

God is ... MERCIFUL

God is ... #3 – Speaker Mike Laramie – June 9th, 2024 – Ephesians 2:4-10

INTRO: Good morning church! We are continuing our sermon series this week where we will explore how to know God by getting to know some of his attributes. This week, we will delve into His mercy, which flows from His love which with we started the series. Here's the series theme verse: John 17:3 (ESV) And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. The famous theologian and author J I Packer said, "What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God... Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. This way you can waste your life and lose your soul." — Packer, J. I., *Knowing God* (p. 19, 33).

Need: The saying goes: only the strong survive. From marketing campaigns and sports teams to climbing the corporate ladder, strength is one of the highest values in our culture - we spoke about that last week as we explored the mightiness of God. Mercy, on the other hand, often doesn't make the cut when we talk about things we value. In a society placing more and more emphasis on power, mercy has almost become a foreign concept. So, what is mercy all about and should it even matter to us?

Mercy is not something we talk about much these days. Instead, we talk about people getting their rights. People are suing each other at the drop of a hat and taking revenge when they feel they have been wronged. They lash out at situations they think are wrong or unjust. I am amazed by how quickly people judge and criticize other people especially through social media. One recent talk show featured a woman who had been cleared of murder charges by law enforcement but was harassed through social media by people who judged her to be a murderer. In our world, mercy is sadly lacking – and desperately needed. In reality, mercy is a true picture of strength being used as a blessing and benefit to others in need. This is at the heart of why God sent Jesus for you and for me. The challenge for us is that we don't want to admit that we have a need. To truly understand mercy, we must first recognize our true needs.

The Bible shows us that the need we have is great. We all fall short. We need someone to step in - we need a Savior. We need a Savior who sees all our actions, thoughts, and deeds but doesn't give us what we deserve. Instead, He took what we deserve upon Himself and gave us mercy. He saw our true need and did something about it. It is His mercy that makes us worthy. As a result, we are set free to live a life of mercy toward others.

Trans: God's mercy is closely linked with forgiveness. What we do in response to God's mercy sends an important message to the people in our lives. James is very clear in his letter that though deeds are not required to earn God's favor, or to be a Christian, a repentant heart that loves God will surely be evident by the lives we live. In his article "Have Mercy on Me," David Mathis says "When God shows his mercy, he does so with utter intentionality and strength, and we as his creatures get our deepest glimpse of who he is not just in his sovereignty but his goodness."

BODY: In the apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he told the believers that they could know God's rich mercy. We can know this rich mercy of God. How can we know this rich mercy of God? The text gives four ways we can know this rich mercy of God:

TEXT: Ephesians 2:4-10 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one

may boast. ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

How We Can Know the Rich Mercy of God?

1. By understanding God's great love.

Our text is from verses 4-10 but in 1-3 Paul tells us something more about this "rich mercy" and "great love" in the recognition of man's fallen condition. He says:

- 1- We were dead in our trespasses
- 2- We followed the ways of the world
- 3- We lived to gratify our fallen condition, living by our thoughts and desires.
- 4- And, in verse 3, that we were by nature objects of wrath, **But God:**

Rich - πλούσιος (plousios): abounding in, wealthy; From ploutos; wealthy; figuratively, overflowing with..

Mercy - ἔλεος (éleos); compassion: kindness or good will towards the miserable and the afflicted, joined with a desire to help them; the mercy and clemency of God in providing and offering salvation by Christ

Great- πολλήν (pollēn): Much, many; often- (amount, high capacity, it is abundant)

Agápē - ἀγαπάω (agapaō) – Again, from week one, this means to love dearly; to be well pleased, to be contented at or with a thing; unconditionally love. It describes the sacrificial love of God.

Sounds great already. But Paul doubles down on it and identifies it as "great love".

Take a look here in verse 5 and 6 at the expression of this love and we can see both the richness of mercy and the greatness of love. *5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...* Simply put, the richness of mercy is in his indiscriminate compassion that affords us his unmerited favor or (grace) no matter to the extent of our human affliction.

Many of us just don't realize how much we are in need of mercy – but we needed so much mercy that God had to send his only begotten, sinless Son in to the world to live a perfect life for you and for me. We live in a world filled with people who feel unloved. Some of you need to realize just how much you are loved. You are loved – in fact, loved so much that Jesus died a sinner's death for you and for me.

ARG: God demonstrates His love:

Romans 5:8 (ESV) But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

We did not deserve mercy, but God showed it anyway by loving us enough to send His Son:

John 3:17,18 (ESV) For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

ILL: If the Apostle Paul were standing here right now, he might tell you about the self-absorbed pride of a Pharisee - and how that hubris stood directly in the face of God and had him hunting and killing God's people. The very God who at the same time loved him, showed mercy toward him, to-spice the fact that he himself was the object of wrath. I think Paul understood God's love to be a "great love" and "God's mercy to be rich".

APP: Many in this room need to realize just how much in need of mercy we are. Like Paul, you and I need to avail ourselves to the mercy of God – we need to understand just how much He loves us. You who may feel unloved – you are loved! You who are confident that you are “OK” – God loves you so much that He gives you mercy! Understand that relationship between love and mercy.

We do that:

2. By experiencing God’s immeasurable grace.

EXP: (5b-7) by grace you have been saved - 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Here, we see how the mercy of God plays out - through His grace. Grace and mercy are very closely related. God’s mercy - not giving us what we truly deserve - is shown by His grace - by giving us what we don’t deserve. We deserve Hell and punishment for our rebellious lives, but He doesn’t give us that - He offers us grace.

Grace - χάρις (charis) - unmerited favor, good will, loving-kindness, the divine benefit of knowing Him

So, God reached down when He didn’t have to, while we were enemies of God, and because He is merciful, extended his grace in order to do three things:

Saved - σώζω (sozo) - keep safe and sound, to rescue from danger or destruction, to deliver from the penalties of judgment. He saved us for the wrath and penalty of Hell.

Raised - God then raised us up, not only in the future in Heaven, but gives us a life with Him now. We are with Him in this life and the next.

Seated - We are seated with Him, in Christ Jesus, positionally. We are adopted as sons through the completed work of Jesus.

We need to experience God’s grace.

ARG: **One of the ways we can experience God’s grace is to continually seek Him:**

Colossians 3:1 (ESV) Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Another is to be on mission with Him:

Acts 14:3 (ESV) So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

ILL: God’s grace is essential for our spiritual lives, but we don’t control the supply. We can’t make the grace flow, but God has given us circuits to connect and pipes to open in case it’s there. I can flip a switch, but I don’t provide the electricity. I can turn on a faucet, but I can’t make the water flow. There will be no light and no liquid refreshment without someone else providing it. We need to put ourselves in the path of God’s grace. Consider Zacchaeus, who may have been a wee little man, but he modeled this big reality by positioning himself along the path of grace. He couldn’t force Jesus’s hand, he couldn’t make grace flow, but he could put himself along the path where Grace was coming (Luke 19:1–10). The same was true of blind Bartimaeus (Luke 18:35–43). He couldn’t earn the restoration of his sight, but he could position himself along the route of grace where Jesus might give the gift as he passed that way.

APP: How can we see God's mercy by experiencing His grace? We need to avail ourselves to His grace. Some of us are still closed off to the Lord - we are here in the building, but not really "here". Seek God. Allow Him to work through you. Allow yourself to fully receive His mercy and be available for Him. Some have gone on mission trips to see God's grace in action. Others may step out in faith in a new ministry, not knowing how it will turn out, and they may see God's grace in action. But it can be even more simple than that – look for grace all around. A beautiful sunset, a day at the beach, a child's laughter, a good cup of coffee, and the joy of spending time with the people you love all is by the grace of God.

How can we experience His grace?

3. By receiving God's free gift by faith.

EXP: (8-9) For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Faith - πίστις (pistis), conviction of the truth of anything, belief with the predominate idea of trust, confidence.

Gift - δῶρον (dōron), gift, present, specially: a sacrifice. This is something that is free - a gift is not something that you pay for in any way. Here Paul is saying that the gift is faith, the response is ours - we need to accept it.

Works - effort on our part. More to follow in Point 4.

Boast - to glory in a thing; to take credit. What Paul is saying is that since there is no way you could save yourself, but salvation is a free gift, there is no point in taking the glory or taking any credit for it.

ARG: Abraham, the great patriarch, did nothing but believe in faith in God's promise:

Genesis 15:6 (ESV) And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

This gift is free:

John 5:21 (ESV) For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.

ILL: Bible study in Incirlik AB, Turkey.

APP: Some of you have not taken the step of accepting the free gift of God. Some have not received the faith that God has given. Would you do it now? Jesus is calling, offering His free gift.

Now, what do we do next?

4. By becoming God's workmanship which He prepared us for.

EXP: (10) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

"Workmanship" (10) (ποίημα, *poiēma*) - a product, i.e. fabric (literally or figuratively): thing that is made, workmanship. The only thing created in the image and likeness of God (imago Dei).

"Created" (10) (κτίζω, *ktízō*) - through the idea of proprietorship of the manufacturer; to fabricate, i.e. found (form originally): create, Creator, make. Like a patent.

"Good works" (10) (ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς, *ergois agathois*) - useful, salutary, good, pleasant, agreeable, joyful, happy; (to work); toil (as an effort or occupation); by implication, an act: deed, doing, labor, work.

“Prepared beforehand” (10) (προετοιμάζω, *proetomázō*) - to fit up in advance (literally or figuratively): ordain before, prepare afore; for whom he appointed glory beforehand. God has foreordained us to do Kingdom work in our lives, He has made us for this.

“Walk in them” (10) (περιπατέω, *peripateō*) - to make one's way, progress; to make due use of opportunities. Hebrew idiom for, to live, to regulate one's life, to conduct one's self, to pass one's life.

You might be asking – why did you include this last verse? It doesn't seem to speak of God's mercy. On the contrary – this demonstrates the mercy of God very well. Why in the world would God use fallen human beings like me to be on mission for Him? I'm literally broken and flawed, yet, God can do great things through me and you!

“Once a man has truly experienced the mercy of God in his life he will henceforth aspire only to serve.” - Dietrich Bonhoeffer

ARG: **When His family came looking for Him, He taught them that He was about His Father's work. Jesus modeled walking in the way His Father had prepared:**

Luke 2:49 (NKJV) And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"

Jesus calls out the difference between works of God and those of man:

Matthew 23:23 (ESV) “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.”

Scripture teaches a clear progression of God's grace received by faith which then produces work:

James 2:18 (ESV) But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

ILL: We see this all the time in this church. Someone “comes as they are” and guess what? They are forever changed by the love of Jesus. Then what happens? We get them involved. We might start them serving coffee or greeting people at the door, but as that person grows, and becomes more like Jesus, we see them getting disciplined, then they start disciplining others. Soon, they are leading ministries, witnessing to others and leaving a Godly legacy. It's not about filling our volunteer rosters. Every ministry in this church has a purpose – to help you become God's workmanship – his *poiēma*.

APP: Will you yield to the Lord's work in your life? He has already prepared His Kingdom work for you and has also prepared you to accomplish it. Will you then follow Him in accomplishing the mission He has set aside?

CONCLUSION: We can be a people who have come to know God better by knowing of His mercy. We can know His rich mercy by 1.) understanding His great love, 2.) experiencing his immeasurable grace, 3.) receiving the free gift of His faith, and 4.) becoming His workmanship.