

## THE UN-MESS

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Series: Attending to the mess  
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Mess, Grace, Law

So I do not know when you were last in an argument or a fight but I know something about that fight that I want us to talk about today. And if you have never been in a fight maybe you are living with some very fake people. And maybe they are all perfect so I only hope that you have at least seen people fighting or heard stories. I do not know how that looked but there is something I know about it.

Every fight has one thing in common, there seems to be an assumed right and one person or both have missed the mark. Each player in the fight seems to know that there was a right and a wrong. So the accused is either saying that they did not do the wrong thing they are being accused of, or they are giving an excuse for why they could not meet that standard or simply asking to be cut some slack because no one is perfect.

No one ever says, "forget that standard", that they do not subscribe to them. Especially around issues of justice. Somehow there is always an unspoken agreement about there being a right and a wrong, a perfect. People can argue about where that line is but not whether it exists.

Another example is Adolf Hitler could give excuses for what he did and try to justify it all he wants but whether one is a believer or not, no one can argue that there was not something wrong done with the holocaust. How do we know that there is a wrong and there is a right?

Somehow, we all seem to know that there is a perfect. Somehow, we all seem to know that there is a just and unjust. Somehow we can look at the world and recognize the mess around it and we know it is not normal, meaning there is a un-mess.

Last week was the memorial of the September 11 attacks in New York. Kenya has had its share of trouble with terrorism. Somehow not even those who support or are involved can argue that it is just. They can give reasons why they think they are exempt from keeping the standard of justice but they cannot argue that there is not a standard. Where does this knowledge come from?

Let's bring it back home. When that email you should not have sent is discovered. When you make that booking that you know you should not have made. When it happens one more time and you had promised you would never do it again. Sometimes when you are confronted what do you say

***"But nobody is perfect..."***

You know what that means is, there is a perfect that nobody is. It again points to something our souls just kind of know. Something our attention is being drawn to.

We have seen the mess around us and in us and maybe that is to say that if we can identify the mess it is because we realize that deeply that perfect exists. The un-mess.

Let's pray

We have all seen people in our lives and thought, "What a mess!" And it could be anything. Some people are in a relational mess, some have made a mess of their finances. But we all can identify a mess when we see one.

The other side of that coin is, really we all know what it's like to make a mess of ourselves, or our relationship or our lives. When you say something you should not have said or gone somewhere you should not have gone to in the first place.

Sometimes the mess is in the marriage and no one remembers where the rain started beating but what you are sure is that you are not doing well. Some people's mess is an addiction they just cannot kick. Every time they promise it would be the last time. We all know what it is like to be a mess.

Sometimes you smuggled into your future from your past relationship. Destructive habits that should have stayed in the last season of your life but you still have them around.

And sometimes everything is going great, but if you have been living for any length of time you know that often what that often means is that you are in between a mess. One just ended or one is around the corner. We are always one decision away from creating a mess.

A few months back we were looking at conflict among believers and one of the statements I made was that we all get a turn to offend. This is also one of those things we all get a turn too. We all get a turn to be a mess. We all get a turn to be in a mess. Sometimes it is our own making, sometimes it is not but you are in it. Other times you inherit a mess. It has been in the family or the city.

Do you know the idea that there is always going to be someone ahead of you and others behind you? Well, guess what? It applies to being a mess too.

There is always someone dealing with a bigger mess than you. Take heart. The point is, you are not the only one in a mess. The mess is what brings us together.

And what if the mess around us, the mess in the world is actually a lens through which we can see, experience and become aware of God? What seeing the mess caused by the drunk uncle at every family event means you are steps away from seeing God?

If you can see the mess of the pain caused by the mother who walked away from her family then you just received a lens through which you can see God. If you can see the mess in the world; if you can see the mess in your own family; if you can see your own mess maybe you are not too far from seeing God.

I want us to see that through the life of a guy named Paul. He was an apostle of Jesus. And he showed up in history, not as a good guy or a great Christian leader and church planter that we now know him as.

The first time we meet Paul he is causing the mess unapologetically. He is shutting down churches and overseeing the arrest of followers of Jesus which sometimes usually ended up with them being murdered.

But then he had an encounter with Jesus, and guess what he was given grace. It was such a powerful encounter that he became a big follower of Jesus preaching him, arguing with Jews to prove that Jesus was the messiah. He travelled a lot to plant churches.

He then started writing letters to those churches to encourage them or answer questions raised or clarify things. In them, he would expound on some of these big Theological issues.

These letters became so precious to the early church because of who Paul was and so they were included in the canonization of the New Testament which is the second half of our Bibles today.

Here is something he said in one of them

Romans 3:19-20

***Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. 20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.***

Okay, let's slow down and hear what he is saying in that excerpt.

***"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law"***

And here is simply what that statement means if you are under any law it is because it is above you. If you are a citizen of a country, whatever the laws of that country say, they say to you. And those laws may be different in different countries and those are binding to the citizens of that country.

Here, Paul was specifically referring to God's law. For the Jews, it meant the Torah, for followers of Jesus it is his commandment that you love one another just as you have been loved by Him.

But let us expand that even more, for those who are yet to believe in God you are under the law of your conscience. We all instinctively know some standard of right and wrong and justice. Somehow we are all aware of some law. Somehow you have an idea of the kind of man or woman you should really be.

That is why at the beginning I started by saying that somehow, we all know that there is a standard. There is justice. Somehow you know that you should not have responded as you did. You should not have gone there. And you should not be addicted to that. Somehow we all know. Why? There is a law and it is written on the tablets of your heart.

Remember what I said at the beginning? We have all used the line, "But nobody is perfect" Especially when we are the ones who have been caught.

When we catch people we are quick to talk about how they should have done better but when we are caught, we see clearly that no one is perfect. When it is the political from the other party caught up in something, they are the antichrist but when it's your favourite politician you remember that we are all just human after all. Nobody is perfect.

Look at what Paul says

***Now whatever the law says it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.***

This is exactly why the law exists; so that when you are about to point a finger in criticism you are silenced. So that when you are about to boast about how good you are, you are silenced. Because we all know that we do not match up. Here is how Paul puts it

***“For all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God”***

Whatever the standard is. For believers, it is the life Jesus is inviting us too. To love others just like he loved us. For Jews it was the law of God as given in the Old Testament, for those who have not heard of the name of Jesus or still finding faith, it is the conscience. Whatever it is, no one matches up. Even those who do not subscribe to the Bible do not match up to what they think they should be.

I do not love people as well as I should. I am not always kind. Oh, I am not always doing the right things even. You know you said it was over. You know you are supposed to leave that relationship. You know you are supposed to treat your husband better or pay your employees better. We are all held accountable to God. We are all kept silent.

But the law does not exist so that you beat yourself up and work hard to perfection. You will not feel guilty enough and wake up one day to never making a mistake. Oh sure, it does not exist so that you can self-righteously beat people up.

You will never do your right things up to perfection. Let us even assume that you could remain clean from messes from now on, what do you do about the times in the past that you did not meet the mark?

Here is why the law is there; here is why you instinctively know right and wrong; here is why; Here is why your conscience keeps screaming at you when you miss the mark

***Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. 20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.***

It makes us aware of our sin, our imperfection. It keeps reminding you what you are not. It keeps pointing out to the un-mess. It makes aware that there is a perfect. It is like a compass in our soul that keeps pointing to true north and telling us that we are not there yet. It tells you what you are not.

You see maybe if you can see all the mess in the world and your life and your family, then you can see God. The mess in the world around us is a lens through which we can see God.

Because every time we are acknowledging that we are not perfect and no one is, we are acknowledging that there is a perfect, that we are not. Every time we are looking at the world around us and grieving at the injustice, we are acknowledging that there is a just. Every time we see the mess we have made, the mess we inherited, the mess around us, we are acknowledging that there is a un-mess.

And the best news ever is that something unimaginable happened. In those days when everyone thought of God, they imagined judgement and anger and punishment. And the old guy sitting on a white cloud, more interested in what goes wrong for him to punish.

And the thing is to this day, people live with that idea. I have heard countless times when someone falls sick people saying that they must be under God's punishment for their sin. When tragedy hits a city, people are quick to point out that evil people lived in the city after all.

You should have heard the conspiracy theories after 9/11 and August 8 in Kenya. All of it was born out of the fact that somehow there is a compass in our soul that sees the mess and tell us that there is the un-mess, the perfect and we jump to the wrong conclusion.

So God did the unexpected. No one expected that God would draw close let alone get into the trenches of our mess with us. He looked at the mess and instead of being moved to anger, he was moved by compassion.

That is what the most famous verse in the bible means

***God so loved the messy me and the messy you and all the messy people of the world, that he was moved to give his son to us.***

Essentially, what has us gathered here today, is the fact that you and I are a mess. Was it yesterday evening? Was it the last financial year? Was it your last employee? Or was it your last marriage? What mess is your conscience reminding you of?

What mess is your the law reminding you of? Can you dare believe that God has compassion over you instead of anger

You see I think people have trouble giving or receiving grace because they are finding it hard to imagine that God would have compassion over them for things they have done.

What I want for you, for this community is that we will be a people who have confidence that God loves you despite your faults, you name it. And a community that will embrace very messy people with a lot of compassion, knowing that God has compassion for them too.

And maybe what it means also is that before you criticize and judge when you see the next messy person, could you try compassion? Remembering that you too have been and are a mess. Remembering that you too have received compassion.

When I was young and someone would hurt me I would run and pray fire and fury to fall on them. Partly because that is what we had been taught in churches, that God is for us and our enemies will fall left right and centre. We were the good kids.

As I grew older, I started realizing that I was such a mess myself. I started seeing cracks in my own character. Yet surprisingly, I still felt the closeness of God. I had a strong sense that God had forgiven me. Despite my fault, despite my mess, God was still there.

That made my life particularly difficult because now every time I was mad at someone and wanted to call down fire from heaven on them, I would remember that I was forgiven and I had no reason why they should not be forgiven. And that is how my teachers survived my time in school.

Here is where that should leave us, compassion. The awareness that mess is common to all of us should invite us to be very compassionate to each other. We have all seen people who are making the wrong choices and some even consistently.

And you are thinking if they continue to drink as heavily as they do they will land themselves in a big mess. If they continue talking to their spouses as they do, they will land themselves in a big mess. If they continue to go where they go with who they go with, they will land themselves in a big mess.

The fact that we were such a mess did not push God further away from us instead it drew him to compassion and drove him to action. And this is what Grace is. Jesus introduces the world to Grace and even better, amazing Grace. Where instead of getting what you deserve you receive mercy and compassion. Don't pretend you are not a mess. You would be the only one you are lying to

Would you dare accept God's compassion?

***Let's Pray***