

LIVING IN THE GRACE OF GOD'S MERCY

A SERMON

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Before we read let me remind you where we are in the story. Jesus has just called His first disciples and has started to preach and teach throughout the land. At this point in the story Jesus and His disciples have headed up a mountain with the crowds following behind. He sits down, and begins to teach...

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”

Let me start by ask you a question. How do you respond when someone does something bad to you? For instance, someone crashes into your car while you at the cinema, and instead of leaving a note they drives off and leave you to pay for the damage yourself. Or someone at work interferes with a project you been working on for months and messes it up? Often I find my immediate response is to become annoyed or even angry. Even this morning, there are probably some of you who have arrived at church upset with someone. The kids who didn't get up in time. Or the driver who could have let you out of that junction, but didn't bother. So as we come to this week's message, we're reminded that, Those who are merciful to others will themselves receive mercy.

So what comes to mind when you think of the word Mercy? When I asked my kids what they thought they immediately said the children's game. You know the one... The idea is that you lock fingers together with another person and twisting your wrists attempt to make them shout "mercy". However Webster's defines the word quite differently. It says mercy is Mildness or tenderness of heart which causes a person to overlook injuries, or to treat an offender better than he deserves; and to forbear punishment, and inflict less than justice warrants. So what else do you think of when you hear these words? For me I immediately think about God's grace. In fact you could say Grace and Mercy are two sides of the same coin. "Grace" is getting what you don't deserve. i.e. forgiveness, friendship with God, and eternal life. Whereas "Mercy" is not getting what you do deserve. i.e. condemnation, enmity with God, and eternal punishment. So I want to ask you, is your life defined by mercy? Are you merciful to others? And are you merciful to yourself? In other words, are we by nature merciful? If we're unsure, Paul makes it clear. In Ephesians 2 he says

[we] were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience - among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Ephesians 2:1-3

So before God took hold of our lives the Bible calls us Children of Wrath. We are both under God's wrath for our own sins. But we are also wrathful towards others. We were spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins. We were dead towards God. Not wanting anything to do with Him. And in fact running headlong towards Hell itself. But God is rich in mercy. He wants to make us alive in Christ. God wants us to draw near to His throne of grace. To receive His mercy. And to be merciful to others. So what actually is mercy? The best way to understand it is to simply look to God Himself.

God is the Alpha and the Omega. He was there before and will be there after. And like His love, His mercy extended from before time to eternity. As I've looked at mercy this week, it seems to have broken it down into three main areas, Past mercy, Present mercy, and future mercy. Let's begin with Past Mercies.

Throughout the Old Testament we see God's mercy to His people. In Genesis 3 we read that Adam and Eve rebelled against God. They disobeying His one command which was not to eat from a certain tree in the garden. And God was very clear when He said to them,

“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden;
but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,
for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

But so often like us, they didn't listen. Instead they listened to the lies of the enemy. “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” (Genesis 3: 1). How often do we listen to that voice? Listening to the lie of the enemy, Or even the lie from ourselves. Listen to the wise words of Martin Lloyd-Jones,

“Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?”

Martyn Lloyd-Jones

That is wise counsel. “...most of our unhappiness is due to the fact that we are listening to ourselves instead of talking to ourself”. Remind yourself instead of God's promises. (James 4) Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you, or (Isaiah 41) ...fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Or even (Philippians 4) And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. How wonderful are Gods promises. What comfort they bring when we're in need. However Adam and Eve did not hold fast to Gods word. Instead they listened to the lie. But God, in his grace reached out His hand and had mercy on them. Were else do we see God's mercy in the Old Testament? Well its found everywhere! For instance, Many years later we see God used the prophet Moses to rescue His people from the hand of Pharaoh. After God had sent many plagues upon Egypt eventually Pharaoh let the people go. Moses led them out of captivity, across the Red Sea, and towards the land He has promised them. You would have thought the people would have been filled with praise and joy toward God. But no, they began to complain almost immediately. And are we not like them too? How quickly we forget all that God has done for us. As soon as trails come or things don't go according to plans we to begin to complain.

Back in our story, Moses heads up Mount Sinai to receive the ten commandments, while he's gone, the Israelites are busy replacing God. Replacing Him with an idol they've made in the image of His creation. When Moses comes down he's furious. But not as much as God was God was so angry that He wanted to destroy the Israelites completely. But instead God choose to have mercy on them. As we continue to read through the Old Testament we see over and over again how God had mercy on his people. Over and over again Gods people turn away from Him, and over and over again he had mercy on them. But Gods mercy is not only evident in the Old Testament, but also in the New. In the book of John we read how a woman caught in adultery was brought before Jesus. It's important to remember that she was caught in the act, so there could be no doubt she was guilty. Based on the Law the women should have been put to death. However Jesus shows amazing mercy to her. Instead of condemning her as the people wanted, he instead said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." The people know they too where sinful. As the people drifted away, Jesus said, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more." Just as Jesus was merciful to the woman, so is merciful to us. When we succumb to temptation or even sin, instead of running to hiding, run to Gods, for his word says.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9

Throughout the New Testament we see many other times Jesus' has mercy on people. However, it isn't until the cross that we see God's greatest act of mercy. Paul tells us in the book of Romans, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.

For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Romans 5: 18-19

Paul tells us that because of Adam's sin, all mankind will be condemned. We can think of this condemnation affecting us in a few ways. Firstly Adam's sin is inherited by us, in that we are born a sinner. And secondly Adam's sin is imputed to us, in that his sin is counted against us. So we are both sinners by nature and sinners by choice. Apart from God's grace we are unable to respond to Him because we are dead in our trespasses and sin. But although we have chosen to rebel against God, In His mercy He has made the first move towards us, He has reached out His hand of salvation. We read about this in Paul letter to the church in Ephesus,

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Ephesians 2:4-9

Through the cross God has shown his unmeasurable mercy to us. In sending His own son to die in our place, so we can be reconciled to God. Even though we were dead in our transgressions and sins, God has made us alive in Christ. Just as Jesus was raised from the dead, we too are raised and become new creations.

Listen to words of Mr. Spurgeon,

There is nothing little in God;
His mercy is like Himself - it is infinite.
You cannot measure it.
His mercy is so great that it forgives great sins to great sinners, after
great lengths of time,
and then gives great favours and great privileges, and raises us up to
great enjoyments in the great heaven of the great God.

C. H. Spurgeon, Morning and Evening (August 17th)

But God's mercy doesn't end at the cross, listen to what the author of Lamentations says to us. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22–23). His mercies never come to an end. You can not out sin Gods grace. You can not run from his mercy. You can not hide from his face. God is always there for you. In every situation. Every day. Always.

However, once you put our trust in Jesus' death of the cross you may think life will get easier, but in fact we know it can often become more difficult. The bible calls these difficulties - trials. In James 1 we read,

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

James 1:2–4

God uses trials and suffering in our lives to produce steadfastness, and holiness. The theological term is Sanctification. Just as Christ suffered, so also we suffer. That is what He meant by, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." (Luke 9: 23). But through our trails God continues to pour out His mercy to us. Listen to the Psalmist as they declare God's ongoing love to us. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalms 23:6). As for you, O Lord, you will not restrain your mercy from me; your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me! (Psalms 40:11). But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. (Psalms 86:15). However God's mercy to us goes even further than this. The fact we woke up this morning breathing, our heart beating, still full of faith is all due to His amazing grace and mercy towards us. And this leads us onto my last main point, God's Future Mercy.

As we look to the future, God has promised us amazing things. Because of God's saving grace in our lives we can hold firm to the fact that He will see us through to the end. Jesus himself says in John 6, "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." (John 6: 39-40). God in his mercy will continue to sustain us to the end. There is nothing you can do to lose your salvation. There is no sin you can commit which will cause God to stop loving you. You are safe and secure in His amazing grace and love to you. But we all know life does get hard. We know temptations come. We know sometimes we fall. But we can rest in God's word when it says, According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1: 3-5). God's love continues to reach out to us and his grace and mercy continues to sustain us as we walk out our Christian life. When someone asks you "How's your day going?" You can truly respond, "Better than I deserve!"

So all of this begs the question, returning us to where we started, if God has been so merciful to us, how should we respond to others? In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus makes this abundantly clear, For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14-15). This is a sobering word, it should cause us to sit up and take note. Would God really not forgive with me if I don't show mercy and forgiveness to others? Surely I don't have to forgive everyone? As we look to the scriptures the answer is clear. We need to forgive as God has forgiven us. Although time doesn't allow, when you get home read through Jesus' parable called 'The Unforgiving Servant' which is found in Matthew 18. This is another example of how God calls us to be merciful to others, and the consequences if we're not.

In the book 'The Cross Centered Life' the author writes: When I become bitter or unforgiving toward others, I'm assuming that the sins of others are more serious than my sins against God. The cross transforms my perspective. Through the cross I realize that no sin committed against me will ever be as serious as the innumerable sins I've committed against God. When we understand how much God has forgiven us, it's not difficult to forgive others.

If we want to know how to become merciful we need to first look deep at our own sinfulness. Only after truly looking at how sinful we are, and how much God has forgiving us will we see what true mercy is. We need to really understand that everything we have is because of the mercy of God on a sinner like me. Then we will be merciful to other. One of the issues in leaving forgiveness unresolved is that it breeds disunity. As we come out of the hard season God has just brought us through, we are in a unique position to bring glory to God through being unified as a body. And if we are holding unforgiveness towards others, which causing a spirit of disunity, we are not truly satisfied in God. And if we are not truly satisfied in God, He not fully gloried in us. And bringing glory to God is something we should take very seriously. So let us be know as a people in unity with each other, a people of mercy, and a people who are quick to come alongside each other and forgive.

So as we begin to wrap things up let us remember, we are not by nature as mercifully and gracious as we would like to believe. However, God who is rich in mercy and because of His great love to us has forgiven our sins. He has taken out our heart of stone and put in a heart of flesh. And has given us His Holy Spirit to enable us to walk in a manner worthy of the calling we have received. And not only does He continue to lavish mercy on us freely each day, but has also promises to keep us until the time we see Him face to face.

So through way of application, firstly, for all of us, we should praise and worship to God for His mercy and grace in our lives each day. Second, for those of us who are saved, God calls to be imitators of Himself. We are to forgiving others, just as God has forgiven us. And lastly, for those of you who don't yet know Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, today is the day to put your faith in Him. As we close in prayer, ask God to forgive your sins, and for Him to become the centre of your life.