



## **Week 6: He is Rich in Mercy**

Based on “Gentle & Lowly” by Dane Ortlund  
NCAC Adult Sunday School  
February 20, 2022

**What would have to be true of someone in order for us to call them “rich”?**

**COURSE GOAL:** To reflect on not just what Jesus has done or is doing, but on who he *is*—and to then find encouragement, strength and rest as we delight in the deepest affections of Christ for his people.

**The only place in Scripture where Christ describes his heart:** *“<sup>28</sup>Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:28-29)*

**We’ve seen this truth reflected in multiple aspects of Christ’s work and character:**

- **Christ is now our sympathetic high priest.** (*Hebrews 4:15*)
- **Christ will never cast out his own.** (*John 6:37*)
- **Christ is presently interceding for us.** (*Hebrews 7:25*)
- **Christ is our Advocate.** (*1 John 2:1*)
- **Christ is also our Friend.** (*Matthew 11:19*)

**We’ve seen that what Scripture teaches regarding the Holy Spirit, the Father, and even God as revealed in the Old Testament is all consistent with what we’re told regarding the heart of Christ:**

- **Regarding God the Holy Spirit:** *John 16:13-14*
- **Regarding God the Father:** *John 14:9*
- **Regarding God as revealed in the Old Testament:** *Exodus 34:6*

**We’ve also seen that Scripture teaches our view of God’s love and mercy is often too small:**

*<sup>7</sup>“Let the wicked forsake his way,  
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;  
let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him,  
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

*<sup>8</sup>For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.”*

*<sup>9</sup>For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
**so are my ways higher than your ways**  
and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:7-9)*

**TODAY’S FOCUS:** Consider three passages from Paul’s letters that correct potential errors regarding how we—even as believers in Christ—may view God’s mercy.

**Potential Error: We fail to appreciate how rich God is in mercy.** Despite all Christ has said and done, even as believers we often continue to project our own human nature onto God. The result is that many of us have a diminished view of God's grace, love and compassion. Therefore, we must continually go to Scripture and let it correct our thoughts as it reveals the magnitude of God's rich and lavish mercy.

<sup>1</sup> *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

<sup>4</sup> **But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,** <sup>5</sup> *even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...* (Ephesians 2:1-6, ESV)

**What stands out to you in verses 1-3 about the hopelessness of our prior estate without Christ?**

**If God is “rich in mercy” (v. 4) how should this impact the way we relate to God?**

**Perhaps you've had a hard life with significant challenges. As you consider your life, you struggle to see evidence of God's mercy toward you. Where should you look for proof of God's mercy toward you?**

“If my life is any evidence of the mercy of God in Christ,’ you might think, ‘I’m not impressed.’ To you I say, the evidence of Christ’s mercy toward you is *not* your life. The evidence of his mercy toward you *is his life*—[He was] mistreated, misunderstood, betrayed, abandoned...In your place. If God sent his own Son to walk through the valley of condemnation, rejection, and hell, you can trust him as you walk through your own valleys on your way to heaven.” (*Gentle and Lowly*, p. 179)

**Perhaps you feel that you've taken advantage of God's grace and squandered His mercy. Knowing how you've lived, you're hesitant to approach God again. What do you need to remember about God?**

“Do you know what Jesus does with those who squander his mercy? He pours out more mercy. *God is rich in mercy. That's the whole point...* That God is rich in mercy means that your regions of deepest shame and regret are not hotels through which divine mercy passes but homes in which divine mercy abides. It means the things about you that make you cringe most, make him hug hardest...It means our haunting shame is not a problem for him, but the very thing he loves most to work with...It means on that day when we stand before him, quietly, unhurriedly, we will weep with relief, shocked at how impoverished a view of his mercy-rich heart we had.” (*G&L*, pp. 179-180)

**Potential Error: We function as legalists.** Another struggle we have as believers is that despite all we know about the Gospel, our hearts still naturally bend toward the false belief that we are somehow made right with God based on what we *do* and that our obedience to God strengthens his love for us.

“There are two ways to live the Christian life. You can live it either *for* the heart of Christ or *from* the heart of Christ. You can live *for* the smile of God or *from* it. *For* a new identity as a son or daughter of God or *from* it. *For* your union with Christ or *from* it.” (*Gentle and Lowly, p. 181*)

**Practically, what’s the difference between these two ways of living?**

**Galatians 3:1,3:** *“<sup>1</sup> O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?...<sup>3</sup> Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (ESV)*

**Galatians 5:1,4:** *“<sup>1</sup> For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery...<sup>4</sup> You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.” (ESV)*

**Galatians 3:10-11:** *<sup>10</sup> For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” <sup>11</sup> Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” (ESV)*

**How would you explain what the above verses are attempting to warn us of?**

**Though we all tend to think we’re avoiding the error of the Galatians, legalism remains our natural bent. Where, then, do we see in believers today the subtle, chronic tendency to strengthen our standing before God based on how we are performing spiritually?**

*“To the extent that you are clinging to any vestiges of self-righteousness or are putting any confidence in your own spiritual attainments, to that degree you are not living, by the grace of God...We cannot stand, as it were, with one foot on grace and the other on our works of merit...If you are trusting to any degree in your own morality or religious attainments, or if you believe God will somehow recognize any of your good works as merit toward salvation, you need to seriously consider if you are truly a Christian.” (Jerry Bridges)*

**How can we avoid the error of the Galatians and find true rest in Christ?**

**Potential Error: We doubt God forgives our present sins.** Yet a third struggle we have as believers is that though we may believe God forgave all our *past* sins when we first put our faith in Christ, we often struggle to believe that God *continues* to just as freely put away all the sins we commit as believers.

**Do you have a harder time believing God forgives our present sins than believing God forgave our past sins? Why or why not?**

*“<sup>6</sup> For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— <sup>8</sup> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup> More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” (Romans 5:6-11, ESV)*

**How would you explain the inner logic of this passage?**

“What’s the ultimate point Paul is driving at in Romans 5:6–11? Not God’s past work, mainly. Paul’s deepest burden is our present security, *given that past work*. He raises Christ’s past work to drive home this point: If God did that back then, when you were so screwy and had zero interest in him, then what are you worried about now?” (*Gentle and Lowly, p. 193*)

**How should the logic of Romans 5:6-11 affect our daily lives as disciples of Christ?**

**What does repentance look like for a Christian? Is it any different from the way we repented when we first put our faith in Christ? If so, how?**

**WATCH VIDEO: SESSION 9**

“God has already executed everything needed to secure your eternal happiness, and he did that while you were an orphan. Nothing can now un-child you. Not even you. *Those in Christ are eternally imprisoned within the tender heart of God*. We will be less sinful in the next life than we are now, but we will not be any more secure in the next life than we are now. If you are united to Christ, you are as good as in heaven already.” (*Gentle and Lowly, pp. 194-195*)