

## Bethel Christian Church

# The Mercy of God

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The God of Mercy in the Man Jesus Christ

Study 4

The mercy of God is expressed to all his creation, not simply to Israel or his Church. Wherever his creatures know misery, then he graciously extends his mercy into those situations. This would be denied by many who constantly accuse God of inactivity.

*The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, His compassion is over all that He has made.*

It is, however, in Israel's misery that his mercy shines through in holy brilliance. Say what we may about Israel's stubbornness to live in the covenant love of God, she was the one nation in antiquity who sang the praises of his everlasting mercy.

We need to pause and ask ourselves again, are we those who know our need of his mercy? Are we those who sing the praises of his mercy? It is one thing to define it or analyse it from afar, but vastly different to sing about it. To sing about it means it has deeply moved and changed our heart.

Our opening studies have proceeded from the foundational revelation of God to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7. As we consider the mercy of God in New Testament times and beyond we begin in John's prologue.

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us, and we beheld His glory, glory as the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth [1:14].*

Two things stand out and confront us here. The grace and mercy of God have now been fully expressed in and through a human being: And the revelation John spoke of was remarkably similar to that given to Moses. The grace, mercy and steadfast love of the Exodus passage is reflected in the 'grace' of John 1:14. The 'steadfast faithfulness of God in Exodus finds full expression in the 'truth' revealed in Christ's humanity. Whereas God spoke about his qualities in Exodus, in Christ they take on the kind of expression that is completely related to and understandable by all humanity. With Moses it was God 'walking by' Moses, with Jesus it was God walking in and amongst flesh and blood.

With the coming of grace and therefore mercy in Christ we are confronted not with a 'thing' called mercy or a 'thing' called grace (how adept we are in attempting to turn the dynamic presence and action of God into commodities to be examined and studied, thus thinking we have embraced them). The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ confronts us with the immediate action of God's love present in him.

Both Mary and John the Baptist's father spoke prophetically concerning Jesus birth. They saw that the mercy of the Messiah was dynamic action, not merely a nice new idea about God. Both saw God's action as his present power to keep his covenant. Mary saw God's hand upon her in the birth of Jesus resulting in the continuing expression of God's continual mercy,

*For the Mighty One has done great things for me and Holy is His name. And His mercy is from generation to generation towards those who fear Him [Luke 1:49f].*

Zacharias praised God directly for Jesus as the materialization of mercy promised to our fathers. Again this mercy was seen as the faithful remembering his covenant. That eternal covenant mercy involved being delivered from the hand of our enemies in

order to serve him freely. So the theme of mercy being delivery from misery remained the same. Both these heralds understood that the mercy of God was very practical and present in Jesus of Nazareth.

Because Jesus was God incarnate, God in human flesh, then he must have been love in the flesh, grace in the flesh and thus mercy in the flesh. Paul claimed that Jesus was the fullness of God dwelling in our flesh.

The idea of receiving the mercy of God as an idea or a commodity is unthinkable. It is a life-changing experience. All the old things pass away as mist before the morning sun. Hence Jesus powerful parable about the impact of mercy in the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:22-35).

The unforgiving servant had received the mercy of his king as a right, perhaps even as a weakness on the part of his master for letting him off the hook. The mercy he was shown was not really understood or received. This is the whole thrust of the parable. Had it been received then his actions would have been far different towards his fellow servant who owed him a pittance. In terms of the parable of the Good Samaritan, this unforgiving servant was not a neighbour to his fellow servant as his King had been to him. The one who shows mercy is the true neighbour, the true reflector of God's neighbourliness.

The point Jesus made was that to receive the mercy of God, present in the person of God's King was to receive release from the enemies that keep the heart of man from seeing and serving freely as God does. Mercy delivered actual change to the heart, conscience and mind of those in misery.

Thus in the parable the only place for the servant who refuses mercy is the place of torment and judgement. There is no alternative place to find the reality of mercy other than in the grace that God brings.

The King set no conditions in the parable. His mercy was given simply and without requiring any promissory behaviour from the servant. Wherever Jesus went we see that he showed the fullness of God's mercy. He made no demand that people repent in order to receive mercy, he simply went around releasing people from their misery, self inflicted or otherwise.

The servant's pleading for mercy was not the thing which moved the King. His pleading was polluted by an impossible promise. This man could never have paid back \$10,000,000. To base his appeal for mercy on that unrealistic promise was to reveal the true nature of his heart. Nevertheless the King forgave him, having true compassion. To have that much debt was bondage indeed. His King was moved not by the man's plea, but by a higher compassion he found in his own heart. We would say that the King himself, in terms of the story, must have been a man who had truly received mercy and understood its amazing power.

So failure to receive mercy leaves us merciless. The harsh reality of contractual relationships becomes the norm. His fellow servants saw the injustice of this man's actions. It was a deeply offensive thing. However, the servant himself only saw life as an opportunity to demand his rights.

Hence we see that even though the mercy of Jesus was full to the brim it was never to be accepted as a right.

