

Love, Mercy and Forgiveness

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Let's look back at some of the things we have gone through in our lives, especially with the churches. We will begin to see something because we're going to touch a little bit on Job, because we need *love, mercy and forgiveness*. Without it, life becomes very difficult.

After Jesus taught His disciples to be persistent in their prayers, He says, Luke 18:9: "And to some who trusted in **themselves**... [they were righteous] (What happens?): ...and despised others... [Would you say there's a lack of love there?] ...He also spoke this parable: 'Two men went up into the temple... [coming before God] ...the one was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed with **himself**... [yet, he was coming to God, even coming to the Temple of God] ...in this manner: "God, I thank You that I am not like other men—..." (vs 9-11). *I'm better!*

Notice that everything that he said here was something that God required. So, knowing what God requires is good, but then if you forget that it comes from God that's not good, even though you're in God's presence.

"...extortioners... [no one ought to be an extortioner] ...unrighteous... [I'm righteous] ...adulterers—or even as this tax collector.... [notice what he did, he was really zealous]: ...I fast twice in the week, *and* I give a tithe *of* everything that I gain.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat himself *on the* chest, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner'" (vs 11-13).

Every one of us has to come this point of knowing that we're sinners. Also, the truth of it is that even though some people may think they're perfect in the letter of the Law, *spiritual perfection is another whole dimension*.

Have you ever gone to a church where you felt like it was full of Pharisees? *Yes!* Some churches say, 'Unless you come to church with a suit and tie and a certain kind of shoe, you can't be admitted.' You know what James said in James 2?

My brethren, if there comes into your synagogue a poor man wearing clothes that obviously were unacceptable and there comes in a rich man and he's got his jewels of gold and all decked out and you say to the poor man, 'Go back in the corner,' and you say to the rich man, 'Come up here, brother.'

James said you've sinned because *you're judging the heart by the outward appearance!*

Let's go back and look at a tremendous Pharisee: Job. Remember, I asked you what was his sin? He had a lot of sins; not just a few, he had a lot. He knew a lot about God. He talked about God. He gave God a lot of credit. But he also wanted to *go to court* with God. He was blameless in the letter of the Law—*outward*. But what was inside?

What is God interested in? *He's interested in the heart!* That means the mind, the thoughts and everything about you. Look at Job. This is quite an exciting book when you read it and you know what to look for. I think Job 29 highlights nearly everything. Everything that he did here was in accordance with the will of God. But if you do things that are in accordance with the will of God *without loving God and without really worshiping God*... Oh, you give God the credit, but you give yourself high marks.

Let's see what he said. Here he is, now just picture it. After days of talking back and forth with his three friends, having been afflicted with boils from head to toe, having a potsherd to scrape off the boils, let the pus run down, throw ashes on you to kind of keep them away. The maggots are now breeding everywhere, they love pus. You look down at your flesh and you say, 'Look, the worms are eating me up.' Poor guy, thin and gaunt, probably his complexion black and everything.

Job 29:1: "And Job continued speaking, and said, 'Oh, that I were as in months past, as *in* the days when God watched over me; When His lamp shined upon my head; and when I walked *through* darkness by His light; as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God *was* upon my tabernacle; when the Almighty was yet with me, *and* my children were around me'" (vs 1-5).

Remember, he lost his sons and his daughters and all the things that took place. Number one lesson with all of that: *you can't save anybody, not even your own kin, only God can!*

Verse 6: "When I washed my steps with butter, and the rock pressed out rivers of oil for me. When I went out to the gate of the city; *when* I prepared my seat in the square!" (vs 6-7) *There was Job's seat, the seat of wisdom!*

Verse 8: "The young men saw me and hid themselves; and the aged arose *and* stood up... [they gave me honor] ...The rulers refrained from talking, and laid their hands on their mouths.... [because my

speech was so much better] ...The noble's voice was subdued, and their tongue clung to the roof of their mouth. When the ear heard me then it blessed me....” (vs 8-11). *Oh, Job, that's so good. Oh, what a marvelous thing, Job!*

“...And when the eye saw me it gave witness to me.... [there goes a man of God] ...For I delivered the poor who cried for help... [should do that] ...and the fatherless who *had* none to help. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me; and I called the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me... [having clothed him, how good he was] ...my justice *was* like a robe and a diadem” (vs 11-14).

Verse 15: “I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I *was* a father to the poor; and the cause, which I did not know, I searched out. I broke the fangs of the wicked, and plucked the prey out of his teeth. Then I said, ‘I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply *my* days like the sand.’ My root *was* spread out to the waters, and the dew lay all night upon my branch. My glory *was* fresh in me... [I'm here rotting away] ...and my bow was renewed in my hand. They listened to me, and waited, and kept silent at my counsel. After my words they did not speak again; and my speech dropped on them. And they waited for me like the rain; and they opened their mouth wide *as* for the latter rain. I smiled on them *when* they did not believe; and the light of my countenance they did not cast down. I chose out their way, and sat as chief; and I lived like a king in the army, as one *who* comforts the mourners” (vs 15-25).

Elihu gave a lot of good answers, and the moral of the story is that *you can have 'religion' based on what God says, but unless you have God you turn what you do into your idol and your own righteousness!* There are a lot of people in the world that work hard. They discipline themselves, they write books and can give speeches. They're counselors, just like Job.

Job 35:1: “And Elihu answered and said, ‘Do you think this to *be* right, you *that* say, “My righteousness *is* more than God's”?’” (vs 1-2).

That's why Job said, ‘I wish that God would come down and speak to me.’ *Well, God did! And Job's answer was considerably different after God got done working with him!*

Let's see that without love, without mercy, without forgiveness, what do you have? Even though you may have some things without God?

Ezekiel 14:1: “And some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. And the Word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, these

men have set up their idols in their hearts...’” (vs 1-3). *They worshipped themselves*, or they had some other thing that they wanted besides God.

“...and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I at all be inquired of by them?” (v 3). *This is what happened to Job!*

On the outside Job was blameless, even Satan couldn't find anything wrong with him. But it took all this—what Job went through—so that he could see the Truth of God! So, here's what happens: though people may have an exterior façade about them, that they're doing the will of God.

Verse 4: “Therefore, speak to them, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Every man of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and comes to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him according to the multitude of his idols.”’”

Did God do that with Job? *Yes, He did!* There came a whirlwind and God said, ‘Job, you wanted to speak to me? I am here!’ Basically, we can sum it up this way: You need to have, first of all, *the love of God!* That's what has to be first! Yes, the other things we need to do.

What did Jesus say when the apostles came to Him and said, ‘Lord, increase our faith.’ Jesus said, ‘When you have done all you're commanded to do, you are unprofitable servants.’

That sounds kind of tough! *NO!* All the commandments of God are necessary, but the commandments of God, without loving God, without having the first goal in what you're doing—which is to love God...

Let's see how we are to love God. This is what happens in the world. They have a false love.

- Why do you do what you do? *I keep the Sabbath because God said so!*
that's fine
- What is your relationship with God?
✓ *I obey Him!*
that's fine, you should
✓ *I despise evil!*
that's fine, you should

But the greatest thing you can do is to have the love of God, and that has to be within!

Mark 12:28: “And one of the scribes who had come up *to Him*, after hearing them reasoning together *and* perceiving that He answered them well, asked Him, ‘Which is *the* first commandment of all?’ Then Jesus answered him, ‘*The* first of all the commandments *is*, “Hear, O Israel. Our one God is

the Lord, the Lord. And **you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength...**” (vs 28-30).

What does that require of every individual? *Not just what you do on the outside!* Everything that we’ve talked about here:

- **“...with all your heart...”** *is on the inside!*
- **“...with all your soul...”** *is your whole physical being!*
- **with all your mind...”**—*have your mind oriented with the thoughts of God, the Word of God, the judgments of God, etc!*
- **“...with all your strength...”**

“...This *is* the first commandment” (v 30).

You’re going to find that the entire Bible is based upon:

1. loving God
2. loving neighbor
3. loving the brethren

As we come into the Church, we have a greater requirement of love among the brethren. To love each other as Christ has loved us! *That’s quite a requirement!*

Verse 31: “And *the* second *is* like this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Let’s see the parallel account, and see what’s important with this so that we understand what we are talking about! The reason that God has given all His commandments is based upon love.

Matthew 22:40—after going through the whole account, Matthew says: **“On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”**

In other words, loving God and loving neighbor is the whole basis for the Law and the Prophets. We don’t want to get hung up on ourselves. We don’t want to get hung up on what we are doing. That’s what happened with Job.

Let’s see what else God says that He wants. Here’s a good lesson for us:

Matthew 9:10: “Then it came to pass, when Jesus sat down *to eat* in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And after seeing *this*, the Pharisees said to His disciples, ‘Why does your Master eat with tax collectors and sinners?’” (vs 10-11).

- Don’t you know that these are evil people?

- Don’t you realize what is going on?
- Why don’t you come with us, we’re the righteous ones.

We’ll take a look at one of the suppers that Jesus had with the Pharisees.

Verse 12: “But when Jesus heard *it*, He said to them, ‘Those who are strong do not have need of a physician, but those who are sick. Now go and learn what this means: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.”... [first you have love and then you have mercy] ...For I did not come to call *the* righteous... [those like Job who were self righteous] ...but sinners to repentance” (vs 12-13).

Luke 11:37: “Now, while He was speaking, a certain Pharisee asked Him to dine with him; and He went in *and* sat down.... [notice how they look to the exterior of everything] ...But the Pharisee seeing *this*, wondered why He had not first washed before dinner. Then the Lord said to him, ‘Now, you Pharisees... [notice how He talked to him]: ...cleanse the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are full of greediness and wickedness. Fools, *did* not He Who made the outside also make the inside? Rather, give alms *from* the things that are within... [love, joy, mercy, peace] ...and behold, all things are clean to you. But woe to you, Pharisees! For you pay tithes of mint and rue and every herb, **but you pass over the judgment and the love of God...**” (vs 37-42).

If you have righteousness *outside*, but not the love of God *inside* you are unmerciful. ***God wants mercy; God wants forgiveness!*** That’s why Christ came.

So, He says: “...It is obligatory *for you* to do these things, and not to set aside those *lesser things*. Woe to you, Pharisees! For you love the chief seat in the synagogues and the salutations in the marketplaces. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are as unseen tombs, and men who walk over *them* do not know *it*” (vs 42-44). *He didn’t hold back anything!*

Verse 45: “And one of the doctors of the law answered *and* said to Him, ‘Teacher, *by* saying these things You are also insulting us.’ And He said, ‘**Woe to you also, doctors of the law!** For you weigh men down *with* burdens heavy to bear, but you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. **Woe to you!** For you build the tombs of the prophets, whom your fathers killed. Therefore, you are bearing witness and consenting to the works of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs” (vs 45-48). *Jesus let them know! No mercy.*

Matt. 12—where He told them again, finding physical fault. Listen, the key is this. ***If you love God and have the Spirit of God and you are converted inside, then the outside will take care of itself!*** They did the same thing when the disciples were plucking and eating grain. So, He told them:

Matthew 12:7: “Now, if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless.”

- Christ came to bring mercy
- Christ came to bring forgiveness

Remember what they said when He healed the man who was the paraplegic and they had four of them let him down right in front of Jesus when He was speaking? He said, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’ The Pharisees said, ‘Who but God can forgive sin?’ He said, ‘What’s easier to say, pick up your bed and walk, or your sins are forgiven?’ Besides He was God in the flesh so He could say ‘your sins are forgiven.’ So, learn what this means.

Let’s see about *mercy and forgiveness*. This is where prayer comes in. We look at what we’ve been doing and we see that there have been sins. What does God expect? Will God hear? There are certain Psalms that are really good for us to understand. Remember that *God has forgiven us* whenever you’re dealing with people and their problems and difficulties. Because when people begin to understand about sin they don’t understand how difficult it is for human beings to quit sinning and so they wonder if they’re going to be forgiven. This is a good prayer to help them with. This is how we need to pray, not like the Pharisee that we saw there.

Psalm 86:1: “Bow down Your ear, O LORD, answer me, for I am poor and needy.... [Not like Job. ‘Look at all the good things I did.’] ...Preserve my soul, for I am Holy; O You my God, save Your servant who trusts in You. Be merciful to me...” (vs 1-3).

What did Jesus say in the beatitudes? *‘Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy!’* All right, take the opposite: ***Cursed are the unmerciful for they shall not receive mercy!***

Verse 3: “Be merciful to me O LORD, for I cry unto You all day long. Rejoice the soul of Your servant, for to You, O LORD, do I lift up my soul... [all of this is motivated out of loving God] ...**For You, LORD, are good and ready to forgive...**” (vs 3-5). ***Upon repentance He is ready to forgive!***

What did Jesus say if you’re dealing with your brothers and he sins seven times against you?

What are you to do? He turns to you and says, ‘I repent!’ *You are to forgive him!*

“...and rich in mercy to all those who call upon You. Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer, and attend to the voice of my supplications. In the day of my trouble I will call upon You, for You will answer me” (vs 5-7).

God will hear your prayer. That’s why repentance is so important. The whole process of conversion is this: ***God is changing our heart and our mind, converting them! It takes love and mercy and forgiveness!***

Psalm 103 is a tremendous Psalm. Does God forgive all your sins? *Yes!* But God never forgives *future* sin because it hasn’t been committed, yet. This is why in the daily prayer we ask God to forgive us our sins. As long as we’re in the flesh, guess what? *We’re going to sin!* How many here were perfect all day yesterday? Notice I didn’t raise my hand very high.

The whole Psalm here is the whole story of *love, mercy and forgiveness!* When you do something really, really wrong and sometimes you have big bloopers and sometimes you have little bloopers and sometimes you just plain mess up. This Psalm is a Psalm of great comfort to you and a promise and hope.

Psalm 103:1: “Bless the LORD, O my soul and all that is within me... [Does that agree with what Jesus said about loving God? *Yes, it does!*] ...bless His Holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits... [Does He not give us many benefits? *Yes, indeed!*] ...Who forgives **all** your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases” (vs 1-3).

Notice what God is doing. Those of us who have the Spirit of God have the greatest thing that we can receive in this life. It doesn’t come through a man. It comes through Jesus Christ. That is the Spirit of the Father and Christ ***in you*** because God loves you, has forgiven your sins, has blotted them out. That’s the greatest thing because God wants to change us. God wants us to be in His Kingdom, to be in His Family.

Verse 4: “Who redeems your life from destruction... [*The wages of sin is death*. Is that not destruction? *Yes, indeed!*] ...Who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your desires with good things; your youth is renewed like the eagle’s. The LORD executes righteousness and judgment for all who are oppressed. He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel. The LORD is

merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in mercy” (vs 4-8)—*and most of us are not!*

- we have to learn
- we have to grow in this
- we have to overcome

Verse 9: “He will not always chasten, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities, for as the heavens are high above the earth...” (vs 9-11).

This is something that we cannot fathom. You know the more that they find about what the universe is all about, the more awesome God really is.

I heard a little-known fact the other day that really struck me. Every human body has about 10-trillion cells. That blew me away. Think of that! Think of all the work that God has done for us, just physically, let alone spiritually. What does God want to give you mentally and spiritually? *The mind of Christ through the love of God!*

Verse 11: “For as the heavens are high above the earth, so is His mercy toward those who fear Him.” *That obviously conotates love!* Does God get rid of your transgressions? *Yes, He does!*

Verse 12: “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

He does it all *free*. All He requires is ***your total love to Him*** in exchange for eternal life. He took all the pain and He took all the suffering through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and what He went through for it. We’ll cover that leading up to the Passover.

Verse 13: “As a father has compassion upon his children, so the LORD has compassion upon those who fear Him, For He knows our frame... [Yes, He made us!] ...He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes, for the wind passes over it, and it is gone; and its place shall know it no more” (vs 13-16).

That’s the way that human beings are. All of us who have been in the Church for a while, we’re another Sabbath closer to the end of our lives!

- hopefully, we’re learning some wisdom
- hopefully, we’re learning some love
- hopefully, we’re being converted

With God helping us, we will be!

Verse 17: “But the steadfast love... [or *mercy* because *mercy comes from love*] ...of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting... [conditional] ...upon those who fear Him, and His righteousness is unto children’s children, To those who keep His covenant, and to those who remember His precepts to do them” (vs 17-18).

Yes, God loves the world, but not with the love that He loves those who He has called and given His Spirit to. *He has given His Spirit!* Christ has died for the sins of all mankind, but now is not the time that it applies to everyone. Now is the time it applies to us and His love *particularly to us* through His Spirit. He is called ‘Our Father.’ He is there *ready to forgive*. He is there *desiring mercy* to give to you and then you to those that you know.

There are times for correction, like with children, yes, that’s true. There are times for correction for adults—*us*—yes, that’s true. If we let God’s Spirit lead us and let His Spirit guide us and let His Word correct us, that’s the easiest way of receiving correction. We don’t have to go through what Job went through. God blessed him in the end, but I just cannot imagine the affliction that Job had. That was something!

Let’s see how *God’s mercy* applies. This has to do with our prayer life. This is why praying every day is the key to your relationship with God, *every day!* Do you want God’s Spirit with you every day? *Of course you do!* Then the way you keep the Spirit flowing and the way you keep things going is by yielding to God.

Mark 11:21—after they saw the fig tree that Jesus cursed the day before: “Then Peter remembered *and* said to Him, ‘Look, Master! The fig tree that You cursed has dried up.’ And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Have faith *from* God’” (vs 21-22).

This is how you have everything. You receive ***the love of God, the mercy of God, the faith of God***. Read some of the things that the Apostle Paul wrote and he said it is the faith *of* Jesus Christ *in* us through the power of His Holy Spirit.

Verse 23: “For truly I say to you, whoever shall say to this mountain, ‘Be taken away and be cast into the sea,’ and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he said will take place, he shall have whatever he shall say”—*if it is the will of God!* He says you pray, ‘Your will be done.’

Conversion:

- change of heart
- change of mind
developing

- love
- mercy
- faith
- hope
- endurance

and all of the characteristics of God! It's harder to move, change and convert the human mind than to move a mountain!

Verse 24: "For this reason I say to you, all the things that you ask *when* you are praying, believe that you will receive *them*, and *they* shall be given to you." What are the most important things? A car? a house? money? *No!*

- love
- faith
- hope
- mercy
- truth

Wait for the true riches of God!

There's a condition to it. We can't be like the Pharisee as we read; we can't be like Job bragging about what we do.

Verse 25: "But when you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive, so that your Father Who *is* in heaven may forgive you your offenses." *That's mighty important to do, brethren!*

Unfortunately, that's one of the big problems with the Churches of God and the people of God today. Wouldn't you say that's one of the biggest ones? There are some people who say, 'Why would I want to come to a Church of God where all I see is a bunch of fighting, squawking people after each other.' Why should it not be said: 'I want to come to this Church of God because everybody there loves each other.' Wouldn't that be much better? ***We can't change others, but we can change ourselves!*** This is why we need to pray for all of God's churches wherever they are, everywhere. And for the brethren that they will learn, grow, and change.

Could it be that we've been cutting ourselves off from God by not forgiving each other? There are some people who have been so turned off by the 'Jobian' attitudes of the Churches of God that they want nothing to do with the Church of God. I talked to a woman who came out of a Church of God where they had the commandments. That was correct, but there was no love, there was no mercy, there was no grace. Everybody was on edge and everybody judging everybody. That's not what God wants.

Does it cut us off from God? *Yes!* It's like just saying taking the lights here. Turn them down 60%. The light is still there, but it's not of much

benefit. So likewise, if we quench or squelch or grieve the Spirit of God by hateful, self-righteous attitudes this kills us.

Let's also see this reinforced. He says this many times. Everyone wants to have their sins forgiven.

Luke 11—Jesus teaching them how to pray. As I've covered before, but I'll just cover it again here, because you have a blessing and privilege. Be sure and go through the sermon series *How Jesus Reveals the Father*. It's revealed more in the Gospel and the Epistles of John than anyplace else in the Bible. Prayer is not just a formality to God. Prayer is the fellowship relationship between each one of us and God.

How do we start praying? There's not one thing that says *give me*. 'Our Father,' meaning everyone who has the Spirit of God; He is our Father. I want to show you something that is really fantastic. This is important for us to understand. Here's what Jesus told Mary Magdalene when she wanted to give Him a hug after He had been raised from the dead.

John 20:17: "Jesus said to her, 'Do not touch Me, because I have not yet ascended to My Father...'"

Listen carefully to what He says. I want you to understand the close relationship we need to have with God the Father and Jesus Christ, because *this is the whole heart and core of our relationship with God and why we are here*. If it were just to change the exterior behavior of what we are doing and we could join any organization that had discipline and things like that. ***God is doing a work in us!***

"...But **go to My brethren** and **tell them that I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God**" (v 17). *Keep that in mind when you are praying!*

This will help you with your prayers. Remember there are a lot of things that you need to pray every day until they are answered. Those are not vain repetitions. Those are necessary repetitions because you need to be persistent until the answer comes.

Luke 11:2: "And He said to them, 'When you pray, say, "Our Father Who *is* in heaven, hallowed be Your name...'"

- Your *thoughts are on God*
- You are *loving* God
- You are *praising* Him
- You are *worshipping* Him.

“...Your Kingdom come...” (v 2). *God’s rule in your life!* We know the Kingdom is coming. Yes, it is coming, but this is more particularly for God’s rule in our life.

That’s why it says: “...Your will be done... [in our lives] ...as in heaven, *so* also upon the earth” (v 2).

Now then it comes close to *give me*, but not *give me*, but *give us*, v 3: “Give **us** our bread as needed day-by-day; and forgive **us** our sins...” (vs 3-4).

Not only are we to ask for forgiveness for our sins, but ask for the forgiveness of others. Sometimes you have to keep praying until God works with the individual and opens their minds to see and to understand. In the meantime, you don’t retaliate against them. No, you pray for them. There is a condition to this:

“...as we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us; and lead us not into temptation, but rescue us from the evil one” (v 4).

(go to the next track)

Let’s see God’s *mercy, love and forgiveness* all combined in one prayer in Dan. 9. This is quite something! Once we have it in our mind the understanding that when we pray, and it’s to our Father, those prayers go to the throne of God in heaven above.

If you read the book of Revelation, the 24 elders have something to do with answering those prayers or managing them or whatever it is coming to God. Because it says that there was incense with the prayers of the saints on the golden altar. I think it’s really interesting in what is written in Dan. 9. Think of this: All the time that the Jews were in captivity in Babylon they knew it was going to be for 70 years. There were three invasions over a 20-year period. How do you figure it? *Daniel didn’t understand it until it was time* for the first wave of those to go back under the decree of Cyrus.

Daniel 9:2: “In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood by books the number of the years, which came according to the Word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet... [this also tells us he had the writings of Jeremiah] ...that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. And I set my face toward the LORD God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes” (vs 2-3).

So, there is time for fasting. There’s time for very serious things that need to be petitioned to God and those require that. Jesus said that difficult things do not come about except by prayer and fasting.

Verse 4: “And I prayed to the LORD my God and made my confession, and said, ‘O LORD, the **great and awesome** God...’”

Imagine how he felt. He came as a young man, as a captive to Babylon. Here he is an old man. God had given him these tremendous revelations and things, made him second in the kingdom of Babylon. Here he’s coming to God.

“...keeping the covenant and mercy to those who love Him... [loving God] ...and to those who keep His commandments.... [here’s the confession]: ...‘We have sinned...’” (vs 4-5).

Notice how this follows along very closely with the model prayer that Jesus gave. You might take that and lay it alongside here and analyze it.

“...and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, and have turned aside from Your commandments and from Your ordinances. Neither have we hearkened unto Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our rulers, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land” (vs 5-6). *That’s pretty much where we are right here in the United States today!*

Verse 7: “O LORD... [notice how he comes to God] ...righteousness *belongs* to You, but to us confusion of face, as at this day to the men of Judah and to the people of Jerusalem, and to all Israel who are near and who are afar off, through all the countries where You have driven them because they dealt treacherously with You.” **Sound a little like the Church today? Yes, indeed!**

Verse 8: “O Lord, confusion of face belongs to us, to our kings, to our rulers, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against You. To the LORD our God belong **mercies and forgivenesses** even though we have rebelled against Him” (vs 8-9).

When there is *confession and repentance* God always honors that, and God forgives. Look at how long they had left God but God received them back.

Verse 10: “Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God to walk in His Laws which He set before us by His servants the prophets. Yea, all Israel has transgressed Your Law, and have turned aside, so that they might not obey Your voice. Therefore the curse has been poured out upon us, and the oath that is written in the Law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against Him. And He has confirmed His words which He spoke against us and against our judges who judged us by bringing upon us a great evil, for under the whole heaven *it* has not been done as *it* has been done upon Jerusalem” (vs 10-12).

Always remember this: *God corrects His own first!* We can see many parallels in this in the life of the Church of God in our lifetime. But God always honors repentance.

Verse 13: “As *it is* written in the Law of Moses, all this evil has come upon us. Yet, we did not make our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your Truth.”

Isn't that an interesting phrase? *You have to turn from your sin before you understand Truth!* Why is that? *Because every way is right in a man's eyes!* You have to turn from them.

It's like I tell people when they don't know about the Sabbath and they still have questions. I give them the 4-week Sabbath challenge, which is this: You keep the Sabbath four weeks in a row and every Sabbath you spend a good portion of the day studying about the Sabbath in the Word of God, and then whatever else you want to study, too. Then you will see that man is not going to tell God, 'God, we're so good, we're going to change the day.' You will understand that if you keep the Sabbath, that's not *your* work, that's *God's* work. You will understand that *God will fellowship with us* on the Sabbath. God blesses those who assemble in His name in love and service to give them understanding, to comfort them.

Verse 14: “Therefore, the LORD did not hesitate concerning the evil that He brought upon us, for the LORD our God *is* righteous in all His works which He does, but we did not obey His voice. And now, O LORD our God, Who has brought Your people out from the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and has made a name for Yourself, as it is this day, we have sinned, we have done wickedly!” (vs 14-15).

Wouldn't that be something if something like this came officially out of Washington, D.C.? *Yes, indeed!*

Verse 16: “O LORD, I pray You, according to all Your righteousness, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem...”

Look at it today, what a pitiful, pitiful situation that is: hatred, blood, violence, war, killing, bombs, rockets. What a magnificent day it's going to be when Christ returns. Notice all of this confession of sin, and now he prays for God's mercies. Remember: *whenever there is repentance and confession of sins there is mercy! God does forgive, even long-standing sins.*

Verse 17: “And now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and cause Your face to shine upon

Your sanctuary that is desolate for the LORD'S sake. O my God, incline Your ear and hear. Open Your eyes and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name. For we do not present our supplications before You on account of our righteousnesses, but because of Your great mercies” (vs 17-18). *God wants:*

- love
- mercy
- forgiveness
- *mercy, not sacrifice*

Verse 19: “O LORD, hear; O LORD, forgive; O LORD, hearken and do. Do not delay, for Your own sake, O my God; for Your city and Your people are called by Your name.”

Then right while he was finishing that prayer the angel Gabriel came and gave him the 70-weeks prophecy of Jesus' coming. *Amazing how God answers!*

Verse 20: “And while I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin, and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the Holy mountain of God; Yea, while I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, came to me, about the time of the evening sacrifice” (vs 20-21).

That's quite a thing! This is the prayer we need to pray for God's people today, brethren. We're heading into some really, really difficult times. How they are going to fall, the way they're going to come, we don't know. That's why we have to go to God in this attitude and this way. Psa. 130 is a prayer when you're overwhelmed with sin and troubles and problems, just like Daniel was.

Psalm 130:1: “Out of the depths I have cried unto You, O LORD.” *Overwhelmed with sin, problems, troubles, difficulties, nothing going right, everything going wrong!*

Verse 2: “LORD, hearken unto my voice, and let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O LORD, who shall stand?” (vs 2-3).

That's why we need to forgive one another. If we backbite each other all the time, what's going to happen? Who is going to stand?

Verse 4, remember this: “**But there is forgiveness with You...** [God is ready to forgive!] ...that You may be feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, and in His Word do I hope” (vs 4-5).

That's why we study the Word of God so we know it and we go through the things that we do.

Some of them are very difficult indeed, but please, let's understand something. We have not resisted against sin into losing blood, yet! *Not yet!*

Verse 5: "I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, and in His word do I hope. My soul waits for the LORD more than those who watch for the morning; I say, more than those who watch for the morning. Let Israel hope in the LORD... [unless there is *love and mercy and forgiveness* there is no hope] ...for with the LORD there is mercy, and with Him is plentiful redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities" (vs 5-8).

- God will *forgive*
- God will *help*
- God will *lift us up*

When you go through these things and when you have things you need to repent of and so forth, remember:

- He is your Father
- He loves you
- He has called you
- He wants you

He wants all of us in His Kingdom; every one of us!

- He called us because we're not the great of the world
- He called us because we are the forgotten of the world
- He called us because we are the weak of the world

But if there is strength in the God then we're stronger than the mighty in the world!

2-Corinthians 1:1: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by *the* will of God, and Timothy *our* brother, to the Church of God that is in Corinth, with all the saints who are in the entire region of Achaia: Grace and peace *be* to you from God our Father and *the* Lord Jesus Christ" (vs 1-2).

Grace is our *standing with God*. Peace, *we're not warring with God any longer*. Notice what he says here. After all the trials that he went through and it says that he went in here, some of them he just despaired of life.

Verse 3: "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ **the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.**"

That's pretty powerful! When you're in trouble and when you have sin and when you're fighting and overcoming sin, you need to be comforted.

Verse 4: "Who comforts us in all our tribulation... [Look back at all the things you have gone through. What's the purpose of that?] ...**in**

order that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trial, through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." *It's always darkest before the dawn!*

Verse 5: "For to the degree *that* the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. And if we are in distress, *it is* for your comfort and salvation, which is being worked out by *your* enduring the same sufferings that we also suffer; *and* if we are comforted, *it is* for your comfort and salvation (and our hope *is* steadfast for you)... [that's what we want] ...knowing that as you are partners in the sufferings, *you are* also *partners* in the comfort. For we do not want you to be ignorant of our tribulations, brethren, *even the trials* that befell us in Asia; we were exceedingly burdened beyond *our own* strength, so much so that we even despaired of living" (vs 5-8). *But they were delivered from it!*

Let's see the great thing that God has done for us and is doing for us. Let me recommend this: If you have difficulties and problems and are down in the dumps, don't know what to do, you need some encouragement, you *get on your knees and you open the Bible* to the book of Ephesians. You get your mind on the great plan that God has for us *individually*.

- He is *our* Father
- we are *His* children
- He has *called* us

Ephesians 1:1: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by *the* will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and to *the* faithful in Christ Jesus... [this is written for all time] ...Grace and peace *be* to you from God our Father and *the* Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *things* with Christ" (vs 1-3).

One of the most important things that we have today, brethren, is the whole Word of God, which until you go back about not quite 500 years ago, the average common person could not have the Bible. For the English people, William Tyndale was the one who translated the New Testament and later the Old Testament so that the 'plowboy' could have the Word of God and that the 'plowboy' could know more than all of the 'religious' elite. It opened up a whole new tremendous way of getting the Word of God out in two forms:

1. one *as a witness* to the whole world, witness to the children of Israel
2. now the Word of God could be solidified so that *the Church could operate in freedom* in America

I've got a booklet at home about the Sabbath written in 1729. I remember one phrase there about the 'religious' leaders. It's very digging, because it's obvious, the same thing that we know is the argument concerning Sabbath and Sunday, and he says, '*The wittingly leaders do not acknowledge the Truth, but believe a lie.*' I thought that that was really something!

Here I have in my hands a booklet written by a man in 1729, and through the power of the printing press and the preservation of things in paper, I could have it in my hand. Think about the whole Word of God. *We've got the whole Word of God!* That's a tremendous thing to realize and understand. That's why we need to be inspired and uplifted by this. That's why we need the *love of God, the mercy of God, the forgiveness of God*, and among ourselves as well.

Verse 4: "According as **He has personally chosen us...**" *I want you to let those words sink into your heart and mind! 'The Father draws him'* (John 6:44).

- Is it to you personally?
- Is it to me personally?
- Is it to everyone that God is dealing with personally?
- *Yes, it is!*

"...for Himself before *the* foundation of the world... [His plan was set before the foundation of the world that He would choose] ...in order that we might be Holy and blameless before Him in love... [For what purpose?]: Having predestinated us for sonship..." (vs 4-5).

The *King James* says 'adoption.' But it's *sonship*. You have the Spirit of God from the Father Himself. You are His children. He's not adopting you, you are going to be His spirit-born children at the resurrection.

"...to Himself through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of His own will" (v 5).

Isn't that magnificent? That's almost more than we can handle, really, when you understand the greatness of what God is doing.

Verse 6: "To *the* praise of *the* glory of His grace, wherein He has made us objects of *His* grace in the Beloved *Son*; In Whom we have redemption through His blood, *even* the remission of sins, according to the riches of His grace.... [you must have love, mercy and forgiveness] ...Which He has made to abound toward us in all wisdom and intelligence" (vs 6-8).

After viewing the cartoons that Randy got from *The Simpsons*, there's one that struck me. Homer has been confronted by God, and Homer asked God, 'What is Your purpose?' God supposedly answered him, 'I don't know.' (paraphrased). The sum at the end was, 'I'll worship God anyway I want to and He will accept me.' **NO!** *God has something special for what He wants for you. That's why you have to do what He has said, because it's special!*

Verse 9: "Having made known to us the mystery of His own will... [the Family of God] ...according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself."

There is nothing higher or greater or better than what Paul is telling us here for the purpose of our life. That's why we don't have a *religion*. 'Religions' are substitutes for God's way. **We belong to God!** That's what it's all about, that we love God, that we serve Him, that we love one another. That He grants us these great and magnificent things. He has given us the understanding of His will. That is awesome indeed!

Verse 10: "That in *the Divine* plan for the fulfilling of *the* times, He might bring all things together in Christ, both the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth; *yes*, in Him, in Whom we also have obtained an inheritance, having been predestinated according to His purpose, Who is working out all things **according to the counsel of His own will**" (vs 10-11). *That is something! God is involved in our lives that way directly!*

Verse 12: "That we might be to *the* praise of His glory, who first trusted in the Christ; In Whom you also trusted after hearing the Word of the Truth, the gospel of your salvation; in Whom also, after believing, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (vs 12-13).

What I want you to understand concerning the *forgiveness* of God. A lot of people have heard a lot about the *unpardonable sin*. There will be some who will do that. The first saying—there were *seven sayings* of Jesus while He was on the cross... As we're coming up to the Passover we need to understand about the sacrifice of Christ:

- what God did because He loved us
- what God did because He has forgiven us

First thing He said was this, Luke 23:34: "Then Jesus said, '**Father, forgive them...**'" Who is that?

- Pilate
- the high priest
- the people
- those who were shouting to crucify Him

- those who were standing down below the cross saying, ‘If You’re the Son of God, cast Yourself down from here.’

He said: “...**for they do not know what they are doing**” (v 34). Isn’t that something?

Let’s see if we likewise can carry that into our lives and into the things that we perceive with God and study and prayer. *Let there be with us:*

- *love*
- *mercy*
- *forgiveness*

Scriptural References:

- 1) Luke 18:9-13
- 2) Job 29:1-25
- 3) Job 35:1-2
- 4) Ezekiel 14:1-4
- 5) Mark 12:28-31
- 6) Matthew 22:40
- 7) Matthew 9:10-13
- 8) Luke 11:37-48
- 9) Matthew 12:7
- 10) Psalm 86:1-7
- 11) Psalm 103:1-18
- 12) Mark 11:21-25
- 13) John 20:17
- 14) Luke 11:2-4
- 15) Daniel 9:2-21
- 16) Psalm 130:1-8
- 17) 2-Corinthians 1:1-8
- 18) Ephesians 1:1-13
- 19) Luke 23:34

Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- James 2
- John 6:44

Also referenced: Sermon Series:

How Jesus Reveals the Father

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