

# REDEEMER

R E P O R T

APRIL 2003

## THE GRACE OF KINDNESS

BY TIM KELLER

*This continues a series on the character changes caused by God's grace.*

One of the marks of a supernaturally changed heart is the grace of *kindness*. It is listed as one of the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22) and as one of the facets of Christian love (1 Cor 13:4.) The most common definition of kindness is "practical love"—unselfishly serving people by meeting their concrete needs. But I must confess that for years I did not find this character trait to be very helpful or inspiring. First, it seemed rather easy. Everyone knows a lot of naturally kind people. But even more, to me it sounded wimpy and insipid. David Denby, in a review in *The New Yorker* last year, expressed irritation with actors in films who

want to play roles of pure goodness, kindness, and concern for other people. "*Actors forget how hard it is to make extreme goodness dramatically interesting*," he wrote. Extremely nice, good, and kind people tend to be boring. Why would that be?

We begin to get an answer when we realize that the trait of kindness is listed every time the New Testament describes the marks of a supernaturally changed heart. Paul says that it is possible to serve the needs of others, even to the point of giving away all your goods to the needy, and still do it all "*without love*" (1 Cor 13:3.) In other words, much of the 'kindness' that the world sees is

not the real thing that is created by the gospel. It is possible to be apparently kind and compassionate but out of either **a)** a desire for power over others or **b)** esteem for yourself— an apparently unselfish form of selfishness.

Three of the sisters in *Pride and Prejudice* illustrate this. The oldest, Jane, was temperamentally nice and kind. We all know people like Jane, who are instinctive "nice-makers" and who are extremely agreeable, always courteous, and who never complain or confront. But it is quite possible that our nice-making comes not from the joy of grace (Eph 4:31-32) but from an inner weakness and insecurity. Some people feel absolutely

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## EASTER SACRIFICIAL OFFERING

BY MICHEAL O'NEIL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, HFNY

**Redeemer Celebrates the 10th Anniversary of Hope for New York's Easter Sacrificial Offering**

This is the tenth anniversary of Redeemer's Easter Sacrificial Offering, and the official granting of HFNY's 501c3 status by the Internal Revenue Service. For 10 years, HFNY has assisted faith based organizations in New York providing holistic, compassionate care for the city's underserved. Our vision has been carried out in two ways. First, by making cash grants to partner ministries. Second, by connecting individuals to volunteer opportunities serving these ministries. For ten years we have worked at developing relationships with New York's faith-based organizations, and recruited, trained and mobilized individuals who desire to embrace

the city and serve their neighbors.

Donations made at the annual Easter Sacrificial Offering are multiplied many times over when combined with the tens of thousands of hours of volunteer service provided by HFNY volunteers.

This year, as we celebrate ten years of service to those in need – and by extension, to our Lord – we ask that you consider how you might support this year's appeal by embracing your neighbors with a heart filled with joy, compassion and mercy. There will be a special,

second offering taken at each of the Easter services for the Hope for New York Easter Sacrificial Offering, or you may donate as described below.

To make a donation, please make checks payable to: "*Hope for New York*" and mail to: 271 Madison Ave., 16<sup>th</sup> Floor, New York, NY 10016 or go to [www.hfny.org/support](http://www.hfny.org/support) for additional ways to make a donation.

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terrible about themselves if they see anyone unhappy within their spheres of influence. As a result they will do anything to keep people happy, even if it means avoiding a confrontation that they need. But is this true kindness? No, it is an artificial kindness. When I am kind to you like this, it is all about *me*. I need people around me to be happy, so I'll bend over backwards to keep them so. But it is not really for them, but for me.

Another sister, Mary, was moralistically nice and kind. In the book the narrator tells us that Mary was the "plainest" of the daughters, and therefore she needed to find some way to be better than her sisters. One of the ways was in altruism and charity. She was very moral and did many things for the "less fortunate." But while the temperamentally nice person needs others to be happy, the moralistically nice person needs others to be admiring and grateful. C.S. Lewis describes this type of artificial kindness.

*If you do someone a kindness to show him or others or yourself what a fine chap you are, or to put him in your debt, and then you sit down and wait for his gratitude, you will be in for a disappointment.*

Again, this is a form of selfishness. Neitzsche was quite wary of moralistic kindness, writing: "*Subjection to morality can be slavish or vain and self-interested...and thus*

*not moral at all.*" Kindness can be basically a way to gain power or leverage over others.

The central figure of *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet, is a much more attractive character than either Jane or Mary. Lizzie is smart and insightful and can see beneath the veneer to discern people's true motives. But as a result, Lizzie tends to be unkind. She tends to be brusque, sharp-tongued, proud, and disdainful (especially of the rich.) Now it becomes clear that true kindness — serving the needs of others for their own sake, not ours — is not a natural thing at all! Mary and Jane do not have the inner confidence to be truly kind. But neither does Lizzie have (initially) the humility to be truly kind. She trusts her own discernment and integrity too much. Real kindness would require a unique juxtaposition of the deepest humility and yet also of great assurance and inner confidence.

How can that happen?

In Titus 3:3-5 Paul writes:

*"We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another — but when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared he saved us, not because of righteous things that we had done, but because of his mercy."*

Everything Jesus did to save us, especially his dying on the cross, Paul sums up under the term the kindness of God. Jesus' death on the cross is the ultimate kindness.

Why? Here is the ultimate "practical" love! Every other religious founder gives us teaching that, in order to achieve salvation, we have to practice for ourselves. But Jesus *saved us not by things we have done*. He lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died, in our place, to completely fulfill the requirements for salvation. How much more practical can you get?

And here is the source of true kindness. The salvation of Jesus humbles us profoundly — we are so lost that he had to die for us. But it exalts and assures us mightily — we are so valued that he was glad to die for us. Because we are sinners totally accepted by grace, we have both the humility and the boldness necessary to serve others for *their* sake, not ours. In the end, Lizzie Bennet is the best model of gospel change, because she is humbled into a spirit of kindness, out of her pride. The Janes and Marys, I suppose, need to be assured into a spirit of kindness, out of their neediness. This is the only way that an extremely lively, non-boring sweetness of spirit can develop and grow in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. "*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*" (Eph 4:32)

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## REDEEMER REPORT

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The Redeemer Report is a publication of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church.  
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HUNTER COLLEGE AUDITORIUM  
East 69TH (Between Park & Lexington)  
services at 9:30AM • 11:15AM • 6:00PM

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH  
Corner of West 79TH and Broadway  
service at 7:00PM

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# DEATH, SUFFERING AND RESURECTION

BY: KATHY KELLER

To paraphrase C.S. Lewis's famous statement, "All the wars and all the plagues in history have never increased the death toll an iota — it has always been, and will always be, one per person." One death per person. Am I the only mother who has looked at her newborn child and wept "Oh, sweet little one, I've brought you into a world that you can only leave by dying!"

In some cultures this realization of the inevitability of death has bred a fatalism that has enlarged to include not just acceptance of death, but of its foreshadowing, suffering. If we're all going to die sooner or later anyway, what does it matter if it's a little sooner? So disease spreads unchecked, even hidden, and callousness to pain in oneself or others becomes a badge of maturity.

Other cultures, most notably our own, take the opposite approach and deny the existence of death (at least our own) down to the last moment. I recently learned of a 93 year old woman in New York City who died without having willed her rent controlled 3 bedroom/2 bathroom apartment to an eligible family member. (In New York City, for those of you who read this out of town,

the difference in monthly rent between that rent-controlled apartment had it been passed on to a family member, and what it will fetch now on the open market is about \$20,000. A month, remember.) Despite her age and illness, she didn't really believe in her own death.

Younger people can be even more, not less, in denial about the possibility of death entering their world. Seatbelts, condoms, restraint in the consumption of drugs and alcohol are all unnecessary, since I am young and therefore immortal. I am personally related (by having given birth) to a young man who, though falling into none of the risk categories above, nevertheless grinds his teeth every month when his health insurance bill comes due. He is young, he says, so what are the odds he'll get sick?

I sigh and think of a friend of my sister's, whose healthy 19 year old son went for a new contact lens prescription. The doctor noticed what she thought was unusual pressure behind his eye, and he called his mother from the MRI waiting room of the hospital to say, "Mom, they think I have a brain tumor." He went out to get contact lenses, and has been

fighting for his life ever since.

As we approach Easter, we should take the time to remind ourselves of the Bible's teaching about death, suffering, and its aftermath. On the one hand, Psalm 90:12 tells us to "Number our days aright, that we may get a heart of wisdom." We are not being asked, of course, to literally discern the exact number of our days, but to recognize that we have a finite number of them. Psalm 139:16 says of God beholding the baby as it develops inside its mother: "Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."

But God, in his mercy, has turned even the inevitability and terror of death into one of his mercies. Job's friend Elihu (the one who isn't rebuked for giving bad advice) suggests that God uses the pains of approaching death to "terrify them with warnings, to turn man from wrongdoing and keep him from pride, preserve his soul from the pit." (Job 33:14-30 is too long to print here, but I recommend that you take a look at it.) He goes on to say, however, that these "scare 'em into the Kingdom" tactics would be useless

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## NEW SUNDAY CLASS

*Redeemer's Marketplace Ministries is offering another new class this spring called VOCATIONAL DECISION MAKING: Does God Have a Plan for Us?*

Many of us in New York and around the country are re-thinking our career plans in light of the economic downturn, a re-awakened desire to do something for the greater good, and just plain fiscal necessity. How do you involve God in the process?

This class will help us wrestle with God's promises that he has a plan for us (Jeremiah 29:11-13), even as we face a discouraging job/career environment. We will focus on making decisions in light of the gifts, experiences, and interests God has given us. We will also talk about how to pray for encouragement and discernment in a way that will deepen our relationship with God.

In keeping with the prior two classes: Theology of Work and Leadership 101, this class is being led by a team of people with varied work/career experiences from our own Redeemer community. For more information, contact Katherine Leary at [kleary@redeemer.com](mailto:kleary@redeemer.com) or the SOCC classes section of the Redeemer web site.



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## DEATH, SUFFERING AND RESURRECTION CONT. FROM FRONT PAGE 3

BY: KATHY KELLER

unless (v. 23) there is an angel on his side as a mediator, one out of a thousand, ... to say "Spare him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom for him!"

Jesus is our mediator, our ransom, the one who saves us

from going down into the pit. We can therefore face death and suffering knowing that he is by our side, that in fact he has been there before us, and leads us through to resurrection. We can battle pain, suffering, and disease, because Jesus did so first,

and told us to imitate him. "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" It is gone, swallowed up in life, so that we may have confidence whether our lives be long or short, easy or painful, he will be with us and bring us through.

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### EASTER WEEK SERVICES AT REDEEMER

#### **Friday, April 18**

Good Friday service –  
The Triumph of the Cross

#### **6:30 PM**

*All Souls Unitarian Church  
Lexington Avenue  
and 80th Street*

**7:45 PM** A community meal –  
following the 6:30 service

\$5 for meal;  
no reservation required  
childcare provided

#### **Sunday, April 20**

4 Easter Sunday services:

#### **9:30 AM and 11:30 AM\***

*\*please note time change for second service*

*Hunter College Auditorium  
69th Street and Park Ave.*  
Sermon by Dr. Timothy Keller  
Testimonies of changed lives  
Selections from Handel's  
*Messiah* and *Judas Maccabaeus*  
performed by the Orchestra  
of the Redeemer, choir and  
baritone Samuel Hepler

#### **6:00 PM**

*Hunter College Auditorium  
69th Street and Park Avenue*  
Sermon by Dr. Timothy Keller  
Testimonies of changed lives  
Music by the Redeemer East Side  
Band with soloists George  
Merritt and Holly Krueger

#### **7:00 PM**

*First Baptist Church  
79th and Broadway*  
Sermon by Dr. Timothy Keller  
Testimonies of changed lives  
Music by the Redeemer West  
Side Band with soloists Mindy  
Sax and Ken Prymus