

28. Learning Why God Shows Mercy

In our last topic, we saw that God promised many blessings to the people of Israel. However, not all of the people of Israel had the privilege of enjoying those blessings. Many were only physical descendants of Jacob and did not place their faith in the promises of God. As a result, they were physical descendants of Abraham but not spiritual descendants of Abraham. We saw as we concluded that topic that Esau rejected the opportunity for spiritual leadership and sold that opportunity to Jacob for a bowl of stew. Today, we are going to build on that topic and learn how to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand why God shows mercy.

Romans 9:14-16 says, “What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.’ So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.” Paul knew that some people might think that God was unrighteous to judge Esau. As a result, we see that Paul answers that question so that we can learn to answer that same question if our children also have that question. Paul began these verses by pointing out the fact that God certainly was not unrighteous. Paul used the statement of God to Moses to make that point clear.

In Exodus 32, we read about the nation of Israel choosing to worship the golden calf instead of following the Lord. The people all deserved judgment and those who were committing immorality along with their worship of the golden calf were judged by those who chose to stand on the Lord’s side. However, the rest of the people had also worshiped the golden calf and also deserved judgment. As a result, Moses prayed for the people. Later in Exodus 33:18-19 Moses prayed again, “And he said, ‘Please, show me Your glory.’ Then He said, ‘I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.’” Here, we see that God chose to show mercy and compassion to the people even though they all deserved judgment. God is the One who has all authority and He can choose to show mercy even though we have all sinned and we all deserve judgment.

It was not our will that caused any of us to turn to God. It was not anything in our own efforts that caused us to turn to God. Instead, Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Each of us who have become Christians has been saved because of the grace and mercy of God. We were saved by grace through faith. Even that faith was not our own faith. Instead, we see that the faith that we had to believe was a gift that was given to us by God. God did not give any of us that faith as a result of our own efforts because God knew that we would then boast about what we had done. Instead, God chose to save us by His mercy even though we did not deserve mercy.

Romans 9:17-18 goes on to use another illustration when those verses say, “For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.’ Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and

whom He wills He hardens.” In these verses, we see that God used Pharaoh as the illustration. Pharaoh had already hardened his heart and refused to let Israel leave the land of Egypt several times. As a result, God said in Exodus 9:16, “But indeed for this *purpose* I have raised you up, that I may show My power *in* you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.” God explained to Pharaoh through Moses that God had raised Pharaoh up for the very purpose that God could show His power in Pharaoh and that demonstration of the power of God caused the name of the Lord to be declared throughout the earth.

We read at least six times that Pharaoh hardened his heart. God made it clear that He could choose to show mercy to those that He desired to show mercy. However, God also chose to harden those that He willed. Six times it says that Pharaoh hardened his heart. Six times it says that the heart of Pharaoh was hardened. Six times it says that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh. Both the people of Egypt and the people of Israel had been rebellious against God. God could have judged them all. Exodus 12:12-13 says, ““For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I *am* the LORD. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you *are*. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy *you* when I strike the land of Egypt.” Here, we see that the people of Israel showed faith in God by putting blood on the top and sides of their doors and that the death angel then passed over their houses and spared their firstborn.

Romans 9:19-21 goes on to say, “You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?’ But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed *it*, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?” Many times, people do not follow the Lord and try to find an excuse for their sin. We see that Paul is answering the questions that would come from such individuals here. Such people want to blame God for their own sin. They might say that God should not find fault with them if God did not choose them. They ask how they could be accused of resisting the will of God.

Paul uses a very interesting illustration to answer such individuals. Paul chose to use a lump of clay as an illustration. Can a lump of clay tell the potter what kind of a pot to make from that lump of clay? That is the choice of the potter. Jeremiah 18:2-4 says, “‘Arise and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause you to hear My words.’ Then I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make.” Here, we see that the potter is the one who chooses what to make with the clay. The potter can use a lump of clay to make a fancy pot, a water pot or a pot for garbage. That is the decision of the potter and not the decision of the clay. The point that God is making is He is free to choose what He does and how He works in the life of each individual.

This is why Romans 9:22-24 says, “*What* if God, wanting to show *His* wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared

beforehand for glory, *even* us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?” God is a perfect God and yet has chosen to allow sin. He is also a holy God who must show His wrath against all sin. At the same time, God has accepted the payment that Christ made for the sins of every person when Christ died on the cross. This means that Christ took the wrath of God against sin for every person. As a result, God must show His wrath by bringing judgment on every person that does not repent and turn to Christ. That way God is not unfair. He accepts the payment for sin by Christ for all those who turn to Christ. To be fair, He also judges all those who reject the payment of Christ and choose to pay for their own sin.

In addition to showing His wrath against sin, we also read that God chose to make His power known. We read in Romans 1:19-20, “Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.” Here, we see that the very creation makes it possible for people to see the power of God. Each person must choose whether to recognize that power or try to deny that power. God shows His longsuffering even to those who choose to deny that power by giving them a lifetime to repent and turn from their sin. Each person that refuses to repent has still seen the longsuffering of God.

In contrast, those who turn to Christ see something very different because God chooses to make known the riches of His glory on all those who turn to Him and accept the mercy that He offers. Here, we see that God has chosen to accept the payment by Christ for our sins by all of us who come to Christ in repentance and faith whether we are Jews or Gentiles. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” God planned that salvation for us before He ever created the world because of His desire to help us understand the riches of His glory.

Then, we see that God called each one that He chose. Romans 8:30 says, “Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” God determined to give us eternal life before He ever created the world. Once we were able to understand, God began to work in our lives to call us to Himself. When we came to Him in repentance and faith, God justified us and declared us righteous in His sight. In His sight, He has already glorified us and looks forward to the day when we will be in His presence.

Although none of us deserved mercy because of our sin, we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that God has shown His mercy because of His desire to enjoy fellowship with us forever. He could show that mercy because Christ paid the penalty so that He could freely forgive our sin. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand the greatness of the mercy of God.