to take care of us—and **we have experienced** His care for us in the past—and yet we **doubt that He can care** for us in this “new” situation, whatever it might be. We know we are to **trust God**—not our own understanding—and yet, we **do lean** on our own understanding.

What does God do? He “brings the hammer down” for doubting Him, right? No; He remains longsuffering and patiently waits for us to come back to Him. Aren’t you glad God is longsuffering?

Not only did the Hebrew nation—and us—forget God and what He has done...and despise what He gives...and don’t believe what He says, they... D. Disobeyed what God said

We see that in the mid of vs 25 “...and hearkened not unto the voice of the LORD.”

Disbelief and disobedience often go hand in hand, don’t they? They **didn’t believe** God would help them with the giants in the land, so they **refused to go** into the land to conquer it. In fact, they went so far as to say it would have **been better to die in Egypt**—or even in the wilderness they had just passed through (Num 14:2)!

How did God respond? Numbers 14:12 says that God was going to smite them and disinherit them and make of Moses a new nation! God didn’t do that, though. Once again, He exercised longsuffering and let them live. But they didn’t get to go into the Promised Land. They wandered in the wilderness for 40 years.

They enjoyed some of God’s blessings—but missed out on many, many more. And they died—one by one—over the course of that 40 years. Only two people—Joshua and Caleb—entered into the Promised Land.

What about us? God’s people—at least, those who claim to be God’s people—**disobey** what God says. Worse than that, we don’t even **want to know** what God says! Here is the attitude of many—far too many!

‘God, thank you for creating me. Thank you for daily watching over me. Thank you for loving me so much that You came to earth in the Person of Jesus to die for my sins. Thank you for forgiveness—and the promise to allow me into heaven to spend eternity with you.

But...I’m busy, God. I have a lot going on in my life just trying to make a living and survive this crazy world. So...I don’t have time to read my Bible. I don’t have time to go to church. I don’t have time to pray.’

How **does God** respond to our disobedience—and our excuses? I couldn’t help but think of the parable of the fig tree that Jesus told in Luke 13. The owner came and looked for figs but didn’t find any. He told the keeper

of the vineyard “Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and found none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?” (Luke 13:7).

Remember what the vineyard keeper said? “Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it. And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.”

That, my friends, is what I believe God is doing in many of us!

--He is expecting fruit, but not finding any.

--He “digs around us” by bringing things into our lives to get our attention, but we remain disobedient.

--He even brings some dung—some manure—some trials into our lives to shake us up and wake us up—and yet we remain disobedient.

--And if it weren’t for the longsuffering of God, He would have cut us down by now, so we weren’t just cumbering the ground!

God is longsuffering, isn’t He? But why? Why is God so longsuffering? Is God longsuffering because He wants to “trick you” into believing that He doesn’t care...or know about...or see... your disobedience?

No! God is longsuffering because He wants you to repent! We see that in **Romans 2:4** “Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?”

So what does God want you to do with what you heard this morning?

1. If you’re not saved, God wants you to come to Him in humility and repentance. God wants you to see the danger you are in and come to Him. God is not willing that any should perish—that is why He sent Jesus to pay our punishment for us! But you need to receive Him. You need to get in the ark—not just know about it!

2. Second, for those of us who are children of God, are you presuming on God’s lovingsuffering?

--Have you forgotten what He has done?

--Have you taken lightly what He has in store for you?

--Have you doubted God’s Word regarding His care for you?

--Are you knowingly, willingly disobeying what He says?

If so, humble yourself under the mighty hand of God!