

LD 4; Psalm 86; Ex. 34:6-8; Understanding the Character of God I. God is Merciful II. God is Just
 Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, what is in a name? Most people have two names- an official name and a familiar name. One that they sign with- and one that they are called by. Nicholas or Nick. Robert or Bob. Jonathan or Jon. And sometimes, a person has to change their name. For example, an immigrant might have the name- Allie-Rensca- but her American name might be Alice. We even do this with families, don't we. We attach qualifiers to a name. Are you part of the water Eenegenbergs or the manufacturing Eenegenbergs? So we use names to locate and identify. But what about God- what does His name reveal about Himself? As we find in Ex. 34, the name of the LORD reveals that God is both merciful and just! We hear a lot about justice lately- even our Men's Book study has been on understanding the Social Justice movement. But do we as fallen sinners really want justice? Do we know- confess- what true justice means? Not justice for our fellow man- but justice from God? So this morning we consider this theme: The character of God moves His people to praise Him.

I. God is Merciful

In our first point, we consider that God is surely merciful. In our catechism context, we have been focussing on the justice of God- and the wretchedness of man's sin. So the question is raised- is God anything more than a just and angry judge who is just waiting to throw down the gavel? Is there any hope for us wretched sinners? Well, the way in which God reveals Himself to Moses in Ex. 34 should give us great hope and comfort! As the LORD passed in front of Moses He proclaimed His name- the LORD- a God who is merciful and gracious. Slow to anger and abounding in love, faithful- keeping steadfast love for thousand, forgiving iniquity and transgressions. If you boil these verse down, you find that God is merciful, gracious, faithful, loving and forgiving. As the LORD is taking His people out of bondage- and bringing them to the promised land- the focus here is one of comfort! Even after their idolatry and rebellion- God is still dedicated to His people- to saving His people! And He will rescue those who look to him in true faith! The mercy of God can be seen in both what He gives and what He does not give. After the fall, God does not immediately destroy

the earth and everything in it- so His mercy is seen in that He postpones judgment for a while. After the Israelites make a gold calf, God listens to the petition of the Mediator Moses and He does not destroy the people. And positively, we see His mercy in what He gives! God comes to man who was afraid and trembling because of his sin- God comes to Him and gives Him a promise. The promise of a snake crushing child! God enters into covenant with man- I will be your God- you will be my people. And even the context of Ex. 34 we find God giving man the law- the 10 commandments which were broken by Moses because he saw the idolatry of the Israelites. God graciously gives the Law a second time to be inscribed. God does not leave us without a testimony- He gives us His word so that we might know Him and His works! God will still go with this stiff-necked people- and He is going to make a covenant with them as v. 10 continues.

Now in looking at QA 11, you might be wondering why the mercy of God is so quickly passed over. Is God merciful- yes He is. But He is also just! Now why would this QA pass so quickly over the good news of God's mercy? Well, remember where we are in the Catechism. We are still in the first section which deals with man's sin and misery. We are not yet in the second section which will unfold and expand upon the concept of God's mercy. But before we can fully appreciate the good news- we have to come to grips with the bad news. You are sinner- born in iniquity- unable to do anything good. But even as we have found in Ex. 34- the ratio of merciful characteristics is quite significant! Even though our QA may focus on God's justice- God would reveal Himself as the God of mercy, compassion, forgiveness and love! And just to give you a little glimpse into the mercy of God that we will soon consider- look at how the very next QA brings us to Jesus. QA 12- God's justice demands that this penalty- the eternal punishment for sins- must be paid. But that payment can be made either by ourselves or by another in our place! So although we are still in the sin and misery section of the catechism, God mercy is not forgotten! The Door of Gospel cracks open and the light sneaks through- another can satisfy the justice of God for us- so that in Jesus Christ justice and mercy kiss- or the justice of the Law is kept when Jesus purchases mercy for us when He dies in our place! So the cross is where we see both the severity of God's justice and the richness of God's mercy! But we must press on this

week- because the focus of God's mercy will cover LD 5-31. We are still in the second of man's sin- and what man's sin deserves!

II. God is Just

So God has boundless mercy, but He is not to be trifled with! God is surely just! As Abraham asked, will not the judge of all the earth do what is right? The answer is, Yes He will! But do we really want God to give us fallen sinners what we deserve? The fact is, fallen sinners will not like what is strictly just! Every little child is born with an elevated sense of fairness. If someone gets what they want- they respond by saying- that's not fair! But is God fair? Yes! God punishes sin- He must and He will- and He does. Sin is a rejection of God- a rebellion against the Great King- sin is a transgression and it incurs guilt. But the gravity of the sin increases when the person you sin against is royal. Even more when you sin against someone who is divine! To sin against the immortal and infinite God is to incur an infinite debt! God will not accept a rebel in His presence- rather He must break out against the sinner as fire breaks out in tinder dry brush. What does God say about Himself in our reading from Ex. 34? He will by no means clear the guilty. He will not let the wicked off without giving them what they deserve. What does sin deserve? As QA 10 says, cursed is everyone who does not obey all things in God's law. Here quoting from Gal. 3, we find that all sinners are under God's curse. And as QA 10 states, God punishes sin both now and in eternity. Now this point is not accepted by all. Mankind tends to think that trials, hardship and tribulations in this world have nothing to do with God's justice. But throughout the pages of Scripture, we can see that actions have consequences. As Prov. 11 says, the crooked are an abomination to the LORD, rest assured, and evil person will not go unpunished! The seeds of sin bear bitter fruit! Just consider the fall of nations, the disease and famine, as well as the point of the sword and the pinch of chains. These were all used by God as a sign of His displeasure- even anger with the nations and people because of their sins. Think of the plagues on Egypt. This still happens today- rebellious leaders plunge their nations into great calamity because God is the God of justice- wicked actions have bitter consequences. Like the thief and the murderer who are sent to prison for their sins- God does

reward the wicked for their actions in this life. Now we need to be careful, we cannot always declare that a person is suffering because of their sinful actions. Jesus makes this point in Luke 13. When the Tower of Siloam fell on those men- do you think it was their specific sin brought the tower down upon them? So it is not always the case the hardships and pain can be linked to a person's specific sin. And it is also true that sometimes the most rebellious of men enjoy a long life of ease! That was question raised in Psalm 73. Why do the wicked seem to prosper? A life of perceived ease is not sign of God's acceptance and pleasure and the presence of trials are not always proof of God's anger! We do not always see God's justice evident in this life. But we can rest assured, that sin does have consequences. Although He may not tell us, He does send hardship upon the wicked as they bear the consequence of sin in their own flesh as Rom. 1 states. It may simply be a life of slaver to sin which is its own punishment. But there is also a future punishment that awaits sinners. God punishes sin both in this life and in the next. There is a punishment for eternity that awaits rebellious sinners. The fact remains, no sinner gets what he deserves in this life! That is what hell is- it is a place of torment and punishment of the body and soul. A place of darkness and despair- of weeping and want. Where rebels get what they deserve. The rich man of Luke 16 described it as a place of torment- of unquenchable thirst. Or as Jesus described in Mark 9- a place where the fire is not quenched and the worm never dies. From time to time, you may hear something like this- God hates sin but He loves the sinner. But is that true? Let me ask- who or what does God send to hell? Does God send sin to hell or does He cast rebellious sinners into hell? To whom does the Son say- away from me, you workers of iniquity. Go into the punishment reserved for the devil and his followers. Now although hell is not a nice topic to discuss- it is an actual place whose existence must be confessed! Why? Because God is just- and His justice must be upheld- His anger must be spent- His cup of wrath must be poured out! God's anger may be slow in coming- but when it comes it is a consuming fire! God's punishment of sin is most severe and most just! Now many in our world say that hell is nothing more than a fairy tale- a story told to scare little children. Will God really judge the earth with equity? People do not like to think of Day when all their actions and words will be

weighed. So they live like it will never arrive. They did the same thing in the day of Noah- as Matthew 24 says. And suddenly destruction will come upon them. Pretending like hell is not real and the day of Judgement is not coming will not help you on the day! So repent- flee the coming wrath! Find rescue and shelter for that day by trusting in Jesus! For the Judge on that day is the Same one who took on your flesh- who died as a curse to make payment for your sins!

But before we conclude, we note how Moses responded in v. 8. After hearing the name of the LORD- that He is both merciful and just- forgiving but He will not clear the guilty. Slow to anger and visiting the iniquity upon people for generations. How does Moses respond? Well, He bowed down his head and worshipped! When we come into contact with our God- when we see His face- when we hear His name- when we learn of His character; awe and worship is the only acceptable response! This is a very clear application- those who learn about who God is must respond by praising and worshipping Him according to His revealed character! God is holy and just- so let us worship Him with fear and reverence! God is also merciful and kind- so let us worship with joy and thanksgiving! The character of God is what guides us into proper worship!

As we close, perhaps the best-known sermon by Jonathan Edwards is "Sinners in the hands of an angry God." Since God is just- every sin must be paid for! God is merciful and just- 100% both at the same time! Far too few sermons are on hell today- God's holiness is little pondered. God is not like an aged grandparent who neither sees nor hears very well- only all too happy to indulge spoiled grandkids. No, that is not the picture of God we find in the Bible! That is not the name by which He is revealed! The LORD- merciful, gracious, loving, faithful, forgiving! But also just- not clearing the guilty but visiting iniquity upon their heads. The character of God moves His people to praise Him. Only when we see the need for justice will we understand why Jesus needed to die a cursed death on the cross if we would be saved! So may God's justice and mercy remind us all that God is holy, just and pure; but also loving, kind and gracious! May we embrace this God as our God- and revere His holy Name and may our worship be with reverence, awe, thanksgiving and praise!