

Connect & Reflect

3/13/19

SERMON SUMMARY

The Kindness and Severity of God

Romans 11:22; Deuteronomy 27, 28, 32

“How America Sees God” (*USA Today* lead story from October 7, 2010)—the article is based on a study conducted over the last four years by two sociologists from Baylor University in Texas. Their work is published in a book called, *America’s Four Gods: What We Say About God and What This Says About Us*. Here’s a summary:

- 5% of Americans are atheists or agnostics. The authors suggest that the rest can be divided up according to their allegiance to one of four views of God:
- 24% believe in a distant God who “booted up the universe, and then left humanity alone.” They quote a rabbi who identified with this view: “There is no one who can fix things if I mess them up.”
- 21% hold to a second view that God is disengaged from this world, but that he will make things right in the world to come.
- 28% think God is “engaged in history and meting out punishment to those who do not follow him.”
- 22% believe in a benevolent God who is “a force for good who cares for all people, weeps at all conflicts, and will comfort all.”

In the sermon, we looked briefly at Romans 11:22, where Paul writes of the kindness and severity of God. We read from Deuteronomy 27 and 28, where Israel was told to march in front of two mountains—Ebal and Gerizim. From Ebal, six tribe representatives would call down curses on Israel if they did not obey the covenant. From Gerizim six representatives would call down blessings if they obeyed.

We looked at Deuteronomy 32 where Moses teaches Israel a song. In the song God is presented as one who blesses and punishes his people. The sermon suggested that it is misleading to describe God as a God who either punishes or blesses, as if he doesn’t do both. We believe the Bible teaches that too many people want to limit God, and in so doing they develop a one-sided image of God that is inaccurate.

God sometimes blesses and sometimes punishes, but the trajectory of the biblical story is toward the cross, where we see both God’s judgment and God’s mercy. Believers live in confident expectation of God’s judging our sin at the cross and extending eternal blessings to us on the merits of Christ.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Start Praying

1. How can our class pray for you or a friend or loved one tonight?

Start Reading (read Romans 11:22 and Deut. 28:1-6, 15-19)

2. What questions do you have after reading the text?
3. Summarize what happened at Ebal and Gerizim.

Start Sharing

4. What do you think of the *USA Today* article?
5. Could you put yourself in one of the four categories? If so, which one? If you *had* to put yourself in one, which would it be?
6. Were you brought up in a church/home environment that leaned sharply in one direction or the other (God as wrathful Judge or loving Savior)? Which one?
7. Which view of God do you think the world leans toward?

Start Thinking

8. The sermon talked about Jeshurun who “grew fat, and kicked” (Deut. 32:15). What was the significance of that description? Do we ever “grow fat, and kick”?
9. Could God be God if he didn’t punish evil? If he just stood back and allowed evil to be perpetrated indefinitely without responding?
10. Do you try to emphasize both views of God in your personal study/reflection/life? How?

Start Doing

11. When you return to the “real world,” how will you live out what you’ve learned in this text and sermon?
12. How will viewing God as a God of “kindness” and “severity” change the way you relate to him tomorrow?

Start Praying (ACTS acronym)

13. **A**doration: Praise God for his kindness and severity.
14. **C**onfession: Admit that we often become off-balanced in our view of God, emphasizing one aspect over the other.
15. **T**hanksgiving: Thank God for being a God who judges and saves, but especially for offering salvation through the cross.
16. **S**upplication: Ask God to help the other members of this class to submit to him in obedience and to trust in his mercy to save them by his grace.