

The Great Reversal: The Merciful

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To show mercy, one must know mercy. Distributing mercy is not merely the response of the one who has experienced God's mercy, but also the action that brings greater mercy upon us.

Matthew 5:7

[Matthew 5:7 NKJV] Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

When I was a kid, my brother and I used to play this game. I think it might be illegal now.

- We'd lock both hands and begin to press them against each other. It was a test of one's strength and endurance.
- Finally, when one person would weaken, the other would be in a place of domination. If you were in the submissive position and were out of strength, the only way you could save yourself from breaking your hand was to cry out, "MERCY!"
- Or in other words, "You're in the position and have the power to destroy me, and within the rules of the game you'd be justified in doing so, but I'm asking you to withhold your sentence for my sake. I'm helpless, and the only way I'm not going to get hurt is if you decide to stand down and give mercy."

INTRO

Mercy is a difficult subject to put into one 45 minute sermon because of how broad it really is. Mercy is like a diamond; it's multi-faceted. The first and most important reason we must arm ourselves with mercy is that it's a key quality of the nature of God.

- Before giving the law to His people at Mount Sinai, God introduced Himself to Moses as a merciful God (*Exodus 34*).
- It's repeated over and over from that point on. *Nehemiah, Psalms, Joel, Jonah, Nahum* all declare that the Lord is merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness.
- The reality is if God was not merciful by nature, humanity would not be in existence today. Yes, God is a judge, and He has rightfully judged, but the fact that in His judgment He has kept a remnant of human beings alive is a sign of His mercy.
- *It was mercy that caused God to make animal skin coverings for Adam and Eve instead of totally killing them on the spot.*
- *It was mercy that God allowed Noah to build an ark and escape God's rightful wrath on wicked humanity.*
- *It was mercy that God allowed a remnant of Israelites to cross over the Jordan river into the promised land after 40 years of unbelief and complaining in the wilderness.*

- *It was mercy that God allowed a remnant of exiled Jews to return from Babylon and rebuild Jerusalem after all of their idolatry, rebellion, and hard-heartedness.*
- *It was mercy that God sent His own Son to die on the cross and receive wrath and judgment for the sin of other people who deserved to die.*
- *It is mercy that God has put up with the world and all of its wickedness and godlessness just so that more people might come to the knowledge of Jesus and escape the wrath of God that is coming upon the earth.*
- If we were to simplify the definition of God's mercy to one sentence, it would simply be:

QUOTE

The mercy of God – God withholding from us the penalties that we deserve, choosing rather to treat us with compassion.

Mercy, Definition

APPLICATION

Seemingly closely attached to the mercy of God is His compassion.

- The Greek word for “mercy” is rooted in the word for “compassionate.”
- When God looks at completely spiritually impoverished people, His heart breaks for them and demonstrates mercy. When God walked among us in the person of Jesus, we frequently saw this. *Jesus would see people in need, spiritually and physically, and His bowels (emotions) would be moved with compassion and mercy for them.*
- *The woman caught in adultery*
- *The Good Samaritan*
- *Zacchaeus*
- *The lame, blind, and sick*
- *the hungry crowds*
- *This is why Hebrews tells us that Jesus is our “merciful high priest” who empathizes with us and is compassionate toward us.*

So those who walk in the kingdom look at others as God has looked upon them. They are compassionately merciful to those who don't deserve it and those who are in need. They empathize with those in trouble in the same way our merciful high priest, Jesus, empathizes with us in our weaknesses.

But in order for us to exercise mercy, I believe there are things we must be keenly aware of; things that we must embrace as realities in order for God's mercy to be birthed in us.

Matthew 9:10-13 NKJV – 10 Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, [that] behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. 11 And when the Pharisees saw [it], they said to His disciples, “Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” 12 When Jesus heard [that], He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13 “But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”

(Reference – Hosea 6:6)

Luke 6:35-36 NKJV – 35 “But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. 36 “Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

1

Recognize we're not the ultimate Judge

APPLICATION

When God extends mercy, He does it from the place of a judge to a defendant.

- He's right, we're wrong.
- He's justified, we are without excuse.

When we, on the other hand, extend mercy, we do it from the place of the defendant to other defendants.

- We are all wrong at some point in time.
- Those who are spiritually merciful are those who are willing to forgo vengeance and be quick to forgiveness because they realize that they are not the judge; they don't have the right to convict and sentence others for their sins against them.

When James talks about mercy, he captures this idea beautifully:

[James 2:10-13 NKJV] 10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. 11 For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

APPLICATION

We as people, learn to deal mercifully when we realize that God judges us all according to the same standards.

- We are to speak and act as those who will be judged by the perfect law of liberty.
- We can hold bitterness, unforgiveness, and hatred toward a person who committed a wrong against us and we can justify our desire to make them pay. But we fail to look at ourselves and our guilt before God. If God were to hold us to the standard of Jesus's perfect law of liberty and look to see if you've ever had a lustful or hateful thought, then you too would be guilty as dirt.
- And the economy of God says, *“live toward others without mercy, and you may experience merciless treatment when you need forgiveness.”*

[James 4:12 NKJV] 12 There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?

QUOTE

To be merciful – Withholding from others the penalties that only God can rightfully give.

Mercy, Definition

APPLICATION

Now it's important to insert here that just because we are not the ultimate judge doesn't mean we can't make certain judgments.

- *Jesus tells us that we are to judge righteously (John 7:24 NKJV – 24 “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”)*
- *Paul tells us that we are to judge matters in the church.*
- *We can judge if something is sinful. We can discipline those under our authority if they are in disobedience.*
- *We can make assessments based on someone's fruit or consistent actions.*

The Christian judges sin by a stricter code than anyone in the world would, but always looks upon the sinner with compassion, and would even wish to find some way to see that sinner reconciled to God and man.

What we can't do is pronounce a sentence on someone and carry out that sentence from our own anger or sense of vengeance.

QUOTE

We show mercy when we, understanding that only God is the ultimate judge, abstain from negatively returning to others that which they have demonstrated toward us.

Josh,

[Romans 12:19 NKJV] 19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.

2

Recognize that we are indebted to God

APPLICATION

The merciful person understands that every sin done against them pales in comparison to the sins they have committed against the heart of God.

This is why mercy is also demonstrated by our ability to forgive from our hearts those who have sinned against us.

[Ephesians 4:32 NKJV] 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

APPLICATION

This doesn't mean that we refuse to call out the wrong, or that we don't feel the righteous anger or anguish because of the wrong done. It doesn't mean that we go into denial and pretend that we haven't been hurt or that we don't need healing from that hurt.

True forgiveness comes from a deeper place that is sourced back in the cross of Jesus, where all the wrong I have done was dealt with.

ILLUSTRATION

I like to think of forgiveness as having a "slippery heart." that is, in regards to those who have wronged us, all bitterness, hatred, ill-will, and vengeance doesn't have a place to stick and take root within our hearts because of how consumed our hearts are with the mercy and grace that Jesus showed us at the cross.

QUOTE

The merciful are those persons who do not take to heart any injuries or insults done against them, whether intended or unintended.

Spurgeon,

APPLICATION

This is what Jesus meant in His model prayer, when in the original language He literally teaches us to pray, **"Forgive us our debts and we forgive our debtors."**

We owe more to God than anyone owes to us, regardless of what they've done.

- In Matthew 18 Jesus paints a picture of mercy, both from God and the mercy God expects from us toward each other.

The most beautiful and compelling analogy in the scripture that demonstrates this principle is given by Jesus in Matthew 18.

[Matthew 18:21-35 NKJV] 21 Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven (*God's mercy and forgiveness are limitless – 490 – 70 weeks of Daniel – God has dealt with Israel in 7/490 year periods! His mercy is infinite and will never cease! They are new every morning!*).

23 "Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 "And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents (*approximately seven billion dollars by today's standards – would make you the 107th richest person in the world today – Jesus is exaggerating an absurd amount to make a point*).

25 "But as he was not able to pay (*The debt was too high for his position to ever be able to get the funds*), his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made (*this is not "meanness" on the part of the master, but justice and fairness – when someone incurs a debt, they are legally bound to pay it or suffer the consequences.*).

26 “The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ *(cry for mercy – who wouldn’t try in such a scenario? only a person who didn’t recognize their debt and their sentence – NOTICE: The servant offered to pay back the debt, but the master knows better. The master knows that the cost of mercy is that he will have to be forgiven the entire debt – mercy always has a high cost, in our case, it cost the life of the son of God to pay our debt.)*

27 “Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion *(same root word for mercy)*, released him *(The act of mercy)*, and forgave him the debt *(ORDER: Compassion, mercy, forgiveness – He erased the entire debt and didn’t even demand a repayment).*

28 “But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii *(\$11,000)*; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat *(harsh and vindictive)*, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ *(Isn’t it amazing how quickly one can forget their own debt? Isn’t it amazing that you can leave the cross, having been forgiven of much and forget about it as soon as someone wrongs you a little?)*

29 “So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ 30 “And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. *(NOTICE: Fellow Servant – this is not even the case of a master and his servant, but a servant and his fellow servant = they are both equal. One is not above the other – how horrible things get when we forget that the debt of others to us pales in comparison to the debt that we owe God. God is willing to release you from the prison of your sins, but you are willing to put someone else in the prison of your unforgiveness?)*

31 “So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. *(It should sadden and grieve our hearts when we see fellow servants, Christians, harboring unforgiveness toward each other, and even worse, seeking revenge and payback)*

32 “Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 ‘Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ 34 “And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. *(Now, one of the most sobering verses in all scripture)* 35 “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

APPLICATION

Forgiveness from the heart is a command for every Christian. The unwillingness to forgive and demonstrate mercy is a clear indication that one has completely lost sight of the incredible debt that they owed God which He completely and freely forgave.

- Mercy looks at an offender and personally releases them from the penalty they owe.
- [WHAT SHOWING MERCY DOESN'T DO](#)
 - It doesn’t always release them from the legal ramifications of their actions. There are times that withholding necessary judgment is the less merciful thing to do. Sometimes mercy comes in the form of allowing someone to experience the consequences of their actions that they may learn from them.
 - “Mercy to the impenitent is not always the more merciful road.”
 - One author put it well when he wrote, “A God who is only merciful is a God who is unjust.”

- *Mercy and justice are not in conflict with each other, they are in balance with each other. Justice is not void of mercy but is sometimes the greater mercy.*

Mercy, detached from justice, grows unmerciful. -CS Lewis (The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment)

- Showing another person mercy doesn't release them from accountability before God for their action. The Lord will repay every evil. If a person doesn't receive the mercy offered to them by God at the cross of Jesus Christ, there will be a time when they answer for every one of their sins. They will be found guilty, and at the judgment seat of God, there will be no more mercy shown, only rightful judgment.

The Bible is clear on more than one occasion that we will be dealt with in the same manner we deal with others.

- I don't believe God is talking about eternal judgment or purgatory here. I believe simply that if we don't show mercy while on earth then God might deal with us on earth in a similar way. or simply put:

3

Recognize that we need to receive mercy

APPLICATION

The promise to the merciful is that they too shall receive mercy, both from God and from others.

- Let's face it, if you're honest about your condition, you'll be the first to confess that you need mercy.

QUOTE

If any man thinks ill of you do not be angry with him, for you are worse than he thinks you to be.

Spurgeon,

APPLICATION

We should be quick to shovel out mercy because there will inevitably come a day when we need mercy to be shoveled out upon us.

- When we fail to show mercy, we are setting the standard by which God and others may deal with us. Jesus said:

[Matthew 7:2 NKJV] 2 "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

When asked why he was so overly merciful, pastor Chuck Smith said, *"Simple. I want God to be merciful to me."*

[2 Samuel 22:26 NKJV] 26 "With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful..."

APPLICATION

I want to be like the tax collector, the leper, or the lame man who upon encountering God cried out, “Have mercy on me!” And I want the Lord to respond with mercy every day in my life.

- But in order to become that person, I also have to desire to be that to others. When people fail or fall short, hurt or wound me and ask for mercy, I want to be quick to forgive in a compassionate way. Why? Yes, because it reflects Jesus, but also because that’s how I want to be treated when I need mercy... and I do and will.

QUOTE

In refusing to give mercy, we are refusing to receive it. When mercy is not extended to others, don’t be shocked when it is not offered to you. The more mercy you SHOW, the more mercy you’ll KNOW.

Josh,

QUOTE

My problem is that while I want to receive mercy from God, I also want to dispense justice. I don’t want people to get away with evil against me. I want justice... except, of course, when I’m coming to God with my own failings. Then I want mercy!

Chuck Smith, Living Water

APPLICATION

O that we would get off our thrones for a minute and recognize ourselves for who we REALLY are – people in NEED of great mercy! It would certainly aid in helping us become more merciful people.

CONCLUSION

To show mercy is to recognize that God is the judge and I am not, that I am indebted to God more than others are indebted to me, and that I myself am in great need of mercy.

- If I can remember those things I will find kindness in my heart toward those who offend me, forgiveness in my heart toward those who wound me, compassion in my heart toward those who are in need, and empathy in my heart towards those who are struggling and stumbling. As I show those things to others, I will, in equal share, experience those things in my own life.

BIBLE VERSE

[Micah 6:8 NKJV] 8 He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Amen.