

What a wonderful mercy, Story behind the song

I am a closet musician at heart and a mediocre instrumentalist at best. The Lord, my sweet family, and my bedroom walls have always been my main audience. So when I was asked to come along on a weekend songwriting retreat, I felt excited and insecure at the same time. I wondered, "Would I embarrass myself?" "If I did write something, would anyone like it?" I could feel myself getting fearful and inward. So, I prayed. I prayed that I would be humble, I prayed that I would be teachable and that ultimately, I would focus on writing a song that would give glory to God and build up the saints. Looking back, I'm so glad I went. That retreat was one of the sweetest memories of my life.

After praying, I started studying. We had been asked to start studying through Romans and a few parables to prepare for the retreat. In the Lord's providence, I began with the parable of the workers in Matthew 20:1-16. In my studying, I happened to choose a sermon by RC Sproul. As I listened, I remember being deeply moved, convicted, and struck afresh at the mercy of God toward sinners. There was a particular quote from that sermon that God used to inspire my thoughts and writing process. It was this.

"God owes us nothing. The only title we have is to our own sin, unless in His mercy, he bestows the title of the kingdom of God freely upon us, and that is what he has done for everyone who has believed in His Son." To be honest, at the beginning of the sermon, I could feel my own self righteous tendencies trying to defend me, but praise God, he is good and upright, therefore he instructs sinners in the way. (Psalm 25:8) By the end of the sermon, my heart was dancing only to the song of His glorious grace. I then opened my Bible to Romans and began focusing on chapters 1, 3, and 9. As you know, chapter 1 in Romans is not a pretty sight and our rebellion is on full display. By chapter 3 it's not much better, we see that none is righteous, no not one. But it is against the dark backdrop of our bleak state that God's mercy in Christ shines forth so sweetly and that Christ becomes the most wonderful treasure to the Christian. It was in that sweet light that I began to write. The lyrics and music started to piece together. I had notes and scribbles everywhere. I made changes and then more changes. It was hard work and I think it took me close to 3 weeks to get it mostly complete.

After arriving at the retreat, the team gathered for a time of prayer and we sat around the kitchen table catching up on life and talking about how God had been at work in us. We were then asked if there was anything we had been working on that we wanted to share. So I timidly went to the piano and began to play What a wonderful Mercy. The team liked it! So we started examining the song more closely. The lyrics read "What do you owe me? You owe me nothing." Theologically, this wasn't quite complete. He does owe us something, He owes us wrath. So we went to work and within no time, together, we had finished the lyrics and created a beautiful chorus that showed more clearly the wrath we deserve and how our Savior bore that wrath in our place. Working together and seeing God use our various giftings was a beautiful thing to see.

I am by no means a pro songwriter and to be honest, my songwriting goals remain quite modest. But when we use our gifts, whatever they may be, for His glory and the good of others, we are drawn nearer to the Savior in the process and his nearness is our good. Songwriting, for me, helps me draw near, near to God who is abundant in mercy, wonderful mercy!