

10. 17. 2010

Recently, my son Zac had a fever and he passed it on to me. When I get sick, I often find myself yearning for extra attention, wanting to be taken care of and indulged. Perhaps this is because my mother died when I was young and I lacked much of that kind of attention. I know I do not deserve or need it, but when I am sick, I especially want that care, and Cindy gives it to me.

The definition of “indulgence” is to treat someone with excessive leniency, generosity, or consideration. Scripture tells us of a God who indulges us in exactly those kinds of ways. His goodness, forgiveness, and kindness to us is excessive and beyond what we deserve. Psalm 103: 8-12 states, “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve, nor does he repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” Our goal over the next several sermons is to take a moment and digest some examples of God’s indulgence over us, to see that this is in fact the heart of His character. The hope is that as we see this to be true, we might be moved in our hearts and motivated to action, to respond in worship and obedience, and to be transformed in our values and thoughts.

We start from the beginning. From Genesis 2, it is clear that God’s intention was to indulge us from the beginning. In verse 8, God planted the Garden of Eden and put “all kinds of trees” there that were good for food and pleasing to the eye. The phrase “all kinds” really means “every.” God planted every tree in the garden for man to enjoy. There are no pointless trees like the fruitless mulberry tree in my backyard. All the trees are pleasing to the eye and produce good fruit, for the health, nourishment, and enjoyment of man. God did not create the garden for any other creature to enjoy; He created it especially for man. Just as a good host sets out the best food for his guests, so God set out an abundant feast of the best fruits for Adam.

In verse 10, a great river waters the garden, from which four major rivers flow: the Pishon, Gihon, Tigris, and Euphrates. If these four are major rivers (certainly the two we know – Tigris and Euphrates – are major rivers) then certainly the river from which they sprang must

have been enormous. God prepared this river to water the garden. The trees will never dry up, and man will never go thirsty.

In verse 16, God says, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it, you will surely die.” We tend to focus on the second part of the sentence instead of the first. It is natural to focus on God’s prohibition instead of his abundant provision. But what is one tree compared to the entire garden? How big we imagine the garden to be shows what our attitude is about God and His indulgence. If you think of the garden as only five trees, with one forbidden one in the middle, you clearly don’t think much of God’s indulgence. But given the description of the river, the garden likely stretched as far as the eye could see. And in this garden, Adam is “free” to enjoy all the trees, but one. It is not merely that God *permits* man to enjoy the fruits of all those trees, God made the trees all *for man* to enjoy. We should not focus on what God does not allow us to do or have, but rather on what he allows us to do and the abundant provision he gives us, lest we lose sight of God’s great indulgence towards us.

And if the garden, the river, and the fruit bearing trees were not enough, God indulges man with a helper in verse 18. Up to this point, all of creation has been “good” or “very good” in God’s eyes, but the first thing that was “not good” was that man had no suitable helper. All the creatures were placed in front of Adam, who was yearning for one suitable to be his helper. As they were paraded in front of him, Adam perhaps hoped an animal would be right for him. God, however, knew that none of them were right for him. God had a better plan. While Adam slept, God made woman out of Adam’s rib. He specially makes a perfect and suitable helper for man, better than anything else the world had to offer Adam thus far.

This entire chapter of Genesis is an example of God’s indulgence towards man. God created the world to spoil man with excessive leniency, generosity, and consideration, and to demonstrate His character. We should be careful as we read this chapter to pay more attention to the abundance of what he gave to mankind, instead of fixating on what they couldn’t do. Certainly the God described here is a God who enjoys indulging (and spoiling) His children. What a great God we serve!