

New Mercies
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GFC – 3-24-19

We're in a sermon series called All Things New. Today I'm preaching a message entitled New Mercies. My text is Lamentation 3:19-26 – but before I read it I want to give you some historical background.

When the nation of Israel was entering the Promised Land, God told them that if they followed Him – they would be blessed, but if they disobeyed Him – they would be cursed. Israel went through cycles of obedience and blessing – followed by disobedience and losing the blessing. Then they would repent, and the cycle would repeat.

Eventually God spoke to them through the prophet Jeremiah. He said that if they did not repent of their disobedience – He would send an army to destroy their nation and the people would be taken captive.

They did not repent of their sin after repeated warnings, so the army of Babylon invaded Israel and systematically defeated every city until only Jerusalem was left. Jerusalem was under siege from 588 to 586 BC when the walls were breached, and the Babylonian army entered the city. They burned the temple, the king's palace, and all the other major buildings in the city; and they tore down the walls of the city which provided her protection. When the Babylonians finally finished their destruction and departed with everything of value and thousands of prisoners, they left a jumbled heap of smoldering rubble.

The prophet Jeremiah witnessed this destruction. With all these events stamped vividly on his mind Jeremiah sat down to compose his series of laments – which we call the book of Lamentations. The word lamentation means to cry and to grieve. In writing this book, Jeremiah expressed his sorrow at the destruction of the Holy City and the beautiful temple of the Lord. He also prays to the Lord for assistance and deliverance, even though he knew that the sins of the people were to blame.

I'm sure it looked like Jeremiah's forty years of faithful ministry were wasted because the people did not listen to his repeated warnings. Jeremiah had warned them that if they persisted in rebelling, there would be dire consequences. But they continued in their rebellion against God, knowing full well what the consequences would be.

This story shows us that sin results in death and destruction and being taken captive by the enemy. We should not be surprised by this! God warns us in Galatians 6:7-8

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one

who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Always remember there are always consequences for sin! God forgives us when we repent, but being forgiven for sin does not mean there are no consequences for your sin!

Think of it this way – suppose you’re convicted of committing a murder. Can you be forgiven by God for that? Of course! But guess what – you’re still going to prison. Even though you are forgiven by God – there are still consequences!

I am very concerned about some of the popular teachings going around these days that are teaching out-of-balance grace. They teach that once you are saved, you no longer need to confess sin or repent. They say that the Holy Spirit never convicts you of your sins or points out your faults – so preachers should never talk about repentance or consequences of sin for believers.

Really? I want to ask them if they’ve ever read the book of Revelation. In chapters 2 and 3 – Jesus Christ Himself speaks to seven churches. So, He is speaking to born-again believers! And do you know what He says to five of those churches? REPENT! And He points out specific sins and tells them there will be consequences if they don’t repent.

We see that truth all through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. We see it when Jeremiah warned God’s people of the consequences of sin and we see it today when God warns us through His word. We must heed God’s warning because the things that take us captive don’t usually announce they are here to enslave us. Our enemy is much more subtle than that!

The things that addict us either give us great pleasure or numb our pain – for a while. Hebrews 11:25 calls this: *...the passing pleasures of sin*. In other words, sin is enjoyable – for a while. But ultimately it will enslave you, hurt you and can even kill you.

Sin promises pleasure, but delivers pain.
 Sin promises happiness, but delivers sadness.
 Sin promises a high, but delivers depression.
 Sin promises freedom, but delivers addiction.
 Sin promises life, but delivers death.

Sin will take you farther than you want to go and teach you things you need not know.

Sin will keep you longer than you want to stay and cost you more than you want to pay.

Sin will take you places you wish you could leave and cause you pain you cannot believe.

Sin will start some things you wish would quit and give you memories you want to forget.

That's what happened to Jerusalem, which was destroyed because of the people's sin. In Lamentations, Jeremiah grieves over the death and destruction that occurred in Jerusalem. Then, in Lamentation 3:19-25 he looks over the smoldering ruins of Jerusalem and says:

O Lord remember my affliction and my misery, my wandering and my outcast state. The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss. Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in Him!" The Lord is good to those who depend on Him, to those who seek Him.

What do you tell yourself whenever everything around you falls apart?

When all you see is death and destruction?

When you are looking at the smoldering ruins of your life?

Do you blame God or are you able to remind yourself: *The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.*

Jeremiah shows us that the people of God experienced the consequences of their own sin, but God had not abandoned His people. No matter what they did, He was still faithful and merciful and forgiving.

Notice that God's mercies are new every morning. Why is that? Because we need them every morning!

And notice the Lord's mercies is a plural number.

That speaks of the abundance and variety of God's mercies.

It is because of the new mercies of God that we are not consumed for our sin.

It is because of the new mercies of God that we are forgiven when we sin.

It is because of the new mercies of God that we are saved and have eternal life.

God doesn't save us because we are so good or worthy – He saves us because of His mercy! Ephesians 2:1-6 says:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.

We were dead in our sins – but because of God’s new mercies – we’ve been made alive in the spirit! We were deserving of the wrath of God – but because of God’s new mercies – we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ! Thank God for that!

So, when we see the destruction we have brought into our own lives – we should do like Jeremiah and not just focus on the destruction – but we must throw ourselves on the new mercies of God! 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. It goes on to say:

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. But 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 when we place our faith in Jesus and receive His forgiveness and life. I always tell people, “Don’t ask God for what you deserve. Ask for mercy.” Never confuse God’s patience and mercy with His justice. 2 Peter 3:8 says:

The Lord is not slow in keeping His word, as He seems to some, but He is waiting in mercy for you, not desiring the destruction of any, but that all may be turned from their evil ways.

So, cry out to God for mercy now because one day there will be judgment. 2 Peter 3:10 says:

But when the Day of God's Judgment does come, it will be unannounced, like a thief in the night.

R. C. Sproul tells the story of when he was a college professor. At the start of the semester, he told the class there would be 3 papers due. The penalty for a late paper was a zero grade. When the first paper was due, 10 students did not turn one in. Sproul asked them, "Where are your papers?" They said, "We have had so much work, and we are having such a hard time adjusting to college. Please give us an extension." "Okay," said Dr. Sproul, "but the next time your papers are late, you will receive a zero grade. Agreed?" "Yes," they all replied.

When the next paper was due, 25 students did not turn one in. Sproul asked them, "Where are your papers?" They said, "We had mid-terms, and we just did not have time to write the papers. Please give us an extension." "Okay," said Dr. Sproul, "but this is your final warning. The next time your papers are late, you will receive a zero grade. Understand?" "Yes," they all replied.

When the next paper was due, about 50 students did not turn one in. Sproul asked the 50 students whose papers were late, "Where are your papers?" They said, "Oh, Professor Sproul, don't sweat it! Don't worry about it! We'll get the paper to you in a day or two!" "Each of you will get a one letter grade reduction!" said Dr. Sproul. The students were enraged and shouted, "That's not fair!" "Oh, you want me to be fair!" said Sproul, "I will be fair. I said that if your papers were not on my desk by noon today, you would receive a zero grade. Since they are not here, I will be fair and just, and you will receive a zero grade."

What Sproul was illustrating is that since he set the rules, he had the prerogative to extend mercy when he wanted to extend mercy. He did so the first two times the papers were late. But then the students presumed upon Sproul's mercy. They thought that there would be no penalties for their failure to perform according to the instructions. So, when they asked for justice by saying "That's not fair!", they received the full penalty for their failure to perform. They should have never presumed on the professor's mercy and when caught in their failure, they should have asked for mercy, not justice.

It's the same way with us and God. We should never think we can sin without consequences, but we should always 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! Through Jesus, He forgave the debts that we had accrued through our sin. We were all spiritually bankrupt and unable to pay.

We were all at God's mercy and He forgave us.
 Forgiveness means to release from a debt and to cancel punishment.
 Forgiveness is the highest expression of love.
 Forgiveness is choosing mercy over judgment!

James 5:11 says *The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.*

What we sometimes fail to realize is that it's God'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. Mercy gives second chances. I want to finish by giving you a couple of biblical examples of this. In my Bible reading this week I read about when King David disobeyed God. 2 Samuel 24:10-14 says:

David was conscience-stricken and he said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O Lord, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing."

Before David got up the next morning, the word of the Lord had come to Gad the prophet, David's seer: "Go and tell David, 'This is what the Lord says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for Me to carry out against you.'"

So Gad went to David and said to him, "Shall there come upon you three years of famine in your land? Or three months of fleeing from your enemies while they pursue you? Or three days of plague in your land? Now then, think it over and decide how I should answer the one who sent me."

Which would you choose? There are no easy options there. But it really wasn't a difficult decision for David.

David said to Gad, "I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for His mercies are many and great; but let me not fall into the hands of man."

David made the right choice by throwing himself on the mercies of God! He understood that mercy rejoices over judgment! There were consequences for David's sin, but God showed him mercy.

A great example of mercy triumphing over judgment is found in John 8. 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 new mercies that will bring you through.

I know your needs to 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 have a choice today. You can choose to not forgive. 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 new mercies triumph in your life!