

Lord's Supper

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Moving Slide

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Lets start today with a question-

"Are we supposed to understand villains & empathize with them? Or should we want them to pay for their crimes?"

Two movies about classic fictional villains in the last 4 years represent an ongoing shift in the way we think about evil- and justice.

Those movies are- "The Joker" and "Cruella".

The Joker, of course, is the Batmans' arch nemesis. And Cruella is the famed Disney villain from the "101 Dalmatians" series. In their 2019 & 2020 film releases, each movie explored the backstory of the villain in an effort to raise empathy- to understand these villains. To humanize them.

But when the Joker was first introduced in comic books in 1940 and Cruella de Vil in the "101 Dalmatians" 1961 film- there was no attempt at understanding them or feeling bad for them. They were evil...to the core. I mean- Cruella de Vil is a play on the words "cruel Devil".

And these aren't some quiet background niche indie films. These are prevalent ideas that represent the larger cultural values. The Joker, is the highest grossing R-rated film of all time. And Cruella preceded by Maleficent and the Broadway hit, Wicked- all explore HOW those Disney villains and witches BECAME who they are.

These movies and Broadway plays want us to see that people are more complex than they appear to be- even the most evil ones.

Arthur Fleck had a mental illness and was bullied by society- Don't just see him as the Joker.

Maleficent had a pure heart but she was betrayed- how else do you think she would respond to that kind of double-crossing?

Elphaba tried over and over to be good- but circumstances out of her control made her the Wicked witch of the West.

And before there was Cruella de Ville- she was Estella Miller- emotionally manipulated and abused by her mother- don't you understand? She's NOT the CRUEL DEVIL you think she is.

And Empathy is good, right? Some compassion can go a long way. Don't we need more of that?

Yes. Yes we do. People are not the worst things they've done or the best things they've done. We too quickly demonize people and too quickly make them our heroes.

At the same time, a problem has arisen with this shift from clear Good & Evil.

A paradox if you will. Think of it like this.

We got a movie about Cruella to understand why she was evil. And we together-blamed her mother. But we didn't get a movie to understand her mother. SO the buck was passed. But couldn't we make a movie about Cruella's mother and pass the buck to someone else?

We got a movie about the Joker- to understand him- but we didn't get a movie about each individual person that bullied him to understand them. SO the Buck was passed . But couldn't we get a thousand movies about all the people that were nasty to Arthur Fleck and pass the blame on?

Not to mention- at the very same time in our western cultures over the last 60-70 years- cries for JUSTICE have been on the tip of our tongues- and we live in a society- where we have a list of sins that immediately- without listening or understanding- will get you canceled. Speakers are uninvited because a 5 year old social media post is uncovered. You can't act in this TV show anymore because you made a disagreeable political statement. We, collectively as a society, will try to pretend like a person doesn't and has never even existed if they commit one of the sins on this list.

And that- leads us back to the paradox.

“Are we supposed to understand villains & empathize with them? Or should we want them to swiftly pay for their crimes?”

Title Slide- “Sparing the Joker: How God’s Justice Makes You Patient & Compassionate”- 1 Samuel 24, Psalm 57

On one hand, our society wants us to be patient with evil and empathize with a villain- and its en vogue to mock or scorn a God presented to us in the Bible that brings swift judgement.

On the other hand- we have a societal ethic that says- “Whatever you do- don’t put up even for a second with a list of these sins.” While the Scripture describes God as being patient and slow-to anger.

What I want to show you today- is that if you get rid of the idea of a just God- who judges evil- you also get rid of the very ability to be patient and compassionate with your enemy.

Today- in 1 Samuel- David is on the run from King Saul- who wants to kill him because he’s envious of David and doesn’t want to yield his throne. He’s already made several unsuccessful attempts to take David’s life...so we pick up the action in Chapter 24.

1 Samuel 24:1-22

When Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, “David is in the wilderness near En-gedi.”

2 So Saul took three thousand of Israel’s fit young men and went to look for David and his men in front of the Rocks of the Wild Goats. 3 When Saul came to the sheep pens along the road, a cave was there, and he went in to relieve himself. David and his men were staying in the recesses of the cave, 4 so they said to him, “Look, this is the day the Lord told you about: ‘I will hand your enemy over to you so you can do to him whatever you desire.’ ” Then David got up and secretly cut off the corner of Saul’s robe.

5 Afterward, David’s conscience bothered him because he had cut off the corner of Saul’s robe. 6 He said to his men, “As the Lord is my witness, I would never do such a thing to my lord, the Lord’s anointed. I will never lift my hand against him, since he is the Lord’s anointed.” 7 With these words David persuaded his men, and he did not let them rise up against Saul.

Then Saul left the cave and went on his way. 8 After that, David got up, went out of the cave, and called to Saul, “My lord the king! ” When Saul looked behind him, David knelt low with his face to the ground and paid homage. 9 David said to Saul, “Why do you listen to the words of people who say, ‘Look, David intends to harm you’? 10 You can see with your own eyes that the Lord handed you over to me today in the cave. Someone advised me to kill you, but I took pity on you and said: I won’t lift my hand against my lord, since he is the Lord’s anointed. 11 Look, my father! Look at the corner of your robe in my hand, for I cut it off, but I didn’t kill you. Recognize that I’ve committed no crime or rebellion. I haven’t sinned against you even though you are hunting me down to take my life.

12 “May the Lord judge between me and you, and may the Lord take vengeance on you for me, but my hand will never be against you. 13 As the old proverb says, ‘Wickedness comes from wicked people.’ My hand will never be against you. 14 Who has the king of Israel come after? What are you chasing after? A dead dog? A single flea? 15 May the Lord be judge and decide between you and me. May he take notice and plead my case and deliver me from you.”

16 When David finished saying these things to him, Saul replied, “Is that your voice, David my son? ” Then Saul wept aloud 17 and said to David, “You are more righteous than I, for you have done what is good to me though I have done what is evil to you. 18 You yourself have told me today what good you did for me: when the Lord handed me over to you, you didn’t kill me. 19 When a man finds his enemy, does he let him go unharmed? May the Lord repay you with good for what you’ve done for me today.

20 “Now I know for certain you will be king, and the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand. 21 Therefore swear to me by the Lord that you will not cut off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father’s family.” 22 So David swore to Saul. Then Saul went back home, and David and his men went up to the stronghold.

Psalm 57

Be gracious to me, God, be gracious to me,
for I take refuge in you.

I will seek refuge in the shadow of your wings
until danger passes.

2 I call to God Most High,
to God who fulfills his purpose for me.

3 He reaches down from heaven and saves me,
challenging the one who tramples me. Selah
God sends his faithful love and truth.

4 I am surrounded by lions;
I lie down among devouring lions —
people whose teeth are spears and arrows,
whose tongues are sharp swords.

5 God, be exalted above the heavens;
let your glory be over the whole earth.

6 They prepared a net for my steps;
I was despondent.

They dug a pit ahead of me,
but they fell into it! Selah

7 My heart is confident, God, my heart is confident.
I will sing; I will sing praises.

8 Wake up, my soul!

Wake up, harp and lyre!
I will wake up the dawn.
9 I will praise you, Lord, among the peoples;
I will sing praises to you among the nations.
10 For your faithful love is as high as the heavens;
your faithfulness reaches the clouds.
11 God, be exalted above the heavens;
let your glory be over the whole earth.

TRANSITION:

If David was Batman- Then his Joker is undoubtedly Saul. And yet, in this passage- David shows incredible understanding and compassion- at the same time he has no intent to “let Saul off the hook”.

And in the song that he wrote in this cave- we get the secret to his ability to embrace justice and compassion together.

I’m going give you 3 instructions today from this passage about HOW you become a person that deeply cares about justice...and is also incredibly compassionate.

1) Trust God- even if you don’t understand the timing.

When David is backed into this cave- he already knows that he is supposed to be King and that Saul’s kingship has been rejected by God.

He knows he has done nothing wrong- while Saul has come morally unhinged.

Saul has repeatedly attempted to kill David, and is currently on a manhunt to do so to eliminate his royal competition.

David has plenty of justification to kill Saul on the spot, and now has the opportunity- literally catching him with his pants around his ankles in the cave.

v 24:4

Not only that- he has a group of loyal trusted men around him encouraging him to do it- even telling him that God wants him to do it.

BTW- this “scripture” thats quoted here is nowhere to be found in the Bible.

And yet, David restrains himself by merely cutting off the corner of Saul’s robe

v 5

But then directly after- he feels terrible about it. Why? I mean this sounds like the guy who never does anything risky and then to prove to his friends that he's an adrenaline junkie he cuts the tag off of a mattress- or rides his bike without a helmet- or throws his recycling bin in the regular garbage.

But this is more than an inventive plan to prove to Saul that David could have killed him. There is actually something here for David to be remorseful about.

By cutting off the corner of Saul's robe- he is making the most obvious- public facing symbol of Saul's kingship- unwearable. The Jewish Law- the Torah- requires the corners of his robe to be intact. So David- is sneakily making it so that when Saul emerges from the cave- there will be this public message to everyone that Saul is unfit to be king.

v 6

So David resolves- no. I'm not going to kill Saul. The Lord put him in this position as King- and when its time- the Lord will take him out.

v 8

We even get this moment where Batman essentially takes his mask off in front of the Joker and bows his face to the ground. I mean- it takes a lot of trust to expose your neck blindly to a man who has a sword and wants to kill you.

v 15

And notice- that David isn't saying "Oh Saul- you are magnificent. I hope you reign forever. No- he says "May the Lord judge between you and me." In other words- David acknowledges that either Saul or himself will be king- but he is trusting in the LORD to bring that about at the right time.

So how does David do it? We get the answer in the Psalm he wrote in this cave just before Saul came in.

Psalm 57:1-2

David's thoughts- his meditations have been on the saving nature of the Lord. He's been writing and singing a song about God's graciousness. About the fact that the LORD is his salvation and refuge.

and look at v 2. About the LORDs "purpose" specifically for David. He is meditating on the character of God and the purpose God has revealed about David's life.

57:3

He meditates on God's character. His faithful love- HESED in Hebrew- which is the deep mysterious, unexplainable attached covenant love of God toward his people.

57:4

Then he remembers the way God has faithfully saved him in the past. Referencing times when he was a shepherd and God saved him from lions- and allowed him to triumph over those lions.

57:8

David's time in this cave reflecting on God's character and his plan have led him to sing to his soul- "Wake up. I know its dark in this cave. But God has something better than this. And i'm going to sing about it. I'm going to put my mind on his love- his faithfulness- and his record of caring for me- so that in this dark moment- I will anticipate the dawn. the rising of the sun. A new day. I'll look to his beautiful future- his sovereign plan- when my present is ugly and it feels like my enemies are the ones calling the shots.

Back to 1)

I want you to think about a couple of things here.

First- in case you're the person who thinks music or the arts is a waste of time- its David's engagement in the arts- literally writing a song- that puts him in the headspace to think about who God is- and God's trustworthiness to keep a promise- that allows him to understand what God wants him to do in this moment. Its one of the reasons we sing songs together as the people of God. Because I'll tell you- 30 years later- I don't remember a single sermon from the pastors of my childhood- but you can start one line of a hymn- and I can probably do the 1st, 2nd, and 4th verses (because we always skipped the 3rd).

Songs have a way of getting stuck in our heads...they engage a part of our brain and memory that can beautifully shape us. Which- BTW- is a good reason to think about the music you listen to. Because what can shape you positively toward God and also shape you in the other direction.

Second- and more importantly- is the content of this song. Psalm 57 focuses David on God's character from the past- in order to see the future- and then bring that into the present. Its a time travel device.

See- if all David sees is his present circumstance- he's going to get frustrated and act rashly. Which- if you remember- is EXACTLY why the kingship was torn away from Saul. Saul panicked in a moment- and then decided to disobey God in order to bring about the promise of God.

But Samuel has been reminding himself of God's faithfulness in such a way that even when his best friends try to tell him "Hey- this is your opportunity. I know it feels wrong- but God wants you to do it." He knows the LORD better than his friends. So he changes

his present actions based on God's past faithfulness- and the bright future he sees in a God who keeps his promises. He doesn't understand the timing. But he does know and trust the one who is keeping time.

This is what I've called before the "Bountiful attitude that looks to receive from God". The bountiful attitude expects good from a good God- and is always open handed, ready to receive from God.

This is why its so crucial to read and meditate on Scripture. Because without it- you aren't going to meditate on God's faithfulness- and you will trust your idiot friends in the moment- or you'll just trust your gut in the moment- and end up forgetting what God has called you to.

Transition- That is the opposite of the bountiful attitude. Its the Technical attitude...which always manipulates to get something from God.

2) Don't do God's job for him to get his promise now. Do the job God gave you while you wait.

There's a history in the Scripture of people receiving a promise from God...and then doing exactly the opposite of what God tells them to do to achieve it.

In Genesis 3- the man and woman are told by God that they will image God by being fruitful and multiplying and filling the earth (which takes a long time)- and then a serpent creeps up and tells them that they should be like God, but the only way to do that is by disobeying him- and then they can be like him RIGHT NOW. That decision brought death into the world.

In Genesis 16- Abram has been promised by God that he will be the father of many nations- but he and his wife Sarai are still childless when they are old. So Sarai convinces Abram to sleep with their servant Hagar...and she can have that baby RIGHT now instead of waiting for the impossible to happen. Lets just get this thing going NOW. That decision brought so much pain and hurt into the lives of Abram, Sarai, Hagar, and their offspring.

Now here- the old temptation comes up again.

God has made a promise that David will be King. And Saul is a Joker- who needs justice. And now David has the opportunity to become King...and administer God's justice by killing Saul. He could eliminate the waiting. He could take the Kingdom now.

But look what he says.

v 24:12

He says- vengeance belongs to the Lord. But as for me- I won't be the one to lift a hand against you.

Do you see this? This is, in some ways, an answer to the question we asked at the first. Do we show compassion and empathy to our enemies? Or do you bring justice and make them pay for their crimes?

Here- David on one hand doesn't let Saul off the hook. "You've done some terrible things Joker- and you will pay for them." on the other hand- "God will be the one to bring justice."

Back to 2)

Miroslav Volf is a Croatian who lived through one of the worst instances of ethnic killing in history in Serbia in the 1990s. I want to boil down something he said about God's wrath against sin and justice. So this is a paraphrase: "You know, people often say that if you believe in a God of judgment that you will become violent yourself." He said, it's actually exactly the opposite. It's when you don't believe in a God of justice that you become violent and judgmental. Because you think you need to do God's job for him. Who is going to pay these people back for what they did? When you've watched someone murder your parents and siblings, how can you not be filled with a rage that will eat you alive? He talked about how he wrestled with hating the enemy who had been so cruel to his people. But then he said, "As I contemplated the gospel, I realized that because the people who did these things would answer to God, I didn't have to make them answer to me. And that gave me the resources to not hate them."

Look at this in the NT.

Romans 12:19-21

Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God's wrath, because it is written, Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord. 20 But

If your enemy is hungry, feed him.

If he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

For in so doing

you will be heaping fiery coals on his head.

21 Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.

Here is Jesus on the subject

Matthew 5:43-45

You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Back to 2)

There is always a calling that God gives us in the waiting. Whether its waiting for justice to our enemies...or its waiting for some suffering to be removed.

And listen- for some people- law enforcement- judges- there is a role that humans play in administering at least temporary justice. This is true.

But where we often find ourselves is seeing any fortuitous circumstance that allows us out of our suffering- or allows us the ability to take revenge on someone who hurt us and call it "justice"- we think just because we have the opportunity- it must be God that wants us to do it.

But in this instance- and the instances I showed you earlier from Genesis with Adam and Eve and Abraham- often its the Devil himself who offers opportunities to make us the judge and jury of someone else...not God.

But don't do away with God's justice just because you aren't the one he's called to pull it off. You will never have the strength to love your enemies- if you don't have a deep conviction that every wrong will be dealt with by God.

and that brings us to this direct quote from Miroslav Volf- who we heard from earlier in the Serbian genocide.

Once we accept the appropriateness of God's wrath, condemnation, and judgment, there is no way of keeping it out there, reserved for others. We have to bring it home as well. I originally resisted the notion of a wrathful God because I dreaded being that wrath's target; I still do. I knew I couldn't just direct God's wrath against others, as if it were a weapon I could aim at targets I particularly detested. It's God's wrath, not mine, the wrath of the one and impartial God, lover of all humanity. If I want it to fall on evildoers, I must let it fall on myself – when I deserve it.- Miroslav Volf

TRANSITION: In other words- I need God's justice- Gods wrath against sin to love my enemy. But that means that his justice is going to come to me in all my sin, too. Which leads me to this last point.

3) Don't demonize- because everyone is made in God's image. Don't Lionize- because everyone is a sinner.

Saul is a character who had been absolutely lionized- made into a hero before he ever really did anything at all.

The people celebrated him when literally because he was really tall.

Of course- then they met Goliath and got some perspective.

And yet- he was full of jealousy, envy, pride and hatred.

David had a front row seat to all of Saul's nastiness-which was often and most intensely directed at him.

And yet- look how he speaks about and to Saul.

v 6, 8 , 11 (end at Father)

David calls Saul his lord...recognizes God's calling in Saul by calling him the LORD's Anointed...and even calls him his "Father". Which he is not, but played a fatherly role.

In other words- even though he's seen Saul's worst- when he speaks to him he calls to mind God's best in Saul.

And then look how he speaks about himself.

v 14

He sees himself as insignificant. This isn't false humility. This is David recognizing that compared to God- who is the Sovereign Lord- calling the shots about who is and isn't King- David has as much significance as a dead dog. Or a single flea on that dead dog.

Put another way- Saul- I'm not your problem here. I don't have the power and control you think I have.

At the same time, David is honest about Saul's sins and his own innocence and calling.

And Saul's response? It softens him. Even if only for a moment.

v 16

He sees David as a son. Not an enemy.

Back to 3)

What David went through with Saul in that cave ultimately points is to Jesus.

You see, like David, Jesus was anointed King, but like David, Jesus didn't receive that Kingdom immediately; he had to wait, while he was disrespected and snubbed and persecuted and falsely accused.

And, like David, Jesus never took matters into his own hands. He waited on God, trusting that his Father would make things right in his own time.

And, like David, Jesus was tempted by Satan to take a shortcut in the wilderness. "Just take this shortcut," Satan said to Jesus, "and you can have it all right now." But like David, Jesus refused.

When Jesus was tempted to the technical attitude- to turn stone to Bread- or to jump off the temple and have angels rescue him proving HE was the real king...or to bow to Satan and receive a kingdom now instead of going through the cross to rescue those that would be with him forever... Jesus turned to his Father. He took the bountiful attitude that looked to his Father's faithfulness and looked ahead to the joy set before him...and he endured the temptation to bring justice now.

And like David, Jesus didn't take vengeance on his enemies when he had the opportunity and right to do so.

In this story, we are Saul. We, the human race, each of us, had usurped Jesus' throne; and we were the ones trying to kill him. We were all represented in the crowd in Jerusalem that Friday afternoon crying out 'Crucify him!'

As Jesus hung from a cross, he was tempted again- "come down from the cross. Take vengeance on your enemies.

And yet, Jesus said, "Father forgive, they know not what they do."

Even in his last breath- he forgave a murderer.

And that's where Jesus' story and David's story diverge a bit. You see, Jesus did more than just spare us, like David spared Saul. Jesus actually died in our place so that we could be forgiven and restored to the palace. David merely let Saul go; Jesus laid down his life for us.

See, on the Cross, God himself in Jesus Christ was receiving the justice each of us deserves for our sin. So that, we would eternally not be ripped from the Kingdom of God, but we would be included- as his sons and daughters. \

Look what the apostle Peter writes about God's patience with us as he waits to bring ultimate justice...and make all things new in a perfect kingdom with no more sin or death.

2 Peter 3:8-9

8 Dear friends, don't overlook this one fact: With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. 9 The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.

He's waiting for you to repent. He's waiting for you to hear him call you "son". He's waiting for you to hear him forgiving you...so you can forgive those who you have so long held anger, resentment, and a deep grudge that has poisoned your life for so long.

God's justice will come. And his justice will either be on Jesus...or it will be directly on you. Only God himself can withstand his own wrath against sin as he makes all things new. SO run to him. Take refuge in him.

Today, Repent and trust Jesus as the only way that you can enter the Kingdom of God.

Pray.