

Waves of Mercy

Week 3: Mercy for THEM?!?

Objective: To help us understand that God's mercy extends even to people who genuinely deserve judgment, and allow the mercy they have received to soften their hearts toward others.

ICEBREAKER: We all have people who are easier to like than others.

Without naming names that might get you in trouble:

- What is a harmless kind of person you find unusually difficult to tolerate?
- What is it about them that gets under your skin?

1. Who Is “Them”?

The sermon asked:

“How many of you have a ‘THEM’?”

Sometimes our “them” is funny. Other times it is someone who has hurt us, betrayed us, or represents something we strongly oppose.

- Why is it so easy for us to divide people into “us” and “them”?
- What makes some people easier for us to judge than to love?
- Is having a “them” always the same thing as hating someone? Why or why not?

2. Mercy Gets Another Chance

Jonah 3 begins:

“Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time.”

— Jonah 3:1

Jonah ran, rebelled, and had to be rescued—and God gave him the assignment again.

- What does “a second time” reveal about God's character?
- How have you experienced God's patience or second chances?
- Why do you think God chose to continue working through Jonah instead of simply replacing him?

3. Mercy Works Through Us

God's mercy toward Nineveh begins with His mercy toward Jonah.

- Mercy pursued Jonah.
- Mercy rescued Jonah.
- Now mercy works **through** Jonah.

The sermon put it this way:

“God doesn't just give Jonah a second chance. He gives Nineveh one through him.”

- What does this tell us about why God shows us mercy?
- How can our obedience—or disobedience—affect people around us?
- Where might God want His mercy to flow through you to someone else?

4. Nineveh Is Overturned

Jonah's message was simple:

“Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”

The Hebrew word translated *overthrown* can carry the idea of being overturned, reversed, or changed.

Nineveh really was overturned—but instead of the city being destroyed, **the people changed.**

- What do you find interesting about that twist in the story?
- Why is transformation a greater demonstration of God's mercy than simple destruction?
- Where have you seen God “overturn” a person or situation through transformation rather than judgment?

5. “The Ninevites Believed God”

Jonah 3:5 says:

“The Ninevites believed God.”

Their response was immediate and widespread. They humbled themselves, called out to God, and turned from their evil ways.

- What stands out to you about their response?
- What is the difference between simply feeling bad and actually repenting?
- What does genuine repentance look like in our lives?

6. Mercy for People Who Deserve Judgment

Nineveh wasn't innocent. Their violence and wickedness were real.

The problem wasn't that Jonah incorrectly believed they deserved judgment. The problem was that **he couldn't accept that people who deserved judgment could also receive mercy.**

- Why is mercy sometimes hardest to accept when someone's wrongdoing is real?
- Is extending mercy the same as pretending the wrong never happened?
- How can we take sin and injustice seriously while still desiring God's mercy for the person responsible?

7. Everybody Is Happy—Except Jonah

After Nineveh repents and God spares the city, Jonah 4:1 says:

“But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry.”

- Why do you think God's mercy made Jonah angry?
- Why can it sometimes be difficult to celebrate when God blesses, forgives, or restores someone we believe deserves something else?
- What might our reaction to mercy shown to others reveal about our own hearts?

8. What Happens in Me When God Shows Mercy to Them?

The sermon returned to this question:

“What happens in me when God shows mercy to THEM?”

- Who—or what kind of person—do you genuinely struggle to imagine God embracing, forgiving, and restoring?
- What makes extending mercy toward that person or group difficult?
- How might remembering God's mercy toward you begin to soften your heart toward them?

FINAL THOUGHT

Jonah received exactly what he didn't want Nineveh to receive: Mercy.

He ran from God. God pursued him. He sank into the depths. God rescued him. He failed his assignment. God gave him another chance.

But when God extended that same mercy to Jonah's enemies, Jonah became angry.

That's where Jonah's story becomes uncomfortable—because it's possible to love God's mercy when it lands on **us** while resenting it when it lands on **them**. But there isn't one kind of mercy for us and another for everyone else.

God's mercy is not reserved for people I would have chosen. And the mercy that saves us is meant to make us more merciful toward others.

THIS WEEK – PRAY FOR “THEM”

This week, allow God to challenge the boundaries you may have placed around His mercy.

IDENTIFY

Ask God:

“Who is my ‘them’?”

Who is difficult for you to imagine God embracing, forgiving, or restoring?

REMEMBER

Spend some time remembering the mercy God has shown **you**.

Remember that you didn't earn it either.

PRAY

Pray specifically for your “them.”

Don't simply pray that God will straighten them out or make them agree with you.

Pray that they would experience God's grace, forgiveness, restoration, and transforming mercy.

SOFTEN

Pray:

“God, use the mercy You've shown me to soften my heart toward them.”

Pay attention this week to any opportunity God gives you to replace judgment with compassion, hostility with kindness, or resentment with mercy.