

O.T. Shadows of the Mercy of God

INTRODUCTION:

1. I am excited to be able to explore many of the O.T. shadows with you, with today's focus being on the O.T. shadows of *God's mercy*.
2. It is wonderful to be able to talk about this because Christians are the special recipients of God's mercy in its fullness which these shadows pictured.
3. I must admit that this topic poses some difficulty for me in my preparation due to how...
 - A. The shadows of mercy overlap into future studies of shadows of atonement, redemption, Christ.
 - B. The O.T. shadows of mercy and judgment also overlap, seeing that many examples of God's mercy also include His judgement and vice-versa.
4. So, what I have tried to do is to pick an O.T. shadows that I feel best picture the mercy we experience in its fullness today, while hopefully infringing as little as possible on future studies.
 - A. In doing this, however, I want to begin by making a few needed points about God's mercy.
 - B. I want to look at Israel to understand just how deep the mercy of God was toward them.
 - C. Finally, I want to focus on an incident of God's mercy toward Israel that was a definite shadow of how we as sinful people receive God's mercy today.

BODY:

I. God's mercy:

- A. Points about God's mercy we must remember:
 1. Mercy refers to God's wonderful disposition to *pardon the guilty*, to choose to stop or set aside the penalty of law, when that penalty is deserved because of our transgression.
 2. God's mercy can only be applied where there is *guilt*, for mercy *always implies guilt* on the part of those who receive it.
 3. Because mercy is for the guilty, it cannot be earned. God must *choose* to bestow it.
 4. Mercy implies that one has no hope in God's *justice*, only condemnation!
 5. God's mercy must be bestowed *without* trampling His law.
 - a. This is the great difficulty facing God concerning His mercy because in setting aside the *penalty* of His Law, God must not set aside *His law*.
 - b. So, the question is how can God's law retain its full majesty while the execution of its penalty is withdrawn?
 - i. This issue is clearly addressed in God's dealing with His rebellious nation.
 - ii. For, mercy was shown while the execution of *justice* was also present.
 6. Receiving God's mercy and having it continue in one's life is *conditional* upon the attitude/actions of the guilty. For, God does not and cannot show mercy on the sinner who remains in rebellion! (Psa. 103:17-18 – "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting *on those who fear Him*, and His righteousness to children's children, ¹⁸ **to such as keep His covenant**, and to those who **remember His commandments to do them.**").
- B. We should know these six points apply universally to God's mercy, even to mercy in Christ!
 1. For, salvation in Christ comes through Him being the ultimate expression of God's mercy while also being the complete fulfillment of the justice of God's law.
 2. So, we should not hope for God's mercy to be bestowed in violation to the rules of mercy.

II. Israel—The recipients of God's mercy:

- A. Israel was the product of God's *love* and *grace* (Deut. 7:6-8 – "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the **Lord your God has chosen you** to be a people for Himself, **a special treasure** above all the peoples on the face of the earth. ⁷ The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; ⁸ but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He

swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”).

1. Israel did nothing to deserve their exalted position. Instead God *chose* to love them and to be faithful to His oath given their fathers concerning them despite their many faults.
 2. In this Israel was a shadow of us, the Church (1 Pet. 2:9-10 – “But you are a **chosen generation**, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, **His own special people**, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ who once were **not a people but are now the people of God**, who had **not obtained mercy** but now **have obtained mercy**.”).
 3. Israel was who they were—freed, redeemed, and holy—for the same reasons we are who we are—freed, redeemed, and holy—because of God’s love, grace, and mercy (Eph. 2:1-9)!
- B. But, to understand the debts of God’s mercy, we must understand the debts of Israel’s struggle to appreciate their freedom, redemption, and holiness God had given them.
1. Israel, although freed from oppressive Egyptian bondage by God’s power **seen** in the plagues, saved by God’s power **experienced** in parting the Red Sea, and though **hearing** God **speak His covenant** to them as Mt. Sinai **quaked** and was **engulfed in divine smoke, fire, lightning, and thunder**, *struggled* to trust in God’s power and to obey Him.
 - a. For, when God revealed His covenant He said, “**I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt**, out of the house of **bondage**.³ “You shall have no other gods before Me.⁴ “You shall not make for yourself a carved image...” (Ex. 20:2-3).
 - b. Yet, even as the rest of God’s covenant was being revealed to Moses, and the people had claimed, “all the words of this covenant we will do”, and the covenant had been *sealed with blood* (24:3-8), Israel’s next move was to reject God’s word and demand that Aaron make an idol “god” to lead them (Ex. 32:1, 4 – “Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, “Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”...⁴And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then **they** said, “**This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!**”).
 - i. They ascribed to this idol the very description Jehovah gave of Himself when He revealed the covenant after **He** had led them out of bondage in Egypt (20:2)!
 - ii. Though God in His anger/justice desired to destroy the people and start over with Moses, at Moses’ plea God showed mercy and the *nation was spared*, though in *His justice* 3000 worshippers of the calf were executed (32:10-28). **Mercy and justice!**
 2. Did they learn their lesson? Sadly, and sympathetically, I can say they did not!
 - a. Numbers 11:1-3 – After receiving the Law and leaving **Mt. Sinai** the people complained against God and fire consumed many, but *the nation survived*. **Mercy and justice!**
 - b. Numbers 11:4ff. – The people complained against God for the *manna* He provided. Yet, when God showed mercy and gave them meat, their attitude was so repulsive that God sent a very great plague among them. Yet, the *nation survived*. **Mercy and justice!**
 - c. Numbers 14 – Israel wept and complained against Moses, Aaron, and God because they believed the report of the 10 faithless spies, saying that God had brought them out of Egypt to die by the sword of the Canaanites.
 - i. God’s response again was to destroy and start over with Moses (Num. 14:11-12).
 - ii. Yet, after their intercessor, Moses’ pleads for them, God’s description of Israel shows how great His mercy was in *sparing their lives* (Num. 14:20-23 – “Then the Lord said: “**I have pardoned**, according to your word;²¹ but truly, as I live, all the earth

shall be filled with the glory of the Lord—²² because all these men who have **seen My glory** and the **signs** which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and **have put Me to the test now these ten times**, and have **not heeded My voice**,²³ they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it...”).

- iii. Note that amidst God’s mercy **justice had to be served to preserve His glory!**
3. We may see Israel as a nation of faithless rogues, but I cannot help but see myself and God’s people, at times, in their pathetic faithlessness and discontent.
 - a. We as God’s redeemed have promised to obey Christ’s covenant.
 - b. How often do we, like Israel, place our hope, security, and protection in worldly idols of money, possessions, power, etc., when Jehovah says He is our hope, security, protection?
 - c. How much do we struggle like Israel to see our relationship with God as more than *hardships* and *missing out* on what the world *has* and *gets to do*?
 - d. How often do we fail to see our relationship with God through Christ as one of *great freedom, exaltation, privilege, confidence, and joy!*
 - e. Why do we listen to the *faithless fears* and tell so few of our great salvation in Christ?
 - f. We are not so different. Yet, we too are blessed with Israel of old to have a *merciful* God.
 4. With all this in mind, I would like to call your attention to one last thing, a shadow of God’s mercy that sums up what we have discussed and applies with great impact on our lives today.

III. Numbers 21: The fiery snakes and the bronze serpent

- A. Because Edom refused passage, Israel had to go the way of the Red Sea which was a desert that likely furnished little food or water and caused all Israel to be discouraged (21:4-9)
 1. The people spoke against Moses, God, and God’s provisions (21:4-7).
 - a. They called the *manna* sent by God “worthless bread,” loathing what in Psalm 78:24-25 is called “the bread of heaven/angel’s food.”
 - b. This ingratitude caused God to send fiery snakes among them and many died (21:6).
 - c. Because of the snake bites and the death that followed, Israel reflected on their actions and penitently sought Moses’ intercession so that God would remove the snakes (21:7).
 - i. No relief came before they sought it out.
 - ii. And, relief came about through the work of an intercessor.
 2. **The shadow of mercy (type): A bronze serpent set on a pole** by Moses (21:8-9).
 - a. God didn’t remove the snakes, seeing that *justice* was served in the pain and death their bites inflicted on the faithless. **Justice had to be served!**
 - b. Important: God’s mercy to heal was found in appearance as that which has caused the pain and suffering—a reddish, bronze snake that was placed on a pole, **but without the poison.**
 - c. Snakes were unclean, an abomination, personifying sin (Lev. 11:41-42; Gen. 3). So, God’s cure raised up for all to see appeared as an **unclean and detestable** thing.
 - d. Only those who had **faith** enough to **look on this despised creature**, a snake of all things, could receive healing.
- B. **The substance of mercy (antitype):** God’s chose to cure our sin through the sacrifice of Jesus the Christ, His only son, on a cross at Calvary.
 1. First, the Jews rejected Jesus, the true *bread of life from heaven* (John 6:48-51 – “**I am the bread of life.**”⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead.⁵⁰ This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die.⁵¹ I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; **and the bread** that I shall give is **My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.**”...⁶⁶ From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.”).

2. The Jews' rejection of Christ would result in their *lifting Jesus up on a cross* for all to see (John 3:13-16 – “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”).
3. **Like the form of that unclean, despised snake lifted up on the pole...**
 - a. Death wasn't taken away. It had to come...to God's Son! Justice had to be served even as mercy was bestowed!
 - b. God's cure was found in the same form as that which caused the pain and death, sinful and accursed man, yet *without the sin*.
 - i. Phil. 2:7-8 speaks of Christ “taking the form of a bondservant, and **coming in the likeness of men**. ⁸ And being found in **appearance as a man**, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”
 - ii. 2 Cor. 5:21 speaks of God's mercy/justice in that God made Christ “...who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”
 - iii. 1 Pet. 2:22, 24 speaks of Christ “who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth”; ...²⁴ who Himself **bore our sins** in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were **healed**.”
 - c. The crucified Christ was also despised, believed to be an unclean and accursed creature.
 - i. Deut. 21:22-23 – “If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, ²³ his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God.” (They removed/buried His body the same day to avoid defiling the Passover.)
 - ii. Gal. 3:13 – “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, **having become a curse for us** (for it is written, “**Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree**”).”
 - d. Christ's death brought victory over sin and death for all who believe (John 3:16-17 – “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.”).
 - e. **God's mercy and judgement were fulfilled!**

CONCLUSION:

1. Just as Israel had to obey God and in faith turn their eyes to the serpent on the pole, so must the sinner today obey God in faith and turn their eyes to the Christ on the cross to be saved.
2. For, through His work of redemption...
 - A. Jesus could claim “that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (Jn. 3:15)
 - B. The apostles proclaimed that “though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. ⁹ And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (Heb. 5:8-9).
3. So, will you put your faith in Christ and obey Him as your Lord and Christ, repenting of your sin, confessing your faith in Him, and being baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins?