

The Beatitudes

Blessed Are the Merciful

Matthew 5:7

Introduction

The beatitudes are the eight statements of blessing spoken by Jesus at the beginning of His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew Chapter 5. Each statement begins with "Blessed are..." The word "blessed" describes the prosperity and deep joy of the soul.

Jesus says those who experience the blessing of these beatitudes are the poor, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted. And the blessings of the Kingdom of Heaven are comfort, inheritance of the earth, a fulfilling life, mercy, a clear view of God, and the right to be called the children of God and receive an inheritance in the kingdom of Heaven.

The people Jesus describes in this passage are different in character and lifestyle than those still "outside the kingdom." Believers who make a significant impact for God in our world have to be different from it. The character of a genuine follower of Christ distinguishes them from other people. Unfortunately, for some, Christianity is nothing more than an outward form of legalistic holiness. But authentic believers know the inner joy and peace that flows out of the abundant life of fellowship with Christ. Their faith is a fountain of spiritual life that continually refreshes them and those around them. It is the Holy Spirit who graciously provides their inner joy and faith.

When you know you are forgiven, it inspires you to be a constant source of blessing. There is a relaxing and quiet gentleness about a person who is filled with God's Spirit. There is an attitude of mercy and compassion for others that is distinct and obvious.

The New Testament truth is that God really does emphasize mercy as a part of authentic Christian behavior. God not only wants us to show mercy; He insists on it. So, before we look at this fifth beatitude, let's read them once again from Matthew's Gospel Chapter 5.

"And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated, His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy."* (Matthew 5:1-7 NKJV)

Jesus is an example of what He asks of us in the beatitudes. He tells us to be poor in spirit, but only after He empties himself and takes the form of a servant.

Philippians 2:6 says that Jesus, "being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men." (Philippians 2:6-7 NKJV)

In 2 Corinthians 8:9, Paul says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."
(2 Corinthians 8:9 NKJV)

Jesus is the perfect example of one who is poor in spirit. He sets an example for us in mourning. His heart breaks over Jerusalem, the unrepentant capital of Israel, and tears flow down his face as He yearns to relieve the distress of their sinfulness. At the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus weeps again, not just the death of a friend, but in recognition of the sin that dominates our world. Jesus understood the eternal separation that faces every person who chooses not to believe in God. Jesus weeps for us all! He demonstrates his meekness in submissiveness to His Father's will, even when faced with the agonizing prospect of facing crucifixion.

Jesus only says what His Father tells him to say, and he only does what His Father tells Him to do. He always acknowledges the authority of the Father and never steps outside the Father's will. His hunger and thirst for righteousness is so great; He feels compelled to call out the hypocrisy and inconsistencies of the scribes and Pharisees right in front of them.

On one occasion, Jesus enters the Temple, and the disciples witness the fulfillment of the prophetic word, 'the zeal for thy house has consumed me.' Jesus drives out the money changers saying, 'my house shall be called a house of prayer, not a den of thieves.'

And in our lesson today, Jesus again sets the example in mercy. In Matthew 9:27, two blind men cry out to Jesus with the words, 'Son of David, have mercy on us.' What does Jesus do? He heals them. In Chapter 15, a Canaanite woman with a demon-possessed daughter doesn't know much about Jesus, but she knows enough to cry out, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord.'" In situation after situation, the New Testament records this same request; Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." Mt. 17:15; Luke 17:14.

The people knew Jesus was powerful, but they also knew He was merciful.

I. Being Merciful

Why did the people think Jesus was so merciful? Do people see you as a merciful and forgiving person, or are you more of the grudge-bearing pit bull variety? Jesus heard requests for mercy because people recognized his life was a demonstration of it.

How many times in the Gospels does it say that Jesus had compassion on the crowds. So when we examine these beatitudes, they say to us, this is the way Jesus is – be like Him! Mercy is one of the attributes of God.

The merciful are able to care for those who are obviously wrong and deserve judgment. They care to the point where they are prepared to get involved in the hardship, suffering, and difficulties of rescuing the condemned. It's not excusing or overlooking faults and wrongdoing; it is seeing the potential for good and presenting the opportunity for a person to change. It recognizes when the offender is truly repentant and wants to change and provides the opportunity for that to happen.

It's easy to love those who love you. Reciprocity is when we give back to those who help us. But mercy is more than that. Mercy is the strength of character that shows kindness to those who would even kill us if they could. It expresses compassion even to those who are ready to crucify us with criticism and scorn. It even cares for those who dislike us and belittle us without cause.

Sadly, there are many believers who have no patience at all. No mercy. No compassion. No concern for any of those who don't live up to their particular expectations. How many times have you turned up your nose at those who disagree with you or oppose you who think differently than you do?

I think many of us would have to confess that we are kind only when it serves our own selfish purposes. But when it comes to really caring about people who've made mistakes and fallen through sin, we have only scorn and disdain to offer them. And yet, to be truly Christ-like, believers must learn to be merciful.

So how do the fallen receive mercy?

II. Receiving Mercy

It's always easier to insist that you're right and everyone else is wrong. Politicians today have made a career out of it! But mercy is not compatible with a self-righteous attitude. Nor does mercy tolerate the inconsistencies and wrongs of others.

Mercy is not a weak-kneed indifference to sin. It is a caring concern that attempts to right the wrong without regard for the personal cost involved. Jesus didn't just stroll around doling out mercy and forgiveness. He gave it to those who sought it out and realized the horribleness of their actions. He gave it to those who begged for a chance to change their standing.

You must be able to admit you are at fault to have even a remote chance of receiving mercy. The law says you reap what you sow! But Jesus takes this straightforward precept and says, 'If you sow mercy, you will reap mercy.'

I know those who receive mercy sometimes turn around and dishonor the very one that showed them mercy. But that doesn't mean we quit dispensing mercy. Jesus is our example. He continually offered love and compassion, and mercy wherever He could. He healed the sick, helped the suffering, encouraged the downhearted, and forgave the sinful. And yet, His generation still turned against him.

Some people ridiculed, abused, despised, and rejected Him, and in the end, their hatred became so strong that they finally crucified him. They couldn't stand the fact that he would forgive people who were obvious sinners. And yet from His own mouth at His crucifixion, he cries out on their behalf, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

He pleads for the very self-righteous ones who wanted him dead. That is incredible compassion and mercy! By the way, if Jesus, who was the very Son of God, didn't receive mercy from this world, it's doubtful we will either.

Only those who recognize and understand the depths of sin can show mercy. So how do we obtain it? Well, surprisingly, it often comes to us from those we least expect it. And it always comes from the abundance of a God who is merciful. It is a true miracle that a God, who is perfect in every way, can look upon us with compassion and offer us mercy. But, because of God's mercy, Jesus willingly offers himself as the sacrificial lamb for the sins of the world.

The justice of God must be satisfied. His law demands it, and the penalty of sin is death! So, Jesus volunteers to take our place and pay the penalty for our sin, allowing God to extend his mercy and the opportunity to start a new life. But you have to ask Him to receive it! Obtaining mercy requires humility and true repentance.

Nothing will humble you any more than recognizing and receiving the mercy of God. It is the mercy of God that causes Him to provide forgiveness for my sins, and it is His love that accepts me into His royal family as His child. His mercy allows me to be acquitted of my sinfulness, and His forgiveness relieves me of all guilt and shame in his presence. His mercy lets me start over with joy and anticipation for a peaceful life.

Sometimes we are too tough on the sinner and not tough enough on the sin. When the woman taken in adultery was brought to Jesus for his judgment – he demonstrated mercy. He didn't condemn her to death even though He could have! – but he did insist that she change her ways! Have you ever considered that it might be time for you to change your ways! Jesus was more interested in the damage being done to this woman because of the sin than he was on the particular type of sin she committed.

The truth is, all sin destroys and injures the very people God created to be instruments of praise and glory. It's the mercy of God that reaches out to us even at the depths of our sin. The merciful take time to understand why people behave the way they do and then take steps to help them correct those ways.

Christ calls us to experience His blessing of mercy and then be merciful to others.

III. The Blessing of Mercy

Every Christian has experienced God's forgiveness and compassion, and mercy. Now He calls upon us to demonstrate it before others. That does not mean we overlook sin and offenses and sweep them under the carpet. It means we boldly confront sinful behavior, but instead of passing judgment, we give others an opportunity to experience God's love and forgiveness by offering them God's mercy.

As Galatians 6:1 says, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load." (Galatians 6:1-5 NKJV)

The blessing for the merciful is they hear the words of God and in the end, obtain His mercy. Matthew 25:34 says, *Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry, and you gave Me food; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you took Me in; I was naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.'* "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me.'

(Matthew 25:34-40 NKJV)

If you want to live a blessed life, then be a blessing! Don't be a source of irritation or ridicule. Instead, be an inspiration. Be compassionate. Be merciful!

Conclusion

Remember this. Mercy is not a cover-up for sin. Guilt is a condition that precedes the exercise of mercy. Mercy actually pre-supposes the reality of guilt. No one can be a subject of mercy unless they realize just how much they deserve punishment. However, the greater the need for mercy, the richer the reward is.

When mercy is exercised appropriately, it confers intense joy and relief to a person. By his manifested love, God can even overcome the hearts of His enemies. When God reveals his great love, he subdues the hearts of even those who were once His enemies, and even though they deserve to be banished forever, he rejoices over them as one who has found a great treasure.

When a penitent prodigal son returned, hungry and filthy, we see the father rushing out to meet him with a heart full of joy. The exercise of mercy has always been God's intention, and thank God; it is still a present reality. Mercy is the virtue behind God's whole plan of redemption.

The manifestation of God's mercy truly confounds Satan and all hell. What can these demons say when they see the personal cost at which God exercises His mercy! Satan's plan to overthrow the Kingdom of Heaven was to introduce sin into our world. But in the end, it has only served to strengthen it because we have obtained the blessing of God's mercy! And to that, Jesus says, Congratulations to those who learn the ways of mercy! And we say, "Thank you, Jesus!"