

Blessed Are The Merciful

The first four beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount are focused on our spiritual relationship with God. Those who are poor in spirit understand and believe that they are spiritual beggars. Spiritually they have nothing. They are in great need. They must come to God asking for spiritual help. They are sinners - spiritually bankrupt. As a result they mourn their sins and seek God's forgiveness. When Jesus said, "Blessed are the gentle for they shall inherit the earth," we discovered that the word for "gentle" had the idea of "yielding to another" just as an animal yields to his master. The animal is "gentle" in its conduct and attitude. It is no longer wild. It yields and submits. Those who submit to God as a tamed animal submits will inherit the earth. Jesus' fourth beatitude tells us that satisfaction comes when we chase after or pursue righteousness and not those things that we believe will satisfy us. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be satisfied." Most of us pursue pleasure and satisfaction in order to be happy. We have it wrong. A true spiritual relationship with God starts by realizing that we are spiritual beggars. In response, we will mourn our sinful behavior, submit to Him, and pursue holiness. Then and only then will the blessings of the beatitudes fall on us. The next series of beatitudes is the result of a correct spiritual relationship with God.

THE FIRST EVIDENCE. Jesus' fifth beatitude is the focus of this study. It is about mercy towards others. does not deserve his or her terrible situation.

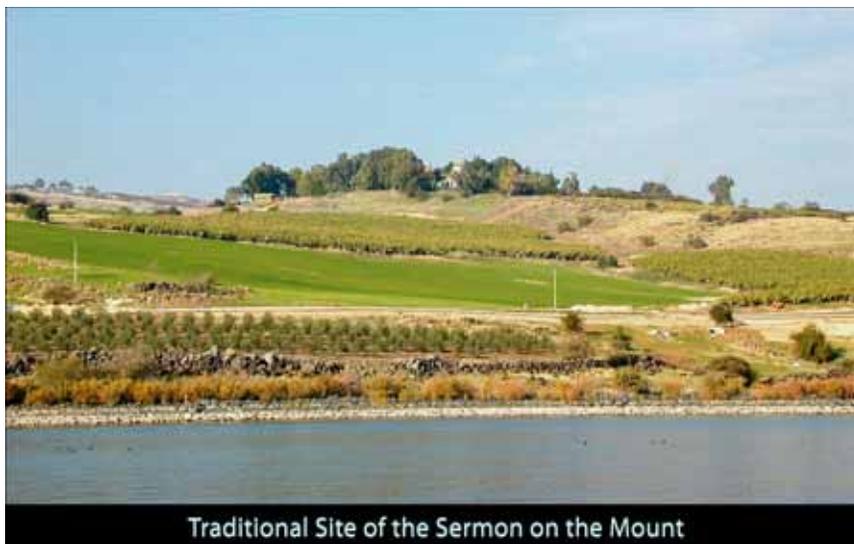
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. (NASB)
Matt. 5:7

The Greek words that Jesus used for "merciful" and "mercy" in this beatitude come from the root words ELEEMON and ELEOS. Both words have the idea of "a person who is emotionally moved by another's suffering and in some way shares in that person's suffering." They are emotionally moved by what they see and hear and in some sense suffer. Aristotle said that mercy is an emotional response for someone who

Mercy has its object in a being that does not deserve its misfortune.

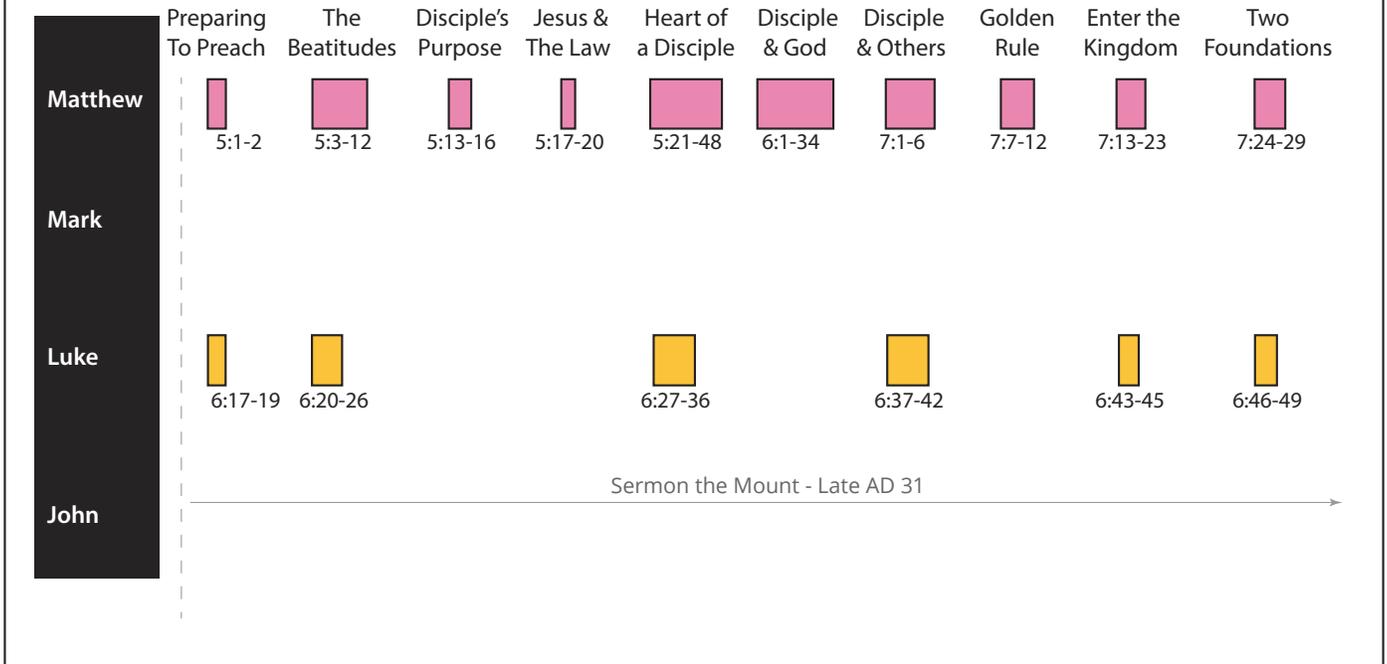
There is a commercial that is occasionally shown on television in which we see partially clothed children who have bloated stomachs, insects flying around their heads and lips, broken teeth, and disfigured features. The children are

hungry and in great need of food and someone to care for them. The commercial eventually asks for money to feed the little ones. If you or I feel compassion and respond with money or do something to help these little ones, then we have responded



Life and Heart of Jesus

Sermon on the Mount



with mercy. (It is important to respond through organizations that you believe will not misuse your funds.)

MERCY - PAST. The ancients did not consider mercy to be a virtue. Polybius said this,

Mercy is the morbid condition of souls that feel an excess of misery. (Pilo, Josephus 144).

Plutarch added,

Some philosophers criticize even mercy inspired by misfortunes, thinking it is good to help, but not to feel compassion. (De Tranquillitate Animmi 7)

In the next quote, which comes from Nero, we discover once again that the ancients considered mercy to be an inferior emotion. Nero believed that mercy was an emotion resulting in action that men and women should not display. Here is the statement that Nero made in A.D. 67 when he granted the Greeks their freedom.

On this day it is not pity but only goodwill that makes me generous towards you. (Spicq, Ceslas. Theological Lexicon of the New Testament. Hendrickson. 1994)

Roman history tells us that Roman fathers had the right and authority to murder a new born child. At its birth the father had the choice of allowing the child to live or die. According to Roman law, his actions were never subject to legal action or question. It was his decision. Mercy was missing in the Roman system of justice. John MacArthur makes this statement,

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 and especially a real Roman. (MacArthur, John. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-7. Moody Press, p.188.)

It is interesting to note that the Roman virtues of wisdom, justice, moderation, and courage did not include mercy.

Emotion of any kind for another person was not considered a virtue. Notice the key virtues that the Apostle Paul includes in his letter to Timothy.

To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. (NASB) 1 Tim. 1:2

The key godly virtues are grace, mercy and peace.

MERCY - NOW. Today, mercy is missing in our societies and cultures too! Many of them are murdering their children. We call it abortion. Approximately 1.4 million babies are aborted or murdered every year in the United States. Abortion is legal in fifty-four countries or sixty-one percent of the world population. Forty-six million abortions occur every year and 126,000 occur every day. Many women murder their babies due to inconvenience, economics, a desire for independence, ignorance, or for other reasons. There is no mercy!

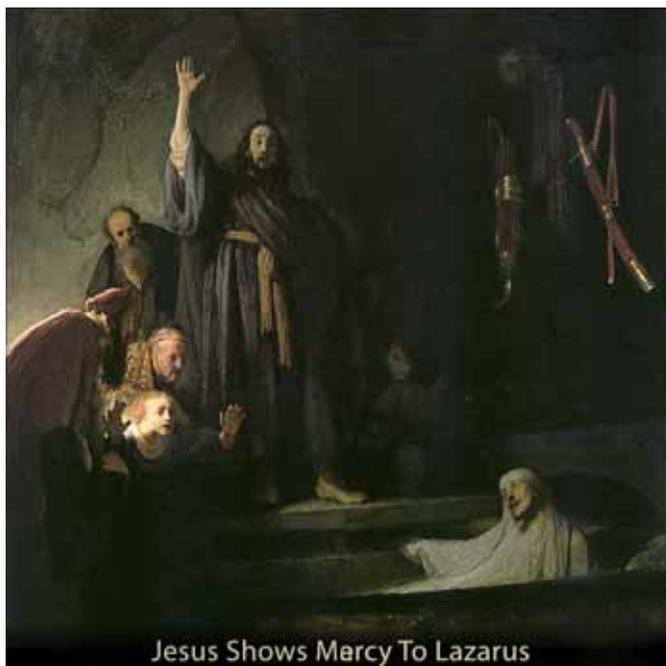
It is reported that a truck driver was once eating in a restaurant in Nebraska when three bikers who were wearing leather coats with chains came in and sat down next to him. One of the bikers reached over and took the truck driver's drink, the second biker took his french fries, and the third one grabbed his hamburger. After the bikers had taken all of his food, the truck driver stood up, walked over to the cash register, handed the waitress his bill, paid for his food, and left the restaurant. After the trucker driver had left, one of the bikers said, "He wasn't much of a man." The waitress responded, "I don't know about that, but he's not much of a truck driver. He just ran over three motorbikes." We laugh at the event because we respond with a sense of justice. But Jesus never said anything about justice in the beatitudes. The

beatitudes address issues that are not obvious or are ignored.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. (NASB) Matt. 5:7

Mercy is missing among us, and Jesus included it in a beatitude. Mercy is missing when babies are aborted. Mercy is missing when a society is lawsuit happy, when there is a lack of forgiveness, and violence, and racial and religious hatred abound. Mercy is missing in politics, the workplace, our homes, and churches. Many of us are like the Romans. Our virtues do not include mercy. It is missing!

EXAMPLE OF JESUS. So what is mercy? Jesus Himself and the New Testament give us our best illustration of mercy in action. The word mercy appears 11 times in the gospel of Matthew. Unlike the Greeks, Romans, and many today, God highly values mercy. Listen to Jesus in Matthew.



Jesus Shows Mercy To Lazarus

But when Jesus heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (NASB)

Matt. 9:12-13

God makes it clear that if you want to do something for Him, He prefers mercy. And that is exactly what Jesus gave during His ministry.

Mercy occurs four times on the lips of needy men and women. As you read the following verses, notice who is asking for mercy or who needs mercy.

As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed Him, crying

out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" (NASB) Matt. 9:27

And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." (NASB) Matt. 15:22

When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before Him and saying, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water." (NASB) Matt. 17:14-15

And two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" The crowd sternly told them to be quiet, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" (NASB) Matt. 20:30-31

Who asked for mercy? Who needed mercy, and who did not have mercy in their hearts? The answer is that those who were in need asked for mercy, and those who were physically well often did not give any. Mercy is something we cannot earn and these

sick men and women knew it. They did not deserve mercy and they knew it. So they pleaded for mercy. Mercy is not mercy if it is something you deserve. Mercy is mercy when a person must beg for it.

Jesus showed mercy to the blind men, the Canaanite woman, the sons of several men, an adulterous woman, lepers, a dead man, and a Roman soldier whose ear had been cut-off. None of these people could help themselves.

MERCY FORGIVES. In Matthew 18:23-35 Jesus gave us an illustration of mercy in action. We call it a parable. The parable is about a king who forgave the debt of one of his slaves. The slave was not able to pay his debt and pleaded for patience. The servant did not deserve to be forgiven. He could not pay his debt, but the king forgave the debt because he felt compassion for him. Then the slave left the king and demanded that one of his fellow slaves be put into prison

until that slave could pay-off the debt he owed the first slave. When the king heard about this, he summoned the slave.

Then summoning him, his lord said to him, "You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. "Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?" (NASB) Matt. 18:32-33

Did you see the word "mercy"? Jesus is sending us a message and it is this: mercy forgives another person who does not deserve to be forgiven.

MERCY HELPS THE NEEDY. The events surrounding the Good Samaritan are stunning. Jesus tells His disciples the story of this man and explains that he was beaten and robbed. Then a priest and a Levite passed by him and ignored his desperate need. These Jewish religious leaders were unwilling to help another man of their own race and religion. But a Samaritan, a group the Jews hated, stopped and helped the Jewish man. The Jews did not like the Samaritans, but this Samaritan did not care and helped the man and spent

some of his own money to care for him. Then Jesus concluded with this com-

*N*o one can earn mercy. No one deserves mercy - no one! Mercy is a compassionate gift.

ment,

"Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same." (NASB) Luke 10:36-37

Who showed mercy? The Good Samaritan did. Mercy forgives. Mercy helps those who hate. Mercy cares for those who do not deserve to be helped. No one can earn mercy. No one deserves mercy - no one! Mercy is a compassionate gift. Therefore, go and do the same.

MERCY IS NOT JUDGMENTAL. The Holy Spirit gives us another illustration of mercy in the book of James.

For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy;

mercy triumphs over judgment. (NASB) James 2:13

This verse does not mean that we are never to evaluate the life and conduct of another person. Otherwise, we could never determine who was a false teacher. We could never determine that we needed to help restore a sinning Christian. We could never select church leadership based on the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3. God is not telling us to withhold judgment. He is telling us that mercy does not have a judgmental spirit. Mercy is not always finding fault with others. Mercy is not being critical of others. Mercy does not gossip about others. Mercy forgives, protects, and shows compassion even when the person may “deserve” to be criticized.

MERCY SAVES SOULS. Maybe the most meaningful example of mercy is found in Titus 3.

But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit . . . so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (NASB) Titus 3:4-7

Here we are told that God has forgiven us through His mercy. We were not able to do anything to deserve His forgiveness. We were helpless just as the man who was robbed and beaten, and just as the slave who owed a debt he could not pay. We deserved to be criticized because of our sin, but He showed us mercy and forgave us everything.

1 Peter 1:3 says that God shows us mercy when He causes us to be born again. Romans 9:23-24 calls Christians “vessels of mercy,” and Ephesians 2:3-5 adds that the followers of Jesus have been made spiritually alive because He is mer-

ciful. We cannot, we are unable, and it is impossible for us to deserve God’s forgiveness. God is merciful toward every sinner who believes in Jesus and desires to follow Him. We deserve spiritual death - not forgiveness. We deserve an eternity without Him - not compassion and grace. We deserve punishment - not mercy.

CONCLUSION. Psychologist James Dobson reports seeing a sign on a Roman Catholic Convent in Southern California in the United States that read as follows,

**Absolutely No Trespassing.
Violators Will Be Prosecuted
To the Full Extent of the Law.**

It was signed, “The Sisters of Mercy.” When I read this, I just laughed. But there is a serious side to this illustration. Sometimes we display a sign by our actions and words that

says, “There is No Mercy Here!” and yet we say that we are full of mercy. Do you show mercy to others? Do you forgive?

Do you help the needy? Are you judgmental? Are you reaching out to others to tell them about God’s mercy?

The beatitude says,

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. (NASB) Matt. 5:7

Jesus did not say that our goal for showing mercy should be to receive mercy. Our purpose for showing mercy should be that we are emotionally moved for someone who has, but does not deserve a terrible situation. It is a spiritual virtue! Mercy is a mark of a follower of Jesus.

