

# MERCY AND RAHAB AGAIN

## A SERMON

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“But if you had known what this means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless.” Matthew 12:7

I SHALL take but a twofold view of the text. First, *what it is savingly to know the mercy of the Lord*. Secondly, *the justification of the guiltless*.

First, then, *what it is savingly to know the mercy of the Lord*.

The teaching of the Holy Spirit is as essential to our salvation as the mediatorial work of the Lord Jesus Christ; and after experience has taught us what and where we are, we shall see that the sovereign pleasure also of God the Father is as essential to our salvation as the work of Jesus Christ. And so, by degrees those who shall be saved are guided into all truth, and the truth makes them free, and they delight therein. Let us, then, take the word of the Lord to guide us in this great matter of saving acquaintance with the mercy of the Lord. We see one dreadful error here resulting from their not knowing the mercy of the Lord, namely, that they condemned the guiltless, and that, of course, would lead to the opposite practice of justifying the guilty; and he that justifies the wicked, and he that condemns the just, are both an abomination in the sight of the Lord. Let us come this morning, then, once closer to God's blessed word; let our consciences and hearts now be laid open thereto, and may the Lord help us for a few moments honestly to deal with our own souls and with his blessed truth, in things essential to our eternal life and to his glory. Now this scripture, as you are aware, is a quotation from the 6th chapter of the prophecies by Hosea, and I shall take the description, to begin with, given in that chapter of the work of the Holy Spirit. “Come and let us return unto the Lord;” let us turn away from man, from the world, from sin, from our own works; let us turn away from the law; let us turn away from all creature confidences; yes, let us turn away from the temporal things that concern us, and let us return unto the Lord. And why was it that there was this earnest proposition? Notice the reason given, “For he has torn, and he will heal us.” What has he done? Why, he has brought life into the soul, and it has torn me asunder from the world; it has torn me asunder from what I was and where I was. I was in carnal security; but now I see and feel my lost condition, I was an enemy to God, but I can stand against him no longer. I was careless about my precious soul, and about eternity and judgment, and escape from

the wrath to come, but I can be careless no longer. "He has torn, and he will heal us: he has smitten, and he will bind us up." Here, you see, is confidence and illumination. "After two days will he revive us; in the third day he will raise us up." By the two days and the three days we of course are to understand two distinct things; first, that after he has subjected us to all that humbling soul-discipline, to all that agony of heart and of feeling that shall bring us to where Job was when he said, "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; and I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." There is a set time to favor Zion. You will not always be in that wounded state; no, the Lord will pass by, and, as it were, spread his skirt over you, and it shall be a time of love, and he shall take you into covenant with himself, and you shall become his, and he will become your light, your life, your salvation, and your portion forever. The next thing we are to understand evidently by the two days and the three days is the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is by the death of Christ, everlasting honor to his dear and blessed name, that every one of our sins has lost its life; not one of these dogs can ever move its tongue against any of the children of Israel. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect"? He will give you to see what the Savior achieved in his death; and when you see what his death is, what his atonement is, the Holy Spirit, bringing home the word with power, shall then revive you, and you will say, If my pardon is to be there, if my sanctification is to be there, if my salvation is to be there, if the mercy of the Lord be there, if the grace and love and promise of the Lord be there, if all my blessedness be there, then I dare not despair. Jesus Christ is Immanuel, God with us. "After two days will he revive us; in the third day he will raise us up," the third day referring, of course, to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is risen, and he is risen as the resurrection of his people: "He dies no more: death has no more dominion over him." Now, if you are brought thus far, you will know what that means, "I desired mercy." Never, never was there a scripture heard of conveying a sweeter and a more endearing correspondence between God and the sinner than this. God desired mercy: he desired to have mercy upon us; he desired to show us mercy; he desired to reveal his mercy; he desired to have us by his mercy; and what his will desires, that he does. And the sinner thus taught desires mercy; "God be merciful to me a sinner." Just what God desires, and he makes his people desire the same thing; so that his desire and their desire meet. God desired the ark for Noah, and he made Noah earnestly desire the ark; the desires met. Hence the apostle upon this delightful subject says, "I apprehend" to apprehend is to lay hold of, "I apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." He apprehended me first to save me, then to make me one of his witnesses on earth; and I lay hold of both, the salvation that he apprehended me, saved me with; and he apprehended me to make me one of his witnesses. "Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." "I desired mercy." Thus, I hope, then, most of you at least know what this means, "I will have mercy." Oh, it is a way of mercy that sweetly accords with and divinely illustrates all the perfections of the everlasting God. But again, as he has thus torn, and smitten, and will heal us, and bind us up, and deliver us at the set time by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, then we shall have to be put to the test after this. Because people do come into apparent soul-trouble, and by a sort of religious glee and joy get out of it, and they go on well for a time, by-and-bye away they go, and we hear no more of them. This made the prophet say, "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know." Ah, the stony-ground hearer, he was in a little trouble; but the minister's gifts, or the minister's voice, or something or other, gave him a sort of delight; he was all right, and very soon became all wrong. The stony-ground hearer did not know what this means, "I will have mercy;" he did not understand it, he never really felt his need of it. He had a little concern, was pleased at the sound, became somewhat glad, but he soon went

away. Whereas, where the work is real, there will be an increased downward experience, and instead of feeling your need less of the mercy of God, you will feel your need more of it, and consequently you will not change your path, but go on in the same path; you will not change the true gospel for a false one. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know," this same mercy, this same path, this same death of Christ, this same resurrection of Christ, this same order of things. Hence the apostle Paul, the same grace that called him he abodes by, the same Jesus Christ, the same God, the same gospel, the same order. The apostle goes back to the Lord's first dealings with him, and rejoices in the blessed truth at the last that he rejoiced in at the first, that "this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief;" not of whom I *was* the chief, but "of whom I *am* the chief;" because as he went on he learned the greater depth of the deceitfulness of his own heart. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord; his going forth is prepared as the morning." I am afraid that we lose, for want of a little care, the beauty of that scripture I have just quoted, that "his going forth is prepared as the morning." We are apt to go to the literal morning and see if we can trace out in the sun's preparation for his daily journey the meaning of that scripture, and that is all very well in its way; but I think we ought to take the morning there to mean the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, that his going forth was prepared as the morning. By the resurrection of Jesus Christ God had a ransom in hand by which to go forth into all the world and save sinners from going down to the pit. By the resurrection of Jesus Christ was brought in an everlasting righteousness, by which God was prepared to go forth and justify the ungodly, by which he was prepared to justify all that he should bring to believe in Jesus Christ. Oh, what a preparation! Why, the Lord says, "Come, I am prepared: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." I am prepared; I have found a ransom; I have a righteousness, I have a salvation, I have a victory in hand, I have my Son at my right hand; he shall reign till he has put down all hostile rule, gathered in all his sheep, accomplished the predictions of God's word, carried out his counsel, and shall at the last triumphantly say, "Here am I, and the children you have given me. Preparation! Your preparation for life must be by an acquaintance with the righteousness and atonement of Jesus Christ, God on your side by that; your preparation for the solemn hour of death must be by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, God on your side; your preparation for judgment and for the enjoyment of an endless day must be by that one offering in which he has perfected forever them that are sanctified. Now notice the gentleness. As you go on you will soon learn that you need some gentleness somewhere. "And he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." He has desired mercy, not ceremonial sacrifice; he will deal gently and tenderly with you. You will have some hard hits from the world, you will have some fiery darts from Satan, and sometimes be perhaps deeply wounded in the house of your friends. The apostle Paul had to lament this, and so have all more or less. But behind all these rough dealings, and ugly things, and hard things you meet with, there is One that is gentle to you, and tender in his dealings, and you will have ere long to testify, "Your gentleness has made me great." He deals with you, therefore, carefully, and gently. "He that touches you touches the apple of his eye." Thus, then, if we have a saving acquaintance with the Lord's mercy, it will make us that kind of character which the Lord pronounces blessed. "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." Now if the Pharisees had known this, they would not have condemned, as they did, the guiltless.

But some tell us that we must be careful we do not so preach mercy as to dishonor truth. Very true; that is right, perfectly right. Mercy without truth would be no mercy at all, and truth without mercy

could only be law truth. If God came to us in simple truth, it could be only to our eternal condemnation. God's law is true, his law of condemnation. And if he came to us in mercy without truth, what dependence would there be in the mercy? If a person were to show me mercy today, but had no integrity, no stability, no truthfulness about him, why, there would be no certainty in the mercy. And therefore, the Bible ever unites mercy and truth. "Mercy and truth shall go before your face." And you must take this mercy and truth in their several stages in the Lord's dealings with you. First, sovereignty. He has mercy upon whom he will have mercy; because he can do so, because it is a truth that there is not his equal, that he is above all, and can do as he pleases. There is truth, therefore, as to his sovereignty. I know several who say that we make the sovereignty of God absorb all other perfections. Now, for myself, I have always thought that the perfections of God make him sovereign. I never could understand how God, without his self-existence, omnipotence, infinite knowledge, holiness, and integrity, could be sovereign. And therefore, to talk of our making his sovereignty absorb his other perfections is in keeping with the other parts of the nonsense that these men talk. Now I hold, then, that God can do just as he pleases, and if he is pleased to have mercy upon you, it is simply according to his good pleasure: "Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." He does so in mercy, and he does so in integrity. It is not his will that one of you should perish, it is not his will that one of you should be lost, for his mercy, backed up by his infallible integrity, endures forever. There we have, then, the sovereignty of his mercy and the integrity of his word. But we go on a little farther, and the scene brightens as we go on. What does the Lord do? Does he save sovereignly without a mediator? No, he does not. He was pleased to come down to our comprehension in this matter, and has provided for his holy law a Surety, a Substitute; has provided for the demands of justice, has provided for the dignities of holiness, and has provided for the integrity every way of his character. Here, then, God saves us as justly as he does mercifully; here, in and by Christ Jesus, mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace embrace each other. Well, then, it comes to us freely; he remembered us in our low estate, he abides by us freely, and will abide by us, and that forever.

I notice, in the next place, then, *the justification of the guiltless*. And in this second department I have to point out the liberality of the gospel, beautifully typified by that to which this circumstance leads us. The Lord in that dispensation was graciously pleased to make many provisions of a very liberal kind, and one is that with which our text stands connected. 23rd Deuteronomy; "When you come into your neighbor's vineyard, then you may eat your fill;" and "when you come into the standing corn of your neighbor, then you may pluck the ears with your hand." Now this was one of the liberalities of that dispensation, let your neighbor be who he may. But then the man must be hungry, and he must take the grapes and the corn from necessity, and not as a matter of prodigality, as though he would try to injure the man who owns the field; and he was not to take any away with him. Who does not see in this a spiritual meaning? That man that would take some away with him, he was abusing the privilege. But was the privilege wrong because some might abuse it? So, my hearer, who are the persons to whom the cornfields, I mean the promises, belong? The 5th of Matthew will show. We will take one. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst." See that you hope in the promise, because your soul hungers for that mercy which the promise holds forth; that you hope in Jesus Christ, because your soul hungers for the bread of life, and for that meat that endures unto everlasting life. If this be your feeling, then you are welcome in the fields of the gospel. And though the Pharisees may murmur at you because of your eating this free-grace corn, and they think that you ought to have a little of their chaff with it; yet you rather prefer the clean provender,

and you have a right to it if you are very hungry, and a believer in the God of the Hebrews. But they were not to take any away. Now you must not carry election away, and you must not carry the promises away. Some ministers do this, because, they say, we hold all the same truth that you do: but they take them away; they do not bring them to the people. Now this is abusing the privilege. But, again, all three of the sabbaths of that dispensation were provisions of mercy; but I notice only one of the sabbaths. The fiftieth year sabbath was another of which Christ is Lord; he is the Lord of all these sabbaths. There is something amazingly charming, I think, in that fiftieth year sabbath. It was to be on the tenth day of the month; what is that but the end of the law? And it was to be in the seventh month; and what does the seventh mean but the completeness of the Savior's work? And it was to be on the great day of atonement; and what is that but the Lord Jesus Christ putting away our sins by the sacrifice of himself? Ah, then, the law is ended, perfection is brought in, sin is atoned for. And notice, "You shall sound the trumpet of jubilee throughout your land;" not to this tribe, that tribe, nor the other tribe merely; but throughout the land. "Go you into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," is that that seems shadowed forth even in that part of the jubilee. And that trumpet was to the poor and needy a joyful sound, for every one's debts were then cancelled. When the jubilee came the creditor knew that that would put an end to the matter, and their dealings were to be regulated by the jubilee, to the end that no injustice should be done by it. When that came the debts were cancelled. Why, the man in debt would hardly be able at first to realize his freedom. He used to be afraid to go up that street and down the other, lest he should meet one of his creditors; and if his coat happened to catch in one of the railings, "Who is that?" thinking it was some sheriff's officer, as nervous as can be. You are out of debt. Why, then, I am indeed happy. And not only so, but he got an inheritance. I have not only got out of debt, but out of poverty; I have got my inheritance, and my inheritance is that which the Lord has given me; what a happy man I am! And he was to return to his family, not shut out from his family. Why, say some, you cannot spiritualize that. No, I should think I need not; you can do that pretty well. Do not some of you know what it is to feel that you are shut out of the family of God? You say, the Lord has a family; I know he has; there are people that are God's children, I know they are there are some that are saints, I know there are there are some that are taught of the Spirit of God, some that are predestinated to the adoption of children, and are blessed with the Spirit of adoption; but alas! alas for me! I fear I am not one. I love to be among them, I love their God, I love them too, but I fear I am not one; I seem as though I had no business among them; I seem to have no experience except that that tells against me. I am such a poor creature and feel and tremble at the thought that the time will come when I shall see them enter into the everlasting kingdom, but I shall be thrust out, I shall be left behind, lost, and lost forever. Unhappy, unhappy me! By-and-bye the trumpet of jubilee sounds into your soul; the law is ended, and you are justified; "You are complete in him" I have found a ransom, the kingdom is yours, the inheritance is yours; I have paid the uttermost mite that you owed, let him go, he is free, and free for ever; "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound." These are some of the liberalities of the gospel. And those that availed themselves of them were not to be condemned; they were justified, they were gratulated, by embracing these privileges as a type, I say, of the liberalities of the gospel. I have named only a very few, I could name many others, of the liberalities of that dispensation.

But let us come to *the guiltless*. Now these Pharisees had wonderfully perverted the twenty-third of Deuteronomy, and they had made it un-lawful for a man thus to eat on the sabbath day. They had set up their malicious standard, and every one that did not conform to their malicious standard of course must be tabooed, must be written down and cast out, as far as man was concerned. So

that the Pharisees of old were like our moderns. Our moderns, what are they? Why, they are holier than God, more righteous than God, wiser and more authoritative than God. Now the guiltless Rahab felt that she must not betray the spies. She used lawful evasions, with mental reserve, there was mental reserve, and she was justified in every word she uttered. I dare not, if my neck was now on the block, and the question asked, Will you recant one thing, I dare not. I believe as a dying man that every syllable that woman uttered, as put-upon record, was by the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God. I go to the second chapter of James: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? See you how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" that is, became a perfect evidence of its reality, that it was the faith of God's elect. "You see, then, how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." Notice, we are justified as to our eternal acceptance by faith only, without any works whatever; or else infants could not be saved, nor the eleventh-hour man, nor the thief on the cross. But we are not justified in making a profession of the name of Jesus Christ by faith only. Because if our faith does not sever us from the world, if our faith does not lead us to practical acts of kindness to the poor of God's people and to God's house and God's cause, if our faith has not works, and be not ready to make such sacrifices as shall be expressive of our sincerity, then we are not justified in making a profession, because our profession stands in word and not in work, in form and not in power, in semblance and not in substance. You must therefore distinguish between our eternal justification by the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and our evidential justification by our personal character and works. Now I ask this one question, Does the Holy Spirit, by James, make any exception to any part of the conduct of Abraham? Does he say, Abraham was justified in offering his son Isaac, except his binding him, except his taking a knife, except his laying the wood upon his shoulder? Does he make any exception? No, say you, he does not. Very well, then, "Likewise", "Likewise also was not Rahab justified by works" now watch me very narrowly, "when she had received." Take particular notice of that, "the messengers, and had sent them out another way;" when she had done it. What, James, do you take that view of it, justified when she had sent them out? Yes. What, after she had used those evasions? Yes, those evasions had no sin in them; those evasions had no more sin in them than the brazen serpent on the pole had in it the venom of the living serpent. Mark, then, when she had sent them out, she was justified. Does James make any exception? Thus, as the apostle makes no exception in any part of the conduct of Abraham in offering Isaac, so he makes no exception to any part of the words or works of Rahab. Here I pause for a moment. I have two or three more points to bring forward yet. I shall make no apology, because this is almost the anniversary of Rahab, twelve months ago on Monday, the 18th. I think we ought to keep an anniversary or two of our old friend Rahab. Now I ask two or three questions. If there is something we cannot very well understand, are we to reckon ourselves wiser than God, and holier than God, and more righteous than God, and more authoritative than God? Is it not an act of the highest insult to God, and a daring presumption, to condemn what he justifies, and to call Rahab's words sinless lies? I deny that they were lies at all in the proper sense of that word. Is Jesus Christ the image of God? Yes. What did the Pharisees do? What was the spirit they manifested? Were they not wiser in their own eyes than Christ was? Did they not say to Jesus Christ, "Stand by yourself, we are holier than you"? Were they not holier in their own eyes than Christ was, and more righteous than Christ was? And were they not more authoritative, did they not call Jesus Christ to account? "Why do your disciples on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?" Now I say this spirit of self-justification, this spirit of Pharisaism, is a spirit upon which the heaviest woes of the Bible are denounced; and if they had known what this means, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." they would not have condemned the guiltless. As to

my persecutors pretending that she deceived the messengers of the king of Jericho, why, that is the same spirit that said, "Not this man, but Barabbas." I still hold that there is in the Bible the doctrine of lawful evasion and mental reserve; that there is in the Bible the doctrine of lawful deception. But before I progress with the other points, I will here just say that the man, be he who he may, that would take occasion from the lawful evasions of Rahab to indulge in lies; the man who would take occasion from the other circumstances I have to name to indulge in deception or do anything wrong; I only say that the heaviest judgments of the Most High, and the deepest and the most flaming hell, must be the destiny of the daring sinner that thus could abuse the truth of God and insult the Almighty.

Now I come to Elisha, sixth chapter of 2nd Kings. Here is a man of God, called the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof. The king of Syria could not make out how it was he could not be too many for the king of Israel. Who is on the king of Israel's side? None, my lord, but that Elisha. He tells the king that which you speak in your bedchamber. So, he sent horses, and chariots, and a great host, to Dothan, after Elisha. And when they had compassed the city about by night, one of Elisha's deacons, a timid deacon, came to him and said, "Alas, my master!" they spoke respectfully in those days, you see, "what shall we do? And he answered, Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." Where are they, master? I do not see anyone. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw the fiery steeds of heaven, he saw the flaming chariots of eternity, marshalled by the immediate presence of the great God himself. Then the young man was happy. Ah, he would say, it is true, more is he that is for us than all that can be against us. Now, Lord, smite these men with blindness. And so, the Lord did. Now for the deception. "This is not the way;" but it was the way; "neither is this the city;" but it was the city; follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." Why, he was the man all the time. I shall make no remarks here; I leave the wise men of Gotham to settle it themselves, and I may come in afterwards. "But he led them to Samaria," and there the men's eyes were opened. Then said the king, I should like to cut all their heads off. "My father, shall I smite them, shall I smite them?" Smite them? no; they cannot hurt us, and do not let us hurt them. What shall we do, then? Oh, "set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master." You see they have learned that their horses are flesh, and not spirit; and that they are flesh and not spirit. So, the king gave them some bread and water, and sent them about their business. "So, the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel." Would you blame Elisha for his deceptions? I should think not. Will the protesters do so? Surely, surely, here is another piece of work for them. Surely, surely, they will step forward now, and vindicate the honor of the Lord against that terrible Elisha. But it will be a difficult subject; God was there, God was present, so you will have to encounter God himself, and if you know what this means, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice," you will not condemn the guiltless. Rahab brought about the deliverance of the spies; Elisha brought about the deliverance of Israel; salvation was wrought, the adversaries confounded, and God was glorified. But then the use of these things is one thing, and the abuse is another. The men that have charged me with holding ungodly doctrines, I hurl the accusation back in their teeth. I ask no mercy from them because I need none; I ask only justice. As for mercy, I know not that I have committed a single fault to lay me under need of mercy at their hands.

Again, David goes into the house of the Lord and eats the shewbread, and they that are with him; at least, the shewbread was handed to them. This was contrary to the law. Here was one law suspended; here was the law concerning the shewbread suspended for the time, to make way for

David's necessity; one law suspended to make way for another law. And suppose the Savior had not taken up this circumstance, plenty of Pharisees would have condemned David. But does the Savior condemn David? Does he not as much justify him as he does the disciples rubbing the ears of corn on the sabbath day? Take heed, then, how you condemn your Maker; take heed how you rush in upon the thick bosses of his buckler. So that they were justified. But if a man come forward after David had taken the shewbread, and say, Well, David has taken the shewbread, so will I; those that were with him did the same, so will we. Stop, are the cases the same? What were David's circumstances, what were his feelings towards God, and how far was God's authority on his side? The man that would come to do that daringly that David did in the fear of God would he smitten dead, as the sons of Aaron were when they rushed with strange fire before the Lord.

Thus, then, I again repeat, if I were placed in analogous circumstances, but only so, only so, and had that divine authority which I believe Rahab had, I will tell any one of the protesters, or my opponents, that I would do my utmost to save their lives if I were so placed. And if I were placed as Elisha was, I hope I should do as he did; and if I were placed as David was, I trust I should be led to do as he did. The Lord help us, then, to use his mercies, and not abuse them; not to be wiser than God, nor holier than God, nor better than God. Let us acknowledge our incapacity to understand a thousand things and bless his holy name that we understand anything at all pertaining to our eternal welfare, and especially the amazing mercy by which we are saved.