

Mercy belongs to God

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] Turn back with me to the psalm that we studied last week, Psalm 62. And last week really focused on the words in verse 11, where the Holy Spirit through David says, God has spoken once and twice.

I have heard this, that power belongeth unto God. And this morning I would like to look at this sort of, as it were, the second half of that verse, the second half of the sentence.

You can't leave them on their own. You can't deal only with God's power without looking at God's mercy. And verse 12 says, And also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy, for thou renderest to every man according to his work.

We saw God as powerful last week, but we know that in people's lives, or if you know any individual person, that if they are merely powerful people, or if a force is merely powerful, then it's frightening. And power without mercy is indeed a frightening thought and a frightening concept. But we give thanks to the God that we worship and serve, and in whose presence we're in this morning, is a God who is not only powerful, but whose power is so focused by his love and by his mercy.

[1 : 24] His power to act on your behalf and on my behalf is motivated by a love for us, and by a love for our persons, and for the church and the congregation.

So I would like to look at what we're told here about the Lord being, or the Lord having mercy, or mercy belonging to the Lord.

Mercy and love, the word can be used as well. And surely we're all experts. If we're experts in nothing else, we're experts in love, and we're interested in love, and we're all capable of love. And we all would like to think that we give love to others and receive love in return. But this is slightly different, because this morning we stand on the brink of uniqueness when we look into God's love or God's mercy here.

Because we always take with us into our study of God's word our own ideas. And so when we think about God's love, we take with us our ideas of what it is.

[2 : 34] We take our own bruised and bloodied ideas of what love is. Our ideas of love which are abused by sin and by our own mistakes.

So this morning it's as if we want to change things, and change things around, so that we look at it from a different light. Because this morning we look in almost as it were, tiptoe.

We're tiptoeing and looking over the top of a cauldron, which inside it has God's character, God's characteristics. And we're kind of stretching as we look at God's word and tiptoeing, and glancing over and in to what is unique, and what is God's character, and what is very different to what we are used to.

And so we can really only use our own ideas of love as steps on the outside to help us look in to God because they're so very different, and because they're so very inferior.

God's mercy here is love. It's absolutely different and completely unique to the love we know and experience. And so sometimes it doesn't really help to take our ideas in with us.

[3 : 49] But the original word that's used here is a tremendous word, and it takes us by the hand. It grabs hold of us and walks us straight into God's heart and into God's character.

And it's a completely unique word that we have in the original language. And the word that we have here that's translated mercy is untranslatable with one English word.

We can't really explain the depth and the height and the width of this word with one English word because, you see, all the Gaelic speakers here will know that the English language is really a very one-dimensional language.

It's a very boring language, and in reality it's fairly unexpressive. It doesn't express things very well. It's not a romantic language.

It's not a powerful emotional language. And compared with, say, Gaelic, or compared with Hebrew, which is the language that this Old Testament was written in, it really can't express.

[4 : 54] It struggles. It fails. It hasn't the capability to translate some words from the Hebrew. And this is probably the word that it finds hardest to translate and to bring any kind of meaning to because the original word is a massive word in Hebrew.

It only has five letters, but it's a massive word. It's a word that's really wide and really deep and really high. And it's absolutely full of meaning.

It's intense. It's absolutely concentrated. It's a dense word. It's a luxurious word. It's a word that's pregnant with meaning. It covers such a wide area of meaning, this word that we have in the original language.

It's such an important word that when the translators of the New International Version were doing their work, they translated the whole of the Bible apart from this word.

They left it to the very last because it was so difficult. They didn't know what word to use.

Eventually, they used usually mercy, sometimes love. The authorised version uses mercy here.

[6 : 05] In other places, it uses loving kindness, which is very good in its translation. But it means so many things.

It holds all sorts of ideas. It holds ideas of loyalty, of friendship, of passion, of faithfulness, of kindness, of spontaneous kind of love.

It's a word that's really got so many meanings that we can't just leave it there with that shallow, kind of one-dimensional translation of mercy as it is here.

But it's covered, the idea of God's love for mercy is covered by two major ideas, two major concepts, kind of bring in or under the umbrella of this word, we find that there's two major concepts.

And the first is that this love that's explained here, or this mercy, is a covenant mercy, or a covenant love between God and His people.

[7 : 05] That is, that the love that's spoken about here, and the love that we're always preaching about in God's house, is a love between two persons. It's a love of relationship, of covenant, of a bond.

It's a committed, meaningful love that is focused onto people, focused onto you, and onto me. It's not a kind of wishy-washy, wavy love that we get spoken about when people talk about God's love that kind of hangs in the air and is no use to anyone.

It's a committed, focused love that loves you as a person in your own particular need as a Christian. It is a relationship love.

We're not always objects of this special mercy and love that's spoken of here. We weren't born with this loving relationship with Jesus Christ.

It's not something we have by virtue of the family we were brought up in, or the church we've attended, but rather it's something that happens to us. It begins. It's a relationship that is a start.

[8 : 12] And we came into this love that we have, this love relationship with Christ when we were born again, when we trusted in Him, when He chose us, when we entered in a relationship with Him.

Our status was changed. God always loved us, but the love changed into a deeper covenant, relationship, committed bond between you and God when you came to faith in Him.

It's a covenant love, a love between persons. And the amazing thing about this love that God has, well, for Christians, is that it is a love between two unequal persons.

It's not like a marriage. It's not like any other love where you love because something, and they love back because of something. But here, it's a love between two completely unequal people, between God and between you and me.

His love is offered from heaven downwards from a position of power, from a position of strength, from a position of glory. And it's offered down to us in a position of weakness, in a position of humility, and in a position of pity.

[9 : 29] God looked down in pity and loved us, and we became Christians. He freely offered His love to us in this way. It's really unequal.

If it was on a balance, God would be way up the top and we'd be right down. It's sort of the other way. He's so strong and big, He would be down the bottom and we'd be weighed up the top because we're so light and frothy, as it were.

But it's a relationship that shows two completely unequal partners. And the Bible illustrates this in two ways. It illustrates it in the way, in the Old Testament, by speaking about the history of the Old Testament and by using the word covenant, which I've used already.

Because you see, in the Old Testament times, in the times when there was kings and Old Testament leaders, what happened was that if a king defeated an army, if he defeated another nation, if he was victorious and if his nation was victorious, then he would enter into a covenant with his defeated army.

He would enter into a covenant with the people that he's crushed and the ones that he's mown down, as it were. And this covenant was from a king in a position of strength to those in a position of weakness.

[10:45] He dictated the terms. They didn't come demanding certain things. They accepted what he said. They had no option. And they went along exactly with what terms he made.

There was no bargaining. There was no sitting around a table. He dictated this terms of a covenant whereby he said he would save their lives. He would give them food and water and things like that. He would show great mercy to them, but they would be his servants. It was a relationship between a king and between servants, but it was on the king's terms.

And it wasn't always based on compassion, although it should have been. And that is the kind of relationship that we have with Christ. That we haven't come to Christ in the same terms, but as Christians, God came to us as victorious, as strong, as the one who could dictate terms to us as defeated people, those who were in the enemy's hands, those who faced death and its power and an everlasting punishment.

So we couldn't dictate. We had nothing to offer. We couldn't demand. We don't say to God, come down here and sit at the bargaining tables and I'll thrash out with you a Christian life where I give you so much and you give me so much.

[12:07] It's not a case of taking God down to our level, but he in his mercy has come down and offered us terms of peace as a victorious king.

That is one of the Old Testament illustrations of this unequalness between God and us as Christians. But the other one, and I've mentioned it before because it's my favorite illustration in the whole Bible and I'm going to memorize it word for word, is the unusual marriage that's spoken of in Ezekiel 16.

And it's this amazing picture that the world outside has no idea of. This amazing picture of God's love for those he's chosen where he pictures Christians, believers, as being like little babies who were thrown out from the home after they were born.

Absolutely helpless. Absolutely without any strength. Unable to feed themselves. Unable to live. Unable to forage for food. Unable to live. Lying, kicking in their own blood.

Hopeless, about to die. And we find this picture of God coming along and cradling that baby and washing the baby.

[13:25] God the Father taking this child that was dying and helpless and feeding it and looking after it and clothing it and teaching it and leading it and bringing that baby girl to teenage years and then to years where she could marry him and he has clothed her and made her beautiful and made her a queen.

And this is the relationship we have depicted in the hard task master type of religion of the Old Testament. This beautiful picture of a baby absolutely dependent upon a caring father.

And that is the picture of Christ's love for Christians. That we are the same helpless babies as it were spiritually unable to do anything for ourselves needing God and needing his salvation and his power in order to live.

And he's made a bond a covenant a marriage relationship with us as Christians. He cleans us up he clothes us spiritually he marries us and he loves us as believers.

And the picture there in the Bible is the unequalness that this covenant love depicts. Unequalness between God and us so that we are unworthy as Christians of God's love.

[14:57] We're unworthy of his mercy. And there's nothing that he saw in us that made us worth choosing. And we must get across that fact. And if we don't believe that fact as Christians then we must doubt whether we are Christians.

Because unless we're humble and unless we've seen that there's nothing in us that God could have chosen then we're kind of missing the mark.

It doesn't mean that we go around saying how unworthy I am or how worthless I am. It's not that we're worthless. It's not that we're pieces of rubbish.

It's not that we can say yes indeed I'm a tremendously unworthy person of God's love. He's so great and I'm so poor. It's not a kind of false beating of our breasts and saying that there's no hope.

But rather it's an awareness that because God chose us because we were unworthy of anything that he still chose us.

[15:58] And that having chose us without any worthiness we have gained Christ's worthiness for ourselves. We are important in the sense that Christ lives in us.

And we must believe that there's nothing in us that made God choose us. We must believe it by the way we live by the way we treat others other Christians that they were chosen as well the same as us.

None are better none are worse none are higher none are lower but there's this dependence upon what Christ has done not upon our own merits or demerits but it's what Christ has done for us.

There's this unworthiness that we were chosen not for anything in ourselves and also this weakness where we see that nothing we can do could have earned us salvation.

In other words you can't make your heart beat a second longer than God will allow. You can't defeat death. You can't be raised on the other side of death.

[17:08] you can't know your future. You can't give yourself everlasting life. You can't change your character. That kind of dependence upon God which says that he alone can do these things and that is the idea of this word in covenant and in covenant love.

The other thing about covenant and the great comfort is that it can't be broken. A covenant that was made in the Old Testament between these kings it couldn't be broken. It was a law that couldn't end and it was always in place and how much more so with the love of God for you as a Christian.

It's sealed in the blood of Jesus Christ and it can't be broken. God will not give up. God will not let go. God will not cheat. He'll not mislead. He'll not divorce.

He'll not split up. There's no end to the relationship that has been started in Christ with you as a Christian. He's determined to save you. He's said that He will and He can't lie.

Now there's no doubt that as I stand here this morning I'm scared of dying. Absolutely no doubt that that is a fear that I have within my heart. That I am scared of death. But I thank God that although I'm scared of death because it's the last enemy and it's the last attack, I thank God that He will not let go of me through it.

[18:31] That He will pull me up on the other side. That I will not stay in death and in its blackness. Yes we fear death but we come through it on the other side with Christ because we belong to God.

We're part of Him. We're joined to Him and He lives on forever so we live on with Him. How can you face death alone? How can you face death without Christ? What strength, what courage, what conviction can you have if there's no relationship with the author of life?

So this word depicts a covenant love between God and between His people. But lest you think that covenant and maybe the idea of a bond or a relationship like that gives you the idea of something that's cold or calculated or passionless or something that isn't really that exciting.

Then the other major concept that comes out of this word, what the depth of this word means is not only a love of relationship but it's a passionate love.

The love of Christ for His people is a passionate love and that is the two major kind of pillars or legs that hold up this word.

[19:53] That it's a covenant bond love and it's a passionate love. It's a love of passion. It has this dimension of passion about it. God's love is passionate and we forget that and we say it so casually and we say it without experiencing and taking it to bear in our own lives.

In the Old Testament, the book we so often ignore, God's love for His people is explained as a love affair, as a marriage, as a passionate emotion.

and again, there are two kind of places in the word where that is highlighted for us. It's highlighted in the book The Song of Solomon, which is a love poem between a man and a woman.

It's a love poem between a husband and a wife or it's taken symbolically as symbolizing the love between Christ and His church, which is legitimate because other places in the Bible take it as meaning that.

And we're told there, love and the love of God is described in this tremendous book. It's described in this beautiful way. Song of Solomon 8, verses 6 and 7.

[21 : 11] Love is as strong as death, as jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire and like a mighty flame.

Many waters cannot quench love and rivers cannot wash it away. That is the passion that is behind the love of Jesus Christ.

That is the passion we see in Christ's love for you, that it is as strong as death in your life. It is really strong, as we've seen determined to save.

And it is jealous. A passionate love is a jealous love. And that's what we see in this song, we see in this poem. God is jealous for you as a Christian.

He demands your affection and he demands your time and he demands your love. He has got a driving interest and involvement in your character.

[22 : 09] A person who's jealous of his wife or lover or a husband or whatever it might be is intensely interested in what they do and where they are and who they're with.

And it's often a wrong jealousy. But here we have the passionate, right jealousy of God for Christians is that he demands you all. He wants your love.

He pulls it to himself and he doesn't want it shared with other people. He doesn't want a kind of half-hearted, lukewarm, casual relationship.

You don't drift into church and drift into Christianity and come in and out and take it or leave it as if it doesn't matter because God demands your love and he demands passionate involvement with you.

He wants everything about you and all the love that you can muster. There's nothing worse than a Christian with their hands spiritually in their pockets, disinterested and unconcerned, uncaring about God and about his love for them.

[23 : 16] He has this fire in his belly for you as a Christian. He's emotionally involved with you. He wants you to reciprocate that love, to give him it back.

There's nothing worse than love scorned. There's nothing worse than jealousy that isn't catered for or isn't righted. We must indeed give our love back to Jesus Christ because of what he has done and because he's jealous.

Is our love as Christians strong in return? Are we jealous for Christ and for his honour and for his name? Do we care when people swear and blaspheme and when everyone does things that God hates and God is sad over?

Are we jealous for him and for his love and for his honour? Would we care if he turned his back on us and loved somebody else? Would it really matter? Would it make any difference in our lives if God was like that?

It's a passionate love, a love that is jealous. But this passion in the Bible is also explained in another way as being extravagant.

[24 : 34] A love that is passionate, a love between new lovers is extravagant, it's unreasonable, it acts beyond reason, are above common sense.

You can't write in a manual how lovers are supposed to act with one another because it's extravagant, it's not common sense, they do things that are stupid. Parents look at their children and say, what on earth are you doing spending all your money on that girl or that boy?

But it's extravagant, you're in love, you do what you can for them. As it was explained far better by Professor MacLeod when he was here speaking about Mary and the alabaster box, it's unexplicable, it's beyond reason, you pour out your heart and love to Jesus Christ because you're in love and the same is true of his love for us, it's extravagant.

We have the picture of the prodigal's father, the prodigal could have come and all he wanted, Lord, he said, make me just as one of your servants. Make me someone that lives in an outhouse.

But no, the father took him back, put on the finest clothes, gave him a ring to wear, fatted calf was killed and they celebrated and he became the son once more.

[25 : 48] The great picture and this great illustration of the extravagance of God's love for you and me. We don't believe it, do we? You don't believe what I'm saying this morning.

I don't believe it because it's so unbelievable. Yet Christ has said it in his word and we need to sit down quietly on our own and consider it and believe it that we have all that we need.

He's extravagantly poured it out all over us. He's given us adoption papers into his family. He's given us the divine nature which we share with him. He's given us eternal life.

He's given us the fear of death removed from our soul. He's given us Christ's righteousness. He's given us the power and strength we need to live and a hundred and other things that I can't go over

just now.

It's all been given freely to us from Jesus Christ because of his extravagant love for us. It's unreasonable. If we'd made up the story of salvation we would have asked for a little thing here, a little thing there and an enjoyment once in a while in church and a reading of a chapter here and there.

[26 : 54] But we would never have asked for all the extravagant things that God has given us so freely through Jesus Christ, this covenant love, this passionate love for Christians, for those who trust in him.

In return, Christian, this morning, you and me, what can we do? Can we do too much? Can we ever serve him too much? Can we ever love him too deeply?

Is there anything that he demands of us that is too much for him to ask in the light of what he's given? Can we carry on in our lukewarmness, in our half-hearted, excuse-ridden Christianity in the light of his passion and in the light of his covenant?

God save me from my own part-time, divided, measured, polite, reasonable, acceptable Christianity.

God save me from being someone that is measured for Christ. May we be overflowing and extravagant as a church who serve Christ, known in the area as being different from the image that people undoubtedly have of Christians, stuffy, boring, unconcerned, self-righteous, hypocrites.

[28 : 18] That is the love that God has shown to us as Christians. And it's there for us. And he says, in that verse we saw last week, God has spoken once, twice, have I heard this.

Now that is just an Old Testament way, or a Hebrew way, of saying that God has spoken again and again. He said it once, he said it twice, he said it a thousand times.

It's the message of God's Word, it's the message of the preacher, it's the message of Christianity, that it will be said repeatedly, ad nauseum, if it needs to be, that Christ is power and Christ is love, because that is the only message that will save us.

It's the way the Bible has of saying that again and again, God is saying, God has spoken, he said it before, he said it again, that he is power, and he is strength, and he is love and mercy, and salvation comes only from him.

That is what he speaks as he offers the gospel, and as he teaches us salvation, and it will never change. An unbeliever this morning, it's the same message again and again, and Christ offers you this love, this covenant, this bond, this passion.

[29 : 55] Forevermore, he offers you it from his word this morning. It is for you. It is the best. It can't be bettered.

It'll never be changed. Don't come back next week looking for another message that somehow might be more persuasive, might be a bit more attractive, because God's message is always the same.

Certainly the preacher preaches bad ones, but the message is always there, and he expects you to accept that message without question.

You are the defeated enemy. Remember the Old Testament picture? It's not as if you have a choice. It's not as if you can dictate terms. It's not as if you're victorious in your own right, but God has said he is the only one who has the power to overcome death, to give you strength, to change your heart, to give you everlasting life.

You haven't any option. There's no alternative. You can't dictate terms. What is it? I would love to know.

[31 : 01] What is it that keeps you? What is the alternative that is so attractive that it keeps on dulling your mind and stopping you coming to Christ? Christ, please tell me.

What is it that you have so sewn up in your life that you can say that you don't need this love and this offer and this strength? I would love to know. Give me the recipe of life that you have that is so sure and so free from error and so watertight that you can face the future and death and sin and God's judgment all on your own.

please tell me. I want to know because I'll preach it next week. God is very patient but the day will come when God will say depart from me I never knew you and you'll be left in everlasting darkness and in everlasting punishment and God offers you life now.

there is no alternative except his love his covenant love his passionate love because it's offered to you this morning.

Amen. Let us pray. Gracious God we ask that you would take your word and apply it to our hearts. We are aware that there is nothing we can say that can change hearts and that we need a demonstration of the spirit's power and that we need to pray God's presence in among us and that as Christians we need to be alert to the evil one who is seeking to destroy the work here and we need to be pleading that God will bless his word and take his word and apply his word that we mustn't be complacent sitting back hands in pockets Christians but that we must go out with the message and bring them in and speak to them of the covenant passionate love of Jesus Christ for sinners and we ask that our offer would be sincerely made and sincerely held and sincerely offered. [33 : 13] We pray for unbelievers this morning that their eyes would be open that their hearts would be changed that they would be truly converted and turned to Jesus Christ that they would be trophies of grace and that they would be those who will then go out and tell others of the truth and of the love and majesty of Jesus Christ.

Go before us in our worship throughout this day make us praying for the evening services and the work of the youth fellowship and all that is done. Gracious God we depend and need your Holy Spirit more and more and we pray that we would become that type of people who are reliant on Jesus Christ.

Enable us to see your love and bless our psalm of praise that we sing in conclusion. May it reach the very gates of heaven. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.