

## **Beatitudes: Blessed to Not Give Others What They Deserve - week 5**

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - May 31, 2020  
(Drawing from Rev. Darrell Johnson's *Beatitudes: Living in Sync with the Reign of God*)

We're continuing our series on the Beatitudes drawing from the book by Rev. Darrell Johnson, *The Beatitudes: Living in Sync with the Reign of God*.

Our Beatitude for today is from Matthew 5:7, "**Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.**"

As I have done with the other Beatitudes, I want to ask a number of questions of the fifth Beatitude. You can find fuller answers to these questions in Rev. Darrell Johnson's book.

### **Question one: Why is mercy a mark of the kingdom?**

Why is being "merciful" a character trait of those grabbed by Jesus and His gospel? For a number of reasons. First, Jesus, who announces the gospel, is Himself merciful. The exact word Jesus uses in the fifth Beatitude [*eleemones*] is used in only one other place in the New Testament, in the book of Hebrews. After affirming the real and full humanity of Jesus the Son of God, the author writes: "**Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest**" (Hebrews 2:17). Jesus *is* mercy.

What did the people experience when they first met Jesus? They flocked to Him. Why? (1) Because.

unexpectedly, the Holy One was merciful. Thus the cry, heard over and over again in the gospels: **“Lord, have mercy on me.”** The cry was drawn out of their hearts by the realization, often unconscious, that here was Mercy Himself. Anyone who encounters Jesus, enters into a relationship with Him, and shares His life, will soon begin to take on something of His mercy.

(2) Furthermore, not only is He merciful, but mercy is one of His greatest concerns; it is at the top of His agenda.

The Pharisees, the self-righteous ones, criticized Jesus for eating with “tax-collectors and sinners.” Jesus responded, **“It is not those whose are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire compassion [mercy], and not sacrifice,’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners”** (Matthew 9:12-13). The Pharisees, the rule-keepers, the rule-enforcers, criticized Jesus for picking grain on the Sabbath. Jesus responded, **“If you had known what this means, ‘I desire compassion [mercy], and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent”** (Matthew 12:7).

During Holy Week, Jesus spoke a series of “woes” to the religious establishment. **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** [Note that this shows that mercy is not afraid to speak hard truth.] **For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier**

**provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness”** (Matthew 23:23).

Hang around Jesus long enough, and you cannot but begin to take on His bent toward mercy.

(3) The third reason mercy is a mark of those grabbed by the gospel is that the Kingdom that is breaking into history in Jesus is a kingdom of mercy. This is why the good news is “good” news. God’s new world order has come near, and it is a new order of mercy. Remember the prodigal story?

At a dinner party, one of the Pharisees said to Jesus, **“Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God”** (Luke 14:15). Luke then tells us that tax-collectors and sinners started coming to Jesus to listen to Him, and Jesus welcomed them and shared bread with them. The Pharisees and scribes were horrified and began to grumble, saying, **“This man receives sinners and eats with them”** (Luke 15:2). They said this in disgust and anger.

Jesus then told His most beloved parable, the one about the father and his two sons. The younger son blows it - he is afraid to approach the father, but out of desperation he risks returning home. Jesus says, **“while he [the son] was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him”** (Luke 15:20).

Jesus is showing us that the God of the kingdom of God is the Father of mercy. Our Father in heaven is the Father of mercy. If His Kingdom is breaking into our lives, we then cannot help becoming all caught up in mercy.

**Question two: What then is the nature of this mercy that Jesus embodies and blesses?**

Rev. Darrell Johnson writes of what he hears Jesus saying. Jesus comes at the nature of mercy both negatively and positively. Negatively: mercy is not giving someone what they deserve. Positively: mercy is giving someone what they do not deserve.

Consider Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10:25-37. I trust you know the story already, so I want to note something Darrell Johnson points out. Note that the Samaritan did not need to know why the man was in need. He extended kindness regardless of how the man got himself into that mess.

We assume that the beaten man was an innocent victim, but maybe he was not. Maybe he had offended someone and the beating was an act of revenge. Or, maybe he had been involved in some illegal transaction, and not fulfilled his part of the bargain, and was being "liquidated." Or maybe he had bad-mouthed his assailants, taunting them into their brutal act. The Good Samaritan, as he has come to be called, did not need to know why the man was suffering. It did not matter. It would not have changed his

actions. Mercy extends kindness to the needy regardless of the reason for the need.

Note also that the Good Samaritan *risks* in order to extend kindness. Mercy always involves risk. Mercy may involve risking loss of time, loss of money, loss of health, or loss of reputation. The Samaritan knew he could have been beaten himself, for in that culture, had the beaten man's friends come around the bend and seen the Samaritan near the victim, they would - without asking - have assumed the Samaritan had done the beating, because their people groups didn't get along, and they would have retaliated. Mercy risks for the sake of the other.

Is not the Good Samaritan a picture of Jesus? He risks everything to extend kindness to us. He especially risks the Divine reputation. He loses face with the religious people of the day. **“This man receives sinners and eats with them”** (Luke 15:2) was meant as a put-down - a slam on Jesus. So be it. Mercy does not worry about the loss of name. Mercy is kindness toward those in need.

Mercy is also pardon for those in debt. *“Father - cancel our debts.”* And He does!

This is what Jesus gives us the freedom to pray in the Lord's Prayer. **“Our Father in heaven... forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”** The Father pardons us; He removes the debts and separating wall the debts

create. And He does so at a horrendous price: the price of the incarnation and crucifixion. As an anonymous Chinese pastor is reported to have said, *“He came to pay a debt He did not owe because we owed a debt we could not pay.”*

So, what is this mercy Jesus embodies and blesses? His mercy towards us is not giving us what we justly deserve, and giving us what we do not deserve - kindness in our helplessness, pardon of our indebtedness.

Now, the big question. **Question three: DO ONLY THOSE WHO SHOW MERCY RECEIVE MERCY?**

Is Jesus saying that only those who are merciful toward others will receive mercy from God? After giving us the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus says, **“For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions”** (Matthew 6:14-15). Is Jesus saying that if we do not cancel the debts of others, God will not cancel our debts?

From everything Jesus says - especially the first Beatitude - **“Blessed are the poor in spirit”** - we know that He is NOT saying that before God will extend mercy to us, we must first extend mercy to others. The gospel declares that God’s mercy comes first; He is the first mover. Why? Because He loves us. The foundation we need to start with then is not that we are debtors, but that we are loved. If we start with our debt, we might always wonder if we

measure up or are forgiven or are OK with God. But if we start the foundation of His love for us, then we will always know why the Father is so merciful to forgive.

Our heavenly Father has the kind of love for us that does not have to be earned. The kind of love that always welcomes us home. And having that love, God empowers us to express mercy.

When we turn to the Beatitudes to learn about the Kingdom of God, we read, *Blessed are those who know they don't have it all together before God, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* We who could not earn it or buy it, get it! *You lucky bums! You gained everything in God's Kingdom!*

The other eight Beatitudes help us further understand what's happening in those moments when we receive and give mercy.

The merciful whom Jesus blesses are also **poor in spirit**; they know their own spiritual poverty and need for mercy. And He gives His Kingdom of mercy.

The merciful whom Jesus blesses are also those who **mourn**; they know their own brokenness and twisted-ness and grieve over their own sin. And He gives His Kingdom of mercy.

The merciful whom Jesus blesses are also **mEEK**; they know they have no other hope in life but the mercy and love of God. And He gives His Kingdom of mercy, because He loves us.

The merciful whom Jesus blesses are also those who **hunger and thirst for right-relatedness**; they know they have not arrived, but crave to be all God wants them to be. And He promises to fulfill that thirst.

When we believe God loves us, we can believe that even though we don't have it all together in the things of God, **"Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven."** *Mercy.*

In those moments when we cannot extend mercy - and some of those moments are very painful because we have been so deeply hurt or violated - it is in those moments that we are most in need of mercy. And here is the good news of the gospel: When in that moment we cry out "*Lord have mercy,*" He does. He comes near, so very near. Mercy Himself comes near, and then empowers us to do for others what we know He has done for us.

Blessed, in sync with the heart of the Father, with the heart of the Holy God, are those who practice mercy; who do not give those who sin against them what they deserve, but give those who sin against them what they do not deserve - kindness and pardon - for they shall be shown mercy upon mercy upon mercy.

You lucky bums have been given mercy upon mercy upon mercy!

Would you pray with me?

*Thank You Father that we have all Your love and mercy already because that is who You are! Thank you that we don't need to earn Your love or mercy, but can just receive it with a grateful heart. Empower us by Your Holy Spirit to share this love and mercy with others. In Jesus Name, Amen.*