

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32; Matthew 15:(10-20), 21-28; Genesis 45:1-15; Psalm 133; Isaiah 56:1, 6-8; Psalm 67

Central Point: Holiness is God's mercy so deeply received that it becomes visible through us.

Pulse Sentence: Mercy received. Mercy made visible.

Opener: What Happens to Mercy? [Slide 2]

Friends, what happens to God's mercy after it reaches us?

We know what it is to ask for mercy, right? We ask when we have failed, when life has become larger than our strength, or when someone we love is hurting and we cannot make it better. Sometimes all we have left is, "Lord, help me."

And God is merciful.

But is mercy's work finished when we have been forgiven, comforted, or carried through?

The Scriptures for today say no. God's mercy comes to us, but it does not stop with us. Grace reconciles what has been wounded, forms a shared life, and gathers those standing at the edge. This is the grace that carries God's blessing into the world.

This morning, I want us to hold onto one truth: [Slide3]

Holiness is God's mercy so deeply received that it becomes visible through us.

Scripture Reading

If you have your Bibles open to Romans chapter 11 and Matthew 15... Here, Romans places everyone beneath mercy. While, Matthew exposes the heart, and then shows Christ's mercy crossing a boundary to make a suffering daughter whole.

Read Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32 and Matthew 15:10-20, 21-28.

Friends, Romans gives us the ground beneath our feet, and Matthew puts a face on it.

Paul is wrestling with a painful question: Has God rejected Israel? His answer is clear: "*By no means!*" (Romans 11:1 NIV). God remains faithful. "*For God's gifts and his call are irrevocable*" (Romans 11:29 NIV). [Slide 4]

Then Paul brings both Israel and the Gentiles to the same ground: "*For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all*" (Romans 11:32 NIV).

No one stands before God because of a superior record. No one can look at another person and say, "*You need mercy, but I have earned my place.*" **The ground beneath every Christian is mercy.**

[Slide 5] That is where Grace (holiness) begins. Prevenient grace awakens us. Justifying grace reconciles us to God. Sanctifying grace changes what flows from the heart. Missional grace carries holy love outward. It is one movement of God before it is ever a movement from us. We can then say:

| **Mercy received... Mercy made visible.**

Matthew Gives Mercy a Face

Earlier in the chapter, Jesus exposed a religion that could honor God with its lips while withholding care from one's parents (Mat 5:3–6). Religious tradition had become a way of sounding devoted while avoiding embodied love (Mat 15:7–9). That is why Jesus turns our attention toward the heart. A cleansed heart does not merely speak differently; it loves differently.

[Slide 6] With that warning still in the air, Matthew takes us beyond the familiar boundaries of Israel, into the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman comes to Jesus. Matthew uses an old and loaded name for her. Before she says a word, the story marks her as an outsider.

But she has heard enough about Jesus to cry, "*Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly*" (Matthew 15:22 NIV).

At first, Jesus is silent. The disciples urge Him to send her away. Jesus names the covenantal order of His mission: Israel first. Then comes the hard saying about the children's bread and the dogs.

We should not rush past the discomfort of this exchange. **The historical boundary between Israel and the nations is real. The tension is real.** So is the desperation of a mother who will not leave her daughter without hope.

[Slide 7] She kneels and reduces her prayer to three words: "*Lord, help me!*" (Matthew 15:25 NIV).

She makes no claim to status. [Slide 8] She entrusts herself to the abundance of His mercy: "*Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table*" (Matthew 15:27 NIV).

She believes that even what overflows from Jesus is enough.

Jesus answers, “*Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted*” (Matthew 15:28 NIV). Her daughter is healed at that moment.

Romans tells us that everyone stands beneath mercy. Matthew shows mercy crossing a boundary and restoring a life. The mercy of Christ does not remain an idea; it becomes visible in a daughter made whole.

Her faith did not manufacture mercy or earn it. Her faith acknowledged her need and trusted what only Christ could provide. (You guys get that? Faith and Trust go together.)

The Gospel of Matthew is full of God’s mercy. In the next passage, Jesus supplies bread and places it into His disciples’ hands to distribute. They do not create the bread. They receive what Christ gives and carry it to the hungry.

[Slide 9] Christ supplies what we cannot create. Faith receives what it cannot earn. Holiness carries Christ’s mercy outward.

| **Holiness is God's mercy so deeply received that it becomes visible through us.**

The Old Testament Confirms the Point [Slide 10]

The Old Testament readings bear witness to the same movement of grace.

Genesis 45:1-15, Joseph stands before the brothers who betrayed him. Remember the story: His brothers had sold him into slavery years earlier (**Genesis 37**). And eventually Joseph became Pharaoh’s chief administrator (**Genesis 41:39–44**). Back in Canaan, famine forced the brothers to travel to Egypt for grain, and they did not recognize Joseph... He now possesses enough power to punish them, but he refuses to let the wound determine what will flow through him. He does not pretend the betrayal was good. He sees that God's preserving mercy has been at work even through what was evil, and that mercy becomes visible when he draws his frightened brothers near.

Our passage in Psalm 133 created a word picture of oil and dew flowing downward. The meaning: Unity is received from God before it is practiced by God's people. In Isaiah, he sees foreigners gathered into covenant worship. While Psalm 67 sees God's blessing reaching the nations. **Again and again, grace refuses to remain where it first arrives.** Mercy moves toward reconciliation, shared life, welcome, and blessing.

| **Mercy received. Mercy made visible.**

Illustration: Look Downstream [Slide 11]

A river cannot carry water it has not received. And a river does not hold back what enters; it carries water through fields, beside towns, into dry ground, and toward distant places.

One way to discover whether the water is truly flowing is to look downstream. Is anything living there?

That river is like the Flow of Holiness. Christ is the living source. Grace reaches us through His presence. The riverbanks hold the water in, that is like our shared practices: worship, prayer, Scripture, confession, discernment, and life together. Then the grace we have received travels downstream as reconciliation, mercy, service, and public witness.

Holiness is not a ladder we climb; it is a river we enter.

Paul Anderson writes that God's presence does more than help us see redemptive possibilities. God begins to use us as active means of His saving and healing work. We do not merely develop a theology of presence; it is what we become.¹

[Slide 12] So, the question is not simply, "Have I received mercy?" The question is, "What is living downstream from me?"

What flows from us when we are wounded, interrupted, disappointed, or afraid? Jesus has already told us that what comes from the heart reveals what is forming the person (**Mat 7:16–20, and 12:33–35**).

Mercy becomes visible when a parent listens before reacting. It becomes visible when a church refuses to define someone by the worst season of their life. It becomes visible when we tell the truth without contempt, set a boundary without hatred, or take the first faithful step toward reconciliation.

We cannot control what another person chooses. We cannot make someone apologize, understand, or change. But by the sanctifying grace of Christ, the wound does not have to decide what flows through us.

| Holiness is God's mercy so deeply received that it becomes visible through us.

A Testimony of Truth: Elizabeth Fry at Newgate [Slide 13]

Our Friends' history gives us a testimony of what this looks like.

¹Paul N. Anderson, "A Theology of Presence," *Evangelical Friend* (1993): 4.

In 1813, the Quaker minister Stephen Grellet visited Newgate Prison in London. He found women and children crowded into filthy, dark cells. Some slept on stone without bedding. Babies shivered in the cold. He carried what he had witnessed to Elizabeth Fry.²

Elizabeth did not begin with a public campaign or a polished plan. She began with the need directly in front of her.

The prison governor warned her not to enter the women's side. He considered it dangerous. Elizabeth was frightened, but she entered. She clothed babies, comforted mothers, and prayed among the prisoners.³ She would return. Mercy took form. [Slide 14]

Years later, Elizabeth wrote that prison ministry must be entered "in the spirit, not of judgment, but of mercy." She warned the visitor never to approach another person with the secret thought, "I am more holy than thou."⁴

Do you hear Romans 11 underneath her words?

That is a testimony of truth. The inward work of Christ became an outward pattern of life.

| **Mercy received. Mercy made visible.**

Gospel Convergence [Slide 15]

Friends, now we can see the whole movement.

Mercy begins in the compassionate heart of God. Jesus does not merely teach us that God is compassionate; He makes the compassion of God visible. He sees suffering, enters human need, and moves toward those who cannot rescue themselves.

But Christ's compassion does more than comfort us from the outside. Christ, who is the Truth, penetrates and cleanses the heart.

Religious tradition can become something we keep while remaining unchanged. **But Truth is something that keeps us.** The living Christ exposes our pride, resentment, hypocrisy, and arrogance. Jesus cleanses and forms life in us - that is holy participation: Christ remains the supplier; we become distributors of the mercy we have received.

Compassion is the source. Truth performs the inward work. Holy participation carries mercy outward. Worship is the final overflow.

²Quakers in the World, "Elizabeth Fry," accessed August 13, 2026.

³Quakers in Britain, "The Angel of Prisons: Elizabeth Fry," Teach Peace Pack (2013), 1.

⁴Britain Yearly Meeting, Quaker Faith & Practice, 5th ed., sec. 23.98.

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Holy Response and Open Worship

So, the question is not whether God has shown us mercy. He has.

The question is whether His mercy will stop with us.

Is there a wound in which mercy needs to become reconciliation?

Is there someone standing beyond a boundary whom Christ is asking you to see?

Is there a concern that has remained a feeling, but now needs to take faithful form?

Do not begin by trying to make yourself impressive. Return to the headwaters. Receive again the mercy of Jesus. Let Him cleanse what is flowing from the heart. Then ask Him to show you where that mercy is meant to become visible.

As we enter Open Worship, let this be our prayer:

Lord Jesus, let the mercy I have received become visible through me.

Mercy received. Mercy made visible.

Scripture Readings:

In Romans chapters 9–11 addresses the painful question of Israel's place now that Gentiles are entering the people of God. Paul denies that God has abandoned Israel. Because he himself is an Israelite from Benjamin, which is evidence of God's continuing faithfulness.

Romans 11:1-2, *"I ask then: Did God reject his people? **By no means!** I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew..."* Pause there and skip down to verse 29, here Paul is warning Gentile Christians against spiritual superiority. They stand by mercy, not by merit.

Romans 11:29-32, *"for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all."*

Here in Matthew, Jesus is not rejecting ordinary cleanliness. He is challenging a religious system that confuses external ritual purity with inward holiness.

Matthew 15:10-20, *"Jesus called the crowd to him and said, 'Listen and understand. What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.' Then the disciples came to him and asked, 'Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?' He replied, 'Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.' Peter said, 'Explain the parable to us.' 'Are you still so dull?' Jesus asked them. 'Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.'"*

Matthew 15:21-28, *"Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.' Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, 'Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.' The woman came and knelt before him. 'Lord, help me!' she said. He replied, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.' She replies, 'Yes, it is, Lord. Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.' Then Jesus said to her, 'Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.' And her daughter was healed at that moment."*

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