

# Mercy

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[ 0 : 00 ] Jesus of Nazareth came into the towns and cities of first century Palestine as he comes into the towns and cities of this century with what the writers of the New Testament call the gospel of God.

Jesus shows up with God's good news for our broken world. It is time, he says, it is time for the long-awaited kingdom of God to come near.

Come near, very near, among you and in you. God has come near. Life of heaven is invading the earth.

Now when this gospel, when this good news gets hold of an individual, a community, a city or a nation, something happens.

A new kind of humanity begins to emerge. A healed humanity. A restored humanity. A rewired humanity.

[ 1 : 05 ] The kind of humanity Jesus is describing in the sayings we call the Beatitudes. Matthew chapter 5 verses 3 through 10.

Hear Jesus speak. 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 meek. For they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

For they will be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful. For they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart. For they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers. For they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are the people of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[ 2 : 09 ] Blessed are you. When people insult you. And persecute you. And say all manner of evil against you falsely on account of me.

Rejoice and be glad. For great is your reward in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Lord Jesus.

How grateful we are again. That you enabled Matthew the tax collector. To remember what you said. And then to write down your words.

Will you now in your mercy and grace. Help us understand what you are saying to us. And more than understand. Will you help us actually live the reality of these words.

This we pray in your name. Amen. Amen. As we continue our series in Jesus Beatitudes. I invite you today to look at the fifth of the eight Beatitudes.

[ 3 : 10 ] Blessed are the merciful. For they will be shown mercy. From my perspective. This fifth Beatitude is at once.

The least paradoxical. Paradoxical. And the most paradoxical of them all. I hear the fifth Beatitude. And my heart says. Of course.

Of course. The Savior of the world. Congratulates. Mercy. I hear the other Beatitudes. And my heart says. Really? Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the persecuted. Really? But when I hear Jesus declare. Right on. Are the merciful.

I say. Yes. This makes perfect sense. This is the least paradoxical. Of all the Beatitudes. But then.

[ 4 : 10 ] When Jesus begins. When Jesus begins. To unfold. The nature of mercy. I soon think. Oh my goodness. This quality.

Is more. Upside down. Than all of the others. To practice. Mercy. Is to practice. A paradoxical way.

Of being. In the world. I want to ask. Three questions. Of this fifth Beatitude. Question one. Why is merciful.

A mark. Of those. Who have been grabbed. By Jesus. And his good news. Why is merciful. A symptom. Of the time. Being fulfilled.

And the kingdom. Of God. Coming near. Question two. What is this mercy. Jesus blesses. Can we get some practical handles.

[ 5 : 05 ] On this kingdom quality. And question three. What does Jesus mean by. They shall be shown mercy. Or they shall obtain mercy.

Is Jesus saying. That we merit. Mercy. By being merciful. I think Jesus is clearly saying.

That mercy. Mercy. Begets mercy. Mercy. The more we experience. Mercy. The more we extend. Mercy to others. But is Jesus also saying. That unless we extend.

Mercy to others. We will not receive. Mercy from God. Throughout this series. I've noted. That the words. There. Or they.

Are in the emphatic. Position. They come at the beginning. Of the sentence. For emphasis. To say. Theirs. And only theirs. They. And only they. Is Jesus saying.

[ 6 : 02 ] That only the merciful. Obtain mercy. And that if I withhold. Mercy from others. God will. Uphold. Withhold. Mercy.

From me. Oh mercy. First question then. Why is. Merciful. A character.

Trait. Of those. Grabbed. By Jesus. And his gospel. I can think of. At least. Three reasons. First. Jesus. Who now.

Announces. The gospel. Is himself. Merciful. The exact word. Jesus uses. In this fifth beatitude. Is used in only one other place. In the new testament.

In the book of Hebrews. Where after affirming. The full humanity. Of the son of God. The author writes. Hebrews 2.17. For this reason. He had to be made.

[ 6 : 55 ] Like his brothers and sisters. In every way. In order that he might become. A merciful. And faithful. High priest. What did the people.

Of Palestine. Experience. When they first. Met. Jesus. Of Nazareth. Why were they drawn. To him. Unlike them.

He was holy. Yet they. Flocked. To him. Why. Because. Though he was. Holy. He was. Unexpectedly.

Merciful. And thus. The cry. We hear over. And over again. In the gospels. Lord. Have mercy. On me. This cry. Seemed to have been. Drawn.

Out of their hearts. By the realization. Often. Unconscious. That they were in the presence. Of mercy. Himself. No one.

[ 7 : 48 ] Can encounter. Jesus. Enter into. Relationship. With him. Begin. To share. His life. Without. Beginning. To take on. Something. Of his mercy.

Second. Not only. Is he. Merciful. Mercy. Is one of his. Greatest. Concerns. It turns out. That mercy. Is at the top.

Of his agenda. The Pharisees. The self-righteous. Ones. Criticized. Jesus. For eating. With tax collectors. And sinners. And Jesus. Responded. It is not.

The healthy. Who need a doctor. But the sick. But go. And learn. What this means. I desire. Mercy. Not sacrifice. The Pharisees. The rule. Keepers.

The rule. Enforcers. Criticized. Jesus. For. Picking. Grain. On the Sabbath. Jesus. Responds. If you had known. What these words mean. I desire. Mercy.

[ 8 : 41 ] Not sacrifice. You would have not. Condemned. The innocent. During Holy Week. Jesus. Speaks. A series. Of woes. Against the Pharisees. Woe.

To you. Teachers. Of the law. And Pharisees. You hypocrites. By the way. That shows that. Mercy. Is still able. To speak hard truth. You hypocrites. You give a tenth.

Of your spices. Mint. And dill. And cumin. But you have neglected. The more important matters. Of the law. Justice. Mercy. And faithfulness. Hang around. Jesus. Long enough.

And we cannot. But. Begin to take on. His bent. Toward mercy. The third reason. Why mercy. Is a mark. Of those. Grabbed. By the gospel.

Is that the kingdom. Breaking into the world. In Jesus. Is a kingdom. Of mercy. That is why. The good news. Is good news. God's new world.

[ 9 : 36 ] Order. Has come near. And it is a new. Order. Of mercy. At a dinner. Dinner party. One of the Pharisees. Says to Jesus. Blessed is the one.

Who will break bread. In the kingdom of God. And then. Luke tells us. That tax collectors. And sinners. Began to flock. To Jesus. They just came. To Jesus. In droves.

And. Jesus. Welcomed them. Into his fellowship. The Pharisees. Are horrified. By this. They grumble. And say. This man. Welcomes sinners. And eats with them.

It's said. In great. Disgust. And anger. It's in that context. That Jesus. Then tells. His most famous. Parable. The parable. Of the father. And his two sons.

The younger son. Blows it all. He's afraid. To approach the father. He doesn't want to come home. But he finally decides. To do so. And Jesus says. That as the son. Comes home.

[ 10 : 31 ] The father sees him. A long way off. He's filled with compassion. He runs to his son. He throws his arms. Around him. And kisses him. In that parable. Jesus is showing us.

That the kingdom. Of God. Is the kingdom. Of mercy. That the God. Of the kingdom. Of God. Is the father. Of mercy. And when this kingdom. Breaks into our hearts.

We cannot. But help. To become merciful. Question two. What is this mercy. Jesus embodies.

And blesses. Now as I hear Jesus. I hear him. Come at this. Both negatively. And positively. As it were.

He defines mercy. Negatively. And positively. Negatively. Mercy. Mercy is not giving. Someone. What they deserve. Positively.

[ 11 : 25 ] Mercy. Mercy. Is giving someone. What they do not deserve. Negatively. Mercy is not giving. Someone what they deserve. Positively.

Mercy. Is giving someone. What they do not deserve. Deserve. Not. Giving. What they deserve. Is this not the way the word mercy is used in a court of law?

The plaintiff cries out to the judge, have mercy on me. Do not give me what I deserve. And the gospel, according to Jesus of Nazareth, is just that.

God, the judge, does not give us what we deserve. Amazing. The essential character of the living God demands that sin be punished.

Indeed, that sin be annihilated. God is holy. Holiness by its very nature cannot stand the presence of unholy sin. Holiness by its very nature recoils at all that is unholy.

[ 12 : 31 ] God's very being by nature seeks to consume sin in the fire of purity. It would be perfectly just of God, of God the judge, to wipe us out.

But what does God, the Holy One, do? At the cross, the Holy One expresses his indignation against sin, but does it against himself.

In Jesus, the Holy One becomes one of us. But not only one of us. He becomes us. He not only becomes human.

He becomes the representative human. Pontius Pilate puts over the cross of Jesus, this is the king of the Jews. And many scholars argue that had God written the sign over the cross, it would have said, here is the whole sinful human race.

As the Apostle Paul daringly puts it, he who knew no sin became sin on our behalf. Mercy. God himself takes upon himself our sin, and then God himself takes upon himself the awful judgment for sin.

[ 13 : 39 ] The Holy One does not give me what I deserve, and he does not give you what you deserve. In light of what God has done at the cross, we can see that being merciful does not mean ignoring the gravity of sin.

It does not mean saying, oh, it doesn't matter. It does matter. The cross says it matters terribly.

Being merciful simply means not giving a person what they justly deserve.

And, positively, mercy means going further and extending undeserved blessing. Mercy.

The cross says it matters. New Testament scholar Robert Guller suggested in the Bible this positive expression of mercy points in two directions. Mercy as kindness shown to those in need, thus the phrase acts of mercy, and mercy as pardon according to those who are in debt.

Mercy is extending kindness to the helpless and extending pardon to the guilty, to those who have debt. And the one who announces this fifth beatitude exemplifies both of these positive directions of mercy.

[ 15 : 05 ] Jesus extends mercy as kindness to us who are in need, and Jesus expends mercy as pardon to us who are in the wrong and owe a debt we cannot pay.

We are drowning. Jesus jumps in the water to rescue us. We were crushed beneath a horrible debt, and Jesus canceled it.

Let's dig a little bit deeper here. Jesus develops for us mercy as kindness toward those in need in his parable of the Good Samaritan, recorded in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 10.

You know the story. Jesus says that a man is traveling this treacherous road which winds its way down from Jerusalem into the desert of Jericho. I've been on that road.

It's very dangerous. Twist and turns. Along the way, some robbers overtake this man. They strip him, they beat him, and they leave him for half dead. A certain priest happens by, but when he sees the man lying in the ditch, he does not stop to help.

[16:15] A certain Levi happens by, but when he sees the man, he does not stop to help. But, says Jesus, a certain Samaritan happened by, and, says Jesus, he felt compassion.

He felt mercy. The Samaritan pours wine and oil into the wounds and wraps them with a bandage. The Samaritan then puts the man on his own beast, brings him to an inn, and takes care of him, says Jesus.

Because this man has other concerns, other things on his own agenda, to which he needs to attend, the next morning, he gives the innkeeper the equivalent of two days' wages, promising then to come back later on and pay for all the care of this man.

Mercy is kindness toward those in need. Now notice, that the Samaritan did not need to know why the man was in need.

He extended kindness, regardless of the reason why the man got beaten. We assume this beaten man was innocent. But it's likely he was not.

[17:26] Maybe he had offered, offended someone, and this beating was an act of revenge. Or maybe he had been involved in some kind of illegal transaction and he did not fulfill his obligation and he was being liquidated.

Or maybe he had bad-mouthed his assailants, taunting them into this brutal act. The point is, the good Samaritan, as he came to be known, did not need to know why this man was suffering.

For it did not matter. It would not have changed his behavior. Mercy extends kindness to those in need, regardless of the reason for the need.

How many of us withhold kindness when we discover that the one who is in need has caused his or her own problem?

Yes, some people who are poor have gambled away their income. And yes, some people who are on the streets lack initiative.

[18:28] The merciful see the need and, regardless of the reason, look for ways to bring help. Some people who have the AIDS virus contracted it innocently, as children, for example, or through tainted blood transfusions.

Others who have contracted the AIDS virus were not innocent victims. They could have protected themselves by not using dirty needles when they got their fix or by not violating God's way of human sexuality.

So, ask the merciful. The merciful see the need and seek ways to bring help. Notice also that the good Samaritan risked in order to extend kindness.

Mercy always involves risk. The risk of loss of time, the loss of wealth, the loss of health, the loss of reputation. The priest in Jesus' parable knew that he would risk ritual purity to be kind.

The Levite knew that he might be the target of bandits. The Samaritan pushes through those fears.

The Samaritan knew that he could be beaten himself. You see, in that culture, the beaten man's friends might have come around the bend, seen the Samaritan near the victim, and they would have, without asking questions, assume that the Samaritan was the one who did the beating and taken revenge on him.

[20:01] Mercy risks for the sake of the other. And is not Jesus himself a perfect picture of the good Samaritan?

He risks everything to extend kindness to us. He especially risks the divine reputation. He loses face with all the religious folk.

This man welcomes sinners and eats with them. It's meant as a put-down, as a slam on Jesus. So be it. Mercy does not care about the loss of name.

Mercy as kindness toward those who are in need. Then Jesus develops mercy as pardon for those in debt in the parable of the unmerciful slave recorded in Matthew chapter 18.

Jesus disciple Peter asked, How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Seven times? Peter thinks he's being very magnanimous there in offering to forgive seven times.

[ 21 : 02 ] And Jesus says to him, I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Forty-nine times. And then Jesus tells the story of a king who wanted to settle accounts with his slaves.

A slave who owns the king ten million dollars begs for mercy. Have patience with me, I will pay it all back. Right, how?

And says Jesus, the Lord felt compassion, felt mercy, released the slave, canceling all the debt. Ten million dollars erased from the ledger. The forgiven slave then goes out and finds a fellow slave who owes him five bucks.

Maybe not even that much. The forgiven slave demands payment. The slave who owes the five dollars says the same thing this other slave had said to the Lord, have patience with me and I will repay it.

[ 22 : 05 ] But the forgiven slave will not even listen to the cry and turns his fellow slave into prison. All the other slaves are horrified by this. They are deeply grieved, says Jesus.

They report to their Lord what happened and then the Lord summons this unforgiving forgiven slave. I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me.

Should you not also have had mercy on the slave who entreated you? And the Lord puts this unmerciful forgiven slave into prison. And Jesus ends the story.

so shall my heavenly father also do to you if each of you does not forgive his brother or sister from the heart. Mercy cancels debts.

And is not the Lord of this parable a picture of our Lord to whom we owe a horrendous debt? Dale Bruder in his commentary on Matthew points out that the rabbis of Jesus' day taught that every sin created a certain deposit of debt before God.

[ 23 : 16 ] And the accumulation of this debt formed a kind of separating wall between God and us. On the other hand, every righteous deed contributed to the believers accumulation of assets before God and constituted a kind of bridge.

Sins were demerits that separated, riped it, and the corporate name for these separating demerits was debts. And that's the word Jesus uses in this parable.

And with it, he announces the gospel. The Lord of Lords cancels debts. When we come before him, confess that we owe a horrendous debt, and confess that we cannot pay the debt, he cancels it.

Mercy. this is what Jesus gives us the freedom to pray in the Lord's prayer. Our Father who art in heaven, cancel our debts as we cancel the debts of others.

And when we pray it, the Father does it. The Father cancels our debts. The Father pardons us. He removes the debts and the separating wall the debts creates, and does so at a horrendous price, at the price of the incarnation and crucifixion.

[ 24 : 39 ] As a Chinese pastor used to say, he came to pay a debt he did not owe, because we owed a debt we could not pay. So what then is this mercy Jesus embodies and blesses?

It's his mercy toward us. Not giving others what they justly deserve, giving others what they do not deserve, kindness, and pardon.

We come then to the third question. When Jesus says, blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy, is he saying that only those who extend mercy receive mercy from God?

From everything else Jesus says, especially the first beatitude, blessed are the poor in spirit, we know that Jesus is not saying, he's not saying, before God will extend mercy to us, we must extend mercy to others.

He's not saying that. The gospel declares that God's mercy is first. God's mercy breaks in, enabling us to know and experience mercy. Then is Jesus saying that if we withhold mercy from others, God will withhold further mercy from us?

[ 25 : 59 ] after giving us the Lord's Prayer, Jesus says, if you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive others sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. Is Jesus saying that if we do not cancel the debts of others, God will not cancel our debts?

I've wrestled with this for years. And here's where I am at this point in the journey. I think Jesus is saying this. If we are asking for mercy while refusing mercy for someone else, we are not in that moment actually asking for mercy.

I'll say that again. If we are asking God for mercy while refusing to extend mercy to someone else, we are in that moment anyway, not asking for mercy.

Oh, we are using the words all right. We are saying, Lord have mercy, Father cancel my debts, but we are not in that moment actually living the reality of our words.

[ 27 : 19 ] In that moment when I refuse mercy for another, I am not grasping what I'm asking God to give me. To refuse to pardon another is to refuse to cancel the other's debt.

How can I genuinely be asking God to cancel my debt while refusing to cancel another's debt? in that moment, in that moment when I'm refusing to give another person mercy, I am implicitly saying that that person must pay first before they get mercy.

And if I go into God's presence in that frame of mind, it means that in spite of my words, I either think I have paid my debt or I can pay my debt.

which means in that moment, I'm not asking for mercy, I'm seeking to justify myself. If I ask for mercy from God, but I'm not willing to extend it to others, I'm not really asking for mercy.

I've lost touch with who I am before the living God. For you see, the merciful whom Jesus blesses are also poor in spirit.

[ 28 : 45 ] They know their own spiritual poverty and their need for mercy. The merciful whom Jesus blesses are also those who mourn. They know their own brokenness and twistedness and grieve over their own sin.

The merciful whom Jesus blesses are also meek. They know they have no other hope in life but the mercy of God. And the merciful whom Jesus blesses also hunger and thirst for right relatedness.

They know they have not arrived, but want to be with all their heart, the person God wants them to be. You can see then that it is in that moment when we cannot extend mercy, and sometimes those are painful moments because sometimes we've been so deeply hurt and violated.

It is in those moments when we feel we cannot extend mercy that we are in most need of mercy.

And here's the good news, the gospel.

When in that moment we cry out, Lord have mercy, he does. He comes near, very near.

[ 29 : 58 ] Mercy himself comes near and enables us to do for others what he's done for us.

blessed, in sync with the heart of the universe, in sync with the heart of the Holy One, are those who practice mercy, who do not give those who sin against them what they deserve, but give those who sin against them what they do not deserve, kindness and pardon, for they will experience mercy upon mercy upon mercy.

Let us pray. Where do you need mercy this morning?

say to the Lord of Lords, Lord, have mercy on me.

Who in your life today needs your mercy? Pray, Lord, give me what I need to live your paradoxical way.

Give me mercy to be merciful.