

7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”

*I need to make a confession today: I love musicals... there I said it! One of my favorite musicals of all time is Les Miserables. Aside from the music, what an epic story of struggle and redemption, particularly with the story of Jean Valjean. (When he steals from the church and priest; instead of giving him what he deserves in that moment, he has mercy; he helps him, he even says, “Why did you leave so early, why would you leave the best behind?” When the cops leave, he uses this moment to teach Jean Valjean to “use this precious silver to become an honest man. By the richness of the martyrs, by the passion and the blood, God has raised you out of darkness, I have saved your soul for God.” **It is such a good story, if you haven’t seen it in the theatre or on the screen, you have to watch it.***

We are moving along in our series, The Kingdom Life: A Journey Through the Sermon on the Mount, neck deep in the poetic list of what we have coined, “The Beatitudes,” a list that Jesus crafts together to paint a picture of what it looks like to be a person of God’s kingdom, to see what true blessing looks like.

We established that, with the Beatitudes, there is in each of them an invitation from Jesus and a promise. Yet, face value, almost all of them seem counter-intuitive to logic and reason.

Here’s the unique thing about this particular Beatitude: It is the most straightforward out of any of them. The only Beatitude with the promise being a direct reflection of the invitation... And at face value, it seems contradictory to the one from last week, “Blessed are those hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied...” But, when we stop to think about “righteousness” and “mercy” in their truest sense, we will see they go hand in hand.

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Eleēmōn (adj.) = merciful (actively compassionate, pitiful) eleos (n.) = mercy (noticing those in distress and lending an able hand)

- Even this doesn’t do justice... When I think of this description, I think of the pity and consequential guilt I feel when I see those stray puppies on TV that somehow know how to frown on queue for a commercial...

The mercy Jesus is speaking is going beyond obligation or duty. it is willfully extending generosity to someone, especially those in need and even those who have wronged you.

This Beatitude certainly has general truth to it, but make no mistake, Jesus is very much talking about our posture and presence towards those who are poor. By his mercy on us, we are compelled to associate ourselves with those of lower status, wealth, and popularity. Jesus’ words are marked by this unwavering regard for the poor. The involvement of God in humanity

is always directed towards compassion and concern for those that are marginalized, outcast, and destitute.

But, wait, what?! Remember, Jesus is revealing God's kingdom to a bunch of oppressed and starving Jews who have lost their nation and all its way of life. "Who, Jesus, could you possibly be saying we need to have mercy for?!"

In the wake of their struggles, Jesus hits right to the heart and says, "In spite of it all, guess what? You can experience the kingdom of God and the life that is truly life!"

We have to be careful... Not to read this Beatitude as a "prove it" statement. In our English language, this seems like a simple if, then statement. "An eye for an eye." But, that's not really what Jesus is saying. We could do everything right, we could have every right to get our way, we could kick people when they are down, but that is not what leads to the kingdom life.

The follower of Jesus has experienced God's merciful forgiveness toward an undeserving sinner, which in turn will produce such overwhelming gratitude and deep understanding of forgiveness that he or she will in turn demonstrate that same mercy toward other undeserving sinners.

The depth and breadth of how much we experience and embrace mercy of Jesus is inherently tied to how much we give it away. The last Beatitude of righteousness and this one of mercy almost sound contradictory or counterintuitive, but they're not. Biblical justice is not an eye for eye, desiring fairness in and of itself... But justice comes in the form of mercy and forgiveness that comes in the form of Jesus. He absorbs the injustice and extends healing to all who embrace mercy, for themselves and for others. Thus, he does not give humans what they deserve.

Matthew 9:10-13 (ESV) - 10 And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. **11** And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" **12** But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. **13** Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Context: The religious leadership in Jesus' day tended toward being merciless because of their demand for rigorous observance of the law. Their motive was commendable in that it was driven by a desire for the people of Israel to be pure, but it was inexcusable because their unbending demands produced harshness and condemnation toward those who did not meet their standards. Jesus' disciples learn from this beatitude that God's good requirement has always been mercy. Recall the classic statements of Micah: "He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic. 6:8).

This means that every single human being has no grounds to be the judge, jury and executioner in any circumstance, really. But, the way we unlock the kingdom of God in our life and the lives of others is **mercy**. *In our marriage, when there is disagreement, show mercy... when your kids talk back, show mercy... when people who ridicule you for what you believe, show mercy...* This reality is no more relevant to our cultural moment than in the potent political climate of our country. No matter what we believe, no matter what view we hold, for Christians, it is never a license to be mean.

“For followers of Jesus, the manner in which we hold our politics must be compatible with the spirit of Jesus... no loyalty to a political ideology can justify a turn away from mercy and toward meanness... when you pray, ‘Lord, have mercy on me’— There will be a large reservoir of mercy for God to draw from.” - Brian Zahnd

Why do we withhold mercy? What are the culprits for me and you?

We often struggle to show mercy because we are fighting to be right rather than fighting for the person. We often talk too much, rather than listening to understand where someone is coming from. **19** Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; **20** for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. **James 1:19-20 (ESV)**

Jesus did not go to the cross for us out of obligation or duty, he did it out of the generous, kind and loyal loving heart that he had for you and me. If our default mode is not to show mercy, it is possible that we have not understood and truly embraced God’s mercy for ourselves.

Implications: We do not get to measure or compare our mercy with others. There is no limit. Mercy and meekness go hand in hand!

- *Example: My wife challenges me with this all the time with tipping... she is so generous. If I have bad service, I am docking 3%!*

This should also challenge how and who we pray for.. This Beatitude challenges passive, idle prayers for God to move in the lives of those struggling. The kingdom and kingdom people marked by mercy means that we do pray, we pray fervently and without giving up... but I want to pray a prayer in such a way that starts off with asking how I can be the answer to that prayer in that given situation... and then asking God to intervene and make up the difference that I know I cannot do on my own power. This is why God orchestrated the church... that is why we do Community Groups. **They are God’s answer and our solution to bringing mercy into the fabric of our lives! If you are not in one yet, I highly encourage you to consider one.**

“But, Michael, what if I show mercy and they don’t learn from it? What if my compassion leads to them taking advantage of me? At what point am I just enabling them instead of helping them face the consequences?”

This doesn't mean that there are no consequences for people's actions. However, it does mean that when someone is struggling, there's no need to hold them in contempt or shame them while they're down. It does mean that freedom for you and me comes when we release the hold that people and circumstances have, and the joy that can come from knowing that we have been obedient to Christ...

Mercy has the power to change the trajectory of someone's life. It has the power to transform your heart and the hearts of others.

Where is the reservoir of mercy dried up in your life? Is it for a spouse? A coworker or boss? A sibling or parent? A nameless people group? Maybe yourself? Maybe you need to embrace the mercy and forgiveness of Jesus that is abundantly available to you today...

6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. **7** For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— **8** but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:6-8 (ESV)