

## Matthew 5:1-12 (NKJV)

**1 And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.**

**2 Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:**

**3 "Blessed *are* the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**4 Blessed *are* those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.**

**5 Blessed *are* the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.**

**6 Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.**

**7 Blessed *are* the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.**

**8 Blessed *are* the pure in heart, For they shall see God.**

**9 Blessed *are* the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.**

**10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.**

**12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

**7 Blessed *are* the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.**

What is the path to  **blessing**? What is the path to the state of  **God's approval**?  **Who** are those who are to be congratulated for being in a  **wonderful place**?

That is exactly what we have been studying.

Last week we considered the truth that the person who is truly happy is not making  **happiness** his immediate aim. He is making the  **pursuit of God** His immediate aim. And that leads to today's passage. We are seeing the focus move from the effects of our  **internal** collision with the true state of our affairs to its  **effect** on our  **relationship with God** and now to the effect on our relationship  **with people**.

We start with recognizing our spiritual poverty and ineptness to do anything that is truly good, truly Godly.

Then we react in a reasonable and predictable fashion to our spiritual poverty. We mourn. We weep. We weep at the sorrow of what was lost in the fall. This has an effect in how we relate to God. We no longer regard ourselves in  **partnership** with God. We recognize if anything  **good at all** is to happen Christ must be  **Lord** of our lives. He must be our  **Master**. He must be the source of anything good in our lives. And we submit to Him as such. We become meek. And as we take that posture, we taste the  **beginnings of that**

**life** and it leaves us hungry and thirsty. And as we hunger and thirst we get fed, we get satisfied, only to hunger and thirst all over again for the richness of the heavenly stuff. The things of God take on more and more significance in our lives. We find ourselves seeking first the kingdom and **God's righteousness**, and God **keeps adding** all the other things we need.

And that righteousness spills over into how we act toward others. We begin to respond **rightly**.

That leads us to today.

Before we move on though, it is very important that we see and understand how this change **happens**, where it **comes from**.

Notice that there has not been **one command** in all these passages. We are not told to **become** poor in spirit, that we must **try** to mourn, that we should **force ourselves** to become meek, that we should try to **drum up** hunger and thirst.

No, this is much like how most of the epistles are written. The impossible work of the Christian life must be done **TO** us. It must be done by the author and perfecter of our faith. The lion's share of the work is making us **what we are**. What we **do** always flows from what we **are**. In the Christian life, **being** precedes **doing**. We read much about what we **are** in most of the epistles before we are told to **do** anything. We must understand that our works do nothing to **make us** a Christian. **Being a Christian** makes us **do works**. We don't control our Christianity. It controls us. The change happens at the core of who we are. There are certainly many things that we are told to do. But we are only told to do them **once** we have been **enabled** to do them by the new birth. For example, we are told that we must repentant. But we are also told that this repentance comes from the work of God in us. Godly sorrow produces repentance. Humanly caused sorrow does not.

So we must understand all this first. Jesus starts his sermon describing what a Christian **is**, through and through, before He tells us **to do** a single thing. This is important to notice.

So we move to the text.

**7 Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.**

Now the first obvious thing we must do is to understand what this word **Mercy** means.

The Greek word is *Ella Eh'O*

It is usually translated either **compassion** or **mercy**.

Now I have often explained what I thought Mercy was by explaining the difference between what I thought **Grace** and **Mercy** meant. Grace is God giving us the **good things** that we **do not deserve**. Mercy is God **not giving**

**us** the bad things that we **do deserve**. As I studied the word I realized I have been wrong about that all these years. I am embarrassed about this. This is a very important word to be wrong about.

Definitions are very important. If we cannot **define** something it is most likely because we don't **understand** it clearly. We do well to have definitions in our minds of what **faith** is, what **love** is, what **hope** is, what **grace** is, what **mercy** is, etcetera.

Mr Jones helps us here.

'**Grace** is especially associated with men **in their sins**; mercy is especially associated with men **in their misery**.' In other words, while grace looks down upon **sin as a whole**, mercy looks especially upon the **miserable consequences** of sin.

John MacArthur says "**Mercy deals with the symptoms, grace with the cause. Mercy offers relief from punishment; grace offers pardon for the crime. Mercy eliminates the pain; grace cures the disease.**"<sup>1</sup>

So this mercy really means **a sense of pity plus a desire to relieve the suffering**. That is the essential meaning of being **merciful**; it is **pity** plus the **action**. So the Christian has a feeling of pity. His concern about the misery of men and women leads to an anxiety to **relieve** it.

My definition of mercy fell short. And because of that, my **idea** of mercy fell short.

Let's look at just a couple of places where this word mercy is used.

**Luke 1:57,58 Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. <sup>58</sup> When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her.**

We see here very clearly that God's mercy is ascribed to the **gift** that God gave her. It is not ascribed to something that He **withheld** from her. It was not withholding a bad thing. She longed for a child. God felt pity on her suffering and **granted** her a child. That was Mercy. He removed her suffering.

Remember the story of the demon possessed man? Jesus cast the demons out of him and he was so grateful to Christ. He just wanted to go with Christ. But Christ said this:

**Mark 5:19 (NKJV)**

**<sup>19</sup> However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you."**

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1985). [Matthew](#) (Vol. 1, p. 191). Chicago: Moody Press.

The word used for compassion here is also mercy. We see that the man is not to report what God **DID NOT** do to him. It is what God **DID** to him that he is to report. Mercy clearly does **far more** than withhold that which we deserve. Then we have the good Samaritan story.

Remember how this Jewish person chose to travel from Jerusalem to Jericho, probably alone, on a road that was known to be very dangerous. So naturally he was robbed and beaten up. The priest and the Levite passed the man by. They probably didn't want to become unclean. And after all, had this guy acted wisely he would not have gotten himself into this problem. So they just went on their way. But the Good Samaritan stopped, got his hands dirty, and met the need of this man at his own expense. Jesus goes on to say-

**Luke 10:36-37 (NKJV)**

**<sup>36</sup> So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"**

**<sup>37</sup> And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."**

Here again we see that my previous definition is wholly inadequate. This Samaritan did not **withhold vengeance** in the story. No. He saw this man's suffering and reached out to **end his suffering**. He was not occupied with forgiving the man's sin. That would have required grace. But he was removing the man's suffering. That was mercy.

Let's look at one more use.

Remember the parable of the King's servant who owed the king 10,000 talents. The king forgave the debt. But the servant would not forgive one of his associates a much smaller debt. Jesus finished the story by saying this.

**Matthew 18:33-34 (NKJV)**

**<sup>33</sup> Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?'**

**<sup>34</sup> And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.**

Jesus says here that the motivation for the king to forgive the debt was mercy. The king saw the suffering this man had placed himself in. And his heart was moved toward the man. The king removed the man's suffering at his own expense. But then the man showed that the mercy of the king did not have any kind of **life changing effect** on the servant. So he withdrew his offer and gave the man what he **deserved**.

Look at this parable as it provides a test for us. We can tell if we are merciful or not.

What happens when a person has wronged you and then they fall into your power? What rises up in you? What happens when you have the opportunity to make them pay for what they did to you?

How you respond will either be merciful or it will not be merciful. What happens when people tell you they are **truly sorry** for what they did? Do we want to **remove** their suffering? Or do we want to **intensify** their suffering? Do we take that opportunity to rub in just how bad a thing it is that they did to us. Do we **not want** their suffering over what they did **to end**. Do we take that opportunity to attack? Or do we try to end their suffering and offer restoration.

Now I know that not all confessions are complete and accurate. That surely complicates the process. But if we know they are doing what they **can** to rectify the situation, when they are in our control, when they are under our power, what pours out of us. Mercy or wrath.

So mercy regards the suffering that others experience and acts to remove that suffering. Its focus is on the **effect** of sin more than the **presence** of sin. But it is very active. It gives. It reaches out. It compels a person, or God, to do something about the problem.

That is what it is.

Now what is it not?

Just as it is easy to think of a **meek** person as being one who does not have much gumption, a very timid person. So it is easy to think of this **merciful** person as being one who is really never bothered by anything that anyone ever does to them. This person is not going to get too bent out of shape by sin. They wouldn't think to actually enter a conversation with someone from deep concern for their sinful condition. No they are too merciful for that. They **forgive everything** because ultimately there is nothing to **really** forgive. They have a hands off attitude over sin. He is easy going, easy to get along with, never confronts anything. And the world and people living in sin equally find **him** comfortable to be with.

Well we need not think far to explode that myth. We know that God is merciful. But God has none of those traits we just described. Sin profoundly affects God. And its sheer presence will damn a person if they will not receive the **Savior of their souls** as the **antidote** to their problem. Again, we must define our terms if we are to know what this merciful person is like. And again we must remember, this is not a **human personality trait**. This is a spiritual virtue that only exists in believers.

OK, so what does this mercy look like. How is it exhibited in our lives? Well we already saw a few examples of it in the passages we looked at earlier. It **forgave a debt**, it took care of a **victim of violence**, it gave the childless a **child**, it rescued a man from the effects of **demon possession**. What should it look like **in us**?

The merciful person simply sees human beings from a different perspective. They see them from the perspective of everything that has come previously in the beatitudes. They have an accurate view of **themselves** and their **sin** and their **state**. They have an accurate view of God and are growing each day to be more like Him. And now they look at other humans and they experience mercy.

Now, instead of seeing other humans, whoever they are, as our evil enemies, we see them as they really are. They are being horn swaggled by the devil. They are being cosmically deceived and ripped off. And they are absolutely clueless about it. They think they are liberated. They think they are charging into new territory to save the planet or to improve our civilization. Or they think they chasing their dream. They are all pursuing happiness and in the end they will be tragically **unhappy**.

They are where **we once were**. And they are where we **would still be** if Christ had not gone out of His way to rescue us.

These people we see around us, these people who are making headlines, these people who are taking our nation in very dangerous directions, they are all people to be pitied. Think about it. All these people will be, in a very short time, suffering in hell if they do not receive Christ. I often find myself angry at those people. I find myself hateful toward them. But that is largely the problem, not the solution. If I really believe that being a believer is the greatest thing that can happen to a person, those people are all being robbed. Oh the sin is awful. And we need not sidestep that. But our battle is really about where all that stuff is **coming from**, not the **puppets** that carry out their **master's bidding**. Can we not be sorry for them? Have we no pity? Is not every human who is under the power of sin and in the destroyer's domain, is not that person most to be pitied?

The question must be asked. We must examine this. Are we **merciful** people? I have said things about non believers that I am learning to regret. Maybe we should treat everything we say about another human being from the perspective that we may one day have a chance to talk to that person. If we did, would they even listen to the Gospel? If my words were quoted there are lots of people who would not be open to hearing the Gospel from me.

At work I have felt the need to tell others “the truth” about the shortcomings of people who have treated me bad. Sometimes they are people that I just don’t like. I look back and regret those things because they don’t tell the most important truth. Even the people who have caused me trouble and were unethical are worth pitying. They are very very bad off. My words certainly have not helped them. How much do I believe that Christ has forgiven **me**? How much has He rescued **me** from? **They** are certainly no worse than **me** apart from Christ.

Suppose we as Christians entered conversations in our work world and our families and our neighborhoods and in the political realm, even the IRS workers, and we displayed mercy.... What do you think would happen? Maybe it is worth a try.

Now there is something we must look at before we can feel we have done justice to this text.

**7 Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.**

What is the relationship between showing mercy and getting mercy?

Does this mean we only receive to the degree that we give it?

Like forgiveness?

Jesus will soon tell us about how to pray. When He does He says this:

**Matthew 6:12-15 (NKJV)**

**12 And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.**

**13 And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one.**

**For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

**14 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.**

**15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.**

Now what are we to make of this? It certainly means what it says. But it also means what the rest of scripture says as well.

Do you do **anything** perfectly?

I think we would all probably say “no”. Maybe there is some exception I haven’t thought of. But we are not **prone** to perfection.

Now do you **forgive** perfectly?

No. We do not. I think it is safe to say that no believer forgives perfectly.

There are probably wrongs that others have done to us that we hold against them even though we said that we forgive them.

Ok so then we are in a pickle are we not?

If **we** forgive imperfectly, if we do not forgive every man their trespass when they sin against me **perfectly**, then **God** will not forgive **our sin perfectly**.

And how much **unforgiven sin** would it take to damn us? **One sin** ought to do. So does this mean every one of us is doomed because God will only forgive us to the exact degree that we will forgive someone else?

Do you see what I mean?

Also if I forgive sins perfectly, would God be obligated to forgive all my sins based on my ability to forgive? We know that this would be heresy. We cannot earn favor fit for salvation.

So this must mean something different.

Instead of regarding this as a tit for tat exchange, (I give forgiveness, I get forgiveness) what happens if we regard it as one of those many **signs of life** we are seeing in scripture? I think it is better fitting to the rest of scripture if we regard it like this.

If our lives are not changed by the forgiveness we have received, if we have not gone through the stages of the beatitudes, if we have not been enthralled by the tremendous mercy and grace poured out upon us, if that does not cause us to exhibit a merciful attitude toward others, one thing is sure. We ourselves have not truly experienced this forgiveness.

The question is never, have we reached a perfect **level of forgiving others** so we can be forgiven perfectly? That is the wrong question completely. The real question is have we truly experienced the life changing grace of God. If we have not, we will **not be forgiven** because we are in the **state** of being **unforgiven**. We are not saved if that is how we are. But if we have been forgiven, the power of the gospel will display itself in us being people **quick** to forgive, glad to forgive.

Do you see the big difference there? One view fits what we understand about our salvation. The other would be contrary to it.

If our performance **determines** our eternal state, we may as well quit now. But if our performance **displays** our spiritual state, we of all people have reason to be merciful.

When Jesus said **Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy**, He was describing the attribute of all Christians. Oh there will certainly be varying degrees. But Christians who are Christians **show mercy**.

And Christians who are Christians **have received mercy**. And Christians who are Christians will **continue to receive mercy**.

Do you view God as a God that is compassionate toward you? Do you view God as caring about your suffering? Do you see Him as a God that is driven to move to comfort you. That is what Mercy does. He is like that.



Isn't it a wonderful thing that we are certain to **continually obtain mercy** from God? Does that not have an effect in our lives of **changing** how we see the whole world?

Here are some questions we would do well to apply this week.

**Is what I am saying about this person displaying mercy? Is what I am thinking about this person displaying mercy? Is my primary concern for this person to see an end to their suffering that sin is causing? Is that how I view those around me? Is my primary focus on what I can do that would relieve their suffering, or what they should do to me to make my life better?**

**Blessed *are* the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy,**