

(1 Peter - Part 2): God's Abundant Mercy

by A.W. Tozer

According to 1 Peter, God's abundant mercy is the foundation of all His dealings with humanity, and it is the source of our hope and salvation.

Duration: 40:26

Scripture: Psalm 103:12, Psalm 136:1, Micah 7:18, Matthew 6:33, Luke 18:13-14, Ephesians 2:4-5, 1 Peter 1:3

Topics: "Abundant Mercy"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by describing a man who wanted to look presentable before going to a fine place. However, he was rejected because the artist wanted him as he was. The preacher then talks about two men who went to the temple to pray, emphasizing the importance of being honest and genuine in our prayers to God. He also mentions the need to continue praying regardless of our circumstances or feelings. The sermon concludes with a reference to a hymn that reminds us to trust in Jesus' name rather than relying on our own emotions or frames of mind.

Transcript

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Last week, I talked on this Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Today, I would speak on According to His Abundant Mercy.

Now, Peter, just before he said According to His Abundant Mercy, had blessed God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, we find there was a clear reason for the outbursts. He blessed the Father because the Father had blessed us.

If the Father had not blessed us, we could not possibly bless the Father. And if we had not been begotten again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, there would be no possibility of our blessing the Father. So he said, Blessed be the God and Father of Jesus Christ because he hath begotten us again and he begot us again out of his abundant mercy.

Now, I have pointed this out in order that we might see that there is always a clear link between one truth and another in the Bible. That if an apostle breaks out into a doctology, he wasn't simply having himself a spiritual time. Look what went before, and look what follows, and you will find there were clear, logical reasons for the doctology.

And it is always so with New Testament Christians. The spirit-led life is a clear, logical, and rational life. I must repeat what I said last Sunday night.

In a different context, that you and I must have the courage that belongs to our sound Christian faith. And we must stop this ignoble apologizing and cease to take this quick spaniel attitude out in the world. There is no reason why we should, like a paddled cocker spaniel, look sad and dreary and apologetic and cringe and crawl before the world.

The world has nothing we want. And we have no cause to apologize to the world. We are believers in a faith that is as well authenticated as any solid fact of life.

And what we believe and the links in the chain of evidence are clear and rational. So that instead of apologizing, we should boldly assert if we believed in ourselves and in the faith we hold with the fanaticism that the Communist believes in his devil-inspired doctrines, the Church could go off the defensive and go over to the offensive. Communists never apologize.

Christians always do. And that's why we're where we are. I'm glad that Brother McAfee had the ecclesiastical courage to announce and join in singing a song that's an Easter song.

I think that it's time we rescue some of these great songs from one Sunday a year. Give them back to the Church where they belong. The Church has a right to rejoice.

Christ the Lord is risen today, and our Son sets in blood no more. Marvelous imagery. Marvelous scriptural imagery that Wesley wove into that hymn.

And if we had believed it, we'd go off the defensive and go over to the attack. And so instead of crawling before the world and apologizing in low tones before the learned world, we would frankly and boldly assert that Jesus Christ is risen, and what are you going to do about that great fact? I say that Peter blessed the Lord God, but he wasn't simply letting himself go like an old lady in a cab meeting. There were particularly sound theological reasons for saying, Blessed be the Lord.

He blessed him because he had begotten us again, and because it was through his abundant mercy that he did it. And the hope he had begotten us to was a living hope, not a dead one. I point out that the Spirit-led Christian life is not according to whim or impulse or caprice.

And yet I know Christians who feel you cannot be spiritual without being capricious, and that the more impulsive you are, the more spiritual you are. I remember years ago, I haven't heard of him now for a long time. He petered out the way they all do.

But he was a very popular healing evangelist, and he just oozed in or tumbled into his meetings, just tumbled into them, never knew what anybody was going to do. And he was too busy running around to ever plan anything, so he just sort of stumbled into the meetings and muddled through them. And because he was like that, they advertised him as a man of lightning changes.

Why, they said, this brother is just as likely to get up and take the offering before they sing the first hymn, or he's just as likely to get up and preach the sermon and then have a hymn. You never know what he's going to do. Well, brother, I don't know.

These men of lightning changes. Sometimes it's a cover-up for laziness and poor planning and lack of thought. Sometimes it's simply a temperament.

They're usually no good in the Church of Christ, and they wouldn't be any good if they were for Ford or General Motors either. Imagine, if you will, a fellow who would say to the boss at General Motors, Mr. Jones, I'm one of these impulsive fellows. You never know what I'm going to do.

I'm a man of lightning change. Some day I may be out at seven in the morning, and other times it may be three in the afternoon. Sometimes I may go to my machine, and another time I may push another fellow off and take his machine.

I just follow the leading of the Spirit. You know how long he lasts? He just lasts long enough to get his pay and get out of there. You can't run things on these impulsive, changeable and constantly changing men of lightning changes.

There was nothing like that among the apostles. They were Spirit-led, and they were likely to do always what God wanted them to do. But somehow or other, it so turned out, as it properly should, that what God wanted them to do perfectly fit in with the total scheme of redemption and the whole will of God in the New Testament.

So that there was no place for the temperamental, whimsical fellow. Peter was no good to God, and he got over being whimsical and temperamental. As long as he was temperamental, scolding the Lord to glory for this or that, he was no good to the Lord.

He was a pest. But when he got filled with the Holy Ghost and got a visionary tool and got suffering a little and kicked out of a few places and leveled down, then he became the great apostle, second only to Paul in the New Testament. But God had to take lightning changes out of Peter and settle him down into the harness where he could work for the Lord.

Yet I say there are those who feel that if it isn't clear, it isn't spiritual. If it isn't capricious, it isn't of the Holy Ghost. But I know there is a clear, logical link between everything anybody said in the New Testament and the reason they said it always.

So that we are not victims of caprice, neither are we victims of the weather. Nor are we victims of the state of our health. Mr. McAfee coughed all night last night, but he is still around.

Occasionally I feel tired, but I'm still here, and I don't like sticky weather. But you have to go right on, brother. You can't show up at the house of God just when it's 70 and the humidity 31.

You've got to go to church no matter. And it's the same with prayer. You have to pray.

One man said that you're supposed to go to God and be honest with God. He said, when you go to prayer, you go and be honest. I said, tell God the truth.

One other man said, when you go to prayer and you feel that the whole thing bores you, he said, don't hide it. Tell God frankly, God, I'm bored with this whole business. He said, God will forgive you and bless you and straighten you out and get you started right.

But the main thing is, be honest and pray no matter whether you feel like it or not. So that was the way Christians did things. They weren't victims of moods.

If you knew the whole truth, there are very few Christians whose moods are entirely up on a high level and sustaining level. Sometimes people come to me and they say, Brother Tozer, could I call you up and say, could I have a half hour with you? Usually it turns out to be an hour and a half to two hours. And I say, sure, come on over.

So they'll come over. He'll say to me, Brother Tozer, I believe I'm a spiritual man. I've been filled with the Holy Ghost.

I'm all on the altar. I'm consecrated. But there's one weakness I'd like to have you tell me and how I can correct.

I don't always have the same degree of feeling and spirituality. Sometimes I'm up and sometimes I'm a little down. There doesn't seem to be always that high a level.

What can I do about it? And I say, I wish you would tell me because I don't know either and I haven't read a biography that I can think of. And as it was Francis of Assisi, I might accept him, but outside of him, I don't know any honest Christian that ever can get up and say, I live at consistently high level. I fly at an altitude of 16,000 feet all the way.

Now, if any of you would get up and say, Mr. Tozer, I have lived for 19 years now and never have ceased that high level. Blessed art thou, and I honor you, but I have never reached there. Pray for your pastor because there are times when my liver's out of order.

And there are times when I come to my study with no more desire to pray than a horse, but a little while with the scriptures and a little while with the hymn book and you're back in prayer happy again. And you've prayed it and I don't mean to leave the impression that you are always up and down because that did not accord with what I said at first. But I only mean to say that we are men and women who live according to the high logic of spiritual truth, not according to our feelings.

The old writer talked about what they called a frame, a frame of meat. And they would say, they'd put an entry in their diary, it was a very happy frame this morning, praise the Lord. And maybe two weeks later there'd be an entry with a very low frame this morning.

It felt very depressed. But nothing had changed except their frame. And one hymn writer said, I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name.

And I have gone before audiences now and again and said, now please, anybody knows, stand and tell me. I'll give you a minute to tell me. What does the writer mean when he says, I dare not trust the sweetest frame and I've never found anybody that knows.

Well, we say, a little differently, we say frame of mind. It's the same thing. We say, oh, he was in a happy frame of mind this morning, wasn't he? He said, he was in a very sad frame of mind.

And the writer says, I dare not trust the sweetest frame of mind, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. So you see, brethren, you and I live according to a holy, high, spiritual logic, and not according to either a shifty mind or the sweetest frame of mind. Amen? Now, that's very unspiritual doctrine.

Some people don't like that. They say, oh, you've got to be blessed all the time. Happy, happy, happy, happy.

But if they would just quit lying and tell the truth, they'll have to admit there are days when they're not so happy as they were the day before. But don't let it get you down. Just read your word and pray and sing a song and take the means of grace and you'll be as happy as you were yesterday.

Now, it says here, and this is what I want to really get at, according to his abundant mercy. Whatever God did and whatever he's doing is according to his abundant mercy. And we have the adjective abundant here to modify the word mercy.

It describes God's mercy. And you know that word abundant comes from a Greek word which at least has these associated meanings. It means the largest number, it means the very largest it means it means very great, it means much, and it means many.

Now, it can mean all those things. According to his largest number, his very large, very great, much, many mercies, God has begotten us again. And I'll give you a note here on that word abundant, that everything God has is unlimited.

That is, God being infinite, everything about him is infinite, which means that it has no boundary anywhere. Now, that's hard for you to think. I remember I preached on the infinitude of God here one time, and only one man, and that was Brother Kramer, came down congratulating me and telling me he'd gotten my sermon.

But so far as I know, everybody else just wrote that one off. But you and I need to get ahold of that, and even if it hurts your head, you need to get ahold of that. Good for you to know that God is infinite, unlimited, boundless, with no posts anywhere saying, this is the end.

There are no such posts in the universe. God Almighty fills it and overfills it and he is infinite and unlimited, so that we do not need any enlarging adjectives. When we say God's love, we don't need to say God's great love, although we do say it.

When we say God's mercy, we don't need to say God's abundant mercy, though we do say it. And the reason we say it is to cheer and elevate our own thoughts, not to tell that there is any degree in the mercy of God. There are no degrees in the mercy of God.

But there couldn't be, for God is degree-less, limitless, and infinite. Therefore, when you say God's mercy, you're talking about that which is so vast that the word vast doesn't describe it, because it has no limits anywhere. Its center is any place, and its circumference nowhere.

Now, these adjectives are useful when we talk about earthly things. We talk about the great love of a man for his family. We talk about little faith, or great faith, or much faith, or more faith.

We talk about wealth. We say he was a man of considerable wealth. But if he had a little more tucked away somewhere, we say he is a man of great wealth.

But if his bank account is still larger, we say he's a man of very great wealth. And if he really owns it, we say he's a man of fabulous wealth. So we go anywhere up and down the scale from considerable to fabulous.

You know where you belong on this, in this scale, because wealth, human wealth, is that which may vary up and down the scale, from practically nothing at all to so much you can't count it. But when we come to

God, there is no such degreeing of things. When we say that God is rich, God's riches will include all the riches there are.

God isn't richer, or less rich, or more rich. He's rich. So he isn't more merciful, less merciful, he's merciful.

For whatever God is, he is in fullness of unlimited grace. But you say, then, why does the word abundant occur here? Why do they say he has great love, wherewith he loved us? Those adjectives are put in there for us, not for God. It was in order to elevate our mind to the consideration of the vastness of the unlimited mercy of God that Peter said it was abundant.

Now, God's mercies are equal to God, and for that reason all comparisons are futile. God's mercy is equal to God. And if you want to know how merciful God is, then you will know, just to see how great God is, you see God, and then you will know how merciful God is.

I remember Brother Clark telling us, missionary to Africa, telling us about a deacon in the church in Congo, a great, big, fine fellow. He, of course, had the job of disciplining the converts. One young convert who hadn't gotten all the devil out of him yet, and he implained to break the rules and do things he shouldn't.

And they disciplined him and disciplined him again and again, and finally this big, strapping Christian deacon called in his erring brother. And he said, Now, brother, you have been failing us and disappointing us, disgracing your Christian calling about enough. Now, when we started with you, we had a bottle of forgiveness.

But I'm here to tell you, young man, that bottle is just about empty. And we're just about through with you. The missionary got a chuckle out of that.

He thought it was a very quaint and picturesque way of explaining that they were about done with that fellow. But you know, that bottle of forgiveness that God has, has no partner bottle to it. And God never says to a man, never, and never has said to a man, now, the bottle of my mercy is about empty.

God's mercy doesn't run out of a bottle. God's mercy is God acting the way he acts toward people. And therefore, we can say that it is abundant mercy.

Now, I might point out something here which you may have overlooked, that every benefit God bestowed is according to mercy. You know, there is a sort of pardonable heresy abroad, that God deals with some people in mercy and some in justice, but God deals with everybody in mercy. If God did not deal with everyone in mercy, we would all have perished before we had time to be converted.

We float on a vast limitless sea of divine mercy, and it's the mercy of God that sustains the worst sinner. If we have life, it is according to the mercy of God. If we have protection, it is according to the mercy of God.

If we have food, it is God's mercy that gives us food. And if we have providence to guide us, it is God's mercy. David said, Have mercy upon me and hear my prayer.

Was he just using words? No. Again, a sound, clear, logical statement of theological facts. According to the mercy mercy, hear my prayer.

Mercy even enters into the hearing of prayers. Mercy must enter into the holiest act any man can ever perform, and it is a constant mercy on the part of God. The fact that I'm sane and and we identify it and recognize it, and it's certainly intensified and pointed up, and it's through his mercy that we're begotten

again.

But that same broad mercy of God kept that sinner through maybe fifty years of rebellion. My father was sixty years old when he was born again. Sixty years! He had sinned and told dirty stories and sworn and lied and cursed.

Then he gave his heart to God, to the Lord Jesus Christ, and was converted, and he's in heaven. And the mercy that took my father to heaven is a great mercy, and we celebrate the mercy that took him there. But it is no greater than the mercy that kept him and endured him sixty years.

I've told this story before, but it perfectly fits here. An old Jewish rabbi in Old Testament times, a man came to his door and asked to stay overnight. It was dark, and he was a traveler, and he said, I've made it to your house, could I stay overnight? The old rabbi said, Sure.

He said, You're a very old man, aren't you? He said, I'm nearly a century old. He said, All right, come in, you must stay overnight. The old man came in, and they sat around and talked.

And the rabbi said, What about your relation to God? What about your religion? He said, I don't believe in God. He said, I don't have any faith in God at all. I'm an atheist.

The rabbi rose and opened the door and said, Get out of my house. I won't keep an atheist in my house overnight. The old man got up and hobbled to the door, and the door was shut again.

The rabbi sat down by his candle and his Old Testament, and a voice said to him, Son, why did you turn that old man out? He said, I turned him out because he's an atheist, and I can't endure him overnight. And God said, Son, I have endured him nearly a hundred years. Don't you think you could endure him one night? He leaped from his chair and rushed out, took the old man in his arms, and brought him back in and treated him like a long-lost brother.

It was the mercy of God that for one hundred years nearly had endured that old atheist. And so the mercy of God endured my father fifty years, and the mercy of God endured me seventeen years, and then has endured me all years since. So let's get away from this semi-heretical idea that God deals with some people in mercy and deals with other injustices.

He deals with everybody in mercy. Everybody is dealt with in mercy. The Bible plainly declares it.

It says here that his mercies, the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works. 145 Psalm. Now, God never violates mercy.

I can see the more I pray and read my Bible and think, the more I've got to write my book on the attributes of God. I've got to do it. I hope God will let me live that long.

But this idea that God works according to one facet of his nature one day and according to another facet another is all wrong. God never violates any facet of his nature. When God sent Judas Iscariot to hell, he did not violate mercy.

And when God forgave Peter, he did not violate justice. But everything God does, he does with the full protection of all the visions and the attributes. So when a sinner, though he'll live to be a hundred years old and sin against God every moment of his life, he is still a partaker of the mercy of God.

He still floats on a sea of mercy. And it is from the mercy of God that he is not consumed. And now there will be a day when the sinner will pass out from the realm where God's mercy supports him.

And he will hear a voice depart from me, I never knew ye that work iniquity. And hell will be the just desert, justly apportioned of those who refuse redeeming mercy. But there has been a providential mercy that has kept the sinning man all his lifetime.

So we Christians, we didn't come in through the door of mercy and then live apart from that door. We're in the room of mercy, and the very sanctuary is a sanctuary of mercy. And God has had mercy upon you all your life, sir.

We must not become self-righteous and imagine we're living such wonderful lives and God blesses us because we're good. That's not so. God blesses us because of his abundant mercy which he bestowed on us, and not because of any goodness, though he's busy making us good.

And I do not believe that even heaven itself will ever permit us to forget that we are recipients of the mercy of God. The very angels that burn around the throne are there because of the goodness of God. The very seraphim with their six wings are there because of the goodness of God.

So you and I will never be permitted to forget Calvary. A little old morbid song says, Lest I forget Gethsemane, lest I forget dark Calvary, but there's a modicum of truth in it at any rate. We must never forget that we live because God is merciful.

We are recipients of the mercy of God. I'm here this morning because God has been merciful to me, not because I'm a good man. Although God wants his people to be holy as he is holy, he does not deal with them according to the degree of their holiness, but according to the abundance of his mercy.

Honesty requires us to admit this. I pray that we may all be perfectly honest and admit it. Now, the unjust man will soon pass from mercy to judgment.

A hundred years the old atheist sinned against his God, and God was willing to bear with him overnight yet, but the day will be that he when the old atheist will die and pass from mercy to judgment. So I believe in justice and I believe in judgment. And I believe that the only reason mercy triumphs over judgment is that God, by a divine, omniscient act of redemption, fixed it so men could escape justice and live in the sea of mercy.

The judgment man who believes in Jesus Christ and who was born anew and who is a child of God, lives in that mercy always. The unjust man lives in it now in a lesser degree, but the time will come when he will not stand in the judgment. Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous, for the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

For the unjust sinner, though he is kept by the mercies of God, kept from death, kept from incest, kept from disease, kept a lifetime through the mercy of God, yet he will violate that mercy, turn his back on it, and walk into judgment. And then it is too late for the man, for the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment. But in the meantime, you and I stand in the mercy of God.

So remember when you kneel down to pray, don't do like the man who went to the altar and said he got down on his knees, he was under terrible blistering conviction. And he was a young man, and he had learned the Ten Commandments when he was a younger fellow. He got down on his knees there and he

began to talk to God about his sins.

He had them numbered. I mean the Ten Commandments numbered. He said, Now, Father, now, God, remember, I admit I have broken number one, number four, number seven.

Remember, Father, I kept number two and number three, number six. How foolish, how unutterably foolish. We should go to God and dicker with him like that! We should go to God like a storekeeper and portion out our goodness.

I'd rather follow old Thomas Hooker, the old Puritan saint. He came to die and he had been a man elevated way above the average in his spiritual life and holy living. They said, Brother Hooker, you go to receive your rewards.

No, no, no, he said, I go to receive mercy. And Brother Hooker went out, although he rated high in the level of holy men, he went out not to look for his reward, but to look for still more of the mercy of God. So, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy.

I think that's about enough. The sun shines on the just and on the unjust, and we float along in a glorious shimmering sea of the limitless, boundless, infinite mercy of the Lord our God. How wonderful is God's mercy.

I remember years ago I preached on the text, Thou, God, forgive us sin. Thou art a God who forgives sin. I didn't know it, but a woman was present, and some long time afterward she told me.

I got her somehow through a letter, telephone conversation or some way. She said, That night, that night, as you repeated the text, Thou, God, forgive us sin. That night I believed God, and my sins were pardoned, and I'm a Christian now.

And what could I say more than this? Thou art a God of abundant mercy. So don't look in at yourself, look away. Penelope said, Trying to straighten yourself up and fix yourself over? No, don't do.

Come as you are. But she said, Paul Rader told about the artist, he wanted to paint a picture, for some reason he had an art head, to paint a picture of a tramp, a real tramp, a bum off the street. We're talking about all the time, down here in Skid Row.

So he went to Skid Row and he hunted up the most disreputable run down at the Hill, capacity dirty, disheveled, ungroomed bum that he could find. And he said, I'd like to have you come to my studio. I want to paint you.

His face brightened up. His old baggy, bleary eye took on a new light and said, you mean you want to put me in a picture? He said, yeah, I want to paint you into a picture. Would you come? He said, yeah, how much will it mean to me? Well, he said, I'll tell you.

I'll give you a good fee. He said, I want you to come several times. He said, I'll tell you what I'll do.

I'll give you \$25 now, and here's my address. You show up there tomorrow morning, and I'll tell you what to do. Next morning, the doorbell rang, and the artist went to the door.

Here stood a fine-looking fellow with a white shirt on, clean tie, hair cut, new hat, and his pants having a reasonable facsimile of a press. He said, morning, what could I do for you? He said, don't you know me,

boss? He said, I'm just set for my picture this morning. The artist said, are you the fellow I hired? He said, yeah.

He said, I didn't want to come to your fine place looking like a bum, so I spent this \$25 getting myself fixed up. The artist said, I can't use you. He said, goodbye.

Dismissed him. He wanted him as he was. Two men went up into the temple to pray, and one said, here I am, God.

I'm all fixed up. Every error's in place. And the other one said, oh, God, I just crawled in off a skid row.

Have mercy upon me. God forgave the skid row bum and sent the other man away pardoned and unforgiven. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again.

So come just as you are, friends, and God will show you what to do. He'll straighten you out. There's no contradiction there in the slightest between what I've said now and all my preaching on repentance.

For God does require repentance, as I've said many times. But that's something else again. When the human spirit comes to God feeling that it's better, more acceptable, it automatically shuts itself out from God's presence.

But when the human spirit comes to God knowing that anything it gets will be mercy, then repentance has done its proper work. God will forgive and bless that man and take him into his heart and teach him that all God's kindness is through mercy. You go out on the sidewalk, mercy lets you stand there.

You greet your friend with a singing mind and a clear voice, mercy gave you that. You go sit down to a good meal, mercy gave you that meal. You rest on a nice soft couch this afternoon and take a little nap, mercy gave you that.

You get up and go to your work. Mercy did that for you, for all recipients of the mercy of God. The Christian knows it and has taken that mercy and used it, so to speak, to assure his abundant entrance into the kingdom of God.

A sinner is a recipient of God's providential mercies, too. But he tramples it under his feet and prepares himself for an endless hell. Which are you doing? Father, we pray, bless thou this truth.

O God, thy mercies are abundant. Are not thy mercies full and free, and have they not, O God, found out me? We thank thee for thy mercies, thy many abundant, full mercies. Now we pray that thou wilt help us to lean back upon thy mercy and trust and not be afraid, hate sin and love righteousness, flee from iniquity and follow after godliness, but always know that in all that we do, mercy is around us like the air underneath us, as the earth above us as the stars, and we live in a merciful world to serve a merciful God, and live and swim and move and have our being in the abundant mercies of the Triune God.

Graciously grant us, we pray thee, properly to understand this and to apply it to our hearts. And we give thee praise through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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