

Beatitudes-Marked by Mercy—Matthew 5:7
College Baptist Church
July 18, 2021

Today we will continue with our summer sermon series on the Beatitudes. You can find the Beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 5. So, I invite you to turn there with me. If you didn't bring a Bible, there are Bibles in the pew racks. You will find Matthew 5 on p. 809. The sermon text is also printed in the bulletin along with space for taking notes. Today, we will focus on the fifth Beatitude, which is found in verse 7.

As you turn there, I wonder if anyone can give you my definition of the Beatitudes? Anyone want to try? The Beatitudes are kingdom blessings, pronounced by King Jesus, upon citizens of his kingdom, which is already but not yet.

And can anyone tell me the structure of each Beatitude? Each Beatitude consists of two parts. Remember? Each Beatitude has a pronouncement and a promise. The first half is the pronouncement; and it begins: “*blessed are the/those...*” The second half is the promise; and it starts with the word “*for*”, which means “because.” So, the promise explains the pronouncement. The promise answers the question “why” or “how” the pronouncement is a blessing, even though it might not sound like one.

Good work! Now that we are all on the same page, let's listen again to all of Matthew 5:1-12; before focusing on the fifth Beatitude, which is found in verse 7.

Seeing the crowds, [Jesus] went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:
³ “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
⁴ “*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*
⁵ “*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*
⁶ “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*
⁷ “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*
⁸ “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*
⁹ “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*
¹⁰ “*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* ¹¹ “*Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.* ¹² *Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

The Pronouncement: Blessed are the merciful

Have you ever been “mercied?” I've always enjoyed sports. But I've never been on any really great sports teams. And you know you are on a really bad sports team when you get “mercied” by your opponent.

For instance, in kids' softball and baseball there is often a 10-run rule, which means if one team is ahead by more than 10 runs after a certain number of innings, the game is ended. It spares the losing team any further punishment. It's a gesture of mercy.

Or I can remember a mercy rule in high school football which required the clock to run continuously in the second half if one team was ahead by 35 points or more. I don't know if that is still the case, but this running clock rule definitely reduces the pain of an especially lopsided game. It's an extension of mercy.

When I was a kid in AWANA Club at my church, I learned this definition of mercy: mercy is *NOT* getting what you *deserve*. Think about that definition in light of the sports analogies I just shared. The losing teams deserve a beat down according to the normal standards of play, but they get mercy instead. Mercy holds back punishment. In this sense, mercy is "passive." It withholds what is deserved.

But in another sense, mercy is "active"—especially toward the weak and afflicted. Mercy is an active extension of compassion and pity to those in need. That's why so many hospitals are named "Mercy." In Detroit there is "Detroit Mercy." In the Toledo area there is a health system called Mercy Health. On the west side of the state—in Grand Rapids and Muskegon—there is another organization that goes by the same name. And mercy is not limited to health care, in Christian circles you sometimes hear organizations devoted to the poor and destitute described as "mercy ministries."

So, mercy is both passive and active. And we will want to keep that in mind as think about Jesus' kingdom proclamation in verse 7—"Blessed are the merciful." Jesus is calling his followers—his kingdom citizens—to be exhibitors of mercy. To be merciful is to be *full* of mercy. But before we can be exhibitors of mercy, we must first be recipients of mercy.

Recipients of Mercy

We are all in desperate need of the mercy of God. And until we receive his perfect mercy, our own exhibition of mercy will be deficient. Turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 18; and listen to a parable of Jesus about mercy. Luke 18:9-14 paints a stark contrast between two types of people—one who believes he has no need for mercy and the other who is desperate for mercy. Let's see who Jesus commends. Follow along as I read Luke 18:9-14. Pay close attention not only to the contrast, but also to Luke's introduction in v. 9 and Jesus' conclusion in v. 14.

⁹ [Jesus] also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Which person describes you? The self-righteous, self-exalting religious person OR the humble, needy sinner? The point of Jesus' parable is that we are ALL in need of mercy. If we hope to be exalted, we must first be humbled to the point that we cry out, "*God be merciful to me, a sinner!*" Have you cried out for the mercy of God? Crying out for mercy is the first expression of authentic repentance and faith. It is repentance—because it acknowledges sinfulness—it is a change of mind and heart about one's sinful condition. And it is faith, because it is a belief that God is a God of mercy—a God who extends merciful compassion to sinners in need.

So, what does it look like to “receive” the mercy of God? Well, first of all, it is *not* getting the punishment that we deserve. God could have rightly poured out his wrath on sinners like us. But because Jesus took that punishment on the cross of Calvary, all those who cry out for mercy are shielded from God’s wrath. God withholds the punishment that we deserved, because of the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus. As we sang earlier in the great Charles Wesley hymn “*And Can It Be...?*”

*He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race;
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me.*

We, the offspring of Adam, are helpless; and Jesus poured out his blood as the perfect expression of his immense and free mercy. Because Jesus took the punishment, according to Romans 8:1, “*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” We deserved punishment, but we got mercy. We deserved wrath, but we got compassion instead.

And not only does God’s mercy withhold punishment and wrath, it extends forgiveness and welcomes us into his family. It is not only “passive,” but it is “active.” As we heard in the Scripture reading from Ephesians 2. “*God, being rich in mercy...even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.*” And we learned about this active mercy in our study of 1 Peter last spring, which talks about our adoption into God’s family. Remember these words from 1 Peter 2:9:10?

⁹ *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* ¹⁰ *Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

I have a sincere question for each of you today, have you received the mercy of God by faith in Jesus alone? Have you recognized your sin and humbly cried out “God, be merciful to me a sinner!”? You can’t be merciful until you have received mercy. May we all be the blessed recipients of the mercy of God.

Exhibitors of Mercy

And having received mercy, may we be exhibitors of mercy. As God's people—as members of his kingdom—we ought to reflect his mercy to the world around us. I want to challenge us this morning to be merciful in two specific ways.

First, we must exhibit mercy in forgiveness. Last weekend, in the Euro 2020 Soccer Final, England lost a heartbreaker to Italy in a shootout. And after the match, angry fans took to social media to air their grievances with the three England players who missed their shots and cost England the championship. Now, besides the fact that amateurs harassing professionals on social media is incredibly childish—some of the posts were allegedly violent and racist, which is despicable, if that is true.

But I was particularly taken by the comments of England's coach, Gareth Southgate, addressing the online abuse. In an effort to support his mistreated players, Southgate said in a press conference, "*for some of them to be abused is unforgivable.*" Unforgiveable. Our secular society is increasingly "unforgiving." There are no second chances. Some acts are absolutely beyond forgiveness. The mercy of forgiveness is a foreign concept.

But this must not be the case in the church—among God's kingdom people. If we have truly received the forgiveness of God, how can we withhold forgiveness from another sinner? We should be a people marked by the mercy of forgiveness. The Apostle Peter asked Jesus in Matthew 18 about the mercy of forgiveness and Jesus told Peter a powerful story. Let's listen to Matthew 18:21-35.

²¹ Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

²³ Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents [the equivalent of 20 years' wages]. ²⁵ And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

²⁸ But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii [the equivalent of 100 days' wages, OR a third of a year's wages], and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' ²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. ³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

This vivid story of Jesus speaks for itself. It needs little explanation. It is the application that really needs contemplation. Are we in the habit of forgiving from the heart? Are we—who have been mercied by the forgiveness of God—extending that same mercy of forgiveness to others?

Here are two questions to help you apply the teaching of Jesus today:

- First, are you intentionally harboring unforgiveness against someone? If so, will you ask the Lord to help you forgive from the heart? That doesn't mean turning a blind eye toward wrong-doing. It means choosing not to punish the person who wronged you—which might mean confronting him or her in an effort to reconcile. Or where reconciliation is not possible, it may mean turning that person over to the Lord. But we must never intentionally harbor unforgiveness toward anyone. That's UNmerciful.
- Second, are you quick to extend forgiveness to those in your family? I find that we sin and are sinned against most not by strangers, but by those we love most and know best. That really stinks. But this means that the mercy of forgiveness should abound in our family relationships—and when I say family, I'm talking about our households AND the household of faith—our church family.
 - Parents do you extend forgiveness to your children when they have screwed up OR do you remind them of their guilt over and over again?
 - Husbands and wives, do you extend forgiveness to your spouse OR do you seethe in resentment?
 - Do you forgive your siblings when they hurt you OR do you retaliate out of revenge?
 - Brothers and sisters in Christ, do you truly forgive one another from the heart OR do you conveniently avoid those who have sinned against you without addressing the sin that separates you?

May God help us exhibit the same mercy of forgiveness to others that we have received from him.

Second, we must exhibit mercy in acts of compassion. Christian mercy is not mere pity—feeling sad about the vulnerable. According to New Testament scholar, David Turner, Christian mercy is “pity plus action.” True mercy moves us beyond emotion to compassion in action. As Proverbs 14:21 puts it in the King James, “...*he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.*”

Thankfully, College Baptist has a reputation for acts of compassion. So, for many of you the ideas I am about to share will be a reminder. But perhaps for some of you these ideas will serve as an invitation to exhibit mercy in more intentional ways. Here are three ways to be merciful in acts of compassion.

1. Make a commitment to give every month to the Deacon Fund. The deacon fund is a special offering received on the first Sunday of every month. These gifts go into a special benevolence fund used to meet material needs in our congregation and community. I would say that the amount you give is less important than making a commitment to give on a monthly basis as an act of compassion.

2. Volunteer for a local mercy ministry. Love INC, Share the Warmth, and Helping Hands are just a few of the Christ-centered mercy ministries in our county. Find one that stretches you beyond your comfort zone as you seek to grow in mercy.
3. Help a neighbor. You might offer to help with a yard or house project. You might make a meal for a family next door. You might lend a listening ear or send a sympathy card to someone in grief. You might provide financial assistance for an unexpected expense. Be like the Good Samaritan—who showed compassion to someone in need at his own expense.

And as you exhibit mercy in forgiveness and acts of compassion may you be motivated by the promise of Jesus in the second half of verse 7. “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*”

The Promise: For they shall receive mercy

As we said earlier, Christians have already received mercy. As Paul put it to Titus in chapter 3, verse 5, “[God] saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy.” So, we have already received his mercy. “Our sins they are many, his mercy is more!”

Anticipators of Mercy

But I need to remind you that there is still more mercy to come! We are not only recipients of mercy and exhibitors of mercy. We are also anticipators of mercy.

According to the Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians, God’s wrath is still coming. Listen to Paul describe the report of the Thessalonians’ conversion in 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10,

⁹For they...report...how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

God’s wrath is coming. His judgment on the unrepentant is still looming. But for those who are waiting by faith in Jesus there will be no wrath, because Jesus “*delivers us from the wrath to come.*” That’s *more* mercy. God will pour out his wrath in the days ahead, but he will pour out his mercy in the final rescue and salvation on all who trust in his Son, Jesus.

So, may the anticipation of mercy to come, fuel us to exhibit mercy today just as we received mercy in the past.

Benediction—Numbers 6:24-26

²⁴ *The Lord bless you and keep you;*

²⁵ *the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;*

²⁶ *the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*