“Three Common Misconceptions about God’s Justice”
4/1/12
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- Introduction
  - Sermon series: “The Character of God”
    - God’s faithfulness
    - God’s wisdom
    - Etc.
  - So important to get a balanced and complete picture of God.
    - It’s like the classic story of 6 blind men describing an elephant:
      - Trunk = like a snake
      - Tusk = solid pipe
      - Ear = fan
      - Belly = wall
      - Leg = pillar
      - Tail = rope
    - M.P. = All true – but not the whole story.
  - Same with God:
    - To say God is powerful is true – but not the whole story.
      - (He’s also personal and compassionate.)
    - To say God is merciful is true – but not the whole story.
      - (He’s also righteous and wrathful.)
    - To say God is loving is true – but not the whole story.
      - (He’s also holy and just.)
  - M.P. = So, our goal is to present a balanced, biblically accurate picture of God.
- Transition =) With that in mind, today we want to consider God’s “justice”.
  - Title of the lesson = “Three Common Misconceptions about God’s Justice”.
  - The first common misconception = that God’s grace allows him to simply overlook our sins.  (i.e. not see our sins as that big a deal.)
    - Romans 3:21-26 = “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— 26 he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”
      - The cross demonstrates BOTH God’s grace and his justice.
    - Vs. 24 = God’s grace (re-read)
• **Vs. 25-26 = God’s justice (re-read)**
  - God’s justice demands:
    - Payment
    - Retribution
    - Vengeance
    - Quote Romans 12:19 = “Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.”

• **God doesn’t just overlook our sins! (Sin is serious!)**
  - Someone had to pay for our sins – so Jesus did!
    - Vs. 25a = “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement…”
      - Forgiveness is FREE to us, but COST JESUS HIS LIFE!

• **Commentary by John Piper:**
  - “The good news is that God Himself has decreed a way to satisfy the demands of His justice without condemning the whole human race. Hell is one way to settle accounts with sinners and uphold his justice. But there is another way. The **wisdom** of God has ordained a way for the **love** of God to deliver us from the **wrath** of God without compromising the **justice** of God.”
  - **M.P. =** God’s forgiveness doesn’t mean sin is okay.
    - It means the punishment’s been paid in full – by Jesus Christ.

• **The second common misconception = “God is too loving to punish people or send them to hell.”**
  - But God’s track record shows that He is perfectly willing to judge people and punish them for their disobedience:
    - **Adam and Eve** (refer: Genesis 3)
      - God pronounced curses on them
      - And drove them out of the Garden of Eden
    - **The Flood**
      - Quote Genesis 6:5,7 = “The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time… 7 So the LORD said, “I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth…”
        - God wiped out all of mankind, except 8 people – Noah and his family!
    - **Sodom and Gomorrah**
      - God wiped two cities off the map because of their wickedness!
    - **The 10 plagues on Egypt**
• The Golden Calf idolatry
  • God
    o had the Levites kill 3,000 of their fellow Israelites
    o sent a plague on the people
• And so many others we don’t have time for:
  • Nadab and Abihu
    o killed for offering unauthorized incense.
  • Korah’s rebellion
    o God kills 14,700 Israelites
  • Achan
    o He and his family are stoned for covetousness.
• Captivity
  o Eventually both Israel and Judah are sent into captivity because of their sin.
• And God’s judgment continues in the New Testament!
  • Ananias and Sapphira
    o Acts 5:1-11
      • “Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. 2 With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet.
        3 Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? 4 Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.”
        5 When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. 6 Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.
        7 About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 Peter asked her, “Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?”
        “Yes,” she said, “that is the price.”
        9 Peter said to her, “How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the
men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also.”

10 At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

• God kills two Christians for lying! (terrifying)

• Herod
  o God kills King Herod for his arrogance.
    ▪ Acts 12:21-23 = “On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. 22 They shouted, “This is the voice of a god, not of a man.” 23 Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.”

▪ Jesus himself taught more about hell than anyone else in scripture!
▪ And yet, we still wonder, “Will God really send people to Hell?”
▪ 2 Peter 2 answers us emphatically…
  ▪ 2 Peter 2:4-10a = “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; 5 if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; 6 if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; 7 and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men 8 (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— 9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment. 10 This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority.”

• In the Greek, vs. 4-9 form one sentence.
  ▪ It’s an “if, then” statement:
    ▪ With five “ifs”
    ▪ and one “then”
  ▪ The essence of the argument =
    ▪ Vs. 4 = “For if God did not spare angels…”
- Vs. 5 = “if he did not spare the ancient world…”
- Vs. 6 = “if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah…”
- Vs. 7 = “and if he rescued Lot…”
- Vs. 9 = the conclusion
  - “if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.”
- Vs. 10 then elaborates with the phrase, “This is especially true of…”
  - “those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority.”
- M.P. =
  - Q: Will God really send people to Hell?
  - A: Yes, he’s already condemned several.
- Q: But I thought the Bible teaches that people will be thrown into Hell on Judgment Day – so no one’s actually in Hell yet?
- A: That’s right. Let’s explain…
  - Vs. 4 = Word for “Hell” here is actually “Tartarus” (see footnote)
    - Explain:
      - When people die, everyone goes to “Hades”.
      - Hades has two sides to it:
        - A good side (Paradise)
          - Refer: Luke 23 (Thief on the Cross – “Today you will be with me in Paradise.”)
        - and a bad side (Tartarus)
          - Refer: Luke 16 (Rich Man and Lazarus)
      - Both “reward” and “punishment” begin in Hades.
        - (Refer: Luke 16, Rich Man and Lazarus)
      - But it’s just “a waiting place” till Judgment Day – then, Heaven and Hell.
    - This helps us understand:
      - 2 Peter 2:4 = “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment…”
• Vs. 9 = “if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.”

• M.P. = Hell is not an idle threat.
  ○ God’s track record proves that.
  
  Transition =) The question arises: Q: Is it fair for God to send people to Hell?”
  ▪ Here’s one way to understand this…

  • Most people think Hell is unfair because they don’t understand how serious sin is to God.
    ○ A sin (“transgression, crime, offense”) is only as bad as the one whom it is committed against.
      ▪ Example:
        • To kill a bug is not a crime at all.
        • To kill a dog is a crime.
        • To kill a person is a capital offense.
        • To crucify Jesus is an infinitely grievous offense.

    ○ God is infinitely holy (infinitely superior to man).
      ▪ So sin against God is infinitely grievous (“serious, grave, terrible”) and merits an infinitely grievous (serious, grave terrible) punishment.
      ▪ The only fair punishment for an infinitely grievous sin is infinite punishment (Hell).

  • But because Jesus’ death on the cross is an infinitely sufficient atonement for sin to an infinitely just God, it merits infinite reward – Heaven.
  • So the cross demonstrates not only the infinite love, mercy and grace of God through Jesus, but also the infinite seriousness of sin against our infinitely Holy God and how it merits infinite (eternal) punishment in Hell.

  • Perspective
    ○ What’s really unfair is Heaven.
      ▪ We don’t deserve it.
    ○ What’s totally fair is Hell.
      ▪ We DO deserve that.

    ○ Romans 6:23 = “For the wages of sin [earned] is death [Hell], but the gift of God [unearned] is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord [Heaven].”

• The third common misconception = that God’s justice is a bad thing.
  ○ God’s justice is a very good thing!
    ▪ It means no one’s getting away with anything!
• We long for justice...
  o Example: movies
    ▪ Bad guys commit horrific crimes
    ▪ They seem to be getting away with it
    ▪ Till the good guy catches them and brings them to justice!
      ▪ The feeling = “Ahh, everything is right with the world again!”
        o We long for justice...
        o And we need the hope of justice to keep us going...
  o Luke 18:1-8 = “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2 He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

        4 “For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’

        6 And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

  ▪ Vs. 1 & 3 give the reason for Jesus’ parable:
    ▪ Vs. 1 = “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.”
    ▪ Vs. 3 = “And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’”
      o Q: What causes us to “give up” (Greek = “be faint; weary”; i.e. “lose heart”)
      o A: Injustice.
        ▪ Unfair treatment is so discouraging!
          ▪ (We can all relate.)
      o This is the problem Jesus is addressing!
        ▪ (Although the lesson of “persistent prayer about anything” is a legitimate secondary application.)
  ▪ Vs. 2-6 set up a comparison between “an unjust human judge” and “the just judge (God)”.
  ▪ Vs. 7-8 = the point of the comparison:
• “And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.”
  o Point = If even an unjust human Judge will give you justice if you’re persistent enough, how much more will the perfect Divine Judge give justice to “his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night”?  
• Jesus promises:  
  o God hears the cries of his people!  
  o and “will see that they get justice, and quickly”!
  ▪ God will both “avenge” and “vindicate”!  
    • “Avenge” = “…punish the wrong-doer”  
    • “Vindicate” = “exonerate the victim”  
  o Now and/or on Judgment Day!  
▪ Vs. 8b = “However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”
• Q: Will we trust God enough:  
  o to not strike back, because vengeance is God’s?  
  o to keep doing what’s right, even when others are not?  
  o to keep entrusting ourselves to God in prayer?  
  o M.P. = God’s justice is a very good thing – it motivates us to keep doing right in a world of wrong.
• Close  
  o Sermons on God’s character invariably fall short because God is unfathomably great.  
  o But I hope this lesson has:  
    ▪ balanced our view of God  
    ▪ cleared up some misconceptions about God’s justice  
    ▪ and inspired us to worship and praise our awesome God!