

# Cups of Cold Water

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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We had landed in Chennai, India, last October 21 and were now traveling by cars to Cuddapah to begin our mission trip. We had been forewarned that it was going to be warm. One of our group had preceded us and sent an email that emphasized a particular word by repeating it three times; “sweat, sweat, sweat.” Still, when we landed at the airport the warm and muggy air stifled us. This was at about 1:00 a.m., in late October!

We were hustled to a nearby hotel to grab a few hours of sleep, and then on our way to Cuddapah. We had the luxury of riding in air-conditioned cars, looking out our windows at workers trampling in the rice patties, or peddling carts with goods for market. About half-way through our 8-hour journey, we stopped for a break at a restaurant and got out of the cars and the heat suffocated us again. My eyes carefully and hopefully followed one of the group leaders as he went over to the cashier and began bringing bottles of water. Imagine my delight when my hands grasped a bottle to discover it was not just cool, but that the water inside was in a state of “slushy ice.” How refreshing was that! I still see that picture in my mind, and experience the pleasure of that cool water.

In the arid middle east where Jesus, our dear Savior lived, the climate was warm and they didn't enjoy air-conditioning as we know it. In the summer months, the sun baked down on them relentlessly. For that reason, His illustration of cold water has deep significance. This is what He said: “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.” Matthew 10:40-42.

By the usage of this reference, unmistakable in meaning to His audience as well as us today, Jesus placed in bold type and large font the importance of deeds of kindness. They are as cups of cold water to a warm and weary traveler. Acts of genuine

kindness can win and witness in a powerful way. There's a lot of religion in a loaf of bread, or a plate of cookies.

Kindness is godly. Above all, our omnipotent Creator is kind-hearted. This aspect of His character is threaded throughout the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments. The word "kind," or "lovingkindness" in the Old Testament is *chesed* which is basically the equivalent of the New Testament *agape*. "Blessed be the LORD, for He has shown me His marvelous *kindness* in a strong city" Psalm 31:21. "You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger abundant in *kindness*." "„With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting *kindness* I will have mercy on you,' says the LORD, your Redeemer. „For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My *kindness* shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,' says the LORD, Who has mercy on you." Isaiah 54:8, 10.

"Rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great *kindness*; and He relents from doing harm." Joel 2:13. His kindness was a promise to the afflicted and a disappointment to others like Jonah. "He (Jonah) prayed to the LORD, and said, „Oh, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in *lovingkindness*, One Who relents from doing harm."” Jonah 4:2.

The New Testament is likewise saturated with allusions to God's great kindness. Jesus said, "Love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Highest. For He is *kind* to the unthankful and evil." Luke 6:35. "God, Who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His *kindness* toward us in Christ Jesus." Ephesians 2:4-7.

How can you tell if you have God's love in your heart? It's easy. It's measured by how much love you have for your worst enemy. Godly love crosses all boundary lines. It infiltrates the encampment of the foe. It is because of that we have hope in Christ! "For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the *kindness* and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit." Titus 3:4,

5. It is when we, by His grace, exhibit this type of love, this type of kindness, that we demonstrate that we are in Him and His love dwells within us.

Mr. Lucas was my 7th grade teacher. One of the subjects he taught us was biology which contained a section that discussed genetics and heredity. One day he said something which turned my face beet red. To my extreme embarrassment, he decided to use me as an illustration of the principle that “like begets like.” He made a comparison between the tall and thin physique of my father, and mine. I’m sure those words were forgotten immediately by my classmates, but they were burned in my brain forever. Nevertheless, the principle is valid. “Like father, like son.” It is likewise true in the spiritual realm. God is kind; so are His children. When the Lord established the law of “after his kind,” as expressed in the first chapter of Genesis, this formula was not limited to things in the physical world. If we are truly “born of God,” we will demonstrate the characteristic of godly kindness. “Like Father, like son or like daughter.”

States Paul, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with *brotherly love*, in honor giving preference to one another.” Romans 12:10. Kindness is one of the important rungs in Peter’s eight-step ladder of Christian growth. “Add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge, self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to *brotherly kindness love*.” II Peter 1:5-7. When Paul spoke of “brotherly love” and when Peter referred to “brotherly kindness,” they both used a word with which you are familiar. The word in Greek for “brother” is *adelphos*, and the word for “love” or “kindness,” as found in these passages, is *philia*. When you have “brotherly love,” you have “*philia adelphos*,” or “philadelphia.”

Some pictures of kindness gleam within the pages of the Bible. Some of these stories contain names that aren’t the most familiar, but they shine nevertheless. There is the story of Ebed-Melech. Jeremiah was a prophet of the Lord who lived at the time of the Babylonian captivity. Faithfully, Jeremiah had delivered God’s messages of reproof and warning, yet he had been treated with apathy and contempt. He told the people to change their ways and return to the Lord.

When they refused to do so, but persisted in their wickedness, he told them to surrender to the Babylonians and not resist Nebuchadnezzar. For this, Jeremiah was stigmatized as a traitor and one who wasn’t patriotic. On occasion, attempts were made on his life. He was arrested and thrown into a dismal dungeon. “In the dungeon there was no water, but mire. So Jeremiah sank in the mire.” Jeremiah 38:6. I’m sure the devil was there to tempt Jeremiah to be discouraged and doubt the Lord. It’s not easy

to be God's messenger. Many times God's prophets have borne ridicule and physical harm.

But there was Ebed-Melech. He came forward to give Jeremiah a "cup of cold water," metaphorically speaking. He put in a good word to the king on Jeremiah's behalf so that he could be rescued. He told Zedekiah, "My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon, and he is likely to die from hunger in the place where he is. For there is no more bread in the city." Jeremiah 38:10.

Based on that counsel, the command was given for Jeremiah to be released. But Ebed-Melech didn't stop there. Kindness went a further step. Recognizing the physical condition of the prophet, he desired to make his rescue as comfortable as possible. What did he do? "So Ebed-Melech took the men with him and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took from there old clothes and old rags, and let them down by ropes into the dungeon to Jeremiah. Then Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian said to Jeremiah, „Please put these old clothes and rags under your armpits, under the ropes.’ And Jeremiah did so. So they pulled Jeremiah up with ropes and lifted him out of the dungeon.” Jeremiah 38:11-13. A "cup of cold water" that will be remembered through eternity. Ebed-Melech was promised deliverance for his act of kindness. Jeremiah 39:16-18.

Abigail presents a picture of kindness. David was exiled from Israel, a fugitive from wicked King Saul. Finding himself impoverished, he made a request of a local resident for some food for himself and his company. He felt justified in making such a request since he had many times rescued the flocks of that man and saved him much expense, sometimes supplying the man's loss with his own property.

How did the man, Nabal, respond to such a request? His response was rash and ungodly. "Then Nabal answered David's servants (who had made the request for food), and said, „Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who break away each one from his master. Shall *I* (notice the personal pronouns) then take *my* bread and *my* water and *my* meat that *I* have killed for *my* shearers, and give it to men, when *I* do not know where they are from?" I Samuel 25:10, 11. There's not much room for kindness when self is prominent.

David's reaction to this answer, which would have bathed his sword in blood, was averted only because of the kindness and generosity of Nabal's wife, Abigail. When she heard about it, look what she did. She "made haste and took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five sheep already dressed, five seahs of roasted grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and loaded them on

donkeys.” I Samuel 25:18. With this bounty going ahead of her, she went to meet David and delivered one of the great speeches in the Old Testament, an appeal for him to accept her kindness and not soil his sword.

Later, after Nabal’s death from an apparent heart attack following a drunken binge, Abigail became David’s wife. Her act of kindness was “queenly.”

Add this to the account of David’s kindly treatment of Mephibosheth, a grandson of King Saul. Saul had tried numerous times to kill David, in whom he saw a rival to his kingdom. Twice he had hurled a spear at David while he strummed his harp, and there were many endeavors at other times in which he hunted David’s life as if he had been an animal. On some of these occasions, David had opportunity to do Saul harm, but kindness and respect for the “anointed one” forbade him. When he learned of Saul’s death, did he clap his hands and schedule a parade? No, he lamented loudly and executed the one who claimed to have killed him.

When David was installed as Israel’s ruler, he made inquiry. “Then the king said, „Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, to whom I may show the *kindness of God?*” And Ziba said to the king, “There is still a son of Jonathan who is lame on his feet.” II Samuel 9:3. With this introduction, Mephibosheth was allowed to eat “at the king’s table” and enjoy a royal experience despite his rebellious heritage. That’s a Gospel snapshot, isn’t it? That truly was “the *kindness of God,*” and a picture of us invited to share in Christ’s kingdom despite our unsavory lineage. As David’s days declined, he gave to his son Solomon special orders to treat a certain family with kindness. “Show kindness to the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table, for so they came to me when fled from Absalom your brother.” II Kings 2:8. “Cups of cold water.”

Joseph of Arimathea’s act of kindness will not be forgotten. “Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given to him. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock.” Matthew 27:57-59.

Wishing that the Lord’s body be given a decent burial, Joseph unselfishly gave up his own place of final rest and bequeathed it to the Lord. With their limited vision, it would be reasonable to think that Joseph was expecting the gift of his tomb to be of a permanent nature. Of course, Jesus rose from the grave and the tomb became available again and was where, presumably, Joseph himself was later laid to rest. What a blessing will be Joseph’s throughout eternity! Forever Joseph (and us in a

secondary sense) will ponder the significance of “He occupied my grave.” Assuming that Joseph was later buried in his now vacant tomb, he will be able to cherish the thought that he was laid to rest in Christ’s grave. A “cup of cold” water that will never be forgotten.

Paul and his companions were shipwrecked and floated ashore to what we now call the Island of Malta in the Mediterranean. “And the natives showed us unusual *kindness*; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold.” Acts 28:2. Here’s another word with which you are familiar. When it says that the “natives showed us unusual *kindness*,” the word “kindness” in Greek is “*philanthropia*,” combining *philia* (“love” or “kindness”) and *anthropos* (“man”), from which we get our word “philanthropy.” The natives demonstrated unusual philanthropy.

The story goes on to say that Paul, the humble man that he was, gathered sticks up to put on the fire, and while so doing was bitten by a venomous snake. The apostle shook off the reptile into the fire, while the islanders watched to see him collapse and die. He didn’t. Then they changed their mind and thought he was a god.

Though their theology was imperfect, through the providence of God and their hospitality, they were given an opportunity to learn of the true God, Whose kindness had brought salvation to them. An immediate benefit was the healing of the father of Publius, a leading citizen of the island, which led the way for many on the island to be healed through the ministry of Paul. “They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary.” Acts 28:10.

Malta: an unscheduled stop on Paul’s itinerary, adorned by acts of kindness that brought healing and salvation. It was Satan’s purpose, through the wrecking of the ship, to bring destruction. After all, there were “prison epistles” that the devil would have preferred remain unwritten. (The letters to the Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and to Philemon were written by Paul later while he was a prisoner in Rome.) But God overruled the devil’s plan, as He does so often, and brought salvation and healing. I’m hoping someday soon to meet some of the people of Malta who were won to Jesus through kindness. “Cups of cold water” that will forever be remembered.

Epaphroditus is one whose name is not often mentioned. Apparently he ministered to Paul while he was in prison at Rome and delivered gifts that had been collected by the saints in behalf of the apostle. Paul had high words of commendation and gratitude for the kindly ministry of this disciple. Though he was incarcerated, Paul proclaimed, “Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the

things which were sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.” Philippians 4:18.

The story is told of a group of men swapping stories late night in a tavern. The subject was, of all things, who had the best wife. After others had had a chance to put forth the arguments they felt were convincing, the last man offered this. “You don’t know what you’re talking about. I have the best wife in the world, and I’ll prove it to you. It’s now past midnight, but right now we; all of you, are coming to my house. My wife has gone to bed long ago while I was getting drunk, but when we get to my house, I will awaken her and ask her to fix us something to eat. And she will do just that.”

Despite their protests to the contrary, a slovenly group of inebriates made their way to the man’s house. He opened the door and called loudly upstairs for his wife to come down. Before very long, she emerged, obviously having been deep in sleep. “My friends are here, and we want something to eat,” he bellowed. Without a word, she began to work. Soon, sounds of pots and kettles were joined by delicious aromas coming from the kitchen.

In short order, she emerged with steaming plates, only to find the room occupied only by her husband. “Where are your friends?” she asked. “They’ve all gone home.” “But I thought they were hungry and I was supposed to fix them some food.” “No, they weren’t really hungry,” he replied. “I don’t understand,” his wife answered.

So the man explained what had happened; the conversation at the bar; the proposal to prove whose wife was the best. He finished by saying, “I don’t understand. Why do you treat me with such kindness when I treat you with such meanness?” Here was the chance for which this Christian lady had been waiting. Slowly and thoughtfully, she responded, “It’s like this. I’m a Christian. I believe in Jesus. I believe that He’s coming back soon and will take me to a wonderful place called heaven, where everything is perfect and lovely. You don’t believe in God and aren’t preparing for heaven, so this is the only heaven you’ll know, and I’m determined to make it the very best possible.”

This was too much for the husband! Much of the effect of the alcohol consumed earlier in the evening had now worn off so that sense and reason were breaking through into his abused mind. When his wife told him these things, he broke into the sobs of an infant. He asked the Lord to come into his heart and make him a changed man, a Christian like his wife. That man was converted and began a new life, and that home became a “heaven on earth.” Kindness: it’s unbeatable!

“Whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.” Is there a “cup of cold water” you can give to someone this week?