

## **"The Womb-like, Maternal Heart of God"**

**2 Corinthians 1:3**

**10 May 2020**

Maybe you need this reminder today, 'cause if you're like me, I don't know what month it is anymore. It's Mothers Day, so make sure you call your mom and honor her. And give thanks for her. Maybe your mom passed away and today is difficult for you. Or, maybe you didn't have a good experience with your mom growing up. If so, I know a tender Savior who would love to hold your hand and listen to you pour your heart out to Him. So, do that today. He's waiting. He's willing to comfort your broken heart.

And as His providence would have it, our big idea today, on Mothers Day, is this-

**GOD'S WOMB-LIKE, SURGING, MATERNAL MERCIES NEVER COME TO AN END.**

We'll unpack this as we go along. The testimony of Scripture is that God's heart for His people is like that of a mother. God's heart is like a mother's heart for children, only magnified 10 billion times. So, whatever your image of God is, His word makes it very clear that His heart surges with maternal, womb-like love for you. It's this love and compassion like a new mom holding her baby, nursing her baby, rocking her baby, and singing over it. That's God's heart and His feelings for you today.

I hope that's how you think of Him.

One of my church history professors in seminary, Dr. Jeff Bingham, said, *"The most important thought that you will ever think is what you think when you think of God because it will determine every dimension in your life."* And because that is true, I want us to continue to hang out and hover over 2 Corinthians ch.1 verses 3-4 for a few more weeks. This will be more of a topical sermon, using these verses as a launching pad. And as we saw last week, we don't have to be afraid to have good thoughts of God. We need to understand who God is and what His heart is like. And that's *the question* of life isn't it? *Who is God? What is He like?*

Moses asked God that question. He wanted to know what God was like. He wanted to see God's glory. Moses said, *"Show me your glory?"* And what did God say?

Exodus 33:19

*And the LORD said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'Yahweh.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy."*

God told Moses, *"This is what I'm like: good, gracious, merciful."* And then what did the Lord say to Moses as He passed by him? More of the same stuff:

Exodus 34:6-7

*The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."*

When did God say this? Right after the Israelites made and worshipped the golden calf! Wow! Wow! It reminds us that God always meets our sin, He always meets our mess with His mercy. When Moses says, *"Show me your glory"* what does God say? *"I am merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping... forgiving..."* So God's *glory* is His mercy, His grace, His steadfast love, for sinners who worship golden cows and for churches that have been dazzled by super-apostles and get drunk during communion. And that's exactly why Paul begins his letter this way. We're dealing with a "worship a golden calf" church-type moment. And what they need is mercy.

LOOK AT VERSE 3...

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort...*

How does Paul answer the questions, *"Who is God? What is God like?"* What came to mind when Paul thought of God? Answer: The Father of mercies! 3x Paul mentions the Father at the beginning of his letter. Is this your first thought of God? Father of mercies? What's the first thing that comes to mind when you think of God? Many people might be inclined to answer holy, glorious, powerful, hater of sin, etc. Nothing wrong with that. God is holy, glorious, powerful, hater of sin, etc. But, you can't go wrong by following Paul's lead and saying, *"He's the Father of Mercies. He is a kind Father who doesn't give people what they deserve."*

Puritan Thomas Goodwin said, "*He is the spring of all mercy, so it is natural to him, as it is to a father to beget children*" (Works 2:180). So all this mercy business is natural for God. This is who He is. Mercy is natural for Him. It is as natural to Him as it is for a father to have kids. If I were to tell you that I fathered a giraffe, you would think that I lost my mind. Why? Because I can only beget humans. That's natural. And it's natural for our Heavenly Father to be merciful. It's not weird. Me, fathering a giraffe? Weird. File that under "W" for *WEIRD*. God showing mercy? That's natural.

As we saw last week, when we come to our Heavenly Father for mercy and comfort, we aren't asking Him to change. It's natural for Him. We're not asking Him to be somebody that He isn't. We're not forcing Him to do something that He doesn't want to do. We're not asking Him to be weird and do something unnatural. When we come to God with our sin, we're just saying, "*Be who you are. Have mercy on us.*"

And when we bring our sin to God, He does not show up with a bunch of *I-told-you-so's*. He doesn't drop a bunch of *Shame-on-yous* on us. He doesn't meet our mess with *How-dare-yous*. He always meets our mess with mercy because He is the Father of mercies.

And we're not depleting Him somehow by coming continually. We can't exhaust His mercy. He's rich. He's a billionaire. In fact, His mercies are new every morning! We know this, right?

Lamentations 3:22-23

*The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*

The Hebrew word used here for *mercies* is related to the Hebrew word for "womb." It's this surging, maternal love. It's the love of "being in love." It's love centered in the emotions and heart. It's the love a mother has for her newborn as she holds him in her arms. It's surging, maternal love.

In fact, it's the same word that the real mother uses in 1 Kings 3 when Solomon is trying to discern who the real mother is. Recall that story with the 2 prostitutes, how they were fighting over a baby. Solomon says to cut the baby in half and the real mom's heart yearned for her son. That's the word here for mercy. It's this deep, surging, maternal love that comes from the bowels. That's mercy. It's the love of a mother who would do anything for her child.

So, how 'bout this translation for Lamentations 3:23?

*"His womb-like, surging maternal mercies never come to an end; they are fresh out-of-the-oven every morning."*

Wow. That's a game changer, right? Because if you're like me, you wake up and Mr. Guilt and Mrs. Shame are waiting on you. Ready to bring fresh reminders of your sin, your failures, etc. And God knows this. God knows that the Devil tries to serve up fresh out-of-the-oven condemnation first thing in the morning. That's why His mercies are fresh and new every morning.

And it's this kind of surging, maternal mercies that are new every morning. Fresh mercies. We wake up and we're like, "*Oh, hey, Father. It's me again. Yeah, same old sins, same ole heart. Nothing new to see here. Just me with the same ole sins that I bring to you everyday. Nothin' has changed since yesterday.*"

And God the Father is like, "*That's okay. I have new mercies for your same old sins. I have fresh, straight out of My heart mercies, just for you. Enjoy!*"

Listen, God welcomes us with deep compassion when we've binged on sin. There's no *I-told-you-so's*. No *Shame-on-you's*. No *How-dare-you's*. The Father of mercies waits for His children to wake up in the morning so that He can shower His kids with fresh mercies! No left-overs! Fresh. New. Warm. For how your heart feels on Wednesday morning, not how it felt on Tuesday morning. New mercies every day, as if they came out of an oven. So we get fresh out of the oven-like heart of God, new mercies every morning. Believe it, Grace! Believe it with your whole heart! Drink it in. Take deep, repeated gulps, and then let your worship of Him be extravagant. And then go share this good news with your neighbors and co-workers.

But, His heart is not just like a womb, though. It's like an oven too. That's what the prophet Hosea said:

*How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.* Hosea 11:8

These are some of the most beautiful words in Scripture! God's people have continually turned away from the Lord (Hosea 11:7), and yet His heart moves toward them in compassion.

Yahweh is revealing His heart for His rebellious children so as to allure them to love Him. His heart "recoils" within in Him, His heart is "overthrown" when His people walk away from Him. When we run away from Jesus, His heart is overthrown with compassion and He moves out in tenderness toward us. Yes, He disciplines us (Hebrews 12:5-11), but His knee-jerk reaction is one of kindness. After all, what leads us to repentance? The law? The whips, terrors, and threats of the law? No! His kindness leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

And we see His kindness here in Hosea 11 because when we run away after other lovers, Yahweh's compassion grows warm and tender. The Hebrew word for "warm" (*kamar*) is used of an oven heating up (Lamentation 5:10) and also when Joseph saw his brother Benjamin for the first time after all those years (Genesis 43:30). God's anger does not flare up when we sin, rather His compassion does! His heart heats up like an oven, not with anger, but with compassion! This is why grace is amazing.

And that amazing grace should make you want to live for Him and His glory. And that's why Paul is answering the question "Who is God?" here. Because he wants the Corinthians to repent and return to the Lord. Paul knows that what Charles Spurgeon said is true:

*"While I regarded God as a tyrant I thought my sin a trifle; but when I knew Him to be my Father, then I mourned that I could ever have kicked against Him. When I thought God was hard, I found it easy to sin; but when I found God so kind, so good, so overflowing with compassion, I smote upon my breast to think that I could ever have rebelled against One who loved me so, and sought my good."*

Paul wants the Corinthians church to know that God is not hard. He wants them to know that God is so kind, so good, so overflowing with compassion, so that it would warm their hearts and they would repent and break off their engagement with the super-apostles who had invaded the church. At the very beginning of his letter, Paul is reminding this church that he planted, that-

### **GOD'S WOMB-LIKE, SURGING, MATERNAL MERCIES NEVER COME TO AN END.**

And that's the heart that greets us. His merciful heart meets us at the most shameful, embarrassing moments in our lives. His merciful heart meets us at those places where we have the deepest regrets and desperately wish we could get a do-over. His merciful heart meets us at our most inexcusable sins. As the prophet Isaiah said-

Isaiah 30:18

*Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you...*

He waits for us to shower us with grace. And He is glorified in the process! That's what's so awesome about all this. God does not reluctantly show mercy, as if we are somehow cramping His style. He is glorified by showing mercy! God just feels this mercy deep inside. We have given Him zero reasons to be merciful to us. We have given Him zero reasons to dole His love out on us. And yet He delights to do it. The Gospel is simply that He just feels this mercy deep inside Himself, inside of His heart.

How silly of us to even think that God is not merciful! This is the starting place of the Christian life: Luke 18:13- *"God, be merciful to me, a sinner."* And this is the path we walk on throughout the Christian life. It starts with mercy and it's mercy all the way through. And God never runs out of mercy!

Paul tells us what God is like in Ephesians 2:4 when he says, *"But God, being rich in mercy..."* This the only place in the Bible that tells us that God is rich and what He's rich in: *mercy*. Well, what does this mean? Dane Ortlund gives an answer in his new book *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*. I recommended this book to you last week. Get it if you haven't! Your heart will write you a thank you note, I promise! Here's what he says about God being rich in mercy:

*What does this mean? It means that God is something other than what we naturally believe him to be. It means that the Christian life is a lifelong shedding of tepid thoughts of the goodness of God... He is a fountain of mercy. He is a billionaire in the currency of mercy, and the withdrawals we make as we sin our way through life cause his fortune to grow greater not less...The Bible says God is not tightfisted with mercy but openhanded, not frugal but lavish, not poor but rich. (Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers, p. 172-173)*

God is rich in mercy and He's a big spender! Think about this: How would the Corinthian church hear the words "Father of all mercies?" How did verse 3 land on them? Remember their history: they were getting drunk at communion, and they tolerated some weird, incestuous relationship in the church, and their were cliques, and they began boasting in worldly wisdom, welcoming the super-apostles, etc.

And guess what? God's mercy covered all that! He didn't give them what they rightfully deserved! They deserved a slap in the face from God! They deserved a flick of God's knuckle on the top of their heads. What they didn't deserve was God's kindness. But in Christ, God doesn't come slapping their face, He doesn't come flicking them on the head with His knuckle. He actually kisses them on the cheek with mercy!

And God doesn't come to you, Christian, slapping you on the face or flicking you on the head with His knuckle. He actually kisses you on the cheek with mercy. God is rich in mercy. He's a billionaire. He's loaded with mercy. But please understand that we should not see God the Father as if He were like a vending machine and that He just dispenses mercy and comfort. No, Paul is telling us *who God is* in His core, His very essence. Mercy is a person. Grace is a person. Comfort is a person. These are not some abstract qualities. Mercy, grace, comfort is a person: Jesus. God incarnate. So we should read 2 Corinthians 1:3 as:

*The Father who at His very core is mercy, the God whose very heart is comfort. The God and Father who delights to shower us with Himself.*

Paul is talking about God's nature here. His essence. His personality. This is not just God's *Twitter* bio. He is characterized by tenderhearted compassion and gentleness and love and mercy and grace and a passionate desire to love and care for sinners. And not just sinners. God actually showers His creation with mercy!

Psalm 145:8-9

*The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.*

These verses come straight out of Exodus 34, after the golden calf incident, which we read earlier. The same words are used here: gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. This was *Discipleship 101* for a believer in the Old Testament. This was their liturgical formula. Yahweh is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. This is what they catechized their children with. And this is how they introduced outsiders to Yahweh. They told inquisitive Gentiles that this is what their God was like.

And you, just like them, when you invite your neighbors and co-workers to church, you are participating, just like them, in the point of all of human history, which is this: Welcoming the nations into the mercy of God. And that's should be the response to God's mercy! You invite the nations, you invite others- your family, your neighbors, your co-workers, your fellow students- you invite them into His mercy. You tell them that Jesus is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. That's *Discipleship 101* for a New Testament believer too!

But the psalmist is using this Old Testament liturgical formula and he applies to *all creation*. God has mercy and compassion on all His creation! So, this verse can actually change how we perceive reality! Psalm 145 changes how we view creation! Everything in creation, every person matters.

That means then that lady bugs matter! His mercy is not too great to shine even on lady bugs! God does not say, *"I'm too big to care for lady bugs."* No! His mercy shines over all His creation. All of God's creation can feel the Fatherly warmth of His mercy. Jesus even cares about the lady bugs that He has made!!! Now, how much more does He care for you?

His glory even shines down on lady bugs, so we should not despise his creation. Psalm 145 and 2 Corinthians 1 can open your eyes to see even the "little ones" of creation matter to God.

We see this with Noah, too. You know the story in Genesis 6. God established a covenant with Noah and all of creation that He would never flood the earth again. And the sign of the covenant was the rainbow. The rainbow was God's sign that He would never again send a flood to wipe out all of humanity or His creation. The rainbow was the sign of God's mercy.

What's interesting about the rainbow is that the Hebrew word for rainbow (*queset*) is the word for a warrior's bow. So the rainbow, the very colorful rainbow, is actually a weapon. It's a warrior's bow. So God hung His weapon up in the sky. That's what the rainbow is. It's God's warrior bow that He hung up in the sky to remind us that He is merciful. But what's so significant about that? What's so significant about the rainbow, the warrior bow, being hung up in the sky?

Well, in the ancient Near East, in Noah's day, when 2 warring parties came up with a peace treaty, they used to hang their bows up on their walls to remind them that they were no longer at war with their enemies. They would hang their weapons on the wall to serve as a reminder that they had reached peace

and they could not take the weapon down and attack again. The bow, the weapon, reminded them that they were at peace.

And this is what God did! God hung His bow on the wall, in the clouds. To put it in or language, God put His weapon down. He hung His weapon on the wall. He gave up His right to wipe us all out. He will not wipe out humanity again with a flood, even though we are just as bad as the people in Noah's day, and even though we deserve it!

That's just God showering underserving sinners with mercy. That's God letting you live a life of rebellion and He doesn't come strike you or me down. He's merciful. He's gracious.

Now, please understand that doesn't mean you and me are off the hook. We're still responsible for our sin. We will give account one day. But God didn't wipe you out this morning, even though you're a rebel, because He is merciful. He doesn't give us what we all deserve or none of us would be here.

What God did was give His Son Jesus what we deserve. So God gave Jesus what you deserve. God gave Jesus what I deserve. God punished His own Son on the cross so that we could escape that punishment! Notice that the bow, the rainbow is pointing up to Heaven now: pointing at Jesus, telling us that Jesus would bear the penalty of our sin.

\* INSERT RAINBOW PIC

As Sally Lloyd-Jones says in *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, "God's war bow was not pointing down at His people. It was pointing up, into the heart of Heaven." The rainbow is a picture of what Jesus would endure for us. He took our blame, our sin, our guilt and bore it on the cross. God's wrath was poured out on His own son, for our sin. The warrior's bow was turned upon Jesus for our rebellion.

God is being merciful in not giving you what you deserve. But you will die one day. And then you will give account for your life, your sins, your life of rebellion against the holy and merciful God. The only way to be saved from His wrath and to be safe on that day is to flee to Jesus. To trust in Him. To cry out, "*Have mercy on me, Lord Jesus, because I am a sinner!*"

If you don't repent and fess up to your rebellion and run to Jesus, then you will see Him and He will have a weapon in His hand- the warrior's bow. And because of your rebellion and defiance, He will shoot the flaming arrows of His wrath out on you for eternity in Hell. I don't want that for any of you. Repent. Call out to Jesus today! Right now!

Listen, God put His weapon down. He's been merciful to you in letting you live. He picked His weapon up and shot the arrows of wrath out on His Son Jesus on the cross. But He will pick it up again one day, and He will never stop shooting at you for eternity because of your rebellion. But if you trust in Jesus, God's warrior bow, His weapon, will never be used on you again! But you will see it for eternity! You will see the warrior's bow, you will see the rainbow for eternity and it will remind just how merciful God is. It will remind you that God delights to shower sinners with His mercy.

Where will you see the warrior's bow for eternity? Over the throne of God!

Revelation 4:2-3

*At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.*

What's hovering over God's throne? A rainbow! The warrior's bow, forever hanging up on the wall, reminding us that we are at peace with God! We will forever see the covenant sign of God's mercy!

And when John says that God has the appearance of jasper and carnelian, here's what he means:

*Jasper*- there were several stones in ancient times called *jasper*. This stone was translucent, clear as crystal. It sparkled and flashed when polished. So what John means when He describes God this way is that God is infinitely glorious and holy.

*Carnelian*- has a reddish color, like fire. So what John means when he describes God this way is that this is God's anger at sin. This is the righteous anger of God at man's sin.

So you have God's character, which is holy and glorious and then you have this red-hot hatred of sin.

And then there's the rainbow! Oh, how beautiful is that rainbow! Oh, what wonderful colors hanging over God's throne! The rainbow that hovers over the throne of God tells us that God is merciful and that there is peace and that the war is over. So, you have the holiness of God, the glory of God, the red-hot anger of God at man's sin and what is it surrounded by? Mercy! The rainbow, the symbol of mercy!

In other words, God's mercy overarches all of God's deeds. God's mercy overarches all that He does. The rainbow reminds, and will remind us for eternity, that-

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They are new every morning. New for you today. Right now. This is how God feels for you right now, Christian. Surging, maternal love from deep inside. Just what your heart needs. Receive it today. Then go share it with someone. This is the great theme of the Bible- inviting the nations into the mercy of God. Enjoy it and share it.

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"The Womb-like, Maternal Heart of God"

2 Corinthians 1:3

Sermon Study Questions

1. Dr. Jeff Bingham said, *"The most important thought that you will ever think is what you think when you think of God because it will determine every dimension in your life."* Discuss his words and how they apply to what Paul is telling the Corinthians about God.
2. Discuss what Charles Spurgeon said: *"While I regarded God as a tyrant I thought my sin a trifle; but when I knew Him to be my Father, then I mourned that I could ever have kicked against Him. When I thought God was hard, I found it easy to sin; but when I found God so kind, so good, so overflowing with compassion, I smote upon my breast to think that I could ever have rebelled against One who loved me so, and sought my good."*
3. Read Exodus 33:19 and Exodus 34:6-7. What did God say when Moses asked to see His glory? Is this the answer you would expect? What comes into your mind when you think of God? Do you immediately think of Him as the Father of mercies?
4. Discuss this thought from the sermon: *When we come to our Heavenly Father for mercy and comfort, we aren't asking Him to change. It's natural for Him. We're not asking Him to be somebody that He isn't. We're not forcing Him to do something that He doesn't want to do. We're not asking Him to be weird and do something unnatural. When we come to God with our sin, we're just saying, "Be who you are. Have mercy on us." And when we bring our sin to God, He does not show up with a bunch of I-told-you-so's. He doesn't drop a bunch of Shame-on-yous on us. He doesn't meet our mess with How-dare-yous. He always meets our mess with mercy because He is the Father of mercies.*
5. Read Psalm 145:8-9. How does God feel about His creation?
6. What is the significance of the rainbow in Genesis 9:13 and Revelation 4:2-3?