

Kingdom Attitudes

PART 5 • MATTHEW 5:7 • Blessed Are the Merciful

Baxter T. Exum (#1656)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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It is good to be together this morning! If you are visiting with us today, we are glad that you are here, we would invite you to fill out a visitor card online, and we would also give the reminder that the elements for the Lord's Supper are available on the table in the entryway.

We are here this morning to worship God and to preach the good news that Jesus died on the cross, he was buried, and he was raised up on the third day. We obey that good news by turning to God in obedient faith, turning away from sin, demonstrating our trust in God through our obedience to his command to be baptized, immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins.

The first example this morning comes to us from Polishing the Pulpit, a series of lectures I really hated to miss this year. I've attended for a number of years, but I'll be headed back to the Denver for their lectures in in September. This week, though, they had just over 5100 people come together to learn more about God and his church in the Smoky Mountains. This comes to us from Rob Whitacre, who says that "In early April 2022, Justin and Leah Hopkins met Christine. She was a Catholic, searching for answers. They taught her the truth and she was baptized on May 3. This week Christine took her husband to Polishing the Pulpit. Justin asked if we would help lead him to Christ. We used the study booklet, Does It Matter. Sam just made the decision to be baptized. Praise God! Please welcome him." They went from the convention center to the church a few miles away in Sevierville, where Sam joined his wife as a brother in Christ. Great news from Tennessee this week!

And then, this next one comes to us through Aleksandra Brewer, a graphic designer for World Video Bible School. She says that,

Last night after going through the last book of the Back to the Bible Series, we welcomed Lisa "Scooter" Pearce into the family of God. She found the Buda Kyle congregation by seeing an ad from one of Don Blackwell's videos talking about the Church of Christ. Interested, she found a video of one of Ryan's Sermons on YouTube and made the decision afterward to attend worship that very Sunday. Turns out she's lived only 5 minutes away from the building and passed by it everyday! We then set up a Bible study with her last Friday and continued to do so over the weekend. And after searching for Truth for 20+ years, we welcomed her into the Church.

Great news out of both Texas and Tennessee this week! And we share this to illustrate what obeying the gospel really is. If you are interested in learning more, please get in touch with me or one of the other shepherds of the church here. Our contact information is on the front of the bulletin each week, which is located on the wall right inside the front door.

This morning, let's be turning once again to Matthew 5 as we return to our series of lessons on the "Beatitudes" or "Kingdom Attitudes," as found in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus, of course, has just started preaching that **"the kingdom of heaven is at hand,"** and starting in Matthew 5 he almost seems to imitate Moses in the giving of the Ten Commandments. Only instead of starting with, **"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me,"** and so on, Jesus announces his new Law with a series of eight statements where he uses a word that we translate into English as **"blessed"** or **"happy."** This week, I noticed someone describing this concept as "the smile of God on the life of our souls as we live as citizens in his kingdom." I love that! We are studying the smile of God on our souls this morning! So, we've been working through these...

- **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."**
- **"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."**
- **"Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth."** And then last week...
- **"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."**

Today, we continue with the fifth beatitude (in Matthew 5:7), where Jesus says, **"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."** Once again, very easy to memorize, **"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."** And, as our custom has been, I'd like for us to note the blessing itself, and then we will close by looking at the reward.

I. **First of all, then, let's focus in on the BLESSING itself, as Jesus says, "BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL."**

I need to confess something to you this morning: When I first started thinking about this series, I thought that it might be a bit easier than most, because we have these short phrases that might be easier to research. Not so! I have been overwhelmed over the past few weeks, and especially with today's lesson. With most lessons, I might consult two or three hundred resources. With these? Six or seven hundred or more! This was surprising to me. How do you start to get a grip on a word like **"mercy"**? You don't! The concept is too big! The entire Bible is mercy – from Genesis all the way through to Revelation!

- In Deuteronomy 4:31, Moses says, **"For the LORD your God is a compassionate [or merciful] God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them."**
- In Psalm 145:8, David says that **"The LORD is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and great in lovingkindness."**
- In Matthew 23:23, Jesus says, **"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others."**

- In Luke 6:35-36, Jesus says, ***“But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”***
- In Ephesians 2:4-6, Paul says, ***“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).”***
- In Titus 3:5-6, Paul says that ***“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, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.”***
- In Hebrews 2:17, referring to Jesus, the author says, ***“Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.”***
- In James 5:11, James says that we ***“...have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.”***

Now that we’ve looked at some of the references, we should define the word. According to one scholar [Thayer], the word translated in Matthew 5:7 as ***“mercy”*** is defined as “good will towards the miserable and afflicted, joined with a desire to relieve them.” It’s the idea of seeing a need, being moved by that need, and then doing something to help, an outward demonstration of sympathy. And I would also note that the way Jesus uses this word in Matthew 5:7, he refers to those who ***“are merciful,”*** indicating that this isn’t just an occasional action here and there, but he’s referring to those who ***“are merciful,”*** this is who they are, on a regular basis. They see a need, they feel it, and then they do something about it.

Nothing illustrates this better than Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan. In Luke 10, a lawyer puts Jesus to the test and wants to know what he needs to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus turns it back on the man, ***“What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?”*** And the lawyer (in typical lawyer fashion), cites the Law, ***“YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”*** Jesus tells the man that he has answered correctly, and says, ***“Do this and you will live.”*** The lawyer (also in typical lawyer fashion) tries to justify himself and says to Jesus, ***“And who is my neighbor?”*** Jesus, then, tells a story (starting in Luke 10:30),

³⁰ ... ***“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. ³¹ And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, ³⁴ and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.’ ³⁶ Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers’ hands?” ³⁷ And he said, “The one who showed mercy toward him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do the same.”***

Most of us are at least somewhat familiar with the story, but today I hope we notice exactly what the Samaritan does, ***“...when he SAW [the man by the side of the road], he FELT COMPASSION,”*** and then he acted on that

compassion by bandaging his wounds, applying oil and wine on them, taking him to an inn and paying for his continued care. And when Jesus asks the lawyer, ***“Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers’ hands,”*** the lawyer says, ***“The one who showed MERCY toward him.”*** This is the same word we have in Matthew 5:7! Mercy, then, is seeing a need, feeling compassion about the situation, and then doing something about it. “Happy are those who get involved,” we might say. And this, by the way, is what Jesus does over and over again, throughout the gospel accounts: He sees, he feels, he acts.

- In Matthew 14:14, ***“When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick.”***
- In Mark 6:34, ***“When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.”***
- In Luke 7:13-15, ***“When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her,”*** and he continued by touching the coffin and raising her son from the dead.

Note what all of these have in common: Jesus sees a need, he feels compassion, and then he does something to meet the need. This is mercy! We open our eyes to the suffering we see around us, we feel it, and then we do something about it. And all three of these can be a challenge. We don’t always “see” the suffering around us, do we? We are somewhat insulated from some of the terrible things we see going on around us. Jesus, though, teaches us to open our eyes. If I see that my neighbor’s grass is a foot tall and hasn’t been mowed for a month or more, do I notice that? And when I do, am I more likely to complain to the city, or am I more likely to go knock on the door to see if she is okay? Do I “feel” something about that situation, do I try to put myself in her shoes (feeling concern for what might be happening in that home), or am I more concerned about how that lawn might affect my own property value? And then, am I willing to do something about it? The same goes for poverty in all of its various forms. Do I “see” the homeless children in this neighborhood, and do I feel compassion for what it means to go to school without crayons, and do I choose to do something about it, or do I pass by on the other side? The same goes for the homeless guy in the Home Depot parking lot. The same goes for our own members who might be lonely or recovering from surgery or facing financial challenges. Do I “see” what they are facing? And if not, how do I open my eyes? Don’t we see a value in calling and checking in on each other through the week? If I don’t “see,” then I will never feel compassion, and if I don’t feel compassion, I will never act in a merciful way. So, we see, we feel, and then we do.

A week or so ago, I shared something on social media that absolutely jumped out at me as the perfect example of what we’re talking about this morning. Back in December 2017, Jimmy, a 22-year-old college student in Texas (originally from Haiti) was visiting his mom in Haiti and as they were out on a walk one night, he finds a four-month-old baby abandoned in a trash can, naked and completely covered in ants. Jimmy scooped up the kiddo, taking him home to his mom, where they washed him, fed him milk, and took him in for medical help. Police couldn’t find the birth parents, so a judge asked Jimmy whether he’d be willing to become a legal guardian for the child. He agreed, and now, five years later, he is making plans to adopt. Jimmy says, “I was already behind on my university fees and my family has always struggled to make ends meet. But I didn’t have a dad growing up, and this poor child was facing a lifetime of instability and uncertainty.” He says, “Sometimes you don’t have to know what to do, you just have to be ready, to do it.” Here is a young man who saw a need, he felt compassion, and then he completely interrupted his life in every possible way to care for this child. ***“Blessed are the merciful,”*** Jesus says.

II. This leads us to the REWARD, **“Blessed are the merciful, FOR THEY SHALL RECEIVE MERCY.”**

And once again, like the others, this isn't the idea of “karma” (you get what's coming to you), but this is a reward, a blessing from God. And this is a concept we find throughout scripture. In Proverbs 19:17, for example, ***“One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, and He will repay him for his good deed.”*** We have a similar statement in Proverbs 28:27, ***“He who gives to the poor will never want, but he who shuts his eyes will have many curses.”*** We have both sides of this in the story Jesus tells in Matthew 18, where a master forgives his servant of a debt of millions (in today's currency), but then this servant immediately turns around and tortures another servant who owes him the equivalent of just a few hundred or maybe a thousand dollars. When the master hears of this, he revokes his offer of forgiveness and turns the unmerciful servant over to the torturers, until he has repaid everything. And Jesus says (in Matthew 18:35), ***“My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.”*** Those who show mercy, then, shall receive mercy. Those who refuse mercy, though, will not be shown mercy. As James points out in James 2:13, ***“For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.”***

God's mercy, of course, was demonstrated on the cross. At Calvary (as we are about to sing as we prepare for the Lord's Supper), “mercy there was great and grace was free, pardon there was multiplied to me.” And in response, we are merciful to others. Just as God saw us, and had compassion on us, and gave his only Son for the sins of the world, so also we look out for others, we feel compassion, and then we act on that compassion. And when we do, ***“we shall receive mercy,”*** to the extent that we have shown mercy to others.

Conclusion:

As we close our thoughts on this passage, it seems we have two big ideas, two challenges this week: First of all, we have the reminder to be merciful. Be the Good Samaritan. Be Jesus. And to do this, we start by opening our eyes (we pay attention to what's going on around us, we spend time with fellow Christians). And once we see, we have compassion, we have feelings for what we see, we allow the poverty and suffering and injustice we see around us to move us. And then, we act on what we see and feel – we have mercy; that is, we do something. We feed. We help. We visit. We pick up the baby. We adopt. We do whatever we can do. So, the first challenge is that we be merciful.

I would suggest that a second challenge this week is to be thankful that God has been merciful to us. As God's people, our prayer is the prayer of the tax collector, ***“God, be merciful to me, the sinner!”*** In just a moment, we plan on singing the first of several songs, praising God for his mercy, and hopefully we can head out this morning with a renewed appreciation for the fact that we have been forgiven. God has been merciful to us.

Before we continue with the Lord's Supper, let's close our study by going to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

Thank you for Jesus, and thank you for being merciful to us. We pray that you would open our eyes to the needs all around us. We pray that we would never harden our hearts, but we pray for compassion. Give us opportunities to step in and help in a way that honors you. We pray that we would have the courage to show mercy and to be known as merciful people.

Thank you, Father, for hearing our prayer. We come to you in the name of Jesus, our merciful High Priest. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com