
Made in His Image: Mercy

“The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made”

Key Text:

Ex. 34: ⁶“The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

Hos. 6: ⁴What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away. ⁵Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light. ⁶For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Mt. 9: ⁹As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him. ¹⁰And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” ¹²But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Lk. 18: ⁹He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The 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. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³But 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!’ ¹⁴I 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.”

1 Pt. 2: ⁹But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

- 1) It can be difficult to fully describe God. Exodus 34:6-7, which is referenced and re-quoted at least 20 more times in Scripture, gives us a snapshot of Yahweh describing himself. What five characteristics are attributed to Yahweh in 34:6? Why does Yahweh describe who he is to Moses? What has happened in the context of this proclamation? What tension do you see between justice and mercy?
- 2) Mercy can be described as the compassionate disposition to forgive someone or to offer aid, assistance, or help to someone in need (*Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*). In Hebrew, mercy is translated *rakham*. This word is related and has its roots with the Hebrew word *rekhem*, which is translated "womb". Consider the love of a mother for her unborn child or infant. How does this help us understand the mercy or compassion of God (cf. Isa. 49:14-15)? How does Jesus express this motherly compassion (cf. Mt. 23:37)?

- 3) *Rakbum* isn't just an emotional word, rather it also involves action. This word is used to describe God's actions motivated by his emotions, like when he hears the cries of the Israelites in Egyptian bondage (Ex. 2:23-25, 3:7-10). In his ministry, Jesus is moved by this same compassion to help those who need help: healing of the blind (Mt. 9:27-31; 20:29-34), lepers (Mk. 1:41, Lk. 17:11-19), widow's son in Nain (Lk. 7:13).

Describe the context when Jesus says, "Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mt. 9:13). What is he quoting? What is going on in the context of the original quote? How is this applied to his current situation? What is the application of this teaching to us today?

- 4) The ultimate expression of compassion was when Jesus entered into humanity's suffering and death itself, making a way for the justice and mercy of God to be displayed at the cross. How was mercy displayed in Jesus' death (cf. Eph. 2:4-5, 1 Pt. 1:3)? How about justice (cf. 1 Jn. 2:1-2, Gal. 3:13-14)?
- 5) What compels Jesus to teach the parable in Lk. 18:9-14? Describe the prayer of the first man. How about the second? What is the result of each of these prayers? Why? What does this say about the power of the mercy of God?
- 6) According to 1 Pt. 2:9-10, what are five identifiers that belong to those who are image bearers of God?
- 7) Because of God's mercy, Paul states that we must offer our bodies as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1-2). How should the knowledge that God is merciful and how he has shown us mercy change the way I live (cf. Mt. 18:21-22, Lk. 6:32-36)?