

## Wanted: A Theology Of Mercy

Psalm 130; Matthew 5:7

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AUDIO: [www.fbcjc.buzzsprout.com/7678/284874-wanted-a-theology-of-mercy](http://www.fbcjc.buzzsprout.com/7678/284874-wanted-a-theology-of-mercy)

A person once said to his pastor, "Pastor, when you preach to us on Sunday morning, we'll all be wearing our nice clothes and a big smile. But don't let that fool you. Just remember that under every heart is a little bucket of tears" [Dr. Vernon Davis, *Proclaim Magazine*, Jan-Mar., 1990, p. 15]. I've thought about that a lot over the years. And even the past few weeks. How much I need God's mercy. You need it. Our nation needs it. Right after the horrible slaughter in Charleston, S.C., one of my Facebook friends simply posted two words: Kyrie Eleison (Lord, have mercy on us).

Mercy is one of those commonly used words that we rarely take time to explore. Its root word in the Hebrew is related to the word for "womb." Yes, a mother's love is mercy love. The Hebrew word for mercy, *khaw-nah*, means to bend or bestow, to favor. The great theologian Karl Barth said that God's mercy is God's grace tilting toward us, inclining toward us. God's readiness to show mercy springs from God's nature, because God is mercy and stamps all God's being and doing with mercy [*Church Dogmatics*, 3/1, p. 369].

Mercy is everywhere in scripture, both as a word and an underlying theme: "Have mercy on me, O God" Psalm 51:1; "Let me see your great mercy full-face" Psalm 69:16 (*The Message*); "His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning" Lamentations 3:22; "...but to do justice and to love mercy...Micah 6:8; "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" Matthew 9:27; "God, be merciful to me, a sinner" Luke 18:13; "The Father of mercies and the God of all consolation" 2 Corinthians 1:3; "But God, who is rich in mercy..." Ephesians 2:4. Think of it this way: to ponder God's mercy is to expand our notion of God...and shine a light on how we're supposed to live.

Now this psalm, the 130th, is a great one about God's mercy. The writer is in the depths (v. 1). Corrie Ten Boom wrote that no matter the pit we're in, God can always reach down deeper! Note the honesty. No pretending. We don't have HIDE it; we don't have to HOLD it! When we have deep need, God takes us seriously. My life matters!

I experienced God's mercy recently during my grieving Dad's death. I lay on the sofa, really struggling. Then I opened my Bible and began to read mercy passages and I felt a genuine turning and healing begin. It's true. There is a refreshing quality in God's mercy! (Lam. 3:22). Sometimes, we just have to let God love us! Lewis Smedes once wrote that only God knows the combination to our heart's lock. And God can spin off that combination and open our hearts, if we will let that mercy in.

But please note. Mercy does not mean that our sin does not matter; it simply means there is a greater, more powerful truth working in our lives (v. 7). God's mercy! The Cross! The resurrection!

Now here's the tricky part. There's just as much in scripture about showing mercy as there is about receiving it. Note our second text, Matthew 5:7. Glen Stassen translated this verse thus: "Joyful are those who practice compassion in action for they will receive God's compassion." In other words, mercy has two sides. Remember the great lines from Shakespeare? In "The Merchant of Venice," Portia begs Shylock for mercy and says, "The quality of mercy is not strain'd,/It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven/Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;/It blesseth him that gives and him that takes." [Act IV; Scene 1]. Pope Francis says that mercy improves our view of the other by putting ourselves in his or her shoes. Think of the racial tension tearing at our nation. What would change if we could do that? Show that kind of mercy?

And to further apply these mercy truths, think about people who have been turned off by church or given up on church. What do we hear the most? It's the lack of mercy, the lack of compassion. I found these amazing verses tucked away in the tiny Book of Jude, near the back of our Bibles. "keep yourselves in the love of God; look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ...and have mercy on some who are wavering..." (vv. 21-22). In other words, treat non-believers and those who have dropped out with respect and not disdain. Since you've received mercy, share mercy!

Do you see the broken people around you? The angry ones? The turned off? The lost? The guilty? The poor and the hungry? The people who don't look or talk like you? They are really just saying, "Please love me. Show me some tenderness. Show me God's mercy."