

“Where the Rubber Meets the Road:God’s Mercy”

Scripture: Psalm 51; 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Graphics: tire, tire track, road, mercy

Big Truth: God’s mercy, sovereignty, and justice are all truths that impact our lives as followers of Jesus. Yet, we often either don’t understand these truths or live into them fully. God wants his truth to be our experience fully. That’s where the rubber meets the road and causes forward motion into a deeper life with Christ and his mission to make disciples. The people of PUMC are called to reflect God’s mercy, submit to God’s sovereignty, and enact God’s justice in the world.

Focus Phrase: God’s mercy is reflected in me, by grace through faith in Jesus.

1. Introduction

- A. We’re starting a brand new series today, for three weeks, called *Where the Rubber Meets the Road*.
- B. And to help us, I’ve brought THIS tire. This tire isn’t on a vehicle, yet, obviously, but winter’s coming...and this snow tire will soon be pressed into service, rolling to carry the car on which it will be mounted safely and effectively wherever it goes in this world.
- C. If I was to leave this tire on a shelf in a garage, it would never do what it was made to do. It would stay clean. It would never wear out. It would never have to be replaced. BUT, it would also never DO what it was created to DO...to be a snow tire.
- D. The RUBBER would never MEET the ROAD.
- E. Some history: the rubber tire was invented in 1888, and it exponentially increased the safety of cars that were just starting to be made in the early part of the 20th century. Previous to that, wheels on wagon were wood, maybe with some metal. But when the rubber tire began to mass-produced, people were safer and vehicles moved more efficiently.
- F. “Where the rubber meets the road” is all about the point of contact that the rubber tire has with the road. But it’s a phrase that means things like, “When things get serious...” or “When things get put to the test...” There a sense that when the rubber meets the road, there’s ACTION.
- G. Say Jon, here, built a small fishing boat, but he was unsure if it would float. This weekend, however, is when the rubber meets the road because Jon plans to put the boat on water for the first time to see if it floats. Prior to the rubber meeting the road, the boat was out of water and sitting on dry land, not being used for its purpose. You get the idea.
- H. This sermon series is about three grand characteristics of God that come in contact with our everyday lives - it’s where the rubber meets the road: **God’s MERCY, God’s SOVEREIGNTY, and God’s JUSTICE**. These three truths about who God is are just that, truths. They are a reality, independent of what

we think or our opinions about them. Even if we didn't exist, like before creation, God IS merciful, God IS sovereign, and God IS just.

- I. (Tire) Those are the rubber. Those three things are the divine tires that are ready to meet your road.
- J. Our lives on this earth are the road on which God wants to go! God wants His truths (his rubber) to impact our lives, our church, our community, and this world. And that can only happen when the **rubber meets the road**.
- K. Today we'll start with God's **MERCY**...and how we're called to reflect God's mercy to the world. Each week, we'll read from a Psalm, which will give us a glimpse of the grand truth about God. Then, we'll go to Paul's first letter to Timothy to see where the that rubber meets Paul's road, and ours.
- L. Let's pray and then we can dive in...
- M. PRAY! (Jesus, you are Lord...)**
- N. If you're taking notes, write this down: **God's mercy is reflected in me, by grace through faith in Jesus.**
- O. We'll start in Psalm 51, so open your bibles with me...Psalm 51 starts like this:

2. Scripture

A. READ Psalm 51:1-2

- i. In this famous psalm, the author was pleading with God to, "Have mercy... according to God's steadfast love." The psalmist professed that God's mercy was abundant.
- ii. The truth about God is that God is merciful. It's a spiritual given. We read that 147 times in scripture, according to one source. Here are two:
 - a. Deuteronomy 4:31 says, "For the Lord your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them."
 - b. Jesus said in Luke 6:36: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."
- iii. And here in Psalm 51, the author's appeal was for **mercy**.
- iv. **But what IS mercy?**
 - a. We may have some concept of mercy in our lives - like when someone spares a life or withholds punishment to someone.
 - b. The Webster's definition of mercy helps us some. Mercy is *compassion or forbearance shown especially to an offender or to one subject to one's power*. We are the offender and we are subject to God's power.
 - c. A simpler definition of mercy is **NOT getting what you deserve**.
(repeat)

- d. Yet, if we read on in Psalm 51, we find that mercy is a truth that must be applied to the sin in our lives in order for it to be divine mercy.
- e. Psalm 51:3-5 says, “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.”
- f. “Have mercy on my, God, BECAUSE I’m a sinner...and I know it!”
- g. And when applied to sin, God’s mercy moves the repentant sinner to new understanding of God’s love and a transformed heart.
- h. Maybe the most famous part of Psalm 51 comes in verses 10-12, through mercy, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.”
- i. **Mercy is what God applies to sinners who turn to God in repentance from their sin so that it can cause a changed heart and life.**
- j. Because of sin, as the psalmist highlights, we’re due punishment. And God has the authority and right to subject us to punishment...which leads to death. Our sin causes death. Romans 6:23 says that, “..the wages of sin is death.”
- k. YET, and here’s the Good News, God’s MERCY is compassion and forbearance so that we DON’T GET what we deserve as sinners. And this becomes a reality in our lives as we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.
- v. God’s mercy exists. It’s the tire - the rubber - ready to meet the road of life.
- vi. But how does the rubber of mercy meet the road of life here and now?
- vii. For that, we turn to 1 Timothy 1 starting in verse 12. This is Paul’s letter to his young mentee Timothy. Paul laid out his autobiography to Timothy and then showed him what God’s mercy DOES in his life...and ours.
- viii. Be listening carefully to the times where Paul uses the word MERCY...

B. READ 1 Timothy 1:12-17

- i. Paul mentions *mercy* two times. He used the Greek word ἠλεῆθην (ēleēthēn), which is not just ‘mercy’ but **I have RECEIVED mercy** or **I have OBTAINED mercy**. Mercy, for Paul, is something that is not only a reality about God, but is bestowed upon us by God, who has found him faithful.

- ii. Paul is very aware of the fact that he needed God's mercy. If we remember back to Psalm 51, the psalmist was aware of the fact that he/she was a sinner...and needed mercy in order to move into a state of forgiveness and changed heart.
- iii. Paul gave thanks that God was using him, **EVEN THOUGH** he had formerly done terrible things...blasphemed God, persecuted God's people, was a man of violence. He murdered Christians. Paul was a bad dude. In fact, what Paul did was in direct opposition to God's best will for his life.
- iv. Yet, when Paul had an encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus one day, Paul's former ways stopped and Jesus put him on a brand new path.
- v. **And it was at that MOMENT that MERCY flowed into Paul's life.** Not because he somehow deserved it...but because God desired to not punish him in spite of all the bad stuff he'd said and done.
- vi. He received mercy...and the grace of God overflowed for him with faith and love, that are in Christ Jesus. If mercy is **NOT** getting what we deserve, then **GRACE** is getting what we **DON'T** deserve!
 - a. I love verse 14. If you think of your life for a moment. And if you could take every sin you've ever committed in thought, word, and deed, and collect every one of those into a basket, it would be ugly to look at, wouldn't it?
 - b. Yet, when you give your life to Jesus Christ for Him to use, mercy (**not** getting what you deserve) begins a pathway to grace (getting what you **don't** deserve)...and grace leads to forgiveness...forgiveness to freedom...freedom to mission...and mission to everlasting life in the presence of a merciful God.
 - c. That's why Paul wrote in verse 15 - "The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners..."
 - d. Mercy leading to grace leading to everlasting life.
- vii. But that still doesn't tell us fully how the mercy of God is the rubber that wants to meet the road. If the rubber is to meet the road, the mercy of God needs to make a difference in our lives.
- viii. In Paul's life, that mercy and grace transformed him into the most important evangelist in the first century...he spoke about, preached about, was beaten and put in prison for, his full faith in Jesus. He said that he did nothing but preach Christ and him crucified!
- ix. For Paul, Jesus was everything...and it all began with mercy on that road, when he was transformed from sinner to sinner saved by grace.
- x. And God used Paul as an example of his mercy so that others would see it.

3. Application

- A. For you and me, where does the mercy of God meet the road of life?
- B. Now that you know what God's mercy is all about - about placing you on the pathway of God's grace through faith, holding back the punishment you deserve for your sin - what's the impact?
- C. For Paul, it was clear. We read what he wrote in verse 16... **“But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience as an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life.”**
- D. Paul knew that God's mercy, shown to him - the worst of all sinners - would be a powerful example to those around him...who would come to faith in Jesus.
- E. I mean, if PAUL can be shown mercy and be saved by grace, then I can!
- F. Stop and think about how God's mercy has come into your life. Was there a time when you were like Paul before his conversion? When you did what you wanted? That you made decisions that flew in the face of God's best plan for your life? Maybe you sought after sin and willfully engaged in it. Maybe that's something you're struggling with right now, today.
- G. Guess what? **God's mercy is for you today.** God is willing to NOT give you what you deserve! Because Jesus Christ gave his life and took the full weight of the punishment for your sin, the very simple reality that **God wants to give you mercy.**
- H. And at this moment, He's wooing you, first in mercy and then to His grace.
- I. But the end result of mercy is not just grace, as amazing as that is. The end result of God's mercy is mission...to make disciples of Jesus Christ. When it comes to mercy, that means that you and I reflect the mercy of God, that we have received, to those around us as we introduce them to Jesus.
- J. What does that look like? In the Wesleyan tradition, John Wesley expressed the outward expression of God's mercy to be **Works of Mercy.**
 - i. He broke those down into two categories: Individual Practices and Communal Practices.
 - ii. As individuals who have received God's mercy (ēleēthēn), that means doing good works, visiting the sick, visiting those in prison, feeding the hungry, and giving generously to the needs of others. If someone has a need, or can't meet their own needs, then you are called to individual works of mercy. It's where the rubber meets the road.
 - a. Our church is involved in the Keryx Prison Ministry and now that we're post-COVID, we'll be seeking some gifted and called team to go into the prison in Collins when the time is right.

- b. We have a food pantry that serves those who need some extra help each month. We have a visitation ministry that cares for those who are sick in our congregation. I'm always willing to have someone ride along when I visit people in the hospital or nursing home.
 - c. If God's mercy has been poured into your life, then you're called to reflect that mercy to others.
- iii. The second expression is Communal Practices – seeking justice, ending oppression and discrimination (John Wesley challenged Methodists to end slavery in his time), and addressing the needs of the poor.
- a. We, as a church, are called to be proclaimer of truth about the evil of modern slavery, racism, and oppression. We're called to meet the needs of those in our communities, with our hands and feet and resources.
 - b. It's not enough to simply have us preach about it...you're called to speak truth whenever oppression is present or racism rears its evil head. God hates sin and evil and racism and slavery and oppression are evil.
 - c. We stand for mercy together with those who have gone before us...and we teach mercy to those who come after us.
- iv. God's mercy is reflected in me, by grace through faith in Jesus.

4. Conclusion

- A. (Tire) This tire is only useful when it's on a rim, attached to a car, and spinning as the car drives. It's what it was designed to do.
- B. God's mercy is effective in the world and in your life when it is received and is then reflected to the world.
- C. You have received mercy, church. You and I deserve the full punishment for our sin. Yet, God loves so deeply that He starts with being merciful...and then frees you by grace to offer mercy to the world.
- D. If it weren't for mercy, we'd already be condemned. Yet, through Jesus, we are not only NOT condemned, but are empowered to get to work for Jesus.
- E. Let the rubber meet the road in your life this week. Find one opportunity to show mercy like God has shown to you.
- F. It's GO time...let's GO!

G. PRAY!