

What is mercy? It is a word that we use often in the church, but what is it? I have heard it, and often said it myself, described as “**Not receiving what you justly deserve.**” To an extent, that is correct, but mercy is actually much deeper than that. You see, we typically view mercy as judicial. And though it is judicial in many senses, it is also broader than this. Mercy is the compassionate act of a powerful person to change the state or condition of a powerless person. **It is the strong one altering the condition of the weak one for the sake of the weak one’s benefit,** goodness, or, we could say, life. It is this mercy that is implored in Luke 17 and 18 when the ten lepers cry out, “**Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!**” and the blind man in similar fashion, “**Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!**” Are these suffering men crying out that Jesus would not give them what they deserve? No, rather they are asking for the powerful one to change their state because they are powerless to do so. And Jesus showed mercy as **the lepers’** state of leprosy was altered to one the state of cleanliness and health. The state of the blind man was altered to the state of sight. From one condition of brokenness and abject helplessness to the state of the better condition, the state of life.

So, powerlessness is the key condition of the need for mercy, and power is the key condition for the provision. It is not possible to make leprosy just go away for **most of us, but it wasn’t for Jesus.** **It is not possible to command sight** to return for **most of us, but it wasn’t for Jesus.** **The demon possessed man could not wish his turmoil away or “just believe” that it would get better.** We cannot command death to retreat, nor can we make our hearts desire virtuous things, and surely not the Virtuous One, the glorious God Himself. We are powerless to change ourselves, to alter our condition internally or externally. We are dead and powerless, as the Scripture says, but God is alive and powerful. With Him the possible things not merely become possible, but are made real.

Thus, in this passage of Ephesians we behold the greatness of God’s mercy, His *wealth* of mercy. In it, we see God pull out of the treasury of His super-abundant mercies His preeminent gem, the glorious Arkenstone which would place all who set eyes upon it in awe that it would carry us out of the floodwaters of our death, that act according His powerful love with which He loved us and would transfer us from our state of deadness to the state of absolute life with Him. This mercy is the sending of His beloved Son to rescue us by taking on our state of death and raising us up with Him to HIS state of life. Happy Incarnation Day!

Because the Son of God took on our flesh, was made incarnate as a Servant, submitted Himself to our condition of death and defeated it by His obedience when we were sons of disobedience, God raised Him up to raise us up. **We were dead and God’s mercy has raised us with Christ** to the newness of life. We were separated from God, bound in **our sins and powerless against it, and God’s mercy reconciled us to Himself at His own cost and granted us His** victory over the penalty and the power of sin. We were following the wrong master, the cruel master, the slavish master, and God, in His Son, set us free from the domain of darkness and set us in the Kingdom of His beloved Son!

He was born to alter our state of death by being swaddled in it. The shadow cast by that lowly manger was shaped by eternity and darkened by our sin. God saw our death and showed mercy. The cradle cloths of the incarnate Son of God enfold our dead hearts in the life-giving riches of the mercies of God. This is why Christmas proclaims the great mercies of God for which we, the dead who have been raised to life in Christ Jesus, rejoice. And this joy finds its first steps, as it does here in Ephesians 2, with remembering our present state in light of our former...

1. Remember That You, O Christian, Used to be in a State of Deadness
 - a. “you were being dead”
 - i. We were born into a constant state of death

- ii. It is the air which we breath, for death is a condition, a state, not merely
 - b. Death is alienation, separation spiritually, not merely physically
 - i. Alienated from God – Spiritual Separation, Wrath and Animosity
 - ii. Alienated from One Another – Social Separation, Relational Brokenness
 - iii. Alienated from Creation – Natural Separation, **Nature's Against You**
 - iv. Alienated from Yourself – Psychological Separation, View of Yourself is Broken, too
 - c. This death was caused by sin
 - i. Totality of sin, both willful and ignorant
 - ii. Christians walked according to these sins
 - 1. led by them
 - 2. moved by them
 - 3. motivated by them
2. This Deadness and Alienation Was a State of Self-Glory and Enslavement
- a. Following the course of the world
 - i. The age of this world
 - 1. Temporal period characterized by ungodliness in this world
 - a. Walking *according to* this age means that we were unconcerned with the things of God and were concerned with the values of this idolatrous age
James Boice says **that in this age**, “*sin* does not mean rebellion against God and his righteous laws, to which we are held accountable; it means ignorance of the oppression found in social structures. The way to overcome it is by social change, new laws or revolution. *Jesus* becomes not the incarnate God who died for our salvation, but rather the pattern for creative living. He is our example, not our Savior. *Salvation* is defined as liberation from oppressive and authoritative ideas or systems. *Faith* is becoming aware of this oppression and doing something about it. *Evangelism* does not mean carrying the gospel of Jesus Christ to a perishing world, but rather working **through the world’s power centers to overthrow injustice.**” (James Boice, *Two Cities, Two Loves*)
 - 2. Contrasted with the “age to come” which has a different character
 - a. Walking *in* this age (not according to) means that we are unconcerned with the idols of this age and are deeply concerned with the pleasures and purposes of God.
 - b. Right now we are in both ages at once: one ultimately (in the heavens), one temporarily (in this age), but neither one fully, so we long for heaven
 - i. See battle of Spirit/Flesh (Gal 5),
 - ii. longing for redemption (Rom 8),
 - iii. degrees of glory (2 Cor 3:18),
 - iv. partial understanding (1 Cor 13:12; 1 John 3:1-3)
 - ii. The ruler of the domain of the air (of this world, John 14:30; 12:31; 16:11; 2 Cor 4:4; 1 John 4:4; 5:19)
 - 1. the spirit at work in the sons of disobedience (see 5:6)
 - a. 2 Tim 2:24-26 – “**held captive by him to do his will**”
 - 2. “**air**” is the realm of spiritual powers, between heaven and earth
 - a. wrath comes upon those of the family of disobedience (5:6)

- b. Satan is the father of this family (John 8:43-44)
 - b. This former life consisted of living in the controlling sphere of our overdesires
 - i. This is the “how” we were held captive by Satan and lived according to this age:
 - ii. We, too, dwelt (“wander to and fro”) in the “overdesires” of our flesh
 - 1. We were “busy” trying to prove our righteousness and worth, wandering back and forth trying to achieve peace with those four spheres of alienation, but never achieving it
 - 2. We were powerless to, for we were DEAD
 - iii. Doing the overdesire of the flesh (willing self-rule and self-centered “salvation”)
 - 1. Romans 8:7-8 – “mind” set on the “flesh” (self-salvation, “I can do it”) is hostile to God and incapable of submitting to Him
 - 2. Self-Power and Self-Glory
 - a. Religious: “I convince God to accept me by my sacrifices and righteousness.”
 - b. Irreligious: “Why does anybody need to be saved?”
 - c. Both are ways of getting rid of Jesus AS SAVIOR
 - i. Religious: He shows me the way to live so that I can go to heaven.
 - ii. Irreligious: He shows me the way to live so that I can make this world a better place.
 - iii. In neither instance is Jesus the Savior, He is merely the teacher.
 - 1. We believed that we were OK without an absolute savior, because we thought we were strong enough
 - 2. We couldn’t see our abject weakness because we were DEAD!
 - iv. Doing the over-desires of our thoughts (mind, understanding)
 - 1. We did not *accidentally* oppose God, but rather it seemed right and reasonable to make God into our own image and to trust and love ourselves first (Rom 1:18ff)
3. BUT GOD Sent His Son to Give Us Life by His Death
 - a. Being wealthy in mercy
 - i. Abundance of mercy
 - ii. “Being”, our state of deadness is contrasted with God’s state of mercy
 - iii. God super-abounds with mercies like we exist in deadness
 - 1. It’s who He is towards His people
 - 2. Regenerating our cold, hardened stone, dead hearts to give them life by His sheer mercy
 - iv. He incarnated Himself into our state of death in order to change our state to the state of life!
 - b. Because God loved us with HIS kind of love
 - i. God’s love goes beyond mere concern and care to a sacrificial, ravishing, and severe love
 - ii. The greatness of one’s love correlates to the depth of the commitment to its object by the expense of its efforts to seek its flourishing
 - 1. And God committed Himself to us, by sheer grace, the Almighty infinite uncreated holy God bound Himself to dead, rebellious, haters
 - 2. He bound Himself to our flesh, to our death, to our sin, so that “He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God”
 - 3. THAT is MERCY!
 - c. God made us alive with Christ
 - i. The work is all the Father’s! These three verses are all about Him and His work

- ii. You, the dead enemies of God, were lumped together with His Son because of His love and mercy
- iii. You have been saved by grace alone! You did not earn it! You were not wiser than your brothers or stronger than your former father the Devil! God chose you and made you alive, bringing you back from the dead, when you were unable to save yourself or even want rescue, instead living your life according to your own “wisdom”

4. God’s Mercy Pours Out His Kindness for All Eternity

- a. Three aspects of this new life:
- b. He raised us up – LIFE!
 - i. Removed us from the state of death because of our sins
 - ii. We could not raise ourselves, or even see Him, until He made us alive to see
 - iii. Set free from the age of this world
 - iv. **When we acknowledge God’s grace, we know that we cannot be self-saviors, we cannot earn this kind of miraculous grace**
 - v. **It’s about Him**
- c. He seated us with Christ where He dwells – HONOR!
 - i. We have been taken out of the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of His beloved Son
 - ii. We now are a part of the family of God in Christ
 - 1. sons of disobedience to sons of honor
 - 2. children of wrath to children of mercy
 - iii. This is all due to what Jesus has done
 - 1. **As Jesus sits in heaven, so do we, because of God’s mercies**
- d. He is showing us the incredible depths of His grace from now to eternity – BELOVED!
 - i. **God’s purpose in making us alive and seating us with Christ is so that He could show just how gracious He is**
 - ii. For all eternity God plans to show How gracious He is
 - iii. **It’s about His kindness and His mercy and His love shown toward you in the past, in the present, and into the future**

Conclusion:

Merciful Incarnation Day! God has seen our dead hearts, our rebel minds, and our utter disdain for His holy glory. You and I were lost in our sin, dead in it, powerless over it, and we walked according to it just like the rest of humanity and were, by nature, children of wrath and sons of disobedience. We were enemies of God, hating Him by not even thinking of Him. Remember whence you come.

And He has showered upon us mercy upon mercy. Every breath we took was mercy. Every blink of our eyes was mercy. Every little joy was mercy. And we did not see it. Still He poured out more. And then came the DAY to which none can compare, when God opened up His treasury of mercy and sent His greatest treasure to meet our greatest need: His knowledge for our ignorance, His wisdom for our foolishness, His sight for our blindness, His life for our death, His glory for our shame. You and I *were* powerless, pitiful, petulant, perverse, and putrid in deadness of sin and our evil. And to you who have entrusted your souls to the death-taking life-giving King Jesus, God has *now* raised us up from this state of deadness, seated us with His Son in the heavenly places in the state of life, honor, and glory, so that He might reveal the depths and the greatness of this glorious treasury of His kindness towards us for all eternity. You *were* dead and shameful. In Christ Jesus You are *now* alive and beloved by God. God is extravagantly kind, and He is going to show you how kind for all of eternity. Merry Christmas, indeed.