BUILDING OUR VOCABULARY OF FAITH Water from Rock, April 4, 2017, Tim Smith

*13You have a mighty arm; strong is your hand, high your right hand. 14Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.* Psalm 89:13-14

INTRODUCTION

“To trust in God, we need a rich and accurate way of thinking and speaking about him to guide and support our life vision and our will. Such is present in the biblical language, of course, and it continued to be carefully crafted in the works of Christian writers well into the twentieth century.

Still today the Old Testament book of Psalms gives great power for faith and life. This is simply because it preserves a conceptually rich language about God and our relationships to him. If you bury yourself in Psalms, you emerge knowing God and understanding life…We learn from the psalms how to think and act in reference to God. We drink in God and God’s world from them. They provide a vocabulary for living Godward, one inspired by God himself. They show us who God is, and that expands and lifts and directs our minds and hearts.” (Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*)

In the past two weeks we have sought to build our vocabulary of faith by reflecting on:

“Righteousness” (tsedaqah) God’s faithfulness to His covenant;

“Justice” (mishpat) God acting to establish the heavenly norm or pattern on earth;

Today we reflect on God’s “steadfast love” (hesed).

STEADFAST LOVE (HESED)

The Stork and God’s Hesed

The Hebrew word for “stork” (hasidah) comes from the same root word for hesed, a word denoting Yahweh’s loyal love, mercy, kindness and goodness. “Always and everywhere the bird [stork] has been more or less protected on account of its fidelity to a chosen location, its fearlessness of man and the tender love between mated pairs and for its young.” (*International Standard Biblical* Encyclopedia) The stork was regarded for its devotion and kindness to its young, suggesting to the ancient Hebrews the deep, lasting, loyal love of God for His people. The Hebrew word for “stork” (hasidah) means “kindness”.

1. Hesed literally means “covenant faithfulness”, and is a unique concept so rich in meaning that it is variously translated “loving kindness”, “love”, “mercy”, “steadfast love”, “loyal love”, “covenant love”, and so on.
2. Hesed has both God and humans as its subject. Hesed means loyal, steadfast, faithful love based on a promise or covenant. To show hesed is to act in a loyal, loving way to a person.

David shows hesed “kindness” to Mephibosheth in order to honor his covenant with the father Jonathan in 1 Samuel 18:1-3 and 1 Samuel 20:14-17:

[2 Samuel 9:1-7] *David asked, ‘Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I may show kindness* (hesed) *for Jonathan’s sake?’ 2Now there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba, and he was summoned to David. The king said to him, ‘Are you Ziba?’ And he said, ‘At your service!’ 3The king said, ‘Is there anyone remaining of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness* (hesed) *of God?’ Ziba said to the king, ‘There remains a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet.’ 4The king said to him, ‘Where is he?’ Ziba said to the king, ‘He is in the house of Machir son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar.’ 5Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar. 6Mephibosheth son of Jonathan son of Saul came to David, and fell on his face and did obeisance. David said, ‘Mephibosheth!’ He answered, ‘I am your servant.’ 7David said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, for I will show you kindness* (hesed) *for the sake of your father Jonathan; I will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul, and you yourself shall eat at my table always.’*

1. Hesed is the principal word describing the loyal love, mercy, kindness and goodness of Yahweh, and the name for the covenant-keeping God.

[Exodus 34:5-6] *5The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, ‘The LORD.’ 6The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed,* *‘The LORD, the LORD,* *a God merciful and gracious,*

*slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love* (hesed) *and faithfulness.*

It is important to remember the context of this passage as Israel had just broken the covenant in their worship of the golden calf in Exodus 32. The history of Israel is a history of God’s unfailing, loyal love to them.

1. When used of Yahweh God, we may “identify three basic meaning of hesed, and these three meanings always interact – strength, steadfastness, and love. Any understanding of hesed that fails to suggest all three inevitably loses some of its richness.” (W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*)

PRAYERFUL REFLECTION ON GOD’S LOYAL LOVE (HESED)

Psalm 23:6 *“Surely goodness and mercy* (hesed) *will follow me all the days of my life…”*

[Note: hesed is used 127 times in the Psalms alone! If you want to know what hesed is, look to the Psalms.]

Psalm 51:1 *Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love* (hesed)*; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.*

Psalm 18:1-4 *1 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love* (hesed) *endures for ever! 2 Let Israel say, ‘His steadfast love* (hesed) *endures for ever.’ 3 Let the house of Aaron say, ‘His steadfast love* (hesed) *endures for ever.’ 4 Let those who fear the LORD say, ‘His steadfast love* (hesed) *endures for ever.’*

Lamentations 3:22-24 *22 The steadfast love* (hesed) *of the Lord never ceases,*

*his mercies never come to an end; 23 they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 24 ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in him.’*

SHOWING HESED OR LOYAL LOVE TO OTHERS

Since hesed characterizes God, so hesed should characterize His people.

Micah 6:8 *He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*