

Series: Parables: Did You Hear That?
Message Title: ***The Parable About Mercy***
Date: Sunday, October 14, 2018
Scripture: Luke 18:9-14
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Location: Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA

Introduction

Church is a great place to be encouraged and challenged, but it can also be a good place to get into trouble, right? Examples: Cell phone, falling asleep, loud sneeze, etc.

Jesus told stories because the way to a man's heart is through his ears. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Luke 8:8 ESV).

Did you hear that?

Among all the themes of Scripture, one of the most important and dominant is that of *mercy*. There is no need so great, no sin so grievous, and no grief so severe that we cannot find God's mercy.

We need mercy, not because we deserve it, but because we don't deserve it.

“He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ‘Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.” But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted’” (Luke 18:9-14 ESV).

This is a parable of contrasts—two men (one a Pharisee). The Pharisee was standing alone; he was separated. He was focused on his religious practices—30 words, five times he said, “I.”

For strict, practicing Jews, there were four times of prayer a day: 9:00 a.m., 12:00 p.m., 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. The Pharisee was

present. There was nothing about his appearance that would have given away the attitude that was curling in his heart.

Listen in on the prayer: “God, I thank You that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector” (Luke 18:11 ESV).

Don’t you find yourself sort of cutting your eyes at the Pharisee? ... pulling for the underdog tax collector? ... feeling scorn and angst against this smug, religious Pharisee?

Is it ever a sin to pray? Yes—when prayer is a covering for something sinful in our hearts.

“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear” (Psalm 66:18 NKJV).

“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him” (Matthew 6:7-8 ESV).

Now back to the Pharisee. The Pharisee was not only a self-righteous man, but a self-congratulating man. "I fast, give..." He had a cosmetic view of righteousness! Don't get me wrong, he and other Pharisees like him were disciplined, rigorous and zealous.

Yet, despite their resolute attentiveness to every demand of the law in detail, they missed the main message of the Law—it exposes the problem of sin and reminds everyone we can't eradicate the power of sin! The law points to guilt, and what we all need is grace!

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean"

(Matthew 23:23-26 ESV).

This Pharisee needed mercy, not a rehearsal of his piety.

Now let's turn the page and look at the tax collector. The other man was a tax collector—a social outcast. He was hated because tax collectors made profits by leveraging income from their own people. They aided Israel's oppressors—Rome. Zacchaeus was one of the tax collectors (Luke 19:1). They were known as thieves and extortioners.

The tax collector, stood far off with head bowed, beating his chest. Note his posture. Yet we hear his prayer also: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Luke 18:13 ESV).

What an honest and heart-felt prayer! No justification. No defense. So many of us try to dress-up our prayers to merit God's response, but the reality is that God seeks honesty.

Honesty pleads for mercy, and mercy points to humility and produces authentic piety.

"I know of no better thermometer to your spiritual temperature than this—the measure of the intensity of your prayer. I am not speaking about the quantity of it, for there are some who, for a pretense, make long prayers. I am speaking about the reality of it, the intensity of it." —C. H. Spurgeon

Note the outcome: The tax collector went down to his house justified! That's a big, bold, blessed word. It is the word that describes the need of everyone listening to my voice today. It's a word that expresses a right standing with God. The only way one can be justified is through the mercy of God.

No matter how dressed-up we are on the outside, we are all messed up on the inside and desperate for God to deliver mercy to our sin-sick souls.



God's Mercy is Essential

The tax collector left the temple that day justified. We understand the only way for anyone, anywhere to be justified before God

comes at the place of His mercy, not our merit.

No one can remove the guilt and stain of sins through good works. Mercy is not getting something you deserve.

All false religion is based upon the idea of merit—"do this." Christianity is wholly based on mercy. God has withheld the judgment we deserve and in grace provides the salvation—the justification—we need.

Religion for so many is self-justifying ornamentation. But the truth is we need something far more than "cologne on a corpse" and "lipstick on a pig."

The justification we need is what God provides through His grace and mercy in Christ.

In many ways, this parable is an affirmation of *sola fide*, faith alone—such a vital part of the Reformation. Justification is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:4-7 ESV).

The Pharisee went home deceived! He believed he was good enough to merit the favor of God, without realizing how great his need was for the mercy of God.

The only way I can be relieved from the guilt and condemnation of my sin is through Christ and His sacrifice for me.

... “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:22-23 ESV).

Here is the answer: JESUS!

“For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV).

“Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all...Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush Him; He has put Him to grief; when His soul makes an offering for guilt, He shall see His offspring; He shall prolong His days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. Out of the anguish of His soul He shall see and be satisfied; by His knowledge shall the righteous One, My Servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and He shall bear their iniquities” (Isaiah 53:4-6, 10-11 ESV).

Through faith and trust in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ—not human

compliance, achievement or effort—we are justified before God. Divine accomplishment, not human achievement, is the way of justification. Mercy is essential!

God's Mercy is Transformational

God's mercy cleanses, but then it changes the entire motivational impulse of our lives.

"The objective and substitutionary character of the death of Christ as the supreme demonstration of God's love should result in a transformation of conduct that is effected by the constraining power of that love."

—Eldon Ladd

Mercy not only provides a way for us to be made right with God and before God (justification), mercy is what motivates and moves us forward in the Christian life. It is the reality of this mercy and its effect in our lives that moves us toward sanctification.

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be

conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:1-2 ESV).

Once we experience this mercy, it mobilizes our lives toward godly living.

In January 2004, I was blessed to travel Panama with Operation Christmas Child. I never saw the canal, but the Panama Canal is the hinge between North and South America—the gateway between the Caribbean and Pacific Oceans. Just as this engineering marvel connected and transformed the commercial travel routes of the shipping world, so it is that God’s mercy connects living for Christ and transforms our spiritual lives as we move and live for the glory of God.

What Romans 12:1-2 teaches is that everything God has done for us is the prelude to all He will do in and through us as we walk with Him and trust in Him. Our response to God rooted in His mercy is one that calls us to live and give all for His glory.

The whole of the Christian life is one of thanksgiving to God for His mercy. A former President of Princeton University put it this way: As a young man, I accepted Jesus Christ and the gift of eternal life, and all the rest of my life was simply a P.S. to that day, saying, "Thank you Lord for what you gave me then." Christian living is all about gratitude, and not guilt or goodness!

We process all of life differently when we interpret life through the lens of God's mercy. Who we are, what we have, where we go, and why we are here are all defined by the mercy of God.

"For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned" (Romans 12:3 ESV).

... gifted to serve, lifted to love, liberated to live, entrusted to invest, and blessed to be a blessing.

God's Mercy is Available

Why? Because Jesus is the carrier and deliverer of this mercy in all times, places and seasons of life.

“For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13 ESV).

It can be so easy to lose perspective on our daily need for God's mercy.

- **God's mercy is available when we sin.**

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your steadfast love; according to Your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!... The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise” (Psalm 51:1-2, 17 ESV).

This is how we can return to God when we have rebelled and sinned against God.

- **God's mercy is available in our struggles.**

God's mercy is available here, now and today.

"For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:15-16 ESV).

"The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. 'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in Him.' (Lamentations 3:22-24 ESV).

I'm speaking to some who are weary, weak and worn in your faith. Let me encourage you with this: "Great Is Thy Faithfulness."

- **God's mercy is available in our service.**

"Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart... But we have

this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Corinthians 4:1, 7 ESV).

- **God's mercy is available for our salvation.**

The good news of the gospel is that God provides and pays for the mercy we need through the work of Christ for us.

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us... 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, 8-9 ESV).

It is available to you, but to receive and experience this mercy, there is a necessary response:

"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:14 ESV).

In 1829, President Andrew Jackson pardoned George Wilson, a murderer sentenced to be hanged in Pennsylvania. Wilson, however, refused to accept his presidential pardon. President Jackson, insisting that a pardon was a pardon whether accepted or not, demanded that Wilson's execution be halted until the Supreme Court could decide the matter. The Court decided, much to Jackson's chagrin, that a pardon is not a pardon until it is received. <http://mentalfloss.com/article/546756/can-person-refuse-presidential-pardon>

In *United States vs. George Wilson* and speaking for the Court, Chief Justice John Marshall said, "A pardon is a paper, the value of which depends upon its acceptance by the person implicated. It is hardly to be supposed that one under sentence of death would refuse to accept a pardon, but if it is refused, it is no pardon."

Needless to say, George Wilson was hanged.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23 ESV). Accept God's gift of mercy and forgiveness today! "Lord be merciful to me a sinner"