

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Mercy, Mercy me

Sergio Chavez

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Scripture: Ephesians 2:1-10

¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,

²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,

⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God

⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.

¹⁰For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Transcript:

Bow your heads with me. Father in heaven, we submit this time to You to worship, Lord. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear what You have to say to us, Lord. May Your words be spoken. May Your spirit continue to move today in our hearts during the service and after. Thank You so much for loving us. In Your beautiful and your glorious name, together we said, amen.

Well, I grew up in a Latino church. But sometimes when we were too late for my Latino church, we would go to the African-American church, the all Black church that was in my neighborhood where my Black friends went. And one thing that I noticed between the Latino culture and my Black friends, the pastors, they'll just point out your sin right in front of you. They will just point to you and convict you right there, man. It was like, "I know you were at the club. I know you're drinking. You need Jesus." And that's just normal within Latino culture as well. Didn't happen so much in my Caucasian American churches, but in our churches, they just point it out to you.

And with that, there's a lot of sayings that come in churches. We have the "amen" and "hallelujah" and "praise the Lord." And I notice that Latinos, for some reason, we say amen twice. "Amen, amen." I don't know why we have to say it twice, but we say it twice. But when

the scripture or the pastor's convicting you, I'll tell you what, with my Black friends, you heard a lot of "mm-hmm" and a lot of "Well." And my favorite saying of all time that I learned there is, "Help a brother out." Oh man.

Because when you're being convicted by scripture, by the sermon, you can't help but say just help a brother out, man. I'm a sinful being. Help a brother out. And much as well in those times you hear a lot of "Mercy. Mercy, Lord." Because you know you're sinning, you know you're in the wrong, and you're hearing it through scripture. You're hearing it through the sermon.

Well, I'm giving you that mercy because that's what I'm about to do to y'all. So, you better just gird your loins now, because I'm about to point out sin that comes from U.S. Westernized culture. And I'm giving you the out of mercy. Because one thing that I've noticed from Westernized U.S. church culture is that y'all are some entitled, egotistical, greedy, arrogant, and shaming people, some of the most I've ever met. Mercy.

Now, Señora, before you throw me into the bus and you write me off, you're not the only culture, okay? Before you're like, "Man, I did not come to church to be told that I'm entitled. I deserve better than that." Mercy. You're not the only culture. We have it in my culture, too. Entitlement and privilege comes out differently. I have something in my culture, Latino culture, called male privilege. U.S. Culture has male privilege, but Latinos, we take it up to another level.

So, every culture has its sin. But that's why we're in all need of mercy, which leads to God's grace, something we can never earn. And I'm bringing it up because Paul is bringing it up here in Ephesians. If there's anybody who has the authority of talking about how sinful they were to where God has taken them, Paul does. Because Paul was persecuting Christians. And then he had this encounter with God on the road to Damascus where God showed him mercy, which showed him grace, which then he did a 180 and became one of the biggest advocates for Christ.

But in all of his writing, he never stops to point out that we are sinners, and he always includes himself in that as well. One of the best ones I think is in 1 Timothy 1:15, he says the saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. In some translations it says I am the chief of sinners. Jesus spent his blood for your sins because the penalty of your sins was death. And Jesus came to save sinners, and he is reminding everyone he himself is one as well.

So, he starts with the ugly truth, which is why I started with the ugly truth. It's in the Bible. It's there. So, we go and Ephesians two, one through three. It says, and you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked following the course of this world. And then it goes on, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

Now Paul is writing to these churches where predominantly Greeks are Gentiles, meaning they weren't Jews. They didn't know the way of Yahweh. So, they're just learning about Christ. They're just learning about the gospel. So, he says, before you knew about them, you were trespassing. You were sinning. Whether you knew it or not, you were dead, you're spiritually dead to God because of your sins. And those things, in short he's saying you were going the way of the world that was pointing you away from God instead of towards God, and became by nature children of wrath, because that led them to do some heinous stuff back then. And unfortunately it's still happening to this day.

Humankind has proven to all of history that we are capable of some really good things, but we're also capable of some really evil and heinous as well. In our hands, left to our own devices, we know how to jack things up really good. Things that aren't intrinsically evil, but somehow we find a way to jack it up. Gaining wealth itself is not intrinsically evil, but we found a way to enslave people to not pay them so that we can gain the wealth off of their bodies. To this very day, low paid income for profit, unethical practices.

The internet, which was invented to interconnect. It was this bright, new future. Interconnect this network of computers. And in our hands, we have some of the things we've done with it. We've helped sex trafficking or pornography or gambling, online gambling, and all kinds of other stuff on the internet. Children of wrath. Social media, which was invented to connect friends and those types of things. Even that, in our hands we've made it addictive, something that robs us of our time, which leads to depression, anxiety, loneliness, and body shaming.

Pain pills invented to help people with surgery or for an accident to overcome their pain all of a sudden became a black market. Opiates that are sold in suburban neighborhoods, which get down to our youth. 62% of students get their opiates at home. When we don't have that moral compass towards God, we go the way of the world, and we have proven we're not well. So, Paul is pointing out the sad state that they are in. And mira, air quotes, "We started it."

But then he turns to the good news. In Ephesians 2:4-7 he continues. He says, but God. What an amazing two words, but God. We just had a whole sermon series here at BelPres about but God. In my language it's pero dios. Now, if you want to say to my language, please practice your Spanish because do not roll your R's in that. Pero dios means But God, but if you say perro dios, that means dog god. No, Señor, no. Just stick to English. That's what's going to be happening. Don't be doing that kind of action.

But God being rich in what? Mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. Mercy, Lord almighty. God is rich in mercy. Mercy means compassion shown to an offender. Paul, which said, y'all are all offenders, including myself. But God is rich in mercy. Not that He has a little bit or just enough. He is rich in mercy.

And why is He dishing out this mercy? Because you are loved by God. Because He loves you. Not because you're perfect, not because you haven't sinned in a while, not because you're saved, but simply because you exist. And Jesus' blood paid for your sins. And then his death and resurrection is informing us that Jesus is advocating for us every single day in heaven. A place in judgment where we should be standing, Jesus has pushed aside and put himself there every single day advocating for us. Saved by grace.

Some of you might be thinking, well, my sin isn't that bad. I mean, I'm not like these crazy people who sin a lot. Well then why was your sin paid with blood? I don't pay with a lot of things with blood, I don't know about you, but maybe we need to reflect on ourselves. Because when we finally understand this gift of grace and this mercy that has been given to us, we then can be empathetic and give other people that same mercy so they can lead to grace.

I just spoke with a friend of mine who really-encountered this story of hers when she went to this one church at the age of 13, because her friend invited her to this church. And she does not like church and Christianity, but she took a leap of faith because her friend invited her. So, she put on the best dress that she had, and she went to church. And unfortunately the ushers or deacons or whoever the adults were stopped her in the lobby said, "You are dressed inappropriately for church. You cannot enter the sanctuary."

So they did the best thing that they thought of. They meant well. And what they did is instead of putting her in the sanctuary, we will put you in the cry room. They couldn't send her home because she was 13, so they put her in the cry room. And I asked my friend.

I didn't know about the story until years later. I asked her, I'm like, "Did you hear what the sermon was about or the message that day?" And she was like, "Shut the front door. I was so ashamed. I just sat there in the dark looking at my hands counting down the minutes until that service was over." The fundamental misunderstanding of mercy and grace on both the adults and her part kept her from the larger message of grace.

When we understand the mercy that has been given to us, we become more empathetic to others. If there's anything we should be doing, we should be advocating for everyone to hear about this grace. We must remember we are sinners. We have to admit it so we can reflect on how much mercy has been given to us.

And Paul continues on in Ephesians 2:8-10. He says, for by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. So, when you get to heaven, you don't get there saying, "Well, I paid enough tithe. I went to church every Sunday. I went to prayer meetings. I gave to Jubilee REACH. I did all these things. That's why I'm saved."

Paul's saying, "No. It is a gift given to you that you can never repay or have the money to repay. It was paid by blood. It was a gift. You didn't earn it. It was given to you." For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

So, I'm trying to culture my daughters because they didn't grow up like I did, an inner city, immigrant kid. And one of the ways we've been doing that, or several ways, we've been taking them on road trips to see the rest of the country. And then another way, we decided to show them some foul mouthed comedies about immigration. I don't know how you guys do it in your house, but that's the way we're doing in our house.

And so, we just recently watched Born in East L.A., which is a classic Latino movie, especially in my house. And if you don't know it, it's a story of Rudy who goes to go pick up his cousin at a toy factory, but he leaves his wallet at home, and then immigration then raids it, and he gets deported to Mexico. And the rest of the movie is him taking odd jobs to try to raise enough money to pay \$500 to get somebody to illegally bring him back into America, even though he's an American citizen.

And one of these odd jobs that he does is selling oranges on the side of the road, which we thought as kids, when I was a kid, was hilarious. Because my dad used to say, [foreign language 00:13:42], which translates to, if you don't pay attention in school, you're going to end up selling oranges on the side of the street. And there it was in this movie, so we just thought it was hilarious.

In this little two-minute segment in this absurd comedy, Rudy is selling these oranges. And there's this little poor boy that is observing him, and Rudy notices them and gives him an orange. And this little boy smiles, and then runs to his mom and his siblings a little bit away and shows her that he got this orange. Which she then has a very concerned look on her face.

And she goes back to Rudy and tries to tell him, [foreign language 00:14:19], my son stole this orange from your cart. Now Rudy doesn't speak a lot of Spanish, so he's trying to translate. No, I gave him this orange. She's like, no, no, no. [foreign language 00:14:30]. She was trying

to explain to him, we may be poor, but we don't steal. No steal. And he's like, no, no, I gave it to him.

And so, what he does to try to show this is he takes a bag and he gives it to the boy, an entire bag. And she's like, no, no, no, no. I don't have the money to pay for this. No, no, no. And so, they still don't understand each other. So then he grabs another bag of orange and he gives it to her, at which point she then realizes that he's giving her these oranges.

And I was getting emotional at this little two-minute segment, because her response in thanking him, she says, [foreign language 00:15:06], which translate, may God pay you back one day, sir. May God pay you back one day, sir. Because she knows she does not have the money to ever repay him. She knows that this is a gift beyond anything she could ever afford.

And after that, then Rudy turns and takes the whole cart of oranges and gives it to her so that she can sell oranges to raise money for her family very well knowing that that's now more money he's going to have to raise in order to get himself back to America. A gift that she wasn't asking for, didn't even think about, and was completely given to her.

And every time I see this scene, I just think of Ephesians 3:20. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we can ask or think. And I get emotional when I see that. Because I don't know about you, but I've been that woman, given something that I cannot repay back, on earth, even more so in heaven. When we understand the mercy of God that has led to His grace, it changes us.

We see that in scripture by the story of Stephen in the book of acts, Stephen, who goes in front of the Sanhedrin and proclaims to them that Jesus is the Messiah, which to them at that time is considered blasphemy, and the penalty for blasphemy is death. So, they drag him out to the edge of the city, and they stone him to death. But we read an Acts 7:6, he says, then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord do not hold this sin against them."

And when he had said this, he fell asleep. He died. Because he fundamentally understood the mercy that was given to him, the grace that was given to him, and he wanted to advocate for them, they do not know what they're doing, paralleling what Jesus said when he died on the cross, "Lord, do not forsake them, for they know not what they do."

If there's anything we should be doing, we should be advocating for people to know grace. And sometimes we need someone to reflect that back to us, because we fundamentally need to know the reason why there's mercy is because we are sinners. And that's why I started out the way I did.

My daughters are great mirrors. One of my sins is I am a workaholic. I learned that from my parents of being immigrant parents working all the time. It just transferred down. And my middle child one time at home, I was working on my laptop. And she came and out of paper she made a laptop. Put little keys on it and a little picture on there and a little mouse or whatever it was. And she's like, "Look, Papi, I made a laptop." And I was like, "Oh sweet." I was like, "This is so cool, so creative." She's like, "Yeah, I made it so I could sit next to you and be with you."

We have to admit. And God wants to extend this mercy to us every single day. In Revelations 3:20, we hear God speaking. Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. God is standing at the door, Jesus is standing the door, knocking. All you need to do is answer. Waiting to dish out mercy, to give you the gift of grace.

And the thing that I love about Revelations 3:20 is it doesn't describe what that door looks like. It doesn't say it's a perfect painted door with a perfect Christian wreath or it's a broken down door missing the handle with broken glass. It doesn't say that the door is labeled adulterer, addict, greedy, self-centered, entitled, apathetic, egotistical, divorced, or thief. It doesn't say anything about the door. All it says that Jesus is there knocking, advocating for us every day.

My friends, if you've been Christians your entire life, I just want you to reflect and remember, you've been granted mercy. You've been gifted grace. And if you're just new to this whole Christian thing and Jesus and all this, and you want to know more, you want to learn about this grace, please find somebody here, a pastor, a deacon, anybody who looks like they work here. Even if they don't, talk to them anyways, they'll get you to somebody. That's what I do at any department store. "Hey, can you help me?" He's like, "Man, I don't work here." I'm like, "Well, you fooled me. Congratulations." Talk to somebody.

And today, if you want to commit, recommit, if you want to make this commitment to get to know Christ, I invite you today. I'm not going to call you up here to pray over you here. I'm just going to pray over all of you now to take that next step here or with anyone you know who knows Christ, because mercy leads to this amazing gift called grace. Bow your heads with me.

Father in heaven. I'm going to pray for everyone here, Lord. Now I just personally want to thank You for having continual mercy on me, Lord. I'm a sinner. And for all of us when we recognize we are sinners, we can come to You and repent, and You are always ready and rich with mercy for us that leads to your grace, Lord.

And for them, the person who's here today, who's been wondering if they should take the next step, Lord, I ask you to give them eyes to see and ears to hear how You've already been working in their lives. Send saints their way to help them with the next step, Lord. Thank You so much for being a merciful God, and thank You so much for sending Your son to die on a cross to give us the gift of grace. In your beautiful name, we all said together, amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read Ephesians 2:1-10 and answer the below questions with your friends, family or All In small group.

Ice Breaker Question:

- If you could have an entrance theme song, what would it be?

Opening Questions:

- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions – Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following

- What are three characteristics Paul describes of people previous to salvation? (Ephesians 2:1-3)
- Why do you think we are not allowed to boast in heaven about attaining salvation?

- In Ephesians 2:10 it states we are “created in Christ for good works...” what do you believe some of those good works could be?

Closing Question and Application:

- Given what we’ve discussed together today, how might God want you apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing Group Prayer:

- Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.