

God's Abundant Mercy

The man saw the “Now Hiring” sign in the window and went inside to inquire. He had been out of work for a while and he and his family were experiencing serious financial difficulties. It was worrisome, troubling and stressful. The man was desperate for work. The owner of the business hired the man and then did something very unusual—he went to the back for a few moments and returned with an envelope for his new employee—an envelope containing a paycheck (in advance) for his new worker. But he hadn't worked a single hour. So, what would we call this? Based on last week's lesson: grace - favor without merit. Yet, this story also brings about an important point - **Grace does not stand alone.** So, what is it that stands with grace?

James 2:1–4 *“My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”*

James is telling us to avoid partiality. James continues in verse 8, *“If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well.”*

So, is it love which stands with grace? Well, it certainly should. The business owner in our story demonstrated love for his fellow man, right? But he wasn't going out on the sidewalk and offering paychecks. Did he not love others? Obviously, love is an important part, but I'll leave that for another lesson.

Some might say it depends upon specific **opportunity**. This man came into his business which presented an opportunity. So, we could say grace needs **opportunity**. Paul speaks about us having opportunity in Gal 6:9–10:

“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

A person may say it depends upon one’s **resources**. That certainly enters the equation (and is not limited to money, for instance - ability). 2 Cor 8:12 *“For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.”*

A person could say that it has more to do with **knowledge**. In our story by having a conversation with the man, he gained a knowledge of his specific circumstances. So, when we know of a situation we have a choice. Notice what James says in James 2:15-16 *“If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?”*

So, a person could encounter an opportunity to be gracious. That person could have ample resources and could be knowledgeable of a situation of need. Yet, that person could **choose** not to be gracious. While these are part of the overall equation, there is something else which stands with grace.

James 2:12–13 *“So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”*

It is James 2:13 which “connects” the first portion of the chapter with the latter portion. If v. 16 happens (be warmed/filled), mercy may very well be lacking. If vv. 2–4 (showing preference based upon appearance) happen, mercy may very well be lacking.

Mercy

common definition – “to have pity, be sorry for, help (out of pity), be merciful (EDNT). Another definition I stumbled across: “pity for those in distress.”

When a person has knowledge of a need and has opportunity to help along with ample resources to utilize **and mercy**...graciousness results. Yes, mercy stands with grace.

Examples of God's Mercy

The Mercy Seat

Exodus 25. The context here concerns the description of the tabernacle and specifically the key piece of furniture in the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant. On top of the ark is the mercy seat, flanked on either end by two cherubim (Ex. 25:19). At this very place, at the mercy seat, God meets His people. Ex 25:22 declares, ***“There I will meet with you.”***

And then there is John 20:12. Mary Magdalene had come to the tomb of Christ only to find it empty. As she stooped down to look in, ***“She saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet.”*** Back in Exodus 25, two carved angels took their places at either end of the mercy seat.

Now all we need to do is connect the dots. God desires to meet with His people, and the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, is the only means by which that meeting is made possible. The mercy seat of the Old Testament, and the blood sprinkled upon it by the high priest, prefigured the Christ to come. Christ did come, and Christ did make the sacrifice, and Christ was raised from the dead.

Make no mistake about it, these are historical realities. The tabernacle was real. The ark of the covenant was real. The mercy seat was real. The cross was real. The empty tomb was real. And a real woman stooped to look at real angels.

Mercy is now available to mankind by way of the spiritual temple—the Lord's church. Our salvation is predicated upon the mercy of God. Heb 8:12. ***“For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”***

Mercy is a characteristic of our Holy God. This is easily seen in a huge grouping of scriptures.

- Ex 34:6 (Ps 86:15, 103:8, 145:8; Jonah 4:2; Joel 2:13; Neh 9:17)
- Luke 6:36 (cf. Matt 9:13, 12:7)
- Matt 5:7

Mercy does not change the concepts of right and wrong. When someone sins, God does extend mercy to that individual. But even in that mercy, there may be consequences here and now. A person that kills another may receive mercy from God upon their soul, but the state may not show mercy due to the crime committed. Never mistake mercy with toleration of sin or its consequences.

But, in our interactions with one another, we certainly need some mercy along the way. Both as the one who receives that mercy and as one that extends mercy to others.

Jas 2:13 ***“For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”***

Closing

Eph 2:1–3 ***“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience - among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”***

Paul shows us the sinfulness of mankind and the results of our sin. The desperate need we each have for God’s Mercy and Grace.

We see also the richness of God’s mercy and the greatness of His love for us in the death, burial and resurrection of His Son Jesus. This Grace and Mercy makes salvation possible for each of us. Let us learn to be merciful to all that have that need.