

The Heart of God, Part 1

Exodus 34:6-7; Coast Community Church; Dan Rupprecht; 6/27/2021

The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." Ex. 34:6-7

What is God most like? This is not an easy question to answer, but it is an important one to ask!

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

(A.W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy)

The Heart of God in the Gospel

In the gospel, we see that...

- **God is the Supreme Good**
We should trust Him with our heart, mind, and soul. But because...
- **We are idol worshipers**
Our sinful hearts do not trust Him because we naturally believe lies about Him. But...
- **Jesus is the Double-cure**
When God transforms our hearts, we begin to see Him as He truly is. And because...
- **Faith is trust in the promises of God**
The more we see Him as supremely good, the more we believe what He says. And since...
- **Love is the obedience of faith**
The more we believe His word, the more we love Him, and love like Him.

The Heart of God in the OT

In the Old Testament, we see...

- The heart of God for the nation of Israel as he calls them into a special relationship of blessing.
- The heart of unbelief in the people as they continually doubt him and disobey him.
- The goodness of God as He perseveres in revealing Himself to these evil and unbelieving people.
- The hope for evil and unbelieving people to be transformed by the goodness of God.

The Heart of God in the Exodus Story

In the Exodus, we see...

- The love of God for Israel in rescuing them from Pharaoh and providing for them in the wilderness.
- The idolatry of the people in making and worshiping a golden calf.
- The discipline of God displayed in the anger of Moses and the execution of 3000 people.
- The goodness (glory) of God revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai.
- The faithfulness of God seen in His covenant laws and his commitment to live among them.

The Heart of God Revealed on the Mountain

On Mount Sinai, God declares that He is...

- Merciful (Compassionate)
- Gracious
- Slow to Anger (Patient)
- Faithfulness
- Steadfast (Loyal) Love

Compassionate

The very first word God uses to describe Himself in Exodus is “compassionate” (Rakhum) which is related to the Hebrew word for womb (Rehkem). So compassion in the bible is centered on a person’s core and invites us to imagine a mother’s tender feelings for her vulnerable infant. Rukhum conveys deep emotion and is sometimes translated “deeply moved”. It also conveys action, like when God hears the cries of the Israelites suffering as slaves in Egypt and He rescues them. When Jesus comes on the scene, He is God’s deep compassion (oiktirmos) become human. Jesus calls His followers to “be compassionate as your heavenly Father is compassionate”.

Gracious

The second word God describes Himself with is gracious (Khanun), related to (Khen) often translated grace or favor. One meaning of (Khen) is “delightful” or “favorable”. In the Psalms, the skilled poet is said to have lips of (khen) (Ps. 45:2). Or a dazzling piece of jewelry is an ornament of (Khen) (Pr. 1:9) that attracts attention and favor. The most extreme kind of (Khen) is showing favor to someone instead of giving them what they deserve. Like Jacob, who comes to Esau asking, “may I find (Khen) in your eyes” (Ge. 33:8). Jacob isn’t asking for what is fair, but for favor. No one in the bible shows more (Khen) than God. In the New Testament, we’re told that Jesus is God’s “gracious gift” (Kharis) become human, sent into a world of people trapped in darkness and death. God who is rich in mercy, by His (Kharis) has rescued us. This is what it means that God is gracious.

Slow to Anger

The third word God describes Himself with is “slow to anger” (’erek ’apayim). Some people think the God of the bible is mostly angry, always striking people down for their sin. The phrase slow to anger is literally “long of nose”, the common Hebrew way to say that someone is angry -their nose burns hot. Like in (Ge. 39:19) when Potiphar thinks that Joseph tried to sleep with his wife, his nose burned hot. It’s describing how your face gets hot when you’re filled with anger. This is why a patient person is called “long of nose”. It takes a long time for their noses to get hot. God doesn’t have a nose, but His anger is an expression of his justice and His love for the world. But He is slow to anger, which means he gives people lots of time to change. Paul says in Romans 1:18-32 that God’s anger is being revealed against human evil. But it also says that God is patient, giving people time to come to their senses and change. God is on a mission to rescue. This is why Jesus said that He was going to Jerusalem to die, as a demonstration of God’s love for His enemies. When God is angry and brings justice, it is because He’s good and extremely patient, working out His plan to restore people to His love. That’s what it means to say, “God is slow to anger”.

God has no pleasure in the destruction or calamity of persons or people. He had rather they should turn and continue in peace. He is well pleased if they forsake their evil ways that he may not have occasion to execute his wrath upon them. He is a God who delights in mercy, and judgement is his strange work.
(Jonathan Edwards, commentary on Lamentations)