

Blessed Are the Merciful

Matthew 5:7

**A sermon preached by Dr. Calvin Warpula
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We have been studying the meaning of Christian discipleship as found in the beatitudes that Jesus gave us in Matthew chapter 5. These beatitudes convict us and bring us to our knees in repentance before God. None of us can say that without God we could be poor in spirit, mourning over our sin, meek and gentle, hungry and thirsting for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemaking or persecuted for righteousness sake.

The first four beatitudes speak of our hearts, our attitudes, and what we are in our being. Being always comes before doing in the Bible. God wants our hearts and from our hearts flow our actions, our lives. The last four beatitudes, while they also speak of our hearts, they go further and describe the actions that flow out of our hearts. The first four speak of our relationship to God; the last four speak of how that relationship to God works in our relationship to other people. These beatitudes are not commands but they are declarative statements describing the spiritual joys, delights and happiness of those that are disciples of Christ.

Let's today look at "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy." I encourage you to listen carefully today because there are several misconceptions about this beatitude that are false and misleading. We'll notice those as we discuss this statement of Jesus.

What Is Mercy?

Mercy is acts of kindness prompted by grace and love toward those that are miserable or toward those that are deserving of punishment. Three terms we need to be familiar with are love, grace, and mercy. Love is an absolute attribute of God. God is love in and of himself as part of his intrinsic nature or being. Grace is that love expressed toward man. Grace proceeds from the love of God. Remember the famous verse, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son. . ." Grace is God's love giving. Grace has been defined as the unmerited or undeserved love of God

expressed toward us. Mercy is God's love when God acts kindly toward us and does not give us what we deserve. Grace is God giving us what we do not deserve; mercy is God not giving us what we deserve.

Mercy in the Old Testament

Mercy is found throughout the OT. God is a God of mercy. The word is used 150 times in the OT and 90% of those times it refers to God. In Psalms 136, the expression, "his mercy endures forever," is repeated 26 times. God in mercy forgives our sins when we repent. This is what God said to Moses [read Exodus 34:6-7]. God has mercy on us in our misery and our need.

God's mercy is also tied to his covenant love for those that are his people. The word "covenant" and "mercy" are tied together in these Scriptures. God has mercy on his covenant people, that is, those people that are his children, those in a faith relationship with him. Hear these words of God [read Deuteronomy 7:7-11 and Micah 7:18-20].

Mercy and truth are tied together in the Scripture. The Bible says, "Mercy and truth have kissed each other," [KJV] which means that they are tied together (Psalm 85:10). This means that mercy is not the absence of truth or justice. In our day and age, some think, "Let's just be merciful and not be against sin, wrongdoing, or makes others feel guilty. Let's just 'live and let live' and make no judgments of any kind about anything." This is not biblical mercy. Biblical mercy exists because truth exists, because justice is important. God is truth and God is love. God is righteous and God is merciful. He is perfectly balanced in all his attributes.

God's mercy does not excuse sin. Mercy does not cancel out justice. "The only time God ever extended mercy was when somebody paid the price for the sin involved. . . . God will never violate the truth of his justice and his holiness to be merciful. He will be merciful, but only when justice has been done." [John McArthur, Kingdom Living Here and Now. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980, p. 112]. The only people who receive mercy are those that acknowledge their sin and come with a broken and beggarly spirit before a holy God and seek his righteousness.

God's mercy is seen in two ways: one, in forgiving our sins when we deserve punishment, and two, in treating us kindly when we deserve punishment.

The OT commands God's people to be merciful. Micah 6:8 says, [read it]. God says that he desires "mercy, not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6). Amos speaks of mercy and kindness [5:21-24]. Amos says that God was not

interested in ritualistic, ceremonial religion that simply offered animal sacrifices, went to the house of worship, listened to sermons and prayed and read the Bible. Amos says that God is interested in mercy and kindness for the poor and needy.

Mercy in the New Testament

In the NT mercy is mentioned 27 times. Jesus is God's gift of love to the human race. Jesus ministered among the poor and needy. A blind man yelled out to him, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me," and Jesus healed him. Jesus was moved with compassion on the crowds when they had nothing to eat so instead of sending them away hungry like the disciples urged him to, Jesus took five loaves of bread and two fish, thanked God for them, and then miraculously multiplied them so that everyone, more than 5000 people, had plenty to eat, so much so that twelve baskets of leftovers were collected.

Jesus was passing through the village of Nain when he met a funeral procession of mourners carrying the only son of a widow to bury him. The poor widow had no means of support now that her only son was dead. Jesus stopped the procession, spoke to the widow, and raised the son from the dead and gave him back to his mother.

Jesus was eating at the house of a man named Simon when a sinful woman came in and began to wash the feet of Jesus with her tears and dry them with her hair. The people at the dinner backed away and said, "Why does this holy man allow this sinful woman to touch him? Doesn't he realize who she is and what she does?" Jesus defended her and spoke of her much love that prompted her actions. He said, "Woman, your sins are forgiven you."

On another occasion, harsh, critical men dragged a woman into Jesus' presence and asked him what to do with her. They had caught her in the very act of adultery. They wanted to stone her to death, but Jesus said nothing. He just wrote on the ground. Finally, he said, "The one of you without sin cast the first stone." Jesus then stopped down and wrote on the ground again. Feeling their own guilt, the men quietly slipped away. Finally, they were all gone. Jesus said to her, "Does no one condemn you?" She said, "No one, Lord." He replied, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way and sin no more."

Jesus lived a life of mercy by forgiving sinners and by helping the miserable, the poor and the needy. That's what mercy is—an active, caring,

kind compassion that expresses itself to sinners that don't deserve it and to those that are hurting and needy.

In Matthew, chapter 23, he strongly rebuked the Pharisees for their outward, external ceremonial religion that had no concern for others. Hear what Jesus said in verses 23 and 24 (read them).

Jesus cared for those that nobody else cared for. He invited sinners, harlots and tax collectors to be his disciples. He ate and drank with them. He loved them and called them to God. On one occasion, the Bible says, [read Matt. (9:9-13)]. Jesus quotes the words of Hosea the prophet, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." This means that Jesus wants reality in our religion; he wants genuine love and caring, kindness, and the right treatment of others more than he wants outward ceremonies, robes, candle burnings, prayers, Bible readings, hymn-singing, money collections, and the Lord's Supper. Don't get me wrong: God's people do love and read the Bible, they do pray, they do assemble for worship, they do give money to God's work, they do sing hymns, and they do partake of the Lord's Supper. But a true disciple does much more than just outward forms of devotion to God. A true disciple loves God totally from the heart and expresses that love in worship and in caring for those in need.

On another occasion Jesus once more referred to this famous verse from Hosea. In chapter 12 of Matthew, the Pharisees condemned Jesus' disciples for picking some grain in their hands, rubbing it between their palms, blowing the chaff away, and then eating it. The Pharisees said it was the Sabbath and it was against the law to harvest, thresh, winnow, and prepare a meal on the Sabbath. Jesus condemned their super critical spirit because they missed the real meaning of the Sabbath, they misinterpreted Scripture, they did similar things themselves, and David in an emergency had done something similar. Jesus then said, "Don't you know what Hosea says, 'I desire mercy rather than sacrifice'?"

Jesus taught his followers to be generous, kind, caring and merciful. Listen to his words in Luke 6:36-38: [read]

Of course, the greatest demonstration of love, grace and mercy is the death of Jesus for our sins. God loved us so much that he generously and freely gave his one and only spiritual son to be a sacrificial sin offering for us. All our sins were laid on Jesus. He is the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Jesus had no sin of his own. He lived a perfectly faithful life in honoring God his father. God sent him into the world to seek and to save the lost by taking our sins on himself at the cross. The Bible says [read 2 Cor. 5:18-21]. The apostle John put it this way [read I Jn. 4:10, 14]. The apostle Peter said, [I Pet. 3:18-21]. Jesus is the servant Messiah.

The Bible says, [read 2 Cor. 8:9]. The apostle Paul explained [read Phil. 2:5-11].

The story of what God did to save us from our sins is the good news, the gospel. This gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes (Rom. 1:16). We received God's mercy in Christ when we accepted this gospel. We were made new creations in Christ when we believed in Jesus, turned from our sins, and were baptized in his name. The book of Romans says, [read 10:9-10; 6:3-4]. This is what it means to be born again of water and Spirit. This is what salvation from sin is. And this is all because of the mercy of God. Hear what the apostle Paul said [read Tit. 3:3-7]. Paul spoke of our deliverance from sin into a new life in God as grace and mercy [read Eph. 2:4-7]. This is why baptisms are joyous occasions. Heaven rejoices when sinners are saved.

So we who are God's people through Jesus, children of God by faith in Jesus Christ, are saved by mercy and God wants us to show that mercy to others. We are to act like God in that God's mercy came to us and we are to give it to others Rom. 12:1-2). Because we are the recipients of mercy, we are to be givers of mercy.

Jesus taught that we should love our neighbor as ourselves. One person felt the pinch of that teaching, and tried to avoid responsibility by asking the question, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus told the story of the man who was beaten, robbed, and left for dead on the side of the Jericho road, A priest and a Levite, two of the highest religious officials among the Jews, passed by the man and did nothing to help him. A lone Samaritan, an off cast half-breed of a man who was despised by the orthodox Jews, came by, and had compassion on the man. He poured healing oil on his wounds, bandaged them, placed him on his donkey and took him into the city. There he put him up in the hotel and told the manager, "Look here is some money to pay this man's bills, and if that's not enough, next time I am through here, I will make up the difference." When Jesus finished this story, he asked the question, "Which of these proved to be a neighbor to the man beaten and robbed and left for dead?" The man answered, "The one who showed mercy to him." Jesus then said, "You go and do likewise." Notice that mercy is something you do, not something you feel or think about. Mercy is compassion in action. Just to have pity in the heart does no one any good until that feeling goes through our finger tips into loving deed and acts.

We can be merciful because we have received mercy. We know what mercy is. We have experienced mercy and so we can give mercy. Those who have not experienced the mercy of God cannot give God's mercy. If you don't have feelings of compassion, pity, sympathy, kindness and caring

in you, and you do not express that to others, then you either (1) have never experienced God's mercy, or (2) if you have, you have forgotten it or it did not make a very meaningful impression on you.

How do we show mercy?

We show mercy in two ways. **One, we forgive the sins of others as we have been forgiven.** Jesus said [read Matt. 6:14-15]. The story of Jesus in Matthew, chapter 18, verses 21-35, speaks of a man forgiven of an enormous debt of ten thousand talents. This would be perhaps thirty million dollars in our money. Then that man found someone who owed him a paltry debt of less than a hundred dollars. He treated him unmercifully. Then the master called the first man in and said to him [read vs. 32-35]. God is teaching us here that we who are forgiven so much by God should be willing to forgive others of the little that they sin against us.

Sometimes we enjoy the mercy of others but we do not show mercy ourselves. Ten years ago I bought a new 35-inch Mitsubishi television from Sam's Wholesale Club for the church in Jacksonville, FL. Someone helped me unload it and place it on a high cart so it could be easily wheeled through the building and used in various classrooms. I was so proud of that new purchase because it would greatly enhance our use of video in the church. As I was pushing that cart down the hallway, I came to a two foot rise in the floor where the new building had been attached and adjoined to an older building. Because of that rise in the floor, the ceiling at that point is lower than the rest of the hallways. I was happily pushing that car up that rise when suddenly it jolted and stopped. "Uh oh. What happened?" I thought. I looked and saw that I had pushed the cart with the TV on top into the ceiling joist or beam. I looked at the damage. There was a little paint on the TV and a slight dent in the frame. I hoped to God that in my eagerness to show off and use the new TV that I had not broken something on the inside.

I rolled the cart back down the rise and got help and placed it on another cart that was about 18 inches shorter. The cart fit underneath the ceiling joist and I rolled the TV down to the classroom. I plugged it in, turned it on, and it had a beautiful picture and sound. One minute later, the TV blinked two or three times, made a poof sound, and turned black. That hurt. I wondered if it was my fault and if I had ruined a brand new TV that we had never even used.

For a few days, I thought about what I should do. I was almost sure it was my fault but I did not want to face the elders and tell them that I needed \$500 more dollars to go buy another TV. I finally repackaged the TV in its original carton, took my invoice, and went back to Sam's Club. I rolled the TV in on a cart, stopped at the greeter, showed them my receipt, and told them the TV worked for one minute and then blew up. They opened up the packaging, saw the small dent and wondered what had happened to it, and told me that they would replace it which they did. Wow, I felt so relieved and fortunate. I took the new TV back to the church and it worked perfectly and we used it in our teaching program.

I thought off and on about that broken TV and felt that it was really my fault. After about six weeks of thinking about it, I decided that the honest thing to do would be to pay Sam's Club the \$500. I went back to Sam's with the receipt and my checkbook. I asked to see the store manager and was referred to one of his assistant managers.

I told the lady that I had returned the TV, Sam's had given me a new one, but that I was pretty sure that it was my fault and that I wanted to pay for it. She listened to my story, and then said, "Mr. Warpula, thank you for being honest. We get lots of returns. We return the TVs to the manufacturer and they rebuild them so we are not out that much. Sam's is a big company and we can handle this. Put your conscience at ease. There's no problem here. We'll handle it. You don't owe us a thing." Wow, did I feel so good. I told her I would be back to buy lots more things from Sam's. She smiled, I did, too, and I walked out of there a free man with a good conscience.

That was ten years ago. Four weeks ago, I shopped at a Sam's here in Houston and went home with my groceries. I checked my receipt and found out that I had been mistakenly charged \$10.98 for some chicken that I had in my cart but I told the checker I did not want it when I found out it was not the \$7 chicken that was on sale. The checker said she would deduct it from my bill but when I got home, I discovered the charge was still there. So I overpaid Sam's \$10.98. They owed it to me.

I carried this receipt around in my wallet for a month now thinking that I would go back by the store and get my money. But then I started working on this sermon and it started working on me. I thought how Sam's saved me \$500 and they graciously forgave my mistake and set me free. Now here I am worried about \$10.98 that they mistakenly overcharged me. I thought how hypocritical of me—if somebody owes me something I want every penny of it but if the same entity forgives my debt, it's, "Thank you very much." I said several prayers to God asking for his forgiveness for my tit-for-tat record keeping.

In reality, I know that God has forgiven me of far more than I will ever need to forgive someone else.

It is sometimes said that an alcoholic who won't admit he's an alcoholic hates all other alcoholics. Similarly, it is generally true that the sinner who won't face up to his sin hates all other sinners. But the person who has recognized his own helplessness and wretchedness is grateful for whatever mercy is shown him, and he learns to be merciful toward others.

[D. A. Carson, The Sermon on the mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987, p. 24].

A forgiven person is a forgiving person.

The second way that we show mercy is in meeting the needs of those that are hurting. The story of the judgment in Matthew 25:31-46 speaks of Christ followers who feed the hungry, clothed the naked, and gave water to the thirsty, cared for the sick and those in prison. When we do these good works, we serve Jesus Christ.

Are you merciful? Are you gentle and kind toward sinners or are you harsh and hardnosed? Are you compassionate and patient with the downtrodden? Are you loving and caring with those in genuine need?

Mercy consists of being kind to everyone, not just the attractive, vocal, and successful. Del Tackett in "The Truth Project" video series tells the story of going to his first dance at age 16. When he came home that evening his father met him and asked about his evening.

"How was it?" his dad asked. Del answered, "It was good."

"Did you have a good time?" his dad continued. "Oh, yes, dad, I had a good time."

"Did everybody else have a good time?" "Yes, I think so."

"Did you dance with any girls?" "Oh, yes, I danced with some girls."

"Were there any girls there that nobody danced with?" "Well, ah, yes, there were a few that nobody danced with."

"Do you think that they had a good time?" "Well, probably not."

His father then encouraged him, "Next time you go to a dance, dance with the girls nobody else is dancing with. Make sure that they have a good time, too."

Del, now in his fifties, says that he has never forgotten that lesson that his father taught him as a teenager.

We will not be kind to others if we are always thinking of ourselves. The church is the fellowship of those “dead to themselves” and “alive in Christ.”

What did Jesus mean by “they shall receive mercy”?

This does not mean that by being kind and merciful that we can earn mercy from God. That would be false for two reasons: first, none of us is good enough to merit the forgiveness of our sins, and second, this would contradict the Scriptures that say we are saved by grace and not works.

When a person is truly penitent, and God forgives him, then he lives out that penitence in his treatment of others. We are to treat others the way that God treats us. If we do not forgive, then it means that we have not repented and we have not realized the meaning of forgiveness. If we have not repented, then we have not been saved.

What does “they shall receive mercy mean”? It means that those Christ followers who have received God’s mercy will show God’s mercy and that, as they live a life of mercy, they see more and more of God’s mercy in their lives. The merciful will have an attitude that permits them to enjoy mercy.

This mercy may be in the form of spiritual discernment, spiritual knowledge of God, assurance of relationship with God, the sense of God’s fullness in our hearts, or deeper and more meaningful prayer. This mercy gives us patience in trials, the grace to see things as they really are, or the fire and light in one’s heart, burning in love for God.

[Jerry Mercer, *Cry Joy! Saying Yes to Life That Satisfies*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1987, p. 86]

“They shall receive mercy” also looks forward to the final judgment. We have experienced God’s mercy here and now and then we shall enjoy the fulfillment of what has already begun here.

“Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.”

-cwarpula@westchurch.com