

Building on Biblical Foundations

“Justice and Mercy”

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Genesis 18

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We continue our story in Genesis Chapter 18:16-33

SLIDES: Genesis 18:16-33

¹⁶ When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. ¹⁷ Then the LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?”

¹⁸ Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.^[c]

¹⁹ For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”

²⁰ Then the LORD said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous ²¹ that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.”

²² The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD.^[d] ²³ Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?”

²⁴ What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare^[e] the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? ²⁵ Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

²⁶ The LORD said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

²⁷ Then Abraham spoke up again: “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, ²⁸ what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?”

“If I find forty-five there,” he said, “I will not destroy it.”

²⁹ Once again he spoke to him, “What if only forty are found there?”

He said, “For the sake of forty, I will not do it.”

³⁰ Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?”

He answered, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”

³¹ Abraham said, “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?”

He said, “For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it.”

³² Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?”

He answered, “For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.”

³³ When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

Last week we talked about the many facets of the Lord’s character as revealed to humanity through his Word. So often in scripture, when a man or woman has an encounter with the Lord, they learn yet another divine characteristic of His nature.

In the reading today we encounter both the justice and mercy of God.

JUSTICE:

In verses 16-20 the Lord reveals to Abraham his plans toward Sodom and Gomorrah. Why?

He explains that since Abraham instructs his children in the ways of the Lord, it is good for him to know that the Lord is a God of justice, that he does not tolerate wickedness forever. A time comes when the sin itself cries out to heaven for justice.

Let’s pause here. We have talked about Abraham being a friend of God and how the Lord has chosen to reveal himself to Abraham, and work through Abraham’s descendants to redeem mankind.

The Lord has already shown Abraham facets of his nature. He is the Lord Almighty. He is the Lord who sees. He is the Lord who provides. He is the Lord of covenant. Now, He is revealing himself as the Lord who is Just.

What is Justice? What do you think Justice is? Getting what someone deserves? If a person commits a crime, justice says they should pay a penalty – whether that penalty is loss of freedom, loss of finances, or even loss of life.

In a legal sense when we think of justice, we may think of retribution – which means a justly deserved penalty, or the act of correcting a wrongdoing.

If anyone is able to mete out a *justly deserved penalty* it would certainly be the Lord.

For He is the righteous judge.

Psalm 18:30 “As for God, his way is perfect: The Lord’s word is flawless; he shields all who take refuge in him.”

Psalm 19:9 “...the judgments of the Lord are truth: they are righteous altogether”

In contrast, when we judge, we do so from a place of imperfection. We see only partly as Paul said. We do not see the whole truth. We do not know the intentions of the heart. We don’t even know the intentions of our own heart for the Word of God tells us that the Heart is deceitfully wicked...

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

But as we have seen . . . when God judges, He does so based on being ALL KNOWING and Holy. When he judges he does so from a place of perfection, having insight and knowledge that no one else holds.

How does that make you feel? Knowing that the Lord is perfect, Holy, all knowing, all seeing, and shall hold each one of us accountable for our words, our thoughts and our conduct? He judges based on absolute truth – there is no shadow in him.

How are you found under this gaze? How do you bear up under such scrutiny?

A day is coming when all the inhabitants of the earth will be judged by Jesus – the righteous judge.

Paul wrote, “For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). NIV

Angels were on their way to Sodom and Gomorrah to investigate the reports that had made their way to heaven of wickedness that deserved the judgement of God.

What does Abraham do? When he hears of the plan to destroy the cities, he appeals not to God's righteous judgment, but to his Mercy. For though the Lord is indeed a righteous judge, perfect in all his ways, He is also merciful. . . He "delights to show mercy."

Micah 7:18

**Who is a God like you,
who pardons sin and forgives the transgression
of the remnant of his inheritance?
You do not stay angry forever
but delight to show mercy**

What is Mercy? Mercy is to NOT get what you justly deserve. Ah, but what do we justly deserve? Many would say, I am good person, therefore I deserve mercy. What does the Word of God say about that? Are we good people? We – on our own – separated from God?

No. Unfortunately, we are not "good enough people." No one has ever lived, apart from Jesus who is good enough to stand before the Righteous and Holy judge. Not one.

Romans 3:23 tells us that "**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**"

We are utterly lost if left to our own devices. Thanks be to God that he does not leave us there, but He has indeed provided a way back to him – through Jesus. That now by His grace, by his shed blood – all sin (that thing that causes us to be unholy, and separates us from a Holy God) has been atoned for – once and forever.

We are now made righteous (right with God) "through faith in Jesus Christ" and this is given to all who believe.

This is MERCY. This is the mercy of God extended to all humanity – regardless of individual transgressions, regardless of race, gender, creed, social status, wit or lack thereof, appearance, good works or striving.

It is the Mercy of God that sent Jesus to the cross, it was the Love of God that held him there.

Abraham appealed to the Mercy of God to spare all of the sinners in Sodom and Gomorrah if just 10 people were found who did not commit wickedness. And what does God do? He agrees.

So great is his Mercy that he agrees to spare entire cities full of wickedness, for the sake of just 10 righteous.

We are living in trying times, uncertain times, some might even say wicked times. God is not unaware. He is not sleeping. He is not approving either. You can be sure the sins of wickedness have made their way to heaven, just as they did in the days of Abraham. Justice will come. The word of God says that his justice will come swiftly when it does come. But when. . . ???

2 Peter 3:9

Surrender

In his great mercy the Lord is holding back His wrath. Justice will come and it will be swift. We need not worry about that. Better to spend our days left here on earth preparing those around us to come to repentance.

What is repentance?

Repentance is two pronged:

1 – It is recognizing your own spiritual condition – lost and utterly hopeless without the intervention of Jesus. All have sinned and fall short of God’s requirement of perfection.

2 – Once you realize your condition, you turn from it into the embrace of a savior. You say to God “I’m done doing it my way, I am ready to do life your way.” This is more than a prayer – although it does begin with a change of heart and a change of mind – it is an act of the will that surrenders before a righteous – yet merciful – God.

This surrender must result in more than a change of heart and a change of mind, it must be accompanied by a change in lordship over your entire life. You must get off the throne of your life and invite the Lord to be THE LORD of your entire life.

When you do this – when you exchange your will for HIS – you become a child of God. You now share in the inheritance of the children of God. You have become a rightful citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven withal the benefits its offers and a co-heir with Christ Himself.

AND Your name is written in the Lamb’s book of life. What is the book of life?

Revelation 3:5

The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels.

Revelation 13:18

All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb’s book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.

Revelation 20:15

Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

This is why the Lord has delayed releasing his judgement upon the earth – he desires that ALL should come to repentance. He desires that all of our names should be found written in the book of life. That is His desire. But we must choose. We must do our part.

Justice and Mercy.

When we are the ones in the right – we want - no we demand Justice.

But when we are the ones in error – we beg for Mercy.

Please, please understand that Jesus IS God's MERCY to a world that stands condemned to rightfully receive God's wrath.

John 3:36

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.