

The Gospel of John Phase II

John 5

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Lesson 1

Homework

MERCY

In his classic book The Knowledge of the Holy, A. W. Tozer writes:

“When through the blood of the everlasting covenant we children of the shadows reach at last our home in the light, we shall have a thousand strings to our harps, but the sweetest may well be the one tuned to sound forth most perfectly THE MERCY OF GOD.”

There are really two foundational stones of a God-honoring life. They must be held together and neither side can be forsaken. Every day you and I give empirical evidence to the existence of both. These foundational realities are these:

1. You still have sin living inside you.
2. God is abundant in mercy.

You and I must stand balanced upon both these foundational stones, for excluding either reality will surely place us into danger. Because I am a sinner, I need mercy - and because God is merciful, I can face the reality of my sin. None of us is yet sin-free. We all continue to fail in word, thought, desire, and action. It is only when we choose to admit the depth of our problem that we can get excited about the rescue that only God’s mercy can supply.

Take a moment and just think of all the prayers you have prayed over all your years on earth on all occasions – the times you were sick – needed guidance, counsel, help, peace, comfort, provision, protection, resolution of conflict, and any number of additional requests you have made of God in your lifetime. We have prayed for grace to help us live holy lives. We have prayed at times for a fresh assurance of our salvation. We have prayed for the application of God’s promises to our specific situation, for deliverance from temptation, for strength to do God’s work, for comfort in times of testing. The truth be told we are like beggars, who regularly approach God to ask for whatever it is our souls realize they desperately need.

Your soul has not grown rich on its own!! It is dependent and reliant upon God for its daily allowance of blessing. That is why we pray the whole range of the multiple spiritual mercies we need. Our wants have been countless, but God's supplies have been and are infinite. Our prayers have been as varied as His mercies are plentiful. What kindnesses have you experienced? You may feel sadness on a particular day, but are you forgetting that most significant hour when Jesus first opened your eyes to His mercy? Have you forgotten the moments of your first love with Him (Revelation 2:4)? Did you ever have a sickness that He healed? Were you ever in need and He supplied it? Were you ever in dire straits and he delivered you? Just how many times has the mercy of God responded to your desperation? Return in your thoughts to those choice mercies of God in your past. Simply thinking of this beautiful attribute of our faithful God has the power of lighting up the lamp posts of past mercies causing our remembrance of them to shine their light upon any present temporary darkness. Revisiting the mercies of God in our own experience sets the stage for understanding the great mercy of God in the story we find from John 5 – a hopeless man who had been paralyzed for 38 years.

Mercy: A Definition

Mercy is a divine quality by which God faithfully keeps his promises and maintains his covenant relationship with his chosen people despite their unworthiness and unfaithfulness. There are vast dimensions of the meaning of the word "mercy." Kindness, loving-kindness, goodness, grace, favor, pity, compassion and steadfast love are but a few. Prominent in this overarching concept of mercy is the compassionate disposition of God the Father to forgive offenders or adversaries and to help or spare them – undeserving as they are in their sinful state. At the very heart of the concept of mercy is the love of God freely manifested in his gracious saving acts on behalf of those to whom he has pledged himself in covenant relationship. "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself." (2 Timothy 2:12-13)

Old Testament Examples of God's Mercy

Our understanding of this concept is broadened by taking a brief look at God's mercy as revealed in the Old Testament. It was God's chosen people Israel who were elected to be His own and to whom He chose to manifest His mercy. Again and again we find God persistently exercising patience and long suffering with His disobedient and wayward people as He continuously and tirelessly seeks them out – in spite of their sinfulness – drawing them back to Himself. The Psalmist describes God as "a father who pities his children who reverence and trust him" (Psalm 103:13). Hosea pictures God as a loving, merciful father who looks down from heaven with a yearning heart of compassion upon his rebellious and wayward people (Hosea 11; Jeremiah 31:20). He also regards Israel as

an unfaithful and adulterous wife whom God loves as a faithful husband in spite of her apostate condition and her unfaithful adultery and disloyalty. Isaiah depicts God as a mother who has compassion on the son of her womb (Isaiah 49:15). These various Old Testament pictures spoken through God's prophets to Israel reveal His mercy in rich and diverse ways. God's mercy includes forgiveness and restoration as well as deliverance from distress and danger. It is the remembrance of God's mercy that gives the repentant person hope along with the assurance of divine favor and reconciliation with the offended Lord.

New Testament Example of God's Mercy

The most profound use of mercy in the New Testament is God's provision of salvation for mankind through the finished work of Jesus Christ (Romans 11:30 - 32; Ephesians 2:4). God is the "Father of Mercies" (2 Corinthians 1:3) which He bestows on those who believe in His son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. It is because God is "so rich in mercy" that He saves those who are spiritually dead and doomed by their sins (Ephesians 2:4 - 6). It is out of God's mercy that one is forgiven and granted eternal life (I Timothy 1:13 - 16).

Mercy Given / Mercy Shared

Mercy was at the core of Christ's teaching and healing. We see evidence of it in every parable He spoke and every miraculous healing He performed. His coming was anticipated and announced in the very context of mercy - a mercy that would characterize his entire message and mission. (Luke 1: 50, 54, 72, 78)

According to Jesus, to be full of mercy is a distinguishing virtue of every citizen of the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy." (Matthew 5:7)

Unfortunately we find ourselves all too often out of balance as our thoughts and actions reveal us to be more in line with the Pharisees in our story than like the Lord Jesus whose life and actions we are to imitate. We bask in God's grace but throw the law at others. We simply are not that good at mercy because we tend to see ourselves as more deserving than the poor and needy. However, when God's call of mercy intersects our lack of mercy, we can begin to see ourselves with far more accuracy. We begin to see that we simply do not have inside us what God requires of us. We simply cannot live up to God's standard without Jesus which causes us often to cry out for the very thing we have refused to give to others. We must come to understand that God's mercy is our only hope.

Just meditating upon the mercy that has been showered upon us; we begin to want to help others experience the same mercy. To the degree that we forget the mercy we have been given, it is far easier for us to deprive others of it. The simple truth is – we need God’s work of mercy in order to do his work of mercy.

Mercy: The Heartbeat of the Gospel

God’s love and mercy is the heartbeat of the gospel. All mankind is guilty of taking part in the unholy rebellion that dethroned the King of creation. We participated in that rebellion through our sin – sin that required payment. We all in times past walked according to the course of this world, according to the evil “prince of the power of the air” – that spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience. We have all lived in the lusts of our flesh and are guilty of the pride of life. We were once enemies and alienated in our minds from a holy God. However as Tozer writes,

*“We who earned and deserve only banishment shall enjoy forever intimate communion with a holy God - we who deserve hell will know the glories of heaven – this is MERCY – the tender mercy of our God. Mercy is an infinite and inexhaustible energy within the divine nature which disposes God to be actively compassionate toward sinners. **Mercy is the goodness of God confronting human suffering and guilt.** Were there no guilt in the world, no pain and no regrets, God would yet be infinitely merciful; but His mercy might well remain hidden in His (own) heart, unknown to the created universe. No voice would be raised to celebrate the mercy because none would feel the need. **It is human misery and sin that call forth God’s remarkable divine mercy”***

(The Knowledge of the Holy by A. W. Tozer)

The Mercy of God in the Lame Man of John 5

John 5 is a portrait of the perfect balance highlighted in the above writing: mercy and judgment of sin. A merciful pardon awaits the one – regardless of the depth of sin – who humbles him self to receive Christ’s healing and underserved pardon. For those however who refuse the pardon, the fires of judgment await. The vivid contrast could not be clearer. The paralytic of 38 years received Christ’s merciful pardon and was healed both physically and spiritually, while the Pharisees who watched this merciful miracle refused the offer of God’s grace only to face the wrath of God and everlasting punishment. As stated earlier, to the degree that you forget the mercy you’ve been given, it is easier for you to refuse that same mercy to others.

God is not willing that even one should perish but that all might come to a knowledge of the truth of the Most High God. (2 Peter 3:9). Yes, God's mercy extends even to the vilest enemies of God and His people! Indeed, according to Paul's understanding, it is the mercy of God that is meant to lead the lost to repentance. "Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness (His mercy) is meant to lead you to repentance!" (Romans 2: 4).

We are not just left hopeless in our sins as the lame man of John 5 exemplifies. Nehemiah 9 states: "Nevertheless, in Your great mercies You did not make an end of them or forsake them, for You are a gracious and merciful God" (v.31). You can be courageous in admitting your sin precisely because God is richly abundant in His mercy. He comes to you in mercy not because you are good but because you are a sinner, and he knows that because of this condition, you are unable to help yourself. Since sin means that you are a bigger danger to yourself than anything else in your life - and since it is impossible for you to run from yourself, there is only one hope for you. That hope is for someone with power, wisdom, compassion, and mercy to invade your life, forgive your sins, and progressively deliver you from the bondage that sin has had upon you. That mercy comes to you ONLY ONE WAY – it comes in a person, the Lord Jesus Christ, and His mercy is always fresh and uniquely fashioned for the unique sin struggles of every new day.

Think deeply about your countless prayers over your lifetime for the mercy of God to invade your impossible situation.

Now take time to praise Him and thank Him for His mercy that has seen you through to this very day.

*"Morning by morning new mercies I see
All I have needed thy hand has provided
GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS, LORD UNTO ME!"*

Questions for Meditation and Reflection

Important Principles to Live By:

1. It is God's mercy that protects us from what we truly deserve.
2. God's mercies never cease nor come to an end.
3. God deals in mercy toward the repentant sinner and in perfect justice toward those who reject Him.
4. The Lord is abundant in mercy to all who call upon Him, forgiving and forgetting one's sin FOREVER.

Personal Study:

Read John 5 to provide context for your personal study.

Pray for God to give you wisdom and insight into the depths of His word.

1. Imagine yourself as one of those coming to the Pool of Bethesda each day waiting for your miracle. Describe your impressions as you read John 5 and what it might have been like to watch the waters begin to mysteriously stir. What would you have been thinking on this particular day? Record your insights and thoughts.
2. Why do you think Jesus would ask such a question to a man who had been paralyzed for so many years? "Do you want to be well?" (Verse 6)
3. The details John includes in his gospel are significant. In verse 9 he records that the lame man was healed on the Sabbath.
 - Why is the Sabbath such a significant detail and what was its significance?
4. **Meditate** upon verses 19 – 30.

- A. Why did Jesus' words concerning himself and His relationship to the Father cause so much conflict?
- B. What is significant about these profound declarations from the lips of Jesus?
- C. List Jesus' claims found in these verses and ask God to plant the truth of each claim deeply in your Spirit.
5. What four "witnesses" does Jesus give that support His claim to deity? List them. (See verses 31 – 47).
6. In what ways (besides your own salvation) has God shown you His great mercy by exercising patience with you instead of giving you what you actually deserve?
7. With whom do you need to share the truth of the riches of God's mercy and grace in your life's journey that they might hear this transforming truth and receive God's mercy for themselves through salvation?
- Record the names of those whom God places upon your heart.
 - Pray for the opportunity to share the good news of God's mercy with them.
8. God's mercy extends even to the vilest enemies of God and His people. What are some ways you can extend that same mercy to those without God - in your family, your community and our world?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we don't have to live long in this world to know that everything in it is in some state of decay. This truth however only allows God's mercies to shine even brighter. Lord, Your mercy never grows old. It never runs out or dries up. Your mercies never grow weak nor fail to meet our need. They never fail because they are new every morning. Lord, Jesus, your mercy is our ultimate comfort and our eternal hope. Thank you Lord, for this incredible aspect of your character so clearly revealed in Jesus' healing of the lame man of John 5. Grant us deep insight into this mercy that we might be your instruments of mercy living without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. May we shine as your lights of mercy in this world holding fast the word of life, so that we may rejoice in the day of Christ that we have not run the race in vain nor labored in vain. In Jesus' powerful name. Amen.

*Resources: A.W. Tozer; Knowledge of the Holy
Paul Tripp: New Morning Mercies
Andrew Murray: God's Best Secrets:*

Devotional

JESUS, OUR JUDGE

Have you ever been called to court, either to testify in a case or to serve on a jury? I have had to do both and found them equally unnerving and humbling experiences. Understanding that the outcome of the case and the verdict rendered had the potential to forever change the trajectory of another's life was a sobering thought and one I did not take lightly. Because of the serious nature of this call to public service, it is mandated by law in both situations that a solemn oath is to be taken before God and the people of the court: if testifying, an oath to "tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth" is ordered. To act fairly and impartially a juror must render a decision based solely on the evidence provided. While both experiences were emotionally difficult, I found being a juror was much harder than being a witness. As a witness, I only had to tell the truth about what I had seen and heard. But as a juror, I had to decide, based on what I hoped was truthful evidence, if the person before me was guilty. Sequestered away with the jury at the conclusion of the testimony, I remember crying out to the Lord with a heavy heart, "Who am I that I should be given the responsibility to decide this man's fate? Lord, how do I know that the evidence presented was actually true? Unlike You, Lord, I can't see what actually happened. I wasn't there, but You were! Help me and this jury Lord, to

render a right verdict. Give us Your wisdom so that our decision is fair and just for all those involved.” I also prayed earnestly to the Lord to grant wisdom to the Judge presiding over the trial that he would mete out a fair and just penalty if guilt was indeed declared.

Thankful and relieved to be on the other side of those experiences, I am most grateful that I was not the defendant...that I didn't have to trust in man's testimony to determine my innocence or my guilt. On earth, there is a very real chance that human pride and human error will overshadow the truth and lead to an unjust and unfair sentence upon a person that could have devastating and life-altering consequences. Hopefully, you and I will never have to face such a trial by man on earth, but a Day is coming when you and I will have to face an even more serious trial. A Day is coming, perhaps soon, when every man who has ever lived will stand trial before the Lord. On that Day, He will judge each man according to his faith and belief in Jesus Christ, and He will justly sentence each one, either to eternal life or eternal death. In that trial human testimony will never be considered.

“Say among the nations, “The Lord reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; He will JUDGE the peoples with equity. Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord, for He comes to JUDGE the earth. He will JUDGE the world in righteousness and the peoples in His faithfulness.” (Psalm 96:10-13)

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. (2 Corinthians 5:10)

Unlike man, the Lord is able to render judgement without error. He who created all things, sits enthroned above the earth and sees the ways of man. *“For the ways of a man are before the Lord, and He watches over all his paths.” (Proverbs 5:21)*. The Lord knows the truth about each of us, and therefore, He alone is able to render the judgment we are rightly due. In His omnipotence, He knows those whose faith is real because He sees what man cannot, for *“the Lord sees the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)*. The harsh reality of man's situation is that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God who created us and gave us life. Therefore, all men—including you and me-- rightly deserve to die and spend eternity in hell. The phrase “BUT GOD”....one of my very favorite phrases in all of scripture....has made a way of escape available to everyone in the whole world. *“But God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.” (Ephesians 2:4-5)*. The only thing the Lord requires of every man in order for

him to escape condemnation is to “*believe in the Lord Jesus Christ*” for in this, Paul writes, “*you will be saved.*” (Acts 16:31) As Jesus testified: “*I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*” (John 14:6) and “*I tell you, everyone who acknowledges Me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God.*” (Luke 12:8)

Have you fallen on the mercy of God and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ so that when you stand on trial before Him, as your Judge, your faith in His blood, shed for you, will vindicate you? Have you acknowledged Him before all men so that when He sends His holy angels at the end of the age to separate the evil (unbelievers) from the righteous (believers), you will be saved from the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth? If you are not sure, it is not too late!! The Lord “*is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish*” (2 Peter 3:9).

Today is the day of grace, the day of invitation into the love and mercy of God through His Son, Jesus Christ. Now is the time to repent of your sin and to accept the life-saving truth: Jesus came to earth in order to pay the penalty you owe because of your sin; He bore in Himself the judgement due to you and gave you His righteousness which is the power that sets you free from death and eternal condemnation. This is indeed the great exchange! Jesus Christ died in your place so that when you stand on trial before Him, He will find you “NOT GUILTY”! I think one of the saddest verses in all of scripture is when on Judgement Day Jesus, our just JUDGE declares, “*depart from Me, I never knew you*” (Mathew 7:23). May this not be your sentence!

In her book Servants of the Most High God: Stories of Jesus, Mary Ann Bishop writes, “at the end of the age, those fully committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ will be revealed and rewarded, while those who reject Him will face judgment.” At the end of the age, when you stand before Christ, “*who judges in righteousness*” (Revelation 19:11; Revelation 20: 11-15), what verdict will He render about you? When He opens the Book of Life, will your name be recorded there? Friends, let no one deceive you... unless your name is written there in the precious blood of Jesus Christ, your final destination will be the lake of eternal fire.

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. From His presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened. Then another book was opened which is the book of life. And the dead were judged, each one of them according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them according to

what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found in the book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”
(Revelation 20:11-15)

What you choose to believe about Jesus Christ determines your destiny. Will you choose today to fall into the hands of the One who lives to show you mercy and give you eternal life with Him in glory, so that when you die you will not fall into His awful judgement that will forever separate you from His goodness, mercy and love? If you are saved, is there someone in your life today who needs to hear your testimony about the Lord Jesus Christ? Is there someone who needs to know the Truth so they can choose to receive the life only He can give? Whose life is on the line because you have failed to tell them “the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth” for fear of being judged and persecuted by men? Remember what Jesus said, “*do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell*” (Matthew 10:28). Wouldn't you rather stand with the Lord and be judged by men than to stand with men and be judged by God? Will you today determine to choose life and to testify about that Life to the world? God does not call you to be successful. He calls you to be faithful and in that obedience you will receive great reward!

*“Therefore, they are before the throne of God,
and serve Him day and night in His temple;
and He will shelter them with His presence.
They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
the sun shall not strike them,
nor the scorching heat.
For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and He will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*
Revelation 7:15-17