



COMPASSION

Small group questions

Exodus 33:12-34:14 - Our compassionate and gracious God

Leaders - if the questions make no sense or you don't know the answer - please contact the preacher!

1. As you were growing up, what did you think was God's default disposition toward you?
2. Recall where our passage fits in the unfolding history of Israel.
3. Look again at 33:13. What a lovely request! Compare Philippians 3:10-11 and Col 1:9ff.
4. Look again at 33:15. What is the blessing of the New Covenant in regard to the presence of God? (Who goes with you?!)

Compassionate

5. What was the significance of God proclaiming his name?
6. Why couldn't Moses see God's face? (33:23)
7. From where does compassion emanate in Biblical understanding?
8. Explore the explanation or unfolding of compassion - list the features - 34:6ff. How do you feel about this description of God?

Just

9. If all are guilty, which guilty people does God forgive and which does he not forgive?
10. What is meant by *punishing the children and their children for the sin of the fathers?* (34:7)
11. What is Moses response to seeing this picture of God? (34:8)

Conclusion

12. A friend thinks that past sin in their life means they can never be forgiven and never accepted by God. How do you help them?
13. Another friend thinks God is a pushover and that their sin doesn't matter. What do you say to them?
14. What will you take away from this first sermon in our compassion series?

Date: 10 September 2017
Services: 730am, 930am, Peregrin (via Chris), 630pm
Series: Compassion
Passage: Exodus 33:12-34:14
Title: Our Compassionate and Gracious God
Outline: Compassionate
...and Just

- If I gave you just two words to describe your spouse or your closest friend or one of your children... or one of your parents... how would you go?
- Just two words...
- How can you comprehensively describe someone in just two words?
- Ok - let me leave that one with you and ask you another...
- What is God's default feeling - disposition - toward you? Towards us as humans?
- You have may grown up thinking - he's always angry - cheesed off with us... We can never be good enough - never pull our socks up high enough?
- Like a teenager trying to please their parents... hair's too long); skirt's too short, room's too messy; drives too fast; doesn't study enough; doesn't help enough around home... you can just never please them!
- ...and we often feel that that is how it works with God - we're always a disappointment; we try hard but fail frequently... we can never win....
- ... and his default disposition towards us is a mix of anger and disappointment...
- well there are two words I want to share with you this morning which I think will go a long way to challenging that...
- here's the first - and it's reflected in the title of our new sermon series we start today:

1. Compassionate

- Read with me 34:5 - *Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him (Moses) and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.*
- Some background will be helpful.
- So Israel have been led out of Egypt...
- They are about to come face to face with the challenge of moving into the promised land.
- Moses seeks assurance that the Lord will go with them...
- I love his request in 33:13 *teach me your ways so I may know you...*
- Is that your prayer today as we open God's word? *Teach me your ways so I may know you //*
- Then he adds - 33:15 - *if your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here...*
- why would you want to embark on carrying out God's will if you weren't assured he was with you....?
- ... Moses said to God - this is what will distinguish us from all the other people on the face of the earth... that God goes with them... *////*
- do you know friends that now under the new covenant - that is what distinguishes **you - us** - from all the other people on the earth??

- **God goes with us!!!**
- Think about it... //
- God by his Holy Spirit indwells every Christian... he lives in us and with us... //
- When Susan was kissing Michael to send him off on the train to school every morning... her words to him - *you know who goes with you...?*
- When you head out this door this morning - you know who goes with you.
- When you're heading out tomorrow into what ever Monday holds for you - you know who goes with you.
- Into that challenge, in the midst of that great joy and delight... as you walk on the beach or into the doctor's surgery... or on to the golf field... or into that family crisis... you know who goes with you!!!
///
- Well God in 33:17 says - *I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name....* that's a promise that has come through to us in the New Testament - John 10 - our shepherd Jesus knows us by name...
- But there's something **else** Moses asks for...
- 33:18 - *now show me your glory...*
- Moses longs to see and understand God in all his glory - so that he has the courage to lead God's people in to the future
- What would it mean to see God in all his glory?
- We don't attach much significance to names any more...
- So - does any one know what Christopher means?
- Bearing Christ
- It was thought that the original Christopher bore the baby Christ across a river when he was young - and hence became the patron saint of travellers!!
- Any way - names don't mean much today - so you have in fact someone named Mr Short who's very tall; you may know someone named "Joy" who's anything but; or someone Mrs Jolly who actually lives up to her name...
- But in the ancient world - especially of God - his name reveals something of his nature and character... His name is his person.
- So look with me at 33:19 - Moses has asked to see God's glory and God responds by promising he will cause his goodness to pass in front of him and he will proclaim his name... the LORD - in capital letters - which reflects the Hebrew name of God - Yahweh!
- Now look with me at the two places in our passage God's name is spelled out
- 33:19 *I will proclaim my name in your presence....* And by way of explanation he goes on *I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion..*
- now over to 34:6 *He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, the LORD, the LORD - Yahweh, Yahweh - the compassionate and gracious God....*
- I want us to see and understand this morning - that basic to the very nature and character of God... inherent in the name of God - is his compassion.
- Now - we're going to be reminded in this series - that *we* think of compassion as coming from the heart - you know - our heart goes out to those suffering from the hurricanes in USA or the floods in Asia or the earthquake in Mexico...

- But in the ancient world – compassion is understood as emanating from your **gut** – from your **bowels**...
- You know that feeling when you feel **sick** for someone – or you have **butterflies** from **anxiety** – that's **compassion**... that's where it **comes** from...
- And I want you to know this morning – that that is God's default position toward you
- **That's who God is**
- That's what **drives** him
- That's his **character**... is **nature**... his **default** setting...
- He is **compassionate**...
- What does that look like?
- Well – we don't have to guess – this is what his compassion looks like....
 - **He is gracious**... generous... beyond anything we deserve
 - **Slow to anger**.... Patient with us when we trip up and make mistakes...
 - **Abounding in love**... not because we are lovely but because he is love
 - ...and **faithfulness**... that is – he is loyal – he's committed to us – he keeps his promises...
 - **maintaining love to thousands**... (Remember – for God so loved the world!!)
 - **forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin**... anything that is against his will, that breaks his heart, that is unbecoming or inappropriate... he stands willing to forgive....
- Brothers and sisters – this is brilliant news...
- **Beautiful** news....
- This is our God – **compassionate** and **gracious**...
- This is his **nature**...
- This is how he **is** toward you....
- This is his **glory** – his **goodness**... his **magnificence!** //
- But there's more...
- There's more... because **we** know more than Moses knew...
- We've "seen" more than Moses saw!
- In the pages of the New Testament – in the glory of the New Covenant – we have seen his Son Jesus...
- What does John say about Jesus in the opening verses of his gospel? *We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*
- Jesus himself says in John 14 – *if you've seen me, you've seen the Father...*
- We know that the gift of Jesus, came from God's great compassion – from his love – *for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.*
- He has demonstrated his faithfulness by never giving up on his people.... Through all their unfaithfulness in the promised land... their idolatry... their rebellion – he remains faithful and then pours out his love as he gives his Son....
- Jesus lived the perfect life we couldn't live and died the death we deserve – and THAT is how he can forgive wickedness, rebellion and sin because the record of our failure and the law which stood against it has been nailed with Jesus to the cross...

- *This is love – not that we first loved him – but that he loved us and sent his Son as atoning sacrifice for our sin... I John 4 ///*
- Do you know the reaction of Moses when this vision was revealed... of our compassionate and gracious God?
- Have a look with me at 34:8 *Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshipped.*
- Filled with awe and wonder...
- Gobsmacked at such compassion and grace and forgiveness....
- And you? //

2. JUST

- yet there is another aspect of God presented for us in the vision of God's glory Moses saw.
- And I want to make it clear, that this is not a "but", but an "and".
- That is – this is not a **flip** side of God to sort of **balance** up the good side...
- It's not that God is compassionate BUT somehow the 'down' side is that he's also just...
- The Bible is not the slightest bit embarrassed at the justice of God as we tend to be...
- No the Bible doesn't present his compassion as the **glorious** bit and his justice as the shameful or **awkward** bit... his **justice** is part and parcel of his **glory**...
- So let's look again at 34:6-7 – *The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.*
- Oh Mark, you might be thinking, why did you have to go and wreck a perfectly nice sermon by bringing this up!!
- But let's see if can unpack this a little.
- The verse just said 'forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin'... AND THEN – he does not leave the guilty unpunished....
- Which is it?
- Surely he either **forgives** or he **punishes**? What's going on?
- Hang on - all **sinners** are **guilty** by **definition**.
- So **which** guilty ones will he **forgive**?.... And which guilty ones will he **not** forgive?
- It's helpful to see the way other parts of the Old Testament use this proclamation in Exodus...
- For example.... In Joel 2:12-13 God says to the rebellious people, "*Yet even now return to me with all your heart with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.*" And Joel goes on to encourage the people, "*Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love...*"
- So Joel uses our verse Exodus 34:6 to encourage the people that if they return to the Lord, he will turn away from the judgement he is about to bring on them.
- ...So the assumption is that the people whom the Lord will **not** forgive are the unrepentant people who will not return to God with all their heart.
- That's the way Joel understood Exodus 34:5-7.
- Forgiveness is for people who **repent**.
- The **refusal** of **forgiveness**, is for those **unwilling** to repent!

- he will forgive the **guilty** who turn from their sin and turn to God with their whole heart.
- And the guilty who turn **down** his compassionate and gracious offer of mercy, will face his **judgement**. //
- **For God is compassionate and just.** //

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- There are two kinds of people who are hard to help as a minister.
 - One thinks they are too far **gone** to be **forgiven**.
 - The other thinks forgiveness is a **snap**.
 - One thinks they are utterly **disqualified** for the kingdom. The other thinks they are a **shoe-in**.
 - The one thinks God is only full of **anger** and **judgement**.
 - The other thinks God is a **pushover**.
 - One is blind to the **magnificence** of God's **mercy**.
 - The other is blind to the **magnitude** of their own **sin and rebellion**. ///
 - Which are you today?
 - Which message do you need to hear?
 - Let me address the first category first... those who think they are somehow disqualified from forgiveness...
 - If God is slow to anger even though we give him every reason to be angry with us because of our sin, then he must be very merciful and forgiving – "merciful and gracious – forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."
 - The reason God is slow to anger is not that he doesn't **notice** our sin but that he **forgives** it – and we know that that came at the cost of the death of his Son Jesus!!!
 - And not just some kinds of sin. For those of you who feel that there is a category of sin that is beyond God's forgiveness, please give up having your own opinion and trust what God says in his word!
 - He forgives wickedness, rebellion and sin
 - The reason God used all three Hebrew words for sin here is to show that all sorts and degrees of sin are forgivable. He piles them up to make plain what he means. There are no categories of unforgivable sins. /
 - The only sin that is **unforgivable**, is the sin from which people refuse to repent.
 - If you can repent and turn from your sin, you can be forgiven!
 - Turn from your sin this morning, trust in Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord, and you will find a depth in God's mercy like all the depth of the sea!

- yet in closing... if I may... I want to say to you who think forgiveness is easy... that God is a pushover... that he doesn't really care or mind how you live... that everyone will be OK in the end... then think again... for if you refuse to repent... then there's no forgiveness...

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- where does this leave us this morning in the first of our series on God's compassion?
 - Two words about God – is he COMPASSIONATE and he is JUST

- We've stood with Moses on Mt Sinai this morning.... And with him we've seen the great glory of God - Yahweh Yahweh - the compassionate and gracious God... slow to anger... abounding in love and faithfulness... forgiving wickedness for all who ask - and yet for those who want to say 'no thanks', they will face his judgment... and we bow in awe.
- We've stood with the disciples who saw in Jesus, the glory of the one and only who came in grace and truth - and we bow in awe
- We've stood beneath the cross... and on the cross we saw our Saviour take our sin and bear our shame... and that nailed with him was both the law and the record of our failure... and we see where God's compassion and his justice meet... we see there how it is possible for him to forgive sin... because in himself - he paid the price... and we bow in awe
- And we stand at the empty tomb - and we like Moses on the mountain can only bow to the ground and fall in worship... for we have seen God's glory...
- Our compassionate and just God...