

**Mercy Triumphs!**  
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**GFC – 7-23-23**

We are continuing our Bible study on the book of James called Wisdom for Everyday Life. Last week I preached on Wisdom about the Law of God. Our text was James 2:10-11

*For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.*

You can keep the whole law except for one commandment and you are still a lawbreaker.

This week, someone asked a great question that I will answer briefly. The question was, "Does this mean that all sin is equal in the eyes of God?" The answer is yes and no. Yes, all sin is equal in that any sin you commit causes you to be a lawbreaker. The petty thief is a law breaker just like the murderer. But no, all sin is not equal to God because some sins are greater than others and there are greater consequences for committing those sins.

For example – Jesus said that if you hate someone you have murdered them in your heart. But actually murdering someone is a much greater sin.

In the Old Testament, there were levels of punishment for sin. Some sins required the sacrifice of a dove, but some required a lamb or even a bull. And some resulted in a death sentence. There were greater consequences for intentional sins versus sins that were committed in ignorance. And there were greater consequences for greater sins.

If you have issues with the phrase "greater sin," please realize that Jesus actually used that phrase when addressing Pilate in John 19:11

*You would have no power over Me at all unless it were given to you from above. So the one who handed Me over to you has the greater sin.*

Some translations say, "worse sin." So, Jesus said that some sins are worse than others. But all sins can be forgiven by the grace of God, except for the unpardonable sin. The fact that there is an unpardonable sin in the New Testament shows that there is a sin so bad that God does not forgive it.

Today I'm preaching a message entitled Mercy Triumphs!

Our text is James 2:12-13.

*Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!*

First, James tells us to speak and act in a way that is aware of the fact that we are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom. Speak and act! Words are not enough.

But what is the law of freedom or liberty? James used the same phrase in James 1:25

*The one who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what was heard, but doing it — this person will be blessed in what he does.*

That's pretty interesting to me because we usually don't think of laws giving freedom. But think about driving laws as an example. Without them, driving would be chaotic and extremely dangerous. But when the laws are obeyed, we have the freedom to drive without being in bondage to fear. Also, the law of Christ is not a burden. 1 John 5:2-3 says:

*By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.*

The Greek word for burdensome means heavy, severe, or oppressive. Jesus used this word in Matthew 23:4 when He rebuked the Pharisees.

*They crush people with impossible religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden.*

But God does not burden us down with an unreachable, unattainable list of laws. His commands are not burdensome because they are things that a good God who loves us says are best for us.

If you are a parent, think about why you want your children to obey you. Not because you are a tyrant who loves ruling over little people. But because you love them and you want what's best for them. And you know the obedience that requires. It's the same way with our Father God. He treats us as sons and daughters, not as slaves. He knows that obeying Him will result in freedom in our lives.

The law of freedom is not lax toward sin, but James says we will be judged by the royal law of love and mercy. And we need to know that fact and we need to know that we will be judged by the law of Christ at the judgment seat of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:10-11 says:

*We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.*

We all die – and after that we will face God’s judgment. That fact should impact the way we live today.

- Way too many Christians have a nonchalant view of this or they don’t think about it at all.
- Way too many Christians know nothing about the fear of the Lord.
- Way too many Christians think that because they are saved and going to heaven that it doesn’t matter how they live.
- Way too many Christians fail to realize they will give an account someday for how they live their lives.

That’s why James said in 2:12-13.

*Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!*

Now remember – the context of this chapter is discrimination. When we discriminate we are showing judgment without mercy. And James says there is a price to pay for that. If you don’t show mercy, you won’t receive mercy. You reap what you sow.

As those who will be judged by the law of liberty, we should always show mercy to others by refraining from discrimination. The same mercy we show will be extended to us on the day of judgment, and that mercy triumphs over judgment. James is reminding us of a principle of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:1-2.

*Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the standard you use, will be the standard by which you are judged.*

Jesus also said in Matthew 5:7

*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.

What exactly is mercy? It’s kind of like grace. Grace is God’s unmerited favor. Grace is receiving something we don’t deserve. For instance, salvation is a gift of grace. None of us have earned eternal life. None of us are good enough on our own, but by grace God has saved us. Every good thing we have is by 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 2 things. I know we may have a million unique 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 2 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. The New International Dictionary describes mercy as: "Forbearance from inflicting punishment on an adversary or a lawbreaker." Forbearance is a legal term meaning: "Refraining from enforcement of a debt, right or obligation that is due."

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 for salvation, He gives us mercy – the forbearance of the penalty of our sins. We are guilty, we owe the debt, but Jesus grants us mercy - permanent forbearance. Having received forbearance, Jesus expects us to do the same with our fellow men. What do you think God wants us to give others? Judgment or mercy? 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?

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 someone else?

We can easily get into the spirit of Jonah: receiving mercy for ourselves but wanting judgment for others. We want forbearance from God, but we want those who wrong us to pay! 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. When did God first show mercy to us? When we were lost sinners. Ephesians 2:3-6 says:

*Like everyone who fulfills the lusts of the flesh, 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 because of our sins — it is only by God's grace that you have been saved.*

God showed us mercy when we were sinners and objects of wrath. He did not stay angry with us. Micah 7:18 says:

*Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the rebellion of those who remain among Your people? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.*

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 2:1-4 says:

*You have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who judge others do the very same things.*

*Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?*

*Or 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 is greater than judgment.

Mercy is more powerful than judgment. Mercy leads to repentance.

Mercy gives life. Mercy gives second chances.

Here's a couple of biblical examples of mercy:

How about Joseph? His brothers sold him into slavery and told their father he was dead. He spent years in prison until God got him out and placed him in a position of power. Joseph had the power to have his brothers killed. But what did he do? He showed mercy and mercy triumphed.

How about the prodigal son? When he returned home, he deserved nothing. He had already blown his inheritance. Yet the father cleaned him up, threw a party and gave him gifts. He showed mercy and mercy triumphed. Too many of us are like the older brother who resent it when God blesses someone we think deserves judgment. But mercy triumphs over judgment.

One of the greatest examples 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.

Now let me ask you, according to the law, did this woman deserve to die? Yes. But Jesus gave her what she did not deserve: mercy. Mercy triumphed over judgment. I believe she went away a changed woman for life.

Jesus did not deny God's law, but he made the point that no human being is qualified to condemn someone else because we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Now, was Jesus condoning adultery? NO. He told her to go and sin no more. Mercy does not mean we overlook sin and let people get away with everything. There's a time for justice and there's a time for mercy. I believe when it's time for mercy, it gives the freedom and the power to go and sin no more.

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 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.  
That's why mercy triumphs over judgment!

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 show mercy and forgive.

When we pray the Lord's Prayer we pray, *Forgive us our debts, as we forgive (let go of the debts, and give up resentment against) our debtors.*

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.

Forgiveness is giving up my right to hurt you for hurting 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!

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 show mercy and 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!