

Our Just and Merciful God

Deuteronomy 4:25-31

Introduction

Deuteronomy 4:25-31

²⁵ After you have had children and grandchildren and have lived in the land a long time—if you then become corrupt and make any kind of idol, doing evil in the eyes of the LORD your God and arousing his anger, ²⁶ I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you this day that you will quickly perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess. You will not live there long but will certainly be destroyed. ²⁷ The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and only a few of you will survive among the nations to which the LORD will drive you. ²⁸ There you will worship man-made gods of wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or eat or smell.

²⁹ But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul. ³⁰ When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the LORD your God and obey him. ³¹ For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your ancestors, which he confirmed to them by oath.

Exposition

I. The Justice of God (Vv. 25-28)

In verses 25-28, we see Moses addressing the danger of forgetting the LORD once the people have settled in the land. Sure, the people who were entering into the land would remember the LORD's salvation, but what about their children and grandchildren? Obviously, there was an expectation for multi-generational discipleship. One generation was to declare the good deeds of God to the next generation. One generation was called to teach the next generation the laws of God, to teach them not to worship idols, to teach them to live lives in full devotion to their jealous God.

According to Moses, if the generation that was entering into the land did not teach and model devotion to the LORD, then the LORD would bring the justice of His covenant promises to bear on His people. While they were busy worshipping the created things instead of the Creator, God would call “the heavens and the earth” as witnesses against them. This means that the very things that they were worshipping, the things that they were hoping in, would play a role in their curses of the covenant falling upon all who abandoned the LORD.

Now, you may ask, besides breaking God's command, what is so wrong with idolatry? Why does idolatry result in God's just judgment? Let's consider Jeremiah 2:1-19...

God will not allow His children to live perpetually in a state of idolatry. He disciplines those He loves because He loves them too much to allow their sins to destroy them. As I mentioned last week, God's jealous and His justice is not a contradiction of His love, but rather, an expression of it toward us. And this is true for New Covenant believers as well, which we see in Hebrews 12:4-13...

God intends good for His people, even in His justice. For He want His people to worship Him, which results in His glory and our good.

II. The Mercy of God (Vv. 29-31)

After the people had sufficiently learned from God's discipline, an opportunity for mercy is presented in verses 29-31. As the people repent, turning away from their idolatry ("if you seek me... and return to me and obey me"), the LORD promises that they will find Him. While His justice is holy and unyielding, He is also the God of great mercy.

To speak of mercy is to speak of God's willingness to forgive us even though, in our flesh, we do not deserve mercy. In our flesh, all we deserve is judgment for our sins against Him. Yet, God, in His mercy, does not close the way back to Him for all who truly turn from their rebellion and idolatry and seek Him with their whole heart. He will forgive and restore all who come to Him.

But how could the people come back to God after their sin? We will see this spelled out in more detail as our study of the book of Deuteronomy continues, but for now, you need to know that God implemented a system of sacrifices through the Levitical priests that would offer sacrifices on behalf of the people. A sacrifice was still necessary for those who abandoned the LORD to serve idols like the surrounding nations. The provision of this sacrificial system was an example of God's mercy to the people. It demonstrated that He knew that they were not perfect and would need to address their sin at various times in their lives. His mercy provided such a system.

Conclusion

God desires for all sinners to repent and trust in Him. He is great in mercy toward all who call upon Him in faith. But how will God deal with our sin? In the Old Testament, He dealt with the ceremonial uncleanness of the Israelites through a priesthood, but even that priesthood could not deal fully with our sins.

Hebrews 10 tells us...

Have you been cleansed of your sins? Do you know this just and merciful God who has made a way for you to be forgiven? Would you come boldly to the LORD today and ask Him to forgive you and have mercy on You?