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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

June 21, 2015

Blessed Are The Merciful

Matthew 5:7

Prayer: *Father, we just again thank you for the gift that you constantly give us in your son. Father, we thank you for the fact that we can call you Father, that we have a relationship with the God of the universe, a God who loved us so much that he sent us his son. And Lord, we are looking this morning into the sermon that your son preached and the richness in it and Father, again, we pray for your Holy Spirit -- another gift -- we pray that your Spirit would accompany us, that you would give us the ability to hear the words that are spoken and to make them a permanent part of our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, as I hinted, we are doing the Sermon on the Mount, and you know, the Sermon on the Mount is often times tremendously misunderstood. It's a description of kingdom citizens. And it's not really what they do, it's much more a description of who they are. So far we've looked at four of the beatitudes. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who understand that they've got nothing. Between them and God, they offer only up their

nothingness. Blessed are those who mourn. Those are those who mourn their sin, who mourn this fallen kingdom that they are part of and mourn the suffering that their Savior went through. Blessed are the meek. Those are those who understand that God is ultimately in charge and that he makes no mistakes. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. These are those who have an appetite for God that will be filled. Well, this morning we're going to add a new descriptor to what a kingdom citizen is, and it's *Matthew 5:7*: "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*" Kingdom citizens are merciful. But what does that mean? This morning we want to look at mercy, we want to look at what it is, we want to look at what it does, and most importantly we want to know do I have this quality? Do I have mercy?

So first we ask what is mercy? And just here's the definition: Mercy is grace or compassion extended to someone in no position to demand it. Mercy is always extended from the strong to the weak. It's not victors who need mercy; it is the vanquished. I remember as a youngster, as a kid, we used to have wrestling matches all the time and when you were losing and you were losing badly and you were starting to get pinned, what would you shout out? You'd shout out "Mercy, mercy!" You only did it if you knew you were vanquished and you were desperately in need of that mercy. Now mercy is something that can only be given freely by the victors; it

can never be demanded. Every one of us has a right to demand something of God but it's not mercy. What we can demand from God is justice. I mean, we all have that right; we have the right to demand what we are due. But what are we due? We're due the very same thing that Adam was due when he broke the very first law. *Romans 6:23* says: *For the wages of sin is death.* This is the standard that God has given to us and God just doesn't pronounce the standard, he is the standard. And the standard says that we are all guilty of a capital offense. So each of us has the right, we have the right to demand justice. But trust me justice is not what we want. We want mercy. But as I pointed out, none of us has the right to demand it because it can only be freely given and thank God he has freely given it to us. In *Romans 9:15* it says: *For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."* Now those who have received that mercy are those who freely give it back. Those who refuse to give it back are those who suffer the consequences, and the consequences are severe. *James 2:13* says: *For judgment is without mercy to the one who hasn't shown mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.* You know, if this sounds like war talk, it's kind of because it is. You see, God is the victor, he's the ultimate victor and we are the vanquished. God says we are all transgressors of the law and that all of us are justly under a death sentence, but instead of justice, we receive mercy. You

know, if grace is getting what we don't deserve, then mercy is not getting what we do deserve.

In our text this morning, Jesus gives us the characteristics of those who receive this mercy. He says it very simply in *Matthew 5:7*, he says: "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*" You see, in God's economy, the only ones who ultimately receive mercy are those who are willing to give it as well. And mercy also has a personal side to it. You see, mercy is the ability to pull another one's guts into your own. The Hebrews understood the intestines to be the seat of emotion and feelings, and to be truly merciful was to feel in your own gut what someone else feels in theirs. But mercy never stops with feeling because mercy always, always acts.

Now, our classic example of mercy is Luke 10. It's the parable of the good Samaritan. We've all heard it many times. Let me read it to you. This is Luke 10 starting at verse 25. It says: "*And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested him*" -- that's Jesus -- saying, '*Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*' He said to him, '*What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?*' So he answered and said, '*YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, and WITH ALL YOUR MIND,*' and '*YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.*' And he

said to him, 'You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.' But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' Then Jesus answered and said: 'A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper and said to him, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?' And he said, 'He who showed mercy on him.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'"

Well here we see it. Mercy really is grace extended to those in no position to demand it. And we see what mercy does: It acts. You know, it's not just a willingness to feel bad for someone or something. It involves acting on those feelings. And before we even get into the story, I want to comment on some of the interplay

that takes place here between Jesus and this man. He's introduced, he's a lawyer and he's seeking to test Jesus. And so Jesus responds with an incredibly provocative example. See, Jesus, he takes mercy and he makes mercy the centerpiece but then he makes this hated Samaritan the one who's giving the mercy. Now to put this into context, you have to realize how thoroughly detested the Samaritans were. You know, we're so used to the term "Samaritan" that we actually call laws that are enacted to protect people doing good deeds, we call them "good Sam laws" after the same group of people. Well, the ancient Jews would not have been happy with that at all. I mean, I don't know that I can name a group of people who would engender such a gut reaction of hatred and revulsion as the Samaritans did to the Jews.

Let me explain a little bit of their background. You see, after Solomon died, Israel was divided into two separate nations and the Samaritans were originally the Jews who were part of the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel which was actually called Samaria. In 772 BC they came under an Assyrian invasion. And along with that whole process, the Assyrians brought in a whole bunch of different people groups and they each had their own forms of pagan worship. And over time the Jews in Samaria began intermarrying with these people. And these forbidden intermarriages really turned their faith into a hybrid mix of Judaism and paganism as

they began to worship the other gods that these people brought in. Later on, the southern kingdom fell to the Babylonians, and after 70 years of captivity the loyal Jews began to return to the land, and guess who it was who actively opposed that? It was these former Jews who had been now thoroughly paganized, hybridized and actively hostile to the original Jews. These were the ones who remained hostile to those whose God had commanded not to intermarry and it was the Samaritans. I mean, not only had they intermingled with the pagans and intermarried, they now stood in opposition to Judah reclaiming the land. So for hundreds of years, the Jews considered Samaritans to be half-breed mortal enemies. And so when Jesus chooses a Samaritan to be the hero of the story, the Jews in general and this lawyer in particular is gritting his teeth. And at the end of the story, Jesus is forcing the issue by asking the lawyer in verse 36: *"So which of these three do you think was the neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"* Well, the obvious answer was the Samaritan. But there's no way the lawyer was actually going to say that hated word, so he responded as lawyers are want to do, by kind of dancing around it. He says: *And he said, "He who showed mercy on him."* Then Jesus said to him, *"Go and do likewise."* You see, the impact of how brilliantly Jesus delivered the story as a lesson and as a rebuke to the lawyer who was trying to test him is largely lost on us because we don't really know that much of the Samaritan history. But at least we

know the story. I mean, the story has one victim. There's a man who was beaten, he's stripped, he's left for dead, and there's three different responders, there's a priest, there's a Levite, and there's this hated, detested Samaritan. Well, the priest and the Levite ignore the victim. In fact, they even go out of their way to avoid ceremonial contamination by going to the other side of the street. Now they may have felt something deep inside, they may have had all kinds of emotion about what it is they saw before them, they may have felt shocked, they may have felt dismayed, they may have felt disgust, but they certainly did nothing. And mere feelings are not mercy. I mean, we can call them pity at best but we cannot call them mercy. Pity becomes mercy only when it acts. And the only one who demonstrated mercy was the Samaritan. Of course, he was the one who acted. He bandaged the wounds, he took the victim to the inn and he paid the innkeeper showing the victim not pity, but mercy.

You know today, it is especially easy to mistake pity for mercy. You know, pundits have pointed out that there's a relatively new term to describe a relatively new type of behavior and the term is "compassion overload." I mean, it has more to do with the communication that's available now in the 21st century than anything that existed in the time of Jesus. Because today, the average person on the street who has a smart phone, he has a

knowledge of the world that would be considered God-like in Jesus's day. You know, literally within minutes, we will know if there's an earthquake in Nepal, we'll know if there's an Ebola outbreak in Liberia or if there's a terrorist attack in Syria. And folks say the sheer volume of the knowledge of that information flattens our compassion to where the most dire of circumstances produces a reaction that borders on the "ho-hum." And they suggest that the reason for that is that no one really has a big enough gut to take it all in. You know, for instance, what would happen if the good Samaritan didn't just find one man by the side of the road, he found ten or a hundred? What if he found ten thousand? I mean, how do you respond to such overwhelming volumes of the need for compassion? That is the challenge to mercy that all of us feel today. But we can be fooled by this compassion overload into thinking that empathy is enough, and it's not. I mean, I don't know what the Samaritan would do, but I'm pretty sure I know what he would not do. He would not do what the priest and the Levite did, he would not do nothing. He would have never substituted pity for mercy. He wouldn't think merely being willing to feel badly is anything. But here's our problem. We tend to think that's a big deal. I mean, we have all kinds of campaigns to -- quote -- "raise awareness." Raised awareness without any type of raised action is nothing but organized pity. And just being willing to feel bad is a cop out. When Jesus asked which of the three was a neighbor to

the victim, he got the right answer, and it wasn't he who felt bad for the victim. It was he who showed mercy.

So to answer the first question: What is mercy? Well, mercy is help extended to someone in no position to demand it. And again, the victim could not have demanded help even if he had wanted to, I mean, after all, he was unconscious. And the lawyer was asking Jesus -- he wasn't even asking Jesus about mercy, he was asking him who was my neighbor. Well, Jesus responds that the stranger's neediness is what instantly made him a neighbor to all three, but it was only the Samaritan who gave him mercy. And so Jesus is saying need is what makes a person our neighbor, and mercy is simply compassion expressed with hearts, hands, and feet, given on the basis of need. Well, the hard part of defining that mercy is to define it the way Jesus defines it, and you'll notice that Jesus doesn't spend a great deal of time giving you these elaborate requirements for mercy. What he does is he gives us a story demonstrating again the characteristics of the merciful. Again it's not a "how to," it's a "this is." Blessed are the merciful.

Well, we see what mercy is and we see what mercy does. But the hard question is this third question, it's the one that we have to ask ourselves, and it's this question: How do I know if I have mercy? You know, I mentioned the last time that a Christian is

simply defined by saying it's someone who has the Holy Spirit of God living within them, and that Jesus in this sermon is addressing kingdom citizens who have within them the Spirit of Christ. And along with that Spirit they have the infinite mercy of God. God literally lives inside us if we belong to him. And the hardest part of the Sermon on the Mount is looking at myself in the mirror of scripture and asking the question is that proof of God's presence, his mercy, is that in me? I mean, do I have within me something beyond mere pity? It's interesting to note that Jesus chose to demonstrate mercy by using a story of the good Samaritan, and it's a unique type of presentation because we don't know who the victim is or how he would respond because the victim's unconscious. Jesus makes him not only unconscious but unlabeled. And so he removes the ethnic and the behavioral components that would have labeled the victim in some way. We don't know if he's red or yellow, black or white. We don't know if he's drunk, if he's sick or diseased. All we know is that he's a person in deep need. That's all we know. The good Samaritan saw the need and he loved his neighbor even though he had no interaction with him either good or bad, because he couldn't, I mean, his victim's beaten to a pulp, he's unconscious. You know, you wonder, what if he was a Jew who woke up long enough to demand that the Samaritan take his filthy Samaritan hands off him. Well, the mercy that God is speaking of here wouldn't care. You know, I often point out to

people that -- that loving our neighbor may sometimes involve loving someone you don't like. You know, in a western culture like ours that always ties love to a Hollywood notion of romance, in that kind of a culture that seems bizarre. But love is not what you feel. Love, according to Jesus, is what you do. I mean, if you want to get close to seeing how this works, just ask an EMT how he or she manages a drunk and belligerent accident victim who's cursing him out or her out as she's ministering to him. We call that professionalism, but I would say that Jesus would call that mercy in action. That's what it looks like.

Now there's also a micro level to mercy that is much more personal and it is bound up with a much more difficult term. It's a term that every single one of us has dealt with, it's a term that we all struggle with, and it's the word "forgiveness." Tim Keller has some very helpful thoughts on the idea of forgiveness, and the first thought is that forgiveness always, always has a cost. You know, I mentioned this a number of times before but Keller uses the analogy of going to a friend's house and accidentally breaking a lamp. He says, you know, most hosts under those circumstances would say, you know, "Don't worry about it," you know, "It's okay," and that would settle it. But the point that Keller makes is there is a broken lamp that needs to be paid for. Now either you're going to pay for it or the host is going to pay for it, but

somebody has to pay for the broken lamp. He says the same applies to sin. Somebody always has to pay for it. Now if someone sins against me, I have two different choices, two different directions to go toward: One is reconciliation and the other is revenge. In reconciliation, both parties decide they're going to pay something. It essentially comes to both. If you have been wronged and you are about reconciliation, you know that forgiveness isn't easy but it's necessary. Revenge, however, is a one-way street. You see, revenge demands that the entire bill be paid for by the sinner. And Keller even points out how it goes to the rhetoric of revenge, it's, you know, "You're going to pay for this. I'll make you pay." That area God claims as his own. *Romans 12:19* says: *Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord.*

Jesus was much more blunt about this part of mercy, the forgiveness part of mercy and he told this story in Matthew 18. It says this, it says: *Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times but seventy-seven times. Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered*

that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. At this the servant fell on his knees before him, 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'" Incidentally, it's absolutely impossible to pay; I mean, it's the equivalent of a billion billion dollar debt. So "The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.' But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Well, we see that mercy is all about forgiveness as well. And it, too, is extending grace to someone in no position to demand it.

You know, the king extends mercy to his servant, the servant refuses to extend it to his servant. The king in Jesus's parable understands that reconciliation is costly. He says in verse 27: *Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt*, the huge debt that it was. But the slave, the slave wanted nothing but revenge, and so he seizes his fellow slave and he starts choking him and he says, "Pay back what you owe." Now what drives the story is the size of the debt. You see, the king was owed a debt of billions; the slave was owed a day's wage. You know, the king forgives and the slave refuses to, and the point is obvious. But it is spiritually obvious to only one group of people. It is spiritually obvious only to kingdom citizens who know already that they're the ones who are poor in spirit. Remember when Jesus started out the sermon by saying "Blessed are the poor in spirit?" He's referring to the very same debt. He was identifying us as the ones with the billion dollar debt and no means to pay it. And what he is saying is blessed are those who already know that this monstrous debt over their heads has been paid for. Blessed are those who recognize that God himself became a man, led a sinless life, then went to the cross in order to offer up that sinless life as payment for that debt. Blessed are those who know that they could never in a trillion lifetimes ever begin to pay it back. In fact all they know is that their debt, that is their obligation, if you will, to the mercy of

forgiveness itself is as limitless as the debt they've been saved from. It's a theme the disciples became well aware of when they asked Jesus, "Jesus, how do we pray?" This is what he said in *Matthew 6:9*, he said this: *"In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. 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. For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*

See, there's a lot more to the Lord's prayer than the parts that we actually pray. There buried in that prayer is that statement: *"Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."* Now, have you ever seriously considered those words? I mean, have you ever considered the thought behind them: Father, forgive my debts in the exact same way as I forgive my debtors. Do you really want to pray that prayer? I mean, if I refuse forgiveness, then isn't God saying he's going to refuse to forgive me? Again, verse 14: *"If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."* Jesus repeats

that statement in the story of the unforgiving servant. In *Matthew 18:34*, he says: *"And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. "So,"* he says, *"My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."* You think God is trying to emphasize something here? He's trying to say something. You know, Charles Spurgeon underlined the seriousness of this charge by saying: *"We incur greater wrath by refusing to forgive than by all the rest of our indebtedness."* What he's saying is that all of our sins combined do not equal refusing to give mercy by demonstrating a lack of forgiveness. We can downplay it, we can minimize it, we can ignore it, but the fact is if you cannot or will not forgive, there's a very good chance you are not a Christian. God underscores it by saying this in *James 2:13*, he says: *For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.* Understand, I'm not saying that unforgiveness is the unpardonable sin. What I am saying is that whole attitude of unforgiveness is so antithetical, it is so opposed to the Spirit of God that is now living within us believers, each of whom has been blessed with a forgiveness beyond measure, so much so that an unwillingness to forgive is a strong indicator that the Spirit of God has never really taken up residence within me.

But that raises a question. And it raises the question that everybody wants to know. The big question is: Okay, how much forgiveness do I need to have? What's the minimum daily requirement? You know, it's not so far-fetched a question and it's not like it's never been asked before. The apostle Peter was not one for subtlety, and he asked Jesus literally how much forgiveness do I need to have? In *Matthew 18:21* it says: *Then Peter came up to him and said, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?"* Now from Peter's perspective this was an extraordinarily generous offer. You see, the Jewish Rabbis had already established that the maximum number of times you needed to extend mercy was far less than seven. In fact it was three. So Peter here is being more than generous, he's doubling the amount and he's adding one to it, and when you think about it, his offer is remarkably generous. And so he asks Jesus how about it, Lord? You know, if I forgive again and again and again and again and again and again and again, is that enough? Peter's convinced that he's safely within the confines of what reason would regard as merciful. And the Lord Jesus basically says, Peter, Peter, you just don't get it. In *Matthew 18:22* it says: *Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven."* Jesus is using hyperbole not to suggest that there's a finite number such as 490 that you have to forgive but that the number is literally without limits. This is what God's

standard is. And what God is saying, what Jesus is saying to Peter here is I demand from you limitless mercy.

And again, that goes to our third question. You know, we asked what is mercy? It's extending grace to those in no position to demand it. What does mercy do? It's not simply being willing to feel bad; it's acting on those feelings. Now we need to ask ourselves, how do I know that I have it? You know, scripture according to James 1 is -- actually it's many things, but it's a mirror and it's a perfect mirror with no distortion. It's also a severe mirror showing us God's perfection and reflecting back to us our imperfection. And it's that mirror of scripture that asks you and me, are you merciful? Can you stand before the mirror of God's word, look into that mirror and see mercy? I mean, it's almost a catch-22 going on. I mean, if don't see mercy staring back at you in that mirror, then James 1 says judgment without mercy awaits you. However, if you do see what you think is mercy looking back at you, how do you know you're not simply grasping at the same straws that Peter was grasping at. You see, Peter made the mistake of thinking that mercy is something that you do rather than merciful is someone who you are, and that's the difference. The whole Sermon on the Mount is a description of citizens of the kingdom of God, and Jesus is describing not what they do but who they are. So once again we're back to the discussion about

requirements versus characteristics. You know, Peter thought he could reduce mercy to a finite activity. Seven finite activities, to be exact. And so what he's saying is give me something concrete. I need something to hang my hat on. It's almost as if Peter is saying to Jesus, don't tell me what to be, just tell me what to do. Heck, I'm willing to forgive seven times. How's that for mercy? The Lord says that's not nearly enough. And you know why it's not enough? Because if you are a citizen of the kingdom of God, then God himself, the living God of the universe lives inside you, and he's the source of all mercy. God can demand infinite mercy from us because he is the one who supplies it. Mercy is something that God gives. It's not something that we supply. And it is in a limitless supply.

And if you want to see it actually being dispensed and dispersed, just look at the TV this last week. You know, you look at this monster who went into the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina and killed nine people, and very next day he's being arraigned, and he's sitting there stone-faced, and what are people doing? People are sitting there saying to him you just killed somebody precious to me, but what? I forgive you. You tell me where else you can get that kind of forgiveness from? It comes from inside, it comes from this limitless resource that is inside us when God himself is living in there. Again, *Romans 8:9*, it

says: *You, however, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.* You see, the Spirit of God is the Fountainhead. He's the source of our mercy. The problem is our human reactions. See, when God tells us that we have to move mountains, we basically have two choices. We either trust that he's going to give us the power to move the mountain or we start figuring out how many push-ups I have to do in order to do it myself. Many of us go the push-up route when it comes to mercy. But the quality of mercy that Jesus is speaking of is not a function of human personality, effort, or desire; it is the outward expression of the inward presence of the Holy Spirit. Now, we tend to think that mercy is trying real hard to be nice and trying real hard to forgive. But the bottom line is you can't try hard enough, and if you think you can, then for you the Lord's prayer is probably a curse. You know, forgive our debts, as we forgive our debtors. I can't really say that unless it's by his grace and his grace alone that I forgive. So practically speaking, how do you do that? Well, I think one of the myths that we all buy into is that the idea of forgiveness is this one-shot deal. You know, you forgive, you forget, and then you move on. It doesn't work that way. I've forgiven people only to find old hurts resurfacing and bitterness returning and finding I need to forgive again and again and again. I have learned over the years that forgiveness is a

process, and as a process, it takes time and it often needs repeating. I've forgiven a good number of people over the years but you know what? I've never been able to forgive them perfectly. And that's not how God forgives. God is able to forgive and forget perfectly. You see, for God, forgiveness and forgetfulness is a one-shot deal. In *Psalm 103* he says: *As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.* And you know, God has never suffered from compassion overload because he's got a big enough gut to take all of it in. I simply can't do mercy like God does, and neither can you. I've never shown perfect mercy and have never given perfect forgiveness, and I never will this side of heaven.

So the question is how is it that God demands mercy from us that we can't supply? Of course the answer is that God's standard of mercy is really a function of who God is. He doesn't adapt his standards to our ability to deliver mercy. In other words, he doesn't mark on a curve. I mean, God's demand for forgiveness are rooted in his perfection. He doesn't change his character simply because we're not perfect and not capable of living up to it. I mean, after all, he says: *"Be perfect therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect."* That's not some Old Testament command; it's right from the very same sermon, *Matthew 5:48*. So God demands perfect mercy and perfect forgiveness and we can't deliver. Well, the result is

we're faced with this impossible situation that leaves us with this billion dollar debt. And we either tell a perfectly holy God that his standard is too hard or we say God, our sin, our fallenness, has made our every effort fall far short of your perfection. And you know, God agrees. He's the one who says in *Romans 3:23*: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* We simply cannot do mercy at God's level. And so our only hope lies in the fact that our God is precisely what he demands of us. Our hope is that God is a God of mercy. This is what he says in *Luke 1:50*, he says: *His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.* *Psalm 103* says: *As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.*

You know, there's an interesting qualifier that's the key to obtaining God's mercy in both of these verses. God says his mercy extends to those who fear him; that is, God's mercy is extended to those who recognize who God is and recognize who they are in relationship to him. I mean, they know that every single child of God, that is every single citizen of the kingdom of God got there by virtue of God's mercy and God's mercy alone. If you've been truly forgiven, then you know in your heart of hearts, you know

that mercy. I hate to be so imprecise, but the bottom line is if you are one of his children, you get it. Every child of God who experiences genuine repentance knows the nature of the debt he was forgiven of, and if there's no mercy and no forgiveness in my spirit, then it follows that I probably haven't experienced repentance in the first place. I mean, one thing we know is the unmerciful servant, he didn't get it. He was so focused on this minuscule debt that he was owed that he couldn't see the monstrous debt that he had been forgiven of and so he never put into context his own forgiveness, and he was captured by his blindness. God says judgment will be merciless to those who have shown no mercy.

So what is mercy? It's extending grace to those who are in no position to demand it, and it is given by kingdom citizens who know they're in no position to demand it as well. It's the ability to pull others' guts into your own and to act on it on a macro level. On a micro level it is a willingness to pay down the price of forgiveness.

What does mercy do? Well, first and foremost it doesn't just feel; it acts. So how do we act when it's not just a servant beaten by the side of the road that we know of or tens of thousands or millions who are in desperate need? You know, compassion overload is a very real problem. But there's also a solution to that

problem, and it's a tiny step but it is an action as opposed to a mere feeling. You see, when you hear about an earthquake in Nepal, you can now with your smart phone contribute to help those folks in minutes. I mean, for the price of a latte you can, by sheer volume with others, contribute millions to hurting people on the other side of the world. You pick up your phone and you dial World Vision or you dial Voice of the Martyrs or you dial Samaritan's Purse and you say, "How can I give?" You know, when I hear of tragedies on the other side of the world, the first thing I do is I reach for my wallet and I take out my credit card. It's not much, but it's something that I can do. And the amount is up to you. I mean, I would far rather see a \$5 action than a \$10,000 worth of feeling bad, because \$10,000 feelings are meaningless. You see, we take action because that is what kingdom citizens do. It's a characteristic; it's not a requirement. You see, mercy is not a function of obligation like Peter thought. It is more an action that flows from an attitude of gratitude, forgiveness, and prayer.

And so once again we ask ourself how do I know that I've got that mercy? Again, Jesus expects mercy without measurement. Well, attitude doesn't yield to measurement, and mercy more than anything is an attitude. So how do I know if I have it? Well, the answer is actually very simple. You know you have it if you forgive. I mean, we work at forgiveness because the Spirit of Christ's mercy

is within us and we understand that forgiveness for the believer is not optional. We agree with God in his assessment of the unforgiving servant, he says, "*Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?*" And so we may struggle and we may fail, we may do so over and over and over again but first and foremost, we know we stand by God's mercy alone. We receive it and we live by it, and we struggle by God's grace to reflect it. It's who we are. "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*" Let's pray.

Father, I thank you, I thank you for this sermon, I thank you for this description of kingdom citizens. Father, I just pray that you would accept the mercy that you have placed within us given back to you by the acts of forgiveness that we do on a daily basis. Give us the grace, the strength, the wisdom, and the insight to understand and to grow that forgiveness for your sake, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.