

Powerful Mercy

Matthew 9:27-34

The misery of man is not hard to document. Just look at the news. War in the middle east, some hostages released but many more still captured. Despite a ceasefire, there seems no end to that war. We don't hear much any more about the war in Ukraine, but it continues on, the killing and destruction continue on. There is such a frequency of mass killings, generally shootings in public places. And in any major city these days, every week brings higher numbers of shootings and other violent crime.

Or, we can show that misery of mankind in economic terms, with the hardships so common to people today, those living paycheck to paycheck, often unable to provide for their basic necessities let alone to purchase their own home, what used to be defined as the American dream. For some, there is no paycheck at all. Just poverty.

All of that contrasts so much with the celebrations of Thanksgiving so many of us have had this week. Despite the enjoyment of such a good holiday, despite the brief respite from work and labor and the indulgence in all the sales that proliferate on Black Friday, still the reality of life is one of misery, ultimately the misery of death. And no one can escape it. No one has the power to resist it or avoid it. Which a valid reminder for us today that,

I. FALLEN MAN STANDS IN CONSTANT NEED OF GOD'S MERCY.

You see, we are all miserable. That is to say, in the words of our Shorter Catechism, "The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery." That shorter catechism goes on to define the misery of that estate this way, "All mankind by their fall lost

communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever."

Jesus, of course, came to rescue us, to deliver fallen men "out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a redeemer." Our focus this evening, is that misery. Or actually, more accurately, Jesus' response to our misery. And that is the idea of the word "mercy."

Mercy is the willingness to consider a person's misery, seeking to help. Mercy focuses upon the deep and painful needs we experience, and with that perspective of misery in the forefront, mercy seeks to alleviate the suffering of misery. That misery is represented for us tonight in the presence of those two blind men. Indeed, they cried out for mercy.

It is good to make this conscious awareness of our need for mercy, because,

A. The pain of human need is obvious.

The misery of blindness is not hard to comprehend. But sometimes a plain rebuke is needed to those who think themselves pretty well off. Remember the church in Laodicea?

Rev. 3:17 "Because you say, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing"—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— 18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see."

Such a dangerous condition for anyone to be in, not realizing that "you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." And

those who don't acknowledge their misery will not ever turn to Jesus for help, for the invitation of the gospel given with these words from,

Luke 5:31 "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

So it is that as we stand before God, we stand before him in all our misery. And the cries to God for mercy are easily understood, for God is often revealed to us in terms of his mercy and our misery. For example,

Ps. 103:2 "Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: 3 Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, 4 Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, 5 Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."

That Psalm continues,

Ps. 103:8 "The LORD is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. 9 He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. 10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities...13 As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him. 14 For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. 15 As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. 16 For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, And its place remembers it no more. 17 But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting On those who fear Him."

So there is our misery, our days are like grass. And God "remembers that we are dust." Similarly,

Is. 40:6 "The voice said, "Cry out!" And he said, "What shall I

cry?" "All flesh is grass, And all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. 7 The grass withers, the flower fades, Because the breath of the LORD blows upon it; Surely the people are grass. 8 The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever."

The pain of human need is obvious. It is inescapable. We could go down through our own membership list, and trace the obvious needs we have among ourselves. People die. People battle with illness and disease. They lose their jobs. They endure surgery. And personal conflict. Sickness. Weakness. Sorrow. Stress and frustration. Financial ruin. We are "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked."

So what do you do in that situation, with that awareness? Some people choose to wallow in it, don't they? Some people seem to enjoy their misery, at least in the sense of the attention that it gets. Some people get hardened, unto despair. Others simply cannot escape the morbid reality of suffering and misery, and they live out their life in perpetual grief and seemingly unending sorrow.

But there is a better way, and these two blind men show it to us so very clearly.

v.27 "When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!"

They begged for mercy. And they found it, because they found Jesus. This is what we are told about Jesus,

Heb. 2:17 "Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted."

So beloved, especially you who feel the misery of this life, these words are for you. The Lord knows “your frame; he remembers that we are dust.” So cry out to Jesus, who is a merciful and faithful high priest. “Son of David, have mercy on us!”

But why the reference to the Son of David? Likely these men knew of the promised Messiah by that title. It was a title of honor and authority, and power. For mercy, without power, is quite useless. Pity, compassion toward those in need, without the ability to alleviate their suffering, isn't very helpful. So these two blind men cry out to Jesus with faith in his power. They didn't simply want his sympathy. They wanted to be healed. And what Jesus makes so obvious in the account of this miracle is that,

B. Mercy comes through faith to believe in the power of God.

Faith is the instrument, the means, by which Jesus demonstrates the power of his mercy. Faith is the path by which we become recipients of mercy. It is not a universal disbursement of mercy, in other words. It is not mercy, for mercy's sake. But rather Jesus responds to and rewards the exercise of faith. And that faith is the faith to believe that God is powerful, all-powerful. That is the point of Jesus' questioning.

v.28

So this miracle wasn't merely a matter of social justice. It wasn't just a good work to help a man in need. It was not the social gospel so prominent among the liberal churches of our day. No, this was an evangelistic encounter. This was a moment of saving faith. “Do you believe?” In their case, the answer was “Yes, Lord.” That meant faith to believe in the power of God. And Jesus responded accordingly,

v.29

Don't ever think that Jesus is rewarding their faith as the performance of a good work, that they had somehow earned his mercy. Don't think those two blind men did something themselves by which they merited the blessing of this miracle. Don't think that this has anything to do with that awful expression, ‘God helps those who help themselves.’ Nothing of the sort.

But rather, God's mercy comes to those who believe. He healed, “according to their faith.” There was nothing selfish or self-absorbed about it. These men were not like so many people who go from church to church these days looking for money, with no interest in what the church really has to offer, namely the blessing of the gospel. The miracle was performed, and their sight restored, only in the context of their exercise of faith, their willingness to believe in the power of God.

Notice, however, verse 30. “Jesus sternly warned them.” Jesus did not want his life to become a spectacle. He did not want the reputation merely as a miracle worker attracting the crowds, for he didn't want masses of people coming to him just for the sake of their healing. He wanted to heal in order to demonstrate his authority to forgive sins, thus only to those who would believe. And he didn't want to attract such a large crowd as would immediately put his safety in danger or provoke the jealousy and opposition of the Roman rulers. So the command was clear, though it must have seemed stranger to these two men, “See that no one knows about it.”

They, of course, according to verse 31, disobeyed.

This is so different than the so-called healers and pretend miracle workers of our day, isn't it? “See that no one knows about it.” That's not exactly what they say. Quite the opposite. Put it on television. Publish a book, or better yet, a blog. Make a video for

social media. All for fund raising. So send in your money. The so-called miracle workers of today want all the fame for themselves, in order to make themselves rich. Jesus wanted none of it, because he was interested in showing forth the display of mercy to those who were in such misery. It was all about his show of mercy. Most of all, he was interested in relieving their greatest misery, namely their separation and alienation from God caused by their sin. Jesus came to sinful men in order “to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a redeemer.”

Thus the second miracle here this afternoon demonstrates that spiritual need, the spiritual misery of those who are dead in their sins. Surely,

II. FALLEN MAN STANDS IN CONSTANT SPIRITUAL DANGER.

The evidence, demons.
v.32

Demons are fallen angels, created beings, spirits, who rebelled against God at some point soon after the six days of creation. We know this from,

Jude 6 “And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.”

They oppose the work of God. They oppose the people of God. And the effect of demon-possession is obvious. I should note that Jesus’ presence on earth, as the second person of the Trinity, provoked a dramatic increase in demonic activity, but still, in the broader picture even to include our own lives,

A. The dangerous oppression of the spiritual forces of evil is obvious.

We meet a man described as demon-possessed, and we see the effect. He couldn’t speak.

v.33

So let me dwell for a moment upon this idea. This influence of the spiritual forces of evil. Consider,

Eph. 6:10 “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

Even more personally,

Eph. 2:1 “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”

That’s the influence of the evil one, the devil. That’s the influence carried out by his demons. He is at work “in the sons of disobedience.” And that is the source of our struggle as well, a battle “against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

I don’t believe Christians today can be demon possessed, as we see in these examples from Jesus’ ministry, because we are

possessed by Jesus. We are a temple of the Holy Spirit, and when God dwells within us, Satan has no home. But, we do fight those same spiritual forces of evil. And the struggles of our life, the battles of life, are spiritual battles. Make no mistake about it.

And, further, in the lives of non-Christians, the influence of Satan and his demons is profound, ever-present. Satan is the prince of the power of the air, he is the ruler of his demons, and they cause great danger to us all. For this man whom Jesus healed, the demons had taken away his ability to speak. Such a direct connection between our physical and spiritual lives. One effects the other in every way, and we can't ignore that reality. Nor can we ignore the dangers that continue to confront us in the spiritual realm.

Thus the warning,
James 4:7 "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded."

And the reality of,
1 Peter 5:8 "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

That's the reality of life, as it continues today. That's the danger of our existence in this fallen world. Thankfully, Jesus is more powerful than the Devil. He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world. But the dangers of our adversary abound. And it requires the fullness of your strength and energy. "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

And take note of the great and glorious power of God.
v.33

B. The power of God is awful.

I choose that word intentionally, for it rightly communicates the fullness of our apprehension of God's power. Awful, full of awe. Full of majesty and splendor, such that "the crowds marveled." God's power is, indeed, marvelous, in the full sense and scope of the meaning of that word.

We often substitute the word "awesome" today, but that word is so over-used that it seemingly loses its significance. Awesome seems to have more reference to my own emotional reaction than it does to the substance of what is being described, and God's power is not merely awesome in my own estimation, but rather it is awful in its very existence. "'It was never seen like this in Israel!"

Sadly, however, the self-righteous Pharisees chose another explanation. They accuse Jesus of acting in accord with Satan. They seemed to believe that only Satan had spiritual power, and so they accuse Jesus of using Satan's own power.

v.34

Such utter blasphemy. It wouldn't be the only time Jesus hears that accusation, and his response is forthright.

Mat. 12:22 Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. 23 And all the multitudes were amazed and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" 24 Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons." 25 But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every

city or house divided against itself will not stand. 26 If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? 27 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. 28 But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. 30 He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad. 31 "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. 32 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come."

Let me end with a reminder of the power which Jesus exerted while he lived on earth, a power he continues to possess. The triumph of his power was on full display when he laid down his own life, he suffered and died and was raised from the dead.

Paul describes those events this way, speaking of God's power, Col. 2:12. "...who raised [Jesus] from the dead. 13 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, 14 having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."

So Jesus wins. More accurately, Jesus has already won. Jesus' power is triumphant, his power is awful. And that power is, for us who believe, the power of the gospel unto salvation. So as you face the spiritual dangers of your own life, and the miseries of

this life, here is the encouragement found in the power of Jesus' mercy,

Rom. 8:38 "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."