

The Compassionate God - Defender Of The Weak

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[0 : 0 0] Right, so the power will probably come on in a short while, hopefully. But just to think about, as we start, superhero movies.

Superhero movies. Most of us, I'm assuming, love superhero movies. Some of us might have not watched a superhero movie for some time. But the cool thing about going to superhero movies, if you remember back to your kiddies' days, I'm sure we all watch on TV or watch a superhero movie, when you go with a kid, or you yourself would have done it, and you come out wanting to be like the superhero.

So these days when you go watch, I don't know, one of the Marvel Comics movies, ooh, I hope it's Marvel Comics, Spider-Man, the kids all tell me, and you come out and how does, everyone's, choo, choo, choo, there's only good spider webs.

If you don't know what I'm talking about then. If I, I'll date myself now, but Karate Kid. There we go, okay, someone should remember Karate Kid, okay. And we went to go watch it, and of course, everyone wants, you come out the movie, everyone wants to be like Karate Kid, and that special move, like that, okay.

That move works, by the way. I know because I did it against my sister. Okay. We were all very young in those days. But the cool thing about superhero movies is they remind us that, well, you've got these superheroes that are fighting for justice and protecting the people who need it from very big powers, like these crazy supervillains that, when they're just, the imagination of these bad things that happen in life.

[1 : 4 4] But that's the cool thing about superhero movies, is you've got this hero, this person, who comes in and saves the day with people who need it. Now, when we watch superhero movies, we never really identify with the people who need help.

We always want to be like the superhero. But in our story today, well, it's not a story, in our Bible passage today, we're going to hear about God, who is a superhero, because he does this defending of people who need it, and then how he wants us to be superheroes as well.

So if you haven't thought of yourself as a superhero in a while, then this is a perfect time to listen up. The first point I want us to sort of grapple with in the text in front of us is that God is the compassionate God who listens to the cries of the helpless.

God is a compassionate God who listens and then acts when he hears the cries of those who need his help. Now, the text has got various laws.

We're in the middle of the book of Exodus. In fact, this is a sort of a separate section called the book of the covenant, all these separate laws. And in fact, in our section today, you'd be forgiven for thinking, gosh, what on earth has everything got to do with this?

[3 : 1 0] There's ten different laws in just this one little section. But if you zoom out a little bit in the text, you'll see that there's really two sets of laws in this whole section. One set of laws has to do with how we are to worship God, and the other set of laws is how we are to deal with people.

And the fact that they're both in the text together, sort of just interwoven, is a very important thing for us to grab hold of, and that is that to help people in the world, for God wants us to help people in the world and look after those who need it, but we're not just to look after them and not worry about how we worship God.

Neither are we just to worship God and think it's okay to deal with people however we want and not to worry about how we deal with people. Does that make sense? So, in verse 16, you've got laws about dealing with virgins, which are really young women.

They would have been in their teens, talking about their teens, not to take advantage of them. And if you do, you've got to at least pay the bride price for them, even if you're not going to get married.

But then you've got three laws about not letting a sorceress live, not having relations with an animal, and not worshipping other gods. And so that's all got to do with what's called, well, it's religion, really.

[4 : 30] So even not having relations with animals, it's all pagan practices were very corrupt back in the day, and God is saying, look, don't do that. Don't be like those people.

I want you to be different. And then you've got really what's the heart of this passage, verse 21 down to verse 27, really.

And that is not to ill-treat an alien or stranger, verse 21. Verse 22, don't take advantage of widows or the fatherless or orphans.

Verse 25, if you lend money to my people who is needy, to the poor, so be careful how you treat the poor. Be careful when you make alone, verse 26.

And so those are groups of people that God wants us to be especially mindful of in how we deal with people in the world. And then it goes back to how we deal with God, verse 28.

[5 : 33] Don't blaspheme God or curse the ruler of his people. And then this, worship God by being quick. Be quick. Some translations make sure. Make sure. My inner way says, you must give me the firstborn of your sons.

The other translation is, be quick to give me the firstborn of your sons. So worship God with our earthly possessions. And there's a very good reason for that in this part of the Bible, because he's saying, I also want you to help the poor.

Later on in the law code, in Deuteronomy and Leviticus, that first lot of stuff that you give to God, 10% is to be kept for helping the needy.

So that's why that's in this section as well. But let's just step back and see how this all fits together.

So just remember that the world that God created was meant to be filled with goodness and blessing, with everyone sharing in the rich resources available of the natural world, so that there aren't any needy persons, but also relating to each other well.

[6 : 42] Relating to each other well. Because you can have all, you can have a very rich, resource-filled society, but some are going to want to keep it all to themselves, and then not be fregevig, not be generous to other people.

That's how the world starts. God wants us to live in communities where everyone is treated with love and respect and dignity, no one taking advantage or hurting or treating others badly.

Of course, the world didn't stay like that for long, but it's important to know that's how the whole thing starts. So when you look at how the world works and how God is dealing with the world, it's good to start with, in Genesis always, as a kind of paradigm, a picture of how it's meant to be, and then of how sin damages that and diminishes that and infiltrates it and corrupts it and breaks it.

So God's law takes into account the reality of sin, but especially as it impacts our relationships with each other. Especially how broken family relationships impact our experience of the world.

Just think for a moment how different your life would have been if you'd grown up with all of your family members being really good and loving and kind and not having one single argument or practicing karate kid on your sister.

[8 : 12] Having a dad that was present and engaged and good and helpful and kind and a mom that was there and your brothers and sisters that were nice and loving.

Your experience of being amongst people would be very different, wouldn't it? Most of us have gone through some kind of abuse and trauma in our lives, and most of it comes from bad family relationships.

And so what's emphasized in this section is how God wants us to act towards each other as family. So just as a point, moms and dads, you need to know how important a good marriage is.

It sets up your kid's future and gives them such a good, solid grounding. If you, one of the best things you can do is work on your marriage, make sure you're a good mom and, well, a good husband and wife, and then a good mom and dad to your kids, that's going to set them up for life.

Recently, a friend of mine, a very good friend of mine's father passed away, and at the funeral he just said how much he loved his dad because his dad was his hero. Because his dad spent so much time with him explaining how life works and working with him and teaching him all the good ways of living and staying away from nonsense, and he's carried that out in his life.

[9 : 35] The problem with sin is it impacts the most vulnerable the hardest. It's then no mistake that these laws highlight the plights of those who have the least power in society.

So I've sort of highlighted that for us already. You've got women, you've got foreigners, you've got widows, the fatherless, and then just anyone who's in general need.

Now, two things stand out in this passage about these groups of people. First of all, what must not be done to them, and then secondly, how God responds to them.

And so the NIV has various verbs about what mustn't happen to them, what we mustn't do. So in verse 21, a man mustn't seduce a virgin. The word behind that is to take advantage of, to misrepresent, and to pretend one thing, but actually to pretend to be good, but men, we all know what the guys are after, but promises that you don't keep, that you don't intend to be honest and true to this person.

In verse 21, do not ill-treat, the NIV is not ill-treat an alien or oppress him.

[11 : 05] Verse 22, don't take advantage of a widow. And then for the poor, don't charge him extra.

Don't be like the moneylenders, don't take advantage. There's a different Hebrew word for each of these things that we mustn't do. And they're all very negative.

They can range from, and they've got quite a host of meanings, from being violent against, from crushing, placing a heavy burden on someone, to just causing distress, making their life hard, to holding them back.

These are all the, just those verbs have got quite a range of meaning in the Hebrew text. To hold back. They're trying to escape. You're pulling them back, or you're pulling them down. To afflict, to actually hurt them, to injure, or to just to look down upon.

You just have this attitude of, but I don't really care about you. But essentially what's happening is that all these people are being pushed down, or held down, by someone stronger and bigger than they are.

[12 : 14] That's what's causing their problems. And they don't have an ability, they don't have the power, to stop the person from doing that. And so God is saying, I want you, who are powerful enough, to look after those who aren't powerful.

Does that make sense? Essentially, these are people who are being bullied, and being held against their will, by a force, by a power stronger than they are. I don't know if you can remember, back to your school days.

Who, I'm scared of asking this, who was bullied at school? Most of us? No, some of us. Who did the bullying? No one wants to admit to that.

Okay. Well done. But I mean, you remember the feeling of fear, and helplessness, and being so mad at the person, for wanting to hurt you, and then, but like not being able to fight back?

All you want is someone bigger, and stronger than they are, to come and sort out the bullies. I was a superhero for a day, at school. I was at, Paul Rose in high school, Stenobosch, it's a very Afrikaans school.

[13 : 24] Yeah, yeah. I was one of the Ingalls money. And I was actually quite big, at school, in those grades, standing six. And so I could hold my own, but I don't know what they ate, but they all shot past me later, on.

And, I was, one of the rugby players, was picking on this guy, I played hockey, and he was picking on one of my hockey players. So, I just, so I jumped to his defense.

For some reason, he was beating him with an umbrella. And I did that thing. Oh, the umbrella came in, boosh, I grabbed the umbrella. I leave him alone. And it was like this moment, I was like, yeah. Just, you know.

Anyway, he ripped the umbrella out of my hand, and then started beating me with his thing. And so, but it was okay, because one of my best friends, was a prop in the first rugby team. And so, later on, he had a conversation with the guy, with the umbrella.

But I mean, we've all been, most of us would have an experience of being bullied, and it's, it's just not nice. And you can have that at your workplace, where someone in authority and power is being particularly nasty to you, and you just feel that helplessness.

[14 : 32] And what you want, is someone who's going to listen to you, and then do something to help you. And that's exactly what God does in this text. And that's, that's actually what's unique about these laws in this part of the Bible, is that many places in the old, in the ancient Near East, had laws of protecting the poor.

But, but God has a particular interest. It's, they didn't call the gods to come and help them. But the God of the Bible says, don't mess with him, because you're going to mess with me if you do that.

He's our protector. So, have a look at verse 23. If you mistreat them, so who is he talking about here? Verse 23.

So, he's talking about the foreigner, the stranger, the alien, the migrant worker, if you will. And he's talking about verse 22, the widows and the fatherless, the orphans.

Don't push them down. Don't bully them. Verse 23. If you do, and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry.

[15 : 40] My anger will be aroused. And I will kill you with the sword. Your wives will become widows and your children fatherless.

And then in verse 27, talking about the poor and your neighbor who's, who needs your help. And you hold over his deposit, if you will, for a loan or for any kind of help.

He's supposed to give it back and if you hold it, when he cries out to me, I will hear him because I have compassion. I have compassion.

So firstly, God hears the cries of those who, God hears people who cry out to him. God hears people who cry out to him.

You know, this is such a helpful reminder and you might be in a bad place yourself. There's many people in our community who are in need, who don't have family structures that are helpful and that are helpful.

[17 : 02] And you don't know where to turn to. You don't know how to get help. You've got a God who listens to your cries for help. God promises to hear and act and it's consistent throughout the whole Bible.

This thing of God hearing and acting. The people who God is speaking to know all about it. Exodus chapter 1 and 2. They cried out as they were being oppressed by the Egyptians and then God moved to act to save them.

So if the world seems like it's falling apart around you, you're not alone. God's ears are specifically, specially tuned to hear the cries of people who need help.

And then surprisingly, God acts out in anger. Now that could be surprising for us, but again, you know, we've got to let the Bible tell us how God is.

We mustn't put our idea of who God is. And so often, oh no, God is love, God is love, God wouldn't hurt anyone. No, no. In black and white, I'm going to get so angry if you hurt widows and children and strangers and poor people.

[18 : 15] I'm going to come and kill you. And by the way, God does just that. when you read the accounts of the prophets over and over again, they condemn the people of Israel.

You didn't listen. I told you in the law to be nice to the poor and you're not. You're taking all the money for yourself. Okay, you know what? I'm going to do what I said I was going to do.

And he brings in the Babylonians, he brings in the Assyrians, he brings in whoever. He's like, come boys, we need to go and teach them a lesson. But the thing is this, you actually want a God who cares enough to get angry.

Because it shows you that he cares about you enough to do something about the evil plaguing your life. He will put a stop to anything that threatens to hurt and harm and oppress his people.

He's moved. It gets him. And you want a God like that. You don't want a God that goes, oh, you know, I love you.

[19 : 18] Meaning he's got nice feelings towards you and then shrugs his shoulders and says, but good luck. If you're being bullied in a playground and you've got a friend who's bigger and stronger and then he says, yes, go for it, good luck, and he walks away, I was like, well, help me.

So he acts out in anger when he needs to. It's not that God is angry all the time, but it's just when he's faced with massive injustice that he's, he just, he can't handle it.

And it makes sense that he can't handle it. He's essentially the father of these people. Do you remember in Exodus, early on in Exodus, he says to Moses, go and tell Pharaoh I'm calling my son.

You're hurting my son. So he thinks of his people as his child. And which father, when you, when you see your child being beaten up by another, by a bunch of bullies, I mean, oh man, that's, that's when dad thing, dad mode, that is the coolest thing to see.

Yes. Boom, out. Boom, out. You're not going, oh dad, you're not supposed to be angry, you're supposed to be loving and kind. No, that's cool, sort them out.

[20 : 34] Save me, these people are hurting me. Okay, don't go and beat them to a nonsense, but just make sure that they're not hurting the kids. The practical application, gentlemen, this is God doing this, okay?

Okay, it's not just anger that gets God involved, it's his compassion. What's interesting is the first time we've come across this Hebrew word in the Old Testament.

So, I have a verse 27, when he cries out to me, I will hear, for I'm compassionate. Depending on your translation, various translations, but this word, this compassionate word, is used as one of the deepest descriptives of God's essential nature.

It's used another 13 times in the Old Testament, and each time, it's actually combined with this other trait. So, maybe, just turn with me to Exodus 34, that's the next time it's used.

Exodus 34, verse 6, where our story is going to continue, and we'll get there a bit later in the series, God willing. Moses is, we pick up the story again after these laws of Moses and God interacting on the mountain.

[22 : 02] This is an amazing scene where Moses is visiting God, or God has called him to come and talk to him. And, I'm just going to pick it up from verse 5.

Then the Lord came down in the cloud. Remember how that went? Moses is standing in front of God. So, verse 5, the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name.

Remember, Moses has met God earlier. I am who I am, the burning bush, Exodus 3, but he has a further, a deeper explanation of who God is. And he passed in front of Moses proclaiming, the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God.

There's that phrase, compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin.

Isn't that a fantastic descriptor understanding of who God is? Now, in the Hebrew, you know, when you want to emphasize something, they just put two words together that are essentially normally the same.

[23 : 18] So, I don't think they've got an adjective that goes really, really, I'm really, really loving or really, really angry. They just go, I'm bad, bad, I'm angry, angry, or in this case, I'm loving, loving, I'm merciful, merciful, I'm compassionate, compassionate.

They're different words in the Hebrew, but they've got very similar meanings. God's essential nature is to have compassion and to have mercy. It's important to notice that's not just a feeling, of course it's a feeling, but it's actually, it's like love.

Again and again, love is not a feeling, it's an action. Don't, God's people don't have to have loving feelings, they're to have loving actions. And so, God's mercy drives him, compels him to act, especially against people who are hurting helpless people.

And then to help the helpless. In fact, the sort of meaning behind that word is to bend or stoop down in kindness to an inferior, to show favor.

And so you've actually, it's interesting, the Hebrew word for compassion there is yana, and the Hebrew word for pushing down and crushing is anna.

[24 : 43] So don't anna, but be yana. So this is, so instead of, instead of pushing people down, instead of pushing people down, God wants, he himself bends down.

So what's going on? Oh, okay, let me, he gets, it's him getting involved in the scraps, the fighting, the problems of this world. It's God's compassion and graciousness and kindness that compels him to act towards those in need.

It's just who he is. It's just what he does. And of course, if he does that, then he, he wants us to do that. But before we look at how we are to act, I'm just going to go from here to the New Testament.

And so, that God says he's going to, he is like that in the Old Testament. He wants his people to be like that. And the Old Testament is a record of how they weren't able to be like that fairly consistently.

And so you get to the New Testament and Jesus makes that change. I think God shows in the most concrete way possible the kind of stooping down and bending down and reaching down that is needed in order to change people's hearts and minds for them to stop being bullies.

[26 : 11] This bending down, moving down, moving towards and fixing and listening is ultimately done in the person of Christ. Jesus is God's way of dealing decisively with the problem of people being held down by oppressive forces, being held captive by their own sin or being hurt by the sin of others.

And if you're a Christian then you've experienced this release, this rescue from Christ himself who's saved you from the power of, the horrible power of sin in your own life.

And very often he saves you from, by saving you, he saves you then from abusive cycles of relationships, although that's hard work to get that done as well.

But he doesn't, because what he does then is he puts you in these communities of care, so the problem of sin is it separates you and the only people you know about your immediate surroundings are people who are abusing you, but when you become a Christian you join people who don't abuse you.

I've yet to be hurt by any, well, I've yet to be hurt on purpose by anyone in this church, certainly. The way that Jesus does this is in the cross and it's the cross that precisely shows us how both he acts and how he wants us to act to overturn the problem of misusing our power to take advantage of others, but instead to use our strength and our abilities to lift others up.

[27 : 52] What he does is he gives us the secret superhero power which is quite cool. So, if you'd like to you can join me in Philippians chapter 2. There's a famous passage in Philippians 2 about how Jesus saves us and how he wants us to act then towards others.

So, Philippians chapter 2 from verse 3.

Paul is writing to a church telling him how to live as followers of Jesus. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

Don't be a bully. Be nice. But you do, you be nice by lifting them up and you coming underneath them. You're not going to be over them. You're going to be under them. Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Well, what attitude is that? Just look what he did. who being in very nature God didn't consider equality with God something to be grasped but made himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant, a slave, being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

[29 : 46] Now think about this about how if you weren't a Christian in your life how bad of a bully you would have been and the love of God hears the cries of the people you've hurt and then instead of judging you in Christ he changes you so that you don't become a bully but someone who's strong and then uplifts others up.

Isn't that that's just an amazing thing. So this is the way that Jesus saves us sorry it's the way that Jesus saves us that shows how God wants us to act towards others.

We get changed by Jesus so that we can lift others up just like he did just like he did for us so don't forget how you were saved because that's how you're supposed to act towards others and our superpower we can do this because we receive the same power that raised him from the dead that same power is working in our lives.

We become strong to help save or help the weak and so we get tasked with the work of defending those in need. So we need to look at ourselves now what is it that God does for us what are we to do as Christians?

Well in terms of this passage we're the defenders of the weak that's why we sang those songs. We're the defenders now. We're the superheroes. We just must make sure we don't get in our own way.

[31 : 23] We've seen with other laws of the Old Testament Jesus takes them and sort of intensifies them. What he does is he drives down into the heart level of things and he uncovers our attitudes and our prejudices.

That's why the passage in James that we looked at or we read earlier is important. We still have this ability to look down on the poor and to judge them. So here's the thing if you find that your heart for the work of God to those in need is getting cold you don't have the energy you don't have the power you run out of a bit of compassion fatigue what you've got to do is remind yourself of what Jesus has done for you.

It's his grace and kindness and above all his mercy to save those who can't save themselves and who don't deserve his mercy.

It's the same thing he's done for us. So James 2 you don't have to go there I'm just going to lift this verse out. Listen my brothers has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him.

So we mustn't be uppity and think we're better we're not better we didn't deserve any of the love and mercy that God gave us and so we've got to do the same thing we've got to have the same attitude the same actions that Jesus took for us we take on for others.

[32 : 54] We've got to listen the same as God listens so when there's people in our community that need our help we often want to jump into action we often think okay we'll just pour some money in to solve the problem and let's be honest money does help but God doesn't just pour resources he pours himself he listens he takes the time to listen to what's going on and then he himself goes and sorts out the problem or goes and he's with the people that need his help in the person of Christ he comes down to where they are and spends time with them that's why Jesus chose who did he choose?

the rich and the famous fishermen tax collectors who did he hang out with? sinners people who needed help who did he help?

people who said I need your help where was he? with people who needed his help one of the things I think that stops us from realizing who we are and then taking sort of collective or action in our own lives we might not think that we've got the resources I mean you know the problems of this world I mean the poor how how how do we do this?

but remember sin has we said that sin is operating on a relational level on broken relationships especially broken family relationships if it all goes wrong there then that's what we need to start fixing so the thing what that does for us is it means that we can get involved because all it does is it starts with starting a relationship with someone who's in trouble however that looks but it will often look like opening your home inviting them in or taking something that they need help with but not just throwing resources spending time opening your homes we can get involved because all it takes for us is to begin to have loving kind open caring and supportive relationships with people in need that's really all it takes it doesn't stop there but that's where it starts and we've seen this work already in the way that we're running our home groups

I'm hoping you've begun to experience this in our home groups we've opened our homes we're looking at scripture together and we're talking about the issues in our life and we're praying for them and we're much more doing this thing of helping and loving each other and giving help in need because we're much more relating to each other a lot better yeah it's going to take work it's only the start of it but that's where it's meant to start and so the help and the good relationships you're getting from our home groups we take into our homes and extend that further into our community to people that might need it and we that's how we bring them in and help them turns out your superhero power is having a relationship with Christ having a good relationship with your partner with your family but even if you don't you can just open your front door and say hey what's going on or going to visit them and say looks like you could use some help with some stuff how can

[36 : 17] I help or before you even offer help do you want to tell me about it what's going on tell me about what's going on and there it begins it's true this kind of change or this kind of help takes longer we want often to get quick measurable results just pouring resources it's easier when it's needed but I remember in one of the pipe bands I played for one of the fathers committed suicide terrible story and left his kid he was a fatherless kid and one person said oh he doesn't have to worry the dad was rich he's left him he'll be fine he's got lots of money and all the other dads in the group were like no he needs his dad forget about the money last week we saw that restoration of the world is sorry last week we still saw that the goal of

God working in the world is restoration and that involves peace do you remember that how peace makes everything that's the goal that's what we're aiming for but what gets us there when there's so much hurt and difficulties in the world when you've been hurt by someone well the answer from Exodus 22 is to show compassion and show mercy peace is wonderful to have but we wanted you know the thing about peace is we wanted to come easy we wanted just be nice if there was peace we want peace in our lives how do we do it we take a holiday we go watch Netflix we go for a cycle we go for a walk we spoil ourselves with coffee or milk tart or maybe some alcohol those are all focused on me how I can get peace God's answer is the way to get peace in my world is for you to go and be nice to others be merciful to others that's how it's going to happen what's interesting and we'll close shortly what's interesting is that modern science corroborates this being merciful towards others it brings peace this is from an article by a major hospital in the states it's called

Cedars Sinai it's a famous hospital they do all kinds of research into how the human body works here's an article on the science of kindness the science of kindness they say this acts of kindness release serotonin oxytocin and dopamine and these are hormones that contribute to your mood and overall well-being this practice of showing kindness to others being merciful is so effective it's being formally incorporated into some types of therapy and it's becoming increasingly popular for treating depression anxiety other mental health conditions so it turns out that this law in the Old Testament from how many thousands of years ago is being corroborated by modern science go and be nice you receive these hormones that make you feel good and that's how God restores relationships and peace in the world God's reward system for obeying his word is actually hard wired into the created order into our bodies isn't that amazing so friends that's some good motivators for us to suit up to put our armor on to become the strong noble the kind the compassionate the caring people the army that God needs that God wants to change the world and to go and help those struggling to make it enough essentially we're the defenders of people

God has put us in a place to defend and free people from tyranny and from bullying of others from sin because we can point them to Christ we're given the power the armor of God so we need to think of ourselves as these kind of freedom fighters in the world empowered by the gospel and the gifts of heaven to right the wrongs of the world protect the innocent defend the weak defeat the strong fight the fight and to help others enjoy the freedom that we have received in Christ let's pray and ask him to help us do that well dear Lord Jesus you are our mighty captain of salvation we Lord we're so unworthy to receive your love and your mercy and yet you in your love and mercy you've saved us you've given us all these gifts the Holy

Spirit each other forgiveness the ability to forgive wisdom truth Lord will you so work in our lives that we latch on to this vital truth that because you've come in mercy to help others that we are to go and do the same empower us strengthen us embolden us to do this in our lives in Jesus name Amen