

There's a phrase I've heard a bit over recent years, and I really like it.

God loves us, just as we are. But He loves us too much to let us stay as we are....

These words, I reckon, capture the essence of the passage we've just read.... There's two themes that's going to come out for us today – “mercy” and “transformation”.

God loves us, just as we are. That's mercy, because we don't deserve to be loved. But He loves us too much to let us stay as we are (that's transformation). And as we study God's word this morning, we've got to keep both of these elements (mercy & transformation) in mind. If we don't view this message through the lens of God's mercy, all we're left with, is condemnation. And likewise, if we don't look through the lens of transformation, we're left with disappointment - that I'll always be like that....

Mercy and transformation.

Righto.

One day, a professor of theology said to me, “*Michael, sin is not doing naughty things, you know.... Sin is our attitude toward God.*” Now, this just turns on its head, what most people think sin is. Breaking God's law – transgression – wrong doing, is a symptom – not the disease. The disease is sin, (the attitude of your heart). Wrong-doing, is the outworking of that.

And, what we read today, reveals, that God doesn't just judge us on what we do – He judges sin – He judges attitudes of the heart....

So, how'd you go, when we read this morning's reading? Did anyone feel convicted? Well, if the person beside you didn't indicate that they felt convicted, could you just reach over and test their pulse? It'll be just there in their wrist somewhere.

How could you help **but** be convicted?

Man oh Man, Jesus makes it tough – it's what we think????
(not just what we do???)

Ohh. ... And Jesus launches straight in with a biggy - murder.

Murder??? We don't murder...

This one's actually pretty close to home for me at the moment. I just found out this week, that someone I'd spent time with, and prayed with, and had encouraged him to follow Jesus, well he was murdered a couple of weeks back. It's terrible... And yet I'm a murderer too....

If you really knew the real Michael Brumpton, would you be sitting here listening to me today? If you knew I was a murderer... If you knew I was an adulterer... Would you have come? Would anything I say today, have any credibility with you at all? Well, I hope it does, because the same merciful God, who has shown me mercy, is the same merciful God, who will show you mercy. Somebody once said, *“Evangelism, is simply one beggar, showing another beggar where to find bread.”* And that's all I am. I'm a sinner, and I'm showing you, a sinner, how to get right with God.

21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' **22** But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

Murder, is the symptom of the real sin. What's the real sin? Anger! And when we hold on to anger, it is a sin which leads to judgment....

But then Jesus takes it even further... If you **insult** your brother, you're liable... (that's not good in the Aussie culture where we actually make it a sport to hurl insults at one another...). So insults earn judgment

and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

That's a bit harsh isn't it? I used to wonder, "How can calling someone "a fool" be equated with murder?" ... Get ready. Today's going to be a big day of confession for me. ...

I used to be an instructor at an ag college, and I taught students to operate heavy machinery. Well, one day we had a particularly useless student. He just could not grasp anything. We would have to literally sit beside him in the tractor cab and continually prompt him as to what he had to do, and he could never get it.

Well, at the end of a very long and frustrating day, a few of the staff, including myself were joking that he should have been drowned at birth. We decided that he was so useless – that he was such a fool – that the best thing we could do for the world was to use the equipment we were trying to teach him, to dig a big hole and bury him. And at the time, that was really funny. But then the Holy Spirit convicted me, and I realised then, why it is, that to call someone “a fool” is murder. We had joked about it.... I became a murderer that day ... And it’s only because of the mercy of God, that I can stand guiltless before you today.

But if we don’t repent of anger – if we cannot let anger go, we’re in trouble. *If God punishes anger, we cannot fully worship God, with grudges unsettled¹.*

The story is told of a missionary who was taking a church service on a Pacific Island. When communion began, a row of people came forwards for communion. But before receiving the elements, one man got up and walked swiftly out of the room. A few minutes later he reappeared, and went forward for communion. And after the service, the missionary asked this fellow why he had done that.

And he replied that he was only visiting this church, because he was from another part of the island. And when he went forward for communion, he looked beside him and realised that the man he was kneeling beside, was the man who had eaten his father. And he was so angry, and so he left. But while he was still out in the foyer of the church, he saw a picture of Jesus hanging on the cross, and he knew that the nails which held Jesus to the cross were the nails that brought reconciliation, and so he dealt with this resentment which he had held for years. And he returned to take communion.

Neither you, nor I, can properly worship God, with grudges unsettled.

More confession.

I read this passage last week. And I realised, there was someone I was holding a grudge against. I didn't hate him – I loved him... But I blamed him for something. And it was churning me up inside. And I knew that to be right with God, I had to be right with this man. And you know what – God is good. He'd put the same thing on this man's heart. And we caught up with each other...

How about you?.... I'm pretty sure I'm not the only one here, who was bearing a grudge... God's word cut me, and led me to repentance. Let His word convict you too.....

When it comes to God, there's no room for self-righteousness. He can see right into your heart and He knows what you're really like. By God's standard, He sees my heart, and He sees your heart and He says, "Guilty". What chance do any of us have?...

Well, quite frankly, if it's up to us – None.

If you take the stand of most Australians, and say, "I'm a pretty good guy – I haven't done anything wrong." Well, God will judge you **without** mercy. And without the mercy of God, I would be condemned to hell, and so would you. "Hell" – the word is "Gehenna" the rubbish dump. Without the mercy of God, no matter how good you think you are, you're bound for God's rubbish dump.

V25 Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. ²⁶ Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

Friends, judgment day is coming. The bad news is, if you've been angry, or if you've insulted, or belittled, you'll be judged of being guilty of murder (that's the bad news). The good news is, the mercy of God. Jesus Christ died, for murderers. Without mercy, there is only condemnation, but **with** mercy, there is forgiveness. I **was** a murderer, but I'm not one any longer, because the blood of Jesus – who Himself **was** murdered, is more powerful than the blood that I have shed. And I've been forgiven, and so can you.... No sin is too bad. No crime is too heinous, no act too vile, not to receive the forgiveness of God.. God's grace overcomes all our sin.

So, that's mercy. In God's mercy, He forgives us, even though we're guilty.

But who wants to stay like that???

Who wants to have a heart of anger and hatred and insults???

Thank God for His transformation.... Part of being a disciple of Jesus Christ – part of this kingdom living, is the transformation that the Holy Spirit begins to work in your life. The Lord loves you too much to let you stay as you are. The Holy Spirit is sure to convict you of anger, hatred, insults.... Don't fight against The Spirit. Work with Him... Be transformed by a renewing of your mind...

God doesn't only want to save you – He wants to transform you. He wants to take out of you, anger and hatred and insults... He wants to make you better than that.

Righto, enough of murder. What's next? It can't be as bad as that can it??? Oww, another biggy – adultery.

More confession. I'm an adulterer too. I used to confess "Lord, I'm an adulterer at heart", but that's a cop-out – That's not what the bible says. The bible says, "If you harbour it in your heart, then you're an adulterer"

A young man came to the priest for confession, and said "I've kicked the cat. I stole a pen from work. I shouted at my neighbour, and that's pretty much it." And the priest, knowing the heart of men, said, "Have you been entertaining any impure thoughts lately?" "Oh no, father, but they sure have been entertaining me"

Once again, it's not only what you do – it's what's in the heart that God judges.

Now, I don't think Jesus is talking about when you look at a pretty girl and go "Wow, she's stunning"... (or for the ladies, I don't know, do you look at men? I'll just speak to the men, and you can acquaint it to your situation.) It's not just to see a stunning woman. It's when you start to look down her blouse, or begin undressing her with your mind, or replay the sex scene on the DVD, or pornography... **That** is adultery....

And without the mercy of God, and without confession and repentance, all I've earned for myself is condemnation. But, with the grace and mercy of God, when you confess to Him, "Lord, I am an adulterer, You see my heart. You know it's

filthy. I know I need you, I repent of this adultery, forgive me....”, God is gracious and merciful, and forgives you of all unrighteousness... Mercy.

But God doesn't want you to continue with an adulterous heart. Let Him begin to transform your character. There is no compartment of your life, that you should set as “off-limits” to God. And sometimes we need to make some **radical** changes in our lives, to work with this transformation that He wants to do.

You want to hear a radical statement, listen to this one, and tell me if Jesus meant it:

²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Did Jesus mean that? ... Do you think He meant it?....

Well, Is it true? **If** the cause of your sin is an eye, would it be better for you to lose that eye, than for you to spend eternity in hell??? Yes, it would. What Jesus said is true.... What about your hand? **If** the cause of your sin, is your hand, would it be better for you to lose that hand, than for you to spend eternity in hell??? Yes, it would. What Jesus said, is true... *(so I've brought along a few anti-sin devices, and we'll be having a sin purging session following the service....)*

It's true, but is **that** what He meant?

These couple of sentences are a literary device, called a hyperbole. Jesus makes a way out statement, but it is actually true. And His intent, is for us to take the truth this extreme statement, and to apply this truth to the difficult, but not **so** extreme.

Does pornography on the internet cause you to sin? Well, ring Bigpond, and cut off the internet. It's better for you to live without the internet, then for your whole body to be thrown into hell. But then I won't have email. Lose email. It is better for you to lose email – it is better for you to cut off the internet, then for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

Women, you might be getting off on your favourite Mills & Boone books – and your husband just never lives up to the man you fantasise over... Throw them away, if that is the case. Stop reading them.

Does the television take up all your time, so you don't have time to read your bible or pray, or to spend caring for other people. Well, cut it off. Sell your TV. Throw it on the rubbish heap. You're better off without it.... If that is causing you to sin.

There might be relationships that are not good for you to keep. You might find that whenever you hang out with a particular person, you seem to develop a foul mouth. You might discuss about unsavoury things. Or you might drink too much... Well, if you can't handle that relationship – if that relationship is what's causing you to sin – cut it off.

Greed and materialism might be your sin. Get rid of it. Sell all your stuff and give it to the poor – you're better off without it.

All these things are just examples – murder on the outside – anger on the inside. Adultery on the outside – lust on the inside... They're examples... But it is true for all sin. It's not just what you do – it's what's in your heart. And what it reveals, is this: Romans 3:²³ **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**

Not one of us can legitimately claim “I'm a good guy – God will let me into heaven”.

Every one of us, needs to be saved, and salvation comes **only** through Jesus Christ. Mercy.

And, God loves us too much to let us stay as we are. Romans 12:² **Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind....**

Mercy **and** transformation.

Questions or comments????

ⁱ France RT. Tyndale NT commentary (p120)