

Exposition on Psalm 101

by St. Augustine

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living in the season of mercy, turning to God, and seeking righteousness, while also warning of the coming season of judgment.

Scripture: Psalm 100:1 - 101:3, Romans 2:4, 2 Timothy 4:8

Topics: "Gods Mercy", "Righteous Living"

Description

St. Augustine preaches on the importance of understanding the balance between God's mercy and judgment. He emphasizes that God's mercy precedes judgment, giving sinners a chance to repent. St. Augustine urges believers to imitate God's mercy and warns of the impending judgment for those who do not repent. He highlights the significance of living a spotless life, walking in innocence, and hating unfaithfulness. The sermon delves into the concept of God knowing or not knowing individuals based on their righteousness or wickedness, and the importance of not associating with the proud and envious. St. Augustine concludes by emphasizing the eventual judgment of the ungodly and the need to root out wickedness from the city of the Lord.

Transcript

1. In this Psalm, we ought to seek in the whole body of it what we find in the first verse: Mercy and judgment will I sing unto You, O Lord Psalm 100:1. Let no man flatter himself that he will never be punished through God's mercy; for there is judgment also; and let no man who has been changed for the better dread the Lord's judgment, seeing that mercy goes before it. For when men judge, sometimes overcome by mercy, they act against justice; and mercy, but not justice, seems to be in them: while sometimes, when they wish to enforce a rigid judgment, they lose mercy. But God neither loses the severity of judgment in the bounty of mercy, nor in judging with severity loses the bounty of mercy. Suppose we distinguish these two, mercy and judgment, by time; for possibly, they are not placed in this order without a meaning, so that he said not judgment and mercy, but mercy and judgment: so that if we distinguish them by succession in time, perhaps we find that the present is the season for mercy, the future for judgment. How is it that the season of mercy comes first? Consider first how it is with God, that you also may imitate the Father, in so far as He shall permit you....He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. Behold mercy. When you see the just and the unjust behold the same sun, enjoy the same light, drink from the same founts, satisfied with the same rain, blessed with the same fruits of the earth, inhale this air in the same way, possess equally the world's goods; think not that God is unjust, who gives these things equally to the just and the unjust. It is the

season of mercy, not as yet of judgment. For unless God spared at first through mercy, He would not find those whom He could crown through judgment. There is therefore a season for mercy, when the long-suffering of God calls sinners to repentance.

2. Hear the Apostle distinguishing each season, and do thou also distinguish it....Do you think, he says, O man, that judgest them that do such things, and doest the same, that you shall escape the judgment of God? And as if we were to reply, Why do I commit such sins daily, and no evil occurs unto me? He goes on to show to him the season of mercy: Despisest thou the riches of His goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering? And he did indeed despise them; but the Apostle has made him anxious. Not knowing, he says, that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? Romans 2:4 Behold the season of mercy. But that he might not think this would last for ever, how did he in the next verse raise his fears? Now hear the season of judgment; you have heard the season of mercy, on which account, mercy and judgment will I sing unto You, O Lord: But you, says the Apostle, after your hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto yourself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds. Romans 2:5-6 Lo, mercy and judgment. But he has threatened concerning judgment: is therefore the judgment of God to be feared only, and not to be loved? To be feared by the wicked on account of punishment, to be loved by the good on account of the crown. Because then the Apostle has alarmed the wicked in the testimony which I have quoted, hear where he gives hope concerning judgment to the good. He puts forth himself, and shows in himself too the season of mercy. For unless he found a period of mercy, in what condition would judgment find him? A blasphemer, a persecutor, an injurer of others. For he thus speaks, and praises the season of mercy, in which season we are now living: I who was before, he says, a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy. But perhaps he only has obtained mercy? Hear how he cheers us: That in me, he says, first, Christ Jesus might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe in Him to life everlasting. What means, that He might show forth all long-suffering? That every sinner and wicked man might see that Paul received pardon, and might not despair of himself? Lo, he has instanced himself, and thereby cheered others also....But did Paul alone deserve this? For I had asserted, that as he raised our fears by the former testimony, so did he encourage us by the latter. When he said, The Lord, the righteous Judge, shall render to me at that day: he adds, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing 2 Timothy 4:8 and His kingdom. Since therefore, brethren, we have a season of mercy, let us not on that account flatter, or indulge ourselves, saying, God spares ever....

3. I will sing to the harp, and will have understanding, in the spotless way. When You shall come unto me Psalm 100:2. Except in the spotless way, you can neither sing to the harp, nor understand. If you dost wish to understand, sing in the spotless way, that is, work with cheerfulness before your God. What is the spotless way? Hear what follows: I walked in innocence, in the midst of my house. This spotless way begins from innocence, and it ends also in innocence. Why seek many words? Be innocent: and you have perfected righteousness....But who is innocent? He who while he hurts not another, injures not himself. For he who hurts himself, is not innocent. Some one says: Lo, I have not robbed any one, I have not oppressed any one: I will live happily on my own substance, the fruits of my virtuous toil; I wish to have fine banquets, I wish to spend as much as pleases me, to drink with those whom I like as much as I please; whom have I robbed, whom have I oppressed, who has complained of me? He seems innocent. But if he corrupt himself, if he overthrow the temple of God within himself, why hope that he will act with mercy toward others, and spare the wretched? Can that man be merciful to others, who unto himself is cruel? The whole of righteousness, therefore, is reduced to the one word, innocence. But the lover of

iniquity, hates his own soul. When he loved iniquity, he fancied he was injuring others. But consider whether he was injuring others: He who loves iniquity, he says, hates his own soul. He therefore who wishes to injure another, first injures himself; nor does he walk, since there is no room. For all wickedness suffers from narrowness: innocence alone is broad enough to walk in. I walked in the innocence of my heart, in the midst of my house. By the middle of his house, he either signifies the Church herself; for Christ walks in her: or his own heart; for our inner house is our heart: as he has explained in the above words, in the innocence of my heart. What is the innocence of the heart? The middle of his house? Whoever has a bad house in this, is driven out of doors. For whoever is oppressed within his heart by a bad conscience, just as any man in consequence of the overflow of a waterspout or of smoke goes out of his house, suffers not himself to dwell therein; so he who has not a quiet heart, cannot happily dwell in his heart. Such men go out of themselves in the bent of their mind, and delight themselves with things without, that affect the body; they seek repose in trifles, in spectacles, in luxuries, in all evils. Wherefore do they wish themselves well without? Because it is not well with them within, so that they may rejoice in a good conscience....

4. I set no wicked thing before my eyes Psalm 100:3....I did love no wicked thing. And he explains this same wicked thing: I hated them that do unfaithfulness. Attend, my brethren. If you walk with Christ in the midst of His house, that is, if either in your heart you have a good repose, or in the Church herself proceed on a good journey in the way of godliness; ye ought not to hate those unfaithful only who are without, but whomsoever also ye may have found within. Who are the unfaithful? They who hate the law of God; who hear, and do it not, are called unfaithful. Hate the doers of unfaithfulness, repel them from you. But you should hate the unfaithful, not men: one man who is unfaithful, has, you see, two names, man, and unfaithful: God made him man, he made himself unfaithful; love in him what God made, persecute in him what he made himself. For when you shall have persecuted his unfaithfulness, you kill the work of man, and freest the work of God. I hated the doers of unfaithfulness.

5. The wicked heart has not cleaved unto me....The heart of a man, who wishes not anything contrary to any that God wishes, is called straight....If therefore the righteous heart follows God, the crooked heart resists God. Suppose something untoward happens to him, he cries out, God, what have I done unto You? What sin have I committed? He wishes himself to appear just, God unjust. What is so crooked as this? It is not enough that you are crooked yourself: you must think your rule crooked also. Reform yourself, and you find Him straight, in departing from whom you have made yourself crooked. He does justly, thou unjustly; and for this reason you are perverse, since you call man just, and God unjust. What man do you call just? Yourself. For when you say, What have I done unto You? you think yourself just. But let God answer you: You speak truth: you have done nothing to Me: you have done all things unto yourself; for if you had done anything for Me, you would have done good. For whatever is done well, is done unto Me; because it is done according to My commandment; but whatever of evil is done, is done unto you, not unto Me; for the wicked man does nothing except for his own sake, since it is not what I command. When ye see such men, brethren, reprove them, convince and correct them: and if you cannot reprove or correct them, consent not to them.

6. When the wicked man departed from me, I knew him not Psalm 100:4. I approved him not, I praised him not, he pleased me not. For we find the word to know occasionally used in Scripture, in the sense of to be pleased. For what is hidden from God, brethren? Does He know the just, and does He not know the unjust? What do you think of, that He does not know? I say not, what do you think; but what will you ever think, that He will not have seen beforehand? God knows all things, then; and yet in the end, that is in

judgment after mercy, He says of some persons: I will profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of iniquity. Matthew 7:23 Was there any one He did not know? But what means, I never knew you? I acknowledge you not in My rule. For I know the rule of My righteousness: ye agree not with it, you have turned aside from it, you are crooked. Therefore He said here also: When the wicked man departed from Me, I knew him not....Therefore, when the wicked man departed from me, that is, when the wicked man was unlike me, and was unwilling to imitate my paths, was unwilling in his wickedness to live as I had proposed myself for his imitation; I knew him not. What means, I knew him not? Not that I was ignorant of him, but that I did not approve him.

7. Whoso privily slandered his neighbour, him I persecuted Psalm 100:5. Behold the righteous persecutor, not of the man, but of the sin. With the proud eye, and the insatiable heart, I did not feed. What means, I did not feed with? I did not eat in common with such. Attend, beloved; since you are about to hear something wonderful. If he did not feed with this man, he did not eat with him; for to feed is to eat; how is it then that we find our Lord Himself eating with the proud? It was not only with those publicans and sinners, for they were humble: for they acknowledged their weakness, and asked for the physician. We find that He ate with the proud Pharisees themselves. A certain proud man had invited Him: it was the same who was displeased because a sinning woman, one of ill repute in the city, approached the feet of our Lord....That Pharisee was proud: the Lord ate with him; what is it therefore that he says? With such an one I did not eat. How does He enjoin unto us what He has not done Himself? He exhorts us to imitate Himself: we see that He ate with the proud; how does He forbid us to eat with the proud? We indeed, brethren, for the sake of reproof, abstain from communion with our brethren, and do not eat with them, that they may be reformed? We rather eat with strangers, with Pagans, than with those who hold with us, if we have seen that they live wickedly, that they may be ashamed, and amend; as the Apostle says, And if any man obey not our word by this Epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. 2 Thessalonians 3:14 For the sake of healing others we usually do this; but nevertheless we often eat with many strangers and ungodly men.

8. The pious heart has its banquets, the proud heart has its banquets: for it was on account of the food of the proud heart, that he said, with an insatiable heart. How is the proud heart fed? If a man is proud, he is envious: otherwise it cannot be. Pride is the mother of enviousness: it cannot but generate it, and ever coexist with it. Every proud man is, therefore, envious: if envious, he feeds on the misfortunes of others. Whence the Apostle says, But if you bite and devour one another, take heed that you be not consumed of one another. Galatians 5:15 You see them, then, eating: eat not with these: fly such banquets: for they cannot satisfy themselves with rejoicing in others' evils, because their hearts are insatiable. Beware you are not caught in their feasts by the devil's noose....Just as birds feed at the trap, or fishes at the hook, they were taken, when they fed. The ungodly therefore have their own feasts, the godly also have theirs. Hear the feasts of the godly: Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Matthew 5:6 If therefore the godly eats the meat of righteousness, and the ungodly of pride; it is no wonder if he is insatiable in heart. He eats the meat of iniquity: do not eat the meat of iniquity, and the proud in eye, and the insatiable in heart, eats not with you.

9. And whence were you fed? And what pleased you, when he did not eat with you? My eyes, he says, were upon such as are faithful in the land, that they might sit with me Psalm 100:6. That is, that with Me they might be seated. In what sense are they to sit? You shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Matthew 19:28 The faithful of the earth judge, for to them it is said, Do you not know, that we shall judge angels? 1 Corinthians 6:3 Whoso walks in a spotless way, he ministered unto me. To Me,

he says, not to himself. For many minister the Gospel, but unto themselves; because they seek their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ. Philippians 2:21 ...

10. The proud man has not dwelt in the midst of my house Psalm 100:7. Understand this of the heart. The proud did not dwell in my heart: no such dwelt in my heart: for he hurried away from me. None but the meek and peaceful dwelt in my heart; the proud dwelt not there, for the unrighteous one dwells not in the heart of the righteous. Let the righteous be distant from you, I know not how many miles and stations: ye dwell together, if you have one heart. The proud doer has not dwelt in the midst of my house: he that speaks unjust things has not directed in the sight of my eyes. This is the spotless way, where we understand when the Lord comes unto us.

11. In the morning I destroyed all the ungodly that were in the land. That I may root out all wicked doers from the city of the Lord Psalm 100:8. This is obscure. There are then wicked doers in the city of the Lord, and they at present, seemingly, spared. Why so? Because it is the season of mercy: but that of judgment will come; for the Psalm thus began, Of mercy and judgment will I sing unto You, O Lord....

12. He at present spares, He will then judge. But when will He judge? When night shall have passed away. For this reason He has said: In the morning. When the day shall at last have arrived, night having passed by. Why does He spare them until the dawn? Because it was night. What means, it was night? Because it was the season for mercy: He was merciful, while the hearts of men were hidden. You see some one living ill; you endure him: for you know not of what sort he will prove to be; since it is night; whether he who today lives ill, tomorrow may live well; and whether he who today lives well, tomorrow may be wicked. For it is night, and God endures all men, since He is of long-suffering: He endures them, that sinners may be converted unto Him. But they who shall not have reformed themselves in that season of mercy, shall be slain. And wherefore? That they may be scattered abroad from the city of the Lord, from the fellowship of Jerusalem, from the fellowship of the Saints, from the fellowship of the Church. But when shall they be slain? At dawn. What means, at dawn? When night shall have passed away. Wherefore now does he spare? Because it is the season of mercy. Why does He not always spare? Because, Mercy and judgment will I sing unto You, O Lord. Brethren, let no man flatter himself: all the doers of iniquity shall be slain; Christ shall slay them at the dawn, and shall destroy them from His city. But now while it is the time of mercy, let them hear Him. Everywhere He cries out by the Law, by the Prophets, by the Psalms, by the Epistles, by the Gospels: see that He is not silent; that He spares; that He grants mercy; but beware, for the judgment will come.

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