

## Clarifying Christianity: Love Mercy

Matthew 18:21-35 || Pastor Alex Watlington || 25 October 2020

*To CARE for one another in truth and in love,  
To GROW together as followers of Jesus,  
To SERVE those God has placed in our path.  
– CG Mission Statement*

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**Icebreaker:** Share a story of forgiveness that has influenced your life.

**Worship:** Ephesians 2:1-5 (*Read aloud 3 times, reflect and listen for God's invitation to you.*)

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**Sermon Summary for Matthew 18:21-35** (*Read the passage before reading the sermon summary.*)

Why we desire justice and how we do justice are just as important as the justice we seek. Because without the heart, it ceases to be justice. We end up wounding rather than healing, because when we refuse to show mercy, we are making an active choice to embark upon revenge. In doing this, we aren't sealing the other person's fate; we're sealing our own. Yes, showing people mercy is costly; but refusing to show it costs even more. The justice that God wants is not done from an angry heart but from an overflow of mercy. We too must seek justice out of a merciful love. So, what does it take to cultivate hearts that love justice?

The Need for Mercy // In our divisive society, we have lost touch with our common need for mercy. Everyone desperately needs it; it's a part of all of our stories. We need to see this in ourselves... but we must accept it about others – regardless of our feelings toward them. This should be the first thing we assume about anyone we encounter, opening ourselves to the compassion this can foster.

The Problem in Mercy // There is a problem in mercy: it's slippery. When we are given it, our hearts are prone to forget it. And so we mismanage it. Why? Our hearts are bent toward self-righteousness – to become inflated by (and proud of) our own accomplishments, establishments, and perspectives. Justice becomes impossible, and injustice is perpetuated. When this happens, we lose our capacity for mercy and become out of touch with:

Ourselves // We have an acute ability to forget where we ourselves once stood. Because our hearts are drawn to mercy... but only for ourselves. We can be incredibly charitable personally, yet abruptly cruel with our neighbors – willing to explain or excuse our own need for mercy but insist there shouldn't be (*couldn't possibly be*) mercy for others, especially those we disagree with or disapprove of.

Our Neighbors // How can we withhold mercy when we have received the very same thing? Because we don't think we've received mercy; we think it is deserved. And so others should work to earn it, just as we have. And when we stand on our beliefs, our righteousness, or deservedness... those around (or more accurately: below) us cease to be neighbors in need of this common mercy. They become enemies. We can become so out of touch that even in our pursuit of the best things, we treat them like the worst things.

God (v35) // If we refuse mercy to others, Jesus says our Father will treat us the same (James 2:13). This isn't negating the mercy God offers; it's revealing that mercy was never received unconditionally; we're still basing our relationship with God on the basis of our works. We continue to believe we must earn God's love, refusing His simple requirement of receiving His mercy without condition.

The Power of Mercy // What will help us to hold on to mercy, rather than it slipping from our hands? We need to look deeply into the heart of God's mercy. Jesus longs for us to see His immeasurable mercy – how wholly God longs to extend it to us. Whatever is going on in our lives, God's heart aches for the pain we feel (Heb 5:2). Even in the depths of our sin, Christ is calm, tender and soothing. God is a rescuer; His mercy is aggressive. He longs to be with us, even when no one else would show up. And on the cross, Jesus showed that our forgiveness is complete.

The Practice of Mercy is absorbing the payment that others should pay – even if it would be just for them to. Mercy doesn't dismiss justice; it rearranges who pays for it. Whenever we do this, it puts us back in touch with ourselves, with our neighbors, and with God. We rediscover who we are meant to be: people in need of mercy. How then do we keep other people "people"? We should never give up on anybody; we should never get beyond a willingness to forgive. Adopting this posture allows us to learn the mercy of God, instead of continuing to try to earn it. This may sound impossible, but this is the wonder of the Gospel and the mercy of God. By trying, we will come to worship what we fail to live up to. And ultimately, the continual practice of unconditional mercy will drive us deep into the heart of God because unconditional mercy is at the heart of His heart.

**Discussion Questions** (*You will not be able to discuss all the questions. Pick the ones you like. Some are personal perspective and application questions for life-transforming discussion.*)

- Compare the actions of the two servants in this parable. How are they alike and different?
    - Why is it so easy to forget the mercy we have received?
  - Discuss the attributes and actions of the merciful master in this parable.
    - What does Jesus want us to know about giving and receiving mercy?
    - What do you need to hear most from Him about giving and receiving mercy?
  - What did it cost Jesus to give us immeasurable mercy? Were there any conditions attached?
    - What does it personally cost us to extend mercy to others?
    - What does it cost us to NOT show mercy and why?
  - In what ways does "doing justice out of a heart that loves mercy" change the way you think about justice?
    - What happens when we do justice without mercy?
  - What invitation to personal application have you received from this sermon or passage?
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**Prayer:** See CG Prayer Guide [Here](#). Use the prayer guide prompts for group, family or personal use this week.

**Engage & Experience:** How can we apply the practice of loving mercy to our political discussions during this difficult election year? There is an enormous opportunity in the coming weeks to do something distinctive and special as Christians having received God's tender mercy. Let's choose to interact with people, especially those who may differ in opinions, with an approach of showing mercy. What do you think would happen if we did this?

Sign up to give a Thanksgiving Box of Love [Here](#) and begin praying for the recipients.