

10-22-23

Sermon 4: How Can I Know the Heart of the Father?

Scripture: Psalm 103:1-22, CTW: Psalm 104:1-9

Hymns: 77, 84, 85

Theme: Can we know the heart of the Father? Why does it matter? Because understanding what lies at God's heart allows us to move beyond blame and anger and doubt and mistrust. It allows us to understand and trust Him—essentials in a relationship.

I. Introduction: Parenting is a tough job, is it not? You parents, let me give you some kudos here this morning. Just when you think you might be starting to get things figured out, your kids grow into a new stage of life and there's a whole new set of challenges.

Maybe that's why these two kids were talking the other day about not wanting to be parents—or maybe it was a little different reason. So one girl says to the other, "I'm never going to have kids." And her friend says, "Why not?" Without missing a beat, she replies, "I hear they take nine months to download."

That's definitely a joke for the digital age.

On a more serious note, for the last few weeks, we've been focusing together on some big questions drawn out of the Psalms. The Psalms are a rich and beautifully told story and one that is meant to lead us into so much biblical truth.

And it raises many big questions that we experience in real life, even if we're reluctant sometimes to tackle them head-on. Today, we'll be asking, "How can I know the heart of the Father?"

Why does it matter? Because understanding what lies at God's heart allows us to move beyond blame and anger and doubt and mistrust. It allows us to understand and trust Him—essentials in a relationship.

In today's part of the story . . .

II. Actually, is Anyone Beyond Blame?

A. If you think about it, we are pretty good at judging others, aren't we? I mean, most of us have spent a lifetime judging others. We do it all the time, don't we?

We make snap judgments about the way people walk or talk or the way they look—the color of their skin, the clothes they wear, their facial features and body composition. And that's just the little stuff.

We blame our bosses and employers for conditions we don't like at work. We blame the government and leaders for events or

policies that we feel affect our lives in ways we don't like. We blame other people for the hurt in our lives.

We blame God because our lives aren't going the way we want them to. We may not say it out loud, but don't we feel just like Mack sometimes when he says, "Absolutely. God is to blame"?

B. Maybe it's easier to blame others or God for the pain we experience than to deal with the root of that pain.

Maybe our own sense of guilt drives us to want to accuse others in order to justify ourselves. Judgment can bring a sense of power and even security. The problem, though, is that judging only compounds our pain rather than removing it.

C. But, there's a problem with all this judging we do. The role of judge is not ours. The Bible tells us that job belongs to God alone: "There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?" (James 4:12).

The apostle Paul spelled out that it's not up to us to get even or deliver judgment when we've been wronged. He wrote,

Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say,

"I will take revenge;

I will pay them back,"
says the LORD. (Romans 12:19, NLT)

Where we often get misguided is in our view of God as judge. Yes, He is a righteous judge—one who will treat us fairly at the intersection of justice and mercy.

But too many of us have the tendency to equate God the judge as a vindictive enforcer, eagerly waiting for us to step out of line so He can blast us with gleeful fury. As we discussed in week 1 of this sermon series, it's too easy for us to separate the character of God and view what happened on the cross as a brutal Father showing no mercy on the innocent Son. But that's not an accurate view.

"Why is he so mean?" Does that sentence sometimes enter our minds about God? Does that capture our view of God sometimes?

Maybe our misperception comes from bad experiences with our earthly father. How we view God can be greatly influenced by how we view our earthly fathers.

Psalm 103 tells us, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him" (Psalm 103:13). But if you grew up with a father who lacked compassion, this can be a harder perspective to grasp.

If that is you, let me encourage you that God is not limited to the shortcomings of our fathers or any other human. Instead, He wants to redeem them. He wants to heal the hole in your heart that may still be there. And it's an invitation offered freely to us all.

III. The Reality is that God's Grace Comes from Love

A. By definition, grace is a free and underserved gift. None of us can earn it, and yet God offers it to us in love. Salvation through grace is the whole reason Jesus entered and experienced this world as a human.

We like the idea of grace instead of judgment most of the time—at least when it applies to us. But it's easy to get hung up, when we start looking at who deserves grace and who doesn't.

Although we don't want to be judged, we like the idea of justice and fairness. We want evil people to get what they deserve. And we want to be sure we get the good things we've been promised. In a world still marked by sin and evil, we need God's grace—and we need to trust His grace not only for ourselves but for the rest of the world as well. It's not always easy, is it?

B. But Jesus presents us with a different perspective. His words spell out a different vision: "I and the Father are one,"

He said in **John 10:30**. “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father,” He said in **John 14:9**.

And His actions reveal tangible examples of God’s nature—complete, whole, united, Triune. Jesus reveals a deeper view of the heart of the Father.

Even with the power and authority to judge, Jesus extends God’s love and grace over judgment. **John 8** gives us a beautiful example of this when Jesus encountered a woman caught in adultery.

The religious people of the day wanted to judge and stone her to death, and they wanted to trap Jesus by forcing Him to pass judgment. Instead, Jesus said, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (verse 7). When they all turned to leave, none were able to cast a stone, Jesus told the woman that He did not condemn her either.

By the way, I have always wondered what happened to the men in that story!

We, too, must let go of blame by dropping the rock that we figuratively hold—but how do we reach that point? How do we grasp the grace that we’ve been given and extend it willingly to others, even those who have hurt us? How do we understand and feel the power of this gift that shifts the nature of our being?

The answer is that we must connect with the Father's heart.

IV. How to Connect with the Father's Heart

In the movie, *the Shack*, the father of the little girl who was killed finally gives voice to what he's been feeling for so long: God is to blame. God is to blame for all the suffering and atrocity in the world. God is to blame for the personal tragedy Mack has endured. In Mack's eyes, because God didn't stop it from happening, it's all His fault.

In other words, he has judged God's love and found it lacking.

So the character Sophia, who represents knowledge and wisdom presents him a final choice. He must choose which of his children will spend eternity in heaven and which will spend eternity in hell. When Mack protests, Sophia explains she is only asking him to do "something that he believes God does." Sophia isn't going to let Mack off the hook. He must choose.

Isn't this the place where God found Himself in the greater cosmic setting of good versus evil? According to Jonathan Edwards, the 18th Century theologian and revival leader, God is ambivalent toward mankind, and it took His Son Jesus as our intercessor to save us.

When forced to find a cure for the disease of evil, God chose a personal antidote...His son, Jesus Christ.

In effect, God said, "I won't choose between one or another of you. Take My only begotten Son instead."

A. Why? Because the heart of the Father is love.

This is the beauty of **John 3:16–17**: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

B. Love comes first as the motive. Love endures through the pain as the driving force. And Love conquers and completes the redemptive mission. This is the Father's heart, laid down and broken for you, and we can know it when we're willing to open ourselves and accept the gift of life He offers.

So, how is God reaching out to you today? Pray that you would know His will in that regard. He wants to take you into His heart of love, and be your Father. Will you let Him?

Amen? Let Us Pray...