

Blessed are the Merciful

Actual care that expresses itself in action...

Matthew 5.7

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Introduction

The fifth beatitude begins a new focus. Whereas the first four pointed to how the disciple relates to God, now the focus shifts to how we relate to others. Matthew 5.3-6 focuses on principles that relate to our heart and mind. Matthew 5.7-12 reflects those attitudes outwardly.

The following illustrates how the beatitudes relate to each other:

The poor in spirit, 5.3	→ → →	Show mercy to others, 5.7
Those who mourn over sin, 5.4	→ → →	Are pure in heart, 5.8
Those who are meek, 5.5	→ → →	Seek to make peace, 5.9
Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, 5.6	→ → →	Are willing to suffer persecution for the sake of righteousness, 5.10

The idea of mercy is seen throughout Scripture. It is one of the forms of God’s love where He demonstrates His favor in holding back from us what we deserve. A simple definition describes it this way: “kindness and goodwill toward the miserable and afflicted, joined with the desire to relieve them.” In the Old Testament, it is connected to a word that means “to yearn, to have compassion, to have mercy, to pity.”³¹ In the New Testament, there are a number of words that express it as “a feeling of sympathy with misery, active compassion, the desire of relieving the miserable.”³²

Like much of the rest of the beatitudes, the essential attitude Jesus describes for the kingdom citizen ran totally against the prevailing Greco-Roman view of the day. A popular Roman philosopher called mercy “the disease of the soul.”³³ Mercy was *the* sign of weakness. Real Romans weren’t weak. They glorified courage, discipline, and power.

³¹ Clines, David J. A., ed. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press; Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2011 I:–VIII: Vol. 7, p. 46.

³² Bullinger, Ethelbert W. *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*. London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1908, p. 495.

³³ MacArthur, p. 188.

Weakness was looked at with disgust. As a result, their society was characterized by brutality.

Today while we might idealize our own culture as being more advanced than the Roman civilization of 2000 years ago, the nature of humans has not changed ... and the more we look around the more we see a glaring need for more of us to practice mercy ... in the world, in our families, and in the church. Our society is becoming more violent ... people are brutalized by crime, sexual assault, violent assault, etc. In some places it has become rampant. In some families, we would be shocked if we knew what went on behind closed doors. Besides those physical manifestations, we also see it in the arena of ideas. There is no mercy in politics ... only annihilation of your opponent. There no longer is a desire to cross the aisle and work together. The only thing that matters is the destruction of the other side. There is little mercy on social media ... and in the mass media ... as people with the simple mouse click spew out hate, defame and destroy others through words. In the fifth beatitude we are taught that as we show mercy, it will not always bring mercy from men, but it will bring mercy from God.

A Look at Jesus

There was no one who has ever exhibited more mercy than Jesus.

Jesus' ministry

Much of Jesus' ministry involved interacting with the people of Judea ... who came to Him to be healed. Note the summary of what Jesus did:

The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the good news, and blessed is the one who isn't offended by me,"
Matthew 11.5-6.

Jesus' interaction with sinners

We should also mention His reaching out to the rejected ones of His society, drawing them into His circle of love and forgiveness:

When the scribes who were Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Mark 2.16.

When the woman caught in adultery was drug out in the street before Him, He moved with mercy:

When Jesus stood up, he said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, Lord," she answered. "Neither do I condemn you," said Jesus. "Go, and from now on do not sin anymore."] John 8.10-11.

Jesus' interaction with children

When Jesus had opportunity, He chose to honor children. He took them into His arms and blessed them:

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me. Don't stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." After taking them in his arms, he laid his hands on them and blessed them, Mark 10.13-16.

At the cross...

Jesus' last words from the cross were words of mercy. For those who hung him there He said,

Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing." And they divided his clothes and cast lots, Luke 23.34.

Then, to the repentant thief He said,

And he said to him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise," Luke 23.43.

Finally, he directed John to take care of his grieving mother who would be left behind, John 19.26-27.

What greater example of mercy could there be? May we learn to develop the spirit of Jesus!

What Mercy is Not

It is not superficial pity that reacts only to salve a guilty conscience or impress others.

It is not a simple profession ... empty words with no action.

It is not passive ... it takes selfless action by offering and providing help.

Mercy in Action

It is *actual* care that expresses itself in action. Christians are not takers ... but givers. We are not pretending helpers ... we are practical givers. We should connect it to the principle James spoke of:

If a brother or sister is without clothes and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, stay warm, and be well fed," but you don't give them what the body needs, what good is it? In the same way faith, if it does not have works, is dead by itself, James 2.15-17.

We meet people's needs. We don't merely *feel* compassion, we *exhibit* it. We not only *feel* sympathy, we *give* a helping hand. If someone needs a meal prepared, we do it. If a grieving person needs support, we provide it. Those that others have rejected we love. For those who have offended us or hurt us, we forgive. If someone is lonely, we provide companionship.

Mercy is Required Behavior

The disciple understands that the measure of mercy he or she gives, will be the amount of mercy given back by God:

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you; a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over—will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you,” Luke 6.37-38.

We should also refer to James 2.12-13 where, in effect, James transforms Jesus’ beatitude into its opposite, where he says that those who are not merciful are cursed because they won’t be given mercy. *Judgment is without mercy to the one who has not shown mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.* Mercy is not just the feeling of concern; it is the active involvement of reaching out to show love to others.

This also connects to the amount of forgiveness we give:

“For if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. But if you don’t forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses, Matthew 6.14-15.

Practicing mercy does not mean we earn our salvation. *God does not give mercy for merit, He gives mercy in grace, because it is needed, not because it is earned.*³⁴

Exhibiting mercy will become more natural for us as we grow in our understanding and appreciation of how our God moved with unlimited mercy on our behalf – paying our unpayable debt of sin – and giving us new life. That fact should be the driving force behind everything in our life.

³⁴ MacArthur, p. 197.