

Mercy

Psalm 37:25, *'I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread.'*

It takes a lifetime to begin to comprehend the merciful character of our God. King David of Israel had every reason to know the Lord, but everyone who is called by the Lord in their youth and remains faithful 'til they are old cannot but understand the patience, the loving kindness and the mercy of our Creator.

Our Creator well knows our human passions, our human nature with all of its weakness, for He it was who made us that way, and He it was who planned for us to have a lifetime to learn how to overcome that frailty with the help of His Holy Spirit, given to those whom He calls, and chooses, if they reveal a willingness to repent in the face of His Commandments and Laws, Psalm 90:10, 12,14, *'The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.... So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom....Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.'* And Acts 2:38, *'And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'*

There are just a few verses in the Bible which sum up what God considers to be important in His people. Two of them are: Matthew 23:23 and Micah 6:8, *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.' ... 'He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?'*

In Matthew 23 we are told that the weightier matters of the law are justice, mercy and faith. Justice is about our judgment – the decisions we make as we experience life. Will we be guided by God's Laws, the commandments, the patterns and examples He has placed in the Bible for us, or will we allow our baser human nature to triumph, so that we sin?

The pulls of human nature are strong, and our fleshly desires can be stronger still. We can have a desire in our hearts to walk with God, to keep His Commandments, and yet be tempted by situations we encounter to break those commandments.

That is where the next weighty matter of the Law comes in. While we need to apply mercy to others in our lives, we learn the meaning of mercy from the way that God deals with us when we are tempted and fail to keep His Laws.

I mentioned King David at the beginning. God called him as a teenager, after watching him care for his father's sheep, 1 Samuel 16:11, *'Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here.'* David first learned about God from his father Jesse and from his meditation while tending his flock. His recognition of God's glory came to him as he mused upon the night skies and the wonder of creation he saw all around him, - the sheep, the wild animals and birds, as we read in Psalm 8. These inspired him to study and ponder upon God's words, Psalm 12:6, *'The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.'*

David's life is there for us as an example so that we can learn more about how God deals with us. Despite his desire to please God, David is probably best known for his incidents with Goliath and Bathsheba. David's lust for Bathsheba upon seeing her bathe from the roof of his palace, led him to adultery and murder, 2 Samuel 11:2, *'It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful.'* Few sins could have been more serious and **though David fully repented** and was forgiven by God (read Psalm 51) sin brings consequences and his child with Bathsheba died.

We all sin, and like David stumble in our relationship with God time after time. I know that I have and I marvel at the way that God extends mercy to us bearing with our frailties until we can gradually overcome, though this does not mean that there are not penalties to be paid for our sin, as we saw in David's example.

His wasn't the only example God gives. Abraham's life reveals repeated error in that when faced with danger because of his beautiful wife, over many years he was prepared to lie to preserve his life, thereby breaking one of the Ten Commandments. Abraham however is still recognised by God as very special among the patriarchs, Galatians 3:29, *'And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.'* Genesis 17:4, *'Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.'* In Romans 4:11 we are also told that he is *'The father of all them that believe'*. Like David, he will have a very special role and position in Christ's coming Kingdom and yet he too was subject to human weakness when faced with a temptation to sin.

The fact is that we all sin, 1 John 1:18, *'If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.'*

As a result, **we all need to go before God in repentance**, not just once before baptism, but many, many times as we recognise our errors. One of the spiritual giants of the New Testament, the Apostle Paul, towards the end of his life, wrote Romans 7:15, *'For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.'* He recognised that his human nature brings about sin, verses 16-17, *'Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me,'* - that there are God given drives within us which we sometimes find impossible to overcome, verses 18-19, *'For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.'* Who will deliver Paul from death, which is the wages of sin? Verse 25, *'Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!'*

Of course we should not permit such a glorious promise to limit our diligence and effort to overcome our weaknesses. Despite what some will say, we are rewarded according to our works, Revelation 22:12, *'And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.'* If our goal is to be in the first resurrection, **Christ expects us**, (as His Bride to be) **to be overcomers**, (Read about overcoming in Revelation chapters 2-3). Proverbs 31:29 makes it clear that to qualify we will need to excel in virtue. *'Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.'* We should be able to look back over the years and recognise that we have indeed made progress in overcoming, but thankfully in the final analysis, it will be God's mercy which triumphs in bringing us into His Kingdom.

Well, now that we understand and can appreciate God's great mercy towards *us*, let's make sure that we apply that same mercy to others, when it is similarly justified! Matthew 6: 12, 14-15, *'and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against usFor if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.'*

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