

## Summer conference message 1

### The Mercy of God.

#### Psalm 136

As we know, God has many attributes, none more greater than the other. All of God's attributes are to the fullest. Each of us possess certain attributes in greater depth than perhaps others. Some of us are more caring than others, while some of us show more love than others, and while this is not a good or bad thing, I believe we all possess these attributes to a certain degree. I can think of no one in Maranatha that is uncaring or unloving, no one at all, but certain people do come to mind when you think about some with great care, or with great love, or with great humility.

And yet God possesses all His attributes to the fullest, and there is no one attribute of His that is greater than the other. The world today will tell you that God is a God of love, and that is most definitely God. He knows and exudes and demonstrates love to the fullest every day. Look around you at creation and see the love He put into creating a world that literally replenishes itself. Look at the great love He had for sinners, to send His Son to die upon Calvary. So I would agree that God is a God of love, and thank God that He is. He knows love to no end, He is the epitome of love, however that usually is the only attribute of God's that you ever hear mentioned.

But God is also a God of power, of faithfulness, of grace, of peace, and of wrath amongst many other things. You will rarely hear the last one – that God is a God of wrath. God is as capable of wrath and anger as He is love, and many times He will show His wrath by simply leaving you alone. God is so unlike us, He demonstrates His power differently, He does not do things in order to impress us, or in order to show His power, or in order to get an atheist to believe in Him. I have often wondered why He wouldn't just strike an atheist dead that questions His existence, but then I realize, and thank Him that He doesn't, because He doesn't strike me dead when I sin against Him, when I should know better.

Yet of all the attributes of God, there is one that I have not yet mentioned, which is the One I would like to speak about today. When God created this world, He demonstrated His love. When He cast Satan out of the heavens He demonstrated His anger, and all of those attributes in between were possessed at this time, but the attribute I would like to talk about today is His mercy. And think about this: **the attribute of mercy is a result of sin, for where there is no criminality, there can be no mercy.** If Adam had not sinned in the garden God could never have demonstrated His great mercy. Therefore mercy is an attribute directly related to the fall of man. If we never sinned then God could never have mercy upon us, there would be no need for it.

Sin is not a good thing. Sin ought to be the most hated thing in a believers life. Sin is what nailed the Lord Jesus Christ to the cross. Sin is what caused God the Father to turn His eyes from Calvary as His Son cried out for mercy. His Son is His most prized possession, the Apple of His eye, and yet He gives us something that He did not even give His Son, and that is mercy. **He withheld mercy from His Son upon the cross!** You must have sinned against God in order to have mercy, and His Son was sinless. God the Father could have no mercy upon His Son, because there was nothing in Him to forgive, and yet because of the heinousness of our sin, wonderful mercy was possible.

Because of the sacrifice of His Son upon Calvary, because of sin, because we have committed a crime against God, He can show mercy, something that He would never have been able to have upon the unfallen angels, but He can have upon fallen man. His mercy will extend to us forever, even out yonder in eternity, as the 136<sup>th</sup> Psalm reads, "His mercy endureth forever."

Now there is a reason for the Holy Spirit to have such repetition in this Psalm we just read. There are no wasted words in the Bible. God has revealed of Himself only what He wants us to know. He has only done so in 66 books, and **He wants us to know that He is a God of mercy.** That is a microscopic portion of what He could have revealed of Himself, therefore every book, every chapter, every verse, every word ought to be read with the utmost spiritual concern. The Holy Spirit, in this chapter, is obviously trying to

teach us something very important, that is the great depth of God's mercy, which knows no bounds, and that it will also endure forever.

In this Psalm we read of 26 acts of mercy that God our Father performed, and every act of mercy He performed was undeserved. How is it that any of us can possibly sit here today and think that we are entitled to anything from God apart from His wrath? And yet, He is merciful. We were birthed in sin, born anti-Christ, born with nothing but a hatred towards God, and yet He was merciful to you a sinner. Perhaps you were raised in the church, and yet knew nothing of the truth except what a Sunday school teacher may taught you, and yet He was merciful unto you a sinner. You had your own pre-conceived ideas of Who Christ was, of Who God was, and yet God was still merciful to you a sinner. Some of us, like myself, taunted Him, challenged Him, cursed Him, and yet He was merciful to us as sinners. Just the fact that you are here today is an act of God's mercy. God's mercy cannot be downplayed, it cannot be underestimated, for it is the only thing keeping you out of hell at this very moment – He was merciful to you, a sinner.

Imagine for just one moment if you dare, that God had no mercy, it was not an attribute of His. What peril we would be in. We would have no hope, we would be sitting here today, knowing that we sinned against God, and the only thing to look forward to beyond death would be eternal judgment. Think of that for a moment – what hope would there be to even live another day? Imagine if His mercy had limits? Imagine if you could, because so sinful and so rotten that God would no longer extend mercy unto you? But God does not, He knows no limits, and His mercy reaches the depths of the sea and it endures forever.

There is a difference between mercy and grace, for grace is bestowed upon all men in the form of God's restraining hand upon the world of unbelievers. It is an act of grace for each unbeliever to awaken each morning and go throughout the day without fully experiencing God's wrath upon them. One day, that wrath will come, but until then, His grace and His mercy prevent Him from action. Do you believe that? I hope that you do – God's grace and His mercy prevents Him from action. Whereas mercy is reserved for the believer, and it is a result of sin in their lives, and remember unless there is criminality there is no mercy. It is pure sovereign grace alone which determines the exercise of His mercy.

God is under no dictate to show mercy to anyone other than whosoever He wills to do so. This is established, *“For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy”* (Romans 9:15,16). God alone has the freedom for administering mercy. And as I will show you in a moment, He is the only One that could truly show mercy. He does so because we are sinners, we have sinned against Him, we must have mercy otherwise our sin could not be forgiven, but what is the criteria for God to show mercy upon someone? The answer lies in these verses in Romans. If my child were to come to me and ask, “what does it take for God to have mercy upon me,” what would I say?

First, you must have sinned against Him, which all of us have. In sin did my mother conceive me, said David, and so we know that we are sinners from conception. Imagine that! The moment you are conceived, you are a sinner in the eyes of God, **but also you are eligible for mercy!** Although that is disputed by most people in the world of religion, the hope that comes from that is monumental. Because it allows Jesus Christ to be our representative, just as Adam is our representative for sin, Jesus Christ is our representative for salvation. You need not do anything to be a sinner, God has declared you are from the womb. And likewise, you need do nothing for salvation, God has declared those upon whom He will bestow mercy.

So in order for God to show mercy, you first must have sinned against Him, and so thusly everyone except for unfallen angels and the Trinity, qualify for that. Secondly, **what prompts God to show mercy is His own good will?** His will is under subjection to no one, least of all fallen man. Man's will does not, can not, and will not ever supercede that of God's, otherwise He would cease to be God. Everything in the Bible would cease to be true and open to fallacy if God was ever subject to man and man's free will. You can ask for mercy but will only receive it, if it is God's good will to do so.

This matter of walking down an aisle, saying a few words, and then being born again is a lie. That would make God subject to man. This matter of the age of accountability makes the Bible a lie, God a liar, and

God subject to man, not to mention the mockery it makes of the blood of Christ. This matter of God bestowing mercy freely, liberally, and at the will of whosoever asks is appalling. It flies in the face of everything that is taught about God in the Bible. **Mercy is a direct result of sin**, and since only God can forgive sin, only God can show mercy. I suppose it is the only good thing to have come out of sin, and God offered His Son upon Calvary in order that He might show mercy upon whosoever He wills, and therefore mercy is one of the most precious attributes God possesses.

Furthermore, there is nothing one can do to merit mercy. If mercy was something to be merited, then it would not be mercy. In a court of law, when you throw yourself upon the mercy of the court, you are basically stating – I will do whatever your recommendation is, and I will pray for leniency. A.W. Pink also said, “nor is it the merit of Christ which moves God to bestow mercies upon His elect, that would be substituting the effect for the cause.” Mercy is totally without merit. Certainly it was the death of Christ upon Calvary which enables God to act in mercy upon the sinner, but it is not due to the righteousness of Jesus Christ, but rather to the good pleasure of God’s will. Remember that - the effect is that God has mercy upon us because of the righteousness of Christ, but the cause of God’s mercy is due to His own free will. Otherwise He would be subject unto Christ, and that is not Scriptural.

Nothing moves God to act apart from His free will, and His good pleasure. The only reason you are not burning in hell at this very moment is because of God’s good pleasure. The only reason you have hope today is because of God’s good pleasure. The only reason Christ died for you is because of God’s good pleasure, and the only reason God has had any mercy upon you is because it is in accordance with His own good pleasure. Mercy cannot be merited. Salvation cannot be merited, grace cannot be merited, nothing from God can be merited, especially when we have sinned against Him as we have.

In the tabernacle, we are all aware that there was to be a mercy seat. It was to be made of pure gold. That alone is symbolic of what a high price was placed upon mercy by God. It could have been made of silver or bdellium or beryl or onyx, or any of the many other gems spoken of in the Scriptures, but to show the high price God places upon mercy, He had declared that the mercy seat be made of gold. And not just gold, but pure gold, which indicates that all the impurities were to be taken out. God’s mercy was and is pure, it is untainted, and the mercy seat was to be a representation of His mercy. It was where the sinner came to receive mercy from God the Father.

The mercy seat was the name for the lid of the ark of the covenant which contained the law, the manna, and the rod that budded. The mercy seat was where God said that He would commune with mankind, and it was also to be located in the most holy place. All of these sing out to us the absolute importance of mercy as well as God’s high estimate of it. How many times have we not placed God’s mercy on the highest of pedestals in our lives? I dare ask for a show of hands as to how many here today thanked God for His mercy in bringing you safely here. I’m sure that if I asked several would honestly raise their hands, but why do I think that not all of us would? Because we all, myself included, take God’s mercy for granted. We actually tempt God when we fail to thank Him for His enduring and everlasting mercy to us as a believer. As an unbeliever, you rarely thought about His mercy, but that does not excuse us now that we are believers, and ought to know better.

We also ought to know that our long, wordy prayers oftentimes are not pleasing to Him. In our study on prayer that we did several years ago in Panama City, the book of Ecclesiastes really helped us in understanding some of what prayer is. “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few” (Ecclesiastes 5:1,2). Although we know that God will be merciful only unto those He wills to have mercy upon, we still hear the heart of the publican as he smote his breast, and said, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

A true believer understands that mercy is not merited, mercy is totally of God, and yet that is one of His many outstanding attributes. God receives nothing from us when He bestows His mercy, what can He possibly expect from creatures who have nothing to give but what they have received? Yet we cannot use this as a means of ingratitude. **What good is our admiration of His mercy without our thanks?** Don’t

you know that God loves to hear thankfulness from His children? Do you think that God is just some unobtainable Deity that does not need or desire your fellowship? He could if He wanted, but He doesn't. He calls for you, He beckons to you to fellowship with Him, to be mindful and thankful for His tender mercies. Thank God for His mercy, He did not need to bestow it upon us. The publican would not so much as even lift his eyes towards the heavens when he asked this of God. What has changed that we can be so rash with our mouths? God is God, He will always be God. He holds our lives in His very hands. Because His is gracious, He allows rain to fall upon both the just and the unjust, but this type of grace and mercy upon the unjust will not last forever, it will end one day.

What we can learn from this publican is a respect for a Sovereign God, to understand that mercy comes only from Him and no other. The publican understood that God's mercy was the only hope that he had. God's mercy is the only hope that you or I have. And we have done nothing to merit it. We are born sinners, born dead in trespasses and sins, and had a Sovereign God, for some reason known only to Him, not reached down and touched our very souls with His Holy Spirit, we would be in a hopeless situation today.

But many today do not see themselves in this plight because they believed in a god that only exists in the imagination of whatever denomination they happen to be following at the time. Nor do they know or care to know anything of His mercy. Some are more loyal to their denomination and will change philosophies based upon whatever their pastor says. But God does not change, He never has and never will. Sin is sin, mercy is mercy, and because of sin, there is mercy, and I find that to be an excellent, most wondrous truth.

God is merciful to the sinner, and it is completely unmerited. In the Scriptures He calls us His friends, His brethren, His children, His spouse, the members of His body, and the apple of His eye amongst a host of many other kind, compassionate terms. Although our God is full of majesty, honor, purity, kindness, love, and tender mercy, He is not ashamed to own you and I and bestow His love, grace, peace, and mercy upon such unsightly outcasts as we are. Not only that, He has now made a union with those that are members of His body. With unmatched mercy and patience, He bears with our infirmities, all our provocation of Him, all of our inconsistencies, all our unfaithfulness and ingratitude, and yet He remains ready to forgive those whom He loves all because of His tender mercy.

God is merciful to the sinner. To see God's estimate of sin we need not look any further than Calvary. Had sin been a trifling thing with God, He could have asked for an offering, any offering other than His only begotten Son. But the horribleness, the heinousness of sin calls for nothing short of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because we have sinned, He will have mercy, and as I said earlier, God gives us something that He withheld from His very own Son.

Upon Calvary, He withheld mercy from His very own Son on the account of you and I. If anyone ever deserved mercy it was Jesus Christ. If anyone ever merited the mercy of God, it would be His only begotten Son. If anyone ever earned the love and mercy of God, it was our Lord and Saviour, and yet there at Golgotha hung our Lord and Saviour, beaten, bloodied, abused, mocked, ridiculed, hated, jeered, railed upon and all the while mercy never came. How it must have pained the heart of God to watch His Son perish upon the cross for sinners, and how desperately the angels wanted the Heavenly Father to show mercy to His Son, but that was not His will. Our Father had to be appeased for sin, and it was the duty of Christ to do so because He was the only One that could. God is merciful to us today because of Jesus Christ, don't ever forget that.

Many of you have heard of Charles Wesley I'm sure. He and his brother John founded what today is the Methodist religion. The fact that it derives its name from the word "method" ought to be a warning to us right there. He was a die hard Armenian, he believed and taught man's free will, and went so far as to chastise men that spoke out on God's Sovereignty, even great men such as Augustus Toplady. But Charles Wesley, with all his faults, loved the Lord Jesus Christ, I mean truly loved the Lord in a manner that shames me far too often.

Upon his death, his diaries were published, and it was discovered that he broke every waking moment down into 20 minute segments, and he would record many of these segments. His goal was to not allow one

single segment of time to elapse without either conversing with his Lord and Saviour, or meditating upon the Word. He deemed himself a complete failure if he missed so much as one of these 20 minutes segments a day. Now why am I telling you that? Because you have got to train your flesh to keep your heart and mind upon Christ. I wonder how much time lapses during our day without so much as a godly thought? But he was someone who thought so much of Christ, he did not want even 20 minutes to go by without his Saviour as a part of his thoughts. And what he found most profound was the mercy of God. He would dwell upon that time and time again, how God could have extended such great mercy to common sinners.

Yet that which God extends towards man, He did not even extend towards His Son as He perished upon the cross of Calvary. As our Saviour hung upon Calvary, we hear those horrible words resonate throughout the Scriptures, "Eli, Eli lama sabachthani, that is to say, My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?" Our Lord was there upon the cross to perish for our sins, He was there in order for God the Father to one day show great mercy to you, and to I. As our Lord hung upon the cross, He revealed to us during this most sacred time, His feelings and thoughts. Our Lord knew why His Father was punishing Him, He knew why He was being chastened, He knew why He has being smitten, He knew why He was being mocked, ridiculed, spat upon, jeered at, these things He knew, but that was not His question. His question was why was He being forsaken there upon the cross.

Brethren, if that question does not stab you in the heart, if that question does not bring you to shame, then you might very well consider your personal relationship with Jesus Christ today. You see, I believe, no, I know, that as He hung there and spoke those words, that He was not dying for a massive amount of people. He was not dying in order that every man, woman, or child ever born would have an opportunity to accept Him as Saviour. I know that because God treasured His Son far too much to let Him perish without specifically knowing for whom He was dying. When you understand this, it becomes personal, much more personal.

You will rarely hear men preach on the heinousness of their sin, and the heinousness of what was done to Christ that day because it is not personal. But if you were the only person God ever elected unto salvation, our Saviour still would have had to have endured Calvary, and I am certain that He would have just for you. He was forsaken by man, and forsaken by God. Being forsaken by man was nothing new to Him, that did not cause Him to cry out, but being forsaken by God was more than this GodMan could bear, for He shortly thereafter gave up the Ghost.

There are times that we might feel forsaken by God, but we have this assurance "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." We are taught here by our Lord and Saviour that if we ever feel forsaken by God, that that is the time to pray, the time to cry out to God. When sin bears heavily upon you, and you cannot seem to be able to bear the weight of it any longer, that is the time to cry out to God, His mercy will come, for it endureth forever. Yet this very mercy He bestows upon us was withheld upon Calvary, and for that I am both saddened and humbled.

And yet in Jesus Christ the Scriptures say, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." (Psalm 85:10). The only reason God has mercy upon you or I today is because of His Son, the only reason any truth is revealed to you or to I today is because of His Son. The only reason we are righteous, the only reason there is peace in our lives is because of Jesus Christ. Had God not decided to be merciful to us through the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, we would have no hope today. Please don't let those words be just that – words. They have meaning, a meaning that is so full of depth that it could never be fully plummeted in this life.

We have hope because of the Lord Jesus Christ. Had He not perished upon Calvary, the entire world would be in a hopeless state. Every man, woman, and child ever born would have nothing but eternal hellfire to look forward to as they paid the price for sinning against God. We must never, ever, ever take for granted the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet far too often we do. I know that I take Him for granted every day. I only read or study when it is convenience to me. I only pray when it is convenience to me. Days on end will go by that I totally overlook the minute by minute mercies that God has bestowed upon me through His Son, our Beloved Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Our daily prayer ought to be, "Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O LORD: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me." Webster's Dictionary defines mercy as such: "compassionate or kindly forbearance shown towards an offender or enemy". We are enemies against God, otherwise it could not be called mercy! Yet the fact that we are enemies is what gives us the greatest hope.

God is the Maker, the Creator of all things, and as such He has complete dominion and authority over all. We read, "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" (Romans 9:20,21). Now I know of no greater passage of Scripture to prove God's total Sovereignty other than these verses. He has the absolute right to make every vessel ever born a vessel of wrath, it is His omnipotence that entitles Him to that. But it is His mercy that allows Him to make some vessels, vessels of mercy.

We have all heard the voice of idiots saying, "I just can't see a God of love sending a soul to hell", to which I say, "man has no rights", we lost our rights in the garden, we sinned our rights away. God has every right to cast each of us into hell today, and it is only because of His mercy that any of us, believers or not, live to see even another sunrise. God would be just, He would be so just, to simply smash this world with you and I in it, right into the depths of hell, turn His back upon us, rid Himself of the stench of sin that we have created. We have sinned against a thrice holy God, He cannot, does not, and will not tolerate sin. He is Holy, He is Just, He is Righteous, He will always do what is right, and to dare say, to dare think, or to dare imply that somehow we have rights is abhorrent. I have no rights, I lost them in Adam, and thusly I am a sinner. That is not a matter of fairness, it is a matter of God's righteousness, and He declares the soul that sinneth it shall die.

Brethren, if you die tonight without Christ as your Saviour, it is not God's fault. Just the fact that you can hear the truth is an act of mercy, but to turn from it, to not believe it, to go back to your sinful pathetic life is incomprehensible. And then to dare stand and say that God owes man something, or that a God of love would not do something is just wrong, plain wrong. A lump of clay, a lump of dead clay cannot tell the potter what to create from him, he is dead, he has no life, he has no rights, and the point here is that if God has chosen to be merciful to you a sinner, then you ought to thank Him daily for that. Thank Him for His mercy even if He shows you no mercy, because He is God, He is Righteous, Holy, and Sinless, and will one day hold you accountable for the things that you have both said and done.

We talk about God's Sovereignty, and the Armenian talks about man's free will, but it really doesn't matter to God, He could care less about the multitudes which believe that they have some say so about their salvation. Because if He cared He could send down a blaze of fire in an instant, and set things straight, but again, it is His mercy with restrains Him from doing so. That, and the fact that we are presently living in the age of grace, where God will not act apart from grace and mercy.

Our Lord said, "But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian" (Luke 4:25-27). Notice that Naaman was not even an Israelite!!! Now that was a display of both Sovereignty and mercy. God chose, not man, only God, and He had mercy upon the least expected.

Which is yet another quality of God's mercy – it is on those that seemingly deserve it least. I am the perfect living example of one that deserved no mercy whatsoever from God. I had done nothing except aggravate and anger Him my entire life. I was on a collision course, and should have rightfully stayed on it. I sinned freely, and I loved sinning. I failed to thank God for anything good in my life, and only acknowledged Him in my use of profanity. You are looking today at someone that God really went out on a limb to show mercy to because I wanted nothing to do with Him. Oh sure, due to my upbringing I was somewhat moral, but I wanted nothing from God at all, least of all His tender mercy.

But He did have mercy upon me, and therefore I will use the same tongue that I used to curse Him, now to praise Him. Some people in the fellowship have told me that some of my messages sound a bit like Charles

Spurgeon which I take as a great compliment because I love how he speaks so glowingly and so compassionately and so lovingly about Jesus Christ. I determined many years ago that when I stand in front of you to speak, I am going to use my once vile tongue that spewed forth profanity to speak of Him lovingly.