

Blessed are the Merciful

Call to Worship: Psalm 106:1-5

1st Scripture: Matthew 18:21-35

2nd Scripture: Matthew 5:1-7

Hymn Insert- *Completely Done*

Hymn #175- *Man of Sorrows*

Hymn (Supp)- *My Savior's Love*

Introduction

This morning, we move on to consider the fifth beatitude listed here, in Matthew, Chapter 5: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” And as we have been doing all along, we will begin by considering the object of the blessing (the first portion of the verse), before considering the actual blessing itself (the second portion of the verse).

I. Blessed are the Merciful

“Blessed are the merciful.” Now, before we jump into unpacking the term “merciful,” it is important, once again, to recognize the significance of the former beatitudes, as foundational realities that lead into, and bring us to this beatitude. The beatitudes that we have already gone over, inevitably serve to foster a particular disposition, which includes a desire to extend mercy. We saw this last time, when we considered the blessed virtue of hungering and thirsting after righteousness. When one is poor in spirit, when one mourns the effects of sin in the world, when one is meek, inevitably, a disposition of yearning after righteousness must and will fill the heart of the true child of God. Well, that kind of a connective reality compels this fifth beatitude as well, which is why I believe our Lord doesn't begin with this beatitude. It is a dispositional product of the earlier beatitudes. Now, let me explain this in a more specific and helpful way.

Those who are poor in spirit, have come to recognize their own utter weakness, frailty and dependence upon God. And they mourn the effects of sin in the world, and especially the effects of sin on their own hearts. They know what it is like to live separated from (and at enmity with) God. They know what it's like to stand condemned and judged before God's holy law, incapable of rescuing themselves from its curse. And they now, on this side of regeneration, understand the great depravity of the condition of natural, fallen man, who is dead in sin, and incapable of awakening himself unto embracing the gospel of Christ. They remember so well,

how they were once blind and dead to the realities that they now see, love and enjoy. They can easily rewind the tape of their minds, recalling the history of their life apart from God and Christ, and they can see themselves there, blindly groping after idols and lusts that don't satisfy, and which lead to eternal judgment. They remember, very well, their lost, dead, pitiful and hopeless circumstances, before the Spirit of God had come and awakened them unto life and righteousness in Christ. They cannot forget what they once were, and the grace that found them in that dreadful and damnable position.

And what does all of this do for them, in the present. Well, certainly, it carries them into a realm of ongoing praise, gratefulness and thankfulness to God, who has rescued them from such utter depravity and condemnation. It inevitably produces a deep and profound love for God, and a desire to do His will; a hungering and thirsting for righteousness, as we have seen last time. But, that is not all that it does. Their view of those who are still trapped in that state of blindness and deadness and condemnation, which once owned them, is changed. They now have a view of the world, and all who are lost, which is profoundly informed. And what is that view of the world? How does the condition of those who are still lost, alienated from, and under the righteous condemnation of God, affect the Christian? Does it not, inevitably (though imperfectly, and at times inconsistently) produce a sincere pity for the lost? Does it not, with the Holy Spirit's significant aid and influence, compel us to grieve the lost condition of our fellow mankind, driving us to exercise a disposition of mercifulness toward them, even as they offend us?

Again brethren, I'm not saying that we are perfect in this regard, but the virtue of mercifulness must and will be present in all of God's true children. And when they cast an angry and self-righteous look upon the unsaved, does not the Lord remind them of the fact that they themselves are wearing the righteous robes of another, and not their own? When we are tempted to separate ourselves from who we are in Christ, and we cast a self-righteous gaze upon those who are presently outside of Christ, does not the Spirit of God remind us of our own natural moral bankruptcy before His presence? And it drives us to yearn for the lost; even for those who offend and mock us; compelling us to extend mercy, because they still walk in the blindness and deadness of their Christless reality. Hell is a terrible reality, prepared for those who die outside

of Christ. God, by His Spirit, and in accordance with His own gracious will (and nothing naturally inside of us), has rescued us from such a terrible (and yet, well deserved) condemnation. We are the objects of God's free and intentional grace! And yet, there are some who still perish, and who are heading for a chamber of unending misery, torment and suffering. Can we look upon such lost souls with anything less than pity, compassion and mercy, no matter what their offense toward us, might be. Has not our pride been dealt with at the cross, and are we not now, those who are "pour" in spirit? Do you see why this beatitude follows the first four?

And so, what is it to be merciful? What is this virtue, which doesn't bring one to God (because we don't naturally have it), but which is a product of God having already brought us to Himself through Christ? To be merciful is to humbly pity the condition of those who are still lost, or at the very least, affected by the reality of the fallen nature, leading us to respond compassionately and graciously to them. Now, why do I add the statement "or at the least, affected by the reality of the fallen nature?" Because, mercy is not something that is only to be extended to the unsaved. Since all people (including redeemed Christians, who still remain in this present world) are still affected by the effects of sin, such a disposition ought to be directed toward our fellow Christians as well. Now, this might seem obvious, but the fact that contentions still erupt and exist in all true churches of Christ, ought to compel us to be more diligent in this regard. Preserving unity in the body, where we all still struggle with remaining sin, necessitates that, as Paul commands in Ephesians, we must strive to be long suffering, compassionate, gentle and gracious toward one another, always ready to forgive, even as God, in Christ, has forgiven us!

Now, before we move on to consider the blessing that belongs to those who are merciful, let me just leave you with two examples (one OT and one NT) that can help illustrate all that we have gone over so far.

1) How many years did Joseph endure slavery and being confined to a prison, because of the hateful acts of his brothers, who out of jealousy, sold him into slavery? If ever resentment ought to have settled into the heart of a man, surely, Joseph was a worthy candidate. And yet, when he was later elevated by Pharaoh, as second in command over all of Egypt, and virtually the whole world depended upon Joseph during the time of famine, how did Joseph ultimately

handle his brothers, when they came to seek grain? Did he not pad their sacks with a return of their money? Did he not, even after revealing himself to them, show the utmost compassion, and provide them with the choice parts of the land, into which, they could settle their families and thrive? Joseph did not return evil for evil. Rather, he blessed his brothers.

Now, Joseph was able to see the big picture, of how God had brought him to Egypt and raised him up for this very purpose, so that, the nation of he and his brothers could continue to grow, in accordance with God's promise to Abraham. And Joseph certainly reflected the greater glory of the coming Deliverer from sin (the Lord Jesus Christ), but what a text book illustration of what it means to be merciful. Joseph suffered a lot of wrong from his brothers, and many years of freedom were extracted from his life on account of their sin/offense, but he pitied and showed compassion toward them, didn't he?

2) And from the NT standpoint, we turn also to the example of Stephen. What happened to Stephen, in the very process of him being painfully stoned to death by his persecutors? Did he call down fire from heaven upon them? Did he curse them and speak hatefully toward them? No, as the blood spilled down from his head and his body; as more and more wounds were being torn into him by large stones, and as his life was seeping out of his body, he pled with the Lord to not hold this terrible, murderous offense against his persecutors. He didn't desire it to be the case that God would exercise fiery vengeance upon these murderers, on account of his own unjustified martyrdom. Stephen knew the big picture. Stephen understood the lost, blind, dead and helpless condition of his persecutors. He knew that they were blind to the truth. And even now; even when they had spurned his preaching, and in the very process of their putting him to death, he desired that they be spared, and saved, if God should so will to grant them salvation. That's mercy!

Now, some of you might say, "Why would I not use our Lord Jesus Christ to exemplify mercy, as the example par excellence?" Well, let me leave you with two very quick reasons for my choices here. First, because both Joseph and Stephen were emulating the Lord Jesus Christ in their merciful responses. In other words, we see Christ in them. One cannot help but recall Christ's own plea to the Father, to forgive those who had just crucified Him (and continued to mock Him), when you witness Stephen's martyrdom. Indeed, Stephen was reflecting the glory

of Christ, as was Joseph. But even more so, secondly, the temptation for us, is to see our Lord as reaching a bar, which none of us could ever reach. After all, He was the perfect Son of God and Man. And so, making use of the examples of Joseph and Stephen, we find ourselves without excuse, because they bore the same sinful nature that we still bear. And so, this compels us to recognize that exercising such mercy is not only possible, but actually a very sign and indication of true conversion. Again brethren, this is not to say that we are perfect, and that we have always been merciful throughout the course of our Christian life, but if there is no consistent sense of looking upon sinners with pity and compassion, then that ought to raise a large red flag, in consideration of the nature of our conversion. If all we do is see sinners and those who offend us (among the brethren and in the world) through a bitter and angry lens, then we have either lost sight of the gospel for a time, or we have never really understood and grasped it at all.

This then leads us to our second major consideration for this morning.

II. The Specific Blessing that Belongs to the Merciful

“For they shall receive mercy.” And so, what is the blessing which the merciful will receive? They themselves will receive mercy. That is to say that, they themselves, will be the objects of pity, compassion and mercy. Now, there are two key factors that highlight the great value of this blessing. The first factor deals with the *source* of this blessing, or, who it is that provides this mercy. And the second deals with the specific *time*, when this mercy will be given. Let me briefly address both of these factors, so that we can appreciate the great weight of this blessing.

1) The Source. God is the source of this blessing. In other words, the One who will extend the mercy toward those who are blessed, is none other than our holy and righteous, eternal Creator Himself. Now, why is this such a big deal? Well, when you consider the fact that there’s a big difference between extending mercy to a fellow sinner, and receiving mercy from the infinite and eternal Creator of all things, who is pure light (and within whom is no darkness or stain of defilement at all); and when you consider the fact that eternal hell is the worthy and just punishment for any and all who offend this holy God, that kind of brings things into perspective, doesn’t it? It’s a far bigger deal for God to remain just, and yet, extend mercy

toward God-hating sinners, than for finite sinners to mutually extend mercy toward each other. And so, the gravity of the blessing here stated by our Lord, is first recognized by the infinite weight of mercy that is received by those who are here blessed, in comparison to the mercy that they are expected to show their equals. Factor in, of course, that God's mercy can only be extended to sinners by the incarnation and death of His own Son, and the weight of this reality is clearly found to be immeasurable.

2) The Specific Time. Secondly, it is critical to recognize the specific time, within which, this blessing finds its greatest fulfillment. The mercy that is to be received by those who are blessed is that mercy which is given at the final judgment, where heaven and hell are in the balance. In other words, it is the very determining factor which separates the eternally damned from the eternally blessed, forever. And so, while of course, this mercy is granted all throughout the life of the redeemed (and yet, imperfect believer), it's fullest expression is found at the final judgment, when God says to unworthy sinners, who have grossly offended Him with their sins (and who are truly worthy of eternal condemnation in hell), "Well done thou good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord!" "For they will receive mercy!" When? Most specifically on the Day of Judgment, where the final verdict will be given to all of mankind, determining each individual's eternal destiny. These "blessed" will receive mercy on that day. Their sins will be forever cast behind the Lord, and they will be welcomed, eternally, into the presence of God, bearing the righteousness that was merited by Christ, the Son of God, on their behalf. Such is the incomprehensible blessing that belongs to those who are merciful, as described here in our text.

Now, before we close, brethren, one more point must be made. We must, for a few moments, consider what this does *not* mean, lest some leave here with a wrong impression, based upon what we have gone over this morning. And this is in keeping with what we have been saying all along, about not misusing the beatitudes, thinking them to be a list of means for obtaining the righteousness of God. Remember, the beatitudes are those virtues which are to be found in those who are already righteous in God's sight, by faith in Jesus Christ alone. These virtues are affirming fruits, which follow on the heels of true and genuine conversion, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Why do I say this? Because some might be tempted to say, "Well,

there it is. Jesus clearly says that if I am a forgiving person, and if I show pity and mercy to others, then God will pity me on the day of judgment as well. And so, I merely have to dismiss all grudges and do good to those who offend me, to get into heaven. Is that not what the text states?" Absolutely not! Beware of ever seeing this beatitude (or any of the beatitudes for that matter) as a means of atonement or merit. To do so, is to completely miss the theological boat. And to miss the theological boat here, is to drown forever!

Well, what then is our Lord saying here? He is stating that one of the true fruits of His saving grace, in the lives of His people; one of the clear evidences of those who are truly, *already* saved, is that they, by virtue of their own received redemption and grace, must and will be merciful to others. And if they are not, then they are not truly blessed. And they are not truly blessed because they are not truly His. And so, these are blessed, because they evidence the marks and fruits of the kingdom, and to this end, it affirms the reality of their own salvation, guaranteeing the fact that they will receive mercy at the final judgment. In other words, salvation in Christ involves much more than a mere profession of faith in Christ. A living and true faith in Christ, will lead into the possession of the virtues here described in these beatitudes (as a whole), and as such, this affirms a work of grace in those who have such virtues, and they will be granted all of the blessings that are attached to them. This is the point that our Lord is making, and this is the point that He has been making throughout the entirety of these beatitudes. This is life in God's Kingdom! Where then does that leave us?

III. Concluding Thoughts

1) We ask the question; we examine ourselves, and ask, "What is my response to unbelievers and to the brethren, when they sin against me?" Am I consistently bitter toward the offenses of others? If so, have I forgotten where I came from, and the far more weightier ways in which I have offended my God *often*? Or, might I never have truly come to faith in Christ, in the first place? Have I been trusting in my own righteousness, leading me to look down upon others who don't meet my standard of expectations? Needless to say, brethren, we all ought to examine our own hearts, at least periodically, to this end. And especially with respect to our treatment of the brethren, remember the sobering words of our first Scripture reading [Read Matt. 18:21-35].

It is possible to lose sight of the gospel, and to revert back to a spirit of bitterness toward others, at times. And brethren, if that is where you are, then go back to the cross. See your sin pardoned there in full. Pray right there, and see the Son of God saying, "This, I have done for you." Draw from the well of His shed blood for you, and begin to reformulate your disposition toward others, with the help and aid of the Holy Spirit!

2) Again, if you are not saved; if you are outside of Christ, then you ought not be surprised if you find yourself even hating others who offend you. For, you still remain bound and trapped to our fallen nature in Adam. You don't have the Spirit of God working in you, such that, you can please God in any sense, let alone, in showing mercy and compassion toward sinners. Understand, that your only hope of salvation and change; the only place where you can be forgiven for your sins, and be given a new heart that reflects the kindness and love of God, is by laying hold of Christ by faith! Go to Him in prayer! Ask God to have mercy on your own soul, for Christ's sake, and to transfer the benefits of His life, death and resurrection, to your own account. And then follow Him! You see, that's the good news, friends! Jesus didn't come for the righteous...there are none! He came specifically for sinners! And He laid down His life for them! Come to Him in faith; embrace Him as Lord, and you will be saved!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25