

Checking In

1. Take a few minutes to check in with everyone, see how they are doing, and open with prayer.
2. Church Life: Belong Class (Membership) begins May 20th, Prayer Retreat June 3rd for Small Groups

Learning

Knowing God

Key Doctrines

- *God* – God’s character is marked by both justice and mercy.
- *Christ* – Jesus’ death on the cross was a debt payment, in which God, in Christ, willing incurred the cost of our sin.
- *Christian Life* – Mercy is to be a defining feature of the Christian’s relationship to others.

Key Observations

- What was anything that stood out to you about this week’s sermon, or what did you take away?
- *Read:* Matthew 18:21-35; Psalm 40:11; 51:1; 69:16; 145:9; James 2:13
 - What does the parable teach us about the relationship, in God’s character, of justice and mercy? *Notice that God’s justice is revealed in the figure of the king who “wished to settle accounts.” Settling accounts is a financial metaphor employed by Jesus to teach us that God is a God of justice, that similarly uses this financial metaphor stating that the “wages of sin is death.” In other words, our failure to*

love according to God’s law incurs a debt before God. God in his justice is committed to holding us accountable to the debt we incur. The passage also shows us, amazingly, that God’s justice is subject to his mercy, that God is quite willing to take on the debt himself that we have incurred, so that we can live as if there never was debt in the first place.

- What do the psalms repeatedly teach us about God’s character? *Many people tend to talk about God as “angry” or as a “God of justice” in the Old Testament, but any honest reading of the Old Testament demonstrates that the very same God that is at work in the Old Testament is the God who has revealed himself in Jesus. God has not changed, he is a God of “abundant mercy” and he hears the cries for mercy of his people, just as in the parable.*
- What does the passage in James teach us about the relationship between justice and mercy? *It teaches us that there is a commitment, in God, to both justice and mercy. God does not ignore or pretend as if sin and destruction and harm has not occurred. God confronts sin, calls it to account, exposes it and condemns it. And yet, God is not merely committed to strict justice, his mercy “triumphs over” his judgment. And in fact, the only thing God will not show mercy toward is mercilessness.*
- *Read:* Read Matthew 18:21-35; Colossians 2:13-15; Romans 6:23; Isaiah 53:1-12
 - a. How do these passages talk about the death of Jesus in relation to debt? *The Romans passage teaches that sin incurs a debt (more specifically a wage, in which reckons mercy to be of greater value than justice. This is not to say justice isn’t valued, it is to say mercy is the ‘higher law’ of the kingdom. The king is angry at the servant because the servant has*

other words we are positively 'owed' death). Colossians teaches us that this wage can also be considered a debt because something is owed by us, namely our lives. In it though we are taught, along with the passage in Isaiah that Jesus paid this debt on our behalf. This is not to say that God "extracted" payment from Jesus, but that Jesus as God's agent of mercy, willingly submitted himself to God as the debt-payment for our sin. So instead of extracting payment from us, God willingly pays our debt himself.

- a. How does Jesus' death satisfy God's justice and open us to God's mercy? *The Bible teaches that God does just "ignore" sin; forgiveness isn't as if God just "pretends" as if the sin didn't happen – that would be unjust. Rather God is committed to working justice on behalf not only of himself, but of all those who have been wronged. The question then becomes how can God be committed to both justice and mercy? In Jesus, God provides an answer, whom Paul says "was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification (Romans 4:25)." In other words in Jesus' death God's justice is satisfied, and in his resurrection God's mercy is made available.*

- *Read: Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 6:36; James 2:8-13*
What is the clear relationship between the king's mercy and his expectation of his servant in the parable? *As a servant, and because he is a servant of this king, he is charged with carrying out the king's policies. Clearly the policy of this kingdom is one broken this higher law and has not abided by the king's character and desire. The only thing insufferable to this king is a lack of mercy, he can suffer debt, but he can't suffer a failure to forgive debt.*

- b. What does the passage in James teach us about God's expectations of us? *What the parable tells us in story form James does in a straightforward manner, "For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy." This is similar to Jesus' saying, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you." Jesus doesn't teach us to make no judgment at all, but to be sure that our judgment is a merciful one. In fact, how we judge others will be the manner in which we are judged. If we desire mercy, then our judgment of others ought to be merciful.*

Listening

Responding to God

- In light of hearing this week's sermon, our study together, and listening to God's Word, how might God be inviting you to take a step of obedience?

Loving

Obeying God

- What is happening in my own life right now that I need to share and for which I need prayer?
- This week I am committed to praying for _____ about:

Checking Out

- What was most meaningful about this group session for you (*Give each person 1-2 sentences to share*)?
- Close in Prayer and Read James 2:13.