

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL, FOR THEY SHALL RECEIVE MERCY

Matthew 5:7

We continue this morning with our study in the Beatitudes, in the Sermon on the Mount, in the Gospel of Matthew. The Beatitudes are characteristics of genuine Christians. They don't just apply to the really special Christians, but to every man and woman and child in Jesus Christ. Jesus does nothing halfway; when He describes us in these verses, He describes us as we are meant to be in the fullness of maturity and transformation. None of us have arrived yet, and so we see a difference between what we are meant to be and what we are. So it's important to recognize that spiritual growth is a process that takes an entire lifetime to perfect. Christian, will you be perfectly like Jesus one day? Yes, absolutely. When? At the end of your lifetime, whether that is ten years or forty years or eighty years. We have the promise of Philippians 1:6, "And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

As Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, the Beatitudes reflect the glory of the Gospel, the truth that not only are we meant to be like Christ, we can be like Christ, and we are being made like Christ by the Spirit of God.

WHAT IS MERCY?

Let's think about the author of mercy, nature of mercy, the recipients of mercy, and the basis of mercy.

WHO IS THE AUTHOR OF MERCY? Clearly, God. We see Him showing mercy to Adam and Eve, deferring their judgment after the fall. We see Him being merciful to Cain after the murder of Abel; God protected his life on earth. We see the Lord being merciful to Abraham in his faithlessness, to Moses in his fear, to David in his adultery, to Peter in his denials, and to Saul in his persecution of the church.

God Himself is full of mercy, pity, compassion, affection, and kindness. He sees our need and has pity on us. He acts, especially in regards to our sin, by withholding His judgment and providing salvation for His own. And He calls His people to be merciful because He is merciful.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MERCY? It is first and foremost a character of the soul, and only then an action. Mercy is first compassion toward those who suffer, and then that compassion at work to relieve their suffering. Jesus is our model in this, as in all things.

Matthew writes,

Matthew 9:35–36 (ESV) – 35 And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. **36** When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Which came first, the compassion, or the teaching and the healing? The compassion, of course.

WHO ARE THE RECIPIENTS OF MERCY? Clearly, people who suffer, either because of the circumstances of life, or because of their own sin. Mercy cannot be shown to God, because He is never in need of it. We need to remember that, at least when it comes to sinners, no one who needs mercy deserves it.

When mercy is shown to those who suffer from circumstances of life, it means grieving for their pain, and doing what we can to give them relief. The Norfolk Rescue Mission is a work of mercy; it views those who suffer with compassion, and therefore seeks to relieve their suffering.

When mercy is shown to those who suffer from their own sin, it means, again, grieving for the pain the sinner faces for their sin. Psalm 73 says that with some sinners there is little suffering until the time of their death. But we know, don't we, that judgment is coming upon them, just as it was coming upon us until the Savior intervened. And so we are to be merciful to sinners, because of the judgment of God. We can grieve the emptiness and waste of their lives today, and the torments they face in eternity.

Let me be clear about this – mercy does not excuse sin, or ignore its consequences, or help the wicked justify themselves. Instead, mercy warns them that judgment is coming, and urges them to repent and believe the Gospel.

WHAT IS THE BASIS OF MERCY IN US? The mercy of God. We are to be merciful to one another because He has been merciful to us. The mercy we show others, imperfect as it is, is a picture of His mercy toward us. When we show mercy to others, we are saying two things. First, we have received mercy, especially regarding our own sinfulness. And second, God's mercy is real, and infinitely greater than the small, fuzzy picture we can show. We have the opportunity to tell those around us just how greatly God has poured out His mercy upon them. Even unbelievers are constant recipients of His compassion and care.

- He has given us a conscience, an inner Law of right and wrong, and restrains sin and promotes benevolence. Yes, our consciences are seared to one degree or another. But a broken leg is still a leg; I have eyes, even though I need to wear glasses. Our consciences are imperfect because of sin, but they still serve a purpose, by the mercy of God.
- The Bible speaks of the rain falling on the righteous and unrighteous alike, and this is true of every common grace. God has given us families, friends, the affection of pets, a sense of fulfillment in our work, the delight of good food.
- The average life span has increased due to medical knowledge; people used to die of appendicitis on a regular basis, but now we can treat, and often cure, the worst sorts of cancers.

The mercies of God to His creation are really countless. We have Him to thank for every good thing we have and experience. While only the Christian has been given all things necessary for life and godliness (Second Peter 1:3), God has given to all His creatures all things necessary for physical life. All this is mercy.

HOW IS MERCY DISPLAYED?

Remember, mercy is to be shown to those who suffer **because of the circumstances of life**, and to those who suffer **because of their own sin**.

THOSE WHO SUFFER FROM LIFE'S CIRCUMSTANCES

To those who suffer because of the circumstances of life – which is to say, all of us – mercy is modeled by the Lord Jesus.

In Acts 10:38 we are told

Acts 10:38 (ESV) – 38 God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

And so Galatians 6:10 urges us,

Galatians 6:10 (ESV) – 10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Notice the priority: do good to all, but to Christians before the world. Before someone says, “But that’s not fair,” remember that we do this in our families without apology, all the time. Years ago I had a phone call on Sunday after church, while I was having lunch with my family. My phone rang, and I let it go to voicemail. Later in the afternoon I called the gentleman back. He said, “Did you see it was me calling?” I said yes, I did. “And you didn’t answer it?” No, I was having lunch with my family. “Well that makes me feel like your family is more important than me.” He wasn’t joking; he was serious. I told him that, as a matter of fact, he was not UNimportant, but that, yes, my family is more important. Those who say that no one should be more important than anyone else actually believe that THEY are more important; that was the clear message from the brother who called me.

Doing good to Christians first is simply recognizing that the church is our spiritual family. Even Jesus said several times that He has been sent to Israel, not to the Gentiles. He taught and healed Gentiles, of course, but never at the expense of Israel.

THOSE WHO SUFFER FROM THEIR OWN SIN

To those who suffer because of the consequences of their own sin – which is to say, again, all of us – mercy is – again – modeled by the Lord Jesus.

Luke writes about a time when a Pharisee asked Jesus to come and eat with him. Jesus went into his house, and then a woman of the city, whom Luke calls a sinner, came into the house. She wet Jesus’ feet with her tears, and dried them with her hair, and then anointed them with ointment. The Pharisee thought to himself that if Jesus was a prophet, He would realize what kind of woman was touching Him. I think it’s clear that the woman was a prostitute.

So Jesus told a parable:

Luke 7:41-50 (ESV) – 41 “A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. **42** When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?” **43** Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.” And He said to him, “You have judged rightly.” **44** Then turning toward the woman He said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. **45** You gave Me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss My feet. **46** You did not anoint My head with oil, but she has anointed My feet with ointment. **47** Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” **48** And He said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” **49** Then those who were at table with Him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” **50** And He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

This is mercy for a sinner. Jesus didn't EXCUSE her sin, did He? No. He FORGAVE her sin. He knew that Simon the Pharisee was largely speaking the truth about her. Jesus didn't defend her sin – “Well, if you religious people would only be generous she wouldn't have to earn a living that way!” Neither did Jesus pretend that her sins were no big deal. He even says that her sins were MANY, a GREAT NUMBER. But on the basis of her faith, He pronounced her not sinless, but forgiven.

Can we forgive sin? No. But we can point sinners to the Savior, and urge them to go to Him in repentance and faith. We can tell them that Jesus will not pronounce them sinless, but forgiven, but that He will also make them holy, and that in eternity they will never again suffer from the presence, power, and penalty of sin.

WHAT IS THE BLESSING FOR THE MERCIFUL?

They shall receive mercy. The verb “receive” is passive. No one can go “get” mercy for themselves. What's more, since the sinner has no right to mercy, the only obligation on the “mercifier,” for lack of a better phrase, is that of obedience to the Lord Jesus. And the Lord does not call for us to simply act in a merciful way, but to actually be merciful in character.

The promised blessed of Matthew 5:7 is that the merciful shall receive mercy. They don't receive it from the world, certainly; there was never a more merciful man than Jesus of Nazareth, and His mercy was met with hatred. In fact, the more that Jesus showed mercy to the poor and undeserving, the more antagonism was directed at Him. Those who are merciful receive mercy from God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

WE RECEIVE MERCY HERE AND NOW. All of the blessings of the Beatitudes have a partial, earthly fulfillment, but are perfectly fulfilled in eternity. Here and now there may be physical or material blessings, but the greatest blessings are receiving in our souls. And so regarding mercy, we receive mercy here and now. We experience joy, because we are pleasing our Lord. We receive peace, because we are keeping ourselves pure before the Lord. We experience gratitude because we recognize that our God has caused us to want to be merciful in the first place, and then given us the ability to be merciful. We are made instruments of His mercy, and that is a blessing indeed.

BUT EVEN MORE, WE RECEIVE MERCY ON THE LAST DAY. Ephesians 2:1-7 tells us that every human being is born dead in sin, and lived only for sin and disobedience, because we are by nature children of wrath, deserving nothing but the judgment of God. But God, Paul writes, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in sin and children of wrath, made us alive together with Christ - it is by grace that we have been saved, and raised up with Jesus, and seated with Him in the heavenly places,

Ephesians 2:7

Ephesians 2:7 (ESV) – 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

It is by the mercy of God that we were not condemned before we came to faith in Jesus. It is by the mercy of God that we are not condemned for the sins we commit now, even though we are children of God by adoption. It is by the mercy of God that we are being sanctified by the Holy Spirit. It will be by the mercy of God that the fulness of Jesus' saving work is applied to us at the moment of our death, and in our resurrection in the fullness of time. It will be by the mercy of God that we are brought fully into His heavenly Kingdom, to be with the Lord for all eternity.

LET'S BRING THIS HOME.

I want to exhort you to pursue mercy, and give you two reasons to do so.

THE FIRST REASON IS THAT WE HAVE BEEN JUSTIFIED. I hope to go to my grave teaching and celebrating the magnificent truth of justification by faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus lived as the perfect, sinless Man, and did everything right, every time. This includes showing mercy. God the Father has credited every Christian with the fullness of Jesus' righteousness, not just in general terms, but in detail, line by line. Jesus lived as the perfect Man; if you are in Him, you have been credited with Jesus' perfect mercy. Jesus has DONE so that you and I may DO. It is because of His perfect mercy that we are growing to be merciful in both nature and conduct.

Ephesians 2:10 makes a remarkable statement:

Ephesians 2:10 (ESV) – 10 For we are [God's] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Mercy is one of those good works.

THE SECOND REASON IS THE MERCY OF THE TRINITY. What do I mean by that?

Our **heavenly Father** is literally called "the Father of all mercies" in Second Corinthians 1:3. His children are to be people of mercy.

We are being transformed into the image of **Jesus Christ** (Second Corinthians 3:18), which does not mean His physical image, but the image of His nature as a glorified man, and His holy character. Who was ever more merciful than Jesus? No one.

And we are filled and led by the **Holy Spirit**, who works mercy within us. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. While mercy itself is not a fruit of the Spirit, is it not clear that mercy fully depends on the fruit of the Spirit?

The Father has shown us mercy. The Son has exercised perfect mercy, and we are credited with His perfection. And the Spirit builds within us everything we need to be merciful. Let's give Him thanks today, and walk in the mercy that He prepared beforehand for us.

Let's pray!