

The Heights Baptist Church

GOD IS RICH IN MERCY • MATTHEW 5:7; EPHESIANS 2:1-10 • 2/28/2021

MAIN POINT

God's gift of Jesus to rebellious sinners reveals just how merciful He is.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What picture comes to mind when you hear the word "mercy"?

Describe one occasion when someone showed mercy to you. What does it feel like to be the recipient of mercy?

Mercy isn't a characteristic that comes naturally to most of us. Most of the time, we think about our own wants and desires even if those are achieved at the expense of others. But for the Christian, we show mercy because we know just how merciful God has been to us. When we see just how merciful God has been the only right response is to extend that same mercy to others.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 5:7.

Why is mercy a characteristic of a true follower of Christ?

In what sense have we all been shown mercy?

Describe one specific occasion when you have experienced the mercy of God.

Because God has shown mercy to the Christian, the Christian becomes merciful. Paul the apostle reflected on the great mercy of God in Ephesians 2:1-10, a passage that will show us not only the greatness of God's mercy, but also His call on His followers to extend that mercy to those around them.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 2:1-3.

What attributes of humanity do you see in this passage?

Describe a world where people don't carry out their selfish desires. Who is to blame for the fact that we don't live in a world like this? Why?

What does this passage reveal about why we need salvation and the consequences of not receiving it? Paul reached a dismaying conclusion about the depth of sin: by nature we are children under wrath. In our sinful nature, we all deserve eternal condemnation. We are born into this fallen condition. Without God's grace and mercy, all human beings are spiritually helpless and hopeless.

How does it feel to talk about humans in the terms that Paul used—dead, following desires and cravings, disobedient?

Why is it hard to use those terms to talk about our natures? Why is it good to use those terms to talk about our natures?

It can be hard to talk about ourselves as fallen and wicked. It can feel excessively negative, and it certainly doesn't build our self-esteem. However, by using these terms to understand ourselves better, we gain a greater understanding the great mercy and grace of God.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 2:4-7.

After reading verses 1-3 how do you feel when you read the words "But ...God" in verse 4? What would the world be like without those words?

With the wonderful words "But ...God," Paul turned from diagnosing our spiritual death to describing our new life in Christ. He began by piling up three overlapping terms that describe the divine basis for our salvation. We owe everything to God's character.

What attributes of God do you see in this passage?

Why does Paul highlight the mercy of God as one of those attributes?

How does God's plan and providence for fallen human nature show His mercy?

God's mercy is His tenderhearted, loving compassion toward the needy. God's grace is displayed through showing undeserved favor toward all who have sinned against Him.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 2:8-10.

Salvation is not just from something, it is unto something as well. From what has God saved you? What are some good works for which God has saved you to do?

Why might mercy always be involved in those good works?

If we do not express mercy to others, what might that indicate about our own relationship with God?

Mercy is more than mere emotion; it is a deep character trait born from the mercy God has shown us. Whenever we serve others, in word or deed, we can express the same tenderhearted compassion that God has expressed to us. Conversely, if we find ourselves unable to extend this mercy, perhaps we need to reconnect with just how much mercy God has already shown to us.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What is one specific way you will extend mercy to those around you this week?

Is there something in our community that specifically needs to experience God's mercy right now? How can our group help?

PRAYER

Close your time in prayer, praising God for His mercy. Thank Him for this tenderhearted compassion, and pray that you would be a vessel this week for the extension of that mercy. Pray that our church would continue to demonstrate the mercy of God to our community.

COMMENTARY

| EPHESIANS 2:1-10

2:1 People are not willing to be found (saved) until they know they are lost. Paul reminded his readers of the awfulness of sin that results in every person being lost, separated from God. As long as they are still unbelievers, sinners are in fact best described as dead people. The terms translated “trespasses” and “sins” are similar in meaning. The first term means falling from a known path, that is, actively breaking a boundary or rule. The second means falling short of a required standard. Both refer to the universal human failure to do what is right, either actively or passively.

2:2-3 Another way to describe the helplessness of sinners is to think of it in terms of a lifestyle, step by step, headed in the wrong direction. No person can blame the world or the devil for their sinning. We have only ourselves to blame. It was our fleshly desires that we indulged. It was the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts that have been the source of our disobedience to God.

God's righteous judgment against sin is settled. In our sinful nature, we all deserved eternal condemnation. We were born into this fallen condition. Without God's grace, all human beings are spiritually helpless and hopeless. We need salvation because of what sin has done to us.

2:4-5 Paul turned from diagnosing our spiritual death to describing our new life in Christ. He began by piling up three overlapping terms that describe the divine basis for our salvation. We owe everything to God's character. First, notice the reference to God's "mercy." Mercy is "the disposition to act compassionately in response to the plight of someone in need." Second, notice the reference to God's "love," His sacrificial concern. Paul stressed the abundance of God's love just as he had noted the abundance of His mercy: it was great. The third term Paul used to express the basis of salvation in God's character is "grace." Grace is similar to mercy and love but with a special distinction. The emphasis in the term grace is a person's showing undeserved favor toward someone who has sinned against that person. The first benefit of receiving salvation by grace is that God made us alive. When Christ was raised from the dead, God saw all believers as united with Him.

2:6-7 The second benefit of receiving God's salvation by grace through faith is that God raised us up. Thus when Jesus visibly ascended from earth to heaven, God saw believers as being spiritually united with Him in His ascension. We are now citizens of heaven (see Phil. 3:20). We no longer have to live as those bound to the sinful world, the flesh, and the Devil. Our true identity is in the heavens. The third benefit of salvation Paul named is that God seated us. After His resurrection and ascension, Jesus sat down at the right hand of God (see Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 12:2). He is there now, and God considers believers already to be sharing Christ's eternal victory.

2:8-9 It's too often typical for us humans to suppose that our actions can help earn our eternal life. Paul wrote that this is never true. But then he went on to explain the role that good works have in the life of those who are saved. Trusting wholly in God's provision is the opposite of trusting in one's own contribution to salvation. The whole of our redemption—past, present, and future—is God's gift, by His initiative. For this reason, no one can boast about a personal contribution to salvation. Heaven will be filled with the praises of Christ's glory and His works. No human display of works can compare to the riches of God's grace toward those who once were dead in their sins but now are alive with Christ.

2:10 One of the goals of salvation for us is the fruit of Christlike character and of good deeds. In eternity past God prepared ahead of time that His redeemed people would do these good works as evidence of His grace. Here is His power not only in giving us new life but also in helping us to walk in good works throughout this life and into eternity. We cannot do anything to earn salvation. Yet God means for us who have received salvation to produce good works. If we have

been given new life, raised with Christ, and seated with Him, we will certainly do good works as evidence that we have received this great salvation.