



# HERE IS YOUR GOD

a study of God's attributes

SERMON TITLE: The Justice of God

DATE: August 7, 2022

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 34:6-7; John 3:16-22, 36; 5:22-30

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## SERIES SUMMARY

What we need most is to know God for who he truly is. How we answer the question, "Who is God?" will change our lives indelibly. The Psalmist sings, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised. His greatness is unsearchable!" There's a practical tension to this. If his greatness is unsearchable, then knowing him could be exhausting because there's no end to it. However, if his unending greatness is life-giving, then the journey of knowing him will always be worth it. Also, we should resist thinking about God on our own terms because distorted understandings of God can lead us down a path to ruin. God made us in his image, and we should run from the thought of making him in our image. So, what is God really like, and how do we know it? The story of Scripture reveals the answer to these questions. He's bigger than our categories of him, yet he invites us to know him through Scripture. And this story leads us straight to Jesus. In him, Scripture declares to us, "*Here is your God.*"

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## SERMON SUMMARY

We live in a world where many people try to make a God in their own image—a god like themselves—a god who likes what they like and is okay with what they do, no questions asked. So, in this series, we've been digging into Scripture, asking the question: What is God really like? Today, we're going to look at what is undoubtedly the least popular attribute of God and that is the justice of God—how God is just—how God is our judge—how God is loving, merciful, and compassionate, but also how God is a God of wrath. So, how do we make sense of all this? How can God be a God of justice and a God of mercy at the same time?

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## SERMON SCREENSHOTS & KEY POINTS

Today, we're going to focus on one Old Testament passage and two New Testament passages of Scripture. I want to show you that the Bible is consistent in what is taught about God's nature in the OT and the NT.

Read Exodus 34:6-7—This is the longest, most detailed description of what God is really like in the entire Bible. Do you feel the tension in this text? We like the part about how God is compassionate and gracious and patient and loving and faithful and forgiving and slow to anger. That's the kind of God we want. But the passage also talks about how God is a God of justice. He will not leave the guilty unpunished—and that's pretty scary. So, how do you relate to a God who you think is loving most of the time, but then you're worried that if you mess up, then He'll punish you and maybe even your children and grandchildren?

First, you have to understand this passage in its context. This passage is part of a larger story. God says, "This is what I'm like—this is the kind of God I am" after something terrible has happened among God's people. This is not some abstract, disconnected list of God's attributes. No, it comes as a part of a really important story—the story of the golden calf which comes in Exodus 32 (Go back and read that story). God tells them not to make for themselves gods like the gods of Egypt or Canaan. No "graven images." And they do exactly what God told them not to do. They make a golden calf idol to represent Yahweh. They throw a big ritual worship party. They eat, get drunk, and have sex. This was the way people who didn't know the One True God worshiped their gods in that day. And, there were consequences. The 3,000 who were wicked and rebellious were put to death. But God forgave many, many 1000s of others. So, Yahweh forgives thousands of people. He doesn't sever his covenant with Israel. But, at the same time, for those Israelites who thumbed their noses at God and said, "We don't care what you say. We're going to do what we want anyway"—for them—Yahweh doesn't leave them unpunished. So, do you see how what just happened in this story forms the basis of how God describes himself to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7? That's the point. The story and Exodus 34:6-7 show us how God can be both merciful and just at the same time. No contradiction.

But what about the point of God visiting the sins of the fathers on the children and grandchildren? What's that about? Is it about some kind of "generational curse?" (There's not enough space to write out everything that comes in the sermon regarding how v7 is more poetry and metaphor than what it literally sounds like, so I'm just going to summarize the answer to the question above.) Yahweh keeps his covenant with thousands, by forgiving them, yet he won't do so at the expense of his justice. He will bring his justice to bear on however many generations continue to perpetuate the same sins, the same destructive behaviors, as their fathers. This is not about some "generational curse" that hangs like a dark cloud over families for generations. It's about "generational sin" perpetuated by successive generations. God holds everyone accountable for their own choices—their own sins.

So that's God's self-revelation, self-description in the OT. Now, let's look at how the NT says the same thing. This time Jesus is speaking. READ Jn3:16. Now think. Why would anyone be in danger of perishing if God is a loving God? Answer: He is a loving God. He loves this world that's in rebellion against him. But at the same time, he's also set a day in which he will put an end to the rebellion. God will punish all who have lived in rebellion against him. So right now, this rebellious world stands under the judgment of God and apart from God's love in sending Jesus to save us from that judgment, we would all perish. READ 3:16-18 and v36. Jesus is saying, when he came the first time, he did not come to judge the world, but to save the world from judgment. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus has made a way for us to step into life with God. John 5:22-30 makes it clear that when we put our faith in Jesus, we do not come under judgment, but we pass from death to life (v24). One more time: this rebellious world stands under the judgment of God. That means every person in this rebellious world who rejects the salvation offered in Messiah Jesus stands under the judgment of God and on the last day they will perish. But in Christ, God has made a way for us to be saved. That is Good News—really Good News—that is the gospel of grace—and it's available to us all if we will receive it (READ 2 Corinthians 5:18).

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#### COMMUNITY GROUP QUESTIONS

- What was your "biggest take-away" from the teaching on Exodus 34:6-7?
- How does the story of the golden calf in Exodus 32 help you understand how God reveals about himself in Exodus 34:6-7?
- Talk about how God reveals himself to us Exodus 34:6-7 corresponding with what Jesus reveals about himself in John 3 and 5.
- So, if you found yourself in a conversation with someone who doesn't understand how God is could be a God of love and mercy, but at the same time, he's a God of justice and judgment? How do these two attributes of God fit together? Try to flesh out these scenarios as possible illustrations. How can parents be loving and forgiving, but also not let their children get away with bad behavior? Why is it necessary to punish criminals—people who break the law? Should someone who destroys a beautiful work of art just be forgiven for what they've done or just they have to pay for what they've done? If someone broke into your home and stole your prize possessions, should that person be held accountable for what they've done or it is "no big deal?" What other question type illustrations like this might be a way to help someone understand how, if God is truly good, he must be both a God of mercy and justice at the same time? Spend a good bit of time on this.
- How does the Cross solve the tension between God's mercy and justice?