

# 1-God's Plenteous, Tender Mercy

*Attributes of God*

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**Heritage Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids**

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Our Scripture reading this evening is from the book of Psalms, the 103<sup>rd</sup> chapter. Psalm 103. Let's hear the word of God as it comes to us this evening.

1 Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. 2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: 3 Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; 4 Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; 5 Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's. 6 The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. 7 He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. 8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. 9 He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. 10 He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. 12 As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. 13 Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. 14 For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. 15 As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. 16 For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. 17 But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; 18 To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them. 19 The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. 20 Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. 21 Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. 22 Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.

May God bless the reading of his word to our souls.

We now are going to have public confession of faith. Mr. Ed S., you remember, took our class and was anticipating making full profession of faith some weeks ago but was unable due to severe back injury, pain, but he's here tonight and ready do this by the grace of God. So Ed, if I can ask you to arise, please, and answer the following questions.

Do you acknowledge the doctrine of our church which you have learned, heard and confessed to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, conforming with the sacred Scriptures?

Do you promise by the grace of God to continue steadfastly in the profession of this doctrine and to live and die in accord therewith?

Do you promise at all times to conduct yourself conformably to this doctrine faithfully, honorably, beyond reproach, and to adorn your confession with good works?

Do you promise that you will submit to admonition, correction and church discipline in the event which, God forbid, that you should become delinquent either in doctrine or in life?

What is your answer, Mr. Edward S.?

["Yes."]

Well, it's a blessed evening for all of us as we witness your confession, Ed, and for Rachel, it's a very special night as well, that you may for the first time in your life, I believe, make profession of faith in the church of Jesus Christ. And we rejoice with you, brother, and we do pray that what you've just said yes to may not only capture your heart but may be manifest in your life as well. It's really a wonderful thing to see how the Lord has been at work in you in the past recent years in particular, and we're grateful to that gracious Holy Spirit who has done that work. And tonight you give yourself to the service of the Lord as you give yourself to the church for import, you also make yourself available for export to tell others. You are invited to serve the Lord because he says to you tonight in a special way, "My son, give me your heart." And Ed, you will be the first to say, "But I'm not perfect. I can't do this." But the Lord can help you. He can help you do what you can't do. So you just come to him, you just say, "Lord, here I am. Just use me in some way for the good of others. I choose rather to suffer affliction for the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." That's how you are to go forward and he promises if ye seek him, 2 Chronicles 15:2, he will be found of you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you.

So stay close to the Lord, brother, close to his word and not only be here regularly, of course, for the preaching and worship, but be in the word in private with your wife and ask God for grace to do as you just promised, to adorn your confession with good works, that the fruit of your life may be to the glory of God and that you might be able to say one day on your deathbed, "These last years since I joined that church on Crescent, that they've been the best of my life." The Lord has a way of saving the best wine until last,

we read in John 2, and that's our prayer for you, Mr. S., that the Lord would give you your very best years even as you approach the age of our seniors, the Lord can give you wonderful wonderful things.

So we pray that this is the text I wish to give you, 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and 28. Let me pray this for you,

23 ... the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Rachel, I have to say a word to you too because you have been beside your husband. I'm sure you're rejoicing in your heart tonight. You've been longing for this day and I pray that the same text may be applied to you, and that together with your husband your entire souls may be knit together to serve the Lord, and that together you will be preserved blameless for that coming day when we will worship God forever sinlessly in glory. What a special, that's the really special day, sin free in Immanuel's land.

Our pastor has completed the last sermon in that series of grim Lord's Days from Lord's Days 2 through 4 that plunge quickly and profoundly like a surgeon doing deep surgery into the misery of men. The world in which we live is in the clutches of misery and so is every man by nature, and that has been so from the moment of the fall in Genesis 3 until the end of time, and this is true physically, sickness, disease, disability, pain, even chronic pain, aging, ultimately death brings misery. It's true emotionally, depression, fear, anxiety, hatred, a host of other miserable feelings can fill our hearts, and it is true spiritually. We are born, we live, we die, by nature lost in sin, alienated from God under the bondage of Satan and exposed, again as we heard this morning, to the just eternal punishment of God. Physical misery, emotional misery, spiritual misery, and each of us knows a certain degree of these kinds of miseries ourselves. We don't have to look to others, we are all acquainted with this world of grief in which we live, a world also inside of us that can bring us a sense of loss and confusion that flows out of our own corruption. The world, of course, seeks all kinds of ways to relieve that misery but really there's only one thing that can do it and that's where the Lord's Day ended this morning, "Is not God also merciful indeed?" God is merciful, yet also just.

So tonight is really a continuation, as Dr. Kuivenhoven hinted at this morning, of the sermon this morning, but tonight we focus then on the mercy of God, God's tender mercy is that which jumps out at us against the black backdrop of our misery, and all of Scripture is constantly telling us that God meets us in our miseries with his mercies, our black miseries with his tender mercies. After Israel made a golden calf and worshiped that calf at Mount Sinai, it appeared that God's wrath is going to destroy the nation. The situation is bleak. But instead, God uses it as an opportunity to show his abundant mercy. The very next chapter says, "The Lord declared to Moses," and by extension to the

people, "The Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth." So God's response to a hell-worthy people all throughout the Old Testament, a backsliding people, is astonishing. He manifests himself as the God of mercy to a hell-worthy people, and it's that mercy, you see, still displayed today that is our hope, is our avenue of deliverance from our tremendous natural misery.

So I want to look at that with you tonight from Psalm 103:4b, 8, and 17. We'll look at it mostly topically tonight but I'll draw attention particularly to these three verses. Psalm 103:4b, bless the Lord, "who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies"; verse 8, "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy"; and verse 17, "But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children." So this evening we want to look at "God's Plenteous, Tender Mercy." We'll look at four thoughts. First, mercy defined. Second, general mercy. Third, saving mercy. And then a few words in closing about withdrawn mercy. Defined mercy, general mercy, saving mercy, withdrawn mercy.

Now this is the beginning tonight of several sermons that will be sort of topical and yet textual on the sacred attributes of God. Every believer but also every unbeliever needs to often hear about who our God is, and one of the best ways of looking at that astonishing question about who the comprehensible yet incomprehensible God truly is, is to look at the attributes of God. So we begin tonight by looking at his mercy.

The word "merciful" is related to three biblical terms. One term is associated with, surprisingly, a mother's womb. A mother's womb. It expresses the compassion of a mother for a child or a father as well. Parents possess an extreme sensitivity to the physical, the emotional and the spiritual suffering of their children. What parent will not go to the greatest length to bring relief to their son or daughter? But this is only an earthly shadow of God's mercy. God has a heart that goes beyond the heart of a mother, we are told in Isaiah 49, to show mercy. In fact, God says, "A mother may forget her child, yet will not I forget thee." God is not insensitive. Now he's a holy and a just God and we'll talk about that later again, God is not insensitive to us in our weaknesses and troubles, he is a God who delights in mercy and he responds to our miseries with a tender love and compassion of a caring father, a caring mother.

The second verb that the Hebrew language uses that corresponds with mercy means "to pity or to spare." God has a pitying, sparing mercy, as it were, fatherly tenderness toward repentant sinners. In Malachi 3:17, he says of his wayward idolatrous people, "And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son who serves him."

And then thirdly, we find another picture of mercy in the term that may strike us also as rather strange, the term of bowels. Bowels. And when you read that in the Bible, I used to think as a boy that this was referring to the organs of digestion, but in the Hebrew way of thinking, the bowels was actually referring more to the higher organs of the body, the heart and the reins or kidneys, which the ancient people regarded as the seat of human conscience and human affections. So God uses this term to reflect his own affections, his

own sympathy, his own compassion for his adopted people. This is his mercy. He says of Ephraim, "My bowels are troubled for him. I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." And also in the New Testament, the word "bowels" is frequently used to portray Christ's compassion. Jesus is moved with mercy, Mark 1:41, toward people in grave physical and spiritual need.

So when we talk about having mercy on someone, we often think of not giving that person the punishment that he or she deserves, but you see, God's mercy is a whole lot richer than that. God's mercy we can define this way as his compassionate kindness to people in their misery when they don't deserve it. His compassionate kindness to people in their misery when they don't deserve it. And you see, once we realize that and what the heart of God is like, that God is prone to mercy, as Thomas Watson said, God is like a bee, normally a bee is doing merciful work, pollinating one flower after another, doing a good work, and only stings when it's provoked, Watson said. So is God and therefore once we grasp that, you see, then as poor, needy, hell-worthy sinners, we go to God, don't we, and we say like the cries of the blind men in Matthew 9, "Have mercy on us, O God!" The Puritan, Edward Lee, said that God's mercy or compassion is a sense of another's misery with a prompt and ready inclination of the will to help his creatures freely. That's God. That's God and there is no one in this audience tonight who is forbidden to go to God, just the opposite, you're invited to come to him and to plead his mercy because when God sees people suffering and in need and they come to him, he sees and hears and knows their pain and his mercy, his tendency is to have that mercy move him to help the needy. He will hear the needy when they cry. And so Thomas Watson calls God, God's mercy, his darling attribute which he most delights in.

Now that may raise the question: exactly how does God's mercy relate to some of his other attributes, attributes like his grace and his love and his patience, they are so similar? Well, there is some overlap but to really grasp God's mercy, we need to grasp the differences here between mercy and other attributes of God. Let me just mention those three that seem so similar. First of all, grace. Mercy emphasizes God's kindness to someone in misery. Grace especially emphasizes his forgiveness to the guilty, his free generosity to someone who has demerited it. It is God's favorable disposition towards someone not because of any merit in them, but because of his manifold generosity. And so though mercy and grace are intimately related, mercy is God's inclination to relieve those in a miserable condition, and grace is his favor to forgive those in a guilty condition.

Mercy is also close to love, of course. If God gives relief by his mercy and favor by his grace, he gives himself by his love. God has a tender affection toward his image-bearing creatures, and particularly to those children whom he has redeemed. And so he is to them a father and a husband, and God in mercy then brings relief from misery but God in love delights in his people, and pursues affectionate communion with them. That's why within the Trinity itself, God does not show mercy because there's no sin in the Trinity, there's no unworthiness in the Trinity, there's no misery in the Trinity to be pitied or alleviated. But the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, do show love to each other, perfect love, and they have from all eternity. John 17 is so rich in unfolding that for us in Jesus' high priestly

prayer. And that is why God can say that he is love through John in 1 John 4. Love is a tender, self-giving affection. Mercy is a tender misery-alleviating pity.

Then mercy can be distinguished from patience as well. God is very very patient. He's long-suffering. He's delaying the execution of his judgment often upon his sinful creatures to give them, as Ecclesiastes says, space to repent, and in that way God's patience sets the stage for his mercy. I love the way the Puritan, Stephen Charnock, put this in his great classic on the attributes of God, he says patience sets many a sinner running on his way, running into the arms of mercy. When you look back on your life and you consider how patient God has been to you, that ought to make you fly into the open arms of his mercy. God desires to show mercy and because he desires to show mercy, he exercises patience to sinners, but as we heard this morning, don't mock that patience, it does come to an end.

So mercy, goodness, grace, love, patience, all of these attributes have overlap, but mercy is particularly that attribute that focuses on relief of misery from a merciful God.

Now God's mercy is often distinguished in the Bible and by our forefathers into general mercy that comes to everyone this side of eternity, from saving mercy that comes only to his chosen people. So mercy, mercy is really extended to all creation, even to animals. The Bible says, "God is good to all, his tender mercies," Psalm 145, "are over all his works." Not just man, all his works. Psalm 119 says, "The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy." Everywhere there is mercy. In mercy God gives to all life and breath and all things. God pities his creation. He exercises compassion and kindness.

So he is merciful, in fact, we can say that there is a natural plenteousness to this mercy. If you look at Psalm 103 again, you look at verse 8, "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy." You know, that word "plenteous" in Hebrew is a very rich word. It's a word that means "to overflow the banks," like a river that has its normal channel and then the waters cannot be contained by the riverbed and the river overflows and it goes everywhere. Well, God's mercy is like that. It outgushes from the heart of God. It comes down upon the sons of men and upon the animal kingdom, even, and all the earth, and God is plenteous, he is overflowing in mercy. He's a river that overflows its banks.

And God does this in a general way in three different aspects. First of all, there is a plenteous, merciful sustaining of God. God's plenteous merciful sustaining. God upholds the universe. God changes the seasons. There's rain, there's sunshine. He makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, sends his rain on the just and on the unjust. This is the mercy, the general mercy of God. In fact, when God sent the worldwide flood, he promised in his general mercy that he would never do it again, and though the fall into sin threatened to usher the whole world into destruction, God has sustained the world in his common mercy even until today. So what does that mean for us personally? Well, it means that the very next breath you just talk and you're going to take, is the mercy of God. He giveth to all life and breath in all things. The fact that you're sitting here tonight alive is the mercy of God. All your life, your health, your talents, your knowledge, your

wealth, your liberty, everything you have, everything you can think, it is all the mercy of God.

This is not only true for Christians, it's true for all people. God gives good gifts in his mercy even to his enemies. The food you eat, boys and girls, every slice of bread you have, every drink of water you take, is a mercy of God. "He causes the grass to grow for the cattle," says Psalm 104, "and herb for the service of man, that he may bring forth food out of the earth, and wine that makes the heart of man glad, and oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens his heart." It's all mercy. And you see, of course, that what you heard this morning, that unbelievers who are not in Christ, of their dire future. That becomes all the more solemn when you think of the mercy of God. That's not just his justice that will judge us, the mercy of God will also judge us because God will say to us on the day of days, "I gave you everything. I gave you eyes to see but you abused them. I gave you hands to touch but you abused them. I gave you eyelids to blink but you abused them." Everything God gives us we abuse and we have to give an account for it one day before his face in the day of judgment. So what a solemn thing this is, God's mercy. We owe everything to God's mercy but one day we owe everything back to God for his mercy, and if we just live selfishly and we just take for granted his sustaining grace and we simply ignore or deny the one upon whom we are radically and utterly dependent, what fools we are.

This God is worthy of all your love, all your allegiance. He's worthy of your whole heart, your soul, your mind, your strength. But secondly, God's general mercy is not only sustaining but God's plenteous merciful relieving, his relieving is another part of his great mercy. He relieves suffering. We live in a world of agonizing hardship and all of us fall prey to it, sickness, disease, in pain, but it's a mercy, it's a mercy that God has given into our bodies even as the means to help our own bodies. Boys and girls, who makes you better after you've been sick? It's God that does that. Sometimes he uses the means of doctors and medicines and hospitals, and that too is the mercy of God. And when you do have pain, it's the mercy of God that the pain isn't worse because we all deserve hell, as we heard this morning.

So God's mercy even in our afflictions is always of a relieving nature above and beyond what we deserve. That's amazing. God gives relief also from sorrow and from depression. We ought to know nothing but endless darkness because of sin, but he enables us even when we are unbelievers in this life, this common mercy. We know laughter, we know family togetherness, we know friendship, we know some sense of purpose in life. God sets a solitary in families, that's the mercy of God, that God relieves our suffering. Sometimes I think about it this way, if your car breaks down, somebody's got to fix it and you can't go really that many years without your car breaking down because of one thing or another, and your car is, what, just a couple thousand parts and your body has billions of parts. Billions. Isn't it amazing when you wake up in the morning, isn't it amazing that you can wake up at 30 years of age, and 50 years, and even sometimes 70 years without excruciating pain, sometimes with no pain at all, and your whole body is functioning, every one of those billions of parts? That is the relieving general mercy of God, and sometimes when you're sick, you don't even go to the doctor, you get a bad cold, you just

tough it out and your body has immune capabilities to help you. It's the mercy of God and you get over it, you go on and you're healthy again. Amazing. Inbuilt mercies of God in our very creation, in our very bodies.

And then thirdly, the general mercy of God also has a plenteous aspect of merciful restraining. So verse 8 says God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous, plenteous in merciful relieving, plenteous and merciful sustaining, but also plenteous in merciful restraining. Have you ever wondered why you haven't sinned a lot worse than you have? It's not because you're so good, it's not because you have had the ability to restrain those sins in your own heart, so much as it is God giving you the mercy to keep inside just how bad you are at times. I read in a book one time when I was struggling with somebody who was criticizing me very severely for something that wasn't true at all and it really hurt, it hurt big time, I opened the book and the book just said this, "Be thankful that he doesn't know how bad you really are in your heart because even though what he's saying is wrong, it's not as bad as who you really are inside." You know, if God would, and God knows our insides, if God would reward us even for 10 seconds what we are inside to what we deserve, we'd be cast out immediately. The fact that he restrains you from acting out who you really are in the depths of your being, this is amazing mercy. Why is it that we're not all as evil as Hitler or Stalin? Why is it that unbelievers often put us to shame in some ways by their generosity and kindness? The only reason the world has not become totally anarchic and completely degenerated is because God is restraining in his common mercy, his plenteous common mercy, the wickedness in the hearts of men.

Every single little outward act of love and goodness down to someone holding a door open for someone else exercised by fallen man, is God's restraining mercy. God's restraining mercy. When the world knows any degree of peace at all, it's God's restraining mercy. The fact that this world hasn't blown up yet by countries bombing each other is God's restraining mercy. The fact that the church is at peace is God's restraining mercy. Wherever there is the religious liberty in the slightest degree, much less in a country like ours where we have considerable religious liberty, that is God's restraining mercy. Think about how many enemies there are in this country that would love to wipe out every remnant of Christianity in this land, and yet we can sit here and worship today. God's restraining mercy. All throughout church history in times of peace, it's the Lord's mercy, in times of persecution, the Lord still restrains in his mercy.

So we need to recognize this mercy in every good that we enjoy, in every sorrow that we avoid, we need to recognize the hand of the mercy of God. Every breath we take. Every bite of food we take. I've told you this story before about my dad coming back from a heart attack and he was crying when I entered the room and he said, "It's just the mercy of God that a nurse came in and wet my lips with an ice cube and it felt so good." And I thought to myself, the rich man in hell that we heard about this morning, didn't have a drop of water to cool his tongue. Why do I get an ice cube? I mean, when you see what you deserve, you can be thankful for an ice cube. It is all the mercy of God. Every breath you take, every move you make is plenteous mercy overflowing the banks of your life.



The Lord is good and merciful but, you see, you can go to hell with the general mercy of God. You need God's saving mercy. His saving mercy. That is critical. That is all important because if you don't have that, as I said, God's common mercy will just testify against you on Judgment Day. So what is God's saving mercy? Well, you could define God's saving mercy by combining verses 4b and 17 of Psalm 103. Verse 17, "the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children." And that mercy, verse 4, is a mercy of "lovingkindness and tender." You see, if God pours his saving mercy upon you, you are adopted into his family and he loves you with a love so big you cannot measure it, and he forgives you with a forgiveness so great you cannot find the guilt of your sins anymore. And that love, that merciful love, is grounded in eternity past when he has chosen you before the ages began, has regenerated you in time, and will show you his mercy to eternity future, and he does it all tenderly, compassionately, in and through his Incarnate Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So saving mercy is that mercy by which we are extracted from our self-made darkness and brought into God's marvelous light by the powerful regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, and we are brought to faith and repentance and we are justified by faith in the sight of God, and then we are sanctified by his Spirit tenderly, patiently, and the love of God in his mercy is poured out upon us all our days, and as we have that experience of the mercy of God in us, we look back to eternity past and to eternity future and we cry out, "Lord, I am a recipient of the mercy only because thou hast chosen me from before the world began, and I believe that for Christ's sake that will keep me to eternity future. Eternity past to eternity future, I am clothed in the white robe righteousness, as it were, of Jesus Christ with the mercy of Almighty God." Saving tender mercy.

Saving tender mercy Incarnate. You see, this mercy comes to us not of ourselves, it comes through the Incarnate Savior. The angel said to Zacharias in Luke 1:78, that the Messiah would come through, this is a quote, "through the tender mercy of our Lord," through the tender mercy of our Lord. Dear child of God, your Savior was born in Bethlehem's manger so that he could partake of all the infirmities of our human nature, he would know sickness, he would know trials, he would live in the smoke of sin, so that he can be a tender merciful God to you. What an amazing thing this is, the God of the universe willing to enflesh himself to show us tender mercy, to enter our world in flesh and blood, and to suffer and to die in his human nature for you and for me. Christ's human heart has a greater capacity for kindness than all the hearts of all people and all angels combined. He is infinitely merciful. He is tenderly merciful. He is everlastingly merciful with a special saving mercy to his own.

Now Christ's humanity does not make him more merciful because he is mercy in his own Triune being from all eternity, but it makes him merciful in a way that is identifiable and exactly suited to our needs so that we can go to him in all our needs and all our sorrows and our emotional misery, our physical misery, our spiritual misery, and we can say, "Lord Jesus thou dost understand for thou art a compassionate high priest who was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin."

So technically the Incarnation of Jesus does not increase God's mercy but it brings his mercy near to us. We find mercy in a God who is Son of God Almighty, penetrated the heavens, but we also find mercy in this great high priest who walked among us, who suffered, who agonized, who was hungry. The Son's merciful heart is a manifestation of our Father's merciful heart. "Wherefore," says the author to the Hebrews, "in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God."

So Jesus is able to share sympathy with us in a wonderful way because he shares in our nature. He not only sees our misery but he has experienced our misery, and so whatever trial, whatever temptation or misery we may suffer as Christians, we know that in his essence Christ has been there, Christ has endured it. You say, "Yes, but Christ didn't know the loss of a loved one. I recently lost my spouse." Well, Christ wasn't married physically on earth but he did lose a loved one. The shortest verse in the Bible is, "Jesus wept." Where was he? Graveside of Lazarus. And what does the Bible say about his relationship with Lazarus? He loved Lazarus. You see, in principle then Jesus not only offers himself for our sins to wipe away our sins, but he's also the great God-man high priest who can identify with our sins, or rather identify with our miseries so that he now at the Father's right hand is all-mighty to deliver us from those miseries because he took them upon himself, and he did so so that we might be delivered.

So we're so used to hearing the Gospel, we don't get overwhelmed at this thought but we should be overwhelmed every time we think it, that the eternal Son of God took on human flesh and suffered hell in the place, the essence of hell, in the place of hell-worthy sinners like you and me. This is mercy par excellence. Think of it, divine mercy induced the Son of God to bear our misery so we could find relief? We don't deserve it spiritually, emotionally, physically. This is amazing and we experience it only in part. Here one day in glory we'll experience it fully, no misery at all, for Christ's sake fully delivered from all pain and all dying and all sin; we'll have perfect souls wedded to perfect bodies in a perfect world of love, in a perfect communion with a Triune God through the tender mercies of our Incarnate Savior.

Saving mercy is Incarnate mercy, but it's not only saving tender Incarnate mercy, it's also saving tender mercy received. How do we get that mercy? And the answer is only by his tender mercy. We get mercy by mercy. "But God who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us, made us alive, together with Christ, by grace," or you could say here by mercy, "ye are saved." One of the greatest mercies is that God's great mercies comes to us savingly through his Son so that dead sinners like us come to life, and in that great tender mercy of God, we are given the gifts of repentance and faith so that we trust in Christ alone for our salvation.

Now maybe you are a spiritually dead sinner right now, maybe you don't trust in Christ alone for salvation right now, maybe you love God's gifts but you don't love God right now, you are blind to his beauty, blind to his glory, you know you need mercy or you will go to hell, but you haven't yet cried out, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" The Lord

says call upon the name of the Lord, and those that call upon the name of the Lord will be saved, Romans 10. You go to him just as you are and you plead for mercy, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Call upon the name of the Lord to heal your blindness, to save you, so that you may treasure his mercy.

Now on the other hand, I know that many of you are alive in Christ, thanks be to God, and his spiritual mercies have worked faith in you, and hope in you, and love in you. How should you as a recipient of saving mercy respond to that saving tender mercy? Now let me give you quickly three ways before we close. 1. Grow. Grow in your understanding of God's mercy. That's what verse 17 is all about. It's so rich, isn't it? "But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children." You see, God has a covenant and God's normal way in working savingly is that he saves people, he extracts them from their dire sin and misery. He works in them salvation and he brings them into the living church, and then it's his normal way to work, it is in their covenant seed and in the seed seed from generation to generation to generation. This is his promise and what a mercy that is when the Lord not only mercies us but also mercies our children and our grandchildren with his eternal mercies.

So we're to study this mercy, we are to search the Scriptures to read about this mercy, we're to think about this mercy, we're to grow in our understanding of this mercy, we're to remember it's of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, they are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness. You should wake up every morning and say, "I've been mercied again." It's amazing. Every day we are in hell and every day, dear child of God, you are mercied through a Savior who went to hell, the essence of hell, for you that you may be perpetually mercied to all eternity.

Grow in your understanding and your appreciation of that mercy and, second, worship God. Worship God for his mercy. You know, when Moses came before the Lord and the Lord proclaimed his merciful goodness said, "The Lord God, the Lord God, is full of goodness, mercy and truth," the immediate response of Moses was, "And Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped." That's what we should do is bow, enter into his gates when we come to this place, enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise, be thankful unto him and bless his name for the Lord is good, his mercy is everlasting and his truth endureth to all generations. Can those who are mercied with the blood of Jesus do anything less than just worship him? Who am I, Lord God, what is my house that thou hast brought us hitherto?

Then thirdly, imitate your Father by showing mercy to others. If God can mercy you, beware of getting caught up in a kind of legalism that judges people over relatively small matters and fails to show them kindness and mercy. Remember that God considered not only what you deserved but what you desperately needed, and those people around you who are unsaved desperately need the same kind of saving mercy that you have received. Forgive others as you have been forgiven when you repented. Be a good Samaritan who is willing to give practical help to others in need. Mercy others with the mercy with

which you've been mercied of a Triune God. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

And then finally, I can't close this sermon without coming back full cycle to this morning's sermon, God's mercy can be withdrawn. His saving mercy can't be withdrawn, that's forever, from everlasting to everlasting, verse 17 says, but his common mercy will be withdrawn if we don't flee to him for saving mercy. There's a time when God's mercy will be forever withdrawn from those who purposefully remain in darkness and go on in their sin. There will be no more light, no more laughter, no more kindness in hell. The vials of God's wrath, Revelation 15, will be poured out without mixture. God says in Ezekiel 7, "My eyes shall not spare neither will I have pity anymore. I will recompense thee according to thy ways and according to thine abominations that are in the midst of thee, and you shall know that I am the Lord that smiteth." Well, that sobering parable we heard this morning is a vivid illustration of that. The rich man lifted up his eyes in hell, being in torments, and he asked for one drop of water, the smallest common mercy, to cool his tongue but there wasn't a drop given. "I am tormented in this flame." But all mercy has been taken away.

Eternal absence of mercy. That's hell. That's real hell. Forever hell. And how many, oh God forbid, God forbid those in our midst will follow this rich man to hell. My dear friend, if you're not saved, you've got no time to lose. 150,000 people die in this world every day and the majority of them die without having trusted in God's saving mercy. They are ushered, think about it, ushered into a merciless eternity. I've stood beside coffins of unconverted people who had hard deathbeds, and people have said, "At least they're out of their pain." My friend, you are never out of your pain when you are in hell, when your soul is in hell. It is eternal chronic pain of the worst proportions, exponential to any pain you have in this life. The rich man said, "I am tormented in this flame."

Oh, God forbid that this would be any one of us. Flee to God now. Cast yourself upon him now. Don't be so foolish as to live for this perishing world. Repent. Believe the Gospel. Bow before this great merciful God. He delights in mercy. You say, "But why would he ever give mercy to me?" I say why wouldn't he give mercy to you? He delights in mercy. Come just as you are. Show him your unworthiness. Tell him you deserve what the rich man in hell got, "But O, Son of David, have mercy upon me," and you won't be put to shame. He has never turned away one coming beggar ever. Fall upon mercy and say, "If mercy must destroy me, then I will be destroyed but I'm going to fall upon mercy and trust God, trust his promises, the God who delights in mercy." Amen.

*Gracious God, oh forbid, forbid that any in this audience tonight would keep on refusing to cast themselves upon mercy and would one day experience the eternal withdrawing of mercy forever. But help us to know, Lord, every one of us that saving mercy that is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him. Oh, help us to know that mercy, that mercy that can never die, never be withdrawn. Oh, we thank thee for thy mercy, O God, we thank thee so much. We pray for those in this life who do live with chronic pain. Lord, we lift up those in our midst who are suffering and we do pray show them mercy, those who live, for example, with constant headaches, constant chronic pain. Please be with*

*Mary Beth B., Lori V., with all this trouble they have. Show mercy to them and others too, Lord, who live with diseases and troubles and trials that seem to just keep on lasting. Give them grace to cast themselves upon mercy and do show thy mercy to them also in a general way by giving relief in the midst of pain. And help us all who are healthy day by day to marvel even at thy general mercy. Lord, may we learn to love thy attribute of mercy. In Jesus' name. Amen.*