

*THIS IS ESSENTIALLY A TRANSCRIPT OF PAUL TRIPP'S MESSAGE
"MERCY: THE ONLY HOPE FOR REAL LOVE"*

I. INTRODUCTION

I want to talk with you this evening about the devastating glory of mercy. This has been one of those times of teaching that has morphed and morphed as the Spirit of God has worked on my own heart.

I really want us to reflect in a more focused and maybe a deeper way than you ever have on this call to mercy. I am very afraid that theological biblical language can have a numbing effect on us. I am afraid that often we assign to ourselves more knowledge and more understanding than we actually have. And because we do that, when we hear biblical terminology, we almost have a shut-off switch that happens to us -- "I know that term" – "I understand that concept." I had this amazing moment in my younger pastoral days—just a few years ago. When I was in a retreat context, I asked people to define for me "faith." Well someone said, "Well it means to believe." I said, "Well what does it mean to believe?" They said, "Well it means to trust." I said well what does it mean to trust? They said, well it means to have faith. I don't want us to leave today with this concept of mercy. Think with me. If you were going to pull out a piece of paper and you were going to capture what mercy is and what mercy does, what would you write? Is your understanding of mercy specific and concrete and operational and functional and transformative in your heart? Or is it still something you know its good, you know somehow it reflects the Lord Jesus Christ, you know that its something that you're supposed to be committed to, but you still have a bit of a cloudy, murky understanding of this thing called mercy. Well I want to take you this evening on a mercy journey. And I want to start that journey, if you turn in your Bibles again to James 2.

I want to read two verses that I read to you this morning and I want these two verses to begin to give us our first stage of focus of mercy. And what we are going to do is we are going to look at a broad picture of mercy that we focus down and focus down and focus down to where the rubber meets the road in our experience in everyday life. My prayer is, my pastoral hope for you is that this examination of mercy, God in His Spirit even in this moment would be used to begin to transform your heart to be a place where mercy grows, and mercy thrives and mercy sets the agenda. Verse 12 of James 2. Paul is summarizing his discussion of love remember.

(12) So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. (13) For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

There are so many things that I could say about that last sentence – "mercy triumphs over judgment" but I want to say this one thing and I am going to say it forcefully: you know nothing of the present work of God unless you understand the economy of God in this

moment is fundamentally, comprehensively, perseverently, expansively an economy of mercy. You have life and breath because of mercy. You have rationality and mentality because of mercy. You have relationships of love because of mercy. You have a house to live in because of mercy. You have food to eat because of mercy. You have blood coursing through your veins and organs that are working because of mercy -- the sun shines because of mercy, the rain falls upon the earth because of mercy-- its mercy, its mercy, its mercy! The world basks, the world is bathed every moment of every day in every situation, in every location with the glorious, sustaining, loving compassionate mercy of God – praise Him!

God has chosen for His justice to tarry. And He extends once again His mercy to rebels—His mercy to the lost—His mercy to the selfish—His mercy to the proud—His mercy to the arrogant—His mercy to the self sufficient – so that if per chance this day they would turn and find Him and be transformed by Him – because He is not far from any one of them – because at the very moment of their rebellion they are being sustained by His mercy.

When you wake up in the morning and you see the sun, you see the sun because of the mercy of God. When you wake up in the morning, you're able to think – you're able to think because of the mercy of God. When you wake up in the morning, you take a breath, you take a breath because of the mercy of God. None of these things can you stand before God and say I deserve what I am getting. Every one of them is the product of His mercy. Mercy is the paradigm.

Now here is what this means: it means any time I fail to give the mercy that I have been given, I am outside of the boundaries of the will of my Lord. Any moment my marriage is not an expression of that mercy that I am moment by moment given – my relationship now exists outside of the boundaries of the Word of God. You see, in the deepest, hardest call to mercy your Lord is not calling you yet beyond what you are being given moment by moment by moment; because you would not be in this room, you would not be alive, you would not have what you have and experience what you experience if it were not for the glorious, expansive, perseverent mercy of the Lord. Oh, praise His name! I stand before you as one who feels like my words are too small and too limp to capture the glory of the moment by moment mercy that is showered upon this earth every day. And God would do that so that we would turn and so that His judgment tarries. The paradigm is mercy. You are not called to step beyond the paradigm. You are not called to give what you are not receiving. You are qualified to give because you are bathed in what you are called to give every day. Do you get that? You can never say – hear me husbands – hear me wives – you can never say, “I have no mercy to give” -- because every day, whether you recognize it or not, whether you feel it or not, whether you see it or not, you are bathed, you are dipped once again in the mercy of the Redeemer. Hear this: You're dripping with mercy – how about getting the person next to you wet. Mercy should drip off of you. It should be like hugging a sweaty person. How's that for a nice image? Mercy is just sweet old redemptive sweat. It ought to just drip off of you because you're made wet with the showers of God's mercy every day. I want to

encourage you with that. You're showered, you're showered, you're showered with mercy, because mercy is God's paradigm – it is His economy.

II. THREE CHARACTER QUALITIES THAT DRIVE GOD'S MERCY

I want to focus in a little closer. There are three particular character qualities of the Lord that drive His mercy. Let me mention them to you and then illustrate them from the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Compassion, forgiveness and forbearance. Mercy is the intersection of compassion, forgiveness and forbearance.

Now having said that, let me give you a definition of mercy because I want you to have something that specific in your mind. Here it is: *Mercy is the kind, sympathetic and forgiving treatment of others that works to relieve their distress and to cancel their debt.*

First character quality:

1) Compassion

Turn with me to John 13.

Some of the final moments of Christ on earth with his disciples.

(1) Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. (2) During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, (3) Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, (4) rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. (5) Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (6) He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" (7) Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." (8) Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." (9) Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" (10) Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." (11) For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

It's an amazing moment. It's a rented room and so there is no servant there to do the customary job of washing these sandaled feet that have coursed their way through the dusty roads of Palestine.

Now I don't know how much you know about the servant culture of the New Testament, but there were stratus of servants. The job of washing feet was the job of the lowest

junior servant. It was the lowest of low jobs. And so the disciples were quite willing to walk by that basin because they viewed that job as being beneath them. And they did the unthinkable--they actually went to the meal with dirty feet. And that was a cultural no-no of the greatest degree. And in this remarkable moment of living compassion, Jesus does the unthinkable. The Lord of Lords, the King of Kings, Creator, Sovereign God takes off his cloak now dressed as a servant, gets down on his knees and he washes the feet of arrogant men who would not think of doing what their Lord, King Creator is now doing for them.

I have tried to put myself in this position. I have tried to think if I was a disciple what would I have done? I think I would have walked by the basin. I've tried to think, "If I were Jesus what would I have done?" I think I wouldn't have gotten down on my knees. I think I would have lectured: I am serious. I think I would have said "Are you kidding me? What's up with this? Like, does Messiah mean anything to you? Repeat after me: Lord of Lords." It's stunning. I would have done everything I could to instill transforming guilt. But there is none of that. You know why there's none of that? This is Jesus. And here is what compassion is. I can't think of a better definition than this. Compassion means this there is no job, no calling to low for me to be part of God's work of relieving your burden and cancelling your debt. There is nothing beneath me. That's compassion.

It's not sympathy. You know sympathy can be that flash of feeling bad for somebody as you are walking by. This is compassion. You see, Jesus gets it. He knows the hearts of these men. He knows the warfare that's taking place in their hearts. He knows how blind they can be. Listen: in this moment, what these men need is not rebuke, they need mercy. And so as he touches their feet, he is transforming their hearts. That's what's happening. This is redemption that is taking place. And look at the introduction.

(John 14:3) "*Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God*" -- Jesus didn't do it because he forgot who He was, he did it because of who he was. Ministry, compassionate ministry finds glory in debasement. Oh, if I could be absolutely nothing in a way that God would use to transform another person, what a glorious position that it is. That nothingness is the distinct honor of my life! The disciples were so busy being something, talking about who would be greatest in the kingdom, fighting for the place closest to the Messiah, that they missed the glorious honor of being nothing.

Husbands: are there things too low for you? Are there places too low for you? Are there places where you'll say, "I won't do that, I won't be that? That's beneath me." Compassion doesn't have that "too low" category. Compassion says, "There is nothing too low for me." If the call is to relieve your distress and cancel your debt, there's nothing too low.

The second character quality is the quality of...

2. Forgiveness

I want you to turn to another passage with me if you would. Turn to Luke 23.

Another moment in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. This again is a moment that I've thought many times, "how do you adequately capture this moment in words?" Verse 32, Jesus is now in the midst of his own crucifixion.

(32) Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. (33) And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. (34) And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. (35) And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" (36) The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine (37) and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" (38) There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." (39) One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" (40) But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? (41) And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." (42) And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." (43) And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Hear this: In the moment of physical torment of a character and quality that the probably none of us will experience. With his head pierced with thorns, his body now slumping, and His hands tearing at the nails -- as he again, the king of kings is being mocked by men who at that moment he is giving life and breath—where does his heart go? His heart doesn't go to himself. He doesn't say to himself, "In this moment, it's my right to think about me." His heart goes to the people who are doing this deed to him. And his heart goes to this criminal who is hanging there with him. Listen--He is so committed to the mercy of forgiveness there is no obstacle that will get in His way and abort His mission.

Wives, you're not relieved from the call to forgiveness on those days when you're tired. Husbands you're not relieved from the call to forgiveness on those days when you're busy and distracted. Your call is the call of the cross. And the Bible says that this forgiveness, this call of the cross was a joy to Jesus.

Be honest. What are the things that give you joy? A newspaper that hasn't yet been used for a current events project? A little peace and quiet? To be able to drive on roads paid for by other citizens who choose not to use them? Listen-- there is no sweeter, higher calling than the calling of forgiveness. Forgiveness is what is in the process of transforming every life in this room. And in the moment of His torture, in the moment when he was being mocked, Jesus didn't say "enough already!" His mind and heart didn't go to him, his mind and heart still was controlled, obsessed, focused by the goal of

His calling. And even as he was dying to forgive he was forgiving the people who were taking His life! There is no such thing as mercy without forgiveness.

Third character quality...

3. Forbearance

What is forbearance? Forbearance is Patient mercy under provocation. Turn to John 21.

(15) When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” (16) He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” (17) He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. (18) Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” (19) (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.”

What a sweet moment of forbearance. Listen--what could be more personal than Peter's denial of His association with Christ. He had been warned, but He did not listen to the warning. And in that shocking moment with curses He publically denied that He was associated with Jesus. Oh you know the struggle of the pain of that kind of offense! You know what it's like when somebody has done something like that to you. And you know that you know that you're not supposed to carry it, but you do. And you remember it and you play the DVD over and over again in your head -- you hear the words echoing in your brain and your heart is pained again and again with the offense. And although they haven't done anything more, the offense grows and grows and grows and becomes more and more captivating. Before long it's impossible for you to look at that person without looking at that person through the eyes of that offense.

But not Jesus. Who does Jesus seek out—but Peter? You would think this would be the end of Peter's story -- oh its not. Because mercy has vision. And Jesus was not just seeing the Peter of the offense – are you listening to me? -- Jesus was seeing the Peter beyond the offense—that Peter who would stand before the Sanhedrin and essentially says, “Kill me if you will, but I cannot do anything but preach the Gospel!” Peter who would write the glorious deep words of first and second Peter. Jesus saw what Peter was to be and He treated Him as the Peter that was to be not just the Peter of this moment.

Brothers and sisters -- husbands that's what your wife needs! Your wife needs not to be treated just in light of this offense, but you need to look down and see what God is doing -- you need to embrace the vision of redemption in your wife and respond to her that way. Wives that's what your husband needs -- not just treating him in light of the offense, but

you look beyond the offense and you see the glory of the risen Christ now transforming the heart of that man. It wasn't over for Peter, praise God!

That's forbearance. Forbearance has vision. Forbearance sees what the Gospel will do. And I forebear because I understand what's happening. Listen--what's happening is weightier than the offense.

This is the mercy to which you and I have been called. The mercy of compassion. The mercy of forgiveness. The mercy of forbearance. We have been called to be ambassadors of that Lord Jesus. We have been called to incarnate that mercy where He has placed us.

IV. THREE COSTS OF MERCY

Now, I have to be honest with you. Mercy is costly. I want to give you the three costs of mercy as we end. The first cost is..

1. suffering

Are you hearing me? If you choose to give mercy you must be willing to suffer. Now here's why--Because your judgment must also tarry in order to give God room to work His transforming mercy even more fully in that person's life. And so you won't walk away, you won't quit, you won't turn your back on that person. And so as you are committed to mercy, your life will still be troubled by their weakness, by their failure, by their immaturity. Jesus as He came to earth, knew in order to have His mercy now touch earth, He was going to suffer. He knew he would be despised and rejected. He knew he would be the victim of twisted injustice. He knew the nature of His death. And He was willing.

2. mercy will demand that you wait

I know for myself that I've wanted for my loved ones an instant sanctification switch. I want a fully glorified wife. And if God could throw in self-parenting children, that would be cool! But you've got to hear this: it is God's wise plan that change is most often a process and not an event. Patience means being willing to live with a process mentality. Here's why it's a process: Isaiah gets it. Because what God is raising up are oaks of righteousness for the display of his splendor. Listen--oak trees don't grow overnight. It's decades and decades and hundreds of years. And that oak tree is now majestic and strong and the winds can't bring it down and the freezing frost can't kill it—it's an oak tree! Your Lord is not creating toad stools of righteousness! -- that grow up instantly but easily fall apart. Now, are you willing to water an oak and watch it grow?

Final cost is sacrifice...

3. mercy will call you to sacrifice

You will have to loose things. You will have to surrender things. You will have to give up things. You cannot hold on to a personal possession, personal happiness, control over my life agenda and know anything of the giving of mercy. I can be so focused on my own comfort even in moments when I am being served. I have an eye condition and my eyes don't adjust well between light and darkness in the evening. It makes driving difficult for me because with cars coming toward me sooner or later my vision begins to get very blurred. I have told Luella it's ok because I've realized that there are mobile blobs and stationary blobs and when you are driving the idea is to avoid them both! Well Luella has graciously said that she will drive for us in the evening. So we had an agreed upon destination. And we get to a place where I would have turned and Luella goes straight. I can't leave that alone. And so I say to her, "where are you going?" She says, "This is the way I go." I can't leave that alone. I say, "Well, What if it's the wrong way?" She says "Paul, I don't think it's a matter of right and wrong, I think it's a preference." I can't leave that alone. I say "what if my preference is right?" She says, "Paul why don't we do this. Why don't when I drive I choose the directions and when you drive you choose the directions." Now, that's logical right? I can't leave that alone. And so I say to her Luella right now if we were in a helicopter and we were zooming over Philadelphia and we would hover down over this point you would know that my way is the right way. She looks at me and she says "Paul Tripp, I don't think a helicopter is what you need right now." Now, you laugh because you've been there. But hear this. I am so uncommitted to sacrifice that I can't even be silent with the uncomfotability of going a direction that's different than the one that I have decided upon. There is no such thing as mercy without sacrifice. Listen, you need to open your hands like the hands of Jesus – this is Jesus in Gethsemane – saying "Father if its possible let this cup pass from me" -- watch this -- and then he says, "But not my will but yours be done"

CONCLUSION

Husbands what are you holding onto that you're unwilling to give up? Wives what are you holding onto that you're unwilling to give up? Mercy is the grand agenda of God. God showers His creation and everything in it and in every moment with His mercy. Mercy is driven by specific qualities of character – compassion, forgiveness and forbearance. Mercy can be defined. *Mercy is the kind sympathetic and forgiving treatment of others that works to relieve their distress and to cancel their debt.*

Mercy has a cost
Mercy will call you to suffer
Mercy will call you to wait
Mercy will call you to sacrifice

What mercy is designed to do – hear this – what mercy is designed to do is to drive you to the end of yourself. Hear this truth: true mercy only ever begins when you come to the end of yourself. I want you to hear this glorious concept: Nobody benefits more from the suffering, the waiting and the sacrifice of mercy than the person who is giving it. I am called to give gifts that shock me, that scare me and I turn around and that call has made me rich. That's the Gospel. If you want to be rich, brothers and sisters, give it all away.

If you want to be poor, hold onto all of it. The call of mercy is not to your harm. The call of mercy is a glorious call to be rich, to be rich, to be rich, to be rich! The call of mercy is itself a mercy.

PRAY