

The Mercy of God

David Flatt

“In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri began to reign over Israel, and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him. He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. And Ahab made an Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun” (1 Kings 16:29-34).

Ahab was arguably the most notorious king of Israel. He learned his wickedness from his father and grandfather. As wicked as they were, Ahab was worse. Of course, God did not allow Ahab’s evil to go unchecked. God raised a prophet to preach repentance to Ahab and the rest of Israel. The prophet Elijah was sent to reprove, rebuke, and exhort this godless king.

God worked miracles through Elijah multiple times to prove Jehovah was God and persuade Ahab to repent. Finally, after years of rebellion, Elijah declared that Ahab and his entire family would be killed for their evil (1 Kings 21:20-26). After hearing of his impending death, Ahab reacted in a surprising and uncharacteristic fashion. Ahab repented:

“And when Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly” (1 Kings 21:27). God noticed Ahab’s repentance: “And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, “Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son’s days I will bring the disaster upon his house (1Kings 21:28-29).

Perhaps God’s treatment of Ahab is surprising to us. Mercy is always surprising and unexpected. Repentance is the desired outcome God has for all sinners, even today (2 Pet. 3:9). If we humbly repent, God will extend mercy to us.

Our Merciful God

Truly, our God is merciful. He offers us new life; whereas, we rightfully deserve eternal death. Extending mercy is His prerogative. Historically, God’s people have struggled to understand and accept this right of God. For example, the Jews struggled to understand how Gentiles could have a relationship with God. Paul explained how both groups were equally in need of a relationship with God because both were sinners. Therefore, God offered both groups mercy by faith.

What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills (Rom. 9:14-18).

As difficult as it was for Israel to understand, God originally planned to form a family through mercy. Neither Jew nor Gentile was entitled to be part of God's family. Everyone had sinned. In sin, we are condemned to die an eternal death (Rom. 6:23). However, God is willing to pardon our death sentence. Instead of death, He offers life. This is mercy.

The Mercy of God & Me

Like God's relationship with Israel, God's mercy is intended to reshape us. We may be resistant at first, but in time become obedient. God granting us time and opportunity to receive forgiveness and new life is mercy. We must be thankful we have such a merciful God.

Also, we are to become ministers of God's mercy. We are to share God's mercy with others. This may be challenging at times. Too often, we may want to be ministers of God's wrath regarding those who have sinned against us or those we love. However, exacting God's wrath is not our place.

As the nature of mercy demands, we are to offer what is undeserved: grace, forgiveness, and life. God's family is formed by sinners who have received His mercy by faith. No one is entitled to be part of God's family. No one deserves God's mercy; yet, He offers this to anyone who humbly submits to His love.

How to Be Merciful

1. Love your enemies.
2. Release a grudge.
3. Help the least among us.
4. Listen and help the hurting.
5. Be patient with the stubborn.
6. Be forgiving to others.
7. Pray for the suffering.
8. Give someone another chance.
9. Forgive yourself.
10. Befriend someone whose life is different from yours.

Conclusion

As Christians, we are to live in hope of God's mercy. Jude wrote, *"But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life"* (Jude 1:20-21). In life, we must be obedient to the Lord (1 John 2:3-5). However, our salvation will not be the result of our obedience alone. Our salvation will be the result of the mercy of God.

Our prayer in life must be the prayer of the tax collector: *"Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner!"* (Luke 18:13). Thankfully, our good God is rich in mercy (Eph. 2:4-5). He loves us, even as sinners. If we are willing to repent and obey Him, He is always willing to forgive and pardon us.