

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *Compassionate and Gracious*
SERIES: *What's in a Name?*
SCRIPTURES: *Exodus 34:5-7*
SPEAKER: *Shaun Kipe*
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**This series based on John Mark Comer's book "God Has A Name", so credit to him. In addition, credit to "Old Testament Word Studies" (William Wilson); Philip Yancey (What's so Amazing about Grace); John Ortberg*

Well good morning, it so great to worship with you.

Last week we started a sermon series **(SERMON SERIES GRAPHIC)**... "What's in a Name?"

And again I'm indebted to the author John Mark Comer and his book, "God has a Name" for this series.

We've turned to a passage of Scripture found in Exodus 34...it's a conversation on Mount Sinai, between God and Moses. Where basically Moses asks God "who He is?" And it's one of the few places in the Bible where God gives a description of himself; tells us what he's like.

And, I've put the challenge out there for you all to join me over the next several weeks in memorizing this passage, it's only three verses long. This morning, we're all gonna read this together, but maybe next we'll begin quoting it together. But would you read this with me...

Exodus 34:5-7 - ⁵ Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. ⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.”

AW Tozer once wrote, **“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”**

The purpose of this series is to answer that question “What is God like?” Because how we answer that question will impact how we choose to live our lives.

We started last week with the phrase... “The Lord, the LORD...” Rather starting with a big theology words, or titles...God begins by telling Moses his personal name. In Scripture, when you see LORD, it’s not a title, it’s a name. It’s an reminder, that God is personal/relational.

As you begin to understand God in that personal way...it will begin to change how you live your life.

Ok, second phrase this morning...

⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God,

Now this is a fascinating description of God, in the ancient world, because god’s in ancient Mesopotamia were anything but compassionate and gracious.

This was a time of brutal tribal warfare, battles for land, access to resources and wealth. The world was extremely dangerous. This was not, cross town high school rivalry or picking a political party or religious affiliation. It was often a matter of life and death. Kill or be killed. Primitive. Brutal. Barbaric.

And so when tribes went into battle against one another, it was often our tribal gods versus your tribal gods, whose gods are stronger. Might makes right. This is, for example the back story to David and Goliath. Israel's God versus the Philistine Gods. And David stands there with a sling shot, against the mighty warrior Goliath.

It's also why many of the Jews rejected Jesus as Messiah. They expected the Messiah to be a powerful, conquering military warrior that destroy their enemies for them. And instead Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey.

And in the midst of that environment, brutal tribal warfare. God says to Moses, *"Hey, my name is Yahweh. And the first think you need to know about me is...I'm compassionate and gracious."*

Let's just take a minute and try to understand the significance of these two Hebrew words, what they mean and why it matters to us.

I. The Hebrew

I told you last week, we're all gonna become Hebrew scholars through this series.

In Hebrew, the phrase "compassionate and gracious" looks like this and is pronounced: **Rahum we-hanun.**

Can you say that with me? And like last week, if you just spit on your neighbor, you probably said it right.

A. Rahum = compassionate.

Sometimes translated as merciful or loving.

In Hebrew, this is a feeling word. It describes an emotional posture.

We talked about this concept, several weeks ago on Mother's Day. Remember we looked at the Mother Heart of God.

Isaiah 49:15 - Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion (raham) on the child she has born?

Rahum, shares the same root word as a female womb...it's the feeling, the emotional attachment, a mother has toward her infant child.

I'll give you one example from my life. Every parent experiences this when your children are little and they wake up crying in the middle of the night. And the question, for all parents in this situation is: who's getting out of bed, mom or dad? And the answer is: Who has more rahum?

Jenny and I would both hear our kids crying.

No joke, I would think thoughts like, *"Ok that's Landon crying. Somebody should go get him. Oh wait he stopped. Maybe he'll fall back to sleep. I'll wait to see if he cries again. Oh, he's crying again. Oh now he's really crying."*

And the amusing thing as parents, is that even though we're both laying pretending to sleep, I know, Jenny is thinking the same thing.

But that's about where my rahum ends. I have all these ways of justifying my own lack of rahum. I begin thinking things like, *"He's a big 3 month old by now."*

Shouldn't he be able to put himself back to sleep? He really needs to learn how to put himself to sleep. In fact, before long kids gonna be learning to drive a car. If he never learns to fall asleep on his own, how can I ever let him behind the wheel of a car? I'm being a good father, not getting up out of bed. Oh, there's goes Jenny, out of bed anyway to go get him. Well there's no use both of us getting up. I'll just go back to sleep."

Now, who in that circumstance is getting closer to the rahum of God? Jenny. Now if you can imagine a mother's rahum. And then imagine a rahum a thousand times better, you begin to scratch the surface of God's rahum.

There's a fascinating story in your Bible, **1 Kings 3**. Story is about two women, both claiming to be the mother of a baby, and nobody knows who the rightful mother is.

So the wise King Solomon (David's son), comes up with a brilliant idea to flush out the real mother. The real mother he knows...will have greater rahum for her infant child. Listen...

24 Then the king said, "Bring me a sword." So they brought a sword for the king.

25 He then gave an order: "Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other."

King Solomon has no rahum. He's had enough children to know these little innocent babies grow up to be teenagers and you lose all sense of compassion for your kids when that happens. I'm just kidding.

26 The woman whose son was alive was deeply moved out of love for her son (this woman has the rahum of God) and said to the king, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!"

In Hebrew it says she was “deeply moved out of her raham for her son.” Her intense motherly love for her baby.

When Solomon sees the rahum of this one mother, he knows...she’s the real mom. And she gets the baby!

Now think about this? Moses comes to God and says, “*ok God tell me what you’re like?*” And God doesn’t say, “*Well I can do anything I want, I’m all powerful. I could destroy all of your enemies. I know everything there is know. And I’m everywhere all at the same time.*”

That’s probably where I’d start if I were God.

But instead of that, God goes with “*Well, I guess the first thing I’d want you to know about me, is that I am deeply moved out of my love for you, and people, and every one. I love you like you were my biological children. That’s at the core of who I am.*”

For God so loved the world...

God is deeply and emotionally attached to you...do you know how transformational of a concept that is if we begin to live fully in that reality.

How might your relationship with God look differently if you understood Him first as the God who is compassionate towards you? Just let those words soak in this week as you memorize this passage. God is deeply and emotionally attached to you.

We’re talk about that in just a moment.

Second, God describes Himself as gracious.

“The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God,

B. Hanun = gracious

It means to do something favorably for someone else, even when the person is underserving.

“Grace is God’s choice to love, forgive, embrace, accept and help us when we have done nothing to earn it.” (John Ortberg)

One of the most incredible stories about God’s grace is actually found in the Old Testament. It’s pretty popular Bible story, but often the focus of the story is in the wrong place.

It’s story about a guy named Jonah and often we focus on the part of the story where Jonah is swallowed by a large fish and gets vomited back out and then we get stuck on conversations about whether that kind of thing is really possible or not.

But to be honest that conversation misses the whole point of the story. It’s really a story about God’s shocking hanun/grace, which is most clearly revealed at the end of the story, in the very last chapter of that book.

God tells Jonah to **“Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it.”** Nineveh is one of Israel’s main enemies and is the epitome of wickedness in the ancient Mesopotamian world. This was a nasty group of people.

One of their kings for example, Shalmanesser II, had this to say about a city he had just destroyed: **“A pyramid of heads I reared in front of his city. Their youths and their maidens I burnt up in the flames.”**

Sounds like a pleasant fellow, doesn’t he?

His son Sennacharib had this to say about a king he defeated: **“I flayed him, his skin I spread upon the wall of the city.”**

How'd you like make t-shirts for your sons baseball team that say that? This is gruesome stuff.

The point is these were pretty heinous people.

Eventually Jonah goes to Nineveh to preach and miraculously the wicked group of people, the Ninevites...repent. And then this...

“When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.”

We might even say...the destruction they deserved.

And you would think Jonah would be overjoyed. But he's not because God has chosen to show the Ninevites grace and in fact listen to Jonah's response...as he quotes our key passage from Exodus 34. He probably memorized it as a kid in Sunday school...

to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. ² He prayed to the LORD, “Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love,

I knew that's who you were and you'd forgive those wicked people.

God just goes around blessing all sorts of people who don't deserve it, that's hanun.

These two words, compassion and grace, link up and fuse together to show us what God is like.

II. So what?

If this is who God is, how does that impact those of us who claim to follow Him?

Well remember Tozer's quote, "what you believe about God is the most important thing about you", because it will have huge implications for how you live your life.

So let me just suggest two reasons why this is so important. First, you need to...

A. Receive God's compassion and grace in your life.

You need to know that God's primary emotional posture towards you is "compassionate and gracious".

Just far too many people in our world, who recognize their failure and inadequacy and it begins to take over and define their lives. And they are afraid that God is disappointed in them, frustrated with them or angry at them.

I want to read a list of words, and I want you to see if any of these characterize you:

prideful, judgmental, complaining, easily-angered, unconcerned for the poor, greedy, envious, lustful, unfaithful, deceitful, promise-breaker, secretly cruel, stubborn, self-centered,

Have you ever kind of looked at your life and thought...man I've messed up.

You've failed as a parent and you wonder how it's gonna wreck your kids down the line?

You've hurt a relationship so deeply you wonder if can ever be repaired.

You've taken advantage of someone.

You're living everyday under the weight of that failure. You feel broken, inadequate, and shameful. What hope do you have?

Your hope must be in a God who goes around blessing all sorts of people who don't deserve it.

This is why the stories in the Gospels about Jesus are just filled with page after page of Jesus showing compassion and grace to people who don't deserve it. God revealed Himself to us, in Jesus.

From fishermen to tax collectors, to gentiles, to Roman Centurions, to women and prostitutes and adulterers, to traitors and betrayers, to unwelcome children and soldiers putting nails in his hands...Jesus loved them all with unmatched compassion and grace and offers the same to you and me.

A couple of months ago our kids had made cards for Jenny's parents (Neenie & Pap) for their anniversary. We were not able to go and see them and deliver the cards because of COVID. So they were showing Neenie and Pap their cards on a video call.

Landon is pretty artistic and really enjoys drawing and had drawn this elaborate scene.

Ady is also artistic and very deft with fingers, good putting colors together and her spelling this year has taken off.

And both Landon and Ady were energetically sharing their cards with Neenie and pap, who were oohing and ahing. And I noticed little Keagan, he's the youngest...he's a little further behind in drawing, technique, skills and his spelling isn't as good yet.

I noticed he kind of got quiet and eventually slowly back away. It came time for him to show Neenie and Pap the card he had created for them. But he sheepishly declined.

I wondered what was going on. And then it struck it me. He was afraid his picture wasn't good enough. Like all of a sudden he had become aware of his inadequacy and he felt shame. Just as so many people in our world.

Keagan didn't realize they would be disappointed or ashamed of his artistic ability. God is not ashamed by our failure or inadequacy.

God primary disposition towards you is rahum we-hanun. A God who is deeply moved out of his great love for you.

Some of us in here, need to receive God's compassion and grace...it is by grace you have been saved. Just take those words this week and ponder them...let them soak into you... "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God..."

Second, once you come to accept and receive God's compassion and grace then you become responsible to...

B. Share compassion and grace with others.

Remember what Pastor Bill said a couple of weeks ago in his sermon **"Live your life as Jesus would..."**

God is compassionate...so we should be compassionate.

God is gracious...so we should be gracious.

Now I'll just warn you I'm probably gonna step on some toes. Folks, church...we have a major "compassion and grace" problem? We live in a world that is crying out

for compassion and grace and they aren't finding it in the group of people claiming to follow Jesus.

Philip Yancey tells the story of... *a woman came to (him), homeless, sick, and unable to buy food for her two-year old daughter. Through sobs and tears she told me she had been renting out her daughter – two years old! She made more renting out her daughter for an hour than she could earn on her own in a night. She had to do it, she said, to support her own drug habit.*

I could hardly bear hearing her sordid story...at last I asked if she had ever thought of going to a church for help. I will never forget the look of pure, naïve shock that crossed her face, "Church!" She cried. "Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They'd just make me feel worse.

Yancey goes on to say...

"Evidently the down-and-out, who flocked to Jesus when he lived on earth, no longer feel welcome among his followers? What has happened?"

There's an author, Gordon McDonald, he wrote, ***"The world can do almost anything as well as or better than the church. You need not be a Christian to build houses, feed the hungry, or heal the sick. There is only one thing the world cannot do. It cannot offer grace."*** (Yancey 298)

We shouldn't expect the world to live with compassion and grace. But we should...we MUST expect followers of Jesus to live with compassion and grace...because that's what God is like.

The world has no good reason to go around blessing all sorts of people who do not deserve it. But followers of Jesus should.

Remember you happen to be a follower of the man who said, **“You have heard that it was said love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...”**

WHY? **“that you maybe children of your father in Heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even the pagans do that? Be perfect therefore as your heavenly father is perfect.**

You believe in a God who goes around blessing all sorts of people, even his enemies, even though they don't deserve it because He is “rahum we-hanun”.

Good news is you'll have plenty of opportunities this week to put this into practice....because difficult people are never hard to find, are they? You have someone in your house, your office, your neighborhood, your kids sports team, the grocery store, your church that frustrate you, annoy you, anger you.

If you are parent, you will have an opportunity this week to practice compassion and grace with your kids. When they take longer than necessary to get ready for bed. When they forget to put their dirty clothes in the hamper or put their toys back where they belong. When they talk back with a little bit of attitude.

One of the most important things you'll ever do as a parent is teach your kids the character of God. If you're compassionate and gracious it will be much easier for your kids to believe in a God is compassionate and gracious.

If you are married, you will have an opportunity this week to practice compassion and grace. When your spouse forgets an important date like your anniversary or birthday. When your spouse ??

With your co-workers you'll have an opportunity to practice compassion and grace. Anybody on social media...how would you say the church...how would you say you are doing at showing compassion and grace in the words your speaking.

Is there someone you disagree with about issues of police brutality, racism, justice?
Is there someone on the other end of the political spectrum from you?

Every time you see that person or respond to that person, it's gonna be your opportunity to treat them the way God treats you.

...he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good...

And it will become much easier for our world to believe in a God of compassion and grace when they start seeing and experiencing compassion and grace from His followers.