

The Discrimination Of God

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[0 : 00] Well, I've entitled my sermon this morning, The Discrimination of God. Because we need to realize this morning an uncomfortable truth, that God discriminates.

Now, the word discriminate simply means to treat one person or group differently to another. And there are various forms of discrimination. We know all too well in our country that discrimination can be a wicked thing.

For example, as we know in our history, when a person is treated differently based on their skin color, that is wicked, evil discrimination. God never does that. And that kind of discrimination has no place in his world or in his church.

And there's various forms of evil, wicked, unjust discrimination. But there's also other kinds of discrimination that are not bad. In fact, there are good forms of discrimination.

They're part of life. For example, if you're a parent, you discriminate between your children and other children. You treat your children differently, right? To other children. You give them privileges.

[1 : 09] And you plow energy and resources into them that you don't give to other children. You discriminate. Or if you're a husband, you discriminate between your wife and all the other women out there, hopefully.

Hopefully you treat your wife differently to all other women. That's discrimination. That's discrimination. It's good discrimination. And we need to realize this morning that God also discriminates based on the relationships that he has established in the world.

And that is an important truth to grasp. We need to grasp it this morning. Because one of the biggest mistakes people make is to assume that God treats everyone the same. He doesn't.

And he never has. God treats some people differently to others. And let's see how that comes out in these stories in Exodus.

So, as we learned last week, the plagues that are going on in Egypt were essentially God's first major public awareness campaign to the world of who he is.

[2 : 17] And each set of plagues highlights a different point about how God works in the world. So, these plagues, if you study them, they're actually, the first nine are divided into three sets that are in a pattern of three.

And each set of plagues has a different thing to teach us about how God makes himself known and how he works in the world. We saw last week the last set of plagues showed us that God will make himself known to the world despite humans' attempts to ignore him.

At the end of the day, you just can't ignore God. Remember that from last week and how Pharaoh tried and he failed. The magicians tried to give him an excuse, a reason to ignore God, and they failed. That's what we learned last week.

But this week, this set of plagues, they now step up the volume. So, we also see as the plagues progress that there's an intensification.

And God is very long-suffering with Pharaoh and the Egyptians. He starts with basically the first three plagues are just inconveniences. Nothing terrible has happened.

[3 : 22] And there's frogs running through people's beds and it's horrible and gross and inconvenient, but it didn't really hurt anyone. Well, now things start to get more damaging.

There's a plague of flies, which we're told explicitly ruin the land. So, people are starting to lose property now. There's the death of the livestock. That's the major resource of the Egyptians, right? And then there's boils. It starts to touch people's skin. They start to get really sick. So, this is the next level. God has still not got to killing people. That's coming later.

But this is the next level, stepping up the intensity. And the point about God that is highlighted in this second set of plagues, and it comes up first here in these plagues, is how God treats the

Israelites differently.

Did you notice that as we were reading them? So, have a look in your Bibles. The plague of flies that he sends to ruin the land. We're told for the first time here, verse 22, but on that day, God is speaking, on that day, I will give special treatment to the land of Goshen, where my people are living.

[4 : 29] No flies will be there. Verse 23, I will make a distinction. Literally, I will discriminate between my people and your people.

And then in the next plague, the death of the livestock. Again, we see that. 9, verse 4. But the Lord will make a distinction. Literally, the Lord will discriminate between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, and nothing of all the Israelites will die.

Now, we read that, and we go, well, you know, that's obvious, right? He's rescuing the Israelites. He's judging the Egyptians. So, it might seem obvious that God makes a distinction because the Israelites are the oppressed ones in the situation.

Why would God plague them as well? He makes a distinction because they're the slaves, right? But is that the reason he treats Israel differently? Because they're oppressed, because they're slaves. Is that the reason he's done all this? To rescue them, because they're oppressed? Well, no, not actually. There are many other oppressed people, groups, that God didn't intervene in the history of.

[5 : 45] So, why Israel? What makes Israel so special? Well, do you remember? We already learned that. We were reminded that a few chapters ago, in chapter 6 of Exodus.

Why Israel? Why is God intervening in history? Why does he leave, like he does with most other nations, just leave them to do what they do until the final judgment?

Why does he intervene in history in this particular people group? Why does he treat them differently? Why does he discriminate? What makes Israel so special?

Well, we see back in Exodus 6, verse 2 to 4. Then God spoke to Moses. So, God is now explaining to Moses why he's about to do what he's going to do.

Telling him, I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty, but I was not known to them by my name, the Lord. I also established, now this is the important part, my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan.

[6 : 48] And that is the reason why he's intervening now in history, hundreds of years later. God is treating Israel different because of a promise he made long before, way before they were even slaves.

A promise he made to their forefather Abraham. A promise, a special promise called a covenant. Now, we see that word in Scripture a lot. And it's an important word because that and that alone is the only reason he is treating Israel any different.

In fact, that is the only reason he treats anyone differently ever. Because of this idea of covenant. A covenant relationship.

That's why this idea of covenant is so important. That's why you see it throughout the Bible. That's why at St. Mark's you hear about it often. Because God does not show people favor outside of a covenant relationship.

That is the basis that he discriminates. That is the basis that he treats ever one person differently to another. And so we really need to understand what it means that he makes a covenant and that we're part of it, right?

[7 : 58] If that's the only basis by which he discriminates between one person and another. So what is a covenant? Well, again, if you've been at St. Mark's long enough, you'll probably know.

But I'm going to remind you, it's a formal binding relationship between two parties. That is very basic. The closest example that we have in our lives is marriage. Where marriage is a formal binding relationship between two people.

Once they have their wedding day and they go through that ceremony and they make those vows and promises and they trade the rings, the covenant sign, their relationship has changed, right?

They've made a promise to discriminate.

That's what a marriage is, right? It's two people making promises to each other that they're going to treat them differently to everyone else. It's a promise to discriminate. And when God makes a covenant with someone or a group of people, it is a promise that God makes to treat them differently to everyone else in the world.

It's a promise to discriminate. And this is very important. Why? Why is it so important for us to know that God discriminates and how he discriminates?

[9 : 18] You might be sitting there now and thinking, okay, well, this isn't the theological stuff. This is what the preacher is saying. But what does it mean to me? Why is it so important to me? I'll tell you why it's important to you. Because one day, in the future, Jesus tells us that a great discrimination is going to take place.

He speaks about it in Matthew 25. Let me read to you what he says. He uses a parable to describe it. Because he wants it to hit home.

He wants people to understand what's going to happen. This is from Matthew 25, verse 31 to 34. When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.

Now let me just pause there. That sounds crazy. That sounds like crazy talk, right? The Son of Man. He's talking about the vision, actually, that Daniel got back in Daniel 7 about this great ruler coming to rule all nations from heaven.

And with the armies of angels. And now you think, okay, well, that's lovely. But will it really happen? We know this is going to happen because it was spoken on the lips of the man who died and rose again.

[10 : 36] Which proves to us that he is the one who is actually speaking God's truth in the world. That no one else has. That no one else has the claim to speak. But he did.

And we know it's true. Because of his resurrection. So these words, he's talking about something that's going to happen. It's going to happen someday in the future. God is a day set when everything in this world, all the news, all the stuff that's going on in Europe and Russia and America will stop.

And it will mean nothing because the Son of Man will come in his glory with all his angels. It's going to happen and everyone will see it. And he will sit on his glorious throne and everyone will know who's in charge, finally. But what will happen then?

What is the first thing he's going to do when he comes on that day? Well, verse 32. All the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate them one from another.

Just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

[11 : 56] Okay, so when Jesus comes back, right, the first thing that's going to happen is a separation. He's going to separate the world into two groups.

Now, that's definitely going to happen. And if you've died by that point, he's going to raise you from the dead before he separates.

That's what the Bible teaches us. Everyone is going to be in one of those two groups. You are going to be in one of those two groups. How do you know which one you're going to be in? That's the most important question I can ask you. On that day, when that great division happens, how do you know which group you're going to be in?

How do you know which side you're going to be on? Because you went to church, right? Is that how you know? Because you're sitting here now. Or you lived a fairly good life.

Is that how you know? Because you stood up and said the Apostles' Creed. Because you called Jesus your Lord. But you know what Jesus says?

[12 : 57] Matthew 7, 21. Not everyone who even calls me Lord, Lord will inherit the kingdom of heaven. Only those who do the will of my Father in heaven.

Okay, so even the religious people can't assume that they're going to be in the right group. So how do you know? You can't rely on the things you do.

You can't rely on your church attendance. You can't rely on your good works. How do you know? Well, the answer is in the next chapter in Matthew. If you have your Bibles open in Matthew 25, reading this, turn to chapter 26.

Because Jesus is actually, this is part of the biggest story. And when Jesus warns His disciples of the great separation that's going to happen, and He wants us to ask ourselves, how do we know which side we'll be on?

Then the very next chapter in Matthew, He answers that question. The night before He dies, He has supper with His disciples.

[13 : 59] And He says this to them. Matthew 26, verse 27. He took a cup, and after giving thanks, He gave it to them and said, Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

The answer to the question, how do you know which side you will be on on that great day, is covenant. And Jesus says here that those who trust in His death for their sins, for all those people who have taken in His death into their own lives, and who constantly do in faith when they take the sacrament, for those people who trust in Christ and His death for their sins, God has made a covenant with them.

And they can know that. That's why we do communion on a regular basis. It's God reminding those who take it in faith that they are part of His covenant. And that is a binding promise that God has made to treat them differently to everyone else in the world.

Because of what Jesus did when He died on the cross. That means that if you trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, and you trust in what He did on the cross for you, you can know that God has promised to treat you differently.

You can know that because you're part of a covenant relationship with Him. Which means you can know that no matter what happens in your life, God is on your side.

[15 : 34] That's what it means if you're in a covenant with Him. No matter what happens, no matter how difficult life is being, no matter what you face, no matter what people think of you, you can know if you're in a covenant with God, that the Creator of the world is on your side.

Isn't that the ultimate comfort? It's like a child trusts a parent to always be on their side, even if they've been naughty.

Children, you know that even if you've done something wrong, your parent will be on your side.

Right? Your mom and dad will always do what is good for you, even if it doesn't seem good for you at the time.

Your mom and dad will always be working for your good, irrespective of whether you've earned that or not. That is one assurance a child should have.

And that is the kind of assurance that God wants His covenant people to have, that His treatment of them is not based on how much they particularly love Him today.

[16 : 44] You know, His treatment of you is not based on the strength of your love for Him, because that we know all too well, fades and changes, and is variable and is unreliable, right?

Our love for God. But His commitment to you is not based on your love for Him, because what about when you don't feel that you particularly love Him?

Again, like a parent's commitment to their child is not based on how much their child loves them that day, right? And it's not based on the strength of your faith, because what about when your faith flags?

And it does, doesn't it? What about when you have doubts? What about when you're not trusting like you should? But that's not what God's commitment to you is based on. It's not based on any of those things.

It's based on His covenant relationship, His promise that He's made that He's not going to go back on to His covenant people. Through Christ, His covenant relationship that He's made through Christ, and your faith in Christ.

[17 : 48] Because of that and that alone, you can know that God is on your side in life, and when ultimate judgment comes, you will be protected from His judgment, just as His people were in Egypt.

You see, this protection that He gives to His people in Egypt when He brings His judgment on the Egyptians is a, it just tells us something about Him. It tells us how He treats His covenant people when His judgment comes down on the earth.

And you want to be in that people. And that is the benefit of being in God's covenant people. The great benefit, knowing that God is on your side, knowing that He discriminates in your favor because of what Jesus did on the cross for you, as long as you trust in that.

That is the great benefit of being in His covenant. But you know what? There are also responsibilities if you are in His covenant people. Just like being in a family, right?

If you're in a family, you have the benefit of knowing that your family is on your side, but you also have responsibilities being in that family. Well, it's the same being in God's people.

[18 : 53] And this is the next thing we learn in this set of plagues, because God wants His covenant people to be different to everyone else.

So He treats certain people different so that they can be different. And this is also a very important point. And we see it here.

So back to Exodus 8 and 9. As these plagues proceed, we see a new conflict arises. So Pharaoh, by this time, he's a pretty smart guy, and he knows that he really should let the Israelites go by this time.

But at the same time, he really wants to keep them, because they're useful slaves. And he doesn't want to be told what to do. But he knows that he's going to be in trouble if he doesn't do something. And so what does he do? He negotiates. He tries to negotiate. Did you see that? Have a look. Exodus 8, verse 25.

[20 : 04] From verse 25. Pharaoh summoned Moses. Now this is after the fourth plague. Now his attempts to ignore God have all failed. Now he has to pay attention.

He knows this is the hand of God. Even his own magicians have told him, and this is God doing this. So he knows he's got to do something. Verse 25. Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, Go sacrifice to your God within the country.

In other words, stay in Egypt. Go sacrifice to your God within the country. So he doesn't want them to leave Egypt. Then verse 27. That doesn't work for Moses.

He says, We must go a distance of three days into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God as he instructs us. So Pharaoh responds, verse 28. I will let you go and sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness.

Just don't go very far. Don't go too far. So he's wanting to negotiate. Pharaoh is trying to find a way that the Israelites can serve their God but also stay in Egypt.

[21 : 05] Because he wants them in Egypt. He wants them around. And so he's trying to find a way to negotiate. Okay, can you serve your God? It's fine. We'll tolerate your religion. Just stay with us.

Stay here. But that's not going to work. We see that as the story goes on. Because Israel is not able to serve God if they stay in Egypt.

But Pharaoh thinks they can. That's the tension that's here in the story. And that's Moses' point in verse 26. He's saying, listen, it's not going to work if we stay here and try to worship God.

The Egyptians would stone us. Moses is basically saying to Pharaoh, serving God is not just some religion that we can fit into the structures of Egyptian society. Pharaoh, serving Yahweh, serving this God is not something you can just do one day a week and then we can serve you for the rest of the week.

No, that's not how it works, Pharaoh. If we're going to serve God, we need to leave Egypt totally behind. And that's, of course, something at this point that Pharaoh just can't tolerate. But that's the point that Moses is making.

[22 : 12] We need to leave if we're going to serve our God. And you know why? Because Moses understands how a covenant works. He understands the responsibilities of a covenant relationship.

Again, take a covenant relationship we relate with, marriage. If you get married and you make those vows and you receive those rings, from that point on, you are fully committed to one person.

Fully committed. You're not just one day a week, right? Every day. And that also means that you distance yourself in a certain way from other people because you're committed to this person.

There's certain relationships that you can't have with other people now when you've committed to this person. That's how a covenant works. And it's the same with God. It's the same if we're in covenant relationship with God today.

It's exclusive. It's a full commitment. And I think that's something that many Christians still don't get. Many Christians think that they can fit Christianity into the rest of their life.

[23 : 26] But that's not how a covenant works. If you want to be in God's covenant, you can't just find a way to negotiate and fit it into the rest of your life.

If you're going to serve God properly, you also need to leave the world in a very real way and leave its demands and leave its priorities and leave what the world says you need to be focused on in your life behind.

And not try to compromise like Pharaoh, try to compromise and negotiate where we think we can have one foot in the kingdom and one foot in the world.

It doesn't work like that. But you know what? In my time as a pastor, I've come across so many people who try to do that. And it never ends up working. So many people who try to negotiate. I've had people say to me, well, you know, I get what you're saying about coming to church and sitting under God's Word. And I'll do that. Every second Sunday, because every other Sunday I've got my sport or I've got this, which is my time.

[24 : 28] Okay, so can I do that? Can I have some to myself and then I'll give God some? That's trying to negotiate with God. It doesn't work. God doesn't negotiate.

Or this area of my life is mine. I'll follow Jesus. I'll follow Jesus. I'll be involved in His church. I'll be involved in His people. I'll read the Bible. I'll do what He says. But this particular sin or this particular area of my life, that's mine.

That's what I'm going to keep to myself. That's negotiation. You can't negotiate with God. If you're in His covenant, you need to be all in. Now, there are great, eternal benefits to being in His covenant. You know the God of creation will be on your side forever. I mean, there's no better knowledge than that. But if you're going to be in that covenant, you also need to be all in. You need to leave Egypt behind.

And that, leaving the world, being different to the world, actually shows that you're in covenant. That is proof that you are in that covenant.

[25 : 32] That God will treat you differently because you are different. Not that His favor will be on you because of what you do, but being different shows that you've actually come into His covenant.

Because you can't be the same as the world around you if you truly have. You need to leave Egypt behind. And your life should be noticeably different to the world.

Noticeably. Just as much as the Israelites knew that God treating them differently wasn't for them to just live it up in Egypt. It was so that they could leave Egypt.

And they knew that they would never be able to live comfortably in Egyptian society anymore because they were God's people. In the same way, if you're in God's covenant today, your life should be noticeably different to the world around you.

In your focus, what you spend your energy on, what you spend your time on will look different to the people of the world. What you spend your money on, how you spend your money when you realize it's not yours but it's God's, it will look different to the world around you.

[26 : 42] And your conversations, how you speak, what you do, how you behave will be different, noticeably different to the world around you. You basically, like the Israelites, you need to live a life that doesn't fit into the world.

That doesn't fit comfortably into the world's structures as much as Israel didn't fit in Egypt. Do you? Do you live a life that doesn't fit?

Can people tell? Because here's the truth. If you're not different from the world around you, you can't presume that God will treat you differently when he judges it.

As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians, You can see it on the screen behind me. 2 Corinthians 6 For we are the temple of the living God.

As God said, I will dwell, I will walk among them, I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore, come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord.

[28 : 04] Do not touch any unclean thing and I will welcome you and I will be a father to you and you will be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.

Let's pray. Oh Lord, what a great, amazing promise that you promised to treat your people differently.

But Lord, you call us to live differently. Help us to realize what that means. Help us to read our Bibles and realize the ways that you call us to live differently to the world.

And help us not to think we can negotiate with you, but to be all in. And to realize that that's what it means to be your people. And to just dwell and find our hope on the great assurances that we have that you will always be in the favor and on the side of your people in life and in death.

Amen.