

Jason Upchurch - Systematic Theology - Theology Proper - Attributes - Mercy Peace

As I mentioned last week we are going to take a look at theology proper this morning. We look at Systematic theology every couple of months. We have about 2 more sermons on theology proper - which is the study of God himself and all of his attributes. Then we'll move into the doctrine of man - anthropology. Which I think is going to be a fascinating dive into Scripture.

This morning we're talking 2 more attributes of God: Mercy and peace. God is merciful and God is peace.

1) Mercy - God is merciful. Read Exo. 34:6-7

I want to begin with mercy this morning because in my experience we don't actually talk a lot about God's mercy. We talk a lot about God's grace.

Eph. 2:8-9: For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not your own doing it is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast.

Rom 3:23-24: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

And especially in the reformed world when we talk about salvation we usually couch it in terms of grace. We call the theology of salvation the doctrines of grace. And it is. And God is gracious to us and kind.

Grace is unmerited favor. It is a gift that's not earned. It is God loving us and saving us and giving us more than we could ever ask or think.

But we don't often talk about mercy. And I'm as guilty of that as anyone. How often do we talk about the salvation we have in Jesus in terms of God's mercy toward us? I think if we're being perfectly honest mercy sounds sort of Roman Catholic.

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy. And while the Catholic Church certainly corrupts the concept of mercy, mercy itself is very, very biblical. And God himself is merciful in his nature.

Here in **Ex. 34:6-7** we have a list of attributes that God gives to Moses. These are God's own descriptions of himself to us. And the very first of the descriptions of God is what? Mercy.

God moves past Moses who is tucked in the mountainside because the glory of God would consume him and as he passes by he proclaims his name - Yahweh, Yahweh - and describes who he is. A God merciful.

What does that mean? In a technical way we could say that it's not getting what we deserve. Mercy is really at the heart of the gospel.

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The just and right consequence for our sin should be immediate death whereby we are cast into hell forever. Eternal, conscious punishment is the only right punishment because we have sinned against an eternal, holy God.

If someone commits a triple homicide, the just and right punishment is for them to be put to death.

So we deserve death, we deserve hell, we deserve wrath forever - amen and amen.

The way of escape is through faith alone in Jesus alone. When a person repents from their sin, trusts that Christ died on the cross, in their place for their sin, their sins are forgiven and they become a child of God. And what God does is show them mercy. He does not treat them as their sins deserve. There is no more hell or death or punishment. There is no more wrath or anger or justice from the Lord.

What happens at that moment is that we experience God's infinite mercy. Where he relents of the wrath that he would have shown us and brings us into his family.

Mercy is not getting what we do deserve. It's the gospel and it's also what we're called to show others. Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive what? Mercy.

Jesus says that if you're not a merciful person - then you won't receive any mercy from God. Why? Because people who know the mercy of God pass it along. If you're not a merciful person, you probably haven't received the mercy of God.

Are you merciful to those who wrong you? Are you merciful to your family? Are you merciful to those who work for you and with you? In love do you cover over a multitude of sins like God does?

Or do you keep records of wrongs and treat people harshly? Mercy is who God is but it's also who he calls us to be.

So when don't get what we deserve we receive mercy. That's what mercy is; it's a withholding of wrath,

But I want to take it a step further because I don't think that definition is complete. It misses the heart behind the mercy.

Imagine you're sitting on a lawn chair by a swimming pool. Your kids are playing in the shallow end. And all of a sudden there's screaming. One of your kids strayed too deep and is going under and the other kids can't help. What do you do? You dive in and save the kid.

Now, why do you dive in? Is it just because it's your duty? "Fine, I'll get up from getting a tan and save junior here. He doesn't really do his chores when I tell him but whatever, I'll save his life." Is that why you save your child? Just because it's your duty?

No. But listen, I think that's often what we think of when we say God shows us mercy. "Fine, I'll save her. I'll get off my throne and forgive her sins. She's a total screw up, can't get anything right but she called out to me so I gotta do something." I think that's often what we think of when we think of God's mercy. Yes we don't get what we deserve, but God's kind of annoyed at having to save us. He's annoyed that he had to dive into the pool.

Yeah we're alive but we're going to get yelled at or taken behind the woodshed. That's not the heart behind God's mercy.

Why does a parent dive into the pool to save their child? Because they deeply love the child. There is a compassion - that's the word - that is ingrained into us with our own family. It's a compassion that shows them favor and kindness and mercy. And instinctively we respond to save them. It's our knee jerk reaction: our compassion instantly flows into salvation.

The NASB and the NIV actually translate the word as compassionate. That's the heart behind the word mercy. It's a tender love that drives people automatically into merciful action.

This is the very nature of God. And the pool illustration is on purpose because our compassion for our kids is how God's compassion is for us.

Psalm 103:13 as a father shows compassion to his children, so Yahweh shows compassion to those who fear him.

That's the exact connection. You think you have compassion on your children? God's compassion dwarfs our compassion. When he shows you mercy, when he shows me mercy, it's because he has a heart of a father who can't bear his child to suffer.

What motivates God to give us mercy - to not give us what we deserve - is his compassionate love for us.

And that mercy is huge. **Eph 2:4** says that God is rich in mercy. He's not stingy with his mercy. He's not a penny pincher with mercy. Fine, I'll let you off the hook this time.

Have you ever been down because of how sinful you are? You just can't get anything right, can't put that one sin to death, can't seem to grow in this one area. And you kind of walk around thinking at some point God is just going to backhand you and send you away?

Listen, that's not the real God. He's not short on mercy. He's rich in mercy. Whatever amount of sin you bring to the table, God brings infinitely more compassionate mercy to the table.

And this isn't a license to sin: "Well, if God's just going to show me mercy I'll just go sin some more." No. Romans says "God forbid" that be our attitude.

No, the mercy of God doesn't give us permission to go sin, it comforts us that God will rescue us again and again when we do sin.

Turn to Luke 18:9-14. When we're thinking about salvation and what it is we're crying out for, we need to remember that we're longing for God's mercy first and foremost. This is the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax collector. These were not real people, just an illustration from Jesus himself. **Read 9-14**

So two men, two different dispositions and two very different prayers. The Pharisee is the outwardly righteous one. Someone who knew the Law and kept the Law but who was proud. He thought that his actions are what merited God's favor. He wasn't like the riff raff of society - he fasted, he tithed, faithful to his wife, generous. But utterly offensive to God.

He was not justified. Justification is a legal term. It means you did everything right. When your wife asks what happened to the last of the ice cream you are justifying yourself - you're explaining why what you did was the absolutely right thing to do.

When we are saved we are legally considered justified. God says says we have done everything absolutely perfectly. Not because we did anything, but because by faith in Jesus we are united to Jesus. And since Jesus did everything perfectly, God looks on us as though his perfect record is our record. And he says, "Yep, you are perfect in Christ."

Who was justified here? The tax collector. Why? Because he cried out asking for God's what? His mercy.

Why does God save a person? Because of his mercy. His compassion. Not because of works. Not because they are someone great. But because in humility they cry out to God who is rich in mercy.

This is really the crux of salvation. We know who we are, we know we're sinners, we know that our sins deserve the wrath of God. It's those who recognize their sinful estate that God shows mercy to.

Turn to Rom. 9. This is the famous passage on God's election and predestination. That he chooses some for heaven and some for hell. He chose our outcome before the world began and he didn't do it based on our works. This is a hard teaching, we'll see it more in when we dive into the book of Ephesians. But notice how it's framed here. **Read 10-13**

So why did God choose Jacob and not Esau? Well, it didn't have anything to do with their works. They weren't even born. Neither had done anything good or bad. But it was simply God's purpose to choose one and not the other. God chose to bless Jacob and hate Esau. That's a wild claim, but that's exactly what Paul says here.

Now, our reaction to that is: that's not fair! How can God choose someone over another if they didn't do anything good or bad? That's unjust! Well, Paul anticipates that concern. **Read 14-18**

What's Paul's response? Paul responds with truth about God's mercy. God's mercy is selective. God is not obligated to show mercy on all people. The very definition of mercy - compassion to not give what is deserved - means that he doesn't have to give mercy to anyone.

God is not required to hand out mercy. He can hand out justice and hardening. That's what he did to Pharaoh. Did you think about Pharaoh? Before Moses even went to Pharaoh God said he would harden Pharaoh's heart. Did that ever bother you? What did Pharaoh do?

God could have just changed Pharaoh's heart to want to bless the Israelites. "Hey guys, so sorry for the 400 years of slavery - sorry about all that. Why don't you head over to the Promised Land and we'll even give you some money to help your travels."

He could have done that.

Prov. 21:1: The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.

Why didn't he do that? He didn't want to. He has mercy on whoever he wills. And he hardens whoever he wills.

He has compassion on whom he has compassion and he has mercy on whom he has mercy. So God choosing us for salvation or not doesn't depend on us, it depends entirely on God.

Think about that for a moment. Let that settle down deep. You're not here because of some decision you made. You're not here because you were better than your pagan neighbor. You're not here because you're smarter or richer or even more humble.

You're here, in Christ, because God simply chose to pour out his compassion and mercy on you.

Thank you, Father.

When I was a kid our family visited Grand Coulee Dam a few times. And I remember standing at the base of Grand Coulee Dam when I was a kid sort of scared that the water would just burst through the dam and wash me away. It is a massive dam: a mile long and 200 yards high with 12 million cubic yards of concrete holding back 11.5 billion cubic yards of water. If it were to fail it would be devastating.

Grand Coulee Dam is small potatoes compared to the awesome power of the wrath of God toward unbelievers. Why would God rescue you rather than the next person? Why do you get heaven and she gets hell? **Read 16**

It doesn't depend on your will or exertion. It depends on God's what? Mercy.

Some he has compassion. Some he hardens. This is his prerogative as God. We don't know why. But we praise for his compassion - his mercy - on us.

God is mercy.

2) God is Peace (Order). Turn to 1 Cor. 14:33

What this means is probably a little different than what comes to mind for most of us. Usually when we think of peace we think of calmness or lack of strife. If you and your neighbor have peace it means there's no tension.

And there is a sense in which that's true. But more specifically, the peace of God in the Bible has more to do with order. When we say God is a God of peace, we mean he's a God of order. Everything in its proper place and time and because of that there is no strife. This is the apostle talking about spiritual gifts and their usage in the church. **Read 26-33**

So I won't get into the issues of spiritual gifts, except to say that the way Paul deals with the craziness going on in the Corinthian church is to remind them of God's character. God is not a God of confusion. The word means disorder or confusion or chaos. It's used politically of war and unrest.

God is the very opposite of that. He is a God of order. Notice how Paul solves the problem of craziness in the church is just an airtight liturgy. We do everything in order and God is honored because he is a God of orderliness, a God of peace.

Rom. 15:33: May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Phil 4:9 What the Philippians had learned and received and heard and seen in Paul - his conduct his order of life - practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Practice order and the God of order will be with you.

Turn to Rom. 16:17-20. At the end of Romans here we have Paul warning against people who want to cause strife. They cause divisions and disorder. Notice how Paul says to deal with them and then the promise he gives. **Read 17-20**

How do we deal with people who cause divisions and create obstacles? These are people who create chaos and disorder. Watch out, avoid them. If people are creating chaos we don't try to quell the chaos, we remove them from our lives.

And then did you notice the promise? The God of peace will soon crush Satan under his feet. Well, that doesn't sound very peaceful. It's a reference to Gen. 3 where God promises to crush the serpent's head, even though the serpent bruises the heel of Eve.

What's going to happen when the Lord returns? The head of Satan will be crushed. He'll be cast into hell and no longer able to deceive the nations. There will be no more disorder, there will only be peace.

So Paul says in the mean time, when you come up against people who try to disrupt peace, deal with them rightly and remember that one day they will be no more like their father Satan.

Now, just to be clear, there is a sense in which peace does mean lack of hostility.

Eph 2:14: God himself is our peace who has made us both one and broken down the dividing wall of hostility.

There's a gospel aspect of peace. God, through Christ, has reconciled us to himself and given us peace. But even that peace is a bringing into proper order.

Peace - and I'm just going to say orderliness - is a big theme throughout the Bible.

God's city is the city of peace. Jeru means city, Salem means peace.

The common Hebrew greeting was "peace," shalom.

God has designed orderliness into the universe. We see this on a universal scale: planets go around the sun in an orderly way, moons go around planets.

Even in the earth itself we see order. We see regular seasonal cycles - winter, spring, summer, fall. We see cycles of precipitation, cycles of dryness. Migration of animals.

After the flood God said there would be orderly cycles:

Gen 8:22: While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.

I don't think that means there was a new order of things. I think right after the flood - which cancelled out the order for a year - God is saying "that won't happen again - everything is going to have order until the return of Jesus."

Isaiah talks about the order of the water cycle:

Isa 55:10: For as the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth, it shall not return to me empty.

This is a description of the water cycle 700 years before Jesus. Water comes from the clouds, falls down, flows to the sea, evaporates and starts all over again. Over and over and over.

God also wants order in our lives. We are called to bring order into the world.

God said to Adam be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and what? Subdue it. What does subdue mean? It literally means to put into bondage. Bring it into ultimate conformity. Organize it and order it.

Think about all the commands that God gives. God has a system in mind for how we live life.

There was order for civic life, order for the military, order for kings, order for worship at the Temple, order for foreign relations, order families. And when that was all being worked out there was peace. Why? Because order always leads to peace.

Think of all the commands for worship in the OT and NT. There's a reason we show up here and do what we do in the order we do it. Because God has prescribed how to have an orderly church service.

I don't know how many times I've talked to pastors who tell me stories of how they prepared their sermon and they're preaching but it wasn't until they strayed from their notes that "the Spirit really started working." Almost like the Spirit is random and spontaneous.

Actually, given the nature of God, the Spirit probably works more when people are orderly than spontaneous. And our lives should be well ordered.

Because God is a God of peaceful order, we too should desire order in our lives. Each one of us should strive for order, our families, our businesses, our work, our community.

I've never met a person whose life was just chaotic and random and thought "Boy, the Spirit is really at work in this person's life." Why? Because there's usually no peace, no order.

No, the God of peace brings chaos into order. And since we're created in his image and redeemed by his Son, we should do the same.

There should be order in our lives because order will create peace, to the glory of the God of peace.

Pray