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Mercy Triumphs Over Judgment

James 2:1-13

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“My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? 2 For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, 3 and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, *“Have a seat here, please,”* while to the one who is poor you say, *“Stand there,”* or, *“Sit at my feet,”* 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? 7 Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

8 You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* 9 But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. 11 For the one who said, *“You shall not commit adultery,”* also said, *“You shall not murder.”* Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. 13 **For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.”**

**God is merciful. Mercy is an attribute of God.** Hebrew uses several words for ‘mercy,’ of which the most frequent is *hesed*, which means loving-kindness, mercy, love, loyalty, and faithfulness.

**Psalm 103:8 says,** *“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”* Many of us did not grow up hearing about God’s character like this, rather we heard about a wrathful, vengeful, judgmental God who is just waiting to catch us in our sin.

**We all want God to be merciful to us. We don’t want God to “remember” our sins, but to remember us according to the Lord’s mercy.**

**Psalm 25:6-7,** *“Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness sake, O Lord.”*

None of us wants to be remembered for our worst mistakes or faults or for things we did long ago or when we were young and acted foolishly. We all want the Lord to see us through eyes of mercy and to remember according to God's steadfast love. If this is what we want for ourselves, then we should try to remember others this way as well.

In the Old Testament mercy/loving-kindness is associated with the covenant between God and humans. Humans must be faithful to the covenant and God binds himself to the covenant by mercy and by grace (another Hebrew word used to mean mercy). You know how you feel when you know you've done something wrong – that anxious, stomach churning sense of dread – before you have either confessed or been caught. Sin ties us up in knots.

**Mercy is freeing. God sees us through eyes of mercy, forgives us, and God's mercy is upon us every day.**

**God's mercies never come to an end, they are new every morning.**

**Lamentations 3:22-23**, *"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."* These wonderful words about the love, mercy, and faithfulness of the Lord appear in perhaps the saddest book of the Bible – Lamentations. Written to people who experienced the deaths of so many of their loved ones and friends, in a book whose pages are dripping with tears, we are reminded of the mercy of God. Why? Maybe because in the face of the worst that can happen to us in life – the death of those we love, it is at those moments when we may doubt or question God's love or faithfulness or existence. It is then more than ever we need to hear and be reassured that God's mercy is real and new every day.

What an amazing to begin each day. Each morning to ask, "Lord, open my eyes to see your mercy in my life, in my relationships, at work, at school, every where I go."

**God's greatest act of mercy is sending Jesus to the world.**

**In the New Testament God's mercy is associated with sending Jesus and saving people**

Elizabeth, when the shame of barrenness had been removed from her and she gave birth to John the Baptist in **Luke 1:58**, *"Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her."*

**Ephesians 2:4**, “*But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us<sup>5</sup> even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ<sup>6</sup>—by grace you have been saved.*”

**Titus 3:4-5**, “*But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of the righteousness that we have done, **but according to his mercy**, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.*”

**1 Peter 1:3**, “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!*

***By his great mercy** he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”*

All these scriptures affirm that God is rich in mercy and moves us from being people who are dead in our trespasses and sins and transforms us and makes us alive in Christ. We have a new birth and are baptized. We are renewed by the Holy Spirit. We have a new and living hope in the resurrected Christ. And all this is done according to God’s mercy.

God has been so merciful to us and calls us to **Be Merciful to others**

**If you want mercy for yourself, share it with everyone else.**

**The promise of divine mercy is given in The Sermon on the Mount**

**Matthew 5:7**, “*Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*”

**The encouragement of human mercy is stated in**

**Luke 6:36**, “*Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*”

The merciful are blessed and we are told to be merciful.

**God desires us to be merciful in our relationships and interactions**

In the Call of Matthew in Matthew 9:9-13, Jesus went to eat at Matthew’s house with tax collectors and sinners. When he was criticized for doing so he replied,

*“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13 **Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’** For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”* (see **Hosea 6:6**, “*For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.*”)

Only God is in a position to look down on anyone. Jesus reminds us in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:45) that God “*makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.*” God sent the Son because God so loved the WORLD. Jesus did not play favorites. In Matthew 22:16, the followers of those who opposed Jesus (the Pharisees and the Herodians) described Jesus’

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a Other ancient authorities read *in Christ*

attitude toward people this way, *“Teacher, we know that you are sincere and teach the way of God in accordance with the truth, **and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality.**”* They may not have believed what they said, but what they said was true. Jesus was always encouraging people to act mercifully toward others.

**The most famous Biblical example of mercy: The Good Samaritan** in Luke 10:25-37. “Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 26 He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” 27 He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” 28 And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

You know the rest of the story. The Samaritan went above and beyond what was expected in being merciful to the man. Then Jesus asked the lawyer, <sup>36</sup>Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” <sup>37</sup> He said, **“The one (he couldn’t even bring himself to say “Samaritan”) who showed him mercy.”** Jesus said to him, **“Go and do likewise.”**

**Mercy is compassion and a deeply felt love for a fellow human being, especially for those who are suffering.** So many people are hurting in so many ways, you can look around you and you don’t notice the pain people are carrying because it is inside – it isn’t obvious like a broken arm in a sling.

**Jesus repeatedly shows mercy to the needy whose one request is usually, “Lord, have mercy on me.”**

**In Luke 17:11-19** Ten Lepers are Cleansed and a Samaritan is the one who returns to give thanks.

**In Luke 18:38** Jesus gives sight to a blind man who shouted, *“Jesus, Son of David, **have mercy on me!**”* <sup>39</sup> *Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, “Son of David, **have mercy on me!**”*

**The Example of Paul – God showed him mercy rather than judgment.** If anyone deserved judgment it was Paul who approved of those who stoned Stephen to death (see Acts 8:1-3). Paul was a blasphemer and a persecutor of the church and then God’s mercy broke through his pride on the road to Damascus.

**In 1 Timothy 1:12-17 Paul wrote about his experience with God's mercy,** concluding, *"But for that very reason I received **mercy**, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life."*

The Lord used Paul as the greatest evangelist, missionary, and church planter the church has ever known because he went every where he could engaging people in conversation and striking up relationships to tell others about God's mercy in Christ. When I went to the Red Sox game Monday night, my dad and I walked past the same guy who has been standing outside Fenway Park for years with a sandwich board, flipping out tracts like parking tickets. He looks like a scarecrow in a field of fans, he doesn't smile, I have never seen him initiate a conversation, even when I have said something to him, he doesn't respond, I have never seen anyone talk to him. They simply ignore him and walk around him like they would around a lamp post. I am sure he is sincere, but I question how effective this kind of witness is in sharing the mercy of God. I think there are lots of people who would welcome hearing about the mercy of God that is extended to us all in Jesus. The vessel of mercy is perhaps the best container for conveying the good news about God's love for us in Jesus. The greatest witness for the church has been acts of mercy like starting hospitals, schools, and helping people in practical ways. Mercy benefits both those who extend it and receive it.

Portia's Speech from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, speaks about the quality of mercy.

The quality of mercy is not strained.

It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven,

Upon the place beneath.

It is twice blessed.

It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

It is mightiest in the mightiest,

It becomes the throned monarch better than his crown.

His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,

An attribute to awe and majesty.

Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings.

But mercy is above this sceptred sway,

It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,

It is an attribute to God himself.

And earthly power dost thou become likest God's,  
Where mercy seasons justice.  
Therefore Jew,  
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,  
That in the course of justice we all must see salvation,  
We all do pray for mercy  
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render the deeds of mercy.

In April of 1986, two gray-haired men greeted each other warmly in Tokyo's International Airport. Both men had tears in their eyes. One man was an American named Ponich; the other was a Japanese named Ishibashi. The last time the two men met was more than forty years before, as enemies, in a cave in Okinawa. At that time, the American, then Sergeant Ponich, was holding a five-year-old Japanese boy in his arms. The child had been shot through both legs. Ishibashi was one of two Japanese snipers hiding in a dark corner of the same cave.

Suddenly, Ishibashi and his comrade leaped from their hiding place, aimed their rifles at Ponich, and prepared to fire point blank. There wasn't a thing Ponich could do. He simply put the five-year-old on the ground, took out his canteen, and began to wash the child's wounds. If he had to die, he thought, what better way to die than performing an act of mercy. The two snipers watched in amazement. Then, slowly, they lowered their rifles. Minutes later, Ponich did something Ishibashi never forgot. He took the child in his arms, stood up, bowed in gratitude to the two Japanese, and took the child to an American field hospital.

The two men met because in 1985, Ponich wrote a letter to a Tokyo newspaper thanking the Japanese people for the two Japanese soldiers who had spared his life forty years before in that cave in Okinawa. Ishibashi saw the letter and contacted the newspaper that set up the meeting. The meeting was long and affectionate. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

**We give thanks today because God is merciful.**

**God sees us through eyes of mercy, forgives us, and God's mercy is upon us every day.**

**If you want mercy for yourself, share it with everyone else.**

**Be Merciful to others**

**Mercy is compassion and a deeply felt love for a fellow human being, especially for those who are suffering. So many people are hurting in so many ways today and we can be the vessels of God's soothing mercy.**

**Two final scriptures about God's mercy**

**Hebrews 8:12**, *"For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."*

Psalm 103:8-13

8 The Lord is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

9 He will not always accuse,  
nor will he keep his anger forever.

10 He does not deal with us according to our sins,  
nor repay us according to our iniquities.

11 For as the heavens are high above the earth,  
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

12 as far as the east is from the west,  
so far he removes our transgressions from us.

13 As a father has compassion for his children,  
so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.