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HE'S GOT YOU COVERED

Psalm 85; Mt. 18:21-35; Advent Midweek 2; December 11, 2024

Have you ever gone somewhere with a fee you had to pay to get in, and someone with you said, "I've got it covered," and paid for you? Or maybe you were out to eat with someone and realized you forgot your wallet or purse, or you didn't have enough money to pay for the meal and drinks, and the person you ate with said, "I've you covered," and paid your bill? To "cover" someone in these situations means that whatever is owed, whether money or anything else, will be taken care of and you have nothing to worry about. You don't need to panic over some shortfall that you can't cover. Isn't that a wonderful feeling when someone does that for you?

Verse 2 of our psalm tonight tells us that God "covered" our sin. **You forgave the iniquity of Your people; You covered all their sin.** (This verse was used as the antiphon for the whole psalm. An antiphon is like a call over a mountain valley that echoes back from the other side. The antiphon verse highlights a central thought from the psalm and focuses our attention on it. An antiphon begins by announcing the theme and then repeats it for emphasis at the end.)

The Psalms are Hebrew poetry. Hebrew poetry is different than English poetry which may rhyme the sound of word endings; Hebrew poetry "rhymes" concepts, using two different yet similar words in parallel to make a point. At other times, Hebrew poetry connects contrasting or opposite meaning words with parallel words or concepts. Verse 14 does this. God's "**faithfulness**" and "**righteousness**" rhyme as similar concepts, but they are paired with opposites, "**up from the ground**" and "**down from the sky.**"

**Faithfulness springs up from the ground,
and righteousness looks down from the sky.**

The rhyming of similar concepts is doubled in verse two. **Forgave** "rhymes" with **covered**, and **iniquity** "rhymes" with **sin**.

**You forgave the iniquity of Your people;
You covered all their sin.**

When reading and praying the psalms, knowing this is helpful for us to understand their meaning.

Psalm 85: When it comes to our **iniquities**, the psalm says that God has **forgiven** them. When it comes to our **sins**, God's got them **covered**. An iniquity is a great injustice or wickedness someone does. An iniquity is not reaching the standard that God's law requires, that people be treated with equality. That some are given special treatment while others are mistreated is an iniquity. Iniquities are sins, the breaking of God's law by us.

God's Word sometimes describes sins as debts we owe, obligations we have failed to keep. When we pray the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, **And forgive us our trespasses**, the word for "trespass" can rightly be translated as "debt." When Jesus told the parable of the Unmerciful Servant in Matthew 18, the first servant owed a debt of 10,000 talents, something on the magnitude of owing \$billions today. The Master and King, who represents God in the parable, forgave the entire debt of that first servant. In the words of the psalm: **You forgave the iniquity of Your people; You covered all their sin.** God covers all the debt of sin we owe.

The second servant in the parable owed a debt of 100 denarii to the first servant, something like \$10,000 today, a debt manageable enough that could be repaid in time. But when the second servant begged for time to pay his debt, the first servant choked him and threw him into debtors' prison until he paid it back. The first servant, whose master had covered his enormous debt, did not cover the much smaller debt of his fellow servant. Jesus explains that this parable is about the forgiveness of iniquity, the covering of the debt of sin – God covering our sins, which we owe Him, and we covering each others' sins.

How did the King in the parable respond to the unmerciful servant? **His master was angry and handed him over to the jailers until he could pay back everything he owed.** How does this apply to us? Jesus says: **"This is what My heavenly Father will also do to you unless each one of you forgives his brother from his heart."**

When I consider this parable, I sometimes question the reasonableness of the King who forgave such a large debt, especially of a worthless servant who had lost a fortune. How could He afford to take that loss? How was He able to cover a such a large debt and not demand what was owed? What role does Jesus play in covering our large debts?

The psalm rejoices that God's steadfast love and mercy applies to us, whose iniquity is forgiven and whose sin is covered. **You (God) withdrew all Your wrath; You turned from Your hot anger.** The biblical word that describes God withdrawing His righteous wrath and anger is "**propitiation.**" In a court of law, a righteous judge must hand down a just sentence for crimes committed for justice to be satisfied. God is a righteous Judge; God's justice must be satisfied according to His righteousness. What is wrong must be made right.

Zephaniah prophesied of God: "**The LORD has taken away the judgments against you**" (3:15). In Romans five, St. Paul compared and contrasted our sins and trespasses, and their consequences, with God's response in Jesus Christ. Jesus made things right, justifying sinners as a free gift, by grace. Paul explained that, by one man, Adam, sin came into the world and so all men sin. **For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation.** By one Man, Jesus Christ, Adam's sin and our sin has been overcome. **But the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.**

What does Jesus do to cover our sins? **Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one Man's obedience the many will be made righteous.** All sinners deserve God's righteous wrath and condemnation, but the righteous Judge has held our sins against His own Son, Jesus, counting our sins as His, not ours. Jesus was credited with our sin, condemned as the sinner we are and sentenced to the cross where Jesus gave His body to death shed His blood for us. And by God's grace and through faith in Jesus, we are credited with the sinless righteousness of Jesus and given life.

When we come before the King as debtors who owe Him what is His, a veritable fortune, and we cannot pay, we in faith can plea for mercy using the words of the psalm: "**Show us Your steadfast love, O LORD, and grant us Your salvation. Let me hear what God the LORD will speak.**" Jesus steps forward and says to us, "I've got you covered. I've paid it in full." When we stand before the Judge knowing what we deserve because of our sins, God points to His Son and says, "He's got you covered." Amen.