

Amos Mercy Has Its Limits

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[0 : 00] I had holidays a little over a month ago, and I had a whole three weeks off, which was fantastic. It was a good chance to spend time with people who I don't normally see. And one of the particular highlights for me was the chance to have a conversation with someone who I really care about, about following Jesus.

They're somebody who would call themselves a Christian, somebody who has been around church, knows the answers, they know how it works. But by their own admission, they would say they're a Christian, but not a Christian like me.

In their mind, there's kind of the levels of Christian. So there's the fanatics, which I assume is the end she's placing me in, and then the normal Christians who are normal, but like Jesus.

And the conversation was around why she makes that distinction a little bit. For her, there are some things that she's just uncomfortable with, some things she doesn't understand, some doubts she's got.

And those things for her get in the way of wanting to make that step to go, you know what, I'm all in. I'm all for God. I'm going to live for Him. It's all about Him. And the major sticking point for her was something that a lot of us actually struggle with.

[1 : 15] And it could even be a question that you're wrestling with right now. And that was the question of, how can a God who is loving send good people to hell? How can a God who is loving send good people to hell?

So this person I'm chatting to just can't fathom that nice people who do good things for others and give to charity and just kind of are nice, could end up being sent to hell by God.

And that could be a tension that you feel as well, as you think of family members, friends, people who are precious to you, who are really nice, but aren't Christian.

And maybe you find it hard to imagine how God can be loving and send that person to hell. It's something that I've wrestled with. Now, this person I was chatting with, the answer for them was that God can't send those people to hell.

Because they couldn't fathom a God who's loving and a God who would send people like that to hell, the solution was God won't do it. I asked them about Jesus and about the kinds of things that Jesus says, like, I'm the only way to the Father.

[2 : 28] I'm the only way to heaven. And that just left them feeling a little bit frustrated because it didn't kind of fit with their solution. They'd come up with a solution.

They'd resolve the tension. It didn't fit with the stuff that I was kind of suggesting out of the Bible. Now, behind this question, behind the question of a loving God and people going to hell, is potentially something personal.

It's not so much a question of how could a good God, a loving God, send good people out there to hell. It's actually a question that comes from our own fear and insecurity.

The question is, how could a loving God send someone good like me to hell? It's that fear, especially for people who are following Jesus and want to go to heaven and just maybe don't feel 100% sure.

They want an insurance policy. They want kind of a blank check from God that says, you know what, if you're above this line, let's just agree, all of you will get in. Just take the pressure off a little bit.

[3 : 38] We want to know for sure. We want God's approval. But there can be just this lingering doubt, especially when we open the Bible like we have in Amos these last couple of weeks and just get hammered with talk of God's judgment, with a reminder that God is a just God, that God doesn't tolerate sin.

When we get faced with the judgment of God, it leaves us with a couple of options. It leaves us in a couple of camps, especially if you're somebody who wants to follow God, someone who's trying to follow God.

There are, of course, those who are secure, even hearing about God's judgment. They're confident that they're loved by God and that that's appropriate confidence. There's people just slightly this direction who hear about it and really want to and might be 99% sure or maybe much lower, but there's just that lingering doubt.

There's just that pressure and fear every time you stuff up that just escalates. And then when you're going well, it kind of gets reined in a little bit. And you know that feeling of trying to follow God, but sometimes feeling like, I hope he still loves me today.

And then there is another group just a little bit further down the spectrum who are secure. They're confident. They're sure that God loves them.

[4 : 56] But maybe they're deluded in their confidence. Maybe it's a wrong confidence. There's a part of them that's trying to follow God and enough to the point where they think they've got it all figured out, but the reality is they don't.

So far in Amos, through this series, we've been hearing warning after warning from God to his people Israel. Amos has been explaining judgment is coming. He's been telling the people that those who claim to be gods but aren't truly, those who speak the words but live a different way will face judgment.

Amos is not the first prophet with this message. He won't be the last one. And yet so far, Israel don't seem to be taking him seriously at all.

God has just promised in those few verses that Deb read out that their cities will be destroyed, that they'll be carted off as slaves to another country, and nothing seems to be registering.

Israel falls into this third category of people who are sure that God loves them, but it doesn't seem to be reflective of what God is saying.

[6 : 13] I mean, at best, they're ignoring what he's saying, but at worst, they're trying to shut him up. They're trying to say, stop talking to us. I mean, in chapter 7 that Deb just read out, there's this face-off in the second half from verses 10 onwards.

This is between Amos, who wrote Amos, and Amaziah, who's the priest for Israel. He's like the religious leader. So you'd expect out of anyone, he should be in tune with God and what's going on. But listen to the way he describes Amos' message. This is in verse 10. He's writing a letter to the king. He says, Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel.

He says, The land cannot bear all his words, for this is what Amos is saying. When a prophet speaks in the Bible, they speak with the weight of God's own voice.

They speak with the authority of the God who sent them this message, and yet Amaziah the priest hears this and says, It's just some wacko.

[7 : 16] It's just some guy. We don't have to take him seriously. Let's not listen to him. In fact, not just let's ignore him, let's try and get rid of him. I mean, this message he sends to the king, he's trying to have Amos killed for treason.

He's accusing him of trying to subvert the king and then effectively says, Go home. Stop annoying us. We don't want to listen to you. Go back south.

Go to the farm you came from. Stop prophesying. We don't want to listen. But the really scary part of this bit in Amaziah, sorry, this bit in Amos, is that Amaziah, at least it seems, and all of Israel, genuinely don't see what they're doing as a rejection of God.

So remember, this third group that's confident, but wrongly confident, is actually trying to follow God. That's the starting point for that third group. That's the starting point for Israel. They're God's people.

And even as they tell this prophet, go away, we're not interested, they genuinely believe they're in God's good books. They genuinely believe that he loves them and he's happy with them and they are securely there in his favor.

[8 : 28] That's why they're not listening. The idea that God would judge them is so inconceivable that they have no motivation to even listen, let alone respond to this warning and this call to repent and return to God.

But for us and for them, it begs a really, really important question. Why are they so confident? What's the basis for this group being so sure that God is going to show them mercy?

Because we can look at this passage and this story and even before we know in a few years God's going to come through on his promise, he's going to destroy them, he's going to crush this nation under the military power of Assyria.

Even before you get there, it's pretty clear from what we've seen in the first few chapters of this book, Israel's lives do not reflect what God expects from those who love him. We've heard stories of the prostitutes in the temple, of the oppression of the poor.

So what basis is there for them to be confident? What reason could they possibly have to believe that God is happy with them? Let me show you two.

[9 : 48] Firstly, Israel's confidence flows out of their worship. Flick to chapter 5 if you've got your Bible open in front of you and we're looking around verse 5, 4, 5, 6.

We look at what they were doing in their version of church in the temple and go, it's got some serious issues, it's clearly flawed for us but for them, it was the basis of their confidence that God was going to love them.

God, when he called his people and when he created the relationship between them, created the covenant, he placed himself in their midst in a building called the temple which he placed in Jerusalem.

That was the one place where they would meet with him, where they would sacrifice to him, where he would speak to them, they would pray to him. It was a unique symbol of God's presence. But the problem with that is we're talking to Israel.

So Israel is a group of 12 tribes that broke in half, two stayed down at Jerusalem and 10 stayed up the top, in fact moved north. That's Israel now.

[10 : 50] That's who we're talking to. So they've moved away from the temple where God said, I'll be there, come and meet with me. Now, you know, that sounds like a disaster. They have no intention of going and visiting the place that God said to worship.

So they figure, we can solve that problem. And they come up with three new places to go. They're there in those verses, in chapter 5. Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba.

You don't have to remember all these names. It's okay. But for a second, we do have to look at them. Because Israel didn't just choose, that's a nice hill, let's put a church there. These are really specifically and intentionally chosen places that they thought would help them do worshiping God. And let me show you why. Bethel is a place, earlier in the Bible, in Genesis, where Jacob, who was kind of the forefather of this nation Israel, encounters God twice.

The first time he goes there, he has this vision and he wakes up and he says, clearly, this is a place where the Lord is. And then in his travels, he ends up back there another time and God shows up and engages him and changes his name from Jacob to Israel.

[12 : 00] It is a place that was symbolic for God's presence. And so, this nation thought, well, we can't worship where we're supposed to but if we build a temple at Bethel and we worship there, then God will have to be present with us because that's a place of God's presence.

Now, the problem is, that's not what God told them to do. That's not what God promised but that was their strategy. Bethel. Second place is Beersheba. Beersheba is another place that comes out from earlier in the Bible in Genesis where Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, again, these are the guys who kind of, the great grandfathers of this nation Israel, they all encounter God in this place, Beersheba.

And they all encounter God in a unique way where they are on a journey to which they don't know the outcome. Abraham is travelling to a land that's not his, that God has told him is going to be his. He's freaking out and God says, do not fear, I will go with you. Jacob is travelling on his way to Egypt because of a famine and he's nervous about going to Egypt and rightfully so because his descendants will end up being slaves there.

But God says, do not fear, I will go with you. So Beersheba is this symbolic reminder that God protects his people. And so these geniuses come up with an idea, we'll put a temple at Beersheba, we'll do church there and then God will have to protect us.

[13 : 26] But God didn't promise that. Last one, Gilgal. Gilgal was the first place that God's people camped when they moved into the promised land, the land that God was giving them.

It's a place where they stopped and they had a big celebration to recommit to God. It was the first place where they got to enjoy this land that they'd been waiting and waiting and waiting to get.

They enjoyed the fruit. It was symbolic of the inheritance that God had promised to this nation Israel. The inheritance they were enjoying now in the land that they lived in. It was a great land, good for farming, good for all these things and so they thought we'll put a church there and we'll go and worship there and then God will have to protect our inheritance.

He'll have to protect our borders because we're worshipping at the place where some stuff happened but God didn't promise that. See, there are two really big issues with this new religious system.

Now, give them some credit. The desire is right. The intention is right. But the big issue is, firstly, they've completely ignored and even rejected the explicit instruction that God gave in His law that He will dwell in His temple at Jerusalem.

[14:45] They've just kind of ignored that and used their brilliant powers of logic to invent a new way of engaging with God. They've explicitly rejected the gift that God gave them to tell them how to engage Him.

I mean, do you guys remember a few months ago in church we did a big series in Leviticus? There was a lot of blood, there was a lot of dead animals if you remember it, in the stories, not in church, just to clarify if you're a guest. The book of Leviticus and some of the other big books at the beginning of the Bible are just full of details of God laying out, here's how you can worship me. Here's how you can have access to me. Here's what the priests will wear, here's the animals you will use, here's what the building will look like. It was very, very specific because it mattered because God was God and they were not and yet here they are and they've just ignored all of that stuff that God told them and come up with their own solution and so not surprisingly it's not working. But the second issue is even bigger. The whole system that they have built for relating to God here, the whole religious calendar and structure is built around a wrong view of who God is.

I mean, in this system, worship is a transaction. In this system, if I go to Bethel and do my church there, then God owes me his presence.

[16:08] If I go to Gilgal, then God owes me this land. If I go to Beersheba, then God owes me protection. See, all the things that they have, all the things these places represent are gifts that God gave them out of his goodness and generosity and they have turned them into things that they are bartering for, trying to purchase from God, trying to earn.

Suddenly, God has become someone who can be manipulated, even blackmailed into giving us stuff and the result is that because they feel like they've held up their side of the bargain, they feel like God has to hold up his side of the bargain and one of the reasons they were feeling so secure is because materially at this point, they're doing really well.

It seems like it's working. They've rejected what he said, they've chosen their own adventure, they've completely misunderstood him and shrunk him down into somebody who is on par with them that they can deal with like an equal and at first glance for them, it seems like it's working. They're having bumper crops, they're rich, they're beating other armies, life is good. They're basing their understanding, their confidence in God's approval on their circumstances instead of on what God has explicitly said to them in his word, in the law.

Instead of on the message that he is speaking to them through the prophet right at this moment, they don't want to hear that because they've found a story, their own version, that's kind of nicer to listen to. Life's good, we just keep doing what we're doing, everything's easy.

[17:54] Israel has security, false security, because it's completely lost sight of who God really is. That was the answer.

they put themselves in a situation where they were kind of offside with God because they'd moved away and the way they dealt with it was by shrinking God so that they could delude themselves into being a little bit more comfortable.

But God's not open to redefinition. There in verse eight, having rebuked them for going to Bethel and Gilgal and Beersheba, Amos says, he who made this is in chapter five, he who made the Pleiades and Orion who turns midnight into dawn, darkens day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land, the Lord is his name.

He has no equal, no rival. He's the creator and sustainer and he's not open to redefinition. He's not a movable feast. We can't adjust him to suit us just because something's uncomfortable or difficult. And yet, for a heap of us, that's exactly what we do. When we come across things in God's word that are challenging, that are maybe calling for change or sacrifice, when we look at parts of God that are difficult to hold like his wrath and his judgment, or when our circumstances aren't playing

out the way that we think they should, we adjust God.

[19 : 32] We ignore what he's saying to us in his word and instead lead ourselves into this false security. For example, right now as a church, we're in a season where there is a clear sense that God is pushing us.

If you've been around here for more than a month or two, you'll get a sense that God's been doing a work on us where he keeps pressing the same button about us upping our game when it comes to sacrificially loving our neighbour, caring for those who are in need in the world.

That's uncomfortable to hear because to sacrificially care for other people means you've got to sacrifice. It means you've got to give up something in your life that you enjoy, something that's become part of the way you work, part of your rhythm.

Maybe you were sitting there as we've gone through these series after series and it keeps coming up and you're thinking, I already give some. In fact, I even upped my giving just recently and just after that God gave me a pay rise so he must be pretty happy with what I'm doing because stuff's kind of working out for me.

It's all fallen into place. So this challenge must be for the other people. One of the key signs, warning signs that you've wandered across into this false security group is a refusal to hear challenge from God, is a refusal to be corrected and rebuked.

[21 : 09] If you're wondering whether or not you've strayed over into this land, a good clue will be how do you approach hearing God's word? How do you approach what the Bible says?

As soon as you find yourself tuning out or when we start applying the Bible, you're sitting there making a note of which people in this room need to hear that? That is a sure sign that you are starting to base your security on something that's not God.

You might be still calling it God, but your confidence is now on who you are compared to them, how hard you're working, how good life is as evidence that God must be happy with you.

It's what Israel did. And you know, once they stopped listening to God, once they replaced the real God with their own small unimpressive version of God, it didn't take them long to go the next step and just start worshipping other gods.

God shrunk so much for them that these temples that they made at first as a means of worshipping the God became houses where they worshipped any God they could find. The gods from the countries around them.

[22 : 29] I mean, it's the logical conclusion. When you start changing God, which is essentially inventing God, you may as well worship any God. They're equally powerless.

Now, it sounds disgraceful, or it should sound disgraceful, because it is. That this people who were chosen by God, who were rescued out of slavery, who God has provided for, who God went before to give them this whole land that they're now living in, could somehow get to the point where they treat God like he's somebody that they can deal with, someone they can handle and control and manipulate.

But before you shake your head at them too much, you've got to stop and ask yourself the question, where am I doing the same thing?

Have I started down a path of redefining God to suit me better? Are there things that would be controversial amongst my friends that I've decided to reject as well, even though God's Word says it?

Are there things that he's asking me to do in my life that I've decided would just be a little bit too much? I'll stay in the normal Christian, I don't want to be one of those fanatics categories? Where does your confidence come from?

[23 : 58] Your confidence that God loves you? Is it how hard you work to serve him here at church? Is it how nice you are compared to other people? Is it how great life is going right now?

Or is it what God has said in his Word? See, the scary part about this is this false confidence group and this insecure group are actually closer than you think.

they actually have the same problem. For both groups, the issue is they have a wrong view of God. Some people I spoke to who left our church several years ago expressed their frustration that sometimes when we open the Bible, they felt scolded or rebuked. And what they wanted was to be told that God loved them, which is true and is a good thing to hear.

But they weren't looking for a God to serve and a God to obey, they were looking for a puppy. They just wanted somebody to get excited when they saw them and make them feel good.

[25 : 14] And so they went looking for a church where their version of God wouldn't be challenged and where they themselves wouldn't be challenged. For some people, opening the Bible, coming to church is a process of let's hear what God has to say so I can decide whether or not I want to do this.

Let's check if this fits in with how my life's going and what I think is reasonable, what my friends say. And if it fits, then I'm on board. But the problem with that is becoming a Christian, following God is the decision to follow God no matter what.

You kind of can't take a half step in. That's kind of why the whole idea of normal and fanatics is not particularly helpful. The decision to follow God means that having seen who he is, having seen what he has done in sending his son to die in our place, means we open our Bibles and we arrive here at church with an attitude of God, I'm in, just tell me what.

You say jump, I'll say how high. I'm yours, whatever you need, whatever it costs me. God, I know I'm not finished, I know there's work to be done, so just show me what it is I need to do, or stop doing, or confess.

It's the attitude that recognizes that God has absolute authority, that God owes us nothing.

[26 : 58] The message of Amos, and in fact the whole Bible, is to repent, calling us to come back to God as he really is, as he's shown himself to be, in his word, in Jesus.

It's a call to keep listening to him, to keep submitting to him, to keep being directed by him, to keep obeying him, because otherwise, all that's left is judgment.

Our natural tendency, just like Israel's was, is to overemphasize the mercy of God. That's the bit that we hear, that's the bit we take home and remember from the sermon.

Even here in chapter 7 that Deborah had out for us, there's two judgments that God pronounces, the locust and the second one, which I don't have in front of me. And after Amos pleads with him for these judgments, God relents, says I won't do it, and he's merciful.

And we want to stop there and go, amen. That's the message for tonight, God is merciful. He gets angry, rightfully, fair enough, but he doesn't follow through, so it's okay, fantastic. And God is merciful, but he's not only merciful.

[28 : 18] And if you find yourself with this kind of tendency to only ever hear, or only ever recognize, or only ever engage with God as the one who will always let you off, you need to hear the words, the warning of chapter 7 verse 7.

Having just relented twice, says, this is what he showed me. The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb. With a plumb line in his hand, the Lord asked me, what do you see, Amos?

A plumb line, I replied. Then the Lord said, look, I'm setting a plumb line among my people Israel. I will spare them no longer.

I will spare them no longer. The high places of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined. With my sword, I will rise against the house of Jeroboam.

The message to a complacent, overconfident Israel, and maybe the message for us, is that mercy has its limits. If you begin to see this merciful God as a blank check who doesn't care about how you live or what you do, then the time has come.

[29 : 39] Here, the time has come for Israel to face its judgment, and eventually the time will come for every one of us to face God. For those of you who aren't familiar with building techniques, and I need to put my hand up and own that I'm one of those people, I did a very small amount of research to find out what a plumb line is.

A plumb line is basically a piece of string with a weight on it. It's used by builders to make sure a wall is upright and straight. The point being, you use it and if the wall is not straight, you either knock it down or you fix it.

Clearly the sense here is God is going to measure and he will get rid of anything that doesn't measure up. But the measure that he will use is the measure that he used to build his people in the first place.

Did you catch that? The wall has been built true to plumb. The wall has been built on the truth of who God is. Of God's character revealed in the way that he chose them and he rescued them. God's character revealed in the law that he gave to them and the worship that he made possible. It's the same standard by which all people ever will be judged. Right worship of God and right justice for one another.

[31 : 00] The standard which Israel is being held to is are they loving God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength and are they loving their neighbour as themselves? The question God will ask is, is Israel's worship fitting for a sovereign God who rules over all?

And do they seek justice for the poor and oppressed? And the resounding answer in this book so far is no chance. I mean they're worshipping false gods.

They're watering down the real God. They're trampling on the poor in the process and worst of all they won't listen to the warning and the call to repent and come back. And so God's mercy has reached its limits.

And he says, I will spare them no longer. Now it's really important that you understand, I'm not saying here that God's mercy has run out.

I'm not saying that his allocation of mercy is exhausted. I'm not saying that Israel has failed too many times and so they've used up their bit. God's mercy is part of who he is.

[32 : 12] He is the merciful God. So he's the same amount merciful right now that he was before he created the world. He's eternally merciful. He will always be merciful.

The issue for Israel is that once you ignore or reject the mercy that is offered you won't find more. Once you reject the way that he has offered mercy and go looking elsewhere you won't find it.

It is limited in the sense of where it is, where God has placed it. God has offered mercy to Israel by giving them the law to guide them in how to live. He's offered them mercy by rescuing them.

He's offered them mercy by providing for their worship and their religious practice, giving them a sacrificial system so that they might always remember who he is, how holy he is, how serious sin is, how unworthy they are, and most importantly that in spite of all of that he is making a way for them to know him.

God has shown the mercy, the mercy of the fact that in spite of their unworthiness he has made a way for them to be his. And so if they reject that, if they pervert that, if they take that gift and just mistreat it and change it, there is nothing else on offer.

[33 : 39] And so all that's left is judgment. Do you remember the conversation that I opened with, that I had over my holidays?

That tension that we feel about a God who is loving and the good people we know who might end up in hell? Not one person will end up in hell who hasn't chosen to reject the mercy that God has offered them.

Not one. God is eternally merciful and his mercy is more than sufficient for every person ever. So those that end up facing his judgment will be those that choose to reject the mercy that he offers.

The issue for Israel wasn't lack of mercy, it was that they rejected the mercy God had provided in his law and in the sacrificial system. And so all that was left for them was judgment.

Remember these two groups here. If you're over here in this secure in God category, I want to say that's something to thank God for. That's a good thing. And I hope you're encouraged to be reminded tonight by just how merciful your God is, but I think a whole bunch of us live in this middle group.

[34 : 59] We'd love to be over here, but on bad days we just kind of think, does God actually love me? Maybe you're starting to recognize tonight that you're even over in this group.

The issues for the overconfident group and the insecure group are essentially the same. It's your view of God. The overconfident group gets apathetic in their following Jesus.

That's Israel. They don't care about anything other than ticking the box of going to church because God's going to forgive them anyway. They've got him over a barrel.

They've ticked their bit. He has to show them mercy. It's what we sometimes call cheap grace.

Where all you know about God is that he has to love you and say, you can just do whatever you want.

But that's not the whole picture with God. Yes, God is merciful, but God is just. Now for the insecure group, our issue is that we look at God and we get concerned that God's like us.

[36 : 07] So his mercy is like our mercy, which means it might disappear if we push him too hard.

We get concerned that he's going to get angry and his anger is going to ride over the top of his mercy, that we might do something that's just unforgivable.

And so we serve and we go to church and we be nice to people, but it is driven by this weight of guilt and fear that if I don't, God won't love me anymore. But that's not who God has revealed himself to be either.

God has shown us time and time again in Scripture, in history and most importantly in his son Jesus, that he is patient, he is merciful, he is just, he will not let the guilty go unpunished and that he owes us nothing.

That we have no entitlement to his mercy. And yet he chooses to offer it anyway.

What we find in the Scripture as we go through is that he chooses to send Jesus to die in our place even though it's us who deserve that punishment. Even though it's us who mistreat God.

[37 : 25] Even though it's us who mistreat one another. Even though it's us who live like we're the center of the universe. God chooses to intervene and offer mercy to people like us.

He chooses to take the punishment that makes it possible for unworthy people like you and me to not just know him, but to call him father.

To be brought into his family. It is not possible to find security in your attempts to follow and serve God.

It might work for a little while, but all it will take is one bad week. One lapse in concentration and character and suddenly you've done something you know is not good enough and you're trapped back in insecurity and fear.

It is not possible to find security in your circumstance. Because circumstances change quickly too.

The only security you will find when it comes to the judgment of God is found in God himself.

[38 : 38] Because his mercy and his love are not based on you. They're based in him. They're who he is and they are demonstrated concretely and visibly in what Jesus does on the cross.

On the cross the punishment that you deserve is poured out on him completely and satisfied fully. And so because of Jesus you can stand as somebody who is unworthy and know that God's love for you will never be turned away.

If you accept the mercy that God offers when he says come to me, if you go to Jesus looking for forgiveness, the answer is always irreversibly unconditionally yes.

In those moments where you wonder does God still love me? What Jesus does is prove to you that God has given you the most costly thing he could. His perfect and only son.

And he did it when you were at your worst. He did it knowing everything that would come after that point and he still chose to do it. Which means you can stand in your imperfection and failure as somebody confident that God loves you.

[39 : 53] Not because of you, because of him. That is the call to let go of the things that we are placing our trust in. To let go of the things that we reach out to when we're feeling uncomfortable and to come back to God as he has revealed himself.

To come back to the cross and understand that there we will be released to love God and to love people not out of guilt, not out of fear, but out of the security and peace and hope of being the precious sons and daughters of a heavenly father who is merciful and just and sovereign and powerful.

God's mercy is only limited in the sense of where you can find it. God's mercy is only limited in the sense of God. So long as you have breath in your lungs, if you ask God to forgive you, he will do it. If you ask him to show you the peace and hope and joy and freedom of being irreversibly, unconditionally and eternally loved by him, then today you will experience that.

Right now we're about to share in a meal called the Lord's Supper. This is a meal that Jesus gave to his disciples just before he died. It's a meal that he gave to his disciples and for us as a means of drawing us back to what he had done.

[41 : 29] Drawing us back to the foundation that enables us to stand before a holy God, a God who will judge confident, not because of us, but because of the body that was broken for us, because of the blood that was shed for us.

And so as we get ready to share in this meal, I want to challenge you. Don't just go through the motions like, you know, we do this, pass it on, next, what? If you are somebody who lives in this space of insecurity, I want to invite you to hand it over to God tonight.

I want to invite you to recognize that the reason you're insecure is because you're trying to trust your version of God. But the real God is here. The real God is in what Jesus has done.

And if you stand there, you don't have to fear. You don't have to wonder. You can know. And if you're over here and recognizing for the first time tonight that God's not okay with a blank check and you just get to do whatever you want, tonight is your chance to be forever accepted by God.

Tonight is your chance to be welcomed into the family. Tonight is your chance to recognize that the call to sacrifice, to serve for God, to give for God, to love other people for God is actually a blessing. [42 : 49] It's not a burden. It's not a standard you've got to meet up to. The plumb line, the measure that God demands is perfection. And this bread and this juice is symbolic that Jesus meets that standard for us.

Whenever you wonder whether or not God loves you, all you need do is look at the perfect Savior who died in your place and know that now the words of approval reserved for Jesus are available to you.

The words that God speaks when Jesus is baptized, this is my son whom I love, with him I am well pleased, are now yours if you accept the mercy that God offers in his son and only in his son.

I want to invite the helpers who are going to bring this round, but I want to encourage you, hold on to these two things. Because we're going to eat and drink them together. But if you're not a Christian, when you get this bread and this juice, you might not know what this is about, how it works.

I want you to grab them anyway because this is your chance to actually accept the mercy that God offers in Jesus. This is your chance to go from not sure to secure. And if you're someone who's following Jesus, this is your chance to come back again to the immovable foundation that God offers us in Jesus.

[44 : 20] And if you're not a Nope Salesman, you can put out of that for me. And if you four days before him, you want to London again and then Drop it in space and use them access to him.

And put the Devil in, then password down in life. And you can certainly hold on your help right now. And it's never for me, or for you life. And we would say through this, because there is a long switch coming back, and you're not a thing coming back, but they've been by the way.