

God Desires Mercy More Than Sacrifice

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of mercy over judgment, warning against being overly critical and judgmental towards others. It highlights the need for 365 times more mercy than strictness, drawing from biblical examples and teachings to show the significance of showing mercy to receive mercy in return. The speaker urges listeners to eliminate a judgmental spirit, emphasizing that mercy triumphs over judgment in the eyes of God.

Scripture: Matthew 7:1, James 2:13, Philippians 2:27, Isaiah 11:3, Luke 4:18

Topics: "Mercy over Judgment", "The Call to Compassion"

Description

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Transcript

Well, brothers and sisters, I'm really happy to be back home. I had a very profitable time meeting mainly with a lot of our elders in our churches in India. We had a conference for about 130 elders.

We have altogether about 230, but 130 of them could come and it was a very, very profitable, refreshing time where we got to know each other better and to be challenged for the days ahead. And I believe things are going to be difficult in India in the days to come because of the direction the country is going in terms of religion. When God is on the throne and I believe that such meetings like that prepare us for the days to come.

So what do you think is the greatest danger that a church like NCCF or CFC churches face when we emphasize holiness and God's highest standards all the time? The danger is, I think the greatest danger is of being very judgmental on other churches, on other Christians who don't agree with us, which can lead to being judgmental on people in this church who we see something wrong with. If you recognize the danger, you will steer clear of it. So I want to warn all of you that this is the greatest danger.

When we built our first CFC building in India in 1981, that's many years ago, 45 years ago. 43 years ago, we had to decide what verse shall we put behind the pulpit. And I thought of what I just shared with you.

What do you think is the greatest danger we face who preach holiness? I said, I think it's being unmerciful to others. So I said, let's have this verse behind the preacher on the pulpit above him. Be merciful to others just as God has been merciful to you.

And we have had that verse over us for 40 years. And a constant reminder for all those who get into the pulpit, whatever standard you live by, whatever standard you preach, God's standards in the church, don't forget to be merciful. And steer clear of judgmentalism.

The highest standard that Jesus preached was in the Sermon on the Mount. Amazing standards when you read of it. Anger is equal to murder.

Have you ever heard that? That's what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. But I find even very few believers believe that. The equivalent of murder in the Old Testament is anger in the New Testament.

Don't murder, don't get angry. And the equivalent of committing adultery in the Old Testament is lusting with the eyes in the New Testament. Again, Matthew chapter 5. But how many believers believe that? How much do we hear it preached in the churches? The equivalent of loving your, love your neighbor and hate your enemy in the New Testament is love your enemy too.

So he proclaims such high standards. For example, he said when you pray, don't let anybody know that you're praying. When you fast, don't ever let anybody know that you fast.

And when you give, don't let anyone know that you give. And yet, you know, there's such a tendency in us to let people know that we pray or we fast or we give. And at the end of preaching that high standard, you know what he said at the end of it? In Matthew chapter 5 and chapter 6, he preached this very high standard.

And at the end of that, notice the very first statement he makes is, don't judge other people. Matthew 7 verse 1. Did you notice the connection? After preaching the highest standard that no human being had ever preached in any religious group, he said now the danger is, as you try to live by this standard described in Matthew 5 and chapter 6, the great danger, and we've been preaching Matthew 5 and 6 in this church for many years. The very next thing he says, be careful that you don't judge other people.

Don't look for that speck in somebody's eye. And I believe that we need to hear that again and again and again. You know, you can say you love your wife, and yet you can be looking for specks there.

You may not say it, but you could have an attitude towards your wife or your husband saying, why does he do that? You may control yourself by not saying it, but that attitude can ruin your relationship and marriage. How many people believe that? How many people are quick to judge themselves saying, I shouldn't have that attitude. The Lord has told me, don't judge.

Don't judge does not mean that I don't just express it. Judgment is an inward thing. It means I should not even form that judgmental opinion about somebody.

It's a very high standard. But it's no use keeping all those high standards in the New Testament. I don't lust.

I don't get angry. I've got victory over all that. I don't tell other people how much I pray.

I don't tell other people how much I fast. Great. But then I judge other people.

It's like making a beautiful dish, cooking a beautiful dish, and then putting a dead lizard inside it. You spoil the whole thing. That's exactly what's happening.

How do I know? I've done it myself. That's how I know. You make this wonderful dish, cook something, and then spoil it all by judging others.

Put one dead lizard inside and ruin the whole thing. Let me turn to Matthew chapter 9. The Pharisees were like that. You know, they preached the highest standard in Israel.

But they were so judgmental, always comparing other people with, look, my standard. So in Matthew chapter 9, we read that verse 10, Matthew chapter 9, verse 10. It happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus.

See, the amazing thing about the Pharisees, they were ready to criticize even Jesus, the one perfect man who walked on this earth without making a single mistake. The Pharisees would criticize even him. Now, what do I learn from that? What I learn is that I can have that same danger, and I can be criticizing someone who's a hundred times better than me.

Some of those people you may be looking down on in secret areas of their life, they may be far better than you. Well, it says here that there were many tax collectors and sinners, and the Pharisees saw this. They criticized him.

Why is your teacher eating with tax collectors who are crooks and sinners? And when Jesus heard this, he said, well, they're sick. The tax collectors are sick with sin. The sinners are sick with sin.

And where should a doctor go to those who are sick? So that's why I go to them, because they're sick, and I've come as a doctor. And should a doctor stay away from them, or should a doctor visit only healthy people? And we need to ask ourselves, what is our attitude towards sinners? Do we see them as needy people to whom we have the cure for their sin? How much are we willing to share that with them? And then listen to these words. It's not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.

And then he said, go and learn what this means. That's been on my heart for quite a few days. Go and learn what this means.

I desire mercy, compassion, and not sacrifice. Think of that sentence. I desire mercy and not sacrifice.

Now, you know, throughout the Bible, sacrifice is emphasized greatly. Jesus sacrificed himself on the cross for us. The great example of sacrifice in the Old Testament is Abraham offering up his son.

And God said, when I see you doing this, and I promise you a blessing, I'll bless you. All nations will be blessed through you, because he offered a sacrifice. And in every religion, sacrifice is admired.

We ourselves have admired the sacrifice of missionaries who have given up comfort and gone out in the midst of cannibals and different people. Don't you admire the sacrifice of people who have gone and laid down their life to preach the gospel to somebody? I know I have. I've read the missionary biographies of so many people, and I always admired the sacrifice they made.

And we are challenged by it. We always appreciate sacrifice. Is there something greater than sacrifice? Is there something better than that? Now, most of us sitting here will never go to cannibals or make the type of sacrifices that some of those missionaries made, or many others who have sacrificed many, many

things in order to preach the gospel.

But there's something greater than sacrifice. That's what I wanted to emphasize. Mercy is even greater than sacrifice.

He said, if you make all those sacrifices, he tells the Pharisees, you're not merciful. You haven't understood true Christianity. So when they criticized him for something, he said, you guys are not merciful towards sinners.

And is it possible that the Lord can level that charge against any of us that we preach such a high standard, which is good? We are not to lower the standard. But if it makes us unmerciful towards perhaps somebody in this church who doesn't live up to that standard, who may be sincerely trying, but slips up or doesn't dress the way we think he should dress or she should dress, and maybe we are openly critical, not directly to their face, but to somebody else, or even if we don't critical to speak critically, to think critically. Oh, why in the world does she dress like that? Why in the world does that young man do his hair like that? It's none of our business, really, the way somebody else dresses or the way they do their hair.

But we have that tendency. We may not say it, but that attitude destroys our spirituality inwardly. And dear brother, sister, I want to mention this.

That could be the reason why you have not grown more spiritually. Your foot has been on the brakes, and the car is moving very slowly. And that brake is this unmerciful attitude.

Get rid of it. God has not made us a judge of anybody in this church. If you're an elder, you have some responsibility to correct people.

But even an elder is not a judge. He's to help people, to correct people, warn them, rebuke them sometimes, sure, but not judge. So I learned from this verse that mercy is greater than sacrifice.

So if I appreciate a missionary who's gone to the cannibals and laid down their life to preach the gospel, it's great. I admire that. And then I hear of somebody else who's very merciful to someone.

He didn't go to the cannibals, but he just showed a great mercy to someone. Do I really see that as a greater thing than that person's sacrifice? That's what the Lord says here. I desire compassion, not sacrifice.

Turn to Matthew 12. Here we read that Jesus went through the grain fields. And the disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain.

And the Pharisees, you know, one thing that Jewish people are very strict about is keeping the Sabbath. From sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday, you're not supposed to do any work. And I've heard that in many homes, they wouldn't even turn on the lights here.

I'm saying in our generation, Jewish people wouldn't even turn on the lights because that's the work, to switch on the light, and to get a Gentile to come and switch on the light for them. They're so strict on this matter of work. And they saw the disciples picking up heads of grain and immediately that critical attitude.

See, the Pharisees were so strict about keeping so many laws, they were immediately critical. Look, he says to Jesus, this tremendous itch, an itch to find fault with someone who's preaching a high standard. Why were they so much against Jesus? Because he was preaching such a high standard of morality and

holiness, and there's a tremendous itch in people to somehow pull that person down.

I've seen that with people who want to somehow pull down anyone in CFC who preaches a high standard, to find some little fault in him. Why does he do this? Why does he do that? Or why are his children like this? Why is something like this, something or the other? And if you really want to know, that shows you what a Pharisee you are. The Pharisee said, why? Look what your disciples are doing.

And Jesus rose to the defense of his disciples. And I'll tell you this, when you criticize one of God's children, the Lord will rise up to their defense against you. So be careful.

He rose to the defense of his disciples, quoting a scripture. You remember David, he said, when he was hungry, what did he do? He entered and ate the consecrated bread, verse 4, which is not lawful for him to eat. There was a law that that consecrated bread which is kept in the tabernacle can only be eaten by the priests.

And David went and ate it because he was hungry. And God did not judge him. He says, what did David do? Or haven't you read in the law that on the Sabbath, the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? The priests are doing work on the Sabbath day.

He said, how do you allow for that? They're doing some work and they're not supposed to do any work on the Sabbath day. I really appreciate the way Jesus rose to the defense of his disciples. And I tell you, he's the same today.

Be very, very careful when you pass a judgment on another child of God. You may find Jesus rises up to defend that person against you. And that is a danger that we have to face who preach holiness.

I say that to myself, first of all, because I probably preach holiness more than you all preach. So I'm preaching this to myself, too. I'm telling you what God spoke to me.

Be careful. And then again, he says, if you had known what this means, verse 7, the same verse that we quoted earlier, I desire mercy, not sacrifice. You would not have condemned the innocent.

He calls his disciples innocent. He calls David innocent for eating the bread, which only the priests were supposed to eat. I'm challenged by these passages that that person whom you call guilty, Jesus may pronounce him innocent.

So be very, very careful. The best is to obey Matthew 7, verse 1, literally. Do not judge.

Mind your own business and leave all judgment to God. God is the only righteous judge. Sometimes we form a judgment on the basis of what we have heard or what we say, what we have heard or what we saw.

Turn with me to Isaiah chapter 11. Isaiah chapter 11, it speaks about Jesus here, how the sevenfold Holy Spirit would be upon him. Isaiah 11, a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse.

That Jesse is the father of David, and it's referring to Jesus here. A branch from the roots will bear fruit. It's referring to Christ.

And the Spirit of Jehovah will rest upon him. The Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge of the Lord, the sevenfold Holy Spirit. And listen to this.

When the Holy Spirit fills a person, the one primary result is, verse 3, he delights in reverence for God. That's the primary mark of a person filled with the Holy Spirit. It's not speaking in tongues.

It is delighting in reverence for God. If you want to know whether you're filled with the Holy Spirit, ask yourself whether you delight in being reverent about the things of God. Do you have a reverence, a tremendous respect and reverence for the things of God, for his word, for his commands? And coupled with that, listen to this.

One mark of that fear of the Lord is what is mentioned in the next sentence. He will not judge by what his eyes see. He will not make a decision by what his ears hear.

That is one way by which he proves the fear of the Lord. It's connected. He will delight in the fear of the Lord, comma.

It's the same sentence. He will delight in the fear of the Lord, which results in his never judging by what his eyes see. Never making a decision or forming an opinion by what he heard.

My brothers and sisters, you and I have all been guilty of this. I know I've had to judge myself through the years. Say, Lord, how many times I hear something about somebody and I say, yeah, that's like that.

Or I see something and I assume the worst instead of assuming the best. Have you noticed that about yourself? You are blessed if you've got light on that. We need to ask God to give us light on how quickly we form opinions and decisions by something we saw or we thought we saw it.

Or something we heard and we didn't hear it clearly. Or we didn't hear the whole story. We heard a little bit of the story and we formed an opinion.

There could be another side to it. I remember a brother who they saw him walking into a drinking saloon. And some other brother saw him and spread the news around it.

I saw that brother going into a place where alcoholics were gathering. And it was discovered later that he had actually gone in there to witness to people with tracts. That's why he went in there.

Can you imagine what that brother will feel when in the day of judgment it's exposed that this man whom he judged had actually gone there to witness about Christ to somebody? It's far better we settle these matters before the day Christ comes back. He will not judge by what his eyes see and he will not make a decision by what his ears hear. Because he says there could be another side to it.

I haven't seen yet. There could be another aspect to it that I haven't heard yet. Imagine this is talking about Jesus.

The perfect person who walked on the earth. If there was anybody who could have made a decision on the basis of what he saw and what he heard, it was Christ. And it says he would not do it.

Why? Because, verse 3, he delights in reverence for God. When I have a tremendous fear of God, one result will be I will not be so quick to pass a judgment based on what I saw or what I heard. I don't mind repeating that again and again and again to myself and to all of you.

Dear brothers and sisters, do you think that possibly this is the reason why you have not grown spiritually much more than you already have? Yeah, many of us have grown greatly since we came to CFC and

CCF. But think it could have been more if you had eliminated this one habit in your life. Will we try and eliminate it at least from today onwards? It has definitely hindered spiritual growth in everyone who has practiced it.

I don't doubt it at all. Anyone who's been judging others by what they see, what they hear, and passing opinions, and even forming opinions in one's mind, which we gain nothing out of, it definitely puts a brake on spiritual progress. But it says here, instead, if you would not take a decision by the virtue of righteousness, you will judge the poor.

Mercy is one of the great needs that we have in NCCF and in all CFC churches. I've been emphasizing that the beginning of this year when I was sharing God's Word in Bangalore. And I quoted that verse that was behind us on the wall above the pulpit.

Be merciful to others just as God has been merciful to you. And I said, brothers and sisters, I believe the Lord has laid on my heart this burden that this should be our motto for this year, 2024. That we should try to live this year by that verse.

Be merciful to everyone just as God has been merciful to you. In other words, think of the number of ways in which God has been merciful to you. All the stupid things you and I have done.

And not only has he forgiven us, he has not even let other people know about it. Can you think of the stupid things you did that other people have never discovered? You'd be ashamed if they discovered it. Think of the foolish and stupid things you did in your unconverted days.

Think of it right now. And God has hidden it. He's not revealed to people in this church.

The foolish, stupid things that you and I did in our unconverted days. And he will not. He's buried them for all eternity.

Let's learn from that. Turn with me to Luke chapter 4. This is the first sermon Jesus preached in the synagogue in Nazareth. It says in Luke 4.16, he came to Nazareth and he entered the synagogue.

And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. That was the sovereignty of God that they gave the book of Isaiah to him. You know, they used to have it in scrolls, the different books of the Bible.

They didn't have a big thick Bible those days. So the scroll of Isaiah was given to him. And Jesus searched in that scroll to what we know today as chapter 61.

And read. He found this place. The spirit of the Lord is upon me.

Luke 4.18. Because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives. And recovery of sight to the blind.

To set free those who are oppressed. To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord. And he stopped.

And he closed the book. But that was not the end of that verse. He stopped in the middle of a verse and closed the book.

Have you noticed that? Let me give you a little suggestion in Bible study. It's helped me a lot. Whenever you find an Old Testament quotation in the New Testament, and the NASB is very easy to find it because

they highlight it in capitals.

Go back to the Old Testament and look for that verse. And you'll learn something. So this quotation is from Isaiah 61.

So when I compare Isaiah 61, this quotation, and see why Jesus closed the book in the middle of a verse, did not complete the verse, I learned something. It says he read half that verse to proclaim the favor of the Lord and then stopped. Closed the book.

But when you go to Isaiah 61, it says here in verse 2, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God. He left that out. He stopped.

So when I saw that, it's mercy and judgment in verse 2, Isaiah 61. The year of mercy and the day of judgment. What do you get from that? Let me paraphrase it for you.

To proclaim, Isaiah 61, to 365 days of mercy and favor and one day of judgment. Am I right? What I learned from that, this is the advantage of meditating on Scripture. You must be 365 times more merciful to others than you are strict.

Towards your wife, towards your husband, towards your children. If you're shown strictness somewhere, be sure to continue with 365 times mercy towards them. This is what we can gain by meditating on Scripture and not rushing through when we read Scripture.

Now turn with me to James in chapter 2. So I learned something from that, that if I'm strict and I am strict, I've been strict with my children, I've been strict with the churches, I've been strict with... and I've tried to be strict with myself, but I need 365 times mercy along with that. Not to eliminate the strictness. No, no, no.

Strictness must be there. There's grace and truth. There's a balance in it.

But in James and chapter 2, we read like this. Verse 13. Judgment will be merciless to the one who is shown no mercy.

It's talking about the final day of judgment. Boy, do we need mercy on that day from the Lord. And there's a way to get it.

All those who want mercy from the Lord in the final day of judgment, here's the way to get it. Be merciful to others today, tomorrow, the day after, until Christ comes. Then you'll receive a heap load of mercy in the final day.

But those who've been critical, inwardly judgmental, critical, finding fault with your husband, wife, neighbor, brother in the church, with the elders, always something to find. You are the perfect person, obviously. You, the perfect person, are finding fault with all the imperfect people around you.

I would not like to be anywhere near you when God judges you. It'll be severe. I would not like to see it.

I tell you honestly, I would not like to be anywhere near you if you're like that in the day of judgment. Judgment will be merciless. Imagine God Almighty, who's so merciful, being merciless, just because this person did not show any mercy to others in his earthly life.

That's the only charge. He did a lot of good things, but he was so unmerciful towards his wife and towards other people around him and even people in his own church. But the Lord says, I'm going to be merciless towards him when I pass judgment.

I don't want to be there. I don't want to be around gods like that. Then he says here, but here's the good news.

Mercy will triumph over judgment. My dear brothers and sisters, if you remember one verse, remember James 2.13. Remember it by heart. Judgment will be merciless to those who have shown no mercy, but mercy will triumph over judgment.

That's wonderful. I want mercy from God in the final day. I want a lot of mercy from God because I know I'm imperfect.

And by God's standards, what a lot of mercy. Even on this earth, I see something of God's standards. How much more it will be when I actually stand before him.

Okay, one last verse. Philippians 2. Why are we so often sick? This is not the cure for all sickness, but sometimes when God wants to heal us and we're not healed. Now, don't make this a law.

Please don't judge other people as to why they are sick. Judge yourself only. It says here, Philippians 2. Paul is speaking about a brother called Epaphroditus in verse 25.

I thought it necessary to send Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier, who's your messenger. He was longing for you. He was distressed because he had heard that he was sick.

And this man, Epaphroditus, this godly brother, was sick to the point of death. Seriously sick, but he was healed. And you know how that healing is described? God had mercy on him.

Healing from sickness is an act of God's mercy. That's what I learned from that verse. And you've already heard how to get God's mercy.

Perhaps some sicknesses have not been healed in our lives because we've been so judgmental. Dear brother, sister, I plead with you today. Get rid of that judgmental spirit.

Be healed in Jesus' name. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, please write your words deeply in every one of our hearts, including mine.

I know that I who have preached this will be judged by a higher standard than those who hear. Help us to walk in loneliness before you, fearing you, or refusing in future to judge by what our eyes see or our ears hear. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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