

4/6/25 Christ Fellowship

Holy God – Isaiah 55

How many of you have dogs? How many of you have dogs that like to go? How many of you have dogs that like to go and when they can't go, they pout? You understand. This past week, my dogs saw me getting dressed and putting on my shoes and they started getting excited. Then when I put on my hat, that's it. That's the signal we're going somewhere. Everybody jump around and bark and bite each other.

But then I had to tell them that I had to go and they can't go with me. Now, Bam especially understands that and she is especially sensitive to those horrible, mean words. So, I try to explain. *"Sweet Bammy, I'll be right back. I gotta go get groceries and you can't go. I won't be gone long. I promise. I'll hurry back."* But she just bows her head like she can't even bear to look at me. This level of abandonment is more than she can bear.

If you have a close bond with your dog like I do, you know what they are thinking, don't you? Bam looks at me with pain in her eyes and asks, *"What did I do to hurt you? Am I not enough? Am I not pretty enough? You tell me I'm pretty but then you won't let me go with you. I don't understand. What did I do wrong?"*

I had been studying our passage in **Isaiah 55** this week and it was on my mind and it was at this point that I quoted it back to my precious, sweet Bam Bam. *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, Bam, and neither are your ways my ways,"* And she listened. And she heard me. But I don't think she understood.

You know those bumper stickers moms have on their mini van that say, *"My child is an honor student at such and such"*? Well, my Bammy is smarter than your honor student. And certainly better behaved. But even Bam couldn't understand my words about going to the grocery store. She just couldn't comprehend it. All she knew was she couldn't go with me. And that brought her great pain.

Now, If Bam were able to understand better, then I could explain that the grocery store is where dog treats come from. That's where we get the pig ears and the bones and such. If she knew that and could understand that then maybe it wouldn't hurt so bad. In fact, she could look forward to me going to the store even if I had to go alone. It is for her good. But no amount of explaining can make her understand that.

Now, I bet some of you know where I am going with this. And you are probably right. But it's even better than what you think. Yes, our ways and abilities to understand God are as limited as dogs are to humans, and more so. But it's better than just getting a treat every now and then. Let's turn to **Isaiah chapter 55** and get a look at God's holiness.

So, what is holiness? Technically, being holy just means to be different or set apart, and God is definitely that. But God's holiness involves His power, sovereignty, creativity, majesty, justice and love and so much more. We really don't have the words, much less the understanding to fully describe the holiness of God. And one sermon on God's holiness is certainly not going to do it justice but we can see something of it as we study this passage. Let's read **Isaiah 55:6-9**.

*“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. **7** Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. **8** “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. **9** “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

Okay, here's a horrible scenario. Your spouse comes to you and admits that they have been unfaithful. It was one time and they are terribly sorry and remorseful and they promise to never do it again. Can you forgive them? With God's help and some good Christian counseling, maybe you can. But then, two weeks later, they come to you again and admit to the same thing. Can you forgive them? They are very sorry and ashamed and promise to never do it again? Can you forgive? Then two weeks later...same thing. Forgive or no? Probably not, right? I mean that's just too much.

So, what if it happened every two weeks for years and every time you forgave them? What would you think of somebody that did that? There's something wrong with that person, isn't there? But yet God does that for us. Every time we sin, we are told in scripture to ask for forgiveness and God will give it. **1 John 1:9** says, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* Every single time. And every single sin is a sin that nailed Jesus to the cross. How is God able to forgive like that? Is there something wrong with Him?

No, there is something holy about Him that we can't understand. That is what this passage is saying. God's holiness is scary to think of if you get to Heaven and want to be judged by your good deeds. But if you have trusted Jesus to be your Lord and Savior then His holiness is a great comfort.

It's important that we see this passage in its context. Most of the time we quote this passage – God's ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts – as a way to say, *“Man, that God...I just can't understand Him!”* And that's not wrong but there is more to it than just not being able to understand Him. The context is that this is about showing grace and forgiveness.

Look at it again from the beginning. God is calling out to unfaithful Israel and telling them to come back. Repent and God will forgive you even though it has happened again and again. *7 Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.* That is repentance. “Turn to the Lord” is repentance. Stop sinning. Repent of what you have done. And God wants to forgive. That's mind-blowing.

See, the Jews were of the mindset that since they are God's chosen people, they didn't have to really live according to the Law. They just had to look like it outwardly. Their hearts were black and hard from years of sin but hey, they went to church and tithed and helped little old ladies across the street every now and then, you know, if enough people were watching. And that should be enough for the teacher's pet to get to Heaven. It's actually a mindset that they kept all the way through the Old Testament and into the New Testament and even some of them have it today.

Isaiah was a prophet whose job it was to tell his countrymen that wasn't going to cut it with God. But they didn't want to hear it from him or any other prophet all the way up to the time of Paul or even Jesus. But that whole time God was saying, *“Just turn away from that stuff. Don't continue to live like that. Have a relationship with me and when you are truly mine, I will forgive you and show you grace and mercy.”*

G.W. Knight once said, *“When a person works an eight-hour day and receives a fair day's pay for his time, that is a wage. When a person competes with an opponent and receives a trophy for his performance, that is a prize. When a person receives appropriate recognition for his long service or high achievements, that is an award. But when a person is not*

capable of earning a wage, can win no prize, and deserves no award--yet receives such a gift anyway--that is a good picture of God's unmerited favor. This is what we mean when we talk about the grace of God.” (G.W. Knight, Clip-Art Features for Church Newsletters, p. 53.)

We don't deserve forgiveness. We didn't deserve it the first time we were unfaithful and we sure didn't deserve it the millionth time. That's called grace. And that grace of God is what is higher than our ways. And we can't even think of being that full of grace. We can't understand that about God. That's not how we would do it. And that is what He is saying here in Isaiah. My ways ain't your ways.

Now, we will see next week that God is also a God of justice. Did you know that God has more than one throne? We will see next week that there is a great, white throne and God will judge all unbelievers from that throne. And if at the end of time, you see a great white throne then you have made a horrible mistake in this life because there is only one judgment coming from God on that throne. It will be eternal death in Hell.

But God also has a throne of grace that He is sitting on right now for all believers. **Hebrews 4:16** is one of my favorite verses. I quote it a lot when I start to pray because it helps to remind me that God says, *“Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”* God is a God of justice but He is all about showing grace to His children.

We do need to remember though that one of the differences in our ability to forgive and show grace and mercy and God's ability to forgive and show grace and mercy is that when we sin against God there is punishment and there are consequences. And who do you think is in charge of the punishment and consequences department? We saw a few weeks ago that God is sovereign and He allows or sometimes causes things to happen to us to keep us from making those mistakes again.

But scripture says and shows over and over that when we go to God in true repentance – not just sorry we got caught – but truly as David said in **Psalms 51** coming with a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart that God will forgive us. We may have to deal with the consequences of our sin but God is anxious to show us grace and mercy even when we sin over and over. **Romans 5:8** says, *“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* What kind of crazy grace, mercy and forgiveness is that? I can't comprehend that. Which is

exactly what **Isaiah 55** is saying. His ways of forgiveness, grace and mercy are unfathomable. We can't understand them. That's part of what makes Him God. Like I always say, if I could explain God, He wouldn't be much of a God.

His ways, His thoughts, His grace and mercy and forgiveness and justice and love and power and everything else are unsearchable and we will never completely understand Him. **Romans 11:34** says, *“O, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and untraceable His ways! 34 “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor?”*

Do you know what the difference is between Christianity and every other religion? One word: grace. In every other religion, man has to work hard enough or be good enough to get to Heaven. And that just makes sense to us. That's how we would do it if we were God. As I've said before, every other religion came from some guy sitting under a tree somewhere thinking about how he would do it if he were God.

But God's ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts and He gives us grace – undeserved favor – and all we have to do is believe it. **Ephesians 2** says we are saved by grace and through faith. We don't work for it or do anything to deserve it. And that is mind-blowing. Every other religion is man trying to reach up and grab hold of God when in reality it is God reaching down and grabbing hold of us.

I heard the story of a small-town boy in Brazil who left home after having an argument with his dad. It was very much a “Prodigal Son” kind of story as the boy went to the big city and lived it up but got into a lot of trouble. His dad went to that city to try to find him but couldn't so he put an ad in the local paper that said, *“Dear Pablo, I don't care what you have done or what you have become. I forgive you and if you will meet me at the train station Monday morning, I will take you home. Love, Dad.”* And when the father got there Monday morning there were 25 men named Pablo there at the station looking for their father.

Music

Grace and mercy and forgiveness are so rare it is a big part of why God is holy. But we are called to be holy as well. **Leviticus 19** tells us to be holy as God is holy and one of the big ways we do that is when we show grace, mercy and forgiveness to people that don't deserve it. It will be mind-blowing to them and to the people around us.

God's ways of grace, mercy and forgiveness are beyond our ways and higher than our thoughts but we can still show them in our quest to be holy as God is holy. Who do you need to show grace, mercy and forgiveness to today? God has shown it to you and you have hurt Him way more than anybody has hurt you.

Have you accepted God's free gift of forgiveness and salvation? All you have to do is believe and it will be given to you but that belief is a life-changing belief. If your life has not changed then it wasn't true faith. Ask God to forgive you. Receive His grace and allow Him to change you and make you more and more holy like He is every day. Do it right now as the music plays.