

EXCELLING IN SHOWING MERCY

(Sermon Summary)

Chris Hand

Sunday Morning – 11th December 2022

Reading: Matthew 18:21-35; Matthew 5:7

We have seen that there we are to hunger and thirst after good standing in the eyes of God. Part of that means that we will want to be like the Lord Jesus. We desire that our inner attitudes, dispositions, and inner bias should be towards being righteous and upright. One of the most basic parts of what Christ-likeness will look like is that we will show mercy. This will not just mean that we do acts of mercy but that our whole life and outlook is geared to showing mercy.

1. This is God's character.

Showing mercy is intrinsic to the character of God. It links up with expressions such as 'grace', 'love' and 'goodness'.

Mercy means that someone has been offended and something has been done against them, but that the person chooses not to carry out the sentence of punishment that they might be entitled to inflict. Instead, another course of action is consciously followed and the person who has offended is not treated as they might otherwise have been. This is not something that is given blindly. It is recognized that something wrong has been done. So the person extending and showing mercy does it with eyes wide open and willingly. When God shows mercy, it is not at the expense of justice. It is that God has a way of being able to see the law's penalty met while at the same time showing mercy. We read of the mercy of God, for example, in Exodus 34:6; Psalm 145:9; Micah 7:18; and Luke 6:36.

The showing of mercy on the part of God is to be seen most clearly in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is seen at the cross. The cross points to the nature of the offences committed against God, that they are worthy of death. There we are able to see physical death but, beyond it, we are also able to see spiritual death and ruin as the Lord

endures separation from the favour of God. The cross shows us how the law and justice would treat us. It shows us that God is angry against sin.

The cross also shows us that there is mercy in that we are not having to suffer the law's penalty, but the Lord Jesus is suffering on our behalf. There is pardon and forgiveness available, with mercy at the root of this. In doing this, God's justice is not overlooked. God serves justice and its penalty on His own Son, who having our nature, is able to suffer in our place. God has been wronged by us, but He is satisfied that His Son should bear the consequences of that wrong in our place. We can see that if God was to show mercy it absolutely needed the incarnation. It needed our Lord to live in the flesh, to die in the flesh, to rise in the flesh and to ascend to glory in the flesh. It is according to the mercy of God that we can have hope at all (1 Peter 1: 3-5).

Yet this mercy is only operative for us when we realize that the Lord has shown us mercy and do not see what the Lord has done as if it was something we were entitled to or which God owed us. To have the benefit of it we have to recognise that we are being offered help as an act of mercy and ask the Lord to apply it to us on those terms. God extends mercy to unbelievers day after day but they do not recognize it. Each day is a reprieve for them but one day there will be a reckoning for all the mercy they ignored and spurned. Such mercy spurned will earn judgment.

2. Our calling.

We are to be like the Lord in showing mercy to others. We are to show this mercy from the heart (Colossians 3:12-13). When we have understood, and then received, the mercy of God, it changes our whole outlook. It is unforgettable. We realize that salvation is undeserved and that should make us more patient, gentler and milder in our treatment of others. It makes us stop and ask ourselves, in the light of what we have received, what rights we really have and can feel entitled to.

The parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-35) shows the right and the wrong way to approach other people. The man owed the large amount money was moved with compassion (v27) while the behaviour then towards the man who owed a little was cruel (v28).

We have to ask ourselves, if we are owed something, just how important it really is to us. How important are our rights that we enforce them? And if we are entitled to something, we do not ask for what we are owed angrily but with patience and readiness to hear if the person has a difficulty that we were not aware of.

3. Roadblocks to showing mercy.

We may be reluctant to bear the cost or inconvenience of being merciful. We may have to write off some money or some time, but we should do this willingly (Deuteronomy 15:10). We may have to discipline ourselves not to react strongly when we see the person we have been merciful to, especially if that person does not appreciate just how merciful we have been to them. We still struggle to be truly poor in spirit and being able to think of ourselves more humbly. We are sometimes slow to accept that people might not be able to settle their debts with us promptly due to illness or some adversity.

We are right to distinguish between cases and not squander goodwill on impenitent and stubborn people. That is to cast pearls before swine. People are sometimes very wrong in their reaction and do not appreciate that they have been shown mercy. We have to leave those matters with the Lord, but it may mean that we mark and avoid those people.

4. Mercy received.

To excel in showing mercy is well-pleasing to God. He, in turn, shows mercy to us. He, in turn, forgives us our trespasses.

This means that He will be willing to overrule our mistakes and follies to our benefit. It means that He will deal with us in our sins more gently rather than with the rod. It means that He will be gracious to us in our infirmities and bring us help. Our prayers will be heard, and the Lord will send us merciful providences and helps. Overall, He will put us in a good place to grow in assurance and inner peace.