

The Beatitudes 2 of 3

Sinclair Ferguson Messages

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Bible Text: Matthew 5:6-7; Luke 10:25-37

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Now will you turn with me in God's word first of all to the Gospel according to Matthew, to the chapter that we are studying together in these evening meetings and then to the Gospel of Luke, to the 10th chapter and verse 25. The two Beatitudes we have to consider together this evening come in verses 6 and 7 of Matthew 5.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Then this familiar portion of God's word in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 10, verses 25 to 37.

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 "What is written in the Law?" Jesus replied. "How do you read it?" 27 He answered: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" 28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." 29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' 36 Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell

into the hands of robbers?" 37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

We began our consideration of these verses in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5, last evening by considering together after our general introduction, the opening three Beatitudes and one of the things that we began to notice, I'm sure, is that in a very real sense there is a connecting link in the working of the grace of God in the hearts of men and women. God does not work randomly and when he works according to his eternal purpose, his great plan, the great end that he holds in view is that he might take lost and broken sinners and by his grace transform them into the image of his own beloved Son, rescuing them from the pit and taking them from the miry clay and transforming them by the power of his Spirit through the instrument of his word from one degree of glory into another degree of glory as he ends in all his purposes, in all his desires, in all his providences and in all of his blessed promises in holy Scripture to turn men and women like you and me into men and women who show forth in our lives by our spirit, through our speech and in our earthly conduct, the glories and the beauties and the sweet lineaments of the exquisite character of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is, of course, as we began to notice in some senses yesterday evening, that it is because God has to reach down so far, because he has to chisel against the grain that has been wrought into our lives by carnal nature. But the ways of God with our spirits are patient and slow and oftentimes painful to us. But as we hold before our vision that what God's eternal purpose for his children is, is nothing less than to bestow upon them the blessings and the happiness of his heavenly kingdom, we begin to see that as he works in our lives and makes us poor in spirit and brings us to grieve and to mourn and to bewail our sin and as he makes us men and women who have yielded up all our rights in this world and sink low and yet gladly in the dust before Jehovah, we begin to see a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel of our experience and that glimmer of light is the eternal purpose of our heavenly Father that as he has commanded us through his own Son in the Sermon on the Mount, that we are to be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect. He commands what he wills and it is his gracious intention to give precisely what he has commanded.

So what Jesus is laying before us at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount as he lays the foundations of the Christian life in the nature and the hallmarks of Christian character, what Jesus is doing is he is showing us the chisel marks of the master Sculptor upon our own souls and he is saying to us if we are ever going to grow in the righteousness of God's heavenly kingdom, then we will find these indelible, distinct and distinguishing characteristic marks of the children of God. And we were rejoicing, where we not, yesterday evening, in the sure knowledge that wherever we go, amongst whatever people we move of whatever skin, with whatever different traditions, political and ecclesiastical and personal, we know not only from God's word but many of us have come to experience in our own lives that these great distinguishing characteristic features of God's children draws out to one another and enables us to embrace one another in the bonds of the Lord Jesus Christ. And as we are drawn nearer personally to him who is the light of the world, we are able to distinguish the features of those who similarly are drawn into his light. And as he is the great Shepherd of the sheep calling his sheep by name and we are drawn into the center of the fold where stands our heavenly Shepherd,

we recognize that the marks of the heavenly owner are upon all the beasts of the flock because he has set the seal of the marks of his own blessing upon all his children.

We began to notice yesterday evening how God begins to work in the spirits of men, reducing them to a sense of their own spiritual poverty and beggarlyness before his awesome throne, bringing them to grieve and to mourn for their sin and making them what they could never be and never were by nature, men and women who have this great characteristic mark of our Lord Jesus Christ. They have come to him because he is meek and lowly in heart and they are identified by sharing in some measure in his meekness and his lowliness. But I wonder if you notice as we turn to the next two Beatitudes and as we look at them in conjunction with all the Beatitudes, that there is a further development of the pattern of the working of God's grace in the lives of men and women for by and large what is true of the ministry of the Spirit that is described in these opening Beatitudes, what is true as God begins to chisel into men's spirits, is that first of all, he drives them into themselves. The first need for prodigal sinners is that they should come to themselves and so God with this pressing, pressing work through his Son upon the consciences of men, unveiling their true nature to their eyes, unraveling the complexity of their sin and its foulness in the sight of a holy God, unraveling the horror of the fact that there is a God in heaven who is a God of infinite grace and patience and yet we sinners have spurned his grace and overtaken his patience by our rebellion against his goodness and his justice and holiness and God comes to us and he begins to drive us, drive us, drive us into ourselves. Our consciences, our touch, our needs are spread before us. Our spirits are awakened and we begin to cry out of the depths, "O Lord, I cry to you. If you should mark iniquity, if you should mark up my iniquity, who could stand? If my sins were exposed in public before you, I would flee from your presence." Yet you see at the end of the day, it is never sufficient for our great Prophet of the church merely to drive men and women to discover themselves. Conviction of sin is not conversion to God. Shame for sin is not necessarily that gracious turning to a heavenly Father who welcomes sinners through the blood of his Son. And so in a sense, having driven us into ourselves to see our need, what our Lord Jesus Christ begins to do in his glorious pastoral ministry to men's souls is to drive them out of themselves and into that salvation that God has provided in his Son, Jesus, where men, in a sense, may escape from their sin. Where men may hide from the judgment of Almighty God and find not in themselves nor even in the work of God's Spirit within their breasts that salvation and that holiness of life and character that they so desperately need.

So it is one thing for us to be driven like Job to place our hands upon our mouths and confess silently to God that we are undone, we are miserable and wretched sinners in and of ourselves. God in his wisdom, Christ in his grace, when we ourselves might rest there content or when we ourselves might rest there in the pit of despair believing that we have now come to ourselves and come to the end, tells us that there is a work of God's Spirit within the hearts of men and women that drives and draws them out of themselves and out of the sight of their own sin and into Christ and his grace and his saving power and his all sufficiency, even for such sinners as ourselves. And having driven us, in this sense, out of ourselves and into the sufficiency of Christ, he then drives us out of ourselves and into the needs of men and women. And it is this pattern of God's grace that is beginning

to unfold as we come to the two Beatitudes we are to consider together now this evening for Jesus teaches us that there is a blessing promised to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and it is that in their emptiness they will be filled. And he promises a blessing to those who instead of being as Luther so often said, "turned in upon themselves," have been turned outwards toward others and recognize the needs, the crying needs of other men and women and boys and girls around them.

So he pronounces this beautiful word, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." And we are in the same world here as the Apostle Paul in the seventh chapter of Romans, crying out to God in his need and in his wretchedness and thanking God that there is in Jesus Christ a refuge from the condemnation of Almighty God. And my dear friends, it seems to me that this very pattern is what's laboring in our thinking even by way of introduction to these two Beatitudes this evening for there are some of us who doubtless will need this pastoral corrective of our Lord Jesus Christ. There are some of us it seems who by very nature rest content in mourning for our sin and grieving over our failures almost to the extent that you would think that we did not know that there was good news from God and that good news not to be discerned in anything in us but to be found only outside of ourselves. So there is a very real sense in which we all together, even in a sense while we are being turned in upon ourselves, if I may change the figure of speech, by the heavenly Potter as he begins to mold and shape the clay, at the same time, he is longing to turn us out of ourselves that we may find all our needs met in him and out of our own sense of need, there may be born in our spirits a deepening awareness of the desperate needs of men and women round about us. And it is very simply these two things that we are to consider together this evening: the blessing of hungering and thirsting for righteousness; the blessing of being a child of God who is known for his mercy.

"Blessed are those," says Jesus in verse 6, "who hunger and thirst for righteousness." I want briefly this evening to consider this Beatitude first of all, in the light of the nature of this grace of the Spirit that is described and secondly, in the light of the object of this grace itself. What is the nature of this grace that Jesus describes? How marvelously he puts it in picture language, even the smallest of us is able to understand. You boys and girls have come in perhaps already today and you've been out playing and you've seen daddy or you've seen mommy and as soon as you have seen them you have remembered, "Daddy, Mommy, thirst. Drink. Satisfaction." That's exactly the picture the Lord Jesus places before us here. The little boys and girls who came with their mothers up that hillside to listen to the Lord Jesus preaching. What a tremendous experience it must of been. And as he spoke these truths that your moms and dads and I together with them seek to wrestle with and feel we are simply climbing the first rungs in a ladder that will lead us to heaven itself and yet there is a sense in which there is none of us who is not able to understand that of which Jesus speaks. It is a need in our hearts like the need in our bodies when we are exhausted and tired and the perspiration is dripping down our faces and we have played hard and perhaps lost and we come to our Father and we say, "Father, give me something to drink. I am thirsty." Or we've gone away and it feels as though we've gone away for days, although our moms and dads know we've only been away 30 minutes and we come in and we say, "I'm starving, Mommy! I'm starving!"

Now you see the Lord Jesus' sense that just as in our day-to-day experience we sometimes say, "I'm thirsty or I'm starving." When the Spirit of God begins to work in our lives and he begins to make us sense our need, we perhaps couldn't explain it even to our moms or our dads but we have this sense of need and sometimes we feel it most of all when we are listening to the preaching of God's word. And sometimes we can't understand why our moms and dads delight in being with the people of God because it's there most of all that we feel that we are uncomfortable and we are in need and we are not happy as we believe they are happy and we do not understand what Jesus says when he speaks about being happy when you hunger and thirst. And what Jesus is doing in our hearts is he is making our hearts feel like our tummies feel when we are hungry and we are thirsty. He is making us see how much need we have that we cannot fulfill ourselves and it is his voice speaking in our hearts and saying to us, "My dear friend, you are in need. You are hungering and thirsting and that for which you are hungering and thirsting is the righteousness of God that you do not have." The righteousness of God that you do not have.

Now, what is this righteousness? Jesus later on in this Sermon on the Mount says that if we are to be his children, we must seek first of all his kingdom and his righteousness and everything else will be added to us. Boys and girls, many of you are seeking first, what are you seeking? What do you dream of as you lie in bed at night? What are the ambitions, the things that you look forward to each day? Jesus says our great ambition is that the first thing in our minds and in our hearts is that we should look for his kingdom. How can I enter God's kingdom? How can I have the righteousness of God in my life so that instead of being out of sorts with God and not loving God the way mommy and daddy love God and serve him? I find that Jesus is my Savior and he makes me right with God because that's what Jesus means by righteousness. He means being right with God. Do you know what it's like when perhaps something happens in the house and you're not right with dad or mom and you go out of the house? Have you ever left home? When I was a little boy I left home once for at least five minutes, "I'm leaving home." And oh, how out of sorts I felt until I came home and said to my daddy, "Daddy, I did so wrong and I want to be forgiven. I want us to have the loving relationship that we had before. I'm sorry." That's what it means to have righteousness. It means to be rightly related to God and Jesus says that he promises blessing, happiness, to those who feel they need to be rightly related to God and will come to him and trust in him and ask him who knows the heavenly Father to bring them to the heavenly Father and to say to the Father in heaven, "Father, my little friend here has sinned against heaven and in your sight but he is holding my nail-pierced hand and trusting that when I died on the cross, I bore his sins and all the evil in his heart." And Jesus will take you by the hand and introduce you to his Father and you will be rightly related to God.

I love to think of the boys and the girls who sat around the Savior that afternoon as he began to preach this mighty sermon that the greatest intellects in the world, my dear young friends, cannot even begin to unfold, far less to live out. Boys and girls, like you and me, perhaps boys and girls who have been brought by their mummies and their daddies to hear the preaching of the famous John the Baptist and listening to him had

begun secretly and quietly in their hearts to fear that when the fires of God descended from heaven, they would be burned up and here being but preparing the way in their hearts for them to listen to Jesus and to hear Jesus say that if we hunger and thirst for righteousness, we will be satisfied because we will come to know the Father.

Oh my dear friends, of course, there is so much more to this. There are some commentators who suggest that when Jesus speaks about hungering and thirsting for righteousness he is merely speaking in some kind of general way of men longing that this world that is out of sorts and all out of joint may be pieced back together again. But how could a man who has become conscious of his sin, conscious of the depths of his need, ever be satisfied by a promise that there is blessing to men and women who in some general kind of way desire that the world would be fitted together again by its heavenly Architect? No, no, our Lord Jesus is speaking not only to those of us who are children but to those of us who are older as well and he is impressing upon us that when we have become conscious of our sin, we need to hunger and thirst. We need to long. We need to make it the single idea of our lives that we shall have by God's grace in our lives nothing less than the righteousness of Almighty God.

Oh, what a glorious privilege it is to be able to say on the authority of God's word that this righteousness is not merely something that he demands from us in his justice but that which he provides for us in his grace. You remember Martin Luther struggling with that great text in Paul's letter to the Romans where he speaks about the righteousness of God being revealed and how Luther began to abominate the very thought of the righteousness of God, that God should demand of him what he, Luther, could not supply to God, that God should demand justice and holiness and perfection when he, Luther, struggled with all his might and main to obey the commandments. And the more he struggled to obey them, the more he fell afoul of them and sinned and wept and grieved and mourned and beat himself black and blue that he might find some way of meriting the righteousness that God demanded until he tells us that he began struggling with this very text he hated. He began to see that this righteousness God demanded was the very righteousness that God supplied in the work of grace in the Gospel and it was, as he says, like the very gate of Paradise itself to me. The whole Bible took on a new meaning to him because he had found in the Lord Jesus Christ that provision that God has made for men and women who are conscious of the depths of their need and the despair of their hearts.

I will never forget my own little experience. I could take you to the very spot. It was in Sauchiehall Street in Glasgow. If you ever get there, go to Sauchiehall Street. I was walking along that shopping thoroughfare with a friend of the same age and I suppose in my heart I was preparing to write and disseminate a tract with this title because this is what we were debating, "The injustice of God in the case of the British Royal family." And my thesis was this: that if we were to merit salvation from God, if there was a standard of righteousness that would please God, then God was unjust for he had set me and my home and amongst my school friends where there was every opportunity to sin and little opportunity to merit for myself and he had set the Royal family so surrounded by clerics and lawyers and men and women of nobility that they scarcely even had the opportunity to sin. Then my friend, a few months older and much wiser than

I was, turned to me and he said, "Look, it's not what you do, it's what Christ has done." And I tell you, it was the very gate of Paradise to me and I began to see the difference between struggling up the ladder to heaven and finding myself beaten down on every hand and being driven out of myself and into Christ and knowing that on the cross God had made his own Son to be sin for us so that the very sun in heaven veiled its face for shame, in order that we and I might be made the righteousness of God in him.

My dear friends, there can be few things more important in the life of a child of God than that the glimpse of that saving truth that you grasp when God brought you out of darkness into his marvelous light, should be the underlying melody in the whole course of your Christian experience; that it is Jesus' blood and righteousness that are our beauty and our glorious dress; that it is nothing in us and everything in Christ; that we hunger and thirst in order that we may be satisfied not by what we have done or are doing or shall do but by what he alone has done in his finished work upon the cross of Calvary where he came under the curse of Jehovah God in order that he might be made a curse over us and we might find him to be our shield and our hiding place from the awful judgment of a holy God. And that in the last day when men and women cry that the rocks and the mountains might cover them in order that they may be hidden from the wrath of the Lamb, we ourselves will be found in him not having a righteousness of our own but that righteousness that comes by faith in his name.

Oh beloved, our Lord Jesus Christ tells us that that there is a happiness, a blessing, not merely for those who have once longed and hungered for that righteousness but for those who continue to hunger and to thirst, that is to devote the great attentions of their hearts and their lives to knowing with ever increasing clarity what it means to be hidden in the righteousness of Jehovah Jesus because so often when we stumble and slip and fall and we need a brother to bring us back, the truth of the matter is that it is from this solid ground that our feet have been moved. There is no place in all of the universe from which the enemy of men's souls desires more to lodge them than here. He will do all in his demonic power to tear you away from the knowledge that it is not in me, that is in my flesh, that there dwells any good thing but only in the Lord Jesus Christ. And I want to say this evening if you are ever to know the breastplate that will protect you from the fiery darts of the evil one, then you must wear this righteousness of which Jesus Christ speaks.

"I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' Name.
On Christ the solid Rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand."

My faith is sinking sand. My righteousness is sinking sand. My sanctification is sinking sand. Only Christ's righteousness can save me and only the shield of Christ's righteousness can ever protect me from all manner of evil that Satan seeks to bring into my spirit, lodging evil thoughts in my mind and then coming to me and saying, "How can you possibly be a child of God with a thought like that in your mind?" And we need to

say to him, "Begone, Satan, for I am not trusting in my own merit but in Jesus Christ alone."

My dear friends, I want to say this to you this evening: that if you are justified this evening as we sit together under God's word, you are as justified before God as the Lord Jesus Christ himself because you are justified in him and nothing in heaven or earth or under the earth, nothing in the past or the present or the future, will ever be able to dislodge you from the righteousness of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. And in that knowledge, we rest satisfied. Can there be any more glorious thing for us to be able to do tonight than to lay our heads upon the pillow having confessed our sin before God and to thank our heavenly Father that in his sight we are in Christ? And as Christ having borne our sin as though he were the only sinner on the face of the earth, have been justified by his resurrection from the dead and now sits secure at the right hand of God waiting for his enemies to become a stool for his feet, so I lay me down to sleep. And I am in Jesus Christ as one who hungers and thirsts for his righteousness and I am justified and accepted in the sight of God. Oh, what a privilege. What a satisfaction for the needy soul that there is filling in Jesus.

Yet I wonder if you notice that there is an inevitable connection between hungering and thirsting for righteousness and becoming merciful. You remember how it was with Jonah, that man who cared so little for the needs of those men on the boat with him, of the Ninevites to whom God had sent him until in his own need and despair as he was cast overboard, having despised these pagan Ninevites and despised these pagan sailors calling upon their idols. He himself was brought into the same position and felt himself under the judgment of God and then he began to realize that those who worship vain idols were forsaking the grace that might be theirs if they turned to God and from being pitiless and merciless, at least for a season, he became full of pity and merciful to those in need. And the very same is surely inevitably true in the purposes of God as he works within our spirit. My dear friends, if we have been here in these opening verses of the Beatitudes, if this has any parallel to the kind of experience that God has brought us through, then we cannot lift up our eyes and look on the fields roundabout us without sharing the compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ and being merciful to our fellow sinners for the sake of Christ.

So we turn from considering what it means to hunger and thirst for righteousness to think briefly about this great promise given to us, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." Now, of course, at the very beginning, there is clearly here a matter that needs some clarification. It will surely be abundantly obvious in view of all that Jesus has already said that he does not mean that by exercising mercy we merit mercy. He is not speaking here of the reception of mercy as something that is caused by the showing of mercy but rather that the showing of mercy is evidence that we are among those who alone will receive mercy from God. Rather as later on in the Sermon in chapter 6, verses 14 and 15, he says, "If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." Not saying that the Father's forgiveness is based on our forgiveness but that our forgiveness is evidence that we are among those who share in the Father's

forgiveness. So here the promise of blessing is given to the merciful and they are the ones who will be shown mercy.

Now, what is mercy? Is it simply another word for the love of God? Thomas Watson in his beautiful book on the Beatitudes puts it rather quaintly like this, he says, "The mercy of God and our mercy toward one another is not merely love." He says, "For love is a friend who visits you when you are well but mercy is like a physician who calls on you when you are sick and tends you." Let me put it like this, I think if I may say so even better: mercy is that love seen in God and then in his people which reaches out to men's broken lives in order to heal them and to restore them. Mercy is that in God and in his people which reaches out to men's broken lives in order to heal them and to restore them. There are two things about mercy, two characteristics of mercy that I want us to underscore this evening and both of them are marvelously illustrated in that parable of the Good Samaritan that we read together this evening and the vital thing to grasp about that parable is the difference between the question the man asked and the answer the Lord gave. The question the man asked revealed him to be a man lacking in mercy and the answer the Lord gave summoned him to be a man full of mercy. What was the question he asked? Why, the question he asked was: "Who is my neighbor? If I am to love my neighbor as myself, categorize for me the person who is my neighbor," and you see what the man was wanting to do, he was wanting to define the area of investigation so that he could cut out all ancillary and secondary matters and focus attention on the one small area that he considered his neighbor would fit into. Do you realize how Jesus turned the whole thing round on him in the story of the Good Samaritan? The man had said, "Who is my neighbor?" And at the end of the story, Jesus said to the man, "Who proved to be neighbor? Who proved to be neighbor?" He said to Jesus, "Where is the man who is my neighbor?" And Jesus said, "My friend, you are the neighbor," and the man began to grasp upon it. He said, "It was the one who showed mercy on him."

Now, I say to you that the two chief characteristics of mercy I wish to underline this evening I found in that parable. The first is this: that in giving that correct answer to Jesus' question, the man discerned the true nature of mercy and that is that it is the relieving of the consequences of sin in the broken and bruised lives of men. It isn't the forgiveness of sin. It wasn't in the power of the Samaritan as he passed by that day to go to the man who had sinned and say, "I forgive you your sin," but it was in his power to go to the man who had been sinned against and whose life broken and now in jeopardy was the fruit and consequence of sin, in this case, other men's sins, of course. He was able to bring some measure of mercy, some measure of release, some measure of pity. He bound the man's wounds. He poured oil into them. He put him on his donkey. He took him to the inn. He paid the price of his lodging. He cared for him. He was going to return. And in a very real sense, Jesus is saying to us in the parable that this is always what mercy does. It comes to broken and bruised men and women whose lives, yes, whose lives have been broken and bruised by sin, their sin, perhaps other's sin perhaps, and it seeks to relieve the consequences of sin in the lives of men. It's not at all surprising however erroneous it may seem to us to be that the early church began to think that Jesus himself was the Good Samaritan come from heaven on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho in order to rescue men and to bind their wounds after they had fallen among thieves because

it is a wonderfully Christ-like thing to come to those whose lives have been broken and bruised and marred by sin and to heal and to restore.

He does not bruise the broken reed but comes in his merciful tenderness and begins in his gracious power to heal and to restore and to save and to bring to new life. He did not come into the world to destroy but to save. To save. To save. And he longs that all his children should have their hearts beating with the same regular rhythm of pity and compassion toward their fellowmen as the heartbeat of the Savior himself. My dear friends, I want to say to you openly and freely this evening that I find this to be a most searching thing, that we are called to be merciful. We are called to restore bruised lives with the instruments of grace and love and the instruments of God's word and the fellowship of God's people and prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit that God has put into the hands of his people as instruments they can use for the healing of men's lives under the influence of his Spirit. That's why it should grieve us when instead of restoring men's lives, we have ruined them. When instead of restoring men's characters, we have ruined them. When instead of doing all in our powers to draw men and women into the comforts of the Gospel, by our mercilessness we drive them away humanly speaking from the source of all comfort and life and in death. Oh my dear friends, why is it so that when some of us begin to get a grip on the great doctrines of the Gospel, we become less and less and less like Jesus Christ? Why is there not more Christ-likeness among us? Why? Unless we have not seen that the great hand God has in view in all that he has revealed to us in holy Scripture is to make us like Jesus and to produce in our lives the very characteristics that he forged in the life of his Son. "Blessed are the merciful." And oh, I appeal to you, I appeal to you, see it in your life with the mercy of God that there may be something in you like Jesus that reaches out and sees men and women in need and instead of driving them away, instead of passing them by on the other side, draws them in.

There is another characteristic of mercy here. I find it so difficult to put it into a proper visual form but you see what Jesus is saying to us in the parable of the Good Samaritan about the nature of mercy is this: that mercy does not hide from costly service, behind self-centered principles and it sees divine principles in the light of God's care for human need. You see that in the men who passed by. They had their high religious principles and so they passed by on the other side and it was a Samaritan who in all conscience had as much principle as they possibly could have had and as much reason to pass by on the other side. He may even have known that principle that undoubtedly dominated the thinking of the Levite and the priest that if this man were not merely looking dead but actually dead, they would be ritually defiled by coming into contact with his dead body and they knew that that was not only one of the general principles behind which they could hide but this was a man in need and they had duties to perform but this was a man with whom they might come into contact to their own defilement and they hid behind natural principles and in a very real sense, they hid behind a misapprehension of a biblical principle. And the Samaritan lay aside all his natural predisposition. He was on this road because he was on business. He had no other reason to be on this road than to be on business and his business awaited him and the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans and this man was so clearly a Jew and he so evidently a Samaritan. What

would the Samaritans at home say if they ever heard? He perhaps knew enough of holy Scripture to know that in the sight of God, he would be ritually contaminated if he touched what might be a dead body but he also knew it was not sin to touch it. He knew that the great dividing line was not crossed. It was not sin to touch it so he would pay the price, in a sense, even of ritual defilement as well as social disgrace and he went over and he touched the man, doubtless to his relief, he heard the breathing and he began to mend and to heal and to restore and he paid the price and would not hide behind principle.

Now my dear friends, you will not misunderstand me, you will not misunderstand me to mean that we are to lay aside the principles of God's word that he has given to us in holy Scripture but do you not see that Jesus is after something that lurks within so many of our hearts, that we are able to take the principles of our religion and turn them into defense mechanisms against the deeper work of God's grace and paying the price of being a true Christian in our daily experience. I say to you again, I am not surprised that the early church thought the Good Samaritan was Jesus who was willing not only to be ritually defiled but actually to come under the judgment of Almighty God to show mercy. And do you see what a wonderful thing mercy does? Mercy takes the great and infallible principles that God has settled in the heavens and in his word and it sets them in the light of God himself and puts them in their true perspective. How could ever a man believe that religious principle would keep him from helping this poor, broken man lying on the roadside from Jerusalem to Jericho?

So in heaven when the principle of justice called for your condemnation, when the principle of holiness called for your separation, the Son of mercy came and on his own shoulders bore the principle of justice, dying the just for the unjust to bring us to God and prayed before his Father, "For their sakes, I separate myself," and for mercy's sake, he bore the judgment of Almighty God. Isn't there something in that needed in the life of the believer? Not that we can ever bear either the judgment of the justice of God but that we should imitate the principle that lay in the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ and see that the great principles in God's word, the great standards for which we stand and which we so often have to fight to the death are not meant to be instruments to lessen the cost of sacrificial discipleship nor instruments to separate us from the needs of our fellow men but instruments that God has purposed in his divine economy to be used in order to penetrate to the very hearts of men's needs and to draw them into the bosom of the Lord Jesus Christ. There was a preacher in Scotland last century and the beginning of this century by the name of Alexander White and he made one among many penetrating statements. He said this, "There is such a thing as sanctification by vinegar that makes a man right and hard as steel," and when you're a man traveling on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and you've been set upon by thieves and you are lying, drinking the blood of your own need, my dear friends, it's not a Christian who has been sanctified by vinegar that you need but a merciful Samaritan. And so our Lord Jesus Christ bids us to be merciful.

My friends, there are at least two kinds of men and women who find it perhaps almost alien to show mercy. The one is those of us who are younger and lack experience of life and of our own hearts and we are far more prone to criticize than to show mercy to them,

far more prone to criticize and to categorize humbling and stumbling Christians than to reach out and help them. But there are also those of us who make the great mistake of seeing growth and grace simply as a matter of an accurate understanding of a system. You see this man who asked Jesus the question, "Who is my neighbor?" Do you know what he was? He was a hyper-Calvinist. He was. He was asking Jesus to tell him who the elect were who were to be his neighbor and he was concerned only with systems that would safeguard him from sacrifices and Jesus turned the man around.

Let me say this by closing application: how important is it to show mercy? Do you remember the Psalm that Peter quoted before the day of Pentecost when in the economy of God, he believed that another had to take the place of Judas Iscariot? Do you remember the Psalm he quoted in connection with Judas, appoint another to stand in his place? And this Psalm goes on to say of the one who was taken, "May his days be few. May another take his place of leadership. May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow. May his children be wandering beggars. May they be driven from their ruined homes. May his descendents be cut off, their names blotted out from the next generation. May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord. May the sin of his mother never be blotted out. May their sins always remain before the Lord that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth." Why? "For he never thought of doing mercy." That's how important it is. It means the difference between being like Judas and being like Jesus.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy."

Let us pray.

O Lord our Father, we are so slow to understand what kind of Savior we have and we thank you that he in his grace has given us the revelation of himself in his word that teaches us what it means to be like him. We pray that as beholding ourselves and our failures in the mirror of holy Scripture, we may not forget what we are nor that which we are called to be nor that which he has promised to make us for his sake. Amen.

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And remember that John Calvin in defending the Reformation's regulative principle of worship, a word that is sometimes called the scriptural law of worship, commenting on the words of God, "Which I commanded them not, neither came into my heart," from his

commentary on Jeremiah 7:31 writes, "God here cuts off from men every occasion for making evasions, since he condemns by this one phrase, 'I have not commanded them,' whatever the Jews devised. There is then no other argument needed to condemn superstitions, than that they are not commanded by God: for when men allow themselves to worship God according to their own fancies, and attend not to his commands, they pervert true religion. And if this principle was adopted by the Papists, all those fictitious modes of worship, in which they absurdly exercise themselves, would fall to the ground. It is indeed a horrible thing for the Papists to seek to discharge their duties towards God by performing their own superstitions. There is an immense number of them, as it is well known, and as it manifestly appears. Were they to admit this principle, that we cannot rightly worship God except by obeying his word, they would be delivered from their deep abyss of error. The Prophet's words then are very important, when he says, that God had commanded no such thing, and that it never came to his mind; as though he had said, that men assume too much wisdom, when they devise what he never required, nay, what he never knew."