

The Beatitudes
Matthew 5:1-16

The Character and Witness of the Citizens of the Kingdom

I. Compassion – Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy (5:7)

A. We need to be careful not to interpret this verse legalistically, as if to say God's mercy is essentially contingent on our own.

1. This would be to fall back into the Old Covenant mindset that says, "If I do this then God will do that."
2. To do so is misunderstand the nature of mercy
3. Mercy needs to be understood in the context of other truths.
4. Justice = getting what we deserve
Mercy = not getting all that we deserve
Grace = getting what we don't deserve
5. Grace and mercy are often used synonymously but there is a difference
6. Grace is a loving response when love is undeserved
7. Mercy is a loving response prompted by the misery of the one on whom the love is given.

B. Jesus says that we are to be merciful

1. We are to be compassionate toward the miserable and helpless and if we are not merciful we will not be shown mercy
2. The one who is not merciful is so unaware of his own state that he thinks he needs no mercy; he cannot picture himself as miserable and wretched, so how could God be merciful to him?
3. See Luke 18:10 for an example that we will discuss later
4. By contrast, the person whose experience reflects these Beatitudes is aware of his spiritual bankruptcy (5:3), mourns over it (5:4), submits to the power of God because of it (5:5), hungers to conform to His will (5:6); thus God is merciful toward the wretched because he recognizes himself to be wretched; thus, in being merciful to others, he is also shown mercy.

C. It is the same with forgiveness

1. We are to forgive others because we have been forgiven (Eph. 4:32; Col.3: 13).
2. Simultaneously, we recognize our constant need for more forgiveness and become forgiving as a result.
3. We forgive because we have been forgiven; we forgive because we need forgiveness
4. In the same way, we are merciful, because we recognize that we need mercy
5. I have heard that an alcoholic who does not admit that he/she is an alcoholic, hates all other alcoholic
6. Similarly, it is true that a sinner who won't face up to his/her own sin hates all other sinners
7. But, the person who has recognized his own helplessness and wretched before God is grateful for whatever mercy is shown him and learns to be merciful to others

D. Some questions for us to ask ourselves

1. Am I merciful or supercilious to the wretched?
2. Am I gentle or hard-nosed toward the downtrodden?
3. Am I helpful or callous toward the backslidden?
4. Am I compassionate or callous toward the fallen?

E. Progression of Scripture

1. Titus 2:15-3:7 – a picture of God's mercy
2. Psalm 103:1-14 – rejoicing in the awareness of God's mercy
3. Numbers 21:4-9 – not removal of serpent but turned it into healing and life
4. John 3:14-15 – likened to serpent; view things in light of the cross
5. Matthew 18:21-35 – love is motivation to forgive; asked for time not forgiveness; if we don't forgive, we haven't touched God's mercy in us
6. Acts 7:54-60 – give what God has given us and relate to those around us with His mercy
7. Hebrews 12:14-15 – bitterness can destroy; peace prospers through mercy
8. Lamentations 3:19-25 – His mercy is fresh every day
9. 1 Peter 2:21-24 – mercy in most basic form is the willingness to bear another's burden; mercy is the ministry of interruptions

F. Summary:

Showing mercy is the expression of the fact that in reality we have touched the very heart of God. Now in all of our relationships with people we give to them what God has given of Himself to us, rather than giving them continually the reaction they might stimulate within us. We do not deal with them according to their sins against us, but according to the mercy God has given us in His Son. As the world sees this in our relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ, they will know that we are genuine as Believers.