



Blessed Are The Merciful Because They Will Receive Mercy

Matthew 5:7

As we continue through Jesus' statements of blessing (i.e. – the Beatitudes), I want to re-emphasize some points I've made in previous weeks about them. I've had a few different conversations with people in our church family, and I simply think these points might be helpful as a refresher, before getting into the specific beatitude for today. In general, I believe these beatitudes emphasize:

1. **Identity, not attainment.** In chapter 4 of Matthew, Jesus states that people need to turn to him because the Kingdom is at hand. Then we read of men who leave their jobs as fishermen, and they turn to Jesus. About a month ago, we saw that the Scriptures elsewhere teach that those who have turned from their sinfulness and turned to Jesus are *blessed*. There's nothing we do to attain blessedness. We already are "blessed in the Beloved," as the apostle Paul wrote. Therefore, I believe that these are statements of identity. If you have turned to Jesus, you are spiritually bankrupt. You also are a mourner and a person who hungers and thirsts for righteousness. But there's more to this than *only* identity.
2. **Blessedness, not earning.** When we get to these beatitudes then, we understand that none of these statements are statements of command in order to get blessing. Instead, they are statements of fact to Jesus' disciples. It's not "Blessed are the merciful for if they are merciful enough, they'll get mercy." No! This would contradict all of Jesus' teaching. The word "blessed" here is a state of blessedness. The merciful are in the highest possible state of blessedness. And Jesus then states what exists in this state of blessedness: receiving mercy. "Blessed are the merciful *because* they will receive mercy." It's simply a statement of fact. And, by the way, none of these statements, when understood from a biblical perspective can ever be lived out by people who don't trust Jesus. If we are left to ourselves, we cannot show godly meekness, mercy, spiritual bankruptcy. So, to put these two points together: if you are a disciple of Jesus (meaning, you've turned to Jesus as your Lord and Rescuer), you are in the highest possible state of blessedness. As a result, you have new identity (which includes all these characteristics), and you have received all these blessings that are in this state of blessedness. Now, we can move to one more point:
3. **Motivations, not terrors.** You could listen to all of this and think, "But in every sermon you've preached, you've called us to live out these realities." If these are simply statements of identity and blessedness, then we shouldn't be worrying about applying these to our lives, right? Wrong. Read the rest of the New Testament, and you'll find a consistent pattern – especially in Paul's writings. Paul emphasizes who we are and then calls us to live in line with our identity. Since we are saints, we must live holy lives. Since we are righteous, we are called to live righteously. I believe this is the emphasis of these Beatitudes as well because these Beatitudes have a continuing sense to them. They aren't to be understood as simply a past tense. They are to be expressions of the ongoing reality of who we are. But the beauty of the Beatitudes is that they don't terrorize those who trust Jesus. Instead, we look at these statements as promises of God. If you and I trust Jesus, we are blessed. And because we are blessed, we are merciful and we will receive mercy. Which also means, I'll live like the merciful person I am. And, when I fail, the Law doesn't condemn me because Jesus has taken my condemnation! So, the primary emphasis, I believe, is on our identity and God's grace

towards us to live out our identity. To put it another way, Jesus rescues people to become his disciples and to live out the Kingdom principles, all by his grace!

Having said this, these Beatitudes can encourage and strengthen the believer and rightly challenge listeners. If you're obstinate in sin, then there's warning to you. Like Paul will essentially say to multiple churches: I've warned you as I warned you before, those who persist in sin will not inherit the Kingdom. But to those looking to Christ, there's only grace and mercy.

With these reminders, let's read today's Beatitude: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."¹ To put another way, **The merciful are blessed because they will receive mercy.** Now I'm going to do what I've done each week in the Beatitudes. We'll evaluate what it means to be merciful and then what it means to receive mercy. We'll end with some application questions.

1. Who are the merciful?

Growing up, I remember hearing definitions of mercy and grace – to help me to distinguish between them. I heard that grace was getting what you don't deserve, and mercy was not getting what you do deserve. Personally, I've struggled over the years to differentiate between the two, but this past week, my eyes were opened more to the beauty of mercy. In the Bible, "grace" is God's response to our sinfulness. But mercy is God's response to our misery (see Robinson, *What Jesus Said About Successful Living*, p. 63). A early and mid-20th century theologian defined mercy as **"to get inside someone else's skin, to look at life from another perspective, to feel what another person was experiencing. But it was more than to feel; it was to act, to think, to will as someone else might in desperate circumstances"** (William Barclay, as quot. in Robinson, p. 63).

I want us to challenge ourselves in thinking about mercy because I tend to think that when we hear this definition, we may think of showing this kind of extravagant kindness towards people who are down on their luck, or they just were victimized in various ways. But mercy also carries an understanding that you will act in these ways even towards people who have directly done something against you and/or have brought things upon themselves. To add to this definition, to be merciful means **"to be bent on mercy."** So, to be merciful means to get inside someone's skin and feel what they're feeling and to be bent on answering their desperate needs.

Almost two weeks ago, Tracy and I were in Chicago for a few days, celebrating our 20th anniversary. One of the saddest things for both of us was to see the number of people who were homeless and begging for help. Seeing a young mom sitting on the ground with a 1-2 year old child sitting by her, caused our hearts to ache. Now, we did give some aid to certain individuals, but I also know the arguments I've heard through the years from people: "If you give them money, they'll just buy drugs" or, "They brought it on themselves and they need to learn the hard way." I want you to think about just these two statements and imagine if God said these to you. "If I give extravagant kindness to Timothy Durey, he'll just abuse the kindness and turn to sin." You know what? Romans 2 says that's exactly what we do! God's kindness is meant to lead to repentance, but because of our hard hearts, we store up wrath for ourselves. But does God stop being kind towards us? Think of the second statement: "Timothy brought this upon himself and he needs to learn the hard way." If God said that to me, I'd be in Hell today, and so would you!

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 5:7.

But God is merciful! Think about the idea behind the word merciful. To get into the skin of the desperate and to act in ways to rescue from the desperate circumstances. This is *literally* what Jesus did. God the Son took on the skin of human beings. Why? Hebrew 2:17-18 tells us: **“Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”**² Jesus had to get in the skin of humanity in order to be merciful. And, in his mercy, he made propitiation for people’s sins. “Propitiation” is a big word that we don’t use. Do you know what it means? It means to satisfy God’s just wrath towards sin. God is Just. Sin must be punished. We’re sinners. But Jesus took on flesh and took the wrath that we deserved. He directed what we deserved to himself! And then, the author of Hebrews adds that not only did Jesus satisfy the punishment; so, that we are not punished (that’s grace). But he suffered so that when tempted and tried in this world, he will help us (that’s mercy). Why would Jesus be *this merciful*? We are the rebels. But his mercy has changed and transformed us!

I do hope and pray you’ve turned to Jesus for forgiveness and rescue! And, if you have, Jesus states that as a blessed one, you are now merciful. Do you see God’s heart of mercy resonating with you? Do you have the sympathy and empathy and active response to care for others in desperate need? Whether it’s the drug addict on the streets of the religious, moralist who lives life in his own strength. Do you have a heart of mercy?

Now, let’s move to the blessing.

2. What does it mean to receive mercy?

Is this Jesus saying, “Do ‘x’, and I’ll give you ‘y’?” If you’re merciful *enough*, will you then receive mercy? No, this is not what Jesus is saying. Again, this is a statement of fact. And, if we go back to the principles I shared earlier, it all makes sense. Those who have received mercy from the Lord, are merciful. This reminds me of Jesus’ statement that those who are forgiven much, love much. The only way we can give mercy is if we receive mercy. Throughout the Scriptures, any godly action on our part does not come from us. We are not the initiators. God must act first, and then we act in kind. So, it’s not a statement of attainment.

Others will then say, “If you are merciful, then you’ll get mercy from people.” So, Jesus is essentially saying, “You scratch my back, and I’ll scratch yours?” This doesn’t make sense at all. In fact, when we look at the world, we hear the phrase, “Nice guys finish last.” This is often how the world operates. We can sometimes even hear Christians say, “Don’t be kind to that sinful person! If you’re kind to them, they won’t learn their lesson.” That’s the opposite of mercy. But what we notice about Jesus’ beatitudes is that his Kingdom operates opposite of how the world operates. The world says nice guys finish last. They won’t get a break. Their problems will be propounded. But Jesus says, “Merciful ones receive mercy!”

So, who are we getting mercy from? Are we attaining it? No. Are we getting mercy from other people? No. The answer must be God. Right here, you could say, “Well then it sounds like I’m working to get mercy from God.” That’s not correct. The mercy that the merciful receive is all-encompassing. The disciples sitting and listening to Jesus already received mercy from Jesus, but they also await mercy. The same is true for everyone here who has trusted Jesus. We wait to appear before God’s Mercy Seat. In

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 2:17–18.

Judgment, we will not face any condemnation. We'll face our God who will wipe every tear from our eyes. We'll hear our God say, "Welcome into the Joy of the Lord!" This is future mercy that we await, and it will all be ours because of his eternal, glorious mercy towards us who are destitute. Us, who rebelled against us. Us, who are spiritually bankrupt. Yet, he gives us the riches of his Kingdom and the riches of his kindness. Now, because of his kindness towards us, he calls us to act like him! As Merciful Ones, we are to be merciful.

This idea is emphasized by Jesus in the story of the Unforgiving Servant in Matthew 18. We have a Master whose servant owes him an inordinate amount of money of 10,000 talents. An ordinary worker in that day would have to work 20 years to get 1 talent! Yet, amazingly, this master relieves the man of his debt and sets him free! But the servant then immediately reacts to another servant who owes him measly amount of money. This other servant pleads for mercy, and the servant who was forgiven wants strict justice and even revenge. Do you know how the Master responds to that unforgiving servant? He says, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?"³ Mercy is the response. Giving freedom is part of mercy. Allowing a person to live and not be enslaved by the curse of sin is mercy.

In this parable, Jesus is taking seriously the call that those who have been forgiven, will love. Those who have received mercy will show mercy. Those who do not show mercy, don't know mercy. Do you know mercy? Before getting to the application questions, I want to share one final story about mercy. Years ago, a warden of a prison told a story about a boy who had shamed his family and community by going to prison. This boy would write home at times, but his parents never responded. It was true that his parents were illiterate, but he also wondered if they simply rejected him. Eventually the time came for him to be set free. He wrote his parents one last time. He told them that he'd be traveling through town on a train, and he asked his parents to put up one white ribbon on an apple tree in their yard. That was to signal if they had forgiven him and will accept him. He said that if he didn't see the ribbon, he would simply ride on and be out of their lives. He didn't receive a response, and eventually he was set free. He got on the train. As it neared his hometown, he got extremely nervous. He moved away from the window seat and couldn't look. He told another passenger his story and asked that passenger to look out the window for him. When they reached the town and were passing the home, the passenger grabbed the boy's leg and whispered, "The whole tree is white with ribbons" (as told by Robinson, p. 68).

Ventura, can we relate to that boy? We probably, on many occasions (maybe even today), feel as though God won't accept us. But do you know that God has answered us? Two thousand years ago, Jesus hung on the tree, arms open wide with love – praying for our forgiveness and freedom. Have you turned to him for forgiveness and freedom? And, if so, have you forgotten just how merciful God is towards you? Look again to Jesus. Be reminded. And then, when you know the great mercy towards you, Jesus' call is that his disciples will show mercy as well.

This leads us to a few application questions:

- 1. Do I know God's mercy?** I just asked this question. If you have refused to acknowledge your sinfulness before the Lord, will you today? Maybe you think God's an angry tyrant or maybe you think he doesn't really care what you do with your life. You need his forgiveness and acceptance.

³ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 18:32–33.

You can't have life while rejecting God, who is Life. I urge you to call out to Jesus for forgiveness. Or, if you have more questions, please talk to me or another Christian about what it means to be a Christian. Feel free to ask other questions if you just want to know more.

2. **Am I refusing to forgive and/or care for certain types of people?** Mercy reaches as far as the curse of the Fall is found. So, whether someone is a republican or democrat or homeless or upper class, everyone is in need of the mercy of God. Even people who personally offend you. God has been personally offended by all his creation. Your sins against him are personal. Yet, in mercy, he has given you more than forgiveness. He's given you acceptance and all heavenly riches. But are you acting like the unforgiving servant? If you refuse to forgive, you have (at a minimum) forgotten God's forgiveness towards you. And, if you continue to refuse, Jesus states you haven't received mercy. Take this seriously. In trusting our Savior, grant forgiveness and care to all types and kinds of people! Show them the extravagant mercy of our Lord.
3. **Do I regularly rehearse God's mercy to myself?** Has your time in the Word and prayer simply become formulaic? Or, does the Spirit regularly remind you of God's kindnesses in forgiving, saving, loving you? Do you take time to ensure you know that the Holy, Holy, Holy God loves *you*? And that this came at great cost? Oh, the only way we can be merciful is if we're swimming in his mercy!
4. **How can I actively display God's mercy to others – revealing I am bent on mercy?** I can't answer this for you. I simply know that God has placed us in various circumstances with all different kinds of relationships. Are you more bent towards retribution or mercy? Is there a person, a family? Maybe your spouse or children? Maybe neighbors? You realize that you have taken on God's judgment seat instead of taking on mercy. Based on this beatitude, I urge you to consider today how you can proactively display mercy and to increase in living this identity in this world.

By God's grace and mercy, we continue to experience more grace and mercy, awaiting the day where we will only experience God's perfect kindnesses without the presence of sin whatsoever! So, hear Jesus' words again: **The merciful are blessed because they will receive mercy.**