

Four Week Justice and Mercy Bible Study Series
By Jeff Bergeson

Justice and Mercy

Note: after posed questions, I have indented possible answers.

Note also: When I have my notes for Bible Studies, it's usually more general reminders for myself...and not so much word for word what I'll say, like I've conveyed here.

Week 1

Passage: Exodus 23: 1-13

Learning Objective: Justice and Mercy are not just "something nice to do," but are integral to God's Law.

Open in Prayer

"The Book of Exodus contains three major parts of the Israelites story. The first twelve chapters tell of the Israelites in bondage as slaves in Egypt. Chapters 12-18 tell of the God's might, miraculously freeing the Israelites from the Pharaoh who did not want them to go free. At this point they are in the desert, but the Lord is meeting their needs. Now that they are free from bondage, the Lord is relaying his laws to them as their King. There are 613 laws that the Lord gave the Israelites. All of them were required to be kept, but we're just going to read a few of them."

Read vv. 1-3

"A lot of people think the law is all 'do not's.' Now there are a lot of them. In fact, there are 5 just in these 3 verses, and there'll be more. Why are there so many 'do not's' in God's law?"

(Maybe all the things they were told not to do were things that were being done often either by them or by people around them, and God didn't want people to behave this way.)

"It's easy to understand not helping a wicked man to be malicious. That doesn't seem like a hard law to keep. What might be difficult about not siding with the crowd?"

(These people know you! You have to live with them, and if you're not doing what they want, that will make life hard of you.)

"Discuss verse 3, and its implications."

Read vv. 4-5

"Okay, only 1 'do not' in these verses. If you're out in your neighborhood and you see your best friends cute little new kitty cat loose 2 blocks from home, what would you do?"

(Probably bring it back or at least let them know where you saw it.)

"Think about what your first response is when you see somebody who's been mean to you, and they're having difficulty with their new pickup truck not moving under a heavy load of bricks. Why would God tell the Israelites to actually help their enemies, those who hate them, when they're having similar difficulties?"

(God loves them too...not just me, or the "good guys.")

Read vv. 6-9

“4 more ‘do not’s’ and 1 ‘have nothing to do with.’ There are also 2 ‘for’s’ and 1 ‘because.’ What are some interesting characteristics of these statements?”

(They’re not ‘just because’ God says so. God will not acquit the guilty that means even if you do they won’t get off Scott free. The words of the righteous can be twisted when doing something that can be ‘right for them,’ like accepting a bribe. Because the Israelites were foreigners in a foreign land, they should not oppress the ‘other.’)

“There’s always a reason for the commands God gives even if they are not always made crystal clear to us.”

Read vv. 10-13

“Sometimes we think of Sabbath as being only personal; how do we see how God intends Sabbath to affect those who are not just Israelites under the law?”

(Poor and wild animals may eat. Workers, land, and animals may be refreshed.)

“We know that God does not change. We also know that we are not bound to the law, for we are not justified through the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3: 21-26), BUT how do these laws speak to *us* about being faith-full to God through our relationships with others? What part do Justice and Mercy play in God’s will, and where have we fallen short of that?”

Possible further questions: “How might you react differently to that person who backstabbed you to get to a place you wanted to be, but who is now going through rough times? What would you do if you saw somebody making a snide remark about that new international student? What does it mean for you to rest?”

Close in prayer

Week 2

Passage: Isaiah 58

Learning Objectives: Realize that the Israelites were not obeying God’s laws to pursue Justice and Mercy. Pursuing Justice and Mercy develop communication between you and the Lord; self-righteous, “religious” behavior does not.

Open in prayer.

“This was written by the prophet Isaiah, most likely about 681 B.C. At this point in history the Assyrians have taken the Northern Kingdom (Israel) into captivity, but now the greater empire of the Babylonians has overtaken the Assyrians. Babylon is not yet ruling the Southern Kingdom of Judah, but Isaiah has prophesied against the Israelites, and it does happen in the future. This chapter, interestingly, is found in the midst of prophesy of hope of the restoration and redemption of Israel which will take place after returning from the future Babylonian dominion. Isaiah is proclaiming the word of God.”

Read vv. 1-3a

“What is to be shouted aloud and to whom?”

(The declaration to Israelites their rebellion/sin.)

“Without reading ahead and getting into specifics, why might the Israelites say God has not noticed their fasting and humbling of themselves?”

(They *seem...as if...*)

Read 3b-5

“YET!!! These are the things that the Israelites were doing aside from fasting...and they were wondering why God was ‘not noticing.’” Not necessarily to go over all of them, but here are some examples of fasting in the O.T.: 1 Sam. 7: 5-6 confession; 1 Sam. 31: 11-13 mourning; 2 Chr. 20: 1-4 seeking the Lord for help; Ezr. 8: 21-23 prayer for safe journey

“How are the Israelites current fasting different from these examples of fasting?”

and/or “What could we say is the purpose of fasting?”

(They were seeking the Lord, instead of just *seeming* to seek the Lord by ‘humbling’ themselves. Enabling themselves to communicate effectively with the Lord.)

Read vv. 6-9a

“In vs. 8 and 9 the word ‘then’ is used. How does this ‘then’ promise match up with what we think the purpose of fasting is?”

(The Lord will be your rear guard and hear your call.)

“THEN he will hear your call...but what are the Israelites to do as their act of fasting, opening communication with God?”

(vv. 6-7)

“What are some things that we can do here and now to enhance our communication based on this kind of fasting?”

Read vv. 9b-12

“We’ve read about all these types of Justice and Mercy that the Israelites were not doing, since God told them to do them. In addition to having effective communication with God, what are some more ‘If-thens’ promised by God here?”

(light will rise...needs satisfied...repair broken walls and streets; what was promised to them will be restored)

Read vv. 13-14

“Here some more ‘if-thens’ in the same section, but they’re about Sabbath. If you remember, when we read Exodus 23, laws about keeping Sabbath immediately followed Laws of Justice and Mercy. Do you think there’s a connection, and if so how are these connected?”

(The way we communicate with God is contingent on how we behave with people. How we behave towards others is contingent on our relationship with God. Sabbath shows our identity and trust is in God. Justice and Mercy towards others images God in a manner pleasing to him. Both show how to be in right relationships.)

Close in prayer

Week 3

Passage: Luke 10: 25-37

Learning Objectives: To show mercy to others is to love; to love the Lord and your neighbor (i.e. everybody) is to inherit life eternal.

Open in prayer

Probably don't need to give too much background info before getting into reading, but Luke was a Greek physician, and the only known non-Jew to have a canonical writing. The Gospel account according to Luke was written roughly 30 years after Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead. Account meant to present an accurate account of Jesus as Savior.

“At this point in the Gospel account, Jesus is on his way from Galilee to Jerusalem.”

Read vv. 25-26

“What kind of person is asking this question? What might be his motivation to ask such a question?”

(expert in the law; which means, he knows the law very thoroughly! Either trying to trap Jesus into saying something that might be able to be used against Jesus, or he truly does want to know how to inherit eternal life and thinks Jesus knows how)

“How does Jesus respond, and why do you think he responds this way?”

(with a question...)

Read vv. 27-28

“Where else do we see this statement?”

(Matt. 22: 37-40 and I think the best is Mark 12: 29-31, but they're quoted from Deut. 6: 5 and Lev. 19: 18)

“How do you personally show love to your friends/family/dorm-mates/fraternity brothers/sorority sisters whomever you live near/with?”

answer will differ by person and situation

Read vv. 28-29

“Jesus says he's right! If he loves God and his neighbor, he'll have eternal life.

BUT...the expert in the law wanted to justify himself. What do you think that means, 'he wanted to justify himself?'"

(He probably felt that he had been loving God and loving his neighbor and he wanted to see if who he was loving is what Jesus thought God had in mind. If I can categorize who my neighbor is, and it's the people I like, then I'm good to go!)

Read vv. 30-37

“Okay, there’s a lot to unpack here. We’ve already thought up some reasons why Jesus uses questions as response to answers, but why would he use a story? Forget what this story is about, and think more of what a story does.”

(conveys images to which we can relate our life, it causes emotional reaction...)

“Who are the characters in the story?”

(the man, robbers, priest, Levite, Samaritan, and inn keeper)

“If you were the Expert in the Law, who would you want to be portrayed as the hero or good-guy in the story?”

(Levite or priest)

“Yeah, there’s a twist in the story. Samaritans are a group of people who are part Jewish. Their ancestors, while exiled amongst pagans, intermarried with pagans. So many Jews hated Samaritans. They’re not simply impure pagans without God, they’re considered abominations, half-breeds, and are not to be associated with! I think sometimes we think the Samaritan just drops the guy off at an inn to just kind of get him off the street, still a good deed, but nothing spectacular. Lets look and see exactly what does this so-called monster do for the man?”

(he shows him mercy...pours on oil and wine (resources) bandages (resources), puts him on a donkey (the Samaritan probably walked while the man rode) took him to an inn and took care of him (he spent time, and probably paid for a room for 2 people for a night, he stayed overnight) gave inn-keeper 2 silver coins (denarii, each worth a day’s wages) and promised to return to pay for any other expenses)

“Jesus asks the question who was a neighbor to the man (i.e. loves him), and the expert in the law, acknowledges the Samaritan, but how does he acknowledge that it’s the Samaritan?”

(the one who had mercy on him)

“He didn’t even use the word ‘Samaritan.’ Take a moment and envision, ‘the man’ in your head. How does Jesus describe him?”

(he doesn’t!)

“Who are you in the story? Don’t tell me, unless you want to, but who are you in the story? Think about the people in your life who are beaten, humiliated, disgusting or ‘high and mighty,’ or righteous, or anyone else who you don’t want to associate with. How are we to love them, our neighbors, as ourselves? Can we love God with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind, AND *not* love our neighbors? Is it possible? (Think back to Isaiah 58) How can you love the unlovable in your life?”

“‘Do this and you will live,’ says Jesus.”

Close in prayer

Week 4

Passage: Matthew 25: 31-46

Learning objective: The Lord’s Just Judgment of us is based on our Mercy towards others.

Open in prayer

“To give a little background info...while the order of events are not necessarily indicative of the order in which events actually took place, I think it’s important to know that at this point in the book of Matthew, Peter confessed Jesus as Christ in chapter 16, Jesus was transfigured in chapter 17, Jesus has entered Jerusalem triumphantly in chapter 21, and has given many a verbal ‘smack-down’ to the chief priests and teachers of the law in various situations during chapters 21, 22, and all of 23. At this point Jesus just left the temple, went up on the Mount of Olives, and is speaking with his disciples privately about the end of the age in response to his disciples questioning (24: 1-3). He gives a reeally long answer, and this is the last part of that answer about the coming of the end of the age.”

Read vv. 31-33

“Who is this Son of Man? What imagery is used here to describe him?”

(comes in glory, has angels with him, has a throne in heavenly glory, he will separate out all nations before him. He’s the ruler of everyone! See Daniel 7.)

“What’s the significance of the right and left sides?”

(right hand man...a place of significance is that on the right of the king)

Read vv. 34-36

“Who is blessed and by whom?”

(those on his right, the sheep. By the King’s father.)

“What do you think about that imagery?”

“What is the inheritance? And what do we learn about the King from it?”

(the kingdom *prepared* since the creation of the world. This is an inheritance that the King has been waiting to bestow on them! It’s always been there! The Kingdom was part of the plan, and was always meant to be an inheritance!)

“Why are the sheep getting this inheritance?”

(For I was...and you...)

“Now keep in mind those who he’s speaking to, and what has already occurred at this point. He’s not talking to people who don’t know him, and he’s not talking to people who don’t believe. How are we justified, and cleansed of our sins, and will inherit life eternal?”

(By grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3: 21-26). We cannot enter the Kingdom if we have not been born again (John 3: 5-8). Jesus is the gate to being saved (John 10: 7-13))

“Is any of that mentioned here to receive the inheritance of the Kingdom?”

(NO!)

Read vv. 37-40

“Now we’ve read many commands to give mercy unto others, and here we see that the sheep/blessed have done this. What’s interesting about this situation?”

(They didn’t realize that they were doing it for the Son of Man! Perhaps doing anything to the image bearers, reflects on the initial image??)

“Why do you think Jesus doesn’t mention the need to be born again, or the need to enter through him, or to have faith in him? That’s all true, and biblically accurate, but why do you think he doesn’t he talk about that here?”

(He’s speaking to his disciples; they already know that stuff. If you truly do believe you’ll be about Kingdom work, such as those things that the sheep were doing! God saves us by his grace, and *then* tells us how to respond, not as a means to earn salvation, but in grateful response (see also Ex. 20:1-2))

Read vv. 41-46

“What’s different about the response of the goats compared to the sheep?”

(Nothing, in essence.)

“What’s different about their inheritance, and what do we learn about the King from it?”
(eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. It does *not* say prepared since the beginning. It says prepared for the devil and his angels. This is not what God would have for us, and was not created to be an inheritance.)

“Again, we know that we cannot earn our place in heaven by works, but how do you show you’ve got faith? How do people know that your light is shining?”

(by good deeds! Matt. 5: 14-16; James 2:14-26)

“Justified by faith. Here, God’s justice towards us is based on our faith, shown by good deeds of mercy towards others.”

Any other thoughts, questions?

Close in prayer