

MERCY

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer. Two words for today: more revelation on a seed sown a few years ago, and the word mercy.

IMAGES OF JESUS

The New Testament is full of images that reflect the nature of Jesus himself - images he used to convey his character, his purpose and his love for us. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life, the living bread." He said, "I am the light of the world," and "I am the good shepherd" - and the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. He is the chief cornerstone, the rock to build our spiritual life on.

PSALM 22 - THE CROSS FORETOLD

On the cross, suffering and bleeding to death, Jesus cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). He was pointing us to Psalm 22. Read verses 1-8 and 14-18 - and in your own time, read the whole psalm: "All those who see Me ridicule Me... They pierce My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots."

Here David prophesies Jesus on the cross many years before it happened. This could be a good place to point our unbelieving friends - to open their eyes to a prophecy which points to the cross where Jesus died and rose again.

BUT I AM A WORM AND NO MAN

This morning the focus is verse 6 - a verse we skip through when we read Psalm 22: "But I am a worm, and no man."

David does not use the normal Hebrew word for a worm here. He uses TOLA - the tolaath shani, the scarlet worm. When the female tola is ready to lay her eggs, she attaches herself to a tree. She lays her eggs under her body and dies, and in death she releases a crimson dye that stains the wood and her young. The young live on her for three days. Then she turns white and falls from the tree like snow.

Isaiah 1:18 says: "Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

The image is Jesus. Like the tola, he attached himself to the tree - the cross - and shed his blood to cover his children and make our scarlet sins white as snow. And as the young fed on the mother, Jesus is to us the living bread, the spiritual food we need as we journey through this world and in his kingdom. What a wonderful picture, given in the Old Testament, of how he was going to save us.

The dye of this worm was used for the curtains of the tabernacle, the veil before the Holy of Holies, the ephod and the garments of the high priest. And the scarlet cord tied around the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement - when the high priest laid his hands on the goat to transfer the sins of Israel onto it and it was released into the wilderness - came from this same worm. The image of Jesus becoming our scapegoat, taking away our sins. There is no greater love than he who gave his life for his friend.

If you are here and you have not been cleansed by the blood of Jesus - if you are not born again - please do not go home without being washed in the blood. Open your heart and invite Jesus to be your Lord and Saviour. Come to him as a child, follow him and submit to him, and he will do the rest.

MERCY THROUGH THE SCRIPTURES

The second word came through a dream four months ago, and the understanding of it has grown since: mercy.

In the Old Testament: "showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments" (Exodus 20:6). "The Lord is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression" (Numbers 14:18). "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" (Psalm 23:6). "He is ever merciful, and lends; and his descendants are blessed" (Psalm 37:26). "Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favour and high esteem in the sight of God and man" (Proverbs 3:3-4). "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6) - a command Jesus repeats in Matthew 9:13. "He has shown you, O man, what is good: to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

In the New Testament: "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more" - a new covenant (Hebrews 8:12). "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:4-5). "For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13).

Jesus gave us the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The rich man lacked compassion and mercy on Lazarus the beggar, who had nothing and waited on the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table.

COMPASSION SEES, MERCY MOVES

Compassion is inward: you see someone hurting and your heart is moved - you feel the pain, as it were. But mercy is outward. Mercy is compassion in action. Specifically, when you have the power to punish, or judge, or walk away - and you don't. You withhold the judgment the person deserves, and instead you give help they don't deserve. Real mercy arises from a compassionate heart. Jesus showed mercy to us by not giving us the rightful punishment for sin; he gives us grace instead. God is merciful.

THE MERCY SEAT

In the Old Testament, the mercy seat was the lid on the ark of the covenant, which held the ten commandments representing the law. The high priest would sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy seat, and when God appeared in the cloud above the ark he would see the blood. It was the place where God's judgment and God's mercy met.

In the New Testament, Jesus is the mercy seat (Romans 3:25). His blood on the cross is now the place where God meets us in mercy instead of judgment. Because of that, "let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). The mercy seat is a covering - we are covered by the blood of Jesus.

PUT MERCY INTO ACTION

Our desire is to become more like Jesus every day. We are being made holy through the working of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. And as we work to remove sin from our lives to become more like Jesus, we should also be active in showing mercy to others, as Jesus has shown amazing mercy towards us when we were dead in our sin. Jesus said, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." Let's put mercy into action.