

Ole Miss FCA Weekly Devotional: 11/23/09

The Power and Passion of the Master Coach, Elliot Johnson



Thought of the Week:

God is merciful.

Verse of the Week:

He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. Psalm 103:10

In amateur baseball, there is a rule known as the "mercy rule." This rule terminates a game after a certain number of innings (usually seven) when one team is ahead by a certain number of runs (usually ten). The "mercy rule" has relieved the misery of many inferior teams or of a team that just had a bad day.

Mercy is an attribute of God for which we should be especially thankful. How wonderful that He has not given us what we deserve! We all have our "bad days." So many times we've "blown it" with God. But He is merciful! His patience is astounding! It's hard to fathom God's mercy as He looks down upon this wicked world. How many chances He has given us! How many times we have failed to obey! When we contemplate the Lord Jesus on the cross and recall the brutalities He suffered, we marvel. What an indictment of our merciless dealings with others! Compassion, tenderheartedness, and pity toward those in need are in the heart of God. It is His compassion and pity for us that continues to give us second chances. In Psalm 103:13, the psalmist says, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him." He is truly a merciful God.

Mercy is most naturally expressed within a family or a covenant relationship. It is the natural response of a loving family member to show pity and compassion to another member. Often, parents extend this compassion to a "know it all" teenager who is going through many changes. The love of mom and dad provides stability at a crucial time in life. As a father to a rebellious child, God extended mercy to Israel because of a covenant He made with them. From the latter part of Solomon's reign (931 B.C.) to the year 587 B.C., when their temple was destroyed, Israel moved away from God. God reached out to them day and night (Jeremiah 7:13), sending prophets to call them to repentance. But they did not respond. God's mercy toward miserable Israel extended over 200 years toward the northern kingdom and 350 years toward the southern kingdom, until He finally disciplined both with foreign armies. Then, He called Nehemiah back to rebuild the city defenses. It is God's mercy that gives us hope for a continued relationship with Him.

Because of His mercy, we are still here! We should be so grateful that God is merciful toward His children. Our God promises to complete what He began in us (Philippians 1:6), and by His mercy He shows compassion toward us in our weaknesses. Psalm 103:14 says, "For He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust." God sees us in our lowly estate and extends His mercy. Our hearts should praise the God of mercy, as David did in Psalm 103: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord and forget none of His benefits; who pardons all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases; who redeems your life from the pit; who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; who satisfies your years with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle" (NAS). The compassion of God to redeem, pardon, and heal His people from our lowly estate is astounding.

Jesus was the perfect example of compassion in the New Testament. Because they knew of His mercy, the blind appealed for sight (Matthew 8:27), ten lepers pleaded for cleansing (Luke

17:11-19), and a man in debt asked to be forgiven (Matthew 18:21-35). A tax collector asked God to be merciful to him because he was a sinner (Luke 18:9-14). Jesus showed mercy to both the physically poor and the spiritually poor. He met the physical needs of the poor in order to meet their greater spiritual needs. Jesus said that feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, being hospitable to strangers, and visiting those in prison (Matthew 25:31-46) was doing all those things unto Him. In fact He said, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me!

God's mercy extends to those who seek Him and to those who don't seek Him. While it is clear from Scripture that everyone will not be saved, much of God's mercy is unconditional. For example, when God destroyed the earth with a flood (Genesis 6-9), He vowed to never destroy all flesh again. After a fall rain, He still sends a rainbow in the sky to show the faithfulness of His vow. It's only by His mercy that we are not destroyed totally and completely. Therefore, we must show mercy to those who persecute us, whether they deserve it or not. A person who is merciful would forgive, not retaliate, when someone takes advantage of him. God's mercy is for everyone.

The "mercy rule" can restore some dignity to a defeated team. Similarly, we should be imitators of God and show mercy to people God brings our way.

Time Out:

- 1) A person who has received mercy should show mercy. All believers have received mercy. God has released us from the debt of sin. Are you merciful to those who have sinned against you? Read Matthew 18:21-35 and make three observations of the servant's attitude. verse 26, verse 28, and verse 30
- 2) When Jesus looked upon the multitudes, He looked upon them with compassion because they were like sheep with out a shepherd (Matthew 9:36). How do you look at the lost multitudes? Do you desire to see them saved or sent to hell? Jesus rebuked the Pharisees because they thought of the Gentiles as dogs deserving of hell. Jesus sat down with sinners. Do you?