What God Wants-"Khesed"

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Date: 01 August 2021

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[0:00] Well, good morning. It's really, really good to see each and every one of you here this morning. I welcome you back to church. It's so important for God's people to be gathered together around God's Word. And hello to all of those watching online. You're with us in heart, and we hope this will be an important time for us as we come together around God's Word. We're going to do a lot of work this morning, so put your thinking caps on. We're going to be jumping around a lot in Scripture, so get those fingers ready. We're even going to learn some Hebrew this morning, so you've really got to be ready for that. But there's some important things that God wants to say to us, I think. As I preach, I'm assuming this morning that you want to grow closer to your God.

I'm assuming that's one of the reasons, if not the main reason, that you're listening to this or watching it online. And whoever you are, whether you're religious or not, I think all of us, if we can, want to grow closer to the God who made this world and put us in it, that we want to understand that God better. Am I right? Is that why we're here this morning? I hope it is. And that should be the reason we come to church and we listen to sermons and we open the Bible, not to improve our lives, but to get to know, if at all possible, the God who made all of this and the God who's in charge of it. That's a good aim to pursue. But you can't really grow closer to anyone unless you understand what they really want, right? It's the same with humans. You can't grow closer to someone and really get to know them and be in a proper relationship where you can say, I know this person until you know what's really on their heart, what their deepest desires are, whether it's your spouse or your best friend. To get to know someone deeply, you need to know what they really want.
And it's the same with God. And the verse that we're going to be looking at over the next three weeks, Jeremiah 9 verse 24, which we started looking at last week, is one of the rare passages in the Bible that tells us, or God tells us directly, what's on his heart, what he really wants in his world, what he's passionate about. It's one of the rare places in the Bible that God said, this is, this is, you want to know what I want? This is what I want. This is what I'm passionate about.
Let's read that again. Jeremiah 9 verse 24. But the one who boasts should boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, showing faithful love, justice, and righteousness on the earth, for I delight in these things.
This is the Lord's declaration. So, as I say, we're going to be looking at that passage, and we're going to look at each of the three things God says that he delights in, in each of the weeks coming up. Today, we're going to look at the first word that he says, the first thing he says he delights in, and that is faithful love. Do you see that in the verse? I'm the Lord showing faithful love. That's at least how it's translated. In some other versions, it'll only just be love. Some other versions, it'll be loving kindness. But I want us to look not at what it's translated in your English Bible. I want us to look at the original Hebrew word.
[3:43] And it's a fascinating word. It's, put the next slide up. That's what it looks like in Hebrew. Next slide. There we go. Now, I don't think many can read Hebrew, but that's the word, and it's pronounced chesed, with a guttural. South Africans have a bit of an advantage pronouncing Hebrew because of its gutturals, but that's the word, that's how it's pronounced. Best spelled probably like that.

Chesed. Should I say it? Chesed. Chesed. Good. I want you to remember that word, because it's such an important word in the Bible. It's an amazing word for at least two reasons. When we come across this word in the Hebrew scriptures, one of the first reasons that it's such an incredible word, is that no one knows how to really translate it. It's almost untranslatable to English.
There's no one English word that can translate that Hebrew word chesed. In fact, in six major English translations, it's translated into 169 different words, which proves that no one knows the one English word that sums it up, because there is no one English word that sums up this Hebrew

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word chesed. That's why we have to look at the original word itself. In fact, in the NIV, often it's just translated love, but there's a perfectly good other Hebrew word for love, ahava, which is what love is in Hebrew, but sometimes this word's used, and it's not just love, it's more than that. And it's not just however it's translated in your Bible, it's more than what the English can kind of sum up. But there's another reason this word chesed, say it again? Chesed. Good. I just want you to get that in your head.
There's another reason this word is such an amazing word. And that is because time and time again, in the Hebrew Bible, this word is used as the defining character trait of who God really is. God's defining trait of His true heart and His true character, which means if you want to grow closer to the God that this Bible teaches us about, you need to understand this word. And you need to understand what it means. And that's what we're going to try to get our heads around this morning.
[6:12] So let's have a look. Chesed, this defining character trait of God. Now, to first see where we come across this in the Bible, we need to rewind back to Exodus. Remember Exodus and the story of Exodus, how God takes this group of nothings, slaves in Egypt, and chooses that through them He is going to fulfill His promises to Abraham and bring about His plans for the world. It'll take thousands of years, but He does these amazing things to kick that off, that plan off. He rescues them out of Egypt. He sends the plagues to Egypt in judgment. He miraculously takes them through the Red Sea, sees them through the desert to the promised land. You know the story? And the events of Exodus were really God's first major revelation to the world who's really in charge. But before then, it was standard to believe in a number of pagan gods. And yet, when Exodus happened, when this happened to the superpower of the world, Egypt at the time, this was the first time God is actually standing up and saying,

I'm here, and this is who I am. He was showing off who the real God is. And through those events, as we read them, we see, we can learn, and the Egyptians and the Israelites learned a lot about this God, the one who is the true God. He is powerful. He is just. He brings judgment on the wicked. He is wise. And these are things you would expect of a God, right? You'd expect of the God of the universe to be powerful and wise and just. But it's only later, when Moses met God on Mount Sinai, that God reveals something about Himself that no one knew before and that no one ever expected. And we find that in Exodus 34. You can turn there if you want. We'll put it up on screen as well. This is God revealing a part of Himself that no one expected. Exodus 34 from verse 5.
The Lord came down in a cloud, stood with Moses there and proclaimed His name, the Lord. The Lord passed in front of him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in chesed, faithful love and truth, maintaining chesed to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion and sin.
[9:01] And so, as opposed to all the other character traits of God, what God chooses to reveal to Moses, His main character trait above all the others, is that He is kind.

And that took everyone by surprise. And it's not the way you'd expect a God to define Himself. You know, back in those days, the pagan gods were known for their, even though they were false gods, but they were made up in these myths and stories.
They were known for their power and their vengeance and their might and their cleverness and their beauty. But no God was known for His kindness.
It's not the way the gods would have defined themselves. You know, you think of superheroes of popular culture and what they're known for.
Superman, for his strength and his might, and that he can fly. Spider-Man, for his agility and his intelligence. The Hulk and Thor, for their strength.
[10:17] But you don't know of a superhero whose superpower is kindness. You don't have Mr. Kindness. That's not something that's particularly attractive in our culture, and yet that's the way God defined Himself to us.

That's what God wanted us to know about Himself more than anything else, that He's kind. But, as I said earlier, this word chesed is far more than just kind or loving.
It describes a very special type of kindness. Now, if you did a word study, which I did in the last week, and you look at where this word appears in the Old Testament, it's sometimes used to describe people.
Rarely, but sometimes. One of the main examples of where this word chesed describes what someone does is the story of Ruth. You know Ruth? It's a small book in a Bible, but it's an important one.

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And it's important, not least of all, because it's an example of a human showing chesed. And what Ruth did, you might know the story, is she was a foreigner.
[11:29] She came to live in Israel, married an Israelite man, but he and his brothers all ended up dying. And all that was left was Ruth's elderly dependent mother-in-law, Naomi.

And she said, no, go back to your homeland and build a life there. But Ruth said, no, I'm going to stay with you. I'm going to commit myself to looking after you. Even though Ruth would get nothing out of that, that she knew of, but God had other plans, of course.
But she committed herself. She decided to bind herself to Naomi's welfare. And that, the Bible says, is an act of chesed.
But mostly this word appears in relation to God's kindness towards Israel. God's kindness towards his covenant people in how he binds himself to that nation.
Small and insignificant as they are, he chose in the Old Testament to bind himself to that particular nation. And that was, again and again, said, that was God's chesed at work.
[12:35] And what is fascinating and what we learn about chesed is that even after Israel fell and sinned and were exiled because of their sin by God's judgment, even after that, the amazing thing is that he still had chesed towards them.

Turn with me to Jeremiah 31. We see an example of this. Jeremiah 31.
And yet, this is what he says. Jeremiah 31 from verse 3. From halfway through verse 3.
This is God speaking about Israel. He says, Again, I will build you so that you will be rebuilt. Virgin Israel. You will take up your tambourines again. And you will go out in joyful dance. And you will plant vineyards again on the mountains of Samaria. The planters will plant and enjoy the fruit.
[14:07] And so, what we learn about chesed here is that God doesn't remove from Israel despite their sins, irrespective of what they did and how they responded to it.

God had committed to showing them kindness. God had committed to the land. God had committed to the land. And then, if you turn to Nehemiah, which was our Old Testament reading. Again, this is now fast-forwarding after restoration to the land.
And they're having this big church service. And these are the Levite priests praying. And in Nehemiah 9 from verse 16, they pray this.
Our ancestors acted arrogantly. They became stiff-necked and did not listen to your commands. They refused to listen and did not remember your wonders you performed among them.
They became stiff-necked and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But, you are a forgiving God. Gracious and compassionate.
[15:07] Slow to anger. And abounding in chesed. And you did not abandon them. And so, here we learn that this, whatever it is, this chesed, this kindness, this love that God shows to His people.

Not only has He committed to love them irrespective of what they do, but He is consistent. He doesn't go back on it. And it doesn't change towards those that He has set chesed upon.
His love for them does not change. It doesn't waver like human love. He was devoted to love Israel despite their rebellion and despite their wickedness.
That He already knew that they would commit before they even did. And yet, He was still committed because of this chesed that He has towards them.
David, in fact, in the Psalms, often meditates on this aspect of God. One example is Psalm 103. The Psalm we read earlier as well.
[16:14] That word that we said, you know, we responded. What was the response? Say again? His love endures forever.

That word is actually chesed, not just love. What we should have been saying is His chesed endures forever. But we didn't know that then. But now you do. And in Psalms, over and over again, we find this word.
And Psalm 103, David is meditating on this. And he says this from verse 8. The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in chesed.
He will not always accuse us or be angry forever. He has not dealt with us as our sins deserve or repaid us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His chesed toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.
[17:18] That's David meditating on what chesed means. And what it means to be loved by God with this chesed. As far as the west is from the east, so far has He removed His people's sins from

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them.

How far, boys and girls, how far is the east from the west? Can you say? How many kilometers? Anybody know? How far is the heavens from the earth?
You look up into space. How far away is that black background? It's just, we don't even know yet. With all our telescopes and all the tools we have, we still haven't found how far the heavens are from the earth.
It just carries on going further and further. And that is how far God puts the sins of those who He has chosen to love with chesed away from them.
Isn't that an amazing thought? That He completely forgives. That's what chesed does. It causes God to completely take the sins which would otherwise condemn people and remove them as far away as you can imagine.
[18:30] That's what chesed does. It completely forgives people who don't deserve it. It seems unfair, actually. It seems totally unjust, this chesed.

Unqualified, it seems. In fact, that's why Jonah complained to God. Remember Jonah, the unwilling prophet who had an encounter with the great fish and eventually reached Nineveh.
And then God set His love on Nineveh. And Jonah got really grumpy. Remember that? He said this, Jonah 4.
These are the words he used. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in chesed, and one who relents from sending disaster.
And he was disgusted that God was a God of chesed. That He would forgive so completely.
Because it does seem crazy. This idea, as we uncover it, it's not like love as we understand it.
[19:36] That's why the word love is insufficient as a translation. It's a totally different type of love, a different type of kindness. It's not something we encounter in this world.

In summary, from what we've seen, and as you studied in the Old Testament, I guess the best definition that I could come up with of chesed is this.
It's the binding of the will to love someone irrespective of whether they deserve it, and irrespective of what they give you in return. That's what chesed is.
A choice, a commitment of the will to love someone, and show them kindness irrespective of whether they deserve it, and irrespective of what they give you in return.
That kind of summarizes the heart of this word. And that, if you think about it, is the only way sinful humans can have any hope of salvation, only if God chooses to love us in that way.
[20:40] Because we know we don't deserve God's love. We know that we can't give Him what He deserves back. And so the only way we can have any hope of knowing God, and being in relationship with Him, and being saved from our sins, is if God chooses to love us with this love, with chesed.

But there's a very important thing we also need to understand about chesed. That God doesn't love everyone in this way. The Bible tells us God does not love everyone with chesed.
Only, in fact, those who He has a covenant with, does He set His love of chesed upon. In fact, if you're in Jeremiah still, turn to Jeremiah 16.
We see something quite, words that are very scary to read, actually, if we understand what they mean. Jeremiah 16, verse 5.
This is part of God describing to Jeremiah how far a lot of the people in Jerusalem have fallen, because they have now become idolaters.
[21:54] So He's talking about those Israelites who have chosen to worship other gods. And He says these words. Jeremiah 16, verse 5.

For this is what the Lord says. Don't enter a house where a morning feast is taking place. Don't go to lament or sympathize with them, for I have removed my peace from these people, as well as my chesed and compassion.
Now, if we know what chesed means, that's a very scary thing to read, isn't it? God has removed His chesed from these people. Now, that doesn't seem to make sense, if we understand what this word means, because the word means that God has set His love on people, irrespective of what they do, and now He removes it from people.
How does that work? How can He remove His love, His chesed love, from these people? Well, we can only understand that when we understand that God only loves those within His covenant, with chesed.

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In fact, that original verse, Exodus 34, when He spoke to Moses, it goes on. If we just read on, it says, so He goes, Exodus 34 verse 7, He's telling Moses who He is.
[23:17] He's telling Him about this character of Himself, and He says, I'm a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, bounding in chesed and truth, maintaining chesed to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion and sin.

Then, the next verse, but, I will not leave the guilty unpunished. And so, there's this weird contradiction, seemingly, where God promises chesed, this unconditional setting of His love upon people who don't deserve it, and yet, He also says, I will not leave the guilty unpunished, and in Jeremiah, removes his chesed from these people.
And the reason that exists, the reason it works like that, is because He's holy. And He can't deny His holiness, even though His central character trait is this chesed, a very important characteristic of God is that He is perfectly holy and cannot tolerate sin.
And so, the only way God can commit to loving sinners with chesed, is if those sinners have a means of atonement, a God-given means of atonement.
And the only place that you can find any effective atonement is in God's covenants. That's why we make a big point in our preaching of the covenants of God, because in the covenant only is the place where you can find atonement that works, so that God can place His chesed on people.
[24:50] If you wanted to summarize the whole story of the Bible, it's that God wants to love people with chesed, but they're sinners, and so what most of the Bible is about is how God makes atonement for those sinners so that He can love them with chesed, which is what He wanted to do right at the beginning.

And that's why most of the Old Testament is about these covenants and the New Testament and Jesus and the new covenant that He brings and signifies in His death and, well, effects in His death and resurrection and signifies in the Lord's Supper, which we're going to celebrate later.
And the reason that God removed His love from these people in Jeremiah was that they abandoned His covenant and they didn't realize what a terrible thing that was to abandon His covenant when they put their trust in other gods.
When they started following other gods, they stepped outside of God's covenant and when you step outside of God's covenant and you abandon God's covenant, then you lose His chesed because it's only within the covenant where atonement is made and where atonement is effective that God can place His chesed on people because He is also holy.
Does that make sense? Okay. And it's the same today as it was in the Old Testament. The only hope of having God's chesed is to be in His covenant today.
[26:15] And that covenant is the new covenant that Jesus made possible. It's why He came to earth. It's why He died. To make ultimate atonement for people of every nation, not just people in Israel, but people around the world through faith in what He has done, which we're going to exercise once more later after the sermon as we partake in the Lord's Supper.

Through faith in that alone can be atonement. And the reason Jesus came and died and made atonement available to you and me was so that God could place His chesed upon us.
That's the purpose. That was the end game. God wanted to love us with chesed and that's why Jesus came and went through all He went through so that God can give us His chesed.
And so if you are in the covenant, I want to assure you this morning, even if you have sinned, which I know you have and which you know you have, if you are in this covenant through faith in Christ, I want you to know that God, God wants you to know, not me, God wants you to know, that's why He's said this in His Word.
God wants you to know that He has bound Himself to love you. He has tied Himself to you in a commitment of love regardless of how you feel about it, how you feel about God, regardless of how devoted you are to Him day by day.
[27:49] He has chosen to love you and set His love upon you as long as you are in His covenant through Jesus. That's what counts. Not the intensity of your devotion, not how good you are in doing your works, your religious works.

No, only if you are in covenant with God through Jesus Christ, then you can know that His love for you is unwavering.
Because He has set His chesed upon you. And you will never find that in man-made religion. You see, man-made religion is all about your performance, not about chesed.

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And the reason is because this idea of chesed, it's not of this world. We could not think this up. It's from out of this world.
In fact, if we look just, if we think about the world and how it loves, we see how much the world lacks this kind of kindness, this kind of love.
[28:58] The world's lack of chesed, it does not love like that. Because the world is all about, well, how does the world love? How do people in the world love?

How do we naturally love? Well, let's be honest, we love those who do something for us. Don't we? We love those who somehow add something to our lives.
And, typically, the world, the way the world loves is to always have a back door. to always be able to get out of that when it no longer benefits me or when it demands too much of me to love that person.
Because, of course, the world's greatest treasure that it values is freedom. Freedom. Freedom to go my own way and to do my own thing.
To love who I want to love. Isn't that what the world is saying over and over again? is the highest value and yet chesed is the opposite of that. You see that? Chesed is a self-imposed restriction to commit to love someone consistently.
[30:10] It's a limitation that you place upon yourself when you choose to love with chesed. God has chosen to limit himself to, he's imposed a restriction upon himself to commit to love people in his covenant because that is who he is but it's not who the world is.

It's not the type of love we see in the world but it's who God is. It's the central characteristic of his nature and here's the thing it's who he wants his people to be and it's that that's going to cause us to stand out from the rest of this world more than anything else.
You know we can stand out on social media when we stand against the values of the world and what we say and we can stand out if we stand up for Jesus and tell people about him that causes us to stand up or cause us to stand out more than anything else is when we start to practice God's chesed in the world around us.
That's what he wants us to do. He wants us to imitate him. He wants us to be like him. He saved us to be like him. Again and again Old Testament and New Testament be holy for I am holy.
Show mercy for I am merciful. That's what Jesus said in our reading earlier. And the type of holiness and mercy that he's calling for time and time again is for us to learn how to love with chesed the people around us.
[31:36] That's what's going to make us stand out from this world who cannot do that. And so that's the last thing I want us to consider that God calls his covenant people to live lives of chesed because it's who he is and therefore it's central to how he wants his world to be.

That's his plan for this world. Ultimately he wants this world to be a society where there is complete chesed.
Everybody loves like that. And it's therefore because it's what he wants his world to be it's central to what he wants us to become and what he saved us to become.
people who show chesed. And it's what he's always wanted. Turn with me to Hosea 6 verse 6. It's quite an important passage.
Another prophet that God is speaking much like Jeremiah through. It's towards the end of your Old Testament.
[32:42] Hosea 6 verse 6. This is another good memory verse if you like memory verses or one to highlight in your Bible.

Hosea 6 verse 6. For I desire chesed and not sacrifice. The knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.
See God is telling his people who have become so religious by Hosea's time they had got so used to going to temple doing their religious service and thinking well you know God's happy with us because surely that's what he wants he wants us to be religious doesn't he doesn't he want us to go to church and pray and read our Bibles and do the religious things and sing songs doesn't that make God happy you know what he's saying time and time again no you know what makes me happy is chesed when you show chesed and what the Israelites were doing in Hosea's time is that they weren't showing chesed in their relationships and in their society they were ignoring the poor they were ignoring the needy they were cheating each other and yet then they were going to temple and they thought it was all okay and God said no the very thing I want from you is not your

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sacrifices and your burnt offerings and your religion it's your chesed that's what I've saved you for that's why I've loved you in that way so that you can learn to love others in that way that's the purpose that's what
God wants God has always wanted chesed and not religious empty religious service and yet keep your Bible open in Hosea 6 because we learn in the same passage that we as human beings fail naturally to love with chesed look at verse 4 how God describes it he's talking to his covenant people he says what am I going to do with you Ephraim what am I going to do with you Judah your chesed is like the morning mist and like the early dew that vanishes that's how he describes their attempts to love like him it's like the morning mist you know if you're woken up sort of at sunrise or just before sunrise and there's this mist and you're driving to work by the time you get to work it's gone right the sun's come up it's disappeared it was like it was never there it's so temporary that's what God says about humans attempts to love he says it's so unsustainable and that's ultimately why
Jesus had to come to earth and get stuck in to this world not just to show us what chesed actually looks like in real life which he did by the way when he walked around and he came across people who needed him to set his kindness upon them when they didn't deserve it and when they could give him nothing back he focused on those people to demonstrate what God's chesed is like more than anything it's the sick and the crippled and the poor and the helpless who Jesus was with why did he focus in on those people because he wanted to show us what chesed looked like but that's not the only reason he needed to come to this earth not just to show us what it looks like but through his death and his resurrection and the sending of his spirit into his covenant people to give us a new heart he empowers us to actually want chesed and to do chesed in a new way which we couldn't before that is the purpose that
[36:23] Jesus that's why we needed the new covenant why the old covenants weren't sufficient because they didn't have the power of the spirit enabling God's people to live out the chesed that he saved us to live out and that is also why the early Christians the first century Christians we read of in Acts after receiving the Holy Spirit were known more than anything else for their love for the poor you know that yes they spoke the gospel they evangelized much better than we do but what they were known for in the communities they were in what they were known for is their compassion on the poorest and the weakest in society throughout the ancient world we've got records of how the Romans were just blown away by these early Christians and how they sought out and showed compassion on the poor which nobody else would have done in their society and the reason is because while we are called to love everyone with chesed that the spirit can empower us to do more and more as we grow as

Christians the clearest proof that chesed is at work in our lives is when we seek out those who can't give us anything back and bind ourselves to love them and our country is in desperate need of that kind of love isn't it right now our country is in desperate need of chesed but it has a complete lack of chesed that's why that journalist told him no God has left South Africa because his chesed seems to be nowhere that's why it's our job those who have the Holy Spirit to show this country what chesed is so that they know God is still here and he is loving with chesed through us those who don't deserve it and those who can't give back those are the people we must learn to love and that is what will demonstrate that we've really understood the gospel that will as we learn to love like God that more than anything will draw us closer to God's heart and to know him and when we learn to love with chesed that will help the world around us to get to know who our God really is let's pray that we would be those people Lord we thank you for this word even though it's so difficult for our English translators to translate we thank you for teaching us what chesed really means through displaying it to your covenant people ultimately in the Lord Jesus Christ and loving us who are in your covenant with a firm consistent love Lord we do pray that you would help us to rest in this fact of your covenant faithfulness your faithful love your loving kindness your chesed towards us help us Lord not to rely on our religious works to feel that we are accepted by you but to rely on your chesed towards us and through what Jesus has done for us and we pray Lord as we enjoy and rest and delight in this love that you have showed us you will teach us by your spirit to start to love others in our lives in our workplaces in our schools in our communities especially Lord those who can't give us anything back those who we don't feel drawn to those who are helpless those who are poor help us to show your compassion on them Lord our country desperately needs that and we pray that you would help us to shine that light of chesed brightly in this dark world in Jesus name

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Amen Amen

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