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**Presentation Transcript**  
**True Spirituality 11 - Mercy**  
**By Bill Jacobs**  
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Today's presentation is the eleventh in a series on *True Spirituality*. The topic is *Mercy* and it's being recorded on the Day of Atonement. I'm indebted to Leroy Diem, of Durango, Colorado, for the excellent research he did on this topic.

On the Feast of Trumpets we read in Matthew 23:23 that Jesus upbraided the Pharisees for majoring in the minors, so to speak. They focused on relatively minor aspects of the law, while leaving off the more important qualities, which He said were justice, mercy and faith – all matters of character. On Trumpets we studied what it meant to add justice to our lives. And today we want to do the same thing with mercy.

Before we do that, however, let's ask this question. Since this is the Day of Atonement, how does mercy fit with the meaning of this day? Well, we've had two traditional themes for the Day of Atonement. One is the binding of Satan, as seen in Revelation right after Christ's return. That certainly is a merciful act on God's part toward us. And the result of that is the world beginning to become at one with God. So, for our scripture reading today, we heard the ninth chapter of the book of Hebrews read, where Paul explains how the world is going to be made at one with God. And that is through the grace and the mercy of God to forgive our sins. And all that, of course, is made possible by the death of Jesus Christ. So, as he shows us there, mercy really is at the center of the meaning of this day. It's all about God being merciful to us.

In our family room, Elaine and I have a couch and a love seat. I never sit on either one of them. I have this recliner that I sit in. It's big and it's soft. It's cushy. From that recliner I read, I eat, I use my laptop to do email, I work on these presentations, I watch TV and DVDs, I talk to Elaine, and I talk on the phone – sort of my center of operation. I sit ensconced in my big chair quite a bit of the time. It's sort of my vantage point from which I view so many areas of life. God has a chair in His house, too. It's His throne. It's His vantage point. We've heard a lot about it in the Scriptures – read about it. When God created a model of His chair to put in the Tabernacle – in the Temple – do you know what He called it? He called it the Mercy Seat. Exodus 25:20 says:

**Ex. 25:20** – *And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings covering the mercy seat with their wings. And they shall face one another.* So that lid that went over the ark, which was a box that had two cherubs on either side of it with their wings outstretched over it...the lid to that ark was actually what was symbolic for the throne of God.

Now what do you suppose it means when He calls His throne the Mercy Seat? Well, let's go to Hebrews 4, and verse 14.

**Heb. 4:14** – *Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us, therefore, come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* So Paul is telling us here that that place where God does His business as the official ruler of the universe – His throne – is a throne of grace. And we're told in the Old Testament that it is the Mercy Seat. It's a place where we can come to find forgiveness and mercy – a place where we can expect kindness and blessing from God, because that's what He's like.

Let's go back to Matthew 12 for a minute and look at something. We need to understand more about this.

**Mt. 12:1** – *At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." So they were hungry and they plucked some heads of grain to eat from the field as they walked through it. And He said to them. "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry? He and those who were with him? How he entered the house of God and ate the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath, the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is one greater than the temple. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would have not condemned the guiltless."* So, here they are, again, focusing on relatively minor issues.

When Jesus said this – "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" – He was quoting from the Old Testament. He was quoting from the book of Hosea. So let's go there to understand more about what it means to be merciful.

**Hosea 6:4** – Here God is talking, and it says, *O Ephraim, what shall I do to you? O Judah, what shall I do to you? For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud and like the early dew. It goes away. Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, and I have slain them by the words of My mouth, and your judgments are like light that goes forth. For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.*

Okay, so what can we learn from verse 6? Well, this is a verse that was written in Hebrew poetry. Hebrew poetry was not a matter of rhyming the words, but in repeating thoughts

using different words. The word *mercy* here, in this verse, is linked with knowledge. Mercy and knowledge. “I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” And the word *sacrifice* is linked with burnt offerings. So what this really is telling us is, that, as burnt offerings are to sacrifices, so also is the knowledge of God to mercy. There’s a connection. And to understand it further, we have to take a little time to understand the phrase “knowledge of God.” It’s not just talking about knowing that there *is* a God, but it’s also talking about what God is like – the *knowledge* of what God is like – what’s important to Him, how He acts in various circumstances. And that’s important because He is the pattern we’re to follow. He’s our pattern.

**Lev. 19:2** – *Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them, “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”* So that’s the point that Hosea is getting at here – that God wants us to be like Him. To know about God, and to know what He is like is very important so that we can imitate Him. Paul said that we should imitate him as he imitated Christ, and that we should be followers of God, which means to be imitators of Him. So God is telling us that it’s very important to be like Him.

But what does that have to do with mercy? Well, let’s go to Exodus 33, and verse 17.

**Ex. 33:17** – *So the LORD said to Moses, “I will also do this thing that you have spoken. For you have found grace in my sight and I know you by name.”* Moses, at that time, made a request. He said, “Please show me your glory. Show me how great you are. Show me what you’re really like.” And so in chapter 34, God does that. It says in verse 5:

**Ex. 34:5** – *Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed before him proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth.* So this is God showing His glory to Moses – showing Moses what He is like. Now the word that is translated *merciful* in the King James actually means *compassionate*. And that’s *not* the word that Hosea used when he said, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” That’s not the word that Jesus was referring to when He talked to the Pharisees. The word translated *goodness* is actually the word that Hosea used, and that’s the word that Jesus was referring to when He said, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice. If you were like that, you wouldn’t make these mistakes you’re making.”

So what does that mean? Well, this is a word – this word that’s translated *goodness* – that occurs two hundred and forty-five times in the Bible. Two hundred and forty-five times. It’s translated eleven different ways in the King James translation. There’s no single English word that completely expresses the meaning of that word that was translated *goodness*. It’s translated *mercy* or *mercies* one hundred and forty-nine times out of the two hundred and forty-five. But in doing that we’re limiting the meaning of the word. When we think of mercy, we usually think of letting somebody off, or forgiving them for something they’ve done that hurt us, or pardoning them, or refraining from punishing them. But that’s not all this word really means.

So I thought what we might do is just briefly look at some of the ways this word is translated besides mercy, so that we can understand what Jesus was telling the Pharisees they had neglected.

In Psalm 107.... It's translated *goodness* twelve times in the Old Testament. And Psalm 107 is one example of this.

**Psa. 107:1** – *O give thanks unto the LORD, for He is good. For His mercy endures forever.* And then the same word is used in verse 8 for goodness.

**V-8** – *Oh that men would praise the LORD for His goodness and His wonderful works to the children of men!* Here it's talking about all the good things God does for us.

**V-15** – *Oh that men would praise the LORD for His goodness, and His wonderful works...!* Same thing.

**V-31** – *Oh that men would praise the LORD for His goodness, and His wonderful works to the children of men!* This is, again, poetry. So we're getting some repeats. And if you go through and you read that entire psalm, you'll see that that word translated – where Jesus used the word *mercy* – means all the kindly acts of rescue and blessing that God did for Israel. So, it means somebody that helps other people and, when he has the opportunity to bless, he does it.

And then the last verse in Psalm 107.

**V-43** – *Whoever is wise will observe these things and they will understand the lovingkindness of the LORD.* They will understand the lovingkindness of the LORD. And that word *lovingkindness* is that word. It's translated *lovingkindness* thirty times. And it means that God is inclined to be kind, rather than mean, rather than punishing, rather than dismissing, rather than unforgiving, rather than hard-hearted. He's easily entreated. And He is a kindly God. And He doesn't hold grudges. He lets go of things.

So that's what Jesus was talking about, I think, in part when He talked to Israel. And notice it says that "whoever is wise will observe these things, and they will understand the lovingkindness of the LORD." And that's what Hosea was talking about, too, wasn't it? He was talking about understanding what God is like. God is a pattern for us to follow.

I want you to turn with me to the parallel account to Matthew 23:23. It's found in Luke 11, and verse 42. This is the same account written by Luke instead of Matthew. And notice what he says.

**Lk. 11:42** – *But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe of mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done without leaving the others undone.* So, instead of saying, "justice, mercy and faith" – or faithfulness – he says, "justice and the love of God." So mercy and and faithfulness are

combined together and presented as the love of God. And that goes back very much to what we've already seen, doesn't it? Again, this is not talking about love *for* God, but the kind of love that God *expresses*.

So how does God's kind of love translate into behavior? In other words, how should we act when we live our lives every day. Go with me to John 8. Jesus is probably the best example of this.

**Jn. 8:2** – *Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him, and He sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought to Him a woman they had caught in adultery. And when they had set her in their midst – so they're making a public spectacle of her and embarrassing her and humiliating her – trying to shame her, I guess. ...and when they had set her in their midst, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses and the law commanded us saying that she should be stoned. What do you say?" And this they said testing Him that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger as though He did not hear. And when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up, and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. So Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. And when Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" And she said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more."* Not approving of her behavior, but still merciful.

Why didn't He say that she should be stoned? She broke the law? Well, I think it gets back to that hourglass that we were talking about on Trumpets. This woman was in the top part of the hourglass. And she gets to decide, while she's there, how she's going to live her life. It's when she gets down to that narrow, little place, where you have to go through a grain at a time, that she's going to have to face Jesus Christ again. And I think that's why He said, "Go and sin no more." He wasn't approving of what she did. He told her not to sin anymore. And I think, hopefully, when she meets Him again on that day, she will have been washed clean by Christ's sacrifice, and forgiven graciously by God and sanctified, so that her bad behavior will have been left behind – because that can't pass through, can it? She has to be different. But until then, God is going to be merciful and kind to her, even though she's not living as God would live.

I received a letter several weeks ago. I just got around to answering it yesterday. A man wrote and asked me about my stand on homosexuality. He told me his history of studying about what the church believed about it. He didn't give any personal information. It sounded to me more like he might have had a son or a daughter who was homosexual, rather than himself being one. But he said that he never could understand why some people in the church acted the way they did about it, and how people were so repulsed by it, and yet it was no more of a sin than was adultery or murder or something else. So I explained to him what our position is at LifeResource Ministries.

Homosexuality is clearly defined as a sin in the Bible. Nobody really knows what causes it. It's probably a lot of different causes. Science can show evidence that it's genetic and science can show evidence it's environmental. It might be both. You say, "Well, how would it be fair of God to allow someone to be genetically predisposed to homosexuality, and then call it a sin?" Well, how do we know their genes were affected by toxic waste? I mean, there are so many things that affect gene transcription. Just to say that it's genetic doesn't mean that it isn't caused by somebody's sins somewhere down the road. We just don't know. And there's a lot of confusion about it. And it's even more confusing because it's such a political football in our society. When you have people supercharged on an issue, all the research that gets done is usually biased. It always creeps in. They set out trying to prove what they believe, and so they don't come up with unbiased conclusions.

So we don't know what causes it. We know that it is a sin. We know that it's a sin that's no worse than any other. And we know that God tells us that we are to be merciful to the unrighteous, just as we are to the righteous. And the church's stand on every sin but this one, down through the years – as long as I've been in the church – has always been that you love the sinner, but hate the sin. So that's our position on it. And over the years I've had people in my congregations tell me that they had, at one time, been practicing homosexuals, but had given it up to follow Jesus Christ. And I've worked with people who are homosexual in their orientation and never really had any problem with them.

Sometimes we see on TV the gay parade in San Francisco, where you have all of these pathological, unbalanced, flaming homosexuals flaunting their lifestyle and all that. That's not the way most of them are. That's just media hype. Most of them aren't like that at all. Most of them you never even know. I don't condone it. I wouldn't want to practice it. That's between them and God. They get to straighten that all out. They get to go through the little narrow place just like everybody else – how we look at it. And we think that people who are homophobic – that is, unreasonably mistreating people who have that problem – that issue – we don't approve of that either.

So Jesus was merciful to this woman. She was in the wrong. She was caught out in the open. But He wasn't willing to humiliate her or to put her down. And He was willing to give her the time allotted to every person to repent and to change. And until then, He was going to treat her decently.

Let's go to Matthew 18, and look at another example of how God is – how He expresses love, what He's interested in, and what He cares about.

**Mt. 18:1** – *At that time the disciples came to Jesus – Matthew 18:1 – saying, "Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And then Jesus called a little child to Him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."* God loves children because they are so trusting and pure. He's inclined toward them.

I've told you about the young girl that I was working with in my private practice some time ago. She would qualify for a diagnosis of conduct disorder. She has, with other girls, ganged up on kids and beat them up. She uses a lot of bad language to talk to her mother. She is totally unresponsive to her mother's parenting. She does all the things that a kid that would be considered conduct disorder would do. She was in session with us.... One of the things they say about kids that have conduct disorder is that they don't suffer any remorse from the things that they do. And yet I noticed that she did. She kicked a hole in the livingroom wall one day and it frightened her. She felt bad about what she had done. I started building this relationship with her to try to help her, and one of the things that has to happen is, if she's going to be able to participate in the counseling, she has to have a measure of trust for me. So, I would try very hard to get her attention, and to talk to her, and to help her participate.

One of the things I did was, if her mother made a criticism about her, I would try to say something good at the same time. And if somebody brought up an issue, I tried to make sure that I was evenly weighted on both sides of the issue – the mom's and the girl's. She was a pretty hard-core kid – pretty tough and really angry. I had to leave town for a couple weeks, so I was going to give them some assignments to do while I was gone. And I would reward her for paying attention in the sessions by playing Mancala with her for the last part of each session. She'd really been active in that session, so we were playing Mancala, and I said, "I want to ask you an important question. Do you believe that I am being fair to you in these sessions?" And she looked at me, and she said, "Yes." And I said, "Well, will you trust me, then, to help you and your mom get along better?" And she said, "I trust you. Tell me what to do." I mean, it was like *carte blanche* – "You just say it, and I'll do it." So then I was able to give her an assignment that she was supposed to follow up on.

You know, her mother wasn't nearly as trusting of me as she was actually. And she was supposed to be the one who couldn't trust. But, you know, that's the nature of children. If you give them any evidence that you can be trusted – that you're fair – then they will trust you. "I trust you. Tell me what to do." So that's, I think, what Jesus likes about kids.

**V-5** – He says, "*Whoever receives one little child*" – now we're in verse 5 – "*like this in my name receives Me.*" So, if we treat children with lovingkindness, then we're being like God. That's what God said we should do, didn't He?

Then He says something else. Verse 6.

**V-6** – "*But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea.*" That's pretty strong talk. In fact, that's probably the strongest talk Jesus made. "*Woe to the world because of the offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom they come. If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye rather*"

*than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.”*

So do you remember what has just happened here? This all started because some of the disciples wanted to know who was going to be great in the kingdom of God. And then somehow He winds up talking about offending children. Do you what’s offensive to children? Church politics. That’s what’s offensive to them. Congregational wrangling and instability. Strife over doctrine. Better to enter into the Kingdom not being sure which day to keep the Passover on than to make a big scene about it, drive your stake in the ground, pour concrete around it, offend everybody, tear your congregation apart, and then be wrong in the end. You know, the strife over doctrine and church politics, and the adults fighting one another destroys the faith of children. All this division that we see in the church does not help kids. It hurts them. That’s what Jesus is talking about here. Why risk a millstone over things that are going to be straightened out in a second when Christ returns. That’s what He’s talking about.

So that’s another way that the lovingkindness of God can be exemplified in our lives. We can love each other enough to present to our children a congregation that’s stable, and that is filled with love and care for one another.

Luke 6, and verse 27. Here’s another thing that Jesus told us about the love of God – what God is like – His lovingkindness – how He treats people.

**Lk. 6:27** – *But I say to you who hear, “Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods, do not ask them back. Just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them.”* That’s what He tells us to do. *“But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies. Do good and lend, hoping for nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be the sons of the Most High – now listen to this – for He is kind to the unthankful and the evil.”* That’s what God is like.

In the parallel account in Matthew, Jesus said that God caused rain to fall on the just and on the unjust equally. He allows those who are evil to enjoy the same beautiful, New Mexico sunsets that those who are just get to observe. He allows food to taste good to everybody, doesn’t He? You know, a nice, thick, juicy, tender – you knew it was going to come, didn’t you? – steak with sauteed mushrooms. Maybe a big fat, steaming, baked potato – you know, hot, slathered with melting butter and sour cream and chives. Or even just a great big, frosty, ice-cold glass of water with lemon. (I better quit or I’ll be considered mean.)

Then He summarized everything that He just said. Verse 36.

**V-36** – *Therefore, be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.* And we know what that word means now, don't we? We know that it means to be kind, and generous, and loving like God is – not hardnosed, and tight, and unforgiving, and unappreciative. So that's what that means. That's how we're to be.

I was thinking about my boss at the mental health clinic that I work for. His name is Craig Pierce. Just a little bit of explanation.... When I work for myself, I make the same money that he makes when I work for him. In other words, if you're working with somebody who is a Medicaid client, the Medicaid money is the same. So he gets that when I work for him, and I get the whole amount when I work for myself. But since he provides for me the work, a place to do the work, the billing service, a secretary, and a waiting room, he can't pay me as much as I would get myself. Otherwise, he wouldn't have any money to provide all those services. So I get less money working for him than I get when I work for myself.

Well, he recently opened a clinic on the west side of town, which is good for me, because I don't have to drive so far to go to work. And I was telling him that I was eventually hoping to move my private practice to the west side, but still had some clients on the eastside that I didn't want to abandon. And he said, "Well, why don't you see them at our eastside office? That will save you renting an office over there." So all of a sudden, just with his free offer, he just kind of wiped away my rent. I said that I'd be happy to pay him a sublet fee for each session. He said, "Oh, you don't have to worry about that. We have the space. Just do it." He was generous. And I'm in competition with him when I'm doing that, because I'm doing the same kind of clients that I would be doing for him. He said, "I also want to make one of the rooms on the west side your own private office, so you can see your private-practice clients there as well as the clinic clients. Just do whatever you want." And he said – now listen to what he said – "This will help you get started on that side of town." So he's knowingly setting up somebody to go into competition with him in a way – to see the same kind of clients he would see. "That will help you get started on that side of town." So rather than trying to hold my private practice back, he's trying to help me rev it up.

Now, by contrast, I was asked some time back by the largest and, I think, most prestigious faith-based clinic in town to apply with them. But once they found out that I had a private practice, they weren't interested in hiring me. I asked them why not. The man said, "Well, we've had people come in here, learn everything from us, and then leave to compete with us."

So I have these two examples in my mind, right? Which one do you think I would be more predisposed to help and work for? That's how that works. I was asking my boss the other day why he was so generous – so giving? And he said that it wasn't just his purpose to make money running a clinic. It was also his purpose to promote mental health in the community, and that anybody that he could train and turn loose to go out and help others become mentally healthy was all part of what he wanted to do in life. So these other

folks, they're Christians, but they're all tied up in that scarcity thing. And my boss says that he just wants everybody to be happy. And he's gracious and generous and kind. And because of that, he's blessed. The only people that we've had working in our clinic in the year that it's been in operation that have left are people that have moved away. No turnover. It's amazing. Everybody wants to stay there. We're all willing to work for much lower amounts of money because we have so much fun, and because it's such a wholesome place, and because we learn so much. So that's an example to me of somebody who really tries to practice his Christianity in a way that would make God happy.

Let's turn to one last scripture. Jeremiah 9:23.

**Jer. 9:23** – *Thus says the LORD, “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. Let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches. But let him who glories, glory in this – that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD....”* That's just what Hosea said, wasn't it? To know what God is like. That's what's important. *“...exercising lovingkindness or mercy, judgment and righteousness in the earth.”* And listen to this. *“For in these I delight,” says the LORD.* That's what God likes. He likes lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness in the earth. *“For in these I delight.”*

So on this Day of Atonement, when we're to focus on becoming one with God, we think about going to the Mercy Seat of God to obtain mercy for ourselves. That's the picture of the day. But we also ought to think about how we can also become at one with God by becoming merciful and filled with lovingkindness. And in that way becoming just like He is.