

The Motivation for Mercy

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[0 : 0 0] a former American footballer who played football for the Miami Dolphins, was asked by Newsweek, he was being interviewed by Newsweek, and he was asked what motivated him as a footballer to go to university.

Apparently it's a disconnect there in the United States between those two things. And his reply was, my father and my uncle were human cannonballs in carnivals. And one day my father took me aside and said to me, son, go to university or become a human cannonball.

And he said, I'm working that out. That decision out which way to go when my uncle came out of a cannon one day, he missed the net and hit the Ferris wheel, was killed, and I decided in that moment to go to university.

Seems like a fairly good decision in my mind. Self-reservation sometimes is a great motive. But motive, on the best of times, is often quite a difficult thing to work out.

And especially as Christians. For instance, what's your motive of being here tonight? Why come to church? What motive do you have to pursue spiritual disciplines? What motivates you to give?

[1 : 0 6] What motivates you to serve? What motivates you to show mercy? What motivates us to do, as this series is all about, to love thy neighbour, to love your neighbour? You see, when secular people claim that moral behaviour is possible without God, when secular people say it's possible for us to love our neighbour, they are absolutely right.

From a Christian point of view, someone who does not believe in God is capable of loving their neighbour and doing things that God's laws requires. So what is it about the Christian faith that drives us to care for those in need, for us to love our neighbour?

Is it just simply a sense of duty or a load of guilt? What is the real dynamic that's behind the Christian pursuit of loving your neighbour? Two weeks ago, first message of this series, Sam took us to the parable of the Good Samaritan.

John read out a little bit of it to us just a moment ago, from Luke chapter 10. And there we were confronted by this legalistic law expert who wants to narrow down the definition of what it means to love your neighbour.

He wants to narrow down, in fact, who my neighbour is, and therefore the smaller definition of who it is that I'm required to love. And he wants to do that in order that he can justify himself, declare himself righteous.

[2 : 3 7] He's a self-justifier. He believed his own moral efforts could earn favour with God. And so Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan to help him see his insufficiency.

Jesus put before him a picture of the love that the law of God requires. And it's an incredible picture.

You see, you could as well imagine a Taliban fighter putting his life on the line for a US Marine gunned down on the side of a road.

Or a Palestinian freedom fighter putting his life on the line to assist an Israeli commando. Or a member of ISIS putting his life on the line to come to the aid of a Christian in desperate need, as you could imagine a Samaritan helping a Jew.

But this is what the law of God requires. Luke 10, 27. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind, and love your neighbour as yourself all the time.

[3 : 58] No failings, no gaps, no minimising, all the time. You see, what Jesus' goal was here is to show this law expert who believed that he was spiritually rich, that he was, in fact, spiritually bankrupt.

That was Jesus' goal. That he wanted to help him see that he didn't actually have the resources to make good on his debt. He was in a desperate state, and yet Jesus says that the person who comes to that state of understanding about themselves, that desperate state of need.

Jesus says earlier in Matthew's Gospel that they are blessed. And so Jesus' true goal was to show this law expert that he was poor to prepare him to seek spiritual riches in the mercy of God.

What is the mercy that Jesus is preparing this law expert for? This is in a nutshell. In a nutshell. That all of humanity, us included, me included, is like that man beaten on the road.

We're lying in our blood, waiting for death. We are spiritually bankrupt. We are spiritually lost. We are not capable of helping ourselves. We need a rescuer.

[5 : 21] And yet in that position, God has provided spiritual health and wealth and healing and life. And he did that by putting his son on the side of the road. He impoverished his son, Jesus Christ, on a cross so that all of his riches, all of his health, all of his righteousness, all of his wealth and life could be given, transferred to those who trust in him.

2 Corinthians 5, 21 reveals this incredible, merciful transaction. so clearly when it says, God made him, that's Jesus, who had no sin to be sin for us who are sinful so that in him, Jesus, we might become the righteousness of God.

We might have a clear standing of right standing before God. A couple of chapters a little bit later in Romans, Paul puts that in economic terms.

He says, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich.

And so the foundational core element of the Christian faith is that though poor, we're being made rich through the mercy of God.

[6 : 46] we are human race living in a rubbish tip, scrounging around for scraps to try to keep ourselves alive.

And his grace, in his grace, God has taken us from the rubbish tip. He has clothed us in his kingly robes. He has sat us down at his royal banqueting table never ever to get up again.

And there are a multitude of powerful effects that the grace of God has on the recipients of his mercy. And the one that I want to focus on today is that those who receive mercy while an undeserving enemy of God will have a heart of love and mercy for the most ungrateful and the most difficult of people even their enemies.

You see, when a Christian sees prostitutes and alcoholics and prisoners and drug addicts and the homeless and refugees and the broken and the destitute, when they see them, they're face to face with them, they know that they are looking in a mirror.

That's the heart of the Christian. They know that they're looking in a mirror at that moment. It is irrelevant if that Christian has spent their entire life as a respectable middle class person, they look at the broken, they look at the outcast, and they say, spiritually, I was that person.

[8 : 32] Even if physically and socially, I've never been where that person is right now, they are in desperate need of mercy and I was in desperate need of mercy.

God gives mercy to the ungrateful and the wicked. That is what we were and the powerful effect of his mercy and his grace to us is we become like a merciful God.

That's what we become like. His mercy makes us more merciful and the parable in Matthew 18 that John read out for us a moment ago makes this principle really clear.

It shows the principle with a great deal of force. It's a parable which helps us to see how grace motivates a life of grace.

Jesus has been talking about Matthew 18. You've got your Bibles, go to Matthew 18. Jesus has been talking about how to handle things when someone sins against you and particularly when a brother or sister sins against you but really it's to everyone.

[9 : 38] And Jesus asks a question in verse 21. Sorry, not Jesus, Peter asks a question. He's always the guy who comes up first. He's always the guy with the first question. And Peter asks this question.

He says, Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times? Now you see, the attitude of the rabbis in the first century around Jesus' time is that you would forgive your brother or your sister three times.

That's where we get that's the tradition, that's what lies behind the statement when we say three strikes and you're out. It goes right back to that Jewish heritage which says you could forgive your brother or sister no more than three times.

Three strikes and you're out. And so Peter who suffers from foot in mouth disease is thinking, you know, I have come up short so many times with Jesus.

Jesus asks a question, I give an answer and it's always wrong. So this time I'm going to get the three, I'm going to double and add one just for sure. You know, seven's a perfect number, it must be seven so let's go with that.

[10 : 46] And so Jesus gives this stunning response in verse 22. I tell you, not seven times but 77 times.

And Peter goes, not again. You know, back to the back of the line. You know, John, say something. You know, Barnabas, what do you guys say something? And some people say that Jesus meant 77 times.

Others say, well actually he meant 70 times 7, that's the better translation so he meant 490 times. either alternative is simply missing the point of what Jesus is saying here.

Jesus is saying do not go into pedantic calculation of forgiveness and mercy. Forgiveness and mercy is unlimited.

That's the point that Jesus is making. That's what God's grace is to us. It is unlimited. Limited. And to make the point clear, Jesus goes on and tells his story.

[11 : 50] There's a man who owes a king 10,000 bags of gold. Translation that John said said 10,000 talents. It was a debt, as verse 25 says, that was not able to be repaid.

That's an understatement. 10,000 talents. The talent was the highest unit of currency.

10,000 the highest Greek numeral. It's meant to convey the largest sum imaginable. It's what I say to my kids when they say how much is that?

Oh, it's squillions of dollars. You know, just a lot is what that's meant to convey. In actual fact, the debt was 10,000 was 1,000 times the annual revenue of Galilee, Judea, Samaria, and Edomia collectively.

And it's like taking all the foreign debt and lumping on one man with the responsibility to pay it back. It's totally beyond imagination for those who first heard it.

[13 : 00] It's like, that dude's bankrupt several times over. And yet, this servant here in this passage still has a sense of pride.

In verse 26, it says, this servant fell on his knees before him. Be patient with me, he begged, and I will pay you back everything. See, he hasn't grasped the totality of his debt.

Hadn't quite understood that there is no way he could pay back no amount of time, no amount of patience would ever allow him to pay back this debt. He is utterly bankrupt. He is powerless. He is helpless.

He has no ability to trade out the situation, which is what bankruptcy is. It's what genuine bankruptcy is. Someone else has to come in on your behalf and take over your affairs to help you trade out of this, help to deal with it.

This is what this law expert in Luke 10 failed to understand. It's what this gentleman here, this first servant, fails to understand here. But what they fail to understand is that they are both the men on the side of the road, beaten, helpless, dying, destitute, and they need a rescuer.

[14 : 16] Neither of them could say it. Ephesians 2 says that that's all of humanity. We are dead in our transgressions and sins. Dead people don't cut deals, they don't pay back loans.

That is our state before God. all of humanity. Now of course, the king who represents God here understood completely the plight of his servant.

Verse 27, servant's master took pity on him, which is the exact same word which is used above the Samaritan. In Luke 10, he had pity on him and he cancelled the debt and he let him go.

Again, it's a story about God and the way he has graciously treated us. We who are bankrupt before God with a debt of sin that we could never repay have been forgiven.

Our sin against God has been piling up load of bad load debt after debt hour after hour day after day week after week year after year but God in his gracious action in the Lord Jesus Christ has come in and wiped it all clean.

[15 : 28] He's not just wiped it clean not just taken it away but he's also given us Jesus bank account of pure righteousness he has loved our bank account so to speak with squillions of dollars the words here be patient with me and I will pay you back everything is pitifully untrue for me for you and for all of humanity no amount of good activity no good amount of good Christian activity no amount of pulling up your socks and rolling up your sleeves and trying a little bit harder to be a bit more moral will actually do it our debt against God is phenomenal we are bankrupt we don't have the power or the ability to trade out of it but God comes along and he says I release you from that debt man I wish the heritage bank would do that to me that would be awesome let me tell you if you're someone who's here tonight and is anything happening in your heart right now to say that is news that

I need to discover more I need to know about I need to embrace because I don't know what it is to have my guilt and my shame cancelled all of my sin or my debt against God cancelled to be able to walk away totally free if you don't know that then I would love to talk to you tonight that's what we exist for as a church we want people to know Jesus and treasure Jesus because it's the greatest now the twist in the story comes when this servant who's been forgiven this enormous debt goes out and makes sure that this other guy who owes him a few dollars pays him back right down the last sentence verse 28 but when that servant went out he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins he grabbed him began to choke him pay back what do you owe me he demanded his fellow servant fell on his knees and he begged him please be patient with me and

I'll pay you back but he refused instead he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt it's ludicrous isn't it this second servant debt against the first servant is one six hundred thousandth of the first debt that's how ludicrous it is it's like I don't have a mortgage this big but if I bought a house I would bigger in fact is it it's like the bank rings me and says Steve lucky day we had this sort of spin the wheel at the office today and your debt's being cancelled six hundred thousand dollars boom you're done white free it's all yours the paperwork's in the mail woohoo and I go immediately to John John remember last week I lent you that dollar for that stamp or for whatever else that you bought not much ice cream cheap ice cream

McDonald's and I just and John said I don't have it on me right now and I just leapt on him and started choking him John pay me back and I ring the cops and cart him away it owes me a dollar it's ludicrous isn't it isn't it ludicrous that's nuts you see any limitation of grace or forgiveness or mercy that this first servant shows is inconceivable second servant here pleads for mercy be patient and I will pay you back and he could have paid him back over time he did have a job he did work he did get money but the moment that first servant threw him into prison his livelihood is taken away and he can't pay him back and so he will hold that debt against him forever the one who had been shown mercy refused to show mercy it is a totally unthinkable response to God's grace and it's not unlike what Paul teaches in

Romans 6 I'll read it to you verse 15 it says what then shall we shall we sin because we are no longer under the law but under grace by no means don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves you are slaves to the one you obey whether you are slaves to sin which leads to death or obedience which leads to righteousness but thanks be to God that though you used to be slaves to sin you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance you have been set free from sin and it becomes slaves to righteousness so what Paul's doing here in Romans 6 he's quoting this person and he's trying to help this poor individual who doesn't understand the essence of the Christian life and this person listens to Paul about and what Paul's teaching is that we have a right standing with God by God's grace through faith apart from any effort on our behalf this person hears that hears it as good news and they respond with well if I have a right standing with God by trusting in his merciful actions towards me and the

[21 : 09] Lord Jesus and if all of my sins past present and future are all forgiven I might as well go on sitting then I might as well enjoy that and enjoy doing whatever I want keep on sitting and what Paul says is that's the way a person talks whose Christianity is simply a group of ideas and not an experience of the precious mercy of Christ it's a person whose Christianity is all truth no treasure all choices no cherishing all logic about Christ no love for Christ all decisions and no delight he says it's not genuine Christianity it's not genuine faith a grasp and an experience of mercy gives rise to a life of mercy and we see that in Matthew 18 leading verse 32 onwards then the master called the servant in the first servant in that is he says you wicked servant I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you that is logical reasonable application to mercy is that you would immediately have mercy you have not understood mercy if that's not your response so the master says throw him in the jail too see

Jesus purpose of the parable of Matthew 18 is to teach the principle of unconditional forgiveness forgiveness and especially you do not understand the forgiveness of God if your life is bulging with resentment towards other people who've treated you badly and I want to suggest to you that the ministry of mercy has the same motivation and rationale that is the grace of God to us is the rationale behind love your neighbour the grace of God is dynamic and life changing God's grace his compassion his love his mercy his forgiveness is meant to motivate in us grace compassion love mercy forgiveness the only true and enduring motivation to love our neighbour is an experience and a grasp of the grace of God if we know that we are sinners saved by grace alone we will both be open and generous to the outcast the unlovely and even even our enemy so it's a little ironic for me that our secular society is in many ways more committed to social justice universal benevolence and human rights than any other civilisation has ever been things like suffering and death through famine flood earthquake pestilence war can awaken wide movements of sympathy and practical solidarity in ways that have never been known before in the history of humanity it's a little ironic for me because secularism has its foundation in theories like evolution which is by and large things like the survival of the fittest and also the purposes of life and so technically for the true secularist human life should be cheap individuals count for little and that is represented in vast slabs of our world human life is cheap individuals count for little it's simply survival of the fittest and if I live and you die that means my genes are stronger than yours that means not these my genes you know we want me to keep producing people now I think the Christians should be grateful that this is not broadly the case in the secular west that we're not handed over to the extremes of the secularist theories

I mean certainly in large slabs of you know the communist world that has been the case so what motivation could there be for secular love and mercy and this question dumb founds philosophers because there appears to be no motive for it whatsoever one motive and I want to suggest this applies to religious people as well one motive philosophers are suggesting and these are non-Christian philosophers suggesting is the feeling of superiority us secular people have done what other people are not able to do and we've abandoned all that religion stuff and we've been able to formulate in our own human wisdom how to run the world and so we just want to help you poor religious types and you backward people around the world to see that we have good values and you really need to learn from us and so it's a big brother little brother sort of patriarchal kind of come over the top and let me just show you how to live life that's one way that philosophers say that is what it does is it pumps up our fragile egos that's one reason why we want to love people and I think that applies to the religious person who believes that

God will favour them because of their morality and because of their respectability ultimately you push deep deep deep down and those kind of people who have that as their motive have a contempt for the outcast of the unlovely and certainly for their enemies they say things like I've worked really hard to get to where I am and frankly those people can do exactly the same that's the language of the moralist that's the language of the legalist another motive to act in mercy is the exact opposite of that according to the philosophers and that is that it is a simple anger over injustice in the world and these people who are keen for injustices to be resolved are moved by a burning indignation against racism and oppression and sexism good things to get rid of don't don't hear me wrong and what ultimately does it means is that they inevitably it inevitably requires them to demonize someone in order to help someone else they have to do that they have to demonize someone in order to help someone else in other words one of their neighbors they have to hate in order to love another neighbor you have to do that and as

Friedrich Nietzsche said who was no friend to Christianity whatsoever he says strangely these acts of benevolence and mercy are really powered by hatred and contempt for people that is you've got a real hatred and contempt for this dictator or these governments or these pharmaceutical companies or you know whatever you hate them and you're going to help the people who have been treated so badly by them people he says it's driven by hatred and contempt Christians motivation for the alleviation of poverty and equality and just and suffering is the extension of the radical love and mercy of God that we have received I am only where I am by the sheer and unmerited mercy of God I am completely equal with all other people that is the language of the person who has grasped and experienced the grace and mercy of God God's love motivates our love by doing the exact opposite of the secular motive and that is it actually humbles us that's what it does

[29 : 36] God's grace actually humbles us showing us that we are in fact loved sinners so that spending ourselves for others is not based on a sense of superiority it's not based on hating certain people because we're commanded to love all people but it's based on God showing us our lack our need Christians know that all things wrong will be put right this is another powerful motive all things wrong will be put right by Jesus it's an impowerful incentive to love even our enemy that is what the secularist that is what the legalist that's what the moralist there's good things that they will do and I praise God for the good things that they do do they cannot give their life for their enemy that's what they cannot do but that's what Jesus done and that's what he motivates us to do you see

Christians not only have a deeper motivation to love their neighbor but they also have a much stronger hope when they do that's why you can give your life blood that's why you can give your life because you have a much stronger hope and that is according to this Bible this world in the end will be renewed and the promise of the resurrection of Jesus is that we too will be raised with him with new and perfect bodies all injustice all suffering all disease all death is going to be wiped out that's our hope that's why we can expel ourselves for the sake of others because that is our hope and so that's why Jesus and Isaiah and James and John and Paul use this ministry of mercy of love for your neighbor as the test case as to whether a test case between what is true and false Christianity you see a sensitive social conscience and a love a life poured out in deeds of mercy to the needy is an inevitable sign of a person who has grasped the grace of God a heart for the poor the needy

I believe lays dormant in every true Christian until someone comes along and preaches on the connection between God's mercy and the mercy that he motivates us to give to all people if you like a message like tonight and the message you've been hearing last couple of weeks pushes a button deep in your soul that begins the process of waking us up to a fuller grasp of God's grace and the outworking of it in our lives now in case that button hasn't been pushed for you let me give you another example of this kind of preaching Scottish minister Robert Murray Mishane preached this to Scottish Christians living in Scottish cities in 1838 he said I fear that there are some Christians among you to whom Christ will not be able to say in the last day well done good and faithful servant he's referring to

Matthew 25 he says your hardy dwellings referring to your nice houses your hardy dwellings rise amongst thousands who have scarcely a fire to warm themselves at and have but little clothing to put out the bright frost and yet you don't darken their door you heave a sigh of relief perhaps sorry not relief you heave a sigh perhaps at a distance but you do not visit them my friends I'm concerned for the poor but I'm actually more concerned for you I don't know what Christ will say to you on that great day you say you follow Christ but you don't care for his poor I fear that there may be many hearing me who now know well that they may not be Christians at all because they don't love to give now dear Christians some of you pray night and day to be branches of the true vine you pray to be made all over in the image of

Christ if so you must be like him in giving though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor answer Christ might have said my blood is my own my life is my own another person objects the poor are undeserving answer Christ might have said frankly they're all wicked rebels should I lay down my life for these no that's not what he said he left the 99 and came after the lost he gave his blood for the undeserving and yet another objects the poor might abuse it oh man I mean let me just pause there how many times have I ever heard yourself say that if I give this person they're probably going to go and buy alcohol with it he says the poor might abuse it another answer Christ might have said the same yes we far greater truth

[35 : 10] Christ knew that thousands would trample his blood under their feet that they would despise it that they would make an excuse for sinning even more and yet he gave his blood oh my dear Christians if you would be like Christ give much give often give freely to the vile the poor the thankless and the undeserving Christ is glorious and he is happy and so will you be it is not your money I want it's your happiness remember his own words it is more blessed to give than to receive so friends is the spirit of God waking you up from your deep slumber the power of the good Samaritan is the pattern of God's mercy and his mercy generates a life of mercy and so I urge you to lay aside any remnant of self goodness that you think you might still have to admit your total spiritual bankruptcy to drink deeply from his infinite grace and mercy and then in deep awareness and appreciation of what you have received to live a life of grace and mercy

I think it's really appropriate that we move immediately on to the Lord's Supper and in doing that the first thing I want us to do is just to pause and to confess just to just have a think is your button being pushed at this point is there a connection between a life of mercy because of mercy that's been shown to you because having heard the grace of God we get to experience it together in these elements which are a visceral representation of what we have in Christ so let's just pause silence and we're going to say together a prayer up on the screen in just a moment and then I'm going to lead us into the Lord's Supper and we're going to drink of his grace to us and eat of his grace to us let's just pause so together up on the screen merciful

God our maker and our judge we have sinned against you in thought word and deed we have not loved you with our whole heart we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves we repent and are sorry for all of our sins father forgive us strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen let's pray we thank you our father that in your love and your mercy you gave your only son Jesus Christ to die on the cross for our salvation and by his offering himself once and for all he made a full perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the entire world and he's commanded us to continue a remembrance of his precious death until he's coming again hear us merciful father and grant that we who receive these gifts of your creation this bread and this wine according to our saviour's command in remembrance of his suffering and his death Gottes on his sons all that the bad moment on my shared and all life happened