

*Losing Merit, Gaining Mercy**Jonathan Mitchell*

"If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. 7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith."
Philippians 3:4-9

"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."
Exodus 34:6-7

"Because of the LORD's great love, we are not consumed, for his mercies never fail. They are new every morning."
Lamentations 3:22-23

"Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression... You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy."
Micah 7:18

Mercy is the story.**Merit is our story.**

"What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord [main character], for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith."
Philippians 3: 8-9

"...he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit."
Titus 3:5

We cannot receive God's mercy while clinging to our merit.

"I do not accept glory from human beings, 42 but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. 43 I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. 44 How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? 45 "But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set."
John 5:41-45

Let's Talk About It

In Sunday's message, Pastor Jonathan explains to us that we often try to rely on our own accomplishments and "goodness", but God invites us to trade our merit for His mercy. In Philippians 3:4-9, Paul describes how he let go of all the things he once took pride in so he could truly know Jesus Christ. Pride can make us want to prove ourselves instead of admitting we need mercy, but in reality, real righteousness and freedom comes from trusting Christ and receiving the mercy God freely gives to us.

- Philippians 3:4-9; Exodus 34:6-7; Lamentations 3:22-23; Micah 7:18; Titus 3:5; John 5:41-45

Discussion Questions:

- Which part of the message made an impact, caught your attention, or challenged you?
- Freedom Weekend is coming up soon. It is such a powerful time for all of us to grasp the mercy that God extends to us through spiritual healing. If you have attended one before, tell a story of how you were changed. If you have yet to go, what's holding you back, or what are you expecting as you attend in April?
- When you hear that mercy is the central story of the Bible what reaction does that create in you- comfort, resistance, confusion, something else? Why?
- Where do you feel the most pressure to prove your worth or earn approval through merit- from others, yourself, or even from God?
- Paul says he gave up his own righteousness to receive righteousness from Christ (Phil. 3:8-9). What do you think would be difficult about letting go of your own merit like that? What gift might you gain?

Take a Step

This week, try to notice the areas where you rely on your accomplishments, reputation, or merit for validation, and intentionally surrender those to God. Remind yourself that your worth and righteousness come from Christ's mercy and not on anything we have done on our own.

Here's My Prayer

Lord, thank you for amazing mercy in our lives. Even though we don't deserve it, you constantly extend to us grace and mercy. Please help us to let go of our pride, human "goodness", and achievements and know that Your mercy is all that we need and want. Please help us to walk in the freedom of that truth. In Jesus' name. Amen.