Opening Words

If there was anyone who was a candidate for the mercy of God it was my father, and he often told me, "Jonathan, no one cared for my soul." But someone did – God cared for his soul. Today I will tell you his story.

126 Eph The Mercy of God

Now we come to it – at last – the encouraging words of Paul, the majestic words of Paul in Ephesians 2 that describe more wonders of what Christ has done for us. We say it this way, "at last" because we have had four messages describing the dark, dreary, bleak condition of humanity without Christ. We were dead in our trespasses and sins. We walked according to the spirit of the age, according to the power of the evil one, and according to the flesh. We were children of disobedience, children of wrath headed for judgment but God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved.

Can you see the joy in this? Can see the miracle in this? Our lost condition has been reversed by the amazing and wonderful work of Christ for us.

Listen to Paul's words in verse 4 – "But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us."

These words contain two of the greatest words in the entire English vocabulary – "but God". Our situation was desperate, **but God** stepped in! Our situation was bleak, **but God** did something for us. Our situation was without hope **but God** came through! He came through with mercy because of his great love.

Do we understand the mercy of God? The mercy of God is his compassion and the pity he feels for us because of our miserable condition. It is what keeps God from allowing us to wallow in our miserable condition that will surely bring judgment if we remain in it. His mercy is the expression of his great love to us who are so needy.

When we study the Old Testament, we are struck by the fact that the place where the high priest met with God was called – *the mercy seat*. I think you know how it was in the Old Testament. God made it very clear how he was to be approached. Only with blood, only by the high priest who was properly washed and robed, and only once a year. But this glorious, holy, majestic, powerful, and awesome God made a way for his people to be accepted by him and when the high priest approached the presence of God, that presence was manifested on "the mercy seat." It was not called "The Throne of Judgment." It was not called the Seat of Deliberation where God might decide to be nice to us. It was not called the Chair of Disgust because God could hardly stand to be around us. No, it was called "The Mercy Seat." God knew the deplorable condition into which we had fallen and because of his great love he extended mercy to us.

I love the way God describes his relation with Israel in Ezekiel 16. It is such a picture of mercy. Listen closely as the prophet describes God's love for Israel as one who comes upon an unwanted infant.

> 4 On the day you were born, no one cared about you. Your umbilical cord was not cut, and you were never washed, rubbed with salt, and wrapped in cloth. 5 No one had the slightest interest in you; no one pitied you or cared for you. On the day you were born, you were unwanted, dumped in a field and left to die.
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> 6 "But I came by and saw you there, helplessly kicking about in your own blood. As you lay there, I said, 'Live!' 7 And I helped you to thrive like a plant in the field. You grew up and became a beautiful jewel.

The mercy of God! How wonderful it is and I hope all of us can think back upon our miserable condition without Christ to see how great his mercy is.

I love reading the Prophets. For years, they were difficult for me but I determined to learn about them in depth and now I cannot get enough of them. As I have read of Israel's rebellion against the Lord and how he promised judgment for their sin, I have also been struck by the mercy of God. Listen to these words from Jeremiah 31:20. Jeremiah, as you know, was commissioned by God to preach to a wicked, rebellious nation who reveled in their idolatry. And he had many strong, hard words to say. But through it all, God still had a message of mercy for his people.

> "Is Ephraim My dear son?
> Is he a delightful child?
> Indeed, as often as I have spoken against him,
> I certainly *still* remember him;
> Therefore My heart yearns for him;
> I will surely have mercy on him," declares the LORD.

Isn't that good? Let me ask you today – do you need the mercy of God in your life? I don't mean that generally. Of course, we all need mercy, but I am wondering if someone listening right now needs the mercy of God in a fresh, specific way.

When Jesus walked the earth, one of the most common cries of the people to Jesus was, "Lord, have mercy upon me." Two blind men cried out, "Lord have mercy upon us."

The Canaanite woman cried out, "Have mercy on me Lord, Son of David, my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed."

A father said, "Lord, have mercy on my son for he is very ill."

When Jesus cast the demons out of the man with the legion of demons he told him, "Go home and tell them the great things the Lord has done for you and how he had mercy upon you."

Our God is a God of great mercy. And we know the greatest act of mercy was offering his son as the payment for our sins upon the cross. He received the wrath so that we might receive the mercy.

Peter, in his first letter, chapter 1 and verse 3 said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

In Titus 3:5 Paul said, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit."

I love that verse. We didn't suddenly turn things around. It was not on the basis of our deeds but our salvation was an act of his mercy.

And then we find the writer of Hebrews talking about the throne of God. In the Old Testament, Moses spoke of the presence of God and his *mercy seat.* In Hebrews 4, we find the writer says, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Let me tell you a story.

My father was man who needed the mercy of God. He had a horrendous upbringing. When he was seven, he was kicked in the head by a horse and was in a coma for some time. When he was nine, one of his legs got caught in farm machinery and he lost a leg from the knee down. The pain of learning to walk with a prosthetic and the ridicule he received was a harsh life for a young boy to endure. When he became a man, someone pointed a gun at his chest and said, "I'm going to kill you." My father immediately knocked the gun in a downward motion as it fired and hit him in the leg. Another time my father was just about ready to step into a street when someone grabbed him from behind. Just at that moment, a car sped by where he would have been. My father married, but shortly after his first marriage his wife became sick and in the hospital, as my father held her hand, she passed away.

But it wasn't these brushes with death that were the worst. My father was raised in a family that was involved in a religious cult that denied the resurrection of Christ and that put people into legalistic bondage. That wasn't even the worst of it. Some in his family were involved in witchcraft and they would have séances in the house when he was a little boy and he saw strange things happen in the house.

Yes, my father had an extremely difficult life but after his first wife died he met the woman who would become my mother (who has her own story but which I cannot tell you tell) and they married and started raising a family and as they raised their little children they started listening to Christian radio just as you are doing now and they gave their lives to Christ.

If there was anyone who was a candidate for the mercy of God it was my father, and he often told me, "Jonathan, no one cared for my soul." But someone did – God cared for his soul and God was rich in mercy toward this man who became my father. I'm glad!

And I am so glad for the mercy God has shown me. My upbringing has been just the opposite of my father's. My parents cared for me. They taught me Scripture. They led me to Christ. They provided

for my needs and comforts but two of the greatest discoveries in my life have been the depths of sin in my own heart, for I still was born a son of Adam, and the deeper love and mercy of God.

I am so grateful for his mercy to my family. I am so grateful for his mercy to me. I hope you increasingly find the mercy of God in your life through Jesus Christ. This is a wonder of the spiritual world.