

## The King's Sermon

*Blessed are the Merciful (Matthew 5:7)*

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on April 2, 2017

### Introduction

- ❖ Last month we began a series going through the Sermon on the Mount, but we're still in the Beatitudes. We want to take our time because we've said how influential they are in shaping how you read the rest of the Sermon. **We've been saying that you shouldn't read the Beatitudes like a checklist but a guest list.** It's not telling you what you need to do to enter the kingdom of heaven, but it's describing who's been invited and mercifully brought in. **In other words, the Beatitudes are describing Christians and the normal Christian life.**
  - ▶ In this fifth beatitude, we learn something interesting about Christians. **We learn that the Christian is the kind of person who won't treat other people as they deserve.** We intentionally and unashamedly won't treat you as you deserve. But before you get offended, please understand it's because we know you're just as poor in spirit as we are. **All of us deserve nothing but condemnation.** Because of our sinfulness, we deserve nothing but judgment and wrath. Christians are the ones who know that you should never wish for anyone to treat you as you deserve.
  
- ❖ **Friends, we live in a society, in a generation, where people are really sensitive about being treated fairly.** So much dissatisfaction and anxiety in life comes from feeling like we're not getting what we deserve. So much conflict and disagreement stems from this root issue. And we've been told that if we could establish a more fair society where everyone gets exactly what they deserve, then we'd resolve these conflicts and relieve our anxieties.
  - ▶ But that's based on a false premise. That assumes what humans deserve is positive. But that's being blind to the impoverished condition of our souls. **We're fooling ourselves to think getting what we deserve is a good thing.** When in actuality it would be a disaster for us. It would just mean judgment and wrath.
  
- ❖ That's why I find the Bible so compelling. **Because it presents a God that's not just fair but merciful.** The God of the Bible *is* just and calls us to be just. But he's more than just *just*. He's merciful. Here's another way to think about it: **God will never treat you worse than your sins deserve – but he will often treat you better.**
  - ▶ And that's how he wants us to live. We're not going to make a better world by getting everyone to be fair to each other (treating each other as they deserve). A better world will only come about when everyone starts being merciful to each other (treating each other far better than they deserve). That's a very different thing.
    - Christian, if you want to make this world a better place, it starts with you being merciful, treating people with mercy, and teaching people how to become merciful. That's what we're trying to do this morning.
  
- ❖ Let's look at our fifth beatitude again in v7, "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*" To unpack this one simple but profound verse, we're going to do three things. We'll start with 1) Defining mercy – what is mercy from a biblical perspective and does that describe me? 2) Receiving mercy – how does showing mercy to others relate to receiving mercy from God? And 3) Becoming merciful – how do I become a more merciful person?

## Defining Mercy

- ❖ Let's begin by laying out a definition of mercy. Because being merciful could easily be confused in a couple of ways. **For one, some people might confuse *mercy* for some sort of natural temperament found in certain people.** By describing someone as *merciful*, it may only mean the person is forbearing when faced with the flaws of another. Some people have a disposition where they're just more lenient and easygoing when people make mistakes. Others will be more strict and demanding, but we say that guy/girl is merciful.
  - ▶ But that's not what Jesus meant. He couldn't have been referencing a natural temperament because he calls the merciful *blessed*. And that would contradict his gospel of grace. **That would imply there's a certain type of person who's more savable.** That there's a certain type of personality more suited for salvation.
    - But that's a dangerous idea and quite harmful to the work of the gospel – if we perpetuate this false idea that certain personalities are more suited for salvation. As if some non-Christians, based on personality, are further from the kingdom and harder to save. **No, everyone is equally hard to save.** The naturally polite, humble, patient person is born just as far from the kingdom as the rude, arrogant, demanding person. It's going to take the same miracle to save both of them. **The truth is we're impossible to save – if not for the grace and mercy of the God of the impossible.**
  
- ❖ **And that leads to a second confusion where we tend to confuse the terms grace and mercy.** I grew up being taught that mercy meant “not giving you what you deserve” and grace meant “giving you what you don't deserve”. So just imagine if my 6-year old daughter is being careless, she's kicking a ball around in the living room, and she knocks over and breaks a vase. Now she knows better than that. She knows she should've have been kicking a ball around in the house. What she deserves is some form of discipline.
  - ▶ Now my understanding, for the longest time, was that showing her mercy in that case would mean not punishing her. That's being merciful. And showing her grace would be to give her a hug and tell her it's okay and that I still love her. **Mercy had to do with not giving her the punishment she deserved, and grace had to do with giving her a gift she didn't deserve.**
  
- ❖ That definition, that distinction, is neat and clean. It's helpful in many ways. But I've come to realize that the way the Bible uses the term *mercy* doesn't allow us to limit it to a narrow sense. It's not just about withholding punishment.
  - ▶ The way the Bible uses grace and mercy – there's distinction but they're not that different. If anything, grace has to do with showing kindness towards someone but with the specific focus on the undeserving nature of that person(s). **Mercy, on the other hand, is also about showing kindness but with the specific focus on the miserable condition of that person(s) due to sin. They're suffering either because of their sin, the sin of others, or simply because this is a sin-cursed, fallen world.**

- ❖ So mercy includes having a degree of sympathy for the miserable consequences of sin. **But mercy includes more than a sense of pity but also a desire to relieve sinners of their suffering and pain.**
  - ▶ It's like what James says in chapter 2 of his epistle, *"<sup>15</sup>If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, <sup>16</sup>and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled, without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?"* (Jas. 2:15-16). That's not mercy. Mercy includes not just sympathy but service.
    - So here's a definition I've come up with that I think captures all of that: **Biblical mercy is undeserved kindness towards anyone suffering the miserable consequences of sin, that expresses itself in sympathy and an effort to relieve their misery.**
  
- ❖ Let me give you a biblical example. Consider the **Parable of the Good Samaritan** in Luke 10. The Samaritan was an enemy to the Jew. There were deep racial and religious hostilities between the two groups. From the wounded, Jewish man's perspective, lying there on the side of the road, the Samaritan was the one character who owed him nothing. The priest and the Levite should've felt some sense of duty to help. **The Samaritan is the one guy in the story from whom you wouldn't expect kindness but animosity.** He's the one who should've passed on by. Who should've finished the poor man off.
  - ▶ But instead he showed mercy. **The Samaritan didn't need to know if the man deserved a beating or not.** Maybe he started it. Maybe all of it was his fault. The Samaritan didn't need to know. Those are questions for a judge to ask, for a judge to get to the bottom of. **The Samaritan knew he wasn't the man's judge. He was the man's neighbor.** And my neighbor needs my mercy.
    - Do you see, friends? **Mercy doesn't ask, "What did he do to deserve this?" but "What can I do to relieve this?"** Mercy doesn't wonder, "What's wrong with him?" but "How can I help him?" Mercy doesn't say, "How dare she do that!" but "How dare I ignore her and her needs!"
  
- ❖ I knew God wasn't going to let me get away this week, preparing a sermon like this, without inconveniently confronting me with a stranger in need. It's Friday morning. I'm getting the car serviced at the Honda dealership across the freeway. I'm over at Chachos getting a quick breakfast. I've got lots of sermon left to prep. They give me a call. "Your car is ready for pickup." I'm walking back to the dealership as fast as I can. Still got lots of sermon to prep. I've got my headphones on, trying to squeeze in my daily podcast routine. And lo and behold, someone in the parking lot tries to get my attention to ask for some money. I so wanted to pretend like I didn't hear him and just keep going. I probably could've done so convincingly.
  - ▶ But God was loud and clear. I got the message. I have no idea if he's a drug user or a criminal. I have no idea if he is or was a horrible husband, a deadbeat father, or a rotten friend. I didn't ask. I didn't need to know. I just needed to show mercy. **He didn't need a judge. He needed a neighbor.** Now I didn't give him cash, but I did walk back into the restaurant and helped him out with a meal.

- ❖ Look, I don't share that to toot my own horn. Because to be brutally honest, nine times out of ten I probably would've pretended I didn't hear him. I've conveniently got my headphones on. But God's Word is living and active, and it was doing a work in me.
  - ▶ And that's what I hope it does in you. **Every day God is probably confronting you with people in need, suffering miserable consequences of sin.** And I'm not just talking about strangers on the street. I'm talking about colleagues in the other cubicle, classmates in the hallway, peers on the dormitory floor, family members under the same roof. It's very likely that we're passing by these people and ignoring these needs without even realizing it. So I'm praying the Word of God does the same thing it's been doing to me. Opening our eyes; softening our hearts; moving us to action.

### Receiving Mercy

- ❖ So we've defined mercy. We have a better sense of what Jesus meant by being merciful. But the second half of the beatitude, "*for they shall receive mercy.*" But here is where people get tripped up in interpreting the relationship between the two halves. **How does showing mercy relate to receiving mercy?**
- ❖ **Some conclude that Jesus must be saying that showing mercy to others is a necessary condition before receiving mercy from God.** They'll support that with a related statement Jesus makes in chapter 6 on forgiveness. Let me read you vv14-15, "*14For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*"
  - ▶ **I know, it sounds like God's willingness to forgive us (to show us mercy) depends on our willingness to forgive others first (to show mercy first).** It sounds like the condition for receiving mercy and forgiveness is first being merciful and forgiving.
- ❖ Look back at v7. It says the merciful are blessed because of the mercy they shall receive (future tense). **But notice how it doesn't mention how you become merciful in the first place.** That's not addressed here in chapter 5:7 or in chapter 6:14. But if you read these verses in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, and Matthew's Gospel and New Testament, it becomes clear that how your sinful, selfish heart became merciful and forgiving in the first place was not something you did but something God did as a pure act of grace.
  - ▶ **The good news of the gospel is that we're saved by grace alone – on the basis of God's freedom and willingness to show us mercy first while we were yet incorrigible, wretched sinners.** God is not waiting for us to move in mercy towards others before he's willing to move in mercy towards us.
- ❖ **The rest of Matthew's Gospel affirms this – that the Son of God moves first in showing mercy.** Chapter 9:2 a paralytic is brought to Jesus by some friends, and the first thing Jesus says to him is, "*Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.*" But he didn't quiz the paralytic to see if he's holding any grudges against others. He didn't ask about what he's done to deserve mercy. No, Jesus just sees him in his miserable condition, sympathizes, and shows mercy. He not only heals the man's legs but more importantly his heart.

- ❖ Now you could argue that Jesus, being the Son of God, simply read the man's heart, so he perceived the paralytic was a merciful man and that's why he got mercy. Okay, then let me give another example that clearly makes the point. Consider **Luke 23:34**. Jesus is hanging on the cross. The crowds are jeering him. The centurions are mocking him. The religious leaders are sneering at him. Clearly these are *not* merciful people. And yet Jesus, dying on the cross, turns to the Father and prays, "*Forgive them, for they know not what they do.*"
  - ▶ That's mercy. **Jesus was moved to show such kindness – not because he perceived that they were really merciful at heart – but because he saw their pitiful state, enslaved to their own sin.** They were so blinded by sin, they don't even know what they were doing. And that's what elicited Jesus's mercy. It wasn't their merciful nature. It was their miserable condition. That's what mercy responds to.
  
- ❖ Honestly, I think we're imposing a theological dilemma on this beatitude. I doubt the first disciples would've read v7 and gotten into a debate about which came first. **As if this beatitude is trying to answer the chicken-or-the egg question: *Which came first – us being merciful OR God showing us mercy?*** That's not Jesus's concern here. He's just saying you can't have a chicken without an egg, and you can't have eggs without a chicken. **He's just pointing to the inseparable relationship between showing mercy to others and receiving mercy from God.**
  - ▶ If we read these Beatitudes out of context and simply as platitudes to live by, then I can see why we get tripped up. That's why we have to read v7 within the beautiful logic of the Beatitudes. If I recognize I'm poor in spirit, if I mourn over my sinfulness, if I'm meek and no longer have a false, inflated view of myself – then merciful is the natural result. **Those who know they're wretched sinners and great debtors to God's mercy are going to be compassionate towards other wretched sinners and more than willing to show the same kind of mercy.**
  
- ❖ That's the point Jesus is making about this inseparable relationship. **The forgiven are naturally forgiving and will continue to receive forgiveness. He who has received mercy will naturally show mercy and continue to receive mercy.** There is an inseparable and reciprocal relationship. Yes, it all started with God, but that's not in question here.
  - ▶ **The question here, in this beatitude, that you really should be asking is whether or not you are being merciful towards others right now. And if not, then what does it say about you and your relationship with God?**
  
- ❖ Do you have feelings of callousness or condescension towards others? Do you have unforgiveness or bitterness in your heart towards certain people? Are *you* a merciful person? Those are the questions you need to ask. **If your heart is not right in your horizontal relationships, then it will certainly affect your vertical relationship with God.**

- ❖ Even if you're a Christian, if you cherished sin in your heart – if you cherish the bitterness or the callousness you have towards another, if you ignore their needs, and make peace with your sin – then it's going to affect your prayer life (cf. Ps. 66:18). It's going to affect how your heavenly Father deals with you.
  - ▶ **If you're in that kind of state, he won't be showering you with abundant mercies, leaving you to think you're fine.** No, he'll be confronting you, warning you, disciplining you, leading you to repentance.
- ❖ **So if you feel like God is withholding mercies from you right now, maybe it's because he's warning you about something you're not dealing with in the heart.** Is there someone you need to show mercy to? Is there someone you need to forgive? Are there certain groups of people or kinds of people that your heart is calloused towards or even hostile?

### Becoming Merciful

- ❖ These questions lead us to our third and final point – becoming merciful. How do I become more a merciful person? This is the crucial question. Jesus says the merciful ones are the blessed ones. They're the truly happy ones.
  - ▶ It makes sense. The most unmerciful people are usually the most unhappy. Those who harbor bitterness and unforgiveness are tormented on the inside. If we want to experience true blessedness – and like I said earlier, if we want this world to be a better place – then we need to learn how to become more merciful.
- ❖ Let me stress again, this is not something you can produce on your own. If you were born athletic, then you can hone that and train yourself to be more athletic. **But no one is born merciful, so you can't hone it or develop it by any natural means.** It takes a second birth where you receive new eyes that enable you to see yourself and others in light of the gospel.
  - ▶ Ask God for the new birth, for him to sovereignly act to change you from the inside out, to make you a new person – with a new heart of mercy and a new set of eyes. Eyes that can see how great a debtor you are to God's mercy.
    - **You need to recognize that, in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, you're not the Good Samaritan.** No, you're the poor chap lying and dying on the side of the road. You need to experience the discouragement and despair that comes from having people let you down. When those you were so sure would stop and show you mercy – just pass you by.
- ❖ It's only when you stop relying on man and stop relying on yourself – only then will you experience the true mercy of the One and Only Good Samaritan. Now think about how that'll transform you. ***What if your only hope comes from the one Person in the universe who owes you nothing?*** What if your only Savior is an enemy who didn't have to show you kindness but rather someone you'd expect to show you animosity? What if you experienced that kind of mercy, that kind of undeserved kindness? What is that going to do to you?

- ❖ It will totally change the way you look at other people. **It'll transform the way you treat those you find so hard to love, those you naturally despise, those who deserve nothing from you, who probably brought their trouble upon themselves.** If you've experienced the abundant mercies of the Good Samaritan, then there's no way you can go on treating others with contempt.
  - ▶ Because you'll say to yourself, **"I was once saved by Someone who owed me nothing. I was saved by Someone that I treated as an enemy.** Jesus should've ignored me. He should've passed me by. He should've finished me off. But instead he showed me mercy. He bandaged my wounds. He brought me to safety. He took care of all my needs. And all at great expense to himself. **I've been changed by his mercy, and now all I want to do is show the same mercy to others."**
  
- ❖ **And now you can be a good samaritan yourself, seeing everyone with what Martyn Lloyd-Jones calls a Christian eye.** Let me read you a great quote from his book on the Sermon on the Mount. This is Lloyd-Jones describing how the sinner, changed by God's mercy, starts to see other sinners.
  - ▶ *"I see them now with a Christian eye. I see them as the dupes and the victims and the slaves of sin and Satan and of the way of the world. I have come to see them not simply as men whom I dislike but as men to be pitied. I've come to see them as being governed by the god of this world, as being still where once I was, and would be yet but for the grace of God. So I am sorry for them. I do not merely see them and what they do. I see them as the slaves of hell and of Satan, and my whole attitude toward them is changed. And because of that, of course, I can be and must be merciful with respect to them. I differentiate between the sinner and his sin. I see everybody who is in a state of sin as one who is to be pitied."*<sup>1</sup>
  
- ❖ Let me ask you: **How do see the various people that God has placed in your life, that he has brought across your path?** What's your attitude towards that person in your small group that's really needy? Or towards the colleague who's down and out or the classmate who's going through a difficult season? How do you see the stranger who interrupts you and your busy schedule?
  - ▶ If you want to be a more merciful person, then you need to become a Christian because Christians are the greatest debtors to God's mercy. And that experience of mercy is what enables you to see people with a Christian eye. To see them as you see yourself, as someone equally in need of mercy. And that's how it connects with the Golden Rule that Jesus mentions later in the Sermon – do unto others as you would have them do unto you (Mt. 7:12). **Show them mercy as you would want both them and God to show you mercy.**

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<sup>1</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 87.