

A Merciful Attitude by Sandeep & Zac Poonen

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon encourages believers to embody a merciful attitude, reflecting God's grace in their interactions with others.

Duration: 51:29

Scripture: Ezekiel 36:25-31, Zechariah 3:1-5, Matthew 5:7

Topics: "Gods Mercy", "Christian Compassion"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of mercy and being advocates for one another, highlighting the need to be honest about our struggles and to seek God's mercy in our lives. It delves into the story of Jonah, showcasing the danger of being unmerciful and the call to root for others to receive God's unmerited favor. The speaker encourages a deep desire for mercy towards others, reflecting the love and compassion of God in our relationships and interactions.

Transcript

It is a huge honor for me to be back at home, back with family. I can definitely tell you that this is something that all of our brothers 100% believe that we look all over the world, but this church is the church we look for in other countries and other places. And as you know, my dad gets to speak in different countries, different parts of the world, and they get to see him.

But he's not only on display. CFC, the church in Bangalore, is also on display. There are numerous people who have asked me, tell me how it is in India.

Tell me how it is in the churches in India. So I mean, it is a great joy for me to speak about the church in Bangalore, because that's my home church, and to tell them of what a model church looks like. So I just wanted to encourage you with that, that wherever the word of God is preached, through whoever preaches it in different parts of the world, we carry a bit of you with us.

We see you as the, I see you as the embodiment of what we speak about. We can't find community like we find in this church here. So difficult.

It's so difficult to find pure words of God that we find in this church, and servants who are faithful. These are so rare things. If we go in other places, we'll have to just take my word for it, that we struggle to find it.

But what a tremendous honor you have to be part of this church. I came a few days ago, and it's a little humbling and intimidating to speak in a church where you get such good words, and where I don't, I'm not among you every day, and I'm not in India to know the struggles of India, and the struggles of the young people, especially in India. But I believe that the Holy Spirit is bigger than a person in a particular location, and I was very encouraged by the prayers that God would speak through His Holy Spirit.

That's the person we depend on. I've been thinking about that verse in Matthew 24, verse 12, where it talks about, in the last days as the wickedness increases, the love of many will grow cold. And it always looked at me to be a little bit of a paradox.

You'd almost have thought that as wickedness increased, lawlessness, as one translation says, as lawlessness increased, because of that, most people's love would grow cold. And I almost thought that if the world becomes more wicked, I would think that it would be easier for us to say, we shouldn't be part of that. We should be Christians.

We should follow Christ. But interestingly enough, Jesus says, if wickedness increases out there, our loves are in great danger of being cold. And the way I understand it, as far as I know, is the wickedness is not only something that is out and out evil.

I believe that also what is one of the biggest struggles in my life, and I think the struggles in the church, is not to separate good from evil, but things that take us down the wrong track as Christians, as opposed to the path that follows Christ. So the wickedness could be things that take us away from Christ, but allow us maybe to stay in the church, allow us to stay thinking what Christians are thinking, that we're close to Christ. But the wickedness gets more subtle.

The wickedness gets more complicated. The powers of evil get more strategic in the way they'll attack us, because the intention is for the love to grow cold. And so it's important for us to guard ourselves, not from the out and out wickedness, because I think most of us would protect ourselves from the way the world is going.

But I've seen in my own life to protect ourselves from the spirit that slowly, subtly tries to take us away from following Christ. So I wanted to just start by looking at a verse about Jonah, the story of Jonah. We know the story of Jonah, I mean, I think most of us do, where Jonah was asked by God to go to Nineveh and to tell them that they were in a lot of trouble, and that in 40 days that they will be overthrown.

And Jonah obviously decided not to do that, went and tried to run away. God sent a storm, and then he was thrown overboard. A fish swallowed him up.

He recognized the error of his ways, and this fish vomited him out, and then he preached the word. And then Jonah preached it, and then the king of Nineveh and the people said, hey, we need to repent, because that's our only hope. And they repented, and God relented.

So I'm just gonna start from chapter three, verse 10. When God saw their deeds that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which he had declared he would bring upon them, and he did not do it. But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry, and he prayed to the Lord and said, please, Lord, was this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this, I fled to Tarsus, for I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness and one who relents concerning calamity.

And I saw something in this, that one of the ways the evil one will attack the church and attack us is we may know the very parts of God, we may very know the character of God, but we find ourselves rooting that God would not do what he does, what he should do. And it's interesting because in Jonah, Jonah didn't want God to do the same thing that God did to Jonah himself. When Jonah walked away from God, he was swallowed by a fish, but he prayed to God and asked God for mercy, and it was the mercy of God.

It was the slow to anger, abundant in loving kindness, that very one who relents concerning calamity, it was that same God that caused Jonah to get a second chance. He didn't have any reason to get a second chance, but it was that same person of God that caused him that mercy, that just as soon as a few chapters, a few verses later, when we find that Jonah is not able for his prophecy to come true, that he says, God, I know your character, I know your personality, but I don't want that personality to be true in other people's lives. Because you know, I mean, I never thought about this, but I've imagined what must have Jeremiah, I mean, what must have Jonah looked like.

Jonah came to Nineveh and said, we want this city to perish, this city will perish. He didn't tell them a way out. If we look at Jonah chapter three, it doesn't tell that Jonah said, hey, this is the way out of it.

He just said in 40 days, you guys are gonna be done. Now the king of Nineveh believed in God and they called a fast. It's almost like from the very beginning, Jonah was prophesying, but he wanted that prophecy to come true.

And so finally, he would have loved for that prophecy to come true, because then he is established as a prophet. He's the person who looks good. But it didn't look, it doesn't look like God came up and said, hey, Jonah is my prophet, but I'm not gonna, even though he prophesied it, I'm not gonna cause calamity on you.

It just seems like God just chose not to do it. So now Jonah is looking like he's not a prophet because his prophecy didn't come true. And you know, I mean, I think, and God's response to it was in verse four, do you have good reason to be angry? Because it didn't work out the way you wanted it to work out.

And I think for me, I think that that is something that is so subtle that will slowly take me away from the character of God, from the person of God, because I want my predictions of Christianity. I want my theology of Christianity to come correct. I don't want, I would want to be proved wrong when God somehow decides to be bigger than whatever my prophecies might be.

Or however, I might say, hey, God is gonna do this. God's gonna judge this. And God says, no, I wanna extend mercy.

And I think that that's something that slowly comes in to us, that we think we're on God's side. We think we're preaching the proclamations of God and God might have us to do that. But when it does not come true and people get mercy from God, where they should not receive mercy, then the greater test is for me, not for them.

And you know, we see that same passage in Matthew 20. It seems like this is a recurring theme, even in Jesus' ministry. In Matthew 20, he talks about the laborers.

And when the laborers in the vineyard were all gonna be paid, we know that, that some people came at nine in the morning, some came at noon, and some people came at five in the evening and just worked for an hour. And then when they received it, they got all the same amount of money. And then in verse 10,

they thought they were gonna receive more, but they also received the same payment.

And in verse 12, they grumbled saying, these last men have worked only one hour and you have made them equal to us and you have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day. And we have the sense of fairness that we hold God to. And we say, God, you must do it like this because I've been a Christian for so long, because I've borne the burden for so long, because I have spent all these years laboring in the garden and then this person's coming in and you give him more grace and you give him more abilities.

And that spirit can slowly come in where we actually believe that we deserve something and others don't deserve that same mercy. Matthew 18, just a few chapters earlier, he talks about that with the servant who was owed the king hundreds and thousands of dollars, whatever, rupees or whatever it is. And then when he couldn't pay it, he treated the master and the master forgave him, but then he goes out and catches a person who owes him five, 10 bucks and says, no, you've got to pay it back to me.

And again, Jesus says, should you not, in verse 32, he says, you wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have mercy on your fellow slave even as I had mercy to you? And I think we can, I mean, again, I think we've heard in this church many times of the difference between the religious and the spiritual. And this is what came to me about this passages in Jonah and in Matthew.

The religious man resents the unmerited mercies of God upon others. I'm fine, the religious man is fine with the mercies of God upon myself, but the religious man secretly resents the mercies of God upon other people. And it's a spirit, it's a complicated spirit of wickedness that doesn't come upon us like that.

But I've caught myself so many times being a little concerned that my prophecy about how things should turn out or giving advice to somebody, and they didn't take that advice and things went out better, that I thought I was giving them scriptural advice and that God blessed them. That the test for me was, do I resent when even if it was not grace, when if it was mercy, but I resent the mercy that other people get. I resent when other people get things they shouldn't have got, unmerited favor.

And I thought that the opposite of that is the spiritual man. The spiritual man longs for, the spiritual man roots for the unmerited favor in other people. It is not okay to just say, God do have your way with them.

But I believe that the spiritual person, and I showed you in a couple of verses, that the spiritual person goes to the other extreme of longing for God saying, God show yourself rich in mercy, even though they don't deserve it. Even though I'm the one faithful and they have struggled through it, I long, I yearn for that mercy to be on them. And I mean the passages I'm gonna show you are unbelievable to me, but they're in the Bible, so I will show them to you as well.

Romans chapter nine. I have to believe that these were people who were speaking the truth, but they are at such a level above what I can even fathom that I'm amazed. I'm astonished by the level of faith that these men of God had.

Romans chapter nine, it says, I'm telling the truth and I'm not lying, my conscience bearing witness that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart, for I wish that I could myself be accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren. And this is Paul talking about his fellow Jewish people. And that was the love.

He goes through all the chapters in Romans talking about how the Jewish religion will never get them reconciliation with God. That Jesus was the only way through which they could get it. But yet he has such a love for God's creation, for his brethren, that he says, I would rather go to hell, separated from Christ for my brethren.

And it's hard for me to fathom that kind of love, that kind of love that Paul had. But he said, God, if there's any way that you can show unmerited mercy to them, my brethren, I would do anything, even I would go and be separated from you. And I don't know if it is a literal thing that he prayed, or if it was just that's how deep his love for people were.

It is still a message to my heart, that that's the kind of rooting for people who are not yet getting what I have gotten, people who are not yet following as strongly as I'm following, that I root for them. God, what will it take? That they may feel your love, that they may feel your grace. And a similar passage in the Old Testament to in Exodus chapter 32.

When Moses talks to God, I think most of these passages are familiar to you. Verses nine through 13. And the Lord said to Moses, because the people of Israel were disobeying God, and were worshiping a calf down in the valley.

And God said, in verse nine of chapter 32 of Exodus, I've seen this people and behold, they are an obstinate people. Now then let me alone, that my anger burn against them and I might destroy them. And I will make you a great nation.

The same promise that he gave to Abraham. He told Abraham, I'll make you a great nation. God said, I'm done with that promise.

We'll start with you, Moses. We'll make you a great nation. And Moses says, God, why does your anger not burn? Why does your anger burn against thy people? Verse 11.

Whom you have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand. Why should the Egyptians speak saying, with evil intent he brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth. Turn from thy burning anger and change thy mind about doing harm to thy people.

Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel, thy servants. And it says that God listened to Abraham. Again, it almost seems like God is, Abraham is reminding God about the promise that he made to Abraham.

And it's such a love that again, Moses, that God could find in Moses that he could help lead his people because Moses had such a heart for his people that even when it was given to him that he could be the leader of the Jewish nation, that all of the people could come out of his lineage. Moses says, remember your father, remember Abraham. And this is the faith of Abraham too.

Abraham said that negotiated with God in Genesis 18 about Sodom and Gomorrah. God, if there are only 10 people save this city, even if it is just for 10 righteous people. And in Romans 4 says that we are children of Abraham.

We are the New Testament children of Abraham because we should have that faith. And that faith includes the heart of Abraham where he longed for the merciful trait of God to triumph over the judgment trait of God. It's not that we don't deny, it's not that we deny the judgment of God, but if it were up to us,

that we would say, God, we long that you would be merciful to them over that you would be judging them.

And I think that that is the heart that is so necessary for us to have in this world. I remember watching on TV once where somebody said, hey, great calamity was gonna happen after year 2000. This was before year 2000.

And somebody said, there's gonna be a great tragedy. And only the people who have done this and been with this particular ministry will be saved. And the TV panned to a person and the person in the audience, you could see a sense of relief on his face.

And he said, hallelujah. And the first reaction that I had was that might be true. It obviously turned out not to be true that there was no big calamity.

But I felt, what about the people who have to have that calamity? Is then, do I shout hallelujah when other people endure a calamity, even it is from the judgment of God? Or do I say, God, if there's any way, be merciful to this people. It says in Peter that God doesn't want any of us to perish. The heart of God is something that I've seen through the people who are in the Bible, are people who love the God that is merciful.

Because he's been merciful to us. Be merciful to others, just as God has been merciful to me. That's something that has been drilled into me from a young age, sitting over here.

But it is something that creeps in. The desire to say, God, I want you to be just in this case. I want you to vindicate me.

Rather than God, I want you to be merciful. And there's one thing for God to be merciful to the world, and I think that's a much bigger calling. But as God says, as Jesus says, you have to start with your own brothers and sisters in one John.

And Jesus said, that new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. And before we think about the world and loving them and saying, God, be merciful to the world, there's definitely a lot more practical chances for us to say, God, help me to be merciful in my attitude towards other people in the church. Because that's what love is.

You know, Jesus said that that's the new commandment. And I believe that love, when truly embodied in us, is a love that is merciful. That love that yearns for mercy, for God to provide mercy on other people.

And I thought about this concept of love, because I feel that love is something that I've misunderstood or wrongly understood for many, many years. So I just wanna share with you what God has taught me about what it means to love one another. And you know, Jesus says in John 13, love one another as I have loved you.

So I have gone to the life of Jesus to understand how he loved in different parts of his life, to understand how I must love. And I see it as three different stages, so to speak. I see it as three different stages in climbing the mountain of love, if you can picture it that way.

The first stage is Jesus forgiving and healing. That's what he did on this earth. Jesus came to this earth and it said he did good.

And he forgave people and he healed people. And that's how our love must be too. Our love must be where we forgive and where we must heal.

If we don't forgive and we don't heal, we don't love our brothers and sisters. And I think we all know that. And I think we know that, I don't think I could look myself in the mirror and say that I'm loving somebody if I'm refusing to forgive somebody, and if I'm refusing to extend my hand of healing, saying I want to restore you.

That would be something I think we would all agree. That is what it is to love one. And then the next stage of love was where I saw God, Jesus to be the sacrificer.

Where he sacrificed his love. He sacrificed, he became a servant for us and sacrificed his love for us. And for the longest time I felt, I thought that the sacrificial love was the best kind of love I could give for somebody.

That I could give of myself to somebody else, that's the best way I could show that I love them. But I noticed in my own life that there were many times that I would sacrifice for other people, but I didn't really truly love them in my heart. I would clean up my roommate's mess, for example, but I would have a little, and I would sacrificially do it, but I had a little bit of resentment.

Why didn't he clean up his own mess? I would do things for other people, I spent a lot of time volunteering. But that sacrificial love where I volunteer to others, as good as it was, was still had parts of it which were selfish and motives to saying, God, I want to earn some good points with you. And there were so many different selfish motives that I realized in my love that was sacrificial.

And so I said, God, there's gotta be something more in my love for you, in the way you have displayed your love for me. That is even above a sacrificial love that goes deeper in my heart. And I think that that's the secret to how I can also have mercy, that the spiritual man yearns for mercy towards other people.

And that's in 1 John 2. So Jesus was on earth and he forgave and he healed, and Jesus died on the cross and he showed a sacrificial element to it. But 1 John 2, verse one. My little children, I'm writing these things to you that you may not sin, and if anyone sins, we have an advocate.

With the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. And God showed me that an even bigger love than a sacrificial kind of lover is a person who loves as an advocate. And you know, Jesus lived on this earth and he forgave and he healed and he died and he sacrificed his life for us.

But now he's in heaven and Hebrews 7 tells us what he's doing in heaven. Hebrews chapter seven, verse 25. Hence he is also able to save those who draw near to give through him since he always lives to make intercession for them.

That's why he lives. Jesus rose from the dead and went to heaven, not only to conquer sin, but he's in heaven and he's not sitting on his hands waiting for us to join him. He lives to make intercession for us.

He lives to make intercession for me. And that was, and I feel like that is a love that has inspired me to grow higher than just sacrificing for one another. And what does it mean to be an advocate? An advocate means to be a lawyer, but I like a better word for it.

I say to be an advocate is to be somebody's biggest fan. You've got supporters of different, and you know, you have idols who are of sportsmen and cricketers and all of that. I had my own too.

I just love the way they batted. I love the way they bowl. And I look at advocates on terms of the way God calls me to love and to say, I love them.

I truly want the best for them. I really want them to succeed. That may mean I don't sacrifice for them, but I truly have their best interest in mind.

I want them. I want to do anything I can to help them succeed. And it's a matter of the heart to be an advocate for somebody.

And I think people can even see it in our eyes, in our body language, if we truly are rooting for them or if we have a little bit of an issue against them because of something they said or something they did. But I see that God says, hey, if you clean out your heart and be true advocates, if you clean out your heart and be true fans and absolute fans of those other people, they will accept what you say for them. If they think that you're out to correct them and you're out to sacrifice for them, but with a little bit of an agenda, it's a tainted love.

It's not the divine love. But God showed me that if I cleaned out my heart and said, God, I truly want to root for these people, that they succeed in every way, that they may prosper in every way, as John says, and I think in 2 John or 3 John, that they may prosper in every way. That's the kind of love that people are willing to embrace.

And that's the kind of love through which correction can come so easily. And especially for me, somebody who gets the opportunity to speak from in public places, it's all the more important that I speak with love. And as any of us are asked to give a thought or encourage somebody else, if we speak with vested interest, if we speak with a little bit of a selfish heart, I feel other people can smell it.

Other people can notice it and other people can feel it. But if I clean out my heart and say, God, I want to be their biggest fan, it makes it so much easy to say, God, please show them mercy. Don't be hard on them.

Give them another chance. That's the spirit of Moses. That's the spirit of Paul.

And I love that verse in John 14 in the beginning where he says, you know, I go to prepare a place for you. And I think that that's such a beautiful concept for me. I have meditated on that for a bit, that he goes to prepare a place for me, that Jesus has rolled up his sleeves and he's directing the building, how the building's gonna look.

And he's preparing and he says, my mansion has many dwelling places. And he goes to prepare a dwelling place for you and for me. And he's watching my every move.

He's watching my interests. If I like concrete houses or if I like wood, if I like wood paneling, if I like certain pictures on the wall, if I want to start, if I want a lot of flowers, he's listening to that. And he goes to prepare a place for me.

That's the spirit of a fan. That's the spirit of somebody who is truly rooting for me. That's the spirit through which he came to this earth to die for us.

That's the spirit through which he came to release us from sin, to draw us to ourselves, because he truly thought of us as his biggest fan. And that theology, that thought of love as being an advocate for other people has really released me in my understanding of how I ought to love my wife and how I ought to love my brothers, how I ought to love the church. It's not just sacrificing, I'll do this for you, I'll do that for you.

No, it's to truly go and say, God, how can I be an advocate for those I'm called to love? The people in the church, for my family, for anybody in my life. And when people in the church go through rough times, when people in the church do things that they shouldn't have done, it's my first instinct to say, God, he had it coming, or to say, God, how can we restore him? How can we be merciful to them? How can we long for God's mercy, even though they don't deserve it, even though they're not doing all the things they should be doing right? God, can you extend mercy to them? So that's the thought I want to leave you with. That's something that God put on my heart the last couple of days.

The story of Jonah was where God spoke to me about this, that we can so long to be on the side away from God, because we want to be proved right. We want our prophecies to be proved right, even if it comes to the other people suffering. And that's not the heart of God.

The heart of God is to truly be on the side of God's people. My prayer, my hope is that God will create in us, in this family at CFC as well, a family of people who are advocates for one another. People who are clearly on your side, that when I come into this house, I will know I've got a bunch of fans here.

That each one of us will say, I'm on your side. I mean, I see that on your faces when I come and when you welcome us back home. I feel that so much from the way you welcome me.

And I hope that is true about all of us. Even those who you meet every day and who maybe irritate you. That spirit of in this house, we're gonna be advocates for one another.

Greater is he that is who is in us, because we're rooting for one another through the love of Christ that he is in the world. May God help us. It's a wonderful thing to be honest.

God loves honest people who don't blame anybody else, but seek to see where they are wrong. That was what took the dying thief to paradise. It's a tremendous message that Jesus gave hanging on the cross.

Two equally wicked sinners hanging on either side of him. Never did anything good. One goes to heaven, the other goes to hell.

Amazing. What was it? Only one thing. That fellow was honest.

I deserve this. The other fellow said, well, I wanna get out of here. Get us down from the cross.

So one went into paradise. The exact opposite of Adam, when God told him, did you eat of this tree? Jesus said, yeah. My fault, Lord, 100%.

But instead of that, he says, this wife gave it to me. You gave me this wife. You pass the blame on to others.

Honesty is a very important thing. To me, that has come very strongly. The most important thing God requires from us.

You know who wrote the book of Jonah? I thought of that. I mean, it's written in the third person. Jonah did this, Jonah did that.

But how could somebody know what Jonah prayed inside the stomach of the fish? I mean, you can hear and understand a lot of things about other people. What somebody prayed inside the stomach of the fish? Nobody would know except Jonah himself. And when it says Jonah prayed like this in the stomach of the fish, he wrote it himself.

Read that book, remembering that he wrote it himself. And things like this, Jonah 4.1. Jonah was furious. He lost his temper.

He yelled at God. God, I knew it. When I was back home, I knew this was gonna happen.

What honesty. That's what you and I are to be. That's why I ran after Tarshish.

So God, if you won't kill them, kill me. And God said, what do you have to be angry? Jonah just left. Now I had another question.

Why didn't Jonah write it in the first person? He said, I did this and I was furious. Then he would get some honor for being such a humble brother who tells the truth about himself. Oh, this, I admire that guy.

He didn't want that honor. So he writes it as if somebody else is writing it. You got it? How we like to get honor? To say, I was furious.

I was angry. I yelled at God. And the halo becomes bigger and bigger over my head as I speak about my sin.

It's a wonderful thing when we realize what corruption there is in our holiest acts. To be merciful to others. You know, if I were to ask, put it like this.

How many of you would like to have a little bit of hell inside your heart? Just a little bit. None of us. You know one characteristic of hell? One characteristic of hell is there is absolutely no mercy there.

Hell is a place without mercy. The mercy of God is not there. People are not merciful to each other.

It's a terrible place to go to. Imagine being in a place where, forget the punishment God gives, imagine just being in a place with human beings who are absolutely unmerciful to you. Why? Even if there's no fire and no worms or anything, it'd be terrible to be in such a place.

And to think that I'll never escape from these fellows. I'm gonna be with these fellows for eternity. Who wants to go there? I don't wanna go there.

I tell you, even if hell has got no fire, no worms, no, the very fact that I've got to spend eternity with people are gonna be unmerciful to me. Be terrible. Have you got a little bit of hell in your heart? Towards someone? Are you hard on your husband? Hard on your wife? Hard on children? I mean, we need to be strict, but hard is different.

God is not hard. He's strict. We need to understand the difference between being strict and being hard.

It's a world of difference. Hardness is a human thing. It is never said about God that he's hard-hearted, but he is strict, sure.

Very often we can be hard on others and say we are strict. We need to be honest like Jonah. I was hard.

In the book of Zechariah chapter three, it says, I saw Joshua the high priest. Now, Joshua was a top man. He was a leader.

He's like an elder brother. An elder brother in the church. And Zechariah, by the way, was a very young man.

Zechariah was a young man. It says here, you'll see that, by the way, in Zechariah chapter two, verse four, the Lord said to this angel, run and speak to that young man. Let us speak to Zechariah.

So we know Zechariah was a young man. And Joshua was the elder brother, the high priest. The high priest was the top man in Israel.

And we see here, the Lord showed me Joshua standing before the angel of the Lord. The angel of the Lord is a picture of Christ. The angel means messenger.

And Satan was standing at his right hand to accuse him. Satan is always there to accuse. And the Lord said to Satan, the Lord rebuke you, Satan.

This is a brand who's plucked from the fire. And Joshua, verse three, was clothed with filthy garments. This is a young brother seeing a mistake or a sin.

Some dirty garments in an older brother. Same thing, it's a bit dirty. And the Lord is trying to teach Zechariah a lesson.

I mean, I don't know who it is. Maybe you see your wife in some type of spiritually filthy garments. You know, she's not so good and humble as you are.

You see your husband with some type of filthy garments. Whoever it is you're seeing with filthy garments right now, put that person in Joshua's place. And you are Zechariah looking at this.

And you see, it's not just you see, the Lord has shown it to you. So it's not some imagination. Your wife is really filthy.

Or your husband is really filthy. Or that brother, it's absolutely right. He is filthy, spiritually.

And Satan is standing to accuse. Satan is saying, I agree with you. That's right, it's filthy.

But the Lord says, I rebuke you. And the Lord says, remove the filthy garments from him. And says, I have taken away your iniquity.

Not just taken away your iniquity and left you naked, but clothed him in festal garments. You know, like garments you dress up for a festival or robes. Now, this is the part I like.

Zechariah gets so excited when he sees the Lord covering up that person's sin. He says, no, Lord, not just festal garments. Let him put a turban on his head as well to make your brother glorious.

That's, see there, Zechariah had a choice now. He was standing there. He's seeing Satan accusing him of the filthy garments.

And Jesus saying, no, take it away. Put another garment over him. And the Lord is watching.

What is this young fellow, Zechariah, gonna do now? You know that the Lord is watching you and me many times when we see something wrong in someone to see. Now, whose side are you gonna take here? No wonder that young man, Zechariah, was a prophet. Young man, I tell you, some of these young people whom God picked up, I think they were only in their early 20s.

God picked them up. Jeremiah was one like that. Samuel was even younger.

Zechariah was this young man. And I think it's because he saw in them a heart that desired good for his people. It's not age.

There are people who are 50, 60 years old who are sour and hard. And in the midst of all, you find some young man like Zechariah who desires that God will do good to his people. What do we desire? You know, you can be a prophet.

Just desire that God will do good to others. I was thinking, we have sung this song, Lord, Help Me Be Merciful, as far as I can remember, ever since we put up that verse here. When we built this building in 1981, we moved in here and Ian and I were talking together about what verse to put up here.

I thought that, you know, what is the biggest danger of people pursuing holiness? And we were a church pursuing holiness. Wait, this is in 1981 when we put that verse up here. And I felt that, and I looked at Jesus, the Pharisees, looking at the Pharisees, they were the people pursuing holiness in this time.

Their biggest lack was a lack of mercy. It was not lack of doctrine or zeal, they were doing missionary work across the seas. But with all that activity and all their washing their hands and all their giving tithes and all that, they were so unmerciful.

And so that's why we put that verse. We felt that we who pursue holiness, our greatest number one danger is of being unmerciful to other people who we see with filthy garments. And there, in our pursuit of holiness, we take sides with the accuser of the brothers.

And we don't even realize it, that we're on the wrong side. It's like a person playing in a football game and they change sides after half time and he doesn't realize that and he goes around kicking the ball into his own goal. That's exactly what's happening.

A lot of believers. Why is it that we have sung that song? In 1981, it's 2007 now, some of us have been here all these 26 years. Why is it we just keep singing that song? And still so hard on those whom we call our loved ones.

We are hard on our loved ones. You know, I believe there's, as I said, a great deal for need for honesty. We must be radical, say, Lord, I never want to speak about that, which I'm not willing to do.

You know, there's a high standard. It's very easy to get up in the church and speak about, we must be this and we must be that. I don't know who it was, one of the brothers this evening said, we must give a whole year's salary in one day.

Well, I haven't done it, so I can't speak about it. You know, we can have, talk about the most, we gotta climb Mount Everest, you know. We gotta climb Mount Everest.

I remember some year, months ago, somebody said, here, we gotta have faith to raise the dead. I tell you, this unreality in Christendom, which Jesus called hypocrisy, is the thing that prevents us from being simple, God-fearing people. We speak about fantastic things like the second president of India, Radhakrishnan, once said, you Christians make extraordinary claims, but you live ordinary lives.

Hindus see that. I'll tell you where we can begin. We can begin with mercy.

We leave raising the dead and all for a little later. We can even leave giving one year's salary in one day till later. Let's begin with mercy.

When you encountered God, the first thing about God that touched me was mercy. Isn't that what he did with you? First thing he did was forgive your sin. Before he did anything else, you couldn't even talk to him without his forgiving your sin.

I couldn't. As soon as I encountered God, he forgave my sin. And as a representative of God, you know, this God who is rich in mercy, as I go around the world, and you go around meeting different people around the world, as a representative of God, the first thing they must see in you and me is mercy.

First, and they can see all the other things, you know, doctrines about victory and all that later, but the first thing they must encounter is mercy. And to bring up our children like that in our home, to be merciful to one another, because we are fallen people living in a fallen world. And I was thinking, as I said, why is it after so many years of singing these songs and talking about these, as Radhakrishnan says, making these extraordinary claims, why are we still living such ordinary lives? Are we talking about things which we haven't experienced one bit? There's a word in the New Testament for such people, piracy.

In Ezekiel 36, I saw something else also, Ezekiel 36. It says here, the Lord says some of the wonderful things he'll do for us. Verse 26, I'll give you a new heart.

Verse 25, last part, I'll cleanse you from your filthiness. I'll give you a new heart, put a new spirit. I'll give you a soft heart, I'll put my spirit within you, and you will be careful to observe my ordinances.

I will save you, verse 29, from all your uncleanness. I'll multiply, verse 30, the fruit. And there are two things, we've heard about what God is gonna do, I will, I will, I will, as we heard a little earlier.

It's all I will. Verse 25, I will. Verse 26, I will.

Again, I will, I will, I will. I will save you, verse 29. And then, it says you will, in verse 31.

What's that? You will remember your evil ways. And that were not good. And you will loathe yourselves in your own sight.

It's a mark of a godly man. He loathes himself in his own sight. In the midst of a world where people loathe others, God sees a few.

I wonder how many he sees in our church. Of those who loathe themselves in their own sight. For their iniquities, for the way they failed God.

Such a man can never be unmerciful to others. It's impossible. You will loathe yourselves.

And he says, don't think I'm doing all this for your sake. No, it's for his glory. Okay, I will cleanse you.

I will cause you to inhabit and all that. And then, there's one last thing. And I believe this is what the reason why we don't experience some of these things.

Like being merciful and all. And this is the word. We end with this.

Verse 37. I will allow the house of Israel to ask me to do it for them. Lord, I can't give one year's salary in one day.

I can't do anything. We have to raise the debt. I can't even be merciful to somebody.

Let's begin with ABC. Do it for me, Lord. Do it in my life.

We think we heard a message. We say, I'm going to go out and do it. I will wait until the house of Israel asks me to do it for them.

Let's ask.

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