

A Theology of Mercy

Luke 6:36

October 1, 2017

Luke 6:36, which says, "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful." "Be merciful, as your Father is merciful." And again we see, just by way of introduction as we get started, it's the character of God that sets the standard for our character. And we need to understand it's not just for our behavior, as important as our outward behavior is, our speech, our actions. But as we're going to see, it's his character that sets the standard for our character. It sets the standard for our thought life as well. That's what we're going to find as we get into these verses this week and next.

For today, we're going to camp on just one adjective. It's the word merciful. We want to consider and expand on that word. As a preacher, expository preacher, I've got to make decisions about when to slow down and focus and when to try to, you know, speed things up and cover a little more ground. Even when I do cover a lot of ground, it's really not much ground, is it? It's just I do stick with just a few verses at a time, but today we really do want to focus on that word, merciful. It's very, very

important, because if we're to, "be merciful, even as our Father is merciful," we better clarify what Jesus means by the word merciful.

We ended last week with a look at the true motive of all Christian love, and that is to manifest the goodness and the grace of God. Jesus said there in Luke 6:35, which reiterates his opening command of the sermon on the mount in Luke 6:27. He ties it directly to the goodness of God. He said, "Love your enemies" in verse 35 "And do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, you'll be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil."

What connection does God's character and behavior have to our character and behavior? For truly sons of the Most High, there is to be a direct correlation between the way we think and live, and the way God thinks and lives. That's what this is saying. If our behavior toward others is characterized by disinterested, that is to say, non, self-interested love, that kind of behavior, that kind of thinking proves our parentage.

In other words, how we think how we act, that is the true paternity test. That's how we know for sure who our Father is, when we think like he thinks, when we act like he acts. We gain for ourselves a tremendous assurance that we are indeed his children. That we truly belong to him. What further need of a reward would we have beyond that, if we belong to the sovereign God of the universe? And as the song says, "I am his and he is mine", what joy is that? What else would one want? That's how we ended last time.

Today, Jesus takes this issue of parentage one step further. He says, "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" and we saw at first that Jesus presents love in action. You see, in verse 35 that "Doing good, lending, expecting nothing in return".

But then Jesus, with the next sentence, goes to the heart. He's showing love internally. It's an attitude of compassion that governs our thinking as Christians, which is what we see in verse 37. How we think about other people. Mercy, a heart of compassion, concern for others, that really is the warm beating heart of true Christianity. And it's a heart that our world so

desperately needs to see, walking out of these church doors every single Sunday morning.

We need to lead with compassion. As Christians, it's, it's like we wear the heart of our Christianity really out on our sleeves. It's a bit cliché, but there's truth in the saying that they'll, they'll never care how much you know until they know how much you care. That is true. We act out of loving wisdom that's, that's love that's guided by wisdom, informed and instructed by wisdom.

We act in thoughtful generosity as we tell the world about the gospel that saves them. And we, through our actions and our speech, the way we handle ourselves, the way we treat others, we put that gospel on display. We either do that well, or we do that poorly. But we do put that gospel on display. And our world needs to see the compassion of Christ in us.

It's quite a contrast, really, with what we're seeing in the world around us, isn't it? Jesus describes the end of the age in Matthew 24:12, as a time when, because lawlessness is increased, the love of many will grow cold. We definitely see

that today as people shirk and ignore God's law in the pursuit of their own lusts. The flame of human love and kindness dims to barely a flicker. In many cases the, the light goes out altogether. The love of many today has very much grown cold. It's really winter time. The dead of winter in America today. No compassion.

What Paul says in Second Timothy, 3:1 to 5 describing the last days is true of our time. He said, "In the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous without self-control, brutal not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." Listen, we mix with those kinds of people all the time.

In fact, these are the kinds of people who are making the important decisions in this country. They're at every level of society. From the uninfluential to the most powerfully influential, this is them. They inhabit the world we live in. They work with us, live next door, some are even family members.

They're the people adored by the media, upheld as the heroes of our culture, they're trendsetters, influencers, the ones who shape the world we live in. They're making the world after their own image, which is a cold, heartless image. Unfeeling, loveless.

I don't think a day goes by, that I don't see some headline in the news that just, it causes me such, sadness. You just wanna weep. When I think about the kinds of grisly murders that have become, really commonplace in our news headlines, it's unbelievable. When I think about our country's sin of abortion. The bloodguilt that stains American hands. When I think about the shredding of the family, tearing apart moms and dads, parents and children all through self-centered pursuits of immorality or cold-hearted ambition for money, status, prideful self-fulfillment. When I, when I think about the sin of homosexuality which is violently hostile to humanity.

Beloved, we need to look no further than the daily headlines. Ours is a time when lawlessness has increased, the love of many has grown cold. It's barely a flicker of warmth, human kindness, respect and dignity. Very, very sad times. But

folks, this is why we're here. This is why we remain, for such a time as this.

The gospel shines brightest against the very darkest background. And we are as Christians, the very light of God in a dark, dark world. Jesus said on this same occasion, the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew's account of the sermon, "You're the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand and it gives light to all in the house." He's not saying you are to be the light of the world; he's saying you are the light of the world.

Does your light shine well or poorly? That's the issue. Jesus said, "In your, in the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father who is in heaven." This is why we remain beloved. To shine a light in a dark place, that the world around us may see our good works, and give glory to our Father who is in heaven. And our prayer, is that they will give glory now, today, not when they're forced to bow the knee before the glory of God. But now, while there's still hope for repentance, while

there's still hope for salvation, we pray that God will save many at this time in this place.

And that, I believe, beloved, is why our church exists, to see God save many people in our city, in our region, as far as God will take the message of the gospel to save people through our witness. Through our witness. Our light bearing role starts and ends with God. As Paul said, in Second Corinthians 4:6, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The light of the gospel of God. It is shining in us. It's shining through us.

It's putting the spotlight, then, on the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. That is to say, the light reveals his glory. It draws as, as Christ is illuminated before people it draws. Jesus said, "If I'm lifted up, I'll draw all men to myself." God is the one who lit the Lantern in the beginning. It's his light. That light is shining in and through us.

Then Jesus in Luke 6:27 to 38, He is telling us what that light is to look like. This is what it looks like. Take a look

at the text again, Luke 6:27. "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To the one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either.

"Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? Or what grace is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit or what grace is that to you? Even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit or what grace is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount.

"But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great. You will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful, Judge not and you will not be judged; condemned not, and you will not be condemned; forgive and you will be forgiven; give, and it will

be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." Listen, that is light.

Just as none of us can generate light on our own, but we just make use of the light that is, the light that God created. The light that shines, we have light bearing receptacles, luminaries, but we do not create the light. It's energy from God, and it enlightens every man. In the same way, this is the love of God. We don't create this, God is the source. That love and that light shines through us.

As we've been pointing out, every single week as we've been in the Sermon on the Mount, the love that Jesus commands and describes is a love that the world does not know, does not practice, and cannot generate on its own. And yet, it's a love that the world so desperately needs from God, one that they will only see manifest through Christians. Because only Christians have this new nature that's able to make them a light bearing luminary.

Love of God is, it really is poured out daily. Minute by minute, revealed in the way that God creates and sustains the world and the way he cares for all of humanity. His love is poured out all the time, the ungrateful, the evil, all are recipients of his common grace and unmerited favor that covers the entire world like a blanket. He shows kindness, he restrains evil, he cares for people who are rebels by nature and by practice. It is God's general grace, a common grace unconditionally granted and universally applied.

But there are also particular ways that God shows his love and mercy to the world. Those particular acts of kindness come with particular faces. Our faces, beloved, yours and mine. God puts his love within us by the Spirit because of Christ. Then he sends us into the world to show all of them what divine love looks like.

His love is manifest in and through us first, in action, verse 27. Loving our neighbors, even our enemies. Doing good to those who hate us. Blessing those who curse us. Praying for those who abuse us and persecute us, we give to people we give generously. We give sacrificially we're not motivated by self-

interest, but rather we're motivated simply by the desire to know and please God. Imitating God is our great reward, which we practice now and will enjoy forever.

The love of God is manifest in and through us, not just by action, but also by attitude. It's an attitude of mercy and compassion that we see in God's actions toward us, and he shows kindness to all. That's the same attitude that's to motivate our actions as well. In fact, it's the attitude of compassion that must govern, even govern our thought life, temper all of our judgments, soften our hearts toward fellow sinners, especially the ones who hurt us. That's the compassion that must animate us, as Christians.

So, what I'd like to do today, is sort of to, develop from scripture, just a simple theology of divine mercy. So very important that we're clear on this. Jesus has commanded us to be merciful and according to an infinite standard of comparison, "Just as your Father is merciful," that is to say, the merciful character of God who is eternal. It's an infinitely high standard against which our love is to be measured, and by which our love is to be informed. So we better understand what we're

looking at, right? We need to understand exactly how it is that our Father is merciful, how his mercy and goodness becomes manifest, to us in us through us.

First point for this morning, should be written in your bulletin. Just simply, the mercy of God. The mercy of God. The term that's used in Luke 6:36. As I said, that term for merciful, it's an adjective. It's *oiktirmon*, translated here as merciful, and that's one of several New Testament words that convey this concept of mercy. The most common word in the New Testament is the word *eleos*. It's just translated mercy most of the time, which is the broadest sense of concern that can be showed toward those who are hurting and afflicted. Also intrinsic is a desire to help those who are suffering, help them suffering, in their suffering and affliction.

Another word along with the word *eleos* or mercy, is, which we've talked about it before, it's the word *splagchnon*. It literally means bowels. It means inward parts. Okay, it's not talking about anatomy and physiology here, it's talking about what we feel when we see others in a really pitiable condition. So think about when you've seen those who suffer, images of

suffering. You've seen the devastation of the hurricanes, children who are starving, victims of some form of abuse. All those images that come to mind. They evoke feelings from us natural feelings deep within.

We feel it really down inside of us. We call it the heart, they in their culture called it the guts. It's probably more accurate because that's where we feel. It's a pit in our stomach. That's the word *splagchnon*. But then here in Luke 6:36 the, the word, as I said is *oiktirmon*, *oiktirmos* is the noun. This is an expression of mercy. It's feelings of sympathy, which are conveyed in the terms *eleos* and *splagchnon*, but in, it, it comes out. That's the idea in *oiktirmon*.

In classical Greek, a few hundred years before Christ, *oiktirmos* referred to the literal lamenting or regretting of a person's misfortune or death, and then the literal expression of that lament, like, like, like weeping or crying or grieving, you could see it on the outside pictured. It became a vivid picture, then, of the emotion of sympathy or pity. We get into the first century New Testament times, the word mercy *eleos* and compassionate *oiktirmos* are basically synonymous terms. The

slight difference would be that whereas *eleos* refers to feelings of pity with a desire to help while *oiktirmos* refers to expressions of pity, the actuation of desires to help others.

The idea in, *oiktirmos*, what's felt on the inside, it can't be contained on the inside. It comes to the outside, expressed audibly, with a gasp or a concern, or a, or a weeping even, could be heard by others. So these feelings of sympathy, pity, sorrow, all those drive us to help those who are in need. It's compassion in action. That's the idea. In fact, the word can be translated as, just, compassionate. So if we go back to Luke 6:36, "Be compassionate, even as your Father is compassionate."

And I think for us, that really starts to strike a chord, that gets to the heart of it for us. In fact, the way it's structured, the emphasis is all on the compassion, that adjective there, "be compassionate, even as compassionate, your Father is." When the Greek, in the Greek writing, if they wanted to emphasize something, they'd put that word up to the front of the sentence and then have the sentence after it.

So, "even as compassionate, your Father is," that is to say, our Father notices our plight as wretched sinners. God is not indifferent to our pain. He's not cool and aloof. He's heartbroken, if I could use an anthropomorphism, right. But his heart is stirred about our condition. His heart is stirred about our sadness and sorrow, our pain and suffering, and his heart stirs up his action to relieve our miseries. To remove the source of our pain. And that takes us to the heart of God's goodness toward us.

So as lost and helpless sinners enslaved to sins we suffer under the weight of guilt. We feel shame. God sees it. He cares about our plight. We, we suffer the curse upon the entire world as well. Groaning, Romans 8:22 and 23 says, "Along with all creation that's also groaning because sin entered the world." Death through sin, and now we're all subject to decay and death and the law of entropy. It all is coming apart and we feel it every single day.

And yet, we find as believers, that God is very near to us in our groaning. It says in Romans 8:26, that the Holy Spirit, he "helps us in our weakness." He joins us in our groaning, "for

we do not know what to pray for as we ought." We're perplexed at times, we're bewildered, we're confused as we deal with sin and confront sin in this cursed world, "but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings that are too deep for words."

It's a clear indication, once again, of God's heart of compassion, which is there expressed toward us, his adopted children, to the, toward those for whom Christ died, and now intercedes as well. As First John 2:1 says, "Jesus Christ is the righteous, is our advocate with the Father." He's continuing his intercession, along with the Holy Spirit, praying for us, his people all the time. We're blessed, aren't we? We're blessed to know God now. As the New Testament reveals him to us.

We're blessed to know God in Christ, as Christ himself continues to teach us by the indwelling Holy Spirit that God is merciful and compassionate. In Second Corinthians 1:3 to 4, I love this, he is called "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort." James 5:11 we read again about the purpose of the Lord even in the midst of this terrible sufferings of Job, and yet, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. Those are terms, compassion, mercy, comfort, those terms go all the way

back in the Old Testament to the time of Moses, when God revealed those attributes as essential to his very nature, and he revealed them to Moses.

In fact, I'd like you to turn back to Exodus, Exodus, Chapter 33, Exodus 33. Probably should have warned you earlier when I talked about doing a theology of mercy, that, that means you're going to be turning pages in, on Sunday morning, so I hope you brought your Bibles. I hope you've limbered up your fingers, you've got eager hearts because we're going to be spanning the testaments and surveying the mercy and compassion of God. I will be compassionate to you, though, in keeping with the text and not make you turn to everything. Okay? So that's a promise from, from me.

Alright, the New Testament words for mercy. As I said, *eleos*, *splagchnon*, *oiktirmon*, they translate. Old Testament words for mercy, words like *chesed* and *racham*. The verb for showing mercy, for having compassion is the verb *chamal*. This attribute of divine mercy and compassion, we find this proclaimed in the Old Testament and illustrated in the Old Testament time and time again throughout Israel's history.

So that's really, really helpful to read your Old Testament. Make that a part of your daily reading, because you need to see portrayed before you, the kind of God that God is. Even to a sinful people, especially to a sinful people. I like how Louis Berkhof described and defined this attribute of mercy. He called it the "Goodness or love of God shown to those who are in misery or distress" and get this, "Irrespective of their deserts." That is to say, we see mercy most clearly when the deeds of mankind deserve the very severest of God's judgment.

And yet he doesn't mete out that judgment then. He relents from his just wrath, and he shows kindness, when wrath is deserved. What we read in Exodus 33, we need to remember how it occurred immediately following, well, Exodus 32. I know that's profound, but, but it followed in Exodus 32 with an incident with, if you may remember, the golden calf. God miraculously, powerfully, extracted Israel from the empire of Egypt, which was the world's mightiest superpower at the time.

For him, as the divine, omnipotent God, it was an effortless act of his omnipotence to remove Israel from the

heart of Egypt. But God wanted to teach Israel more than just about his power. He's not just powerful, he's gracious and merciful too. So, along the route of their escape as he brought them to Sinai, where he would give them the law, thereby transforming them from a slave people into a bona fide nation, God taught them along the way to trust him, implicitly showing his grace and kindness and mercy and tenderness all along the way.

God had shown them his perfect faithfulness. His impeccable trustworthiness and right at the moment that he brought them to Sinai, and just at the moment when he brings Moses to the top of Mount Sinai, to give him the law from his own hand. Israelites are down the mountain engaging in pagan revelry. They're feasting, they're drinking, they're dancing, and partying around this idol of a golden calf. You know who led the, the celebration? Aaron their pastor. This is an abominable act. A betrayal on their part. It was an unthinkable act of sin and immorality.

God could have destroyed them there in a moment, in a heartbeat, but he chose to spare them. God remembered his

promise to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. He relented from wiping them off the map altogether, erasing their memory from the Earth. Just an incredible act of restraint on his part. The very picture of mercy, divine goodness from God, and get this, irrespective of what they truly deserved.

Now God did deal with the sin of the Pagan revelers. He used Moses and the Levite's to execute judgment on them by the sword in Exodus 32:25 to 29, but after purifying the camp of that blatant rebellion, God moved on in grace, mercy with the rest of Israel.

Take a look at Exodus 33:1 to 3. The Lord said to Moses, "Depart; go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up from out of the land of Egypt to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your offspring, I will give it.' I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people."

Now look, just that small section is just loaded with grace and mercy. Loaded. He's going to, carry on the plan that he said he would enact, the promise that he made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He's going to fulfill, even with them, at that time. And he's gonna send his angel before them. Don't think, you know, precious moments angels, you know, little, cherub faces and you know, those little figurines that you, you know if you knock off the shelf, they smash into bits and pieces.

Don't think about that when you think angels. Biblically, angels, warriors. Every time they come on the scene, and there's a human-being involved, they are terrified. These are warriors. He says, "I'm going to send my angel before you," and then drive out all these -ites, these peoples, these are not, these are not insignificant groups of people. These are powerful, mighty nations, and God is just going to dispossess them of the land and make room for his people. That's grace.

It's powerful action on their behalf. He says, I'm going to bring you into a land flowing with milk and honey. It's going to be rich, prosperous. This land, these cities that they didn't

build, these fields that they didn't cultivate. God is going to bring them all in, say, here, take over. Incredible mercy, grace and yet Moses can't rest securely if God will not go up with Israel.

Skip down to verse 12. Notice how Moses pleads there with God. "He said to the Lord, 'See, you say to me, "Bring up this people," but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, "I know you by name, you also found favor in my sight." Now, therefore, if, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight.'

"'Consider too that this nation is your people.' And God said, 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.' So Moses said to him, 'If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the Earth?'"

You see, Moses recognizes that it's God's presence that makes Israel distinct as a people, and without him they are nothing. You know he's right about that. God tells Moses, verse 17, "This very thing that you've spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." Berkoff speaks further about this divine mercy, describing it this way, he says "In his mercy, God reveals himself as a compassionate God who pities those who are in misery and is ever ready to relieve their distress." It's true, that's what he just did here.

It's what he did for Israel. And then God did something over and above that something remarkable in response to Moses' requests here. Verse 18, Moses asked, "Please show me your glory," and God acquiesced. He, he showed Moses his glory. Skip ahead in the chapter to Exodus 34 verses 5 to 7. Because he first demonstrated his mercy to Moses, to the people. Now he's going to proclaim his mercy. He's going to lay this down in black and white.

We discover this, in this statement, this is nothing less than an attribute of the divine essence. Look at Exodus 34:5 to 7, says that "The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him

there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, 'The Lord the Lord'", that's the divine name Yahweh.

"A God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation."

His justice is there, his mercy is there, and he leads with mercy. And as we discover, we keep reading throughout the Old Testament and new, that proclamation sets a foundation for our understanding of God. And it's repeated Old Testament, fulfilled and manifest fully in the New Testament. Again, the word merciful, *raham*, compassionate. God cares about the plight of his people. He is never far from those who call upon him. He's ever ready to show mercy and compassion to them.

Before we move on to another passage, take one final look at a request from Moses, the mediator. He, he acts immediately

on what he just heard from God. Like a good mediator, to make one more request, he says in verse 8, verses 8 and 9, "Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. Then he said, 'If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.'"

Pardoning iniquity and sin that demonstrates the heart of God's mercy and compassion toward guilty sinners. Israel kept looking back at those words, Yahweh, Yahweh, "A God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." That they kept looking back to, and you can see why. That's the mercy and compassion of God the, the only one who has the power, and the will, and the heart, the desire to forgive sinners.

Turn ahead in your Bibles to Numbers. Numbers chapter 14. Numbers chapter 14. You're going to see Moses remind God of what he had revealed. Israel had sinned yet again. Israel had listened to the sinful council of the doubters when God said,

look, I'll destroy all those -ites, I'll send my angel before you, get them out of there, and bring you in.

A bunch of doubters gave counsel to the whole people and said, yeah, but those people were pretty menacing. I don't know if God's powerful enough, if God, he's really up to snuff on this. I mean, these are really powerful people. Been fighting a long time. I don't know. They don't believe God. They fear man, which puts God to the test. It's frankly offensive when God says look, I'm gonna do this and they say yeah, but are you really?

So because the people listen to worthless council, they not only failed to take the promised land, they attempted to appoint new leadership, get this, to take them back into slavery in Egypt. God would have destroyed them in the moment on the spot.

But Moses again threw himself, and the people, on God's mercy look at Numbers 14:18, 17 and 18. "Now, please let the power of the Lord be great as you've promised, saying, 'The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to

the third and fourth generation.' But please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of your steadfast love, as you have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."

He just banked everything. He threw everything on red, you might say. He just threw everything on that promise, that you are a forgiving God. We see the same promise of God's unchanging mercy because it's an eternal perfection of God and it's brought up again and again by the psalmists. Sons of Korah, Psalm 86:15, "But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." Repeat right.

David, like we heard this morning in Psalm 103, verse 8, "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love." Another from King David, Psalm 145 verse 8, "The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love." Unattributed, Psalm 111, first few verses of that psalm, verses 2 to 4, "Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them. Full of splendor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever. He has

caused his wondrous works to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and merciful.”

Again and again and again, whether direct quotations or allusions to this text, Exodus 34:6, it's repeated, it wasn't just the psalmist either, who led the Israelites in rejoicing about God's mercy. The prophets, they pointed back to God's compassion, even when they were warning Israel to repent. They're basically saying, look, if you'll humble yourselves and if you'll turn from your sins, look to God, you'll surely find in him a heart that's quick to forgive you.

Joel 2:13 just as one example, the prophet pleads with the people “Return to the Lord your God.” Why? How do we know, Joel, that that's a good idea? I mean, we've been sinners, he may stomp us with his boot. Now, “Return to the Lord your God, for,” here's the reason, here's the explanation, “He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.” God's mercy becomes an encouragement for sinners to repent, because God will certainly forgive you if you repent. It's in his nature to do so. It's in the essence of his being. It's in his character. You find the same refrain in other

prophets as well. As I said, both by direct statement and by allusion to that text.

One more illustration of this, turn ahead to the postexilic book in Nehemiah, Nehemiah. It's before the Psalms, so if you get to the Psalms, you've gone too far. Go to Nehemiah and, chapter 9 verse 17. When Israel failed to rejoice with the psalmist in the character of God, when Israel failed to repent at the preaching of the prophets. People of God finally failed to respond to the mercy and compassion of God. God did what he said he would do.

He sent the whole nation into exile. The northern Kingdom of Israel, he sent first to Assyria, then the southern Kingdom as well, carted off to Babylon in exile. But again, in his mercy, God limited the exile to 70 years. He ordained that the Persian ruler, Cyrus the great, should decree the return of Israel to the promised land. And Nehemiah, as they returned to the land, he's the first governor of Israel. He's there, along with Ezra the scribe, and some faithful Levites, and they led the restored people of Israel who had come back into the land.

Physically there, seeing the fulfillment physically literally, of God's promises. There they are in the land and Nehemiah 9, we read Israel's national prayer of repentance. I love this prayer, and I'm reminded that there was a time, even in our own history, when presidents used to lead the nation in prayers of repentance. Oh, that God would restore that to our land, Amen?

This is the model, Nehemiah 9. So it says in Nehemiah 9, 2 to 3 that the people had, they had basically, tried to purify themselves. They separated themselves from all foreigners, and they stood and confessed their sins, the iniquities of their fathers, they stood up in their place and read from the book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day. And for another quarter of it, they made confession and worshiped the Lord their God.

If ever you think I'm going too long in a sermon, remember, quarter of the day explaining the word of God and a quarter of the day, responding in worship. So they recited here, the goodness of the Lord, the one who created the world. They recited the grace of God who chose Israel from the nations to

belong to him. And now, repentant Israel looks back to God's mercy, confessing this.

Look ahead at Nehemiah 9:16 and following, "But they and our fathers," in spite of your grace Lord they, "acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. They refused to obey, and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them.

"Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, 'This is your God, who brought you up out of Egypt,' and committed great blasphemies, you in your great mercies, did not forsake them in the wilderness." Stop there. The prayer recounts the sins of Israel, which led to their exile, which we've already gone over and looked at. Look at verse 31, "Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God," and there it is again.

Reciting the mercy and the compassion of the divine nature, which God had revealed to Moses, about a thousand years earlier. This restored, repentant Israel made yet another covenant before God. We're going to do better this time. They promised obedience. They even signed their names to that covenant, the leaders did, in Nehemiah 10.

But sadly, that's not the final word in Nehemiah. In fact, if you look at both Nehemiah and Ezra, they describe the spiritual defection of Israel, yet again. Started by failing to support the priesthood, a disinterest, you might say, in church, in spiritual matters. They violated the Sabbath. Again, a disinterest in spiritual matters, and they did it for the sake of money. They were working on the Sabbath, trading on the Sabbath, doing commerce. They intermarried with foreign women again, going after what their eyes saw, rather than what their God told them to do and not to do.

Once again, here's Israel, "We'll do better this time, Lord." They spurn divine mercy, they're going their own way, right from the start. And yet, once again here's God being

merciful, he sent more prophets, Haggai, Zachariah to turn their hearts back to God. Malachi, later on as well. Listen, is there anyone in the universe who's been more offended than God? Is there anyone more unjustly treated? Disregarded by others? Is there anyone more taken for granted and more ignored than God? When he gives, which he is doing continuously, he's not only not thanked, but he's overtly disobeyed.

Sinners celebrate lifestyles that flaunt their immorality and defy his holy word. And yet, we find God to remain unchanged, immutable in being the most merciful and compassionate of all. Folks, that is the unrelenting compassion that we're to show toward other people. Even toward those who disregard us, even to those who spurn our kindness, even to those who are, frankly, they treat us as enemies. For the sake of Christ.

What we see revealed in Scripture, in the progress of revelation, is God's repeated acts of mercy, his heart of compassion that never changes. We also find out, in the progress of revelation, that God intended all along not just to keep this pattern of sin and forgiveness and sin and mercy and sin and

compassion going, *ad infinitum, ad nauseam* all the way into Infinity. No.

He had a plan from the very beginning, Genesis 3:15, to deal fully, and finally with the cause of human pain and human sorrow and human suffering. He sent Jesus Christ his only Son, to put an end to it all by satisfying his just judgment on the cross, deserve for our sins. Turn to John 1:1 as we get into a second point. John 1:1.

A second point, and it's written in your outline in your bulletin, is the mercy of God in Christ. The mercy of God in Christ. From the golden calf incident in Exodus 32, to the repeated rebellions recorded in the book of Numbers to the sinful failures in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, when, what is it that stayed God's hand? What is it that kept him from executing immediate justice? What kept him from annihilating these stiff-necked, hard-hearted people? Mercy, compassion coming at the due and proper time.

Look, God is not long suffering in a cold and detached way. He's not indifferent. He's patient because he's merciful. He

stays his hand of judgment because his heart is full of compassion. When sinners commit sins, look, you need to understand when they commit sins, when you commit sins, when I commit sins, we're, we're showing enslavement. We're trapped by slave master sin, who is the tool, which is the tool, of slave master Satan. Satan wants to mangle your soul. He wants to drag you to hell. There is no goodness in him. When we sin, we're doing his bidding.

People trapped in sin, guilty of sin, defiled by sin, debased in sin, they're all enticed to the slaughter. Ruined and God takes no pleasure in seeing sinners victimized, destroyed under the power of sin. His heart, again, if I can use an anthropomorphism, his heart bleeds with compassion for them.

I like how Stephen Charnock described this, he said, it's a longer quote, bear with me. "His goodness," Charnock says, and mercy I might add, because divine mercy is a subset of divine goodness. Okay, so keep that in mind, "His goodness appears in turning men. When they were pleased with their own misery and unable to deliver themselves; when they preferred hell before him, and were in love with their own vileness; when his call was

our torment and his neglect of us had been accounted for our happiness.

“Was it not a mighty goodness to keep the light close to our eyes, when we endeavored to blow it out? And the medicated bandage near to our hearts, when we endeavored to tear it off, being more fond of our disease than the remedy? We should have been scalded to death with the Sodomite had God not laid his good hand upon us, and drawn us from the approaching ruin we affected, and were loath to be freed from. ... In this state, we were when his goodness triumphed over us.

“When he put a hook into our nostrils to turn us in order to our salvation, and drew us out of the pit which we had digged, when he might have left us to sink under the rigors of his justice we had merited.” End Quote. Look from cover to cover, the glory of God is revealed in the mercy and compassion that he shows in his kindness and tenderness toward undeserving sinners. But we ask, where does God's mercy and compassion finally culminate? Where does it come to its fulfillment, when it, when it deals, not just with the fruit of sins and rescuing

us every time we fall into a trap or a hole? When does he deal, finally, with the root too?

Well, divine mercy triumphed over our sin and our disgrace when God sent Jesus Christ, who is the very embodiment of his grace and mercy. Look at John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men."

Skip ahead to verse 9, "The true light, which enlightens everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own," That is the Jews, "His own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor the will of flesh, nor the will of man, but born of God."

Light and life in Christ. That is the full and final mercy and compassion of God. It's his light that leads us, leads us

out of darkness. It's his life that causes us to be born again to an entirely new life. In mercy, he sent Christ to complete what he earlier revealed to Moses, look at verse 14, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Look, that might not be as apparent in its New Testament form, written first in Greek, then translated for us into English, but that verse, John 1:14 is exactly what God revealed about himself to Moses in Exodus 34:6. The language is strikingly similar, parallel. Whereas God in Exodus 34:6 is "Abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." "The glory of the only Son from the Father," John 1:14, is full or "Fulfilled in grace and truth". Same terms. Steadfast love is the word *chesed*, which is grace. And faithfulness is the word *emeth* which is truth.

What was revealed about God in the Old Testament fulfilled in Christ right here in John 1. Not only that, but the combination of the word "dwelt" with the word "glory," those terms point back to Exodus 33 and 34 as well, where Moses

pleaded for God's glory to remain and to dwell with Israel. We know that as the shekinah glory of God. Shekinah comes from the verb *sakan* which means to dwell in a tent, or to tabernacle with. Same words. What the Old Testament proclaims, illustrates how God is continually abounding in grace and truth.

The New Testament fulfills in Jesus Christ the fulfillment of God's grace and truth. Jesus is God's mercy incarnate. He is the embodiment of God's compassion for sinners. He came as the incarnation of the very shekinah glory of God, the glory of God that would dwell with sinners.

Look, this comes across so clearly, so obviously in the New Testament as we read in the gospels, the way Jesus dealt with sinners touching lepers with his hands. He didn't put on medical gloves first, he touched them. He raised dead children to give them back to grieving parents. He showed tenderness toward the plight of human weakness and human sin. He knows our frame, he knows we're just dust.

Jesus went ashore in Matthew 14:14, he saw a great crowd, he had compassion on them, he healed their sick. Once when he

saw the pitiful condition of two blind men, he was moved with compassion again. Matthew 20, verse 34 says, feeling it in his guts this word, *splagchnizomai*, he "touched their eyes and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him." Same thing in the case of the leper, Mark 1:40 to 41, same verb there, *splagchnizomai*. Same feeling in his guts when he saw this poor wretched leper, "And the leper implored him, 'If you are willing, you can make me clean.'" Jesus, it says, Mark 1:40-41, "He was moved with compassion, he stretched out his hand and touched the man and said to him, 'I am willing. Be clean.'"

Jesus didn't just look at physical maladies, he looked beneath all that physical stuff, he saw the cause of all human suffering at the root of, the root of it all, with sin, the curse of sin, which produces all death. And that's why in Mark 6:34 it says, "When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things." They didn't just need physical healing, physical healing would have taken care of that current malady, that current situation, but they needed spiritual truth, truth to heal their sin, sick souls.

At the same time, and even on that same occasion, he never forgot about their physical needs. After teaching the crowd, Jesus told his disciples, Matthew 15:32, "I have compassion on the crowd because they've been without, with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. I'm unwilling to send them away hungry lest they faint on the way." Such compassion, right?

Look, such joy that must have given our Lord, to use the power of God to manifest the mercy and compassion of God for weak sinners. The greatest act of compassion that he could show, which he demonstrated toward the sick, the weak, needy sinners. To ascend the cross, to die for guilty sinners, to purchase redemption for all who believe.

And he says to all weary sinners, overcome and dismayed by the power of sin in their life. He says, "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, that is, or are weary and heavy laden, I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart," that is to say, I'm a meek man. "You'll find rest for your souls." So the mercy of God is manifest in the person of Christ, who God ordained him to be. The fullness of grace and truth.

The mercy of God is manifest in all the actions of Christ all through the days of his earthly ministry. His interacts with weak sinners. But most profoundly the mercy of God is manifest in the gospel of Christ for all eternity upon all who believe. One more point for this morning is going to carry us into next week, so this is going to be very brief.

Third Point though, the mercy of God in Christ, through Christians, through Christians. This is where it comes full circle, really, back to Luke 6:36, we're to "be compassionate, even as our Father is compassionate." We've seen the mercy, compassion of God toward his people. Though undeserving, though repeatedly sinful, we've seen the mercy and compassion of God fulfilled in Christ. And now we need to see the mercy of God in Christ as he commands our behavior.

As he empowers and motivates our behavior, bringing that compassion to others through us. And for this point, I'd like you to just briefly turn to Romans 12, Romans 12, at the beginning of Romans 12. Paul, there, is transitioning from a predominantly doctrinal section of Romans, into several chapters

of powerfully focused, targeted exhortation. The doctrinal section of Romans is the most thorough elaboration of the gospel in a single book in all of Scripture.

I know you're familiar with it, but just as a review chapters 1 through 3, Paul explains the need for the gospel, because of the condemnation of God on all mankind. Man in his sin has suppressed God's truth, that he can clearly see, in creation, in providence. He's transgressed his law, which he knows either by book, or by what's written on the heart. All mankind exists under divine wrath, no amount of law keeping can deliver us from God's wrath, because we cannot erase the sins that we have committed against God. And as a holy, righteous judge, God must punish sin. He can do no other.

In Chapters 4 and 5, we find out the remedy to this sinful condition we're in. Paul explains, he defends the key principle that enables God to justify the unjust. It's the principle of justification by faith. Romans 3:22, "It's the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe."

That principle, as Paul explains, it's as old as Abraham who believed God. "His faith was reckoned to him as righteousness," and all like Abraham, who put their faith in Jesus Christ. God imputes their sin to Christ and Christ's righteousness to them, and therefore declares them righteous.

In chapter 6 through 8, Paul explains sanctification. This is how the believer grows in holiness, manifesting the righteousness of God. This is the work of Christ in the believer by the Holy Spirit to reveal a new regenerate character. This is nothing less than the character of God the Father manifest in the life of the believer who bears the image of God.

And finally, in Chapters 9 to 11. Paul explains how the rejection of Israel does not indicate any lack of faithfulness on God's part. God has not rejected his people. Instead, by sovereign decree, Israel's rejection means salvation for the gentiles, and God will return with his favor and mercy for his people, the Jews.

Now with that in mind, it's just a quick review of Romans, 1 through 11, take a look at Romans 12:1, "I appeal to you

therefore, brothers," by what? "The mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual," or your reasonable or your logical "service of worship." The word mercy is there same word in Luke 6:36 *oiktirmos*.

This entire plan, this grand, glorious, marvelous plan of divine salvation that took Paul 11 chapters to develop, he summarizes with one phrase. The mercies of God. The compassion of God. Remember what we learned earlier? About the definition, explanation, of divine mercy and compassion? Mercy is the goodness of God toward those who are in misery or distress.

That's all mankind, beloved. That's everyone. All our neighbors, friends, or enemies near relations, or distant acquaintances, they're all in misery and distress because of their sins. And we remember God's compassion as the one who pities those in misery, ever ready to relieve their distress. He's our father, isn't he? By amazing grace, and because of him, we've been granted the right to become children of God.

Now we have the distinct privilege of carrying his name, the name of our own Father before other miserable sinners, to show them compassion, to become dispensers of divine mercy to others. Look, I believe we tend to think of the doctrines of the gospel, and sometimes, far too academically. Church like ours, where we do try to emphasize doctrine, we do try to teach, teach, teach, train, train, train, explain, help you understand.

Sometimes we need to take a pause and say, this isn't just academic, is it? There are things to learn, but this is not an academic exercise. We need to realize the compassion of God, the sympathetic feeling that is at work in our salvation, and beloved, recognizing the kindness of God in our salvation, the mercy of God in Christ. It's what helps us to extend that divine compassion to other undeserving sinners who are in just as much need of God's compassion as you are as I am.

Turn back to Luke 6:36 to wrap this up just quickly. It's the compassion of God, manifest, manifest in the salvation that's won for us by Jesus Christ. It's the compassion that dictates Christian behavior. Our text again, Luke 6:36, "We're to be merciful, even as our Father is merciful." That's gonna

dictate the way we love others, not just in word and deed, even though that's very, very important.

Jesus spent a lot of time developing that. But also in the way we think about others as well. That's Luke 6:37, "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemned not, and you will not be condemned; forgive and you will be forgiven." Look, in light of the manifold, eternal mercies of God, how could we think any other way, right? More on that next time, let's pray.

Father, we are humbled and silenced, really before your continued demonstrations of compassion for us guilty, undeserving sinners. And as we think about the text before us and Luke 6:36 and following and we think about what we have yet to learn from Christ. About this attitude, as we think about others and respond and interact with other people, I pray that your heart of mercy and compassion would animate us. That your heart would be our heart, that your will, our will, your way, our way.