

## Encountering the Heart of God

### Week 5: 'Forgiving and Just'

**Sermon Bible Passages Exodus 34:6-7 (focusing on v7); Numbers 14:1-24  
(*God has a Name* – chapter 6; *Gentle and Lowly* – chapter 15)**

This is the fifth and final week in our set of studies on 'Encountering the Heart of God':

- What have you learned so far about the character of God?
- What difference has it made to your daily life?

Begin by reading Exodus 34:6-7. Then read verse 7 alone.

- What do you notice first of all about this verse?
- Compare your initial reaction with that of others in the group.

Now read verse 7 again.

- Do you notice anything different this time?
- What do you find encouraging about this verse? What puzzles you?

Verse 7 talks about the forgiveness and the justice of God.

- How are these related?

In Deuteronomy 24:16, when the Law is filled out in greater detail, it is clear that each of us is individually accountable to God for the way in which we live our lives.

This individual accountability also comes through in the teaching of the Old Testament prophets. For example, see Ezekiel 18:19-23.

- When it comes to our behaviour, what does it say in Ezekiel 18:23 about God's attitude towards people?
- How does this link back to the first part of Exodus 34:7? 'maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.'

But what is God saying in the second part of this verse?

'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.' (Exodus 34:7)

There are three aspects to this, though you might have time to look at only one or two of them.

- 1) Families and Communities pass on their Baggage from one Generation to another
- 2) Sin has Consequences within Families and Communities

3) The context of the passage, along with other Scriptures, helps us to deepen our understanding of the forgiveness and the justice of God.

### **1) Generational Sin**

What traits have you noticed in your family, that you know you have inherited, that might hinder your discipleship? e.g. perfectionism, low self-esteem, lack of generosity, a short temper, an inability to express appreciation and love.

- What do you need to repent of?
- How can we allow the Holy Spirit to grow his fruit in us?
- What promises of Scripture can help us in this?

### **2) Sin has Consequences**

Discuss areas of your life where you have seen the damage caused by sin. e.g. divorce, greed, anger, addiction, selfishness of different sorts. There might be some areas where you have been the one who has suffered, or seen others suffer.

- How do forgiveness and justice operate as two sides of the same coin in these situations?
- How might God break through and bring freedom and healing?

### **3) Context**

In Exodus 34:10-14 God makes a covenant with Moses and all of his people. He promises that he will show his love and commitment to them, by ensuring that they are given a new life in the safety of the Promised Land. For their part, they are required to love and trust him back.

#### **Read Numbers 14:17-24**

- Which of the two parties in the covenant have kept their side of the bargain?
- What is the result? See how the sins of one generation affect another.
- How have most of the people behaved in their relationship with God? (14:22-23)
- Can you think of some ways in which you been guilty of treating the Lord 'with contempt'?
- From v24, how is Caleb an inspiration to life-long discipleship? See also Joshua 14:6-15.

### **RESPONSE**

- Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what you need to allow the Lord to change.
- Be encouraged – there is hope! By the power of the Holy Spirit our tomorrows can be different from our yesterdays. (2 Corinthians 3:12-18)

- End with the prayer from Augustine of Hippo (354-430) which we used at the start of this series. 'Help me to know you, that I may truly love you, And so to love you that I may fully serve you.'
- In the coming week, continue to meditate on Exodus 34, and give thanks for all you have learned on 'Encountering the Heart of God'. Pray that you may be 'changed from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.' (2 Corinthians 3:18)