

# Bethel Christian Church

## The Mercy of God

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A Short Introduction to the Mercy of God

Study 1

*Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy [Matthew 5:7]*

*Great are Your tender mercies O God [Psalm 119:156]*

*I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever [Psalm 89:1]*

*As we have received mercy we do not lose heart. [2 Corinthians 4:1]*

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end  
[Lamentations 3:22]*

The whole purpose of God sending Christ according to Paul was that we glorify God for His mercy. When do we glorify God for his mercy? When his mercy becomes the most essential and most amazing gift from his heart to us. How do we glorify God for his mercy? We enjoy and treasure it, being glad about the way it renews our hearts to see his love and love him all the more. But mercy is not only an uncommon expression today, it can also be deeply offensive.

Mercy is not a common expression today. We speak more of compassion and aid, which are both important. Mercy may even be seen as a weakness. Rather than a blessing that builds up both the giver and receiver of mercy it can appear as slackness that lets justice slip. The terrorist, who in a rage of so called justice seeking, blows away human life without a second thought finds no place for it. Those who suffer at the hands of such people are persuaded that mercy in return would be weak and asking for more of the same. Left to our own devices we do not appear to be a merciful people.

But mercy is an offence for many for it presumes a deep failure on our part, a deep need only able to be met by God. So Australian's don't need mercy from God for were good blokes and he's a good bloke, so she'll be right. I don't need mercy, I just need attention, love, change of circumstances, a new wife, a new car, a new job, more money, more counselling....but no I don't think I need mercy.

### **Mercy means release from misery.**

Misery as described by God's Word comes from either one of two things, living in sin and guilt or suffering of some description.

I still recall with trembling walking down the main street of Margaret River the day after the tragic cliff collapse which killed nine people including young school children at Gracetown. The town was in deep grief. It was the kind of event which opened the horrifying revelation that we never know what is just around the corner. We feel like we are in control. We send our children off to school and never have them come home. It was a shocking, bleak time. Complete strangers would meet and simply cling to each other in tears. My heart cried like never before for mercy the night before as we met the survivors in the Hospital and then watched the light fade from the face of parents who came to collect their children only to discover they were not there in the room. My cry for mercy just came from the depths. Not because I was suddenly aware of any deep sin but because the frailty and incompetency to speak into such a black and bleak void was palpable. So as I walked down the main street the following day the same cry came up from my depths, 'Let everyone cry for mercy!' Many however, were already angry at God for his lack of mercy. How then does his mercy relate to such a scene? Is it just a cruel religious illusion that God can bring mercy to such horrific scenes? Or does the mercy of God reach into and beyond every sin and 'natural' horror known to the world. Are the mercies of God new every morning. Could the Lord fill that new morning in Margaret River with his mercy? Do his

renewed mercies surround all our sin and all the terror of collapsing cliffs? The answer is a staggering “Yes!” But we must be wise and humble as we seek to comprehend how that mercy appears and how we testify to it in the terrible pain of our misery. We are well beyond clichés here. Mercy is no cliché. We will see that it has been hard fought for by God himself in the man Jesus of Nazareth.

### **Victims with false Expectations**

Both our sin and our circumstances in which misery becomes real may be understood in terms of us being victims. This is a deadly diagnosis for it shifts our attention from the personal responsibility we must embrace for much of our misery.

All political ideologies promise relief from misery, some kind of utopian dream. From Marxism to capitalism, each promises but never delivers true mercy. Each tends to become tyrannical to some degree in the long run. We may not look to these things for ultimate relief from misery.

In our day we have seen a huge growth in international ‘mercy’ giving. There has never been another age which has been able to or has reached out to suffering as ours has. This is often wonderful to watch. However, the question remains as to whether much of our aid work actually reaches the real cause of misery and cures it. We may also ask what actually drives much of our aid work. Some seems related to making the recipients toe-the-line of the mercy giver.

### **Jesus ministry was a ministry of mercy.**

*"Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (Mark 5:19)*

Jesus reached out and relieved many from their miserable sufferings. However, he also understood that suffering of itself may not be the ultimate misery. What comes out of the heart of a person reveals where true misery lies. He told a story on one occasion about two men praying in the Temple (the parable is found in Luke 18:9-14). One man was a Pharisee, the other a tax-collector or Publican. The Pharisee prided himself on being a man of mercy, he tithed all his income. He was glad that he didn't need mercy for he claimed not to be like the rest of the race who were all swindlers, unjust and adulterers. In his opinion they were the ones who really needed mercy. He arrogantly gave thanks that he was not like these people, especially the tax-collector he could see skulking in the back-ground.

On the other hand the tax-collector was present in the Temple in great distress. He could not lift his eyes to look at the others there. He could not focus hypocritically on them for he was consumed with the misery he found in his own heart. His anguish was so great he could not help but beat his breast with the pain of it all. Here was a man who knew he needed mercy. Here was a man who needed more than external aid. In contrast to the Pharisee whose ‘confession’ was full of himself, the tax-collector cried simply to God for mercy.

Jesus poignant words at the end of this parable were that it was the tax-collector who went to his home free from his misery, just as if he had never sinned. The Pharisee must have gone on living in the misery of being self absorbed.

### **Mercy and Our Hearts**

*As we have received mercy we do not lose heart. [2 Corinthians 4:1]*

My hope in taking up this short series on mercy is not that we will have a better theological understanding of mercy, important as that is. In Paul's words mercy is that gift from God which secures us from losing heart. Losing heart is a terrible thing for a human being. It leads to bitterness and cynicism both of which are like corrosive acid to relating and loving freely. Maybe a ‘collapsed cliff’ has left us withdrawn, sad and strangely heartless in all we do. God's ever-new mercies can deliver us into a new sense of heartiness about life.