



I chose this background picture because of its beauty. Have you ever been astounded by the beauty of creation so much so that you just had to stop everything and take it all in? I want to read to you from a couple portions of the Bible. If you can, please listen and try to imagine what its describing. I'll start with Genesis 2. Moses begins by revealing the amazing power of God who merely speaks, and more life comes into being. Time, matter, and energy come into existence by God himself! Then we read a little bit about the creation of this world. Listen:

⁸ And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹ And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. ¹⁰ A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. ¹¹ The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹² And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. ¹³ The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴ And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. ¹

Does the Garden sound beautiful? It's a paradise. And God told Adam and Eve that they were privileged to expand this paradise around the globe! Now, let me read to you another passage. It's from Revelation 21. Listen:

¹⁰ And [one of the seven angels] carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹² It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed— ¹³ on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. ¹⁴ And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.² ¹⁸ The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. ¹⁹ The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 2:8–14.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Re 21:9–14.

second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, ²⁰ the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. ²¹ And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. ²² And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷ But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life. ³

Do you long for these worlds? I know I do. Eden was sinless. Oh to live in a sinless environment. But John writes of a vision of future glory where its both sinless and completely perfect. There is a Garden-City of glory and the whole earth is filled with God’s glory because he not only walks with humans at times, but God dwells with us. We are united with him, communing with him for all eternity. Oh for a world where there’s no injustice, no sin, no sadness. Oh to live in a world where every person truly loves one another and doesn’t just use people for their own consumeristic purposes. Oh to live in a world where there’s no fear. Oh to live in a world of breathless wonder! Do you long for this? I believe every human heart longs for this kind of world. We truly do want global peace. As I read these two accounts from the beginning and the end of the Bible, we should ask ourselves, how did we get here? What happened to the beauty of Eden, and how do we get to Revelation? Or, you may hear these passages of the Bible and think, “Why doesn’t God just perfect everything right now?” Maybe you’ve even thought, “Why didn’t he perfect everything a long time ago?”

Have you ever thought questions like this before? I have. Questions like, **“Why is there so much evil in the world? Why doesn’t God stop it now? Why can’t God just forgive sinners and welcome them into eternal life – whether they believe him or not? If there is a good God, why doesn’t he just bring the New Heaven and New Earth?”** Have you ever wondered questions like these? If so, this sermon (and this series) is for you. Usually, we go through a topical series every January and February, but because of our series through 1 John just ended, and Thanksgiving and Christmas are coming up in just a little bit, I’ve decided to put the topical series here. Over the course of 7 sermons, we’re going to be answering questions like these. But the **main idea of this series is God’s glory in his mercy through judgment.** Earlier, we heard from Exodus 34. What does God say about himself to Moses? In verse 5 of chapter 34, we’re told that God declares his *name*. The word “name” refers to his glory. Do you want to know God’s glory? Meaning, do you want to know the essence and gloriousness of his glory? God declares it right here. His glory is that he is “. . . a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”⁴

If you’ve ever prayed that God reveal more of his glory to you, his answer would be to impress upon you these realities. God is grand in his mercy and grace towards sinners, and God also punishes sinners. With

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Re 21:18–27.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ex 34:6–7.

this incident, Moses writes that after he heard this, he quickly bowed down and worshipped God. These two realities seem so opposite that we can hardly grasp how these can be true at the same time. This statement is a paradox. How can God be merciful and gracious, while not clearing the guilty? Yet, because God is God (meaning, he's not limited like we are), he can do beyond what our minds can conceive.

Now, what does this have to do with the Genesis and Revelation pictures of creation and new creation? Everything! We have asked, "What has happened? Why doesn't God just forgive, wipe the slate clean and get rid of all sin now?" We live in a society that increasingly is angry at a God who punishes, and they're increasingly more prone to believe God just has this generic kind of "love" that means he accepts us no matter how or what we do or feel. Today, and in the weeks to come, I pray that we wouldn't settle for such a small, man-made vision of a god. Instead, I pray that we would behold the magnificent, astounding, mind-blowing reality of the glory of God. So, this morning, what I want to do briefly, is to give a very large **overview of the Scripture's teaching on why God's judgment through mercy and punishment is necessary**. So, without further delay, let's move forward. What you may have noticed is that the title of the sermon is "Introducing. . . ." Kind of an odd title, I know, but what I'm going to do is show how the Bible introduces us to key truths that we must understand if we are to see the necessity of God as Judge. So, where do we start?

Introducing God. What is the point of the Bible? I've heard some people turn the word "Bible" into an acronym: Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth. It's nice and pithy, but is that the point of the Bible? God gave us the Bible primarily so that we'd know how to live before we get to Heaven? No. How do I know that? Because the Bible begins by calling us to consider God and his majesty. Genesis 1:1 doesn't start with, "The words of the Lord tell you to do this or that." Instead, "In the beginning, God. . . ." The Bible is primarily a revelation of God himself.

Why does it matter to know that the Bible is primarily a revelation of God? Well, think about it like human introductions. If I introduce you to someone, I might also add something like, "And, they're a doctor or they're the best sharp-shooter in the world or they're a chef." Depending on what these people do, you might act differently. Have you ever been in a situation where you met someone you highly respected because of their abilities? What if, instead of me introducing you to them by what they've done, I just say, "This is John. He's a human." Would that impress you? No. You'd find commonality and you might feel much more at ease with the individual because you're both human.

Now, imagine God. Who is God? What is he like? What has he done? What can he do? Too often, I think people try to bring God down to us, and we imagine him as if he were human. People read the Bible, and when they speak of God, they treat him as if he were like me and you. But God is not human. In Isaiah, we're given a vision of God, where even sinless angels cover their creatureliness with wings, and they cover their eyes because God's glory is so great. Yet, they are satisfied in calling one another to praise God incessantly! "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty!" Do you know what "holy" means? It doesn't just mean "sinless." It also means "otherly." God is infinitely different in being than humans, and he is utterly perfect in all that he is. In fact, he defines perfection. And there is only One Three-in-One God.

So, the Bible begins by introducing us to God. He's unlike the other gods that are worshipped by others. His power is limitless. And his power doesn't come from anyone else. He controls all. And he is the Source of all. As we're told in Acts, in him we live and move and have our being. In the psalms, we're told that he dwells in the heavens and does whatever he pleases. Without him, we'd die. Our existence

comes from him. Our living comes from him. Our identity comes from him. This moves us to the next introduction:

Introducing Humankind. Our identity comes from him because in Genesis 1, we're told that God created male and female in his image. There's a lot of discussion on what it means to be created in God's image. At a basic level, we're created to rule under his rule over all creation. I think this also might mean that we as humans represent God more in the created realm than any other created thing. Humans have been given the highest privilege, and have been granted the most personal of connections with God as well. In chapter 2 of Genesis, we read how God created male and female. It's not like the other days where he speaks. Instead, he breathes his Spirit into man. He molds female. He gives Adam commands. He unites Adam and Eve together. And, he sets them free in the flourishing Garden to flourish all the more.

By the way, when you hear that God gave Adam commands, don't think of it in the negative. Jesus teaches that his commands aren't burdensome. When we hear of God giving a command, we shouldn't think God is a killjoy. We should think that God is directing Adam to do exactly what he's created to do, and being in Eden, Adam will experience no pushback from creation. He'll experience the thriving that God intended for creation.

As we recognize this about Adam and Eve, we see humans as created with dignity, value, and immense privilege. We also see that human's source of life and fellowship is God himself. When God gives the command to not eat from the fruit of the Tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil, God says they will surely die. Why will they die? I hope I'm not too trite with this illustration: when reading about the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the idea is that you are what you eat. Or, better put, you become what you eat. You eat from the Tree of Life, you have life and live forever. You eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, you become evil and die. Wait. Why do you become evil? Why don't you just have mental awareness of good and evil? Because the word knowledge here refers to experiential awareness of good and evil. That means, evil has come into the good world. So, why is death the result? Because you cannot personally know evil – experientially engage in it – and remain in fellowship with God. I'll often put it this way, "You can't reject God, who is life, and have life." You either have God, and have life. Or, you have your sinfulness, and death is the result. Life and Death cannot coexist.

But Adam, the representative of all humans, along with Eve, chose to eat from the evil tree. And, what did God do? I know what he could have done. He could have immediately taken their lives, put a sheet over the dead world and started over again. But he didn't. He showed grace, while at the same time he judged them. All creation began to break and tear because of human's sin. Humans who were to bless creation, broke creation. And God decided to give them clothes and even kick them out of the garden to keep them from the Tree of Life. You might think that's rude of God, but wouldn't it be unloving of God to give them the Tree of Life while now being sinners? That would mean they'd be stuck in their sins *forever*. It would be sentencing them to hell forever. They have a semblance of life, but not eternal life with God.

At this point, we've been introduced to God and introduced to humans. Now what? Some may say, "Why doesn't God just forgive and give eternal life and move on? Remove the bad things and start over." That kind of question seems to not be aware of another important truth:

Introducing Sinfulness. Human beings don't just sin. They are sinners. King David, in one of his psalms, says that he was a sinner in the womb. That means not that we all do the worst things possible, but instead it means that we choose to find our hope, our life, our satisfaction, our meaning in the created (even ourselves) above God.

Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan, with Satan essentially saying God was making them miss out. God was keeping them from greater joy. So, what did Adam and Eve do? They chose to make their own decisions and they viewed themselves as independent from God. But are humans independent from God? Is anything in creation independent of God? No! But to disconnect yourself from God is to die because God is life. And to move into death is to sin because sin is anything that destroys, anything that is not from God, who is Love and glory.

Now, if you say, "Well, why can't God just forgive and move on," you fail to see the depth of the problem. There also needs to be a rescue of humans from the inside out. Humans don't only need forgiving. They need to be brought back from the dead. In addition, since humans have rebelled against God to become their own rulers without God, God is obligated to show his justice. If God is just a old being in the sky who doesn't care when people hurt one another and when damage is done in the creation, then is he a God who can be trusted? But God is *just*. Sin must be dealt with. It must be punished. And, if people's hearts don't change, God can forgive, but they'll still go back to their sin again and again and again.

Do you want proof of that? Look at Noah and the flood. What happened after the flood receded? Sin. But then God promises not to flood the earth like that again. Fast forward to Egypt and the plagues. What does Pharaoh do? He hardens his heart all the more against God because he believes he's in charge and he can do whatever he wants to do. Go to the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites. They grumble and complain against God because God doesn't give them what they think they need. They then worship other things and pursue other ways of living. God punishes. They say they're sorry. They go back to sin. The cycle continues. Move into the times of the Judges. There's a clear cycle of the people crying out for help, God sending a Judge to rescue, the people having times of peace, the Judge dying and then difficulties and then rebellion, and then the people cry out. The cycle continues. Move to the kings and the prophets. What you discover is that humans are resolute in pursuing their own course.

This shouldn't surprise us, but people sometimes want to argue that's not what we're like. But isn't that what the old Frank Sinatra song said, "I did it my way!" or what about the poem talking about us being the master of our fate and the captain of our ship. We live in a day that celebrates the individual loving and elevating themselves above all. This, according to God, is the height of rebellion. Why? Because you're not living genuine life in God. You're living disconnected from God and calling it life.

And what happens when we live this way? Broken relationships, sins of all kinds (from jealousy to sexual immorality to murder). Anxiety, pain, suffering continue. Why? Because we choose to embrace our sinfulness. Now, this may sound a little confusing, so hopefully I can bring this to everyday life here. What does it mean to follow God versus following sin? A man named John Calvin, who lived in the 1500's once said that the evil we do does not often lie in the thing itself, but in that we love it too much (paraphrase). In other words, we use the creation and elevate it to the level of God. We give it greater worth than we give to God.

That's what we do. We may long for meaning or purpose. Or we may find great satisfaction in certain things around us. And there's nothing wrong with appreciating and valuing these things. But we don't

want to glorify God in all of this. So, let's say there's a young woman who yearns for love and she finds a boy, and she puts him on the pedestal that only God can fill. She marries and she discovers her husband isn't God. What does she do? She may yell and scream or she may become distant. She could do various things in reaction to this reality, but none of those responses will lead to life. Why? Because she never turned to God to fill her heart. What are things in your life that you have turned to for ultimate satisfaction that only God can give? You can test it by noticing your reactions in life. Maybe you're seeking ultimate glory where there's only temporal pleasure.

What you notice with my illustration is that when we seek ultimate glory in the temporal, we ended moving into all sorts of other sins and we can hurt others. Why? Because refusing God leads to sin – living unjustly in this world. Now, question. Is this just a problem that God can “forgive” and wipe away or is this rebellion that needs both justice and mercy? It's rebellion. Psalm 2 says that the whole world is against the Lord. And if you argue against that, let me ask you, “Do you recognize that God is to be worshipped in all things?” I think many people will say, “Well, I don't think God requires worship in everything.” And right there, you prove the Bible's point. Humans don't want to worship God in all things and savor his glory and beauty. They refuse him and want to take God's stuff for themselves. This is rebellion.

So, throughout the Bible, we see God punish in various ways – plagues, famines, deaths. Some people understand. Many still reject. But God is just in all of this. And in the midst of all of this, God also shows mercy. As we read in Exodus 34, God is merciful and he also punishes. By the end of the Old Testament, we should understand that humans deserve the punishment, and we should be astounded that God shows mercy. (Did you hear that? Sadly, many in our day are more confused by the punishment and presumptuous that he shows mercy. But all of this is written to get to our hearts. Will we see our need for God? Will we see our dire need for God to change our hearts so that we will love him and know Life?) So, the Bible moves forward:

Introducing the Rescuer. We are introduced even in Genesis that there is going to be a seed of the woman who will crush the serpent. In Psalm 2, we're told he's the Son of God. In Isaiah, we're told he's going to be a suffering servant who will take the punishment sinners deserve. And in the New Testament, we discover his name: Jesus. Then Paul in Romans 3 tells us what Jesus did: ²³ **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,** ²⁴ **and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,** ²⁵ **whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.** ²⁶ **It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.** ⁵ God was patient through all the sinfulness to get to Jesus who would maintain God's justice while also revealing how God can forgive. Jesus became a new representative for humanity. So, you can either be in Adam or in Christ. Being in Christ, you can be not only forgiven but cleansed, declared righteous in God's sight and promised a new heart that will lead you to want to worship and obey the Lord. How has Jesus done this? In love, Jesus pursued sinners because taking on human flesh, living in this broken world, suffering in various ways, and then suffering ultimately, taking the punishment that myriads of sinners deserved. He satisfied God's justice on the cross. Now, if you turn to Jesus, you're cleansed and set free. You're reconciled to God. And, the Bible goes on to reveal that all who trust in Jesus await a future home: the New Heaven and New Earth. Where Adam and Eve failed in their mission, Jesus completes it. There will be a perfect world to come with no sin, sorrow or shame. Do you know this?

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 3:23–26.

So, why doesn't God just forgive right now and move on? It wouldn't work. Go back to Noah. Well then, why is God waiting for the New Heaven? The apostle Peter tells us that God is not willing that any should perish, but all should come to repentance. Instead of arguing with God about why he's not just, I pray you'd see that he wants *you* to come to him today. He cares for your soul.

The reality is that while it is glorious that there's a New Heaven and New Earth without sin, there's a terrifyingly just reality that the reason there is no sin is because there will be people and beings who rejected Jesus who will be in the prison of Hell for eternity. Now, if you struggle with that, again the future sermons will bring out why this is the case, but let me simply say this: humans have been created with the greatest privilege. We were created as beings to continue on and not just cease to exist. We've eaten from the knowledge of good and evil. So, apart from Jesus, we'll continue in the evil and rebellion. The perfect world cannot have rebellion. So God gives people over to their own ways. I pray that wouldn't be you. Instead, I pray you have either responded to these words, or will respond to Jesus' words when he says, "Come to me all who weary and I will give you rest for your souls."

The Holy, Holy, Holy God is Just and Merciful. Do you know him? Have you beheld his glory? Do you have a future hope and home to look forward to? Have you turned to God because of the justice Jesus received and the mercy he gives to all who trust in him?