

General Mercy, Special Mercy, and Sovereign Mercy

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Bible Text: Titus 3:1-7; John 6:40
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Take your Bibles and turn with me, if you will, to Titus chapter three and I am going to begin reading at verse three or verse one, I should say, down through verse seven. The book of Titus chapter three beginning with verse one down through verse seven.

Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men. For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.¹

Today our study, as we look at another one of the emotional aspects of our Lord, is the mercy of Christ. This mercy is which all of us are now experiencing in some way or another. My hope is that all of you that are listening in today and all of us that are gathered together will profit from this lesson at this hour.

Our lesson falls into these categories. First of all, we are going to look at the meaning of the term mercy and then, secondly, we shall look at the many facets of God's mercy.

Now people today talk about the mercy of God, but they just don't know what they are talking about. Some people think that because God doesn't bring judgment on sin right away that God never will. But, beloved, that is not true. God "will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever."² He does not deal with us after our just desserts, but he deals with us in mercy because he knows our frame that we are nothing but dust.

¹ Titus 3:1-7.

² Psalm 103:9.

And in this portion of the Word of God we read very clearly that, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”³

Now to understand the mercy of Christ we need to know what the term mercy is all about. And I am going to give you three meanings of the term mercy in these few moments that we have together. First of all, we will look at Mr. Noah Webster and his fine dictionary. And I want to say very kindly that when you study the Word of God and you ought to have a dictionary with you so when you come across some words and things in the Bible that you don't fully understand, you pick up Mr. Webster's dictionary and you will be surprised what a great help it will be toward understanding these meanings of these words.

Now the word mercy means the kindness or goodwill towards the miserable and afflicted with a desire to help them. Mercy includes pity, compassion, forbearance and gentleness. Now this is the mercy that Mr. Webster describes for us.

Then in the original language of the New Testament the word mercy means kindness or goodwill of God towards the miserable and afflicted coupled with a desire to help them. This presupposes sin.

Now look at Titus chapter three, if you will, and look at verse three, four and five.

For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.⁴

Now here you have God's mercy. It is the kindness or goodwill of God towards the miserable and afflicted coupled with a desire to help them. And it presupposes sin.

Then in the original language of the Old Testament the word mercy means to be compassionate or have pity on those who are in misfortune. Again, let me give an example of this if I may.

Take your Bibles now and turn to Exodus chapter three and look with me at verse 20 down through verse 22, Exodus chapter three beginning at verse 20 down through verse 22 where we read these words. Listen to the Word of God if you will. Listen to it now.

And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall

³ Titus 3:5.

⁴ Titus 3:3-5.

come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty: But every woman shall borrow of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians.⁵

Then we find in Exodus chapter two verse 23 we read:

And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them.⁶

Now that was Exodus chapter two and I did say Exodus chapter three. But here you find that the Hebrew language brings means that mercy is to have become passionate or have pity on them that are in misfortune.

Now take your Bibles again. Turn to Psalm chapter 37 and look with me, if you will, verse 23 down through verse 26 where the Word of God says these things for our learning.

Psalm chapter 37 beginning with verse 23 down through verse 26 where we read:

The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand. I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed.⁷

Now there you have the description of mercy and also the definition of mercy as they are given to us by Mr. Webster, by the Greek language in your New Testament and the Hebrew language in the Old Testament.

Now as we study the meaning of the term God's mercy we need to know what it is all about because we find God has many facets of mercy. Now take your Bibles and turn with me again, if you will. We find in, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us."⁸

But open your Bibles to Psalm chapter 145 for just a moment and look with me at the Word of God as it says these things in verses nine and 10. Psalm 145 verses nine and 10.

⁵ Exodus 3:20-22.

⁶ Exodus 2:23-25.

⁷ Psalm 37:23-26.

⁸ Titus 3:5.

The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.
All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee.⁹

Now what do we have here? One of the many facets of God's mercy, there is, first of all, the general mercy extended to all. Now notice.

“The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works”¹⁰

Take your Bibles again, if you will, turn to Acts chapter 17 and look with me at verse 25 where the Word of God tells us these things. Listen to it. Acts 17 verse 25.

Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.¹¹

Now what do we have here? The general mercy of God is extended to God. That is why people today have something to eat. That is why the rain falls on the just and the unjust and that is why as long as the earth remaineth there will be seed time and harvest and summer and winter and cold and warm and so on and so forth. It is because of God's mercy which is extended to all.

But then our Lord also has a special mercy which is extended to humanity. Again, take your Bibles and turn with me to Matthew chapter five and look with me at verse 44 where the Word of God describes the general mercy of the Lord God of heaven towards humanity.

In Matthew chapter five verse 44 we read:

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.¹²

Now here you have the special mercy that God extends to humanity. There is a communication of the necessities of life. And we find that our Lord makes the sun and the rain both to shine upon the just and on the unjust.

⁹ Psalm 145:9-10.

¹⁰ Psalm 145:9.

¹¹ Acts 17:25-26.

¹² Matthew 5:44-45.

And in Psalm chapter 73 and verses one through 20 we find, again, God's mercy where it says right here:

For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.
Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.¹³

But then God says, God tells us very clearly what the end of that mercy will be. Now this is a special mercy or general mercy extended to all of God's Word and then there is a special mercy which is extended to humanity. Now the reason you are not in hell at this hour, my radio friend, those of you who are outside of the Lord Jesus Christ is because God is having mercy upon you at this hour. This mercy is giving you the communication of the necessities of life. But then we find it is a temporal mercy which ends at death.

Now you let that soak in if you will. This mercy of God is a temporal mercy and it ends at death.

In the book of the Lamentations we find chapter three and verses 21 through 23 the Word of God says these things.

This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.¹⁴

Now this is the temporal mercy which ends at death. And Isaiah tells us very clearly in Isaiah chapter 27 and verse 11 that this temporal mercy does not last beyond the life, this life on this earth.

“When the boughs thereof are withered, they shall be broken off: the women come, and set them on fire: for it is a people of no understanding: therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour.”¹⁵

This is the mercy of God that ends at death. Now this is a special mercy that is extended to humanity. Now how long may it last? It may last as long as you live on this earth. But,

¹³ Psalm 73:3-12.

¹⁴ Lamentations 3:21-3.

¹⁵ Isaiah 27:11.

my friend, if you don't come to know the Lord Jesus Christ this mercy will end at your death and you will die and go to hell and there be spend eternity in the lake of fire.

Now there is a third kind of mercy that we want to look at for just a moment. There is general mercy. There is special mercy and then we find also there is sovereign mercy.

Look again. Take your Bibles and go back to our text, if you will, in Titus chapter three and look at verses three through seven. And we find here the condition of mankind before salvation.

“For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.”¹⁶

Now notice.

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.¹⁷

Now what you have here you have here sovereign mercy extended to God's elect ones.

Now, beloved, whether you realize it or not and whether you like to hear it or not, God has an elect people that he has chosen from before the foundation of the world. He has ordained them to eternal life and those individuals that God has chosen will come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ before they leave this earth and go out into eternity. This is based upon God's election, God's predestination, God's foreknowledge, God's wisdom and God's way. And we find that God has a number that no man can number. That number is known only to him. And we find that is sovereign mercy which is extended to God's elect.

Now this sovereign mercy is based upon the will, the love and the purpose of God.

Again, our text says:

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.¹⁸

Now, my radio friend, if you don't know the Lord Jesus Christ you do not know what this

¹⁶ Titus 3:3.

¹⁷ Titus 3:4-7.

¹⁸ Titus 3:4-5.

sovereign mercy is all about. It is based upon the will, the love and the purpose of God. Then this sovereign mercy is based only upon certain individuals as God himself directs.

Now we don't know who those individuals are. But we find in John chapter six and verse 40 the Lord Jesus said these words. Listen to it.

And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day. The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven.¹⁹

Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.²⁰

Now what do we have here? We find this is God's sovereign mercy based upon the will, love and purpose of God, bestowed upon the certain persons as God himself directs. And, beloved, they are many scriptural illustrations, but I think one of the clearest is found with regard to the two thieves that were on each side of the Lord Jesus Christ. One of them was converted. The other one was not. Both of them were guilty of this same thing. Both of them railed upon the Lord Jesus Christ. But suddenly, mysteriously and sovereignly God opened the heart of that one sinner that was on the right hand of the Lord and showed him who he was and what he was and the judgment he was under. He granted him both repentance and faith. He called upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to redeem him and my Lord turned to him said:

“Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”²¹

Whereas he never answered the other man whatever.

Now what in the world do you have here? You have here sovereign mercy. And, beloved, today this is exactly what is going on at this present hour.

Now, the benefit of God's sovereign mercy is this. It results in salvation.

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.²²

¹⁹ John 6:40-41.

²⁰ John 6:43-45.

²¹ Luke 23:43.

²² Titus 3:5-6.

Now, beloved, if you are a recipient of this sovereign mercy God quickened you, suddenly, mysteriously and absolutely. He opened your heart, showed you your need of Christ, granted you both faith and repentance and you repented towards God and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and we find that we have been justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Now this is the way God's mercy is extended. Now I am going to ask you a question in these closing moments. Are you a recipient of this mercy?

Remember now. You enjoy temporal mercy. You are enjoying general mercy, but you do not enjoy the sovereign mercy of God which must be extended to you and given to you and it comes only through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then the result of it is this. Those of us who have been redeemed by our Lord, we also understand what mercy is all about and because the Lord God of heaven has had mercy upon us, we, in turn, try to be as merciful as we can to those who are outside of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Oh, my friend, today the greatest thing that can happen to you, if it ever does, is for the Lord Jesus Christ to have mercy on you.

Now the reaction to mercy is either gratitude or dislike and the evidence of mercy is seen in the service of the individual when the individual serves the Lord. If you are not serving the Lord you don't know what the mercy of God is all about. If you do know the Lord you want to serve him to the best of your ability and my hope is that something has been said to bring you to Christ.

Until we meet again, this is pastor Peter Nortier saying, "Good bye," and may the Lord spare you before it is too late.