

A number of years ago, I was invited to the Cultural Centre, to attend a police remembrance service, for the Roma district.

Anyway, an officer from Roma got up to do the Bible reading. And I cannot remember what the reading was, but I will never forget, one word that was in it – “mercy”. He was reading along (quite fluently), and he got to the word “mercy”, “m,m- m m mer..”, and he stopped, and he went back and started the sentence again. And again, he got to the word “mercy”, and “m,m- m m mer..” ... And I felt so embarrassed for the poor man. He went back to the start of the sentence again, and he stumbled again. And I think it was the third or the fourth try, “m,m – mercy!!!”, and he finally got it out.

And I remember thinking to myself, “I hope this copper never pulls me up – I’ll get no mercy out of him – he can’t even say the word” ...

*And it seems to me, a lot of us can be like that – we have trouble getting the mercy out. We **want** to be merciful – we **want** to act mercifully, and do this thing called mercy, but we just can’t seem to get it out... Selfishness gets in the way. Fear of awkwardness gets in the way... We try to be m m m merciful..., but we just can’t seem to make it.*

Jesus said: ^{Matthew 5:7} **“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.**

He also told the parable of the **unmerciful** servant:

A king forgave his servant, of an enormous debt – a debt that he could never possibly pay back – it was an absolute

impossibility for him to pay it off, but the King forgave him of **all** that debt.

But ... that forgiven servant then went and found another servant who owed **him** a **reasonable** amount of money. And he would not forgive that debt. And even though his fellow servant pleaded for mercy, he threw him jail.

And when the king heard about it, he was **furious**. ^{Matthew}

^{18:32} ... **'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt.**

And it was a lesson on forgiveness. God has been merciful to us, by forgiving our sins. Therefore, we must forgive others, when **they** ask **us** for forgiveness. – So, it was a lesson on forgiveness.

And as Jesus said, ^{Matthew 6:15} ... **if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.**

Our God, is a merciful God. We **also**, must be merciful. If **we**, who have **received** mercy, refuse to extend mercy, (I know some people will argue with me), but the Bible is very clear on this – Our Heavenly Father, will withdraw His mercy.

Now there's a scary thought. When you know how much you depend on the mercy of God – imagine if He was to withdraw it. You know, James is pretty clear here – Just how much we

depend on the mercy of God – if we just break one of the 10 commandments, at any time, we are lawbreakers, and therefore we depend on the mercy of God.

So, let's just do a little reality check: Put up your hand, if you depend on God's mercy, for forgiveness... Of course you do. I do. You do. We all do.

Our hearts have been filled with sin. Our actions **have** been acts of selfishness and pride and envy; of lust and anger and dishonour; of hatred and greed and faithlessness..... And the Law has judged us – we **are** transgressors – we **have** broken God's law...

But James comes out with one of the most amazing statements of grace, that you'll find anywhere in the Bible – **Mercy triumphs over judgment**.

Isn't that wonderful?

Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Let me explain this: Without Christ, we have broken God's law – therefore we are guilty. But **mercy triumphs over judgment**. **In** Christ, God's mercy was poured out, for all who will receive it. The old covenant was, "Keep God's Law, and when you break God's law (because none of us are perfect – you will), there was a whole religious ritual of purification and sacrifice for the atonement of sin".

But Jesus fulfilled the Old Covenant, by bringing in the New Covenant. Jesus **became** the sacrifice. Jesus Christ, atoned for our sins, as He was crucified on the cross. And so James

can now use a new phrase for us: He describes those who are in Christ, as being **under the Law of Liberty**...

Not the law of judgment – under the law of liberty. What does that mean? – well it can mean a lot of things, but in relation to mercy, it means that we first, experience God’s mercy, and so we must **be** merciful. When you experience mercy, you’re at liberty to give mercy... Because our Heavenly Father is merciful to us, as His children, we too, must be merciful.

And what is this thing called “mercy”? We tend to think “Mercy is having the power to destroy someone – to crush them – and being justified if we did it (because they’ve been so horrible to us).., but instead, we’re very magnanimous, and we let them off the hook...”

Or, we have the power to forgive, and in our mercy, we forgive them.

And these examples are true.... But mercy is even **more** than that...

The classical **Greek** usage of the word **ἔλεος** (eleos), which we translate as “Mercy” is something to do with our emotions – it’s something to do with what we feel, when we come into contact, with someone who has an affliction, which has undeservedly come upon them.ⁱ

And to be merciful, means for these feelings of empathy that we have for them, to be translated into actions.

And there's 2 reasons, why we fail to be merciful – Either we don't **feel** merciful towards that person – we don't have any empathy for those who are genuinely in need.... ; or, there's something inside of us, moving us to be merciful, but we **beat it down...**

The great debate, that I'm going to have to keep bringing up (over and over again), as we work our way through James, is the relationship between faith and works.

- Some will say – by faith alone we are saved. We don't have to do any good works.
- **James** would say, “Faith and works must go together”. We are saved by faith, to do good works.
- And then the reply would come “The only good that we can do, is the good that God does in us”
- But the problem is, James knows, the sinful nature of Man. And even when God **is** doing something good in me – something that He's intending to express, in actions that I do,,, the sinful nature of Michael, says “No, no, no, no... Don't do that.” Have a bit of sense. Have a bit of reason:
 - You can't give that to the poor – you could put that to good use yourself.
 - You don't have to talk to **that** person – somebody else will do that – you talk to your mates
 - If you're obedient in this – it's going to cost your family if you do...

There's a conflict happening here, isn't there – between the Spirit, and the flesh. The Spirit is telling me how to act, and

the flesh is coming up with the greatest excuses “No, no, no. Don’t do it....

At this stage, I reckon it’ll be useful, if I describe the 4 categories of the way we humans express, or don’t express mercy. And these 4 categories – well, you could use them to consider anything to do with Godly living.

1st category

1) To not **feel** any mercy towards someone, **and** to be unmerciful in our actions, is Lawlessness.

2nd category

2) To give mercy, and hating every minute of it – to know that it’s your **duty** to give mercy, and not feeling merciful at all (so you do it, but hate it) – is legalism.

3rd category

3) To have an inner compulsion – a prompting from the Holy Spirit – a deep feeling of empathy for the other person, and you desire to give them mercy, but then you think better of it, and are unmerciful in your actions – is licence...

4th category

4) But to have that Holy Spirit empathy for that person, and to be merciful in your actions – to actually step out, and **show** them mercy – well, that’s liberty...

Do you understand this? Every one of us, fall into one of those 4 categories.

Which category are you in??? (you don’t have to tell me).

But I **do** want you to be honest with yourself: Which category are you in? Take a moment, to work it out.

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How are 'ya going? – you sorted it out yet???
Do you have an idea what category you might be in???

Now, of course, what are we after? We're after category number 4, aren't we???

So, how do we get to category 4, from where I am?

1.

If you're in category No.1 Lawlessness – (so you don't feel any mercy; you're not moved to mercy; you feel no empathy for the other person, **and** you **do** nothing to help them (this is going to cut deep, but I've gotta say it). Being unmerciful, is sin.

¹ John 3:4 Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵ You know that (Jesus) appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶ No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. ⁸ Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹ No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.

10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

That's some pretty tough words, hey??? But it's pretty important that we hear them? If you feel you're in category 1, don't just throw in the towel. The Holy Spirit wants to do His work in you today. No one can come to the Father, unless the Holy Spirit draws him. And you wouldn't be here today – you wouldn't be listening to this message, unless the Holy Spirit was drawing you.

And the Lord doesn't want any of us to be lost... Remember, this message, is a message about mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. And the Lord wants you to experience His mercy today...

2.

If you're in category No.2, and you do your best to be merciful, but inside, you just hate doing it – you don't feel any empathy for that person – you just feel duty-bound that you have to do it...

Well, you're not lawless, because you love God's law – you're honouring God's law... But your heart isn't in it. Your heart isn't like your heavenly Father's heart. And this can be because of one of 2 reasons: You could be like the Pharisees – who rejected Christ, and tried to be righteous by doing good deeds...

Or maybe you need to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and begin to live by the Spirit.

You see, I can't change myself, but the Holy Spirit can change me. Lord, fill me with the Spirit. Give me a heart like your heart... A heart of mercy; A heart of righteousness; and wisdom and compassion; of love; joy; peace; patience; kindness; goodness; faithfulness; self-control;

And as we spend more and more time with our Heavenly Father, in prayer, and reading His word; and worshipping Him; and just delighting in His presence... Holy Spirit will change your heart...

3.

What about category No.3?? My guess is, a fair few of us may have identified ourselves as being in category No.3. I **used** to be in category No.2. Naturally, I'm a very hard person. My mercy meter, would sit around about "0". But over the years, as I've gotten to know the Lord more and more, as His word cuts my heart, and I hand more and more of my life over to Him, Holy Spirit has been doing His work, to change my heart...

And I, who **once** used to have a mercy level of "0", tear up when the plight of the afflicted, is before me... The seriously ill and dyeing; The grieving husband who's just lost his wife; For those who are living in abject poverty; the abused wife; the abandoned child; The lonely and friendless; the persecuted church; the genuine refuge (fleeing a war-torn country).... – don't get me wrong – I still have "0" mercy for the lazy & disrespectful and for the self-entitled welfare bludger (I don't suffer fools lightly)...

But more than ever, my heart is being moved, for those who, from their pit of despair, humbly cry out for mercy... Only God can change a heart like He's changed mine.

But sometimes, I feel for someone. And I know the Lord is moving me to do something about it, or for them.

- I might be feeling, "I need to donate some money to this appeal", But something else (inside of me) says "No Michael, you need that money. You've got a house to pay off".
- I might be feeling, "The Godly thing to do, would be to invite that person home for lunch, and let them experience the love of a family."... But something else says "That's going to be awkward. He's nothing like you. He's got issues – it might be mental health; or addictions; or he's just socially inept – he won't fit in – best not to give an invite."
- Or I might be feeling, "The Lord wants me to share my faith with that person. They're unloved, and He wants to bring them into His love"... But then something else inside of me says, "Somebody else will be better suited to get alongside that person. I'm not very experienced. I don't really have a connection with them. God will use me, to work with people who are more like me..."

And so we have the urging of the Spirit, and we crush it...

And this is what this whole section of James, is speaking to. If you identify a bit with category No.3, James is the book for you.

^{v12} 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.

Stop crushing mercy. Let it triumph. Go with it. Live it. Live the law of liberty. The Lord has shown you mercy. He is putting mercy in your heart. Stop crushing it. The Lord doesn't give us endless mercy so we can control it and meter it out in small doses when it suits, and hide it when we don't want it.

I have to stop justifying, my being unmerciful... And so do you... And stop telling yourself it's legalism. It's not legalism – it's the law of liberty – it's what living by the Spirit is all about. The Holy Spirit tells you inside, what is the right thing to do. And living by the Spirit, is to be obedient to the Spirit, and do it... To, when you feel mercy, express mercy.

I heard someone talking the other day about a need for us to 'repent of good works'... What a load of rubbish – could there be a greater lie from Satan? The Holy Spirit urges us to express our faith by doing good works, and He expects our obedience. The Holy Spirit urges us to express mercy, and He expects our obedience. There is no mercy in judgment, for those who do not give mercy.

I think we've gone far enough for today (seam's as it's Christmas holidays). But I haven't yet shared everything I believe the Lord wants to say to us on this. And so next week, we're going to put legs on it. James gives us some very

practical examples, of what it means to **be** “merciful”. It’s not just academic. It’s not just how you feel inside. The Christian faith, is a believing faith, expressed in our doing... And so next week, we’re going to have some very practical examples of being merciful.

Let’s pray.

ⁱ “the emotion roused by contact with an affliction which comes **undeservedly** on someone else” H.-Esser, H., 1986. Mercy, Compassion L. Coenen, E. Beyreuther, & H. Bietenhard, eds. *New international dictionary of New Testament theology*.