

Mercy Triumphs!
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We're in a sermon series called Relationships: A Mess Worth Making. We've seen how relationships without grace live without God's blessing. We used the word curse to see the characteristics of graceless relationships. They are:

- C Controlling
- U Unforgiving
- R Rejecting
- S Shaming
- E Ego-driven

On the other hand, Grace-based relationships:

- G Give
- R Release forgiveness
- A Accept others where they are
- C Come close to each other
- E Empower one another

So many people mistakenly believe that if a marriage is from God – the couple will just automatically get along with no problems. There's a TV show called Married at First Sight where experts pair couples together and the couple never meets until they are at the altar on their wedding day.

It's mind-boggling that people do this – but thousands try to get on the show. Some of them just want to be on TV – but many of them know that they've tried to find the right person, but relationships are messy. So, they've given up trying and now they want the experts to do the work for them.

One guy was having a hard time after he got married because he thought if the experts paired him with someone – the marriage should work without any effort. Wrong! Even if God puts you with someone – there is always work to do.

All relationships require a lot of grace and a lot of mercy. So, today I'm preaching on forgiveness and the title of my message is Mercy Triumphs!

Unforgiveness is one of the biggest tools of Satan to hold Christians back from the abundant life God has for them and to tear relationships apart. Many relationships have fallen apart due to unforgiveness.

And if you see a marriage that has worked for a long time, believe me – there's been a lot of work and a lot of forgiveness going on!

I want you to understand that there is supernatural power in forgiveness and there is supernatural power in unforgiveness.

Forgiveness releases supernatural power in your life. Power to set you free. That power is divine. It is of God.

But unforgiveness also releases supernatural power in your life. Power to bind you up. That power is demonic. It is of Satan. So you release supernatural power in your life either way.

This is serious! Jesus defeated Satan on our behalf. Jesus died so we could experience forgiveness - but if we do not forgive others, it gives Satan an open door into our lives. In 2 Corinthians 2:10-11, the apostle Paul said:

Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Unforgiveness is a device of Satan – it’s one of his tools – one of his schemes – one of his strategies to tear our relationships apart. And if we choose not to forgive – we give Satan an ADVANTAGE over us!

Life is hard enough as it is.

I don’t want to live it with my enemy having an advantage over me.

I don’t want to live it with an open door to the enemy.

I want the power of God in my life and that means I must do things God’s way. That includes forgiveness.

Now I’m speaking to everyone today. We’ve all been wronged. We’ve all been hurt. We’ve all been called names.

We’ve all been played, betrayed, delayed or unpaid.

We’ve all been cheated, mistreated or defeated.

We’ve all been rejected, neglected, disconnected or disrespected.

That’s why all of us need to learn to forgive.

If we don’t forgive our family, Satan has an open door into our homes.

If we don’t forgive our co-workers, Satan has an open door at our work.

If we don’t forgive each other, Satan has an open door into our church.

And here’s the big one - If we don’t forgive, we will not be forgiven!

When we pray the Lord’s Prayer we pray, “forgive us our trespasses (sins, debts) AS we forgive those who trespass against us.”

God is saying that we will be forgiven by Him based on the way we forgive others. We will be forgiven AS – just like – in the same way – to the same degree – that we forgive others.

If we forgive a little, we will be forgiven a little.
 If we forgive a lot, we will be forgiven a lot.
 If we forgive completely, we will be forgiven completely.
 If we don't forgive at all, we will not be forgiven by God at all.

You might have a hard time with that, but Jesus said in Matthew 6:14

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Jesus said in Mark 11:25

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

Do you get the point? If we do not forgive those who wrong us, God will not forgive us. This is serious. You can't go through life holding grudges, withholding forgiveness and getting even with those who've wronged you.

In Matthew 18:21-35 Jesus showed the results of unforgiveness:

Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven."

Jesus then told the story of a man who was over his head in debt and was about to be thrown in prison by his king. He begged for mercy and was forgiven. That same man turned around and found a man who owed him a few bucks. The man who owed him begged for mercy, but he was refused and thrown into prison. When the king heard about this, he was very angry.

Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

Then comes one of the scariest verses in the Bible:

This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.

God is saying this story is about us.
 He forgave the debts that we had accumulated through our sin.
 We were all spiritually bankrupt and unable to pay.
 We were all at God's mercy and He forgave us.

Yet we sometimes deal with people according to their sin rather than according to mercy. We sometimes punish people to make them pay rather than show them mercy. But God is saying:

Since I forgave you, you must forgive others.
 Since I released your debt, you must release others.
 Since I set you free, you must set others free.

Matthew 10:8 says:

Freely you have received, freely give!

And if we withhold forgiveness, it gives an open door to the enemy – and it impacts our whole family. Unforgiveness not only puts us in a prison – but also our families. Matthew 18:25 says:

Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

Unforgiveness puts us and our families in bondage. And we will never be free until we forgive! Some people don't forgive because they misunderstand forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not-

- Saying that what the person did was right, but that we will not hold it against them anymore.
- Treating a wrong as if it didn't matter or denying that you've been hurt. In fact, we can only forgive those who hurt us.
- "Forgetting it," as if we strike a delete key and our brains go blank.
- Canceling the consequences for destructive behavior. There is still a place for boundaries and for justice.
- Given because the offender deserves it. Christ forgave his executioners despite their lack of repentance or deserving.
- Trust. A wife who forgives her husband for abuse shouldn't automatically be expected to return to him. Forgiveness is given, but trust is earned. Reconciliation requires repentance and real change before a truly loving relationship is possible. So, you can truly forgive someone and not stay in a close relationship with them.

Forgiveness is not excusing wrong doing or saying we must continually submit to abuse, but forgiveness means we will not hold it against them anymore.

We will leave vengeance to the Lord.

Forgiveness means to erase, to wipe the slate clean, to release from a debt, to cancel punishment, to give up resentment and revenge.

In other words, forgiveness means we do not hold anything against others.

Forgiveness is the highest expression of love.

Forgiveness is giving up my right to hurt you for hurting me.

Forgiveness is giving up getting back at you for what you did to me.

Forgiveness is giving up the right to make you pay for what you did to me.

Forgiveness is choosing mercy over judgment!

I know it's hard to do, but choosing to not forgive will make life harder!

I know it's costly, but choosing not to be merciful will cost you more!

Matthew 5:7 says: *Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.*

We receive mercy when we give mercy. We don't receive mercy when we withhold mercy.

James 2:13 says: *Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.*

Thank God that verse doesn't stop there. I'm preaching today on the rest of that verse: *Mercy triumphs over judgment!* Mercy is greater than judgment.

What exactly is mercy? It's kind of like grace. Grace is God's unmerited, unearned favor. Salvation and every good thing we have is because of God's grace. Grace is receiving something we don't deserve.

Mercy is not receiving what we do deserve. What do we deserve? The wages of sin is death and we are all sinners. What we deserve is to burn in hell.

But God in His mercy does not give us what we deserve. Lamentations 3:22-23 says:

Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.

God's mercies are new every morning because we need them every morning.

I always tell people, "Don't ask God for what you deserve. Ask for mercy."

You see when we go to God in prayer, we really only go for two things. I know we may have a million different needs, but Hebrews 4:16 says:

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Basically, we need two things from God: grace to give us things we don't deserve and mercy to not give us what we do deserve. You go to God for one or the other. You ask Him for grace or mercy.

Mercy includes compassion, kindness, and forgiveness. It also means forbearance and leniency shown to an offender.

For instance, if you are on trial for something and you are found guilty and it is time for sentencing – would you ask the judge for what you deserve or would you ask him for mercy? Receiving mercy would mean, “Don't throw the book at me; don't give me the maximum sentence; go easy on me.” That is called throwing yourself on the mercy of the court.

What do we want from God? Judgment or mercy? Mercy! When we come to Jesus, He gives us mercy and He expects us to do the same with others. Micah 6:8 tells us:

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

We all love mercy when WE need it, but do we love it so much when others need mercy from us?

Everyone thinks forgiveness is a great idea until they have to forgive someone else.

We tend to want forgiveness for ourselves while withholding it from others. We tend to want mercy for ourselves, but justice for everyone else!

We love mercy when we have done wrong, but do we love mercy when others have wronged us?

We love mercy when we need forgiveness, but do we love mercy when we need to forgive?

God wants us to love mercy for others, not just for ourselves. James 5:11 says: *The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.*

If we are being conformed to His image, then we should be full of compassion and mercy also.

We all have people in our lives who have sinned against us. In the natural – in our flesh – we want to stay angry with them. We want to make them pay. What we fail to realize is that it's kindness that leads to repentance, or change – not judgment. Romans 2:4 says:

Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

Mercy triumphs over judgment. Mercy leads to repentance.

One of the greatest examples of mercy triumphing over judgment is in the story *Les Miserables*. In this story a thief named Jean Valjean spends almost 20 years in prison. He comes out as a hardened convict. Yet he later becomes a productive citizen who lives to help others.

What changed him? An act of mercy. He went to a church to get help and the priest took him in and fed him. Jean repaid that kindness by beating the priest and stealing his silver. The police caught Jean and brought him to the priest.

But rather than testifying against Jean, the priest showed him grace and mercy. He showed mercy by not having Jean thrown in jail – which he deserved. He showed grace by giving Jean even more silver – which he did not deserve!

This event changed Jean Valjean forever!
That's because mercy triumphs over judgment.
Mercy leads to repentance.
Mercy gives second chances.

Another great example of mercy triumphing over judgment is found in John 8:2-11. Some Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman caught in the act of adultery and asked Jesus if she should be stoned like the law commanded.

Jesus said, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

These people wanted to stone a sinner. But Jesus confounded them by saying, "Go ahead and stone her... but, only those who have never sinned can stone her."

Of course, that left no one to stone her. Jesus was the only one in the story who was qualified to stone the woman because He was the only one without sin. But Jesus gave her what she did not deserve: mercy – forgiveness – another chance. Mercy triumphed over judgment.

And His mercy can do the same for you. We've all been caught in sin and need God's mercy. No matter how deep your sin, no matter how hopeless things seem. He has tender mercies that will bring you through.

I know your needs today: grace and mercy.
I know what others need from you: grace and mercy.

No – they don't deserve it. That's why it's called grace and mercy.

Some of you have had terrible wrongs done to you.

Someone may have betrayed you – hurt you – cheated on you – abandoned you – divorced you – abused you – ignored you – rejected you – lied to you.

Those things hurt.

And you've got a choice today. You can choose to not forgive. You can hang on to the offense. But if you do, you will be choosing to stay in pain.

You will be choosing to give the power to the person who hurt you.

You will also give the advantage to Satan.

You will be choosing for unforgiveness to triumph over you!

Or – you can choose to forgive and release the supernatural power of God in your life. Forgiveness does not change the past, but it will change the future and it will change you! If you can't forgive, be willing to be made willing. Because mercy always triumphs over judgment!

You can keep throwing rocks trying to make someone else pay!

But I encourage you to show mercy that triumphs over judgment!

I encourage you today to put down your rocks!

Quit throwing stones and start showing mercy!

Give up your anger and hold on to love!

Give up your judgment and hold on to grace!

Choose to forgive and let mercy triumph in your life and in your family and in your relationships!

Relationships are messy, but they can be healed in Jesus' name!