

The Merciful Church

Kenneth Korby

Luke 6:36–42

The Blindness of Discontent

My dearly beloved brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ, there is a blindness that we have in ourselves, and that we can see in Joseph and his brothers. It is a blindness that is fostered by envy and jealousy that spews out in a mouth of discontent. Anybody who is alive and anybody who has lived in a family with fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, knows the angle.

For your own misery, dump on somebody else, make them miserable. For this is how blindness seeks to escape.

It is blind following blind falling into a pit, and the pit is the pit of discontent, murder, and hatred. Our discontent means we cannot allow mercy or anything to the other person unless we choose it. We want to remake it so he is satisfactory to us, but discontent knows no satisfaction.

The Family Likeness: Your Father Is Merciful

The story of Joseph and his brothers is only a preliminary pointer to Jesus and His Holy Church. So that today we are going to learn about the family likenesses.

Your father is merciful. Become children who are merciful, or as the family is called, also the church.

Let the church be merciful, as she is taught by her master. Let the disciples learn when they are fully taught to become like their Lord, merciful to people in misery.

Joseph and His Brothers

The looking for escape that Joseph's brothers made was to get rid of Joseph. Some said, "Kill him." Others said, "No. We really shouldn't kill that [unclear]. What we do is we'll just send

him to be a slave, sell him.”

But God, in His mercy, had something different in mind. He sent Joseph ahead as the one who would save all of his people. He would save them because God had intended to provide food in the midst of the famines that He Himself was going to dump on Canaan, and so Joseph became the one who saved many people alive when the famine struck the whole land. Now God had already prepared Joseph for this, and this is why his brothers, full of discontent and sourness, despised him even more.

Joseph said, “I had a dream. Everybody was bowed down to me, all the family,” and that enraged them. How dare a man think like that?

And so despised, he was enslaved. He was abused by the courts, abused by the people he worked for, and in jail they put an iron collar around his neck and shackles around his feet until that word which God had said came to pass. All of them had to learn it. Joseph himself was tested, says the psalm, to learn that.

And so Joseph, at the end, says something that sounds very much like what Jesus says to you: “Do not be afraid. I am going to take care of you and your children.” And it is this that we must learn from Jesus, so that in our discontent, quarreling, envy, and jealousy with each other, we can be transformed, reshaped into a people who know how to be merciful to others in their misery. The misery of our discontent, Jesus says, is a blindness and a hypocrisy.

Not Low Enough, Not High Enough

It isn't, of course, that you don't see faults being judged, and you see them in yourself. I suspect that there are some of you who talk to yourself very much about you're not a very good person, or you didn't do this very well, or you didn't think very well, or you sure don't have a very happy life. Everybody else seems to have a lot more than you do. You talk to yourself in a kind of what is popularly called a low self-image.

Well, before we're through today you will discover that a low self-image doesn't go low enough, and so what we try to do is we try to develop a higher, better self-image, as we call it. Well, you will learn today that the high self-image doesn't go nearly high enough, because Jesus is not talking about us making our images over. Jesus is talking about discontented, blind sinners, hypocrites being turned into children of God who are merciful.

Blaming and Condemning to Escape Our Misery

By blaming and condemning the other, we think we can avoid or assuage our misery. We can accuse them, find fault with them. We do not want their healing. What we want is some kind of escape from our misery, somehow or another, to prove we're right and they're wrong.

This goes on in the family. Joseph's brothers despise Joseph. They said what you've said: "The old man favors Joseph." Every kid thinks that the others are the favorite.

It's the same thing that goes on in a marriage with that kind of quibbling with each other, but God looks differently. He says, "You hypocrite, you hypocrite! Just remember, I will judge you the way you judge. I'm the judge. You aren't. When you judge, then you learn to judge like I do."

God Judges in Righteousness and Equity

For God judges, we sang in the Introit, in righteousness. That is to say, God comes to us and makes us lower than a bad self-image. You don't get low enough simply by scolding yourself, and He makes us higher than a good self-image because He raises us up to sit with Christ in His right hand, and God says, "That's how I'm going to make them right. I'm going to make their blind lives right."

This is no longer hypocrisy. This is the truth. Hypocrisy wants to fake it, act right. But the truth is, we are transformed.

God says He judges in equity. Everybody is judged the same way. That is, there is nobody here, or in the world, or in this neighborhood, who is not a sinner at a level of death before God. All we're waiting for is the funeral. The death is already at work.

He judges with equity. Whether you are religious or not religious makes no difference. So that He may judge everybody righteous in the same way, only through Jesus Christ. So God has consigned us all to our unbelief and disobedience, that He might have mercy upon us all.

For this is the heart of God, that He has mercy. He doesn't say, "Your misery, your rot, your envy, your grumbling, your discontent—That's okay. I understand. Just have a Coke and feel better."

No, God says that must die. And so, to do it rightly, God lays it upon His Son. There, God does it right. He puts to death all the sin, so that God can judge us now to be right in Jesus.

They Condemned Our Lord

The blind seek to escape from their misery by judging and condemning the others. We sometimes call that fault finding. For many of us, it goes on in the head all the time. We're always getting the stick at the dirty edge.

Everybody else gets it better, and that's the way they did to our Lord and Master. Jesus came, and they condemned him. When He ate and drank, they said, "Oh, He's a drunkard." When He sat with sinners, they said, "He's a quack prophet. He doesn't even know what kind of people He's sitting with."

And they judged him to be worthy of death. So he was crucified. This was not by the act of man. This was by the act of God.

They were not contented with the promise and the action of God in Jesus. So the men decided, human beings decided, wipe Him out, get that [unclear] on a cross, and get rid of Him. And the trusting that they did was that in their misery they would somehow or another persuade God to like them. "If God cares anything about fairness, He must surely have something special for me."

But what God wants is mercy. He does not want us sacrificing our neighbor, finding what's wrong with him so we can kill him. God wants us to take the sacrifice of His Son to be the root of all mercy.

Jesus Was Not Blind

And so Jesus was not blind. He saw the will of God perfectly, and in the garden He prayed for the will of God to be done, and the will of God was done in Him perfectly,

where He took the misery of our soul, mind, heart, and body, and the misery that we give to each other as we live, and the misery that others dump on us as we live with them. He took that. He did not worry to preserve his own life. He did not seek to escape.

Everybody invited Him, "Come down from the cross. Then we'll believe you." They were a bunch of blind liars. They wouldn't believe him under any circumstances.

But he didn't come down. He stayed there, for He suffered the judgment in order to bring about a healing for our lives, our homes, our church, and our community. "Judge not," Jesus said to His disciples.

“Judge Not”: Judging like the Heavenly Father

He does not there command us never to make up our minds to become perverse and not discriminate between anything, as if the lie were the same as the truth, as if life were the same as death, as if good were the same as evil. He’s not telling us, “Lose your head; don’t know how to make up your mind about anything,” but He’s saying when you judge, judge like the heavenly Father, because the judgment you pass out will be the judgment you get. The measure you measure out will be the measure that comes to you, and how is the heavenly Father merciful?

He is merciful in the forgiveness of sins. There are sins; it’s judged to be that. You can’t say, “Oh, it’s nothing.” That’s blind. But it is put to death.

It is sin, and God’s mercy is that He comes to sinners and forgives them. He does not hold the sin against them. It’s there, but he holds it against his son.

And those who are children of the Father trust that word of forgiveness because of the son. They cling to him. That’s where God does the forgiving.

The Speck and the Plank

The disciples then, when they are taught, become like their master. The miserable discontent see the plank in their own eyes. Jesus had no plank in his or no speck. He saw clearly, and he is the one who can fix our eyes.

Now, you certainly, if you go to a doctor to have your eyes worked on, you don’t want the doctor to be blind. You’d like to have him be able to see what he’s doing. Well, that’s what this Lord does. He looks at us to heal our eyes, so that we can indeed remove the splinter from our brother’s eye.

There is nobody we live with. You children, you live with parents who are sinners. You parents, you live with children who are sinners. They’re splinters all over the place. You spouses, you live with spouses who are sinners.

But what is the transaction? It is that merciful treatment of those in misery, that they may be released and healed.

Trusting Jesus' Judgment on You

To be judged by the forgiveness of sins from God is to learn to trust Jesus' judgment on you. No matter what the evidence is, you may not feel like it; it may not look like it. Others looking at you may not say, "Oh, look how free and forgiven they are."

But to trust that word against the evidence, and to trust the word, like Joseph said to his brothers, "No, don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. I'm going to take care of you, and I'm going to take care of your children."

Good Measure, Running Over

Now, in your forgiving, you see and receive that abundant forgiveness of God. It will be given to you, running over like the cup we drink from, running over with the goodness and mercy of God.

It will be given to you, shaken down, so there's no air bubbles in the measure, and like a woman in my time picking potatoes, she pulled up her apron and filled the apron with potatoes, carried it home. You will have your apron, your skirt running over.

Now that's what God says.

The Two Words in Our Heads

The trouble of it is that we always hear two words in our head, the words of the lie: "God's not going to take care of you. You better take care of yourself."

And so the accusation begins. It's the woman. It's the man. It's the snake. It's you. You. It's you. You. You.

We can hear that word. "If you don't take care of yourself, nobody's going to take care of you."

And there's what Paul says: "We don't live for ourselves. We don't die for ourselves. If we live, we live for the Lord. If we die, we die for the Lord. Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's."

But the other word says, "You better take care of yourself, [unclear]. If you don't, nobody else is going to take care of you."

Praise Is the Secret of Contentment

So how are then we going to hear the other word? The words that Jesus speaks: "Let Me teach you that you disciples can become like your Master, like Me, your Lord."

How are we going to learn to thank God for giving thanks? Praise is the secret of contentment. To praise God for all His works. Do you remember in the Psalm? "Who can praise You for all the wonders You have done?"

If you want something to do all day, every time you start gritching or complaining, turn it around and give thanks for something. Even if it's nothing more, give thanks for a little fact that you had wit enough to stop complaining. If that's all you give thanks for, give thanks for.

How will we learn to praise God enough? How can we do this?

The Supper: A Bitter Cup, Sweet Wine

Jesus says, "When you eat and drink, remember Me." That is, you preach to each other. Remember what He said, what He did, what He gives.

We celebrate this supper. We are being [unclear] in mercy, for here is where God takes the misery to Himself.

When Jesus drank that cup, it was bitter death, agony, misery to the perfection, sorrow that broke his heart. When we drink it, it is sweet wine, forgiveness of our sin.

Taking the Splinter Out of a Brother's Eye

And so Jesus helps you see clearly, so that you can indeed take the splinter out of your brother's eye. You parents, you have splinters to take care of the eyes of your children, well, you'd better have your own eyes fixed so that you can do that the way the Lord Jesus teaches that way.

And you, who are spouses, there are splinters. You have to take them out of each other's eyes. You have to work at that. You have to know. But you've got to be able to see.

For you, if you are going to take the splinters out, cannot do it until your own eye is healed, and it's not as if Jesus says, "Oh, you jolly fellows, be the church. Just be happy and upbeat and a good, positive image, and do good in the world. Then everything is fine."

No, the church is like her master. She suffers in the world. She is in agony at the misery around us and within us, and so she teaches Paul's way is the way you treat each other.

He says, "Don't put something there that's going to aggravate you, that's going to nudge, going to [unclear], cause pus in the soul. Don't keep sticking it in." Treat each other differently, and in the congregation, it is that way that we learn to be merciful to each other. Not that we do not have a bag of sin; it is that we treat the sin with the mercy of God.

That's how our sight is healed, and our hearts made free and joyful.

The Merciful Church within the Congregation

So the merciful church is internally learning to be merciful to each other. There is much bitterness and sadness, sourness among the members of the congregation of truth. It does not disappear because we become baptized believers.

It is a sourness of bitterness, and as it was at the water, the bitter water of Marah. God told Moses, "Throw that tree in [unclear]; that will sweeten the waters."

So the church learns to throw the cross into the middle of her life. That's how the sourness is sweetened, and the bitterness becomes refreshment.

The Merciful Church in Its Neighborhood

But you are also the church that has movements to the outside. You are planted 135 years now in the midst of this community. They know where the building is. They know where you are, and a large number of them have chosen all their life to simply to pass it by.

They are in profound danger and misery. A merciful congregation, therefore, is a congregation that will beseech God to have mercy on them, to heal their eyes, that they are no longer blind, thinking that they can escape by accusing, or by ridiculing, or by ignoring. There is no door there. There's one door, and that door is our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, for this neighborhood, you must be a merciful church. That is a church [unclear], praying, interceding with God, [unclear] all who for years just walk by and ignore all the gifts He wills to give, and you preach and you teach, you talk to your neighbors, to those whom you call on, to the children and adults who come to you, that they are to trust this gospel of the forgiveness of sin. For it is in this that we are healed of our blindness, that we can see in that one Master

Jesus Christ the mercy of God that heals us, and in that mercy we can be and become a merciful people.

The peace of the Lord Jesus be with all of you.

SOURCE

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