

“Kingdom Character: The Beatitudes” (part 6)

Matthew 5:7

Charles Brown was a B-17 pilot from West Virginia who flew in combat missions during WWII. At just 21 years old, he was with the 379th Bomber Group stationed at Kimbolton, England. On December 20, 1943, when on his very first combat mission, Brown's B-17 flying fortress sustained heavy damage while on a mission to bomb a factory in Bremen, Germany. The plane's instruments had been damaged, and it was flying deeper into enemy territory instead of turning back toward the coastline. Suddenly, Brown and what was left of his crew were staring at a German fighter piloted by Franz Stigler who had been ordered to shoot down the damaged B-17. In his own words, he had never seen a plane in such pitiful condition--the tail and rear section was severely damaged, the tail gunner had been mortally wounded, the top gunner was gone, the nose was smashed, and the plane was full of bullet holes. When Brown made eye contact with the German pilot, he just knew it was all over. Instead, something odd happened. The German pilot motioned for him to turn 180 degrees, then escorted him slightly over the North Sea toward England. He then saluted Brown and turned back toward Germany. For more than 40 years, Charles Brown wanted to find the German pilot who had spared his life. After years of search, he and Franz Stigler were introduced to each other. Both men became friends until their deaths in 2008, and it was all because one man chose to not fire his guns when he had every right to do so.

Such is a fitting illustration of what mercy is.

“Mercy” - *kind or forgiving treatment of someone who could be treated harshly; kindness given to help those who are in a desperate situation*

Stories of mercy being shown to undeserving people are shocking to us. Mercy goes against the grain of what we feel. Mercy is scandalous and foreign to the world.

The world says, “You deserve to get what you've got coming to you!” The world abides by one simple rule, “Do unto others as they do unto you.” In a way that contradicts everything that we feel and what comes natural to our flesh, Jesus says in this fifth beatitude:

v. 7 - “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

Keep in mind as we study the Beatitudes that they are descriptive of the character of those who are in Christ's kingdom. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is depicting the character of the Christian that is produced by God's Spirit living within his or her heart. He or she is characterized by being:

- poor in spirit
- mourning over sin
- meek
- hungry and thirsty for righteousness

The Beatitudes emphasize who we ARE rather than what we DO. Being always precedes doing in Christ's kingdom. The gospel addresses our attitudes before it addresses our actions.

The first four Beatitudes describe our relationship with God.

The second four Beatitudes describe our relationship with others. Our inward attitudes show up through our outward actions.

Jesus says that His followers are known for being merciful.

First Question: What is mercy?

Mercy is a desperately needed gift of God's working on our behalf. This concept is seen throughout Scripture, beginning with God showing mercy to Adam and Eve.

Three attributes of God are closely related to one another in Scripture--mercy, patience, and grace--each of which show us an aspect of His goodness:

- God's mercy is His goodness to those in misery and distress
- God's patience is His goodness in withholding judgment to those who sin over a period of time
- God's grace is His goodness toward those who deserve only judgment

Mercy is God not giving me what I DO deserve, while grace is God giving me what I DO NOT deserve.

D.A. Carson - *“What is mercy? How does it differ from grace? The two terms are frequently synonymous; but where there is a distinction between the two, it appears that grace is a loving response when love is undeserved, and mercy is a loving response prompted by the misery and helplessness of the one on whom the love is to be showered. Grace answers to the undeserving; mercy answers to the miserable.”*

“Merciful” - *basic meaning is to give help to the afflicted and to come to the aid of the helpless; compassion in action*

The Old Testament equivalent of this word is ‘lovingkindness’ and is commonly used throughout to describe the character of God.

Psalm 40:11 - **“Do not withhold Your tender mercies from me, O Lord; let Your lovingkindness and Your truth continually preserve me.”**

Psalm 51:1 - **“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.”**

Psalm 103:4 - **“Who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies.”**

In Jesus’ day, mercy was not a virtue that was highly sought after. The Pharisees had developed a system based on external righteousness that reflected their proud and self-righteous hearts. Mercy, much like love, was only reserved for those who had shown the virtue to you.

John MacArthur - *“A popular Roman philosopher called mercy ‘the disease of the soul.’ It was the supreme sign of weakness. Mercy was a sign that you did not have what it takes to be a real man...The Romans glorified manly courage, strict justice, firm discipline, and above all, absolute power. They looked down on mercy, because mercy to them was weakness.”*

If one wants to know what mercy looks like, all one has to do is simply look at the life of Jesus.

- healed the sick
- befriended the outcast
- reached out to prostitutes, drunks, and tax collectors

Jesus wept with those who were hurting in life. He sympathized with those in need. With open arms and a compassionate heart, He drew people to Himself and forgave their sins.

Second Question: Am I merciful?

Don’t have the misconception that says mercy is an easygoing attitude that confirms people in their sin. Mercy does not mean that we gloss over sin and ignore it.

John 8:11 - **“Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.”**

Mercy takes sin seriously, but it shows others unconditional love and points people to forgiveness that is only found in Christ.

In this fifth Beatitude, Jesus teaches us that those who show mercy to others are shown mercy by God Himself.

There are two passages I want to point out where Jesus expands what it means to be merciful, Luke 10:25-37 & Matthew 18:21-35. Luke 10 records the Parable of the Good Samaritan, while Matthew 18 records the Parable of the 10,000 Talents.

From these parables, there are several principles that we learn about what it means to be merciful.

1. Mercy is COMPASSION that sees a need

Stated simply, mercy is meeting the needs of helpless people.

It is not simply feeling compassion--it is SHOWING compassion. Mercy is true sympathy that lends a helping hand. No where is this illustrated more beautifully than in the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

It is impossible to understand the meaning of this parable apart from its context:

Luke 10:25-29 - “And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said to him, What is written in the law? What is your reading of it? So he answered and said, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself. And He said to him, You have answered rightly; do this and you will live. But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, And who is my neighbor?”

This prompted Jesus to tell a story in order to illustrate what true love or mercy toward one's neighbor looks like.

Luke 10:30-35 - “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal,

brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.”

Jesus then makes application:

Luke 10:36-37 - “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among thieves? And he said, He who showed mercy on him. Then Jesus said to him, Go and do likewise.”

According to Jesus, this is what it truly means to be merciful and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

I see three types of people in the story:

- Those who take ADVANTAGE of others
- Those who are APATHETIC of others
- Those who come to the AID of others

The Samaritan is the only one who has true compassion, because upon seeing the need, he shows mercy.

2. Mercy is CARE that helps in an unselfish way

Upon seeing the need in the man’s life, the inward compassion of the Samaritan is demonstrated by his outward actions. In true sympathetic mercy, he comes to the aid of the man and cares for him in a way that is totally unselfish. Mercy, then, is compassion that sees a need and care that helps to meet that need.

Notice how the Samaritan shows mercy:

Luke 10:34 - “So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.”

Mercy is always willing to get its hands dirty. It is not love from long distance, but is active involvement.

Biblical love is always love in action. Notice the actions taken by the Samaritan in verse 34:

- went to him

- poured on oil and wine
- set him on his own animal
- brought him to an inn and took care of him

The Samaritan saw the value of just one soul, something that I am afraid we are lacking in our day.

Illustration - *“It is said that Saint Lawrence, the third-century treasurer of the early church’s resources, was brought before the authorities, who demanded that he hand over all the church’s treasures to the emperor. Lawrence compliantly asked for three days to gather the church’s treasures. He promised to then reveal to the Roman magistrate the extensive riches of the church. On the third day, Lawrence appeared and brought with him orphans, the poor, the lame, and the widows in distress. Pointing to them, he said, ‘These are the treasures of the church.’ And for that reply, he was sentenced to death.”*

The poor are mentioned in Scripture more than 150 times, and if we add to that figure the number of times it talks about caring for widows, orphans, and the needy, altogether there are more than 300 references that explain to us the responsibility we have to be merciful to those in need.

Deuteronomy 14:29 - **“And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.”**

Psalms 41:1-2 - **“Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive, and he will be blessed on the earth; You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies.”**

Mercy is being the hands and feet of Jesus to a world that desperately needs Him.

3. Mercy is COST that gives and expects nothing in return

Mercy is shown at great expense to oneself. It is a sacrificial act whereby one is willing to pay the price while expecting nothing in return.

Notice how the Samaritan bears the cost of showing mercy:

- The cost of his time

- The cost of his money
- The cost of his own energy and effort

Luke 10:35 - "On the next day when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you."

Mercy always focuses on what it can give, not on what it can receive.

The Samaritan's mercy is seen in the commitment that he makes to the man that no matter what further costs would be incurred, he would pay the price on the man's behalf.

This is an example of how Jesus Christ has shown mercy to us.

4. Mercy is CHARACTER that forgives wrongs received from others

Mercy is meeting the needs of helpless people, but there is also an element of mercy that forgives those who wrong us. Showing mercy and forgiving those who wrong us are inseparably linked together.

Matthew 18:21-22 - "Then Peter came to Him and said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times? Jesus said to him, I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

This question prompted Jesus to give the following parable:

Matthew 18:23-35 - "Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all. Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me what you owe! So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay you all. And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to

him, You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you? And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

Showing mercy is evidence that we have received mercy. Mercy experienced always results in mercy expressed.

Those who have truly experienced the mercy of God are those who express that mercy to others.

Mercy keeps no record of wrongs. Mercy and forgiveness go hand in hand. Mercy is not giving someone what they deserve.

Mercy is DEFINED as compassion on the undeserving. Mercy is DISPLAYED through intentional actions. Mercy is DESCRIPTIVE of Christ's followers

Mercy's Checklist (David Jeremiah, Signs of Life)

My words and actions evidence Christ's indwelling.

My faith is expressed through works.

I am a source of light in a dark world.

every moment of life is a living moment with God.

I am conscious of influencing those around me.

Those who witness my life see Jesus.

The imprint of my Christian life will remain for eternity.

I am willing to get my feet dusty in the streets of my community.

My walk supports my Christian talk.

Opportunities to share Christ are divine appointments.

The most important thing I can say is "Jesus loves you."

The needs of others are as important to me as my own.

I am a walking, living advertisement for the Lord.

Every day I create incriminating evidence to prove that I am a follower of Christ.

Hearing the Lord's direction begins with prayer.

I am open and listening for God's direction.

Unconditional surrender to God brings me spiritual victory.

My love for God is greater than my affection for anything in this desirable but deadly world.

My life is not plagued by worry because I am held tight in God's hands.

I am willing to be pliable in the hands of God.

I participate in personal ministry that impacts my community.

The world sees the heart of God through the work of my hands.

The major theme of my life is love.

My behavior reflects the teachings of Jesus.

Those who come in contact with me leave encouraged.

I courageously walk through the open doors God puts before me.

My life makes waves in the hearts of those around me.

Humility is the hallmark of my service.

I look for ways to generously give to others.

I give to others because God has given richly to me.

Nothing stands in my way of following Jesus.

God is free to use any area of my life to do His will.

I am a faithful steward of all God has given me.

I take time each day to mine God's Word.

There is always more I can do for God's kingdom.

Compassion is my passion.

I care...regardless.

Others will know I am a Christian by my love.

My love for others is not conditional on their meeting my standards.

I am a channel of God's mercy to others.