

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Seeing and Delighting in Jesus through an Expository
Journey through the **Gospel of Matthew**

79- Jesus Demonstrates His Absolute
Authority- Part 17

Jesus Has the Authority to Save Sinners- Part 5

Church December 10, 2023

Matthew 9:9-13

9 As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth; and He said to him, "Follow Me!" And he got up and followed Him.

10 Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples.

11 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?"

12 But when Jesus heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.

13 But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

*To the Glory of God the Father; God the Son;
and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Two of the most *elusive* Traits that Scripture says genuine Believers should possess- is godly Mercy. And Grace is right behind it. But it's really simple: "*We should be people of Mercy and Grace because God has shown us His Mercy and Grace.*" Got it. Piece of cake.

But even though most people today have a pretty good Handle on Things like God's Wrath; Judgment; Damnation; Vengeance; and Retribution- Mercy and Grace- are, many Times, completely *misunderstood* and *misappropriated*. And that is true- even though we talk; and teach; and preach; and sing; about both Grace and Mercy MORE than just about any other Subject.

Now, there are two kinds or types of Mercy and Grace:

1. The Mercy and Grace of Humans toward other Humans

2. The Mercy and Grace of God toward Humans

The Mercy and Grace of Humans toward other Humans is what we are *supposed* to show to others; while the Mercy and Grace of God toward Humans is what is given to us from God. And many times, we are somewhat *hindered* in offering other people Mercy or Grace- mainly because in our Day- these two godly Qualities have been misunderstood as being “*Leniency*”.

We see Grace and Mercy as “letting people off the hook” and NOT holding them accountable. And yet, every single person who has ever thought of Grace and Mercy as being Leniency; and who has withheld them from others because of that- desire that God give to them these very Qualities. And that means that we need to define just what Mercy and Grace are? So, for the Purpose of this Sermon here is how I would define them:

Mercy: The Gift of God that *holds back* God’s Justice against our Sins- even though we are Guilty.

Grace: The Gift of God that *overrides* our own Rebellion and Unbelief and sovereignly *imposes* on us- what we do NOT deserve

Grace and Mercy are *usually* discussed together because they are two sides of the SAME coin. Mercy is what keeps God’s Judgment (which we deserve) from coming to us- even though we are patently guilty. And Grace actively gives to us what God desires- by sovereignly *overcoming* our own Rebellion and Unbelief.

So, for example, in the Case of Salvation- Mercy sovereignly *holds back* the Just (Righteous) Damnation of God from us; while Grace sovereignly *imposes* the Gift of “saving Faith”; as well as a Love for God Himself and for the “**Things of the Spirit of God**” (1Corinthians 2:14) onto our sinful Hearts and Minds.

Now this may sound elementary- but the ONLY people who are given Grace and Mercy from God- are the people who NEED it. And that means that the ONLY people who receive Grace and Mercy are “*Sinners*”. They are “*Transgressors*” of God’s Commandments. They have *openly* and *repeatedly* rebelled against God, and, spiritually speaking, they have shaken their fist in God’s Face- daring Him to judge them! So, every single person, who has been gifted with either Grace or Mercy are NOT “nice and good” People. People who receive Mercy and Grace from God are “bad People” and “wicked Sinners”, who *deserve* to spend all of Eternity in the Lake of Fire.

But Jesus is demonstrating here in this Passage that He will save Sinners from the awful Wrath of God that is certain to come on all the World! But that’s really the Issue. But in order for Jesus to save a Sinner- that individual MUST be given the Understanding that he is, in fact, a wicked Sinner. But unless God the

Holy Spirit sovereignly reveals that and brings that individual under Conviction- he will NEVER do that.

Now one of the Curiosities about Grace and Mercy is that God the Father NEVER gave Jesus His Grace nor His Mercy. Jesus didn't NEED God's Grace nor did He NEED His Mercy. Why? Because Jesus NEVER sinned! Jesus NEVER failed God! He NEVER transgressed a single Commandment in either Thought; Word; or Deed! In other words, Jesus NEVER had a "Bad Attitude"- not even for a millisecond! He NEVER lusted; He was NEVER was covetous; Jesus NEVER loved Money; and He NEVER loved anyone or anything the SAME or MORE than He loved His Father! So, to Jesus- God the Father ALWAYS had the Preeminence!

And that means that Jesus developed His own, personal Righteousness by and through His perfect Obedience! So, from that Perspective- Jesus *earned* His Way into Heaven! Jesus was saved "by Works"- His own *spotless* Works! Jesus actually and in reality- *earned* Heaven by what He did for Himself! So, Jesus actually did- what the Law commanded! And He was the ONLY one who could say that. So, even though God gave Moses the Law- Jesus was the only One Who actually kept it- perfectly!

But God the Father NEVER gave God the Holy Spirit His Grace nor His Mercy, either. And that is true because, like Jesus, God the Holy Spirit is fully God; and God doesn't NEED Grace nor Mercy! But God is the ONLY One for whom that is true.

So, the Beauty and Marvel of God's Grace and Mercy is that they are given to wicked, evil People- human beings, who have NOT *obeyed* God- perfectly; who have NOT *loved* God- perfectly; and who have NOT *enjoyed* God- perfectly! The people who receive Grace and Mercy are those who have loved *themselves*; and people, who have loved Sin a whole lot MORE than they have loved God- if they have loved God at all!

But here is where there is a great Divide- among those who make up the "modern Church". While we marvel at the Distribution of God's Grace and Mercy- we must come to a solemn Conclusion about them both. Because Grace and Mercy are NOT distributed *equally* among the sons of men. And even among those who *do* receive both Grace and Mercy- they do NOT receive them in equal amounts.

The Bible is crystal clear about this, dear friends, God distributes both Grace and Mercy- ACCORDING TO HIS OWN DIVINE PREROGATIVE! In other words, the Holy Bible teaches *clearly and repeatedly*, that God does NOT give His Grace and Mercy to *everyone*! For example, God the Holy Spirit moved on the Apostle Paul to say this in **Romans 9:18**:

So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

... and even as it pertains to the “chosen people of God”- the Jews- Paul said,

Romans 11:6&7

6 But if it [Salvation] is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.

7 What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;

... and to this- many say, “*But that isn’t ‘Fair! God chose them in the Beginning and so, they are still God’s chosen people!’*” And that is the *prevailing* Sentiment in our day. But to that humanly engineered Logic the Word of God says this in **Romans 9:6-8,**

6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel;

7 nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED."

8 That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

And that is exactly what the Apostle Matthew desires that the readers of his Gospel Record understand: God NEVER chose ALL of the Jews! But He DID choose SOME of the Jews! But how do we know who was chosen and who wasn't? The ones who were chosen- believed! And those who believed- loved God! And those who loved God- were faithful to strive to obey Him! And that is true- even concerning the confusing years from the bodily Resurrection of Jesus until God used the pagan Romans to tear down the Temple in Jerusalem in 70AD.

But ALL who believed- both then and now- believed BY GRACE and THROUGH FAITH! ALL who believed- both then and now- believed because God chose them; and sent them His Grace and Mercy.

But what about the rest? The Bible says God left them in their Sins. And this brings up the Statement:

NOT everybody receives Grace and Mercy from God. And even among those who do receive Grace and Mercy from God- they don't all receive it in equal amounts.

... and that is true- because of another Statement:

God is NOT *Obligated* to give us His Grace and Mercy

God's Grace and Mercy are distributed to wicked Sinners based on a single Criteria:

The Divine Prerogative of God

Romans 9:15

For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION."

Now *where* did God say that to Moses? Back in **Exodus 33**- so, let's go there.

Exodus 33:18-19

18 Then Moses said, "I pray You, show me Your glory!"

19 And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion."

Now the word that was translated here into English as "**gracious**" comes from a Hebrew word, (*hanan*; Strong's # 2603) which means: *to be gracious toward; to favor; or to have mercy on*. And it is here that we see that the Statement:

"... I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion."

... is *part* of God's Name and *part* of God's Glory!

The Reason God said this to Moses was because Moses said,

"I pray You, show me Your glory!"

So, Moses was up in the Mountain with God receiving the Law of God; and right in the middle of all that astonishing Brilliance and Majesty- Moses asked to see God's Glory!

And in Response to the Cry of Moses to see God's Glory- God made that Statement. And then God Himself linked that Statement to His Own Name!

So, God's Mercy and Grace are given to sinful people! Yes! And we

rejoice at that! But they are NOT given to ALL sinful people. SOME sinful people are given God's Grace and Mercy and are saved; while others, who are also sinful- are NOT given them!

And that is because Grace and Mercy are NOT distributed to us based on our Wanting them; or our ASKING for them; or even our NEEDING them. Both Grace and Mercy are distributed to sinful people based on a single Criteria:

"I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION."

... and that means that they are distributed according to God's Criteria- NOT Man's. But that also means that God alone is glorified when He *does* distribute His Grace and Mercy.

Now let me say this in another Way. By definition- both Grace and Mercy MUST be "*Free*". These two Aspects of God CANNOT be *coerced*; or *forced*. God CANNOT be *obligated* to give Grace and Mercy to anyone- else they *cease* to be Grace and Mercy and become a "Wage"; or a "Payment"; or an "Obligation"; or a "Duty". But in order for Grace to be Grace and for Mercy to be Mercy- they MUST be "*Free*".

So, God doesn't HAVE to give anyone Grace or Mercy. He gives them both- yes! But He ONLY gives them because He *voluntarily* CHOSE to give them and NOT because He was "painted into a corner" and HAD to give them.

Now even though this is VERY unpopular today- it is *exactly* what the Holy Bible teaches. And by Paul saying, "**For He says to Moses...**" in **Romans 9:15**, Paul was saying, "*This is the Way it has ALWAYS been!*"

Now the Reason you MUST believe this- is two- fold:

1. It is what the Scriptures teach
2. It will help us to understand why Jesus said what He said in **Matthew 9:13**

But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'

... because even Lost people can see that Jesus was saying here that Mercy outweighs Sacrifice. So, there MUST be *more* to it than that. And there is.

In **Matthew 9:13**- Jesus was *rebuking* the Jewish Leaders by telling them that Mercy toward the Lost is more *desired* by God than all the Sacrifices they could ever offer. But there was a Reason the Jewish Leaders of the 1st Century sacrificed much *more* than they dealt with Sinners:

Sacrifices are much *easier* to do.

The animal chosen for Sacrifice had no Rights¹. And even though it may *temporarily* fight for survival- the Man who is offering the animal- will eventually win and the animal will be sacrificed.

But when you're dealing with Sinners- you're also dealing with other Issues besides just their immediate and visible Sin such as:

- Their Mindset (which brought about the Sin)
- Their Past Experiences (which usually created their Mindset)
- Other Sins that are NOT as visible
- Beliefs that are NOT Biblical
- Various Family or Business Circumstances and Situations

... which are much harder to work with and take a lot longer than simply sacrificing an animal.

The Reality is that *anybody* can kill an animal- even an Unbeliever. And back in the 1st Century- the Levitical Priesthood was filled with Unbelievers.

But it takes a lot of Work and Time when you are ministering to people. And most of the Time, unless you are truly saved- the Time and Effort involved in working with people- WHERE THEY *ARE*- and NOT WHERE THEY ARE *SUPPOSED TO BE*- will involve MORE than a Lost person is willing to invest.

So, dealing with people is *always* much *harder* and takes more Time and Effort than sacrificing an animal. For example, the people who are being worked with- may already have many Beliefs that are deeply engrained in them that are Wrong. So, in order to help those people learn the Truth of Scripture requires that they FIRST have to UNLEARN many things that they picked up or were taught that are not true.

There also may be various Family or Business Circumstances or Situations that will take Time to correct- before that individual is where he needs to be.

Now the Old Testament quote that Jesus gave in verse 13 came from the Prophet Hosea- who lived about 800 years before Jesus was born. And in **Hosea 6:6** God Himself speaks through the Prophet and says:

For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

¹ Slaughtering animals which had been raised for the Purpose of Sacrifice was seen as something that was necessary and required by God and NOT seen as being harsh or cruel.

The King James Version says,

For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

... so, what we need to understand God is saying here is:

For I [God] delight in loyalty [mercy] rather than [more than] sacrifice, And in [you having] the knowledge of God rather than [giving Me] burnt offerings.
[Clarification added]

Now what Jesus was actually saying here *might* have escaped the average Jew of the 1st Century and may have even escaped us- but it did NOT escape the Jewish Leaders. Because many of the Pharisees had actually memorized the *entire* Old Testament. But even at that- they read and studied the Books of Moses and the Prophets all day long- every day- from the Time they were 12 years of age until they died. So, they understood very well *why* Jesus was quoting from the “**Burden of Hosea.**”²

But in order for *us* to understand the Context of *why* Jesus brought up Hosea’s Prophecy here- *we* need to go back to the **Book of Hosea the Prophet.**

Howshea/Osee/Hosea (Deliverer/Salvation/He saves) was the son of a man named, “*Beeri*” (Heb. Belonging to a Fountain; Expounder; Well) who may have been a Prophet himself. But his Prophecies were so few- they may have been incorporated in the **Book of the Prophet Isaiah.**³

Hosea was active in his Ministry during the Reigns of Uzziah; Jotham; Ahaz; and Hezekiah (Kings of Judah); as well as Jeroboam and Joas (Kings of Israel).

Now the **Book of Hosea** is a very *strange* Book because it is very Symbolic. For example, in **Hosea 1:2b** we read where God told the Prophet:

... **“Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry ...**

So, God told the Prophet to marry a Prostitute, named, “*Gomer*”. Now, normally, God would have told His Prophet to call Gomer (and all the other Prostitutes in Israel) to Repentance. But the Reason God told him to marry a Woman who would NEVER be Faithful to him- was for the Prophet Himself to act as a Symbol or a Sign of Israel’s Unfaithfulness to God. So, God told Hosea to marry the Prostitute because...

² The Words, Actions, and Prophecies of the Old Testament Prophets were normally categorized as “**Burdens**”- meaning that God had laid a heavy Burden on them (like people would do to a pack animal) to usually speak Judgment and Correction to the Jewish people and issue “**Divine Indictments**” to Kings and other Rulers- calling on them to repent.

³ **Isaiah 8:19&20.** Beeri is also sometimes identified as “*Beerah*”, who was taken into Exile by the Assyrians (**1Chronicles 5:6**).

“... the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the Lord.”

... so, Hosea’s Marriage was a Symbol of God’s “Marriage” to *faithless* Israel.

But in doing this- God commanded Hosea to go and *do* what God *hates*. For example, we know now; and the Jew of the 1st Century; as well as the Jew of the 8th Century BC knew- that God did NOT want His people marrying Unbelievers. Chosen people were to marry other chosen people. And after Jesus rose from the Dead- that Truth was carried over into the New Testament. And so, God the Holy Spirit “moved” on the Apostle Paul to infallibly write this in **2Corinthians 6:14-18**:

14 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

17 "Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you.

18 "And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty.

... so, God has said that Believers are NEVER to be “**bound together with Unbelievers**”. So, *saved* people should NEVER marry *unsaved* people. And saved people should also NEVER enter into a Partnership with unsaved people. As Followers of Jesus- we CANNOT and we MUST NOT be “**bound together with Unbelievers**”. And yet, here, with the Prophet Hosea, God *commands* what He *hates*; He *orders* what He has *forbidden*; and what He has labeled as “Sin”.

So, WHY would God do what He has told us NOT to do? Because He is God. And so, there are Times- like with Job; and with Samson; and here with Hosea- that God *allows* what He *hates*. He *commands* what He has called, “*Evil*”. Why?

We always need to keep in mind that because He is God- our Lord is *absolutely* Sovereign; over *everything- all* the Time. And that means that satan is NOT Sovereign- God is. Man is NOT Sovereign- God is. So, God is *absolutely* Sovereign over Evil. So, by sovereignly *allowing-* yea, even *commanding* Evil to

come forth; to *that* Extent; with *that* Person; at *that* Time- an infinitely *greater* and *wiser* “Good” WILL come forth; that would NOT have come forth; had God not allowed the Evil to exist; and *seemingly* flourish for a Time!

So, God tells the Prophet to not only marry a wicked and evil and unfaithful Woman- but to have Children with her! So, we read this in **Hosea 1:3:**

So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

... but, again, operating in His Almighty Sovereignty, God did NOT *ask*- He did NOT *suggest*; He did NOT *lead*; He sovereignly *commanded* the Prophet what to name the Child in **Hosea 1:4:**

And the Lord said to him, “Name him Jezeel; for yet a little while, and I will punish the house of Jehu for the bloodshed of Jezeel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.

So, God *commanded* the Prophet to name his Son, “Jezeel” as a Sign that God was going to, “**put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel**”. And then God said,

“On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezeel.” (Hosea 1:5)

... but God wasn’t finished. And so, look what happened next,

Then she conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. And the Lord said to him, “Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel, that I would ever forgive them. (Hosea 1:6)

... and this time, God told the Prophet to name his newborn Daughter, “*Lo- ruhamah*”.

Now what is interesting is that the Hebrew word for “Mercy”; “Compassion”; or “Loyalty” is, “*Ruhamah*” (*Strong’s #7355*). But when you add the prefix, “*Lo*” in front- it means a *negative*. So, while “*Ruhamah*” means; “*Mercy*”; or “*Compassion*” or “*Loyalty*”- “**Lo-Ruhamah**” means: “**I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel, that I would ever forgive them**”.

Now the Key to understanding the entire **Book of Hosea** is found in **Hosea 1:7b** that says,

... I will have compassion on the house of Judah and deliver them by the Lord their God, and will not deliver them by bow, sword, battle, horses or horsemen.”

... here, God promises to save SOME of the Jews- here represented by “**Judah**”.

So, while God will NOT forgive those who *refuse* to obey Him- He promises here to sovereignly save “Judah”. But look again closely at verse 7. God says He is going to save SOME of the Jews- but look at what He said next,

... [I] will not deliver them by bow, sword, battle, horses or horsemen.

... but look how God WILL save them:

... by the Lord their God ...

So, God is NOT going to save His chosen BY or THROUGH the normal MEANS that He used before. This Time, God says here, He is going to save them ALL BY HIMSELF! Truly, Salvation is of the Lord!

So, what we have here in Hosea is a Prophecy about the New Covenant that will come to this earth, IN, BY, and THROUGH the Lord Jesus Christ-ALONE! Because we need to remember that in the New Covenant- God receives ALL the Glory because God does ALL the Work.

You see, the *inferior* Old Covenant was between God and Man (you do this and I will do that). But the infinitely *superior* New Covenant is made between the three Persons of the Godhead- which means that Salvation in the New Covenant is a sovereign Work of God- ALONE! And that means that the ONLY thing we bring into the Salvation of the New Covenant- is the Sin that made Salvation necessary!

Now we need to realize that the people of the northern Kingdom of Israel were Evil. They did NOT love God and so, they *refused* to obey Him. So, God was correct to judge them. But what we need to also realize is that the people of the southern Kingdom of Judah were Evil, too! They didn't love God or obey Him any more than Israel. So, the Difference in the Way God chose to deal with the two Kingdoms is NOT in the people themselves.

Friends, NOBODY loves God when they are Lost. NOBODY! So, the people were the SAME in both Kingdoms. Both groups of people were evil Sinners before the Lord. Neither one of them had done Right in the Sight of the Lord. The people of Judah were NOT “better” than the people of Israel. And the people of Israel were NOT “more sinful” than the people of Judah.

The Difference is in the Covenants! God sovereignly chose that Israel was going to be delivered or saved by the Old Covenant. But that meant that they HAD to obey God's Commandments- perfectly- in Thought, Word, and Deed- 24/7/365- with Joy or they would remain utterly Lost. And that is what happened. But God through the Prophet said the people of Judah would be saved or delivered by the New Covenant! And the New Covenant has NOTHING to do with what the people do or don't do. People are saved in the New Covenant by what God alone does for them! And that is what Hosea was prophesying to the Jews.

And so, when Jesus told the hypocritical religious Leaders,

But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

... He was NOT merely saying that Mercy is better than a Sacrifice- because that is so obvious that even Sinners understand it. Jesus was quoting from the Prophet Hosea because He was telling the Jewish Leaders that the New Covenant that Hosea saw afar off- was now standing before them!

For Jesus to say, "**But go and learn what this means**" to the very people, who were *supposedly* Experts on what the Old Testament said- Jesus was calling them, "*Lo-Ruhamah*"- those who will NOT have the Mercy; or the "Compassion"; or the "Loyalty" of God; and those to whom God said, "**I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel, that I would ever forgive them**".

But with the dirty riff-raff of the City that were gathered inside Matthew's house- celebrating Matthew's Salvation- Jesus was saying,

"It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick... I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners [to Repentance]"

In other words, Jesus wasn't attracted to those evil men because they were Evil. Jesus worked with them because God the Father had sovereignly given them to Jesus for Salvation and God the Holy Spirit drew them there. And Jesus knew that. So, He looked *past* their Wickedness; and saw them as being Gifts from His Father! And He received them- even though they were filthy in Sin- NOT because they were *worthy*- but because of His great Love for His Father!

And those people- Matthew included- who probably represented the very WORST people in that town- became some of the very *first* Examples of Salvation under the New Covenant!

So, Jesus left those who said they had no Sin- and He went to where the others were- while they were in their *worst* Sin. And those who were saved- were saved- by what God alone did for them; and NOT by what they did for themselves!

Now I always try to preach the Truth to you. And so, in order to check myself; and verify that I am indeed heralding the Gospel of Jesus Christ- *rightly and fully*- please listen to a partial quote from a Sermon that was preached 135 years ago, from the mouth of the “*Prince of Preachers*”, himself- Charles Spurgeon entitled, “The Lord’s Own Salvation”:

“GOD is very considerate towards the messengers by whom he delivers his word to men. They are bound to deliver his word faithfully, whatever the tidings may be. Sometimes the burden of the Lord is very heavy. The prophets have to denounce woe upon woe, with terrible monotony of threatening; and then it is that God hastens to relieve them by giving them a gracious word, so that they may refresh their hearts, and not be altogether crushed beneath their load. We have an instance here of the Lord’s care for his heralds. Hosea was bound to say, in the name of the Lord, “I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away”; but when he had said that, with heavy heart and tearful eye, he was allowed to add, “But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah.” The Lord will not let our spirit fail beneath a burden which is all of grief; but he will grant us the high privilege of proclaiming grace, as well as publishing judgment. Dear brethren in Christ, if you have to preach God’s word, preach it faithfully, and abate no syllable of its stern threatenings. Woe unto him who is afraid to preach the terrors of the Lord! Woe unto the man who refuses to put his hand into the bitter box, and take out the wormwood and gall which make such salutary medicine for the souls of men! We must at times speak lightning, and prove ourselves sons of thunder. We must bring on the storm and tempest in the heart of man, if fair summertime discoursing will not touch them. For the most of men there is no going to heaven except by Weeping Cross; and we must drive them that way with God’s thundering sentences of judgment. Let us lead them by the path of sorrow to the Man of sorrows, sorrowing ourselves because it is so hard to bring them to a godly sorrow. It is at our soul’s peril that we allow a warning to lie silent. “If the watchman warn them not, they shall perish; but their blood will I require at the watchman’s hands.” Let us think of that, and give ourselves up to our Master’s work, even when it is heaviest, cheered by the fact that we have to speak of such glorious truths, such precious promises, such a gracious Christ, such a free salvation, such full pardon for the very chief of sinners, such abundant help for those that have no strength, such fatherly compassion to those that are out of the way. Our themes of joy by far outweigh our topics of grief, and we find the Lord’s service a happy one.

The connection of our text suggests the thought that there is a limit to the long-suffering of God. He bade Hosea say, "I will no more have mercy upon Israel." He had borne with that guilty people very long, and overlooked their daring crimes; but he would do so no longer: he would give them over to the enemy, who would carry them quite away, so that Israel as a distinct monarchy should cease to be. O my hearers, God is very gracious, but his Spirit shall not always strive with you. A little more sin, and you may be over the boundary, and God may give you up. Stay, I pray you! Do not further provoke. Repent, and turn unto the Lord with full purpose of heart. Having made that observation, I would make another, namely, that the Lord makes distinctions among guilty men according to the sovereignty of his grace. "I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will have mercy upon the house of Judah." Had not Judah sinned too? Might not the Lord have given up Judah also! Indeed he might justly have done so, but he delighteth in mercy. Many sin, and righteously bring upon themselves the punishment due to sin: they believe not in Christ, and die in their sins. But God has mercy, according to the greatness of his heart, upon multitudes who could not be saved on any other footing but that of undeserved mercy. Claiming his royal right he says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." The prerogative of mercy is vested in the sovereignty of God: that prerogative he exercises. He gives where he pleases, and he has a right to do so, since none have any claim upon him. We are all under his rule, and by that rule we are under condemnation; and if he should leave us there, it would be strictly just; but if any be saved it is an act of pure, undeserved grace, for which he is to have all the praise.

Note, too, that even in the darkest times, when whole nations go astray from him, he still reserves unto himself a people. "I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them." God will have a people even when those who are called his people prove unworthy of the name. There never was a night so dark but that God had a star shining through its blackness. There never was a desert so drear but God could lead a people through it, and make the wilderness rejoice. There never shall be a time in which Christ will not have a remnant according to the election of grace, who will maintain his truth and the honour of his name. Let us be comforted by this, and look for brighter and better times, however dark the days may seem to be just now. God will save his own, and by his own will keep his glory bright among men.

But now the text brings us to consider this fact, that God will save his own people in his own way. He tells us positively how he will save the house of Judah, and negatively how he will not save them. "I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen." God displays his sovereignty not only in the persons saved, but in the ways whereby that salvation is wrought out.

The point which we shall consider is God's way of saving his people, as instanced in the text; and we remark, first, that oftentimes God puts visible means aside in dealing with his people: "Not by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen." Secondly, he has good reasons for doing this: he acts with infinite wisdom. Thirdly, there is a gospel in this, a gospel which has special relation to us. Oh, for a blessing from the Spirit of the Lord!

I. First, then, GOD IS PLEASED VERY OFTEN, IN WORKING SALVATION, TO PUT MEANS ASIDE. He said of Israel, "I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." He thus struck out of the hands of his people their only defence; they had trusted in their bow, and the Lord destroyed it.

First, the Lord does this in the work of salvation by grace. Salvation is of the Lord alone. Salvation is not of human merit, for there is no such thing. Plenty of demerit you can find anywhere and everywhere, but of merit there is none. "When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants: we have done no more than it was our duty to have done." But we have not done all. Alas! on the contrary, we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and we have left undone the things which we ought to have done, and there is no health in us. In ourselves we have neither health, help, nor hope. We are not, we cannot be, saved by our works. We dismiss the idea with an honest indignation, each one of us for himself. Neither are we saved by any good dispositions which lie dormant and latent within us, for there are no such things. There is none good, no not one. The heart is, in every case, deceitful, and desperately wicked. Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one. If our salvation depended upon our hearts going after God of themselves, and the motions of our nature ascending towards the Most High of themselves, it would be a hopeless case. But divine grace waiteth not for man, neither tarrieth for the sons of men. When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and in sins." The first movement is from God to us, not from us to God. As soon expect the darkness to create the day as

expect the sinner to turn his own heart to the Lord. We are saved by the Lord's grace, not by our works', nor by our feelings, nor by our desires, nor even by our sense of need. I believe it is one object of God's infinite wisdom in each individual case to make this doctrine clear to the understanding and the heart. Certainly it is one object of every faithful ministry. We preach down the creature, and preach up the Saviour. Yet, preach as we may, self-righteousness is so natural to man, self-trust is so congenial to our proud imbecility, that we cannot get it out of men till the Holy Spirit comes. Every man his own Saviour is the kind of doctrine which is popular; but to set aside our own doings is to offend many. I see before me a picture which was once before the mind of Isaiah. Our nature seems like a rainbow-coloured field of grass in the early days of summer. The golden kingcups are intermingled with flowers of every hue. What a luxuriant garden! Wait a moment! A wind comes—a hot sirocco burns its deadly way. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass." So have we seen men glorious in their own self-righteousness, boastful of their moral purity and we have half thought, surely there is something in all this! We walk over the same field after the withering work of the Holy Ghost has been there, and men have been convinced of sin, and we see nothing but disappointment, and hear nothing but confession of failure. We see no flowers, but dead, withered grass. How soon has the glory departed! The comeliness of the field is passed away as in the twinkling of an eye!

You cannot have forgotten, some of you, when this terrible self-withering happened to you. When God's rebukes corrected you, your beauty passed away as the moth. Before I was instructed as to myself I thought myself as good a fellow as could be found within fifty miles; but when the Spirit of God had revealed me to myself, I thought myself the basest creature within five hundred miles; or, for the matter of that, even outside or inside of hell itself. You may, perhaps, have seen a picture drawn by a cunning artist. It represents a lady, very fair and beautiful to look upon; but the picture is so contrived that you discover underneath it the form of death. That which appeared outwardly so lovely is only a veiled skeleton. Just that kind of change the Spirit of God makes upon our moral beauty: he turns it into corruption by making us see what we really are. The bones of the skeleton of depraved nature stand out through the proud flesh of our self-righteous pride. Then we cry to God for mercy. Then we give up all idea of saving ourselves. Neither bow, nor sword, nor horse, nor horsemen, are any longer our confidence, the weapons of our self-help are looked upon by us as

weapons of rebellion— and they really are so; and we throw them away, and will have nothing further to do with them. The man upon whom there is found a bad coin is very earnest in declaring that it is none of his, somebody must have slipped it into his pocket. He will not own it. A little while ago he thought to himself, “What a splendid imitation it is! How well I have cheated the Queen!” Self-righteousness is nothing but a piece of counterfeit coin; and when all goes well with us, we say, “How well I have done it! How splendid is my righteousness!” But when the Spirit of God arrests us, then we are anxious to get rid of the very thing wherein we gloried. What was our righteousness we reckon to be as filthy rags— and we reckon according to truth. Thus God saves us, not by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, nor by horses, nor by horsemen, but by his grace, which comes to us freely when Jesus is made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption...

... My time is done, or else I was going to say, thirdly, THERE IS A GOSPEL IN THIS TEXT for those here present. I can only hint at this in a few words.

The first gospel is that salvation is possible in every case. Notice, “I will save them.” What can stand against a divine “I will”? With God nothing is impossible. If there be nothing to help him, what does it matter? He does not need help. He expressly abjures the aid of a creature when he says, “I will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.” My dear hearer, whoever you may be, there is hope in your case: if God saves, then you can be saved. If you had to save yourself, you would not be saved; but as there is nothing wanted of you, but God worketh salvation with his own right hand, your case is hopeful. How clear is this! And how bright with comfort!

Next, salvation is to be sought of God alone. Do not go wandering about to the second cause. Go straight to the Lord himself, and go at once. Straightforward is the best running in the world. Go straightforward to your God, your Saviour. Let there be no waiting for tears, feelings, repentance, sanctification, or anything else; but arise at once, and go to your God, and for Christ’s sake plead with him to have mercy upon you at this moment. As salvation does not necessarily come through the outward means, if I address any here who have neglected the outward means, let them come away to God at once, though they have neglected his courts, profaned his day, and despised his ministers. You came in here with no idea of worshipping God, but only just to see the place, and what the preacher is like. Never mind,

look to the Lord Jesus Christ straight away! With these eyes that are so blinded, look! If you cannot see, it may be that in your obedient attempt to look, the Lord will give you sight. He does not command you to see, but he does command you to look to him and be saved: so that, if you turn your eyes towards Jesus, though they be sightless eyeballs, he will make them see. If you will trust in Christ you may cast your guilty soul on him at this moment. Why should you not do so? Then for you the rain will be over and gone, and you will see the bright light in the clouds. Instead of the dark and dismal winter of doubt, you shall have a summer-time of hope and comfort. These dreary weeks of cold despair shall give place to a season in which heaven and earth shall blend in your experience in a joy unspeakable. The Lord grant it, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen."⁴

Yes! We rejoice that Jesus saves Sinners!
Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

⁴ Charles Haddon Spurgeon; *Sermon on Hosea 1:7*; August 2, 1888; Metropolitan Tabernacle, London

