

I. Introduction and tonight's text in focus:

- A. Tonight I'm following up on a message from March about how Jesus handled a complex situation involving the moral failure of an adulteress and the misguided accusations of religious leaders. (The teaching notes and sermon audio for "Come Down Here: Responding Humbly Like Christ When Accusations Abound" is available at gphop.org/teachings.) When the mercy of God enters difficult situations, profoundly redemptive results come about. As followers of Jesus, we must heed Jesus' instruction to "go and learn" His heart of mercy. If we do, we will be much more adequately equipped to forgive others when they wrong us as well as to properly interpret complex life and ministry scenarios from His vantage point. He is looking to extend His tender mercies to a broken and sinful world through people like you and me.

Matthew 9:13 | But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

Matthew 12:7 | But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.

Hosea 6:6 | For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

- B. From the start, it's good to loosely define the idea of mercy so that we're on the same page. I say loosely because my intention isn't to create a hard and fast definition, but provide a broader sense of the meaning. Having said that, in my view, there are two prominent ideas to consider. One, mercy speaks of God's disposition to treat people (saved and unsaved) far more benevolently than they deserve. He does things—and does not do things—that amount to much more favorable dealings than if He were to rule the universe by exacting justice in the strictest sense at every turn. For example, God makes sure that the hearts of sinful people keep beating every moment of every day. Just that one scenario shows He is merciful to 100 percent of the world today. Imagine if He were just but not merciful, and punished every sin immediately. Nobody would be alive. Thank the Lord for mercy. Two, mercy speaks of God's disposition to treat distressed people in particular with special care. Though undeserving of special treatment, He sees their plight and arranges circumstances in their favor. Of course, there is no way to track how it always happens, but He is attentive to the impoverished family, the homeless man, the brokenhearted widow, the trafficked child, the lonely orphan, the incurably sick baby, etc. He deeply cares and shows mercy time and time again. This is not to say that God is less merciful to those who we think have a good, comfortable life. This is to say that God is especially attentive to those He knows to be in distress.

II. "Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'" What does Jesus mean by this?

- A. Jesus is quoting Scripture, and in particular **Hosea 6:6**. As always, study Scripture to understand what Jesus meant. Jesus mentions this phrase twice in Matthew's gospel (**Matthew 9:13, 12:7**).
- B. "Go and learn" is an interesting charge. The phrase is a commissioning of sorts akin to the "go therefore and make disciples" (**Matthew 28:19**) of the Great Commission. Implied is an intentionality, a purposeful decision to learn the virtue of mercy that we otherwise would not get on the fly. In other words, on a conceptual level, mercy mostly escapes us unless we obey what Jesus is saying and take time to study it further. The audience heard Jesus teaching this, but He wanted them to go on from there in their personal lives and begin to contemplate it further.
- **A disciple of Jesus is a student, or a lifelong learner of Jesus.** Discipleship, therefore, is the process by which the disciple remains teachable and continues to learn. Of special note is that no other virtue was specifically highlighted by Jesus in the gospel text to go and specifically learn. Jesus did not say "go and learn...I desire justice" or even "go and learn...I desire love." Certainly, these subjects are of utmost theological importance, and yet Jesus tells the disciple to give special attention to the subject of mercy. Why is that? Again, it's a subject that would mostly escape us without added focus. Perhaps He knew we would likely assume understanding of the subject more than others. Jesus highlighting mercy raises it to a level of importance that we must recognize.
 - The subjects of justice, mercy and faith were specifically described as "weightier matters of the law" (**Matthew 23:23**). There is apparently a weightiness, a glory to them that exceeds other doctrinal matters such as tithing (contextually speaking). I think of mercy as like the 100 pound plate on the bar versus the 10 pound plate. We need to do some theological weightlifting—much thinking and praying—to begin to really handle the subject of mercy as God intended.
- C. "I desire mercy" reveals that Jesus has desire in His heart to have mercy on others. Mercy is a value system that He deems important. Even beyond the technical requirements of the law, Jesus is looking to relate to fallen human beings in a way that is more magnanimous, dignifying and redemptive than the pervasive understanding of the Law of Moses (the Scriptures) had

produced in the heart of people. Without a depth of understanding of the mercy of God, the commands of God produce a culture of condemnation (**Matthew 12:7**). Leaders then use the Scriptures to condemn people. The people, therefore, always feel condemned. Condemned people go and condemn other people. What essentially happens is the exact opposite of why God gave commands in the first place, which is to liberate people—to free their heart and mind to love God and people.

- D. **“and not sacrifice”** conveys a provocative idea. God, who quite literally commanded the Israelites to make particular sacrifices to atone for particular sins does not want sacrifice? The idea in mind here is the spirit of the Law versus the letter of the Law. Much like many Christians today view sin as something they can continue in simply by “claiming grace” and asking for forgiveness with no intention of really repenting, many of God’s people in ancient Israel viewed sacrifice as a technical requirement instead of a deterrent. God’s heart was always to deter sin by demonstrating that it was so serious that things had to die because of it (ultimately foreshadowing the cross of Christ). Sacrifice was never to be understood as a sort of ritual to do after sinning, but that’s how it was practiced more or less. God was always looking to produce in His people a genuine faith, and that genuine faith would be shown mercy—and that mercy would be shown to others. Experiencing and giving mercy and deeply intertwined (**2 Samuel 22:26, Psalm 18:25**).

III. The revelation of God as merciful in Scripture:

- A. **Moses:** ⁵ Now the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. ⁶ And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, ⁷ keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.’” (**Exodus 34:5-7**)
- **Even during the formation of the Law, God was revealing His nature of mercy.** It has always been who God is and part and parcel to His commandments. Interestingly, Moses “broke” the first set of stone tablets that had the Law on them (**Exodus 32:19**), and so God made new ones. Even the writing of the Law from the outset involved a second chance.
- B. **David:** ⁸ The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy. ⁹ The Lord is good to all, And His tender mercies are over all His works.” (**Psalm 145:8-9**)
- **David described God as “great” in mercy.** Often, when the idea of mercy is mentioned in Scripture, it’s connected to other words that emphasize its vastness. Over and over again, God’s mercy is described with words like “abundant” (**Numbers 14:18**), “great” (**1 Kings 3:6**), “multitude” (**Psalm 5:7**), “everlasting” (**Psalm 100:5**) etc. Also, as I mentioned previously with regard to God’s disposition to act with special care for the distressed, mercy is also described as tender. David states that God is tender in His working. Jesus is humble and gentle (**Matthew 11:29**); Satan is proud and harsh.
- C. **Paul:** “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us” (**Ephesians 2:4**)
- **God is wealthy in mercy.** The emphasis with respect to the riches of God is always on His virtues, and not His money or possessions. Certainly, “the earth is the Lord’s...and those who dwell therein” (**Psalm 24:1**), but His “claim to fame” so to speak is His virtue—especially His mercy.
- D. **James:** “the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.” (**James 5:11**)

IV. The invitation to be merciful in Scripture:

- A. **Jesus:** “Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.” (**Matthew 5:7**)
- **God honors our choice to be merciful to others.** He promises to extend added mercy to us if we live this way. God’s mercies touch our life in a general way every day. There is more available, however, and it depends on our choices to show mercy—to forgive, be kind, bless, etc. The less deserving someone is of our mercy, the more they will see Christ if we respond mercifully. Jesus also said, “Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (**Luke 6:36**).
- B. **Micah:** “He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?” (**Micah 6:8**)
- If you could only pick one verse in the entire Old Testament to summarize what God is really looking for in terms of healthy spirituality, this would be a strong candidate. There’s a relationship between justice, mercy and humility. All three must be held in tension. As Christians, we are to be just, to be humble and to love mercy. Easier said than done, for sure.

V. Personal application:

- A.** Take a moment this weekend and upcoming week to go and learn mercy. Also, pray about how you can put it into action. As you pray and are willing to obey even in small ways, the Holy Spirit will show you where you can begin to show mercy. It could be an inward softening of the heart, a prayer, an action, etc. Let's purpose in our hearts to continue to learn and give mercy.

Help me improve my notes! The first person to point out a legitimate mistake/typo on this document (during service) gets \$1/a gift.

Greater Peoria House of Prayer Announcements for April 19, 2024.

- Welcome** to the Greater Peoria House of Prayer... we're glad you're here and blessed to be worshipping God with you! Be sure to pick up any of the **free** materials at the back table in the prayer room or the desk near the front of the Gathering Grounds area downstairs, which includes teaching notes, stickers, pens, prayer cards and more. **Schedule:** We currently host evening prayer from 7-8 p.m. each Wednesday. Our **Friday Encounter Night** is from 7-9 p.m. and is our main corporate gathering each week featuring live worship and a teaching to inspire love for Jesus and prayer.
- General Announcements: Central Illinois School of Prayer:** Our Spring 2024 classes are underway. More information at gphop.org/school. **Upcoming events:** We are hosting a special two-night "Fresh Fire Weekend" Saturday, May 4 - Sunday, May 5. Invite a friend and come on out!
- Prayer room ministry opportunities:** If you are interested in leading or ministering during a live worship set by singing, playing an instrument, prayer leading or on the sound board, please contact us at info@gphop.org. We'd love to have you serve on one of our teams! **Team ministry opportunities:** If you feel the Lord has gifted you in the prophetic (or would like to grow in this gifting) and would consider helping on a prophetic team, send an email to info@gphop.org. Contact Mandy Kistner at mandy@gphop.org if you would like to schedule a future healing ministry appointment or help out on the healing team.
- Missions:** Please keep the following missionary friends in prayer as well as be considerate of their financial needs: **Ashley Bucknam** (YWAM, Nepal); **Phil Kellenberger** (International House of Prayer; Kansas City, MO) **Babett Mueller** (111 Global; Kansas City, MO); **Kerusso Perhay** (Pioneer 61; Mozambique); **Eric and Erin Simmons** (Bethany Global University; Bloomington, MN); **Alicia Wright** (ACTS, India); **Austin and Amy Zhu** (International House of Prayer; Kansas City, MO).
- Military:** Please keep the following members of our military in prayer as they valiantly serve the United States of America: **Jake Gerst**, stationed in Fort Johnson in Vernon Parish, Louisiana. **Kyle Nix**, stationed in Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane County, Washington.
- Social media:** Follow us on Facebook (Greater Peoria House of Prayer - GPHOP), X (@GPHOPrayer), Instagram (@GPHOPrayer), TikTok, Vimeo and YouTube for regular updates and inspiration. Use these social media sites to get the word out, share pictures, quotes you heard, etc. Contact Derek at derek@gphop.org if you're interested in helping with GPHOP's social media.
- Haven ministries:** Do you need space to pray? Maybe your Christian group needs a place to meet every once in awhile. We're making available the upper Prayer Room and lower-level Gathering Grounds for rent by donation. Email info@gphop.org if interested.
- We provide **free Wi-Fi** to everyone here! The password for the **GPHOP** router is on the chalkboard in the downstairs fellowship area.
- Prayer requests:** If you would like our community to pray for someone or something specific, please submit it to prayer@gphop.org.
- Giving:** If you have been blessed by the GPHOP and would like sow financially into the ministry, we would be more than blessed. You can give in cash, but if you would like to give to GPHOP with a check, please make it out to "Greater Peoria House of Prayer" or "GPHOP"—your gift is tax deductible. Thank you for your generosity! It's helping make day and night prayer with worship possible in central Illinois. You can place your gift in the Friday night offering during the 7 p.m. teaching or drop it in either of the two black donation boxes. Donations can also be mailed to our physical address at 117 East Washington Street, East Peoria, IL 61611. Donors can also use PayPal or our website (gphop.org/donate) to give electronically.

*Thank you for helping to **keep this prayer room sacred** by ensuring conversations with others are brief and kindly reminding others to do the same. Use the large Gathering Grounds fellowship area downstairs if you would like to chat at length.*