

## Show Me Your Glory: Patience Exodus 34/Judges 2

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Not long ago Keren and I were having a long conversation where we reminisced about the past. We remembered how I really started falling for her when we were in our mid twenties. In August, when she was turning 26, I wrote her a letter which detailed 26 attributes that I found commendable and praise worthy in her. When I wrote down 26 attributes, I started with the obvious ones, you are beautiful, smart, kind, and generous. You are a faithful friend. You love God and you love people. But it also prompted me to think about lesser celebrated virtues: you are a gracious host, you are well-traveled, you are a great cook, you read broadly and appreciate fine literature. I think the most obscure quality trait I highlighted was that she had deep, meaningful friendships with people who were 6 years old and 90 years old, she connected with people deeply in every stage of life, which is so rare for someone in their twenties. As I got to know Keren better and fell in love with her, I learned to look beyond the obvious traits and that got the most natural attention and focus on the more subtle, less noticeable aspects of her life, as well.

We are continuing in our series called Show Me Your Glory today, where we are asking God to let us know him better, but also to deepen our awareness and understanding of him. For the past two weeks, we have focused on God being gracious and loving, which I would call some of the more well known, celebrated aspects of God's character. Today, we get to look at God's patience, something we often take for granted and overlook. In fact, early this week, I was talking to one of the smartest individuals at this church. The person who has as much Bible knowledge and understanding of Scripture as anyone I know, and I said, "What do you think we need to hear about God's patience." And this brilliant, very mature person said, "You know what, as a Christian, I don't think I've given nearly enough attention to the patience of God in my life, and how patience is an expression of his love, how patience has led to my salvation. Please, preach a sermon that makes me more aware of and grateful for the patience of God...and do it quick" I said, "That's not the help I was looking for!" But it goes to show how little we pay attention to this aspect of God's character.

When Moses asked to see God's glory, the request we are bringing to God all summer long, God not only said yes and displayed his glory to Moses, God displayed his glory to Moses through revealing his character, and specifically through highlighting his patience.

"Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished." (Exodus 34:5-7)

Today, we get to dive deep into (slow to anger) this lesser known but glorious aspect of God's character. God is slow to anger, in Hebrew, just one word, *arek* (aw-rake), meaning patient, also translated as long suffering. This word means that, out of the abundance of God's love, compassion and kindness, he is able to endure incredible amounts of injustice and injury before bringing punishment...he doesn't react, he responds. He isn't rash, he's wise.

Let me give you an example of God's patience. Last week we looked at God's faithfulness on display through his interaction with Abraham. In Genesis 15, God showed Abraham the promised land, the land that one day all of his descendants would inherit and live in. But at that time, there were other people living there, the Amorites. God told Moses, the people living here are going to enjoy this land for a while longer, and here is his rationale: "For the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure" (Genesis 15:16). These people were living in sin, but did God punish them right away? No. Did he punish them in a month or a year or a decade? No, he waited 400 years before he punished the Amorites for their sin. God eventually brought punishment, but it wasn't reactionary, it was deliberate, purposeful, and his patience was multi-generational.

We see this again in the book of Judges. Judges is the 7th book in the Bible, right after Joshua.

The book of Judges covers a window of history that is roughly 300 years. And for the most part, they weren't very good years. They constantly fell into sin and rebelled against the Lord. But in God's patience, he stuck with them and gave them opportunity after opportunity after opportunity to make things right. Let me show you what I mean:

(Judges 3:7-9) "The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord; they forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs. 8 The anger of the Lord burned against Israel so that he sold them into the hands of the king of Aram, to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years. 9 But when they cried out to the Lord, he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, who saved them....11 So the land had peace for forty years."

God delivers them...but what do we read in the very next verse:

3:12 "Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and because they did this evil the Lord gave Eglon king of Moab power over Israel...14 The Israelites were subject to Eglon king of Moab for eighteen years....15 Again the Israelites cried out to the Lord, and he gave them a deliverer—Ehud, a left-handed man, the son of Gera the Benjaminite...30 And the land had peace for eighty years."

God delivered them, but what do we see in the next verse:

4:1 "Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, now that Ehud was dead...4 they cried to the Lord for help. (God raised up Deborah and Barak to deliver them), and in 5:31 we read, "Then the land had peace forty years."

Then they go through three more judges with the exact same cycle as before.

10:6 "Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord. They served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines...10:10 Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord, "We have sinned against you, forsaking our God and serving the Baals."...God raised up Jephthah.

I think you are catching the theme here. It's known as the cycle of the judges.

Rejection of God.

Reap the consequences.

Repent.

Rescue.

Restoration.

Relapse.

This pattern repeats itself again and again for over 300 years. Just think about how truly great God's patience must be to meet people where they are at and walk with them, generation after generation through this miserable cycle of sin. As an analogy: a husband were to have a wife be unfaithful to him, but then repent, it would be a great sign of his love and forgiveness to keep the marriage going and pursue reconciliation. If after reconciliation, she did it again and again and again, and he welcomed her home every time, now it's not simply a sign of his love and forgiveness, but a sign of his immense patience, he is willing to wait so unbelievably long in order to have the marriage and the wife of his dreams.

Here's what we need to realize: at least at some point in our lives, maybe in small ways, maybe in big ways, maybe today, maybe in the past, we have all been like that unfaithful spouse, we have all been like

the unfaithful Israelites. And we have sinned, we have reaped the consequences of sin, we have reached out in repentance, God has rescued us, he has restored us, and even though he has done all of that for us, we have relapsed and fallen into our old ways. And in God's great patience he gently, slowly, lovingly meets us where we are at and guides us to a better place. God's patience is our salvation. If God were not spectacularly and unreasonably patient with us, we would be utterly consumed. We would be rejected and hopeless.

Can I give you examples of what it looks like when God leans swift justice rather than patience? There were two priests in the OT named Nadab and Abihu. Early in their ministry they offered unauthorized incense before the Lord, they knowingly worshiped God in an illegitimate way. What happened?

(Leviticus 10:2) "So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord."

Or think about the time that the Ark of the Covenant was being brought to Jerusalem, the new capital city of Israel. God was very clear in his word, no one may touch certain holy things and live. As it was being moved, a man named Uzzah who was helping with the transportation, reached out and touched the ark. What happened?

(2 Samuel 6:7) "The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down, and he died there beside the ark of God."

And this is not just Old Testament stuff. When the church was still in its early days, a couple named Ananias and Saphira lied about what they gave to the church. Greed, pride, and deceit entered the church for the first time. When the husband gave false testimony: Acts 5:5 tells us, "Ananias fell down and died." Later the same day, the wife gave the same false testimony, Acts 5:10 tells us, "At that moment Saphira fell down at his feet and died."

In each of these situations, God is not being unfair. He is being perfectly fair and just. The wages of sin is death. These people sinned. They got what they deserved. Sometimes we hear stories like these and our initial response is to ask, Normal response: "Why did God do that to them?" What we should be asking is, Right response: "Why has God not done that to us?" The first response minimizes the severity of sin and arrogantly assumes that God has to defend himself for his holiness and righteous standards. The right response appropriately recognizes the gravity of our own sin and humbly recognizes that God, in his grace, mercy, and patience, has not given us what we deserve. As one theologian has put it, "God has placed a padlock on his wrath and a hair trigger on his mercy." So we can say it again: God's patience is our salvation.

Now I want to look at four specific ways God has been patient with us, so we can see just how myriad and manifold his patience truly is in our lives.

**God is patient with us in our ignorance.** Years ago I was driving through a small rural town and got pulled over. The police officer asked me if I knew how fast I was going. Yes sir, 48 MPH. Then he asked me if I knew the speed limit. Yes sir. 50. He said, it's 30, it changed about a quarter mile ago. I said, I didn't know that. He said he didn't care and he handed me a ticket. In that situation, there was no patience with my ignorance. Fortunately for all of us, God is patient with our lack of understanding. When the Apostle Paul preached to the people in Athens, the intellectual capital of the world, he said this:

(Acts 17:22-23) “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.”

Paul says, the gospel hasn't come to you yet, you were worshiping the Greek gods and the Roman gods because you didn't have a chance to know any better. Paul literally says in 17: 30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance. Now that people know the truth, God commands people to repent and follow him. But when we sincerely do not know, God is patient with our ignorance. And this is not just a message Paul brought to others, he found the patience of God with his own ignorance. Before Paul became a Christian he was not merely a non-believer, he was antagonistic toward the faith. He was persecuting Christians, arresting Christians, and he oversaw the murder of a Christian. Reflecting on her earlier life Paul says: 1 Timothy 1:13 Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. If you are anything like me, then when you look back on your life, there were so many times when you made absolutely foolish, horrible decisions, and you did so because you were ignorant, you didn't know...and most of the time you didn't even know that you didn't even know. And to God's great glory, out of his kindness and love, he is patient with us in our ignorance.

**God is patient with us in our immaturity.** My son Luke just turned two. You can go up to him at any time and ask him where he should relieve himself. Every time he will give you the right answer, go on the toilet, I get candy!” He knows the right thing to do. He knows it will go better for him if he does it. But he is so young, he is still immature, he probably only gets things right about 10% of the time. And for me and Keren, that is okay, we are patient with our two year old. I sure hope we're not changing his diapers when he is 12. The truth is that sometimes, we know the right things to do, but we spiritually speaking, relationally speaking, emotionally speaking, we just aren't mature enough to consistently do it. We haven't developed to that place. And thank God that he is patient with us in our immaturity. When Jesus was talking to his disciples on the night before he died, he said, “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear” (John 16:12). In God's sovereign knowledge, he knows how much we are capable of at any given moment, and in his great patience he meets us where we are at.

**God is patient with us in our sin.** So many times, when we look at the effects of sin in the world, and we look at the atrocious sins other people have committed, we ask why doesn't God just come and punish people? Why doesn't he just come and pour out righteous judgment on sinners. Why doesn't he just send a lightning strike to people like Hitler, to people like the leaders of Hamas who killed and kidnapped so many? For one, God is not in a hurry the way we are in a hurry. We work in terms of seconds to decades, God works in terms of billions of years. So we are on a different time table. But the Bible tells us why God delays in bringing punishment for sin: 2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. God does not treat our sin lightly, he does not say it's no big deal, it's a big enough deal that Jesus went to the cross and died in our place so that our sin could be righteously responded to, but even in our sin, instead of punishing us right away, God is patient with us. Instead of sending a lightning bolt to destroy us, he sends signposts, pointing us back to him, pointing us to the way of truth. God doesn't want our immediate death, he wants our repentance and salvation. He does not want ANY to perish.

**God is patient with us in our rejection of him.** I got to believe this is the hardest of all the areas for God to demonstrate his patience, because nothing breaks the heart of a father like a child who wants nothing to do with him, but God is patient with us, even when we turn our back on him. Charles Dickens called the story of the prodigal son the finest short story ever told. In that story, Jesus tells of a son who went to his

Father and said, “I want nothing to do with you. Give me my inheritance. I want your blessings, not your love. I want your wealth, not a relationship.” The father could have locked him up in the house and forced him to stay, but he didn’t, he affirmed his autonomy and freedom. When he left, the father could have shaken the dust off his feet and said, “If you leave, don’t you dare ever come back.” But he didn’t. When you look at the story, you get the sense that the father always held out hope, always kept his eye on the horizon, hoping beyond hope, wishing with all his might, that his son would return. In Luke 15:20, when the prodigal son made his way back home we read, “While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.” There are some here today who have rejected God. You have not pursued a relationship with him. You have not believed in him. You have not worshiped him. God’s heart for you is not to punish you, not to cut you off, he is waiting on the front porch, scanning the horizon night and day, with extreme patience, waiting for the moment that you decide to run to him. God’s patience is your salvation.

God’s patience is abundant, and it displays his glory, it reveals how good and how great he is. But I would not be a loving or wise pastor if I did not also draw attention to the fact that God’s patience is not unlimited. It is expansive, but it is not endless. Listen to this story Jesus told in Luke 13:6-9:

“A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’ And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

In that story, the owner is patient, he waited three years. Out of his loving kindness he waited another year, but there would come a time when his patience would run out, and if no change came, judgment would come.

We must hold our appreciation for the patience of God in balance—showing profound appreciation for his patience in our lives, and glorifying him because of it, and yet never, ever presuming upon it. Listen to what Paul says in Romans 2:4, “Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?” God’s kindness is not intended to increase our selfishness and sin, but to lead us to repentance.