

Gospel Shaped Mercy

Session Eight: *Review & Application*

Session 1: Shalom: *The World Made Beautiful* (Genesis 1:26-28, Romans 8:19-23, Revelation 21:1-5)

In session 1, we caught a glimpse of the world as God originally intended it to be, when man existed with God in a state of Shalom (peace). We defined Shalom as both the absence of conflict and the presence of wholeness, flourishing and fullness. In other words, Shalom is the way the world was meant to be. In this perfect beginning, the Lord created humans in His own image, He designed them for community with one-another, and He commissioned them to be His royal caretakers of creation, exercising dominion as His representatives. Fast-forward to Genesis 3 and we see that Adam and Eve failed in their responsibility as royal caretakers when their sin “vandalized and destroyed shalom”... The shalom-disrupting effects of sin are evident in our lives today as we experience brokenness, conflict, our own depravity, and as death reigns.

1. Where Adam & Eve failed, how did Christ succeed as THE royal caretaker and restore our purpose as image-bearers?
2. Now, in the broken world we live in, what do issues of justice, mercy, and compassion have to do with Shalom? And how does our role as image-bearers of God impact our responsibility in such matters?
3. When we read Romans 8:19-23 and Revelation 21:1-5, we’re reminded that the Christian experience of Shalom is held in an “already/not yet” tension. How does this shape the way we ought to live now?
4. Understanding Christ’s role in the restoration of Shalom, how do the gospel message and acts of mercy work together toward that end? Why do we as Christians need to be marked by both?

Session 2: Justice: *Wrongs Made Right* (Amos 5:11-12; 21-24, Psalm 146:5-9)

In session 2, we were taught that God intends for us to work for Shalom as we live in the tension between the “now” and the “not yet”, and an essential aspect of that is doing justice. In other words, we are called to make wrongs right as we live out the gospel and our identity as image-bearers.

1. Why is God so vehemently angry with Israel in Amos 5? What were they doing wrong?
2. Why is worshipping God without seeking justice considered empty religion and rejected by God?
3. What are the implications for us? (Individually? Corporately? Socially?)
4. What are the two ends of the spectrum that Christians are mistakenly tempted to default to?
5. How has God’s justice been most clearly displayed? What difference does that make for us?

Session 3: Love: *The Heart of Compassion* (1 John 3:11-24)

In session 3 we acknowledged that everyone likes the idea of love, but in reality, there is a gap between the ideal and the real... loving people can be difficult and costly. We also saw from 1 John that the importance of love can’t be over-stated, because the Lord equates genuine belief (authentic faith) with outward, visible love of one-another. A life of love is brought about by the God of love, who indwells believers. God calls us to believe *and* to love, and to do so in deed and in truth.

1. How do we know that Jesus loved us? And how is our love for one-another visible? (vs 16)
2. How do we make sure that our love in “talk & word” works itself out in “deed and truth”? (vs 17-18)
3. How does self-condemnation sometimes prevent us from demonstrating love?
4. How is the gospel both the answer to our self-condemnation, and a motivation to love others?

Session 4: Mercy: *Hearts Made Soft* (Matthew 25:31-46)

Up to session 4, we've pointed out that God desires a world of shalom, that He's called us to work for justice, and we've been challenged to live a life characterized by self-giving love. In session 4, we see these ideas tied together in the theme of mercy, which is love and justice in action on behalf of those in need.

1. In Matt 25, Jesus lists their acts of mercy after separating the sheep & goats. Why does that matter?
2. Why is mercy a significant issue for us to consider? And why should it be expected of Christians?
3. What are the practical ways Jesus expected mercy to be seen in this passage?
4. How can we grow in developing an impulse of mercy toward others?

Session 5: Generosity: *Stewarding God's Money* (James 1:9-11, 5:1-6; 1 Timothy 6:6-19)

In session 5 we looked at the book of James to see what the Bible has to say about money and generosity. We noted that this can be an uncomfortable subject for us that we'd rather avoid, and it tends to be "the elephant in the church". Observing this, Spurgeon said that "With some, the last part of their nature that ever gets sanctified is their pockets". However, the Bible doesn't ignore this subject... in fact, we learned in this session that all of our resources were given to us by God, therefore He alone can determine how we should use them.

1. Why is money a subject that makes us so uncomfortable and tends to be ignored?
2. What does God say about the rich in James 1:9-11? How should this affect our view of wealth?
3. Is wealth inherently bad? Or is God concerned about something else? (James 5:1-6, 1 Tim 6:17-19)
4. Why should Christians be expected to live generously? How does this differ from secular socialism?

Session 6: Reconciliation: *Relationships Healed* (Matthew 5:21-26, Colossians 1:19-20)

In session 6, we were reminded that part of living in a world this side of shalom is brokenness, including broken relationships. We all experience relational fracture and we know what it's like to have unreconciled relationships. We learned that this isn't just for big issues or particularly tragic cases, this is locally and personally relevant to all of us. Everyone needs reconciliation, and everyone is responsible for reconciliation.

1. Why is reconciliation at the heart of Christianity, and therefore an important issue for us? (2 Cor 5:17-20)
2. What does Matt 5:21-26 say about the importance and urgency of reconciliation?
3. What might it say about the condition of my heart if I'm unwilling to be reconciled to someone?
4. How does the gospel shape the way we think about situations that may seem "impossible" to reconcile?

Session 7: Diversity: *Community Enriched* (Luke 10:25-37, Revelation 7:9-17)

In our final session, we considered how the gospel compels us to fight against our inclination toward uniformity and comfortable relationships by intentionally pursuing diversity, rather than passively excluding those who are not like us. We looked ahead to God's perfect shalom-shaped new creation in Revelation, where we see a beautiful display of how the gospel accomplishes unity in diversity. As one author said: "If you are uncomfortable with diversity, you'll be uncomfortable in heaven".

1. How does the picture in Rev 7:9-14 affect the way we should engage with the world?
2. What was wrong with the lawyer's question in Luke 10:29?
3. How might we be tempted to passively exclude those who are unlike us? How do we deal with this?
4. Is diversity strictly an issue of racial differences? Is diversity an end in and of itself?
5. How can you live a life of gospel-shaped mercy by intentionally pursuing diversity?