Week Two: Merciful Judge by Ray Abruzzi (EHP)

**TITLE**: Merciful Judge

**RECAP**: We are currently in a series called “Who Is God?”. In this series we are discovering the attributes of God and what makes Him so special. Last week we discovered that God is not just any creator but THE Creator. He doesn’t make mistakes or create evil but everything He does and makes is, in fact, beautiful and good. But this week we are going to discover another side of God. God is a Beautiful Creator, but He is also a Merciful Judge.

**INTRO**: Imagine if you were a judge. Your job is to uphold and enforce the law. Its your only job and you must do it without hesitation. One day a man stands before you – a horrible, evil murderer. The evidence against him is firm. There’s no doubt about his guilt – he even admits it. He confesses what he did and follows up to say that he is “very sorry”. Then he asks you to “Forgive him”. And despite your responsibility to side with justice and make him pay for the crime he committed, you grant him complete forgiveness and let him walk free. We’d definitely be scared if human judges operated this way.

But that’s exactly what our *Judge* (God) has done. Despite the clear standard of His law, and in spite of the overwhelming evidence of our sin and corruption, He sweeps aside our crimes, washes away our guilt, and sets us free from the due penalty of our sin.

**BIG IDEA**: God desires to show us mercy whenever we ask for forgiveness, therefore, we can live mercy-full life toward others.

This brings up a few very important questions:

**Problem**: When we look at social media or turn on the news it seems like injustice is running rampant. People are mistreated and others are favored. The guilty are free and the innocent are punished. These are all valid concerns, and the honest question begins to arise, Where is this God of justice? When will He bring justice? How will he deal with the unjust people and situations ?” Who deserves mercy? How do I live a merciful life? How is God able to show mercy yet bring justice at the same time?

**T: To get a clearer understanding of God being a Merciful Judge - Let’s read Exodus 34:4-7.**

**PASSAGE**: “So Moses cut two stone tablets like the first ones. He got up early in the morning and climbed up Mt. Sinai, just as the LORD had commanded him. He carried the two stone tablets in his hands. The LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him, and proclaimed the name, “The LORD.” The LORD passed in front of him and proclaimed:

“The LORD! The LORD! **A God who is compassionate and merciful**, very patient, full of great loyalty and faithfulness, showing great loyalty to a thousand generations, forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion, **yet by no means clearing the guilty**, punishing for their parent’s sins their children and their grandchildren, as well as the third and fourth generation.”

Exodus 34:4-7 *CEB*

**Solution**: In this passage of scripture, there are a couple key things to note regarding God, us, sin, and mercy. Notice though, before God addresses who and how he will deal with injustice, He **first** reveals to Moses what He mostly desires – to **show Mercy**. He reveals to us not His physical features of what he does, but his internal features of *who He is*. In order for us to fully understand why He does what He does, we must first understand who He is and the motive behind His actions.

**T: This brings us to our first point – The first way we see God as a Merciful Judge is understanding that He is Lord.**

**I.**               **God is Lord – Compassionate and Merciful**

Standing before a cloud of smoke is scary and intimidating enough. If I were Moses, my first impression would have been that this is a scary God. During that special encounter, God could’ve revealed himself to Moses as anything He wanted. But what’s most interesting is God reveals not that He is angry, wrathful, vengeful, or even upset:

– He reveals himself as The LORD who is *compassionate* and *merciful*.

·      One thing Moses requested of God in Exodus 33:18 was for God to reveal His glory to Moses. Moses was in such good standing with God that God granted him this request, but not in a way Moses anticipated.

·      If the big cloud of smoke wasn’t evident enough of who was in the room, God reaffirms to Moses who he is standing with. But He doesn’t stop at the smoke show, He formally introduces himself and reveals His name – Kind of like when you meet a person for the first time. “Hello (Extends out hand), my name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

·      God is *Yahweh*, the LORD!

·      *Yahweh* = The Lord; the strong God, almighty & powerful; The self-existent one.

·      There was no mistaking who is in charge and who has the power (authority).

·      Another way of understanding this concept is knowing that God is NOT dependent on us, rather, we are dependent on Him. Specifically in this case, of His mercy.

--- That word *compassionate* can also be understood as “to show pity” or “show concern for”. In other words, God expresses His love for us by the way he is concerned for us.

-       But What exactly about us is God concerned about? Let’s look at this text in 2 Peter.

2 Peter 3:9 tells us that God desires that no one would be destroyed but that everyone would turn away from their sin (repentance).

Peter is telling us that sin will destroy us! And any sin we keep in our lives will separate us from a relationship with God the Father. Thankfully, Gods pure **love (**compassion**)** for us moves Him to action by displaying mercy and forgiving any who believe he forgives and asks Him for it.

Like the evil murder we talked about in the beginning, he was clearly deserving of punishment via prison or even death, but He took a bold step by stating he was sorry and asked the Judge for forgiveness. The judge listened and CHOSE to withhold what he deserved and gave him what he didn’t deserve, freedom from the penalty of the crime. He showed *Mercy*.

*Mercy* = the act of withholding what someone deserves and giving them what they don’t deserve.

-       I don’t know about you, but growing up whenever my parents asked me to do something, I would mistakenly reply “But, why?!” As if their request was to harm us or inconvenience us.

-       And the universal answer every parent or guardian replies with is (can you guess it?) “BECAUSE I SAID SO!”

-       God is Lord, meaning He has the final say in our lives if we have invited Him to be the Lord of our lives. We can trust that He has our best interest and if He asks us to do something, it’s because He is able to see the bigger picture.

-       His plans are never to harm us but to prosper us, and give us hope and a future. (Jer 29:11)

One of the cool things about God is He reveals to us why He is merciful and compassionate.

**T: It is because He loves to keep His promises. The second way we see God as a merciful Judge is recognizing that He is Faithful.**

**II.**             **God Is Faithful – Patient and Loving**

In order to understand what God is being faithful to we need to see what He is referring to in this scripture. Let’s look at Exodus 20: 5-6:

“You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of their parents upon their children; the entire family is affected – even children in the third and forth generations of those who reject me. But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands.”

**Point**: God is not a man that should lie; He vows to keep His own word.

-       Context: God is introducing to Moses the new law of the land.

-       The *10 Commandments* reveal the nature of Gods holiness and how the people were to conduct themselves before a Holy God. Specifically, not to have or make for themselves any other gods.

-       God is clearly serious about this matter because He takes the first 5 verses to emphasize this rule. In fact, He will not even tolerate the thought of them worshipping any other idol.

I love Tim Kellers explanation of what an **idol** is. He states in his book *Counterfeit Gods*, **an idol is**“*anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, and anything that you seek to give you what only God can give you*.”

God probably included this command because he knows how frail and weak humans are. He knows how easily tempted we can be to replace Him for personal pleasures or convience. But He also knew He would be referring to this command in the next chapter to come (Ch. 34).

For example, not soon after, Gods very own chosen people were caught red handed making an idol for themselves, trying to replace God for a cheap calf made from gold. This was and still is a big NO-NO in the eyes of God and worthy of wrath and punishment.

You may think to yourself that you’re in the clear because you haven’t made a golden calf or statue, but the reality is, as Tim Keller stated, an idol is anything that takes the place of what God can only provide us. The truth is, when we turn to idols we are really rejecting God Himself and undermining His deity.

--- God not only keeps the receipts of those who reject Him and disobey Him, but He remembers those that Love Him. Specifically, by how they believe and obey His word. **And He promises to pour out His love and mercy for generations to come**.

In the bible, we see God make special covenants (promises) with those who trust and love Him. We see it with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and many others.

·      A **covenant** is a fancy legal term that simply means “*I promise*”.

In essence, God is telling Moses that He promises to keep His word to show love and compassion for every generation that is to follow. God doesn’t cancel out or change His mind on own His promises. If He says it, He means it.

If God forgives the guilty, we can trust that He sees the bigger picture and will not allow any stone to go unturned. All that He does is according to His plan to save us back to himself.

**POINT**: God doesn’t forget injustice, He is being patient and waiting to pour out mercy for those who ask for forgiveness. He is dependable and keeps His word. What this does for us is it makes us live a life with *certainty*. Because we live with certainty you can live with **Joy** because you can count on God.

**T:** Often, we hear that “God is love”. This statement is true; However, we would not fully grasp God’s true love if we stopped at mercy. **He is also Just**. This brings us to our last point.

**III.**            **God is Balanced – Forgiving and Just**

v.7 “I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations. I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But I do not excuse the guilty…”

-       God is expressing that His goodness and mercy is not just for Moses, its also for but also His children, grandkids, and generations to follow. MERCY IS FOR EVERYONE.

-       “Forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin” = simply put, weather you sin a lot or a little, God is ready to forgive. In fact, HE LOVES DOING THIS!! This is great news!!

ON THE FLIPSIDE: He will not “Excuse the guilty”.

-       There is an important truth we need to grasp when considering the Justice of God. Because he is Holy, He requires perfection. Jesus is the only one who lived a perfect life and paid a cost for you and I that we can never pay for ourselves. But because of Jesus, we can confidently ask God for forgiveness when we mess up.

-       God WILL forgive the repentant sinner, BUT HE WILL NOT FORGIVE THE UNREPENTANT SINNER.

-       It wouldn’t be Just for you to live anyway you want & when you die expect God to overlook your sin and grant you access into heaven.

-       Gods perfect character demands *Justice*.

·      Simply put, either Jesus takes the punishment for your sin or you do before God? Which do you choose? I choose the Jesus way!

**T**: **Justice** (getting what we deserve) & **Mercy** (not getting what you deserve) have nothing to do with fairness but everything to do with **Grace** (Getting what we don’t deserve). When we understand grace, we understand the very heart of God made known through the life of Jesus.

**CLOSE:** There is a man in the bible named *Jonah*. He was a prophet; a man God used and chose to speak through. But what he does is contrary to what we would expect a representee of God to do.

Let’s look at Jonah 4: 1-2. “This change of plans greatly upset Jonah, and he became very angry. So, he complained to the Lord about it: “Didn’t I say before I left home that you would do this, Lord? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people.”

-       Jonah KNEW God was merciful and good, yet, **REFUSED** to go to a place named Ninevah because of the hatred in his heart towards the Ninevites. He wanted to bring justice into his own hands by not showing them mercy. The ninevites were known for doing evil things, specifically to Jonah’s people. Jonah knew God’s heart was that none would perish but that all would come to change and repent before God.

Thought: God calls us to love all people by showing them forgiveness, even if they dont “deserve it”.

--- Jonah is quick to anger, God is slow to anger. Jonah lacked kindness; God loves kindness. Jonah is vengeful, God is merciful.

--- Jonah was called to be a representative of God. Jonah didn’t represent God well.

**QUESTION**: How well are you representing God? Is your life a reflection of the revealed attributes of God?

There are some people listening to this message that might relate to Jonah – you know the truth but don’t represent it very well. The truth is God is quick to forgive us, so this frees us to forgive others.

**GOSPEL**:  2 Corinthians 5:21 – “For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.”

On the cross, Jesus was able to fulfill the requirement of sacrifice and law. He took on himself what we deserve, punishment for sin, so that you and I would be reunited with God. He is calling us and inviting us back to Himself.

Are you ready to take a Bold step and receive Jesus as Lord and Savior and represent Him to a merciless world?

**Discussion Questions**:

1.     What hinders you from showing mercy?

2.     How can you take a step this week to display mercy?

3.     What was one of your main takeaways from the message?