

Caleb Evans

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Preacher: Fr. Caleb Evans

[0:00] Amen. Amen.

So, these past couple of weeks have been a time of fear and trembling in the Evans household. Our baby, Lucy, has started crawling.

Yeah. Now, if you've ever cared for children as they learned to crawl, you know that this is an incredibly nerve-wracking time, right? The kid is into everything.

Chewing on paperwork? Check. Pulling the dog's tail? Check. Trying to pull a lamp down onto her soft little head? Check.

But I think the worst of it is this. She keeps deciding that it might be a good idea to put the dog's chew toys in her mouth.

[1:35] Yeah. Yeah. She doesn't seem to get that she shouldn't do that or that it's really, really disgusting. She doesn't seem to like it when the chew toys get taken from her either.

Now, as parents, I suppose we could be saying, while she seems to be having a great time, we'll let her keep feasting on dog rule. She'd probably prefer that, but that's not what we do.

Why? Because we love her. We don't think that it's necessarily a good thing for her to keep devouring dog germs. Being a loving parent doesn't mean letting your kids get away with just anything, does it?

It means abiding by expectations for their behavior, right? Now, on the other hand, even if one of my kids does something that makes me angry, I don't stay mad forever, even if it seems like I will at the time.

We get that, though, don't we? But here is what we don't always get. As Christians, we should get this. We have the privilege of knowing God as our loving Father.

[2:50] That's a glorious privilege, isn't it? But we are tempted to fall into one of two mistakes when we start thinking about how God relates to human beings.

We can fall into the mistake of thinking that God sees sin as no big deal, that God is never angry because of human sin, that God doesn't really mind it. And a God who is like that would be like the parent who lets the kid keep chewing on the dog toy.

Now, on the other hand, we can fall into the mistake of thinking of God as the cruel taskmaster who is harsh, who is unloving, who is unkind, who is unwilling to forgive, the kind of father who doesn't rejoice when a sinner repents, doesn't rejoice when a lost child comes home, but slams the door instead.

The kind of father who always lets you know that you really need to earn his love. Now, I'm guessing you've probably seen both of these mistaken ideas in practice.

And you're probably prone to falling into seeing God in one of these two ways. Most of us seem to have one of these settings as our default. But I think what we see in our reading from Isaiah 57 for this morning is a helpful corrective to both of those perspectives.

[4:16] So, please look in Isaiah 57 with me in your Bibles. Now, first, a little bit of context. The prophet Isaiah is talking here about God's people returning from the Babylonian exile.

Now, if you're familiar with the Babylonian exile, you know that that had been a real mess. God had allowed them to be carried off into exile because of their sin and their idolatry.

In the judgment that was the exile, we see a concrete example of God's righteous anger against sin. In the restoration and the rebuilding promised in this passage, however, we also see God's great faithfulness and God's mercy.

We see a vivid display of God's character in our Isaiah passage this morning and I want us to think about it. Let's start with God's judgment and anger against sin.

It's better to start with the bad news first, isn't it? We like to think and talk about God's love and mercy, but we start talking about God's wrath and judgment, we start to sweat and we start to squirm a little bit, don't we?

[5:39] Well, let's go ahead and sweat and squirm a little bit because it's good for us from time to time. Now, this is a particularly difficult topic to talk about in our time.

Talk of an angry God strikes people as harsh and primitive. Maybe we have someone here this morning who feels that way, I don't know.

Some sociologists suggest that the default religious system of people my age, of millennials, is what they call moralistic therapeutic deism.

Anyone familiar with that? Do we have any practitioners or is it moralistic therapeutic deism in the house this morning? No? All right. So the idea with moralistic therapeutic deism is this idea that yes, there is a God.

He wants me to be nice. He wants me to be happy. But he's kind of content to just be on standby until I need him for something. And as a bonus, nice people go to heaven when they die and I'm a nice person.

[6:51] That's not what we see in our text here this morning. God sees that his people have sinned, he sees that his people have dealt unjustly, and he is righteously angry about it.

We read in our text, verse 17, Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain, I was angry. I struck him. I hid my face and was angry. But he went on backsliding in the way of his own heart.

What do we do with that? God's talking about striking and being angry. It certainly doesn't fit with the cozy message of a God who wants me to be nice and that's all.

And a God who only wants me to be happy and comfortable all the time. We think that way, we have to ask ourselves, how could a loving God be angry?

How could a loving God strike out at human sin in that way? Well, as in many matters, I think C.S. Lewis is really helpful here. In this case, helping us to see what a loving God really looks like.

[8:10] Lewis writes this, You ask for a loving God. You have one. The great spirit you so lightly invoked, the lord of terrible aspect, is present.

Not a senile benevolence that drowsily wishes you to be happy in your own way, nor the cold philanthropy of a conscientious magistrate, nor the care of a host who feels responsible for the comfort of his guests, but the consuming fire himself, the love that made the world, persistent as the artist's love for his work, and despotic as a man's love for a dog, provident and venerable as a father's love for a child, jealous, inexorable, exacting as love between the sexes.

Loving God is a bit of a frightening thing, isn't it? God doesn't simply wish us to be happy in our own way. God doesn't simply wish to leave us chewing on dog toys.

Go back to my earlier example. God doesn't seek to make us comfortable above all else. God's love is for our ultimate good, whatever it costs.

And that means that God is angry with sin. The kind of God who isn't angry with sin wouldn't be a loving God.

[9:39] Would you want to serve a God who isn't angry at genocide or human trafficking? Do you want to serve a God who thinks those things are okay?

thinks that those things aren't anything to get all that worked up about? Now one of my seminary professors used to say that he loves to preach about the wrath of God.

Because we should hope in the wrath of God. The wrath of God means that sin, death, and the devil will not have the last word because God is in utter opposition to evil.

And he will have the victory. Now at the same time that probably makes us on some level uneasy because as much as we might like to think otherwise, we're not really all that nice.

If we're going by the model of moralistic therapeutic deism even, I am not the kind of person who should go to heaven. I'm not always nice, I can be a real jerk.

[10:55] If you're not sure about that, I know some people you can ask. But what do we do if we're sinners and God is angry at sin? Where does that put us?

Well, we see something remarkable in these verses. The portrait of a God who is righteously angry at sin, who will do something about it, who will bring it to an end, but is merciful to sinners.

Merciful to those who have messed up, gracious to those who are broken. Don't we see that over and over again in this passage? That's actually the dominant theme.

We read in verse 15, God will revive those who admit their faults.

God will dwell with those who are contrite, who know that they have sinned. Read in verse 16, I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry. In verses 18 and 19, I have seen his ways, but I will heal him.

[12:11] I will lead him and restore comfort to him and his mourners, creating the fruit of the lips. Peace, peace to the far and to the near, says the Lord, and I will heal him.

God has honestly seen the sin of his people and it is great, but he promises to heal.

In this passage, we see mercy, we see grace, we see healing, we see restoration. Summing it all up, we see God's character in this passage.

we see his holiness, we see his anger at sin, we see his utter opposition to all that is evil. A loving God, remember, cannot simply overlook evil or refuse to care about it.

How could God do that and continue to be a loving God? To turn a blind eye to what is destructive to his beloved creation. On the other hand, we see God's intention to heal, to forgive, to restore, to show mercy to those who repent, to those who cry out for mercy.

[13:39] How can both of these things be true? There's a question. How can God be just and justify ungodly people?

How can God be angry at sin and merciful to sinners? How can God destroy sin? How can God destroy our sin without destroying us?

We want to see the answer to that. We need to look to what happened 2,000 years ago at Calvary. Where Jesus Christ, the Son of God, took our sins upon Himself, where Jesus, our perfectly righteous Savior, died the death that we deserve.

How can God take sin seriously and forgive sinners? It is too hard for me to wrap my mind around it, I have to admit, but I know this much. My sins are too many to count.

I have racked up a debt that I cannot pay and I deserve nothing but God's wrath and condemnation, but I can say that Jesus paid it all. I have forgiveness, I have restoration, I have the promise of eternal life because Jesus took the holy wrath that my sin deserved and He did it in my place so I am free.

[15:05] What about you? it's not as we're inclined to think that I'm a nice person and I deserve to go to heaven because I'm a nice person.

It's that I deserve death and that Jesus died in my place because He loves me simply because God is merciful. God didn't simply overlook my sin because He is too loving to do that.

He paid the bill Himself. And again, that has nothing to do with how nice we are.

We don't see any mention of nice people in our Isaiah passage for this morning, do we? We see a merciful and a loving God but we don't see nice people.

We do see the wicked. Our passage says to the wicked, the wicked are like the tossing sea for it cannot be quiet and its waters toss up mire and dirt. There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.

[16:20] There's no peace for the wicked. Okay, but what about the good people? Do you see the good people in our passage this morning? Nope. They don't exist because we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

The only other category of people apart from the wicked that we see in our passage for this morning is the contrite, those who repent, those who know that they have sinned, those who ask God for mercy.

the takeaway this morning is this, that God is both utterly opposed to sin and merciful to sinners, and that we are in one of two categories that we have provided for us this morning.

We're either the wicked who have no peace, or we're the contrite. The difference between the wicked and the contrite is not one of moral achievement.

The contrite who know God and who have eternal life have messed up just as badly as those who don't know God and have no peace. It's not that Christians are better than non-Christians.

[17:29] We're not. The difference is simply the difference of being saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ by his death and resurrection.

It is a gift. It's not something that we have achieved. It's not something that we have earned. And it is a gift that anyone who is willing to ask God for mercy in the name of Jesus can receive.

So where are you this morning? If you're a believer, if you have eternal life in Jesus, take this opportunity to remember God's character, his holiness, his opposition to sin, and also his mercy.

thank him to this morning that he has not dealt with you as you deserve and ask him to humble you and make you ever more aware of his love and grace to you in Jesus.

this morning, if you don't know Jesus as your Lord and as your Savior, if you don't know that you have eternal life for him, ask him for mercy.

[18 : 39] Ask him to save you. Ask him to take away your sin and your guilt, and he will. because although he is utterly opposed to sin, he is a God who has mercy on sinners.

His death on the cross is the guarantee that everyone who turns to him and calls out for mercy will have eternal life.

If we are in Christ this morning, we can be sure, to paraphrase what we found in our Isaiah reading. He has seen our ways, he has seen our sins, he has seen our mistakes, he has seen our shortcomings, he has seen them all, but he will heal us, and he will save us.

Praise his holy name. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.