

"Blessed Are The Merciful" Matthew 5:7

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[0 : 00] If you want to be looking at our text this morning, it's in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 5, verse 7. Matthew 5, 7.

Do you ever feel like your life is full of toil and hardship? You've been looking at these descriptions of Jesus' blessings, right?

His descriptions of the good life, of what flourishing in the kingdom of God means. And maybe as you've been listening, you've been thinking, the good life, hey, I'd settle for the okay life, right?

I've got bills to pay. I've got people who need my help. I don't have much time to think about flourishing, right? I'm just trying to make it in life. Who is the time to think of and desire such things? I mean, another way of asking a question, do you ever feel like the promises of the kingdom, as you read God's word, it's like a vague, distant rumor from your experience in this life?

[1 : 10] You know, we think things like, you know, everyone else surely is having like this magical, spiritual experience, like the fullness of the kingdom.

And here I am, and I'm just trying to get on with life. I saw a BBC news segment some years ago where an interviewer went and visited the Ivory Coast to talk to cocoa bean farmers.

The Ivory Coast is the number one exporter of cocoa beans in the entire world, out of which you make chocolate. And the interviewer, he goes and he's talking to a group of farmers and he asks them if they know what these cocoa beans that they're harvesting and exporting are used for.

That's fascinating because these cocoa bean farmers, they say, no, I don't know. We've heard that it's food. We've heard that it's good. Not much time to think about that.

We've got to get back to our hard farming. No idea. It's like this distant, vague rumor. Do you ever feel in your life like that cocoa bean farmer?

[2 : 21] You do all this stuff. You work hard. You hear these whispers of something better, these hints of a good life, and yet it feels like you never actually get to taste it. It remains far away.

You're just left there with this life, with this lot that you've been dealt, wondering if there's something more. And no matter where you are in life, sometimes you just desperately want somebody to show you mercy.

Just a taste of it. Just a taste of mercy. And short of that, what ends up happening, we just get on with life, right? There's responsibilities. Like I said earlier, there's people we're responsible to.

There's jobs that we have. We just have to kind of get on with life. Well, into a world that labors and struggles to taste, in steps a king.

And in talking about the rule of his kingdom, he says these things that seem outlandish. They seem upside down, like a vague, distant rumor that can't actually be true.

[3 : 28] He speaks of a way of being in the world that is actually going to lead to life. And you actually, this life that it's going to lead to, you actually get to taste it now, in part.

This new way of being human. With that in mind, today's beatitude is this. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Before we look at that more, let's pray for the preaching of God's word. Lord, would you have mercy on us?

Would you show us your ways and your goodness and the depth of your mercy? So that we, as we hear your word, might love mercy.

Might desire mercy. Might seek to show mercy. We ask this in the merciful name of Jesus. Amen. Same outline as we've been doing for all of the Beatitudes.

[4 : 35] It's two questions. First off, what does it mean to be merciful? And then secondly, what is the promise attached to that blessing? What does it mean to be merciful? And then what is the promise?

First question, what does it mean to be merciful? And as we've asked that question, there's two parts to it. It's helpful sometimes first to say, this is what it doesn't mean. And then saying, this is what it does mean.

So what does it not mean to be merciful? First off, to be merciful, it does not simply mean to be nice. Right?

You should, yes, of course, you should treat people with kindness and niceness. But mercy, mercy actually demands more than that. You're not merciful if you're just polite. Okay?

Maybe you're good at kindness. Maybe you're the middle child. And so you're just the peacemaker naturally in your family. You don't like conflict. And so you just want to avoid conflict. And so you try desperately to be kind to one another.

[5 : 32] And really what ends up happening is you never really get around to mercy. And my point isn't to flip that around and be a jerk to everyone and try to seek out conflict. I'm just pointing out that to be merciful is not just to smile and be polite.

You know, it's not like you're only... This is the fullness of mercy is in the Starbucks drive-thru. I pay for the person behind me. Has anybody ever had that happen to them before? I did. And then I was like, am I supposed to pay for the person behind me?

Am I a cruel person if I don't do that? I don't remember if I paid or not. So I'm not going to tell you. But mercy, it demands action. Whether it's internal action or externally or both, right?

Mercy is more than just niceness. Secondly, merciful... To be merciful, it doesn't mean that we're never to call out sin. It doesn't mean that we're supposed to pretend like sin doesn't exist.

Sometimes the most merciful thing we can do is to point out sin in somebody's life. Do you remember that Matthew 18 part? If your brother's in sin, this is what you do. You don't just leave them in it, right? You go to them.

[6 : 38] Later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, Judge not lest you be judged. And a lot of times people misinterpret that. And it's basically saying, well, I'm never supposed to make a judgment, a pronouncement on what is actually sin in this world.

That's not what Jesus means. We're not supposed to be neutral towards evil. But we're not supposed to call what is evil good. Rather, what he's saying in that is you don't get to take the place of God in pride over people, right?

And you have to understand that with that judgment, as you make judgments and pronouncements, it's that judgment back on you. And so right after that, he uses the analogy. He says, you know, before you go and take the speck out of your brother's eye, what are you supposed to do?

There's a big old honking log stuck in your eye. So we're supposed to humbly, you don't go and just try to deal with other people's things like there's no sin in your own life. But, he says, in order that you may go and deal with the speck in your brother's eye.

It's not ignoring the specks in other people's eye. It's realizing our own need of mercy, humbling ourselves, realizing our own sin. Okay? So being merciful doesn't mean that you can't talk about sin, but that we deal and reckon with the laws of sin in our own eyes.

[7 : 55] Also, mercy does not mean that there are no consequences for sin in this life. You can forgive the person who stole your car and they can still go to jail.

And the reason we need to mention this sometimes is because there can be abuse towards mercy and forgiveness. People who are abusive, people in places of power, can be abusive. And to show mercy doesn't mean that you cover up somebody else's abuse.

Okay? Whether it's physical, spiritual, emotional. Lastly, mercy is not easy, cheap forgiveness. Because there is no such thing as easy, cheap forgiveness.

We'll see you in a moment. To forgive others is part of what it means to show mercy. Mercy is more than forgiveness, but forgiveness is this great expression of mercy.

And in order to do that, we have to realize the cost of mercy. It can't be, there's always a cost attached to it. Alright? So, for instance, I heard this illustration some years ago, and it's my go-to one.

[9 : 02] Imagine, you invite me to your home, you open the door, and clumsy old me waddles on through, and I immediately slam into your precious lamp.

I hit it, and it falls, hits the ground, and smashes into a hundred pieces. And I feel terrible. And so I say, oh my goodness, will you please forgive me? And you say, well, yes, of course, because you're a gracious, merciful host.

And then I offer, and I say, can I please buy you a new lamp? And again, you're so full of mercy, you say to clumsy old me, no, no, no. That's okay.

Don't worry about it. Well, what happened? I didn't have to pay the cost of the lamp. Did the cost just vanish into the ether? No.

You absorbed the cost, right? You absorbed the cost of it. If you're going to go get a new lamp, you're going to have to pay the money. You're short the money, the lamp that has happened.

[10:01] That's what happens when we forgive and we show mercy. The cost is paid by the one who shows mercy and forgiveness. There's this theologian named Peter Kreef, and he writes about it like this.

He says, I cannot really make you \$100 richer without making myself \$100 poorer. This is the reason why Christ had to die, why God could not simply say, forget it.

Instead, he said, forgive it, and meant that if we did not pay it, he had himself. Mercy is not cheap forgiveness, right? Because true forgiveness, it's never cheap.

There's always a cost attached to it. We need to realize that. And here's, by way of application, let me just say, if you find yourself struggling to forgive, maybe particular people in your life, you're constantly in your mind, whether you're around them or not, you're bringing up old slights and sins that they've done towards you, might I suggest to you that you haven't actually wrestled for the full cost of mercy?

Maybe you need to go and actually talk to that person and reconcile. Or if you already have, to realize that part of forgiving is actually absorbing that debt, that cost, and showing mercy.

[11:13] So, all those things, they clarify what mercy is not, what it doesn't entail to be merciful. It's not mere niceness. It's not pretending like there's nothing wrong. It doesn't erase earthly consequences for sin.

It's not cheap forgiveness. So, positively then, what does it mean to be merciful? What does it mean to be merciful? A lot of times, if you're going through the Old Testament, it's talking about God who is merciful.

What accompanies the description of him being merciful is him being compassionate. You can be nice and remain indifferent.

But mercy comes with compassion. If you go through the Gospels, there's this guy named Jesus who's God in the flesh. And what ends up happening is before he acts and shows mercy and brings healing, you know what happens so many times?

You know what the Gospel writers point out? He saw them. I'm like, well, of course. That's why he has to see them, right?

[12:19] Well, no. It's making a specific point. That Jesus looks. He has the eyes of mercy. He's looking to show mercy. He sees people. And then, what does it say? He has compassion on them.

He sees them. He sees the situation they're in. He has compassion towards them. And it leads to him showing mercy. Mercy notices. Mercy entails that, you know, we don't just stick our face in this all the time.

Mercy, to see people, is to see the situations that they're in, to notice it. Even if it is their own fault, it sees them. And your heart moves towards them in compassion.

It takes the time to hear the heartache in people's voices. And Jesus doesn't just see people. He's moved to help them. Right? Matthew 9, he sees the crowds and he has compassion on them because they are like sheep without a shepherd.

So he moves towards them. A New Testament commentator, D.A. Carson, he writes, Mercy is a loving response prompted by the misery and helplessness of the one on whom the love is to be showered.

[13:33] You know, being merciful, it says, I'm not just going to avoid hurting you, but I am also going to help you. One pastor puts it this way.

He says, Mercy is costly compassion from those who have power. Mercy is costly compassion from those who have power. Now, I know you're probably thinking when you say, from those who have power, you're like, hold on a second.

Like, what are you talking about, only the rich and the influential get to show mercy upon the poor scum of the earth? No, no. We all have different types of power and agency, right?

The cry throughout the Old Testament of the people of God is, Have mercy on me, O God, when they're in need. The cry in the New Testament, there's this guy who's blind named Bartimaeus, and

he just plops himself down on the road because he knows Jesus is going to be going by, and he cries out, Have mercy on me, Jesus.

It's a cry from those in need to the one who has power to help, okay? Remember, we were talking about mercy in terms of forgiveness earlier. The merciful choose to forgive rather than to enact vengeance.

[14 : 42] If you've been wronged, you have the power, this is what I mean by that, you have the power to forgive or to withhold forgiveness, right? So it's not about your power and might, how much influence you have in the world, right?

But even if the rich CEO of the company, if they harm somebody else lower in the company, the power that the person who's been wronged has is whether to show mercy and forgiveness or to withhold it, right?

And I know there's a lot of power dynamics going on and things like that, and the person who has more standing in society, of course, should be understanding of that so they're not demanding forgiveness.

And mercy, you can't demand mercy. It goes against the definition of it. But mercy, it's costly compassion if you have the agency to show it. It's power to forgive.

It's power to lend a helping hand. This is key then. Mercy displays itself then in the care of the needy and the poor, the widow and the orphan.

[15 : 42] It's a forgiveness that happens in our relationships, but then it's also, it's a compassion that gets enacted on those in need. Mercy leads you to use your agency for costly compassion towards those in need.

The famous parable, one of the most famous parables that Jesus tells, the parable of the good Samaritan. Remember what happens in that? There's this guy, he's headed from Jerusalem to Jericho, and so he's probably a Jewish man, and he's walking along, and a bunch of guys jump him and beat him and strip him naked and steal all his things and leave him for dead in the road.

He is desperately in need of mercy. And along walks a priest. Oh, oh, oh, yikes, go to the other side. I don't want to be ceremonially unclean.

You know, I don't, maybe these robbers are still around. I should probably just skedaddle. And then a Levite comes along, one of the ones who would be helping the priests in worship, and he does the same thing. These were the guys who were actually supposed to lead the people of God in showing compassion and mercy to those in need.

And they hightail it. And then who comes by? A Samaritan. One who you would say is naturally an enemy of the Jews.

[16 : 59] And he makes himself vulnerable, right? Whether the robbers are still there or not, he goes and he gets off of his horse, and he goes and he takes care of this man. And he spends time with him.

He notices him. That's what it says in Luke 10, 33. The Samaritan saw the man lying in the road and had compassion on him. Remember what we said about Jesus? He sees the people.

He has compassion on them. And then he moves towards them in mercy to help them. That's what this good Samaritan does. He binds this man up and he takes him to an inn. And he leaves him there and he pays for him to stay.

And he says to the innkeeper, even if he incurs more charges, just charge it to my account. And I'll come back and I will pay it. Mercy is costly.

It's costly compassion. Oh, that we would be a people of mercy. A people who desire to show costly compassion.

[17 : 59] If that happened, if that was the heartbeat of what we did in worship towards God, then leads towards compassion, costly compassion to one another and to this world, there is nothing in this world that can replicate that.

Nothing at all. What is God like? Moses asks that question in Exodus. And God says in Exodus 34, 6. This is what I'm like.

The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. God is merciful.

He is full of mercy. This old Puritan pastor named Thomas Watson, and he writes this. He says, God is more inclined to mercy than wrath.

Mercy is his darling attribute, which he most delights in. The bee naturally gives honey. It stings only when it's provoked, just so God does not punish until he can bear no longer.

[19 : 04] To be merciful is to be like God. And so the person who receives mercy becomes then an active participant in extending God's mercy into the world.

We not only participate by receiving the gift of mercy, but also by extending the gift of mercy. Do you want it? Do you want mercy?

Do you want to see it extended to you and through you? To see it take shape in your life and your relationships and your church and your community? Some commentators, they point out that after the last beatitude, there's kind of a turning point in Jesus' beatitudes.

The last one, if you remember from last time, is blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. And then a lot of commentators point out that these next three are then expressions of righteousness.

Mercy. Purity of heart. Peacemaking. Right? Are you hungry for mercy? Do you desire mercy?

[20 : 09] Can you taste it? Or is it like a distant rumor that you haven't seen actually come to fruition in your life? And you're wondering if there's mercy for you.

And you're wondering what it looks like to show mercy to others. Blessed are the merciful. Not the callous. Not the stingy. Not those who look out for number one. Not those to those who are too busy just trying to avoid sin.

And blessed are the merciful. So to be merciful, it's not just being nice or pretending nothing's wrong or shallow fake forgiveness. It's costly compassion that moves towards others.

It's using one's power, no matter how much the world might say you have or don't have, to bring healing and love and care. Second question then, that's what mercy is.

What's the promise? It's simply this. To the merciful, mercy will flow. The promise and the reward for those who are blessedly doling out mercy is mercy.

[21 : 17] So, here's the question then. Is Jesus saying here, is this saying that it's really the only the merciful who are going to receive mercy from God?

Is it only the merciful who are going to receive mercy from God? Let me try to be as succinct and to the point as I can.

Yes. Yes. It doesn't mean the opposite of what it says. It's to the merciful that mercy will be shown. Now, and maybe that brings up for you, you're trying to think in your mind like, hey, hold on, I've been in a reformed church for a long time. Does this contradict our doctrine that we're not saved by our good works, right?

But by faith in Christ. It seems like if I'm doing mercy in order to get mercy, is that me performing good works in order to get salvation? Well, no, you can't earn mercy, right?

[22 : 15] That's a definition of mercy is not something that you deserve. It's compassion shown towards you, towards the undeserving. It's not something that you perform and then receive, right?

So what is Jesus saying? Right? Right? You'll know a tree by its fruit. To those who've experienced the mercy of God, who've realized their need for the mercy of God, who've realized their hopelessness except for the very mercy of God, mercy will be produced in them.

It's the surest sign that you've received the mercy of God is that you show it to others. Forgiven people, forgive. People who've found mercy and cling to mercy show it to others.

It's what we prayed earlier in the service. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. It's not a meritorious thing. It's not you earning your salvation. It is showing that you are actually alive in Christ.

That you've actually encountered the mercy of God. It's like what we read earlier in Matthew 18. Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant, right? One guy, he's got this gajillion dollar debt.

[23 : 31] That's the Nate Taylor standard version right there. Gajillion dollar debt. And he goes before this king and the king forgives him. And his immediate response is to go grab the neck and throttle this guy who owes him a tenner.

And the king calls him back in. And he says to him, you wicked servant. I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?

And in anger, his master delivered him to the jailers until he should pay all his debt. So also, Jesus says, my heavenly father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart. James 2.13 For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy.

We need to let those words have the full effect on us. That we'd actually listen to those. To the person who is unwilling to show any sort of mercy. How can you be assured that mercy is yours? It's not meritorious. Right? And like, yeah, sure, there's like the thief on the cross and there's deathbed conversions. And not all this time in this person's life to show a bunch of mercy. Again, because it's not meritorious.

[24 : 47] Right? That can happen. God can save out of his sheer mercy. But can I recommend to you that you don't make that your conversion story? I'm just going to be like the thief on the cross.

I'm going to wait until the last possible minute. The Bible has a lot to say about that. It says, you fool, how do you know your life's not going to be taken tonight in your sleep? Those who've received mercy and then extend mercy.

You know what they want more of? Mercy. That's the theme of their song. It's the joy of their heart. The boast of their tongue.

The mercy of God. Having mercy, we can't help but express it. And in expressing it, we get more mercy. It's this call and response of mercy.

And to it, there is no end. Niceness will not save the world. Mercy will. And so we ask for mercy. And we extend mercy.

[25 : 47] And we receive mercy. To the glory of God. Let me apply this in two ways before moving towards a conclusion then. First thing.

We need to believe that we need mercy. I mean, can you, without qualifications, without defensiveness, simply admit, I need mercy.

There is this novel. It's written around the 1950s by a Southern American novelist named Flannery O'Connor. It's called *Wise Blood*. And without going into the whole story, the main character's name is Hazel Motes.

And he is an atheist. Doesn't want to believe in God. But he creates his own religion. And it's got this great line describing him. It says this about Hazel Motes.

It says, There was already a deep black wordless conviction in him that the way to avoid Jesus was to avoid sin. He wanted to avoid sin in order to avoid Jesus.

[26 : 54] Now, if you're a Christian, should you be seeking to avoid sin? Uh-huh. Yeah. Yeah. Read your Bible. Right? We should be seeking to put to death sin, to run away from sin, fleeing idolatry.

Right? But you see what's going on in that? What's it saying about him? The way to avoid Jesus was to avoid sin. It's saying this. That there is one way to say, there are two, excuse me, there are two ways to say that I don't need mercy.

To go, it doesn't matter what I do. I'm going to indulge myself. I'm going to live however I want. I live for pleasure. I'm going to go do everything. God, I don't care what you say. I am going to go do that. I don't need mercy. And so, I sent you this person goes and lives the life of the younger brother in the parable of the prodigal sons. But also, you can try to avoid Jesus and your need of mercy by carefully managing your life.

And I'm going to obey perfectly. Not out of a response, out of love, but in order to avoid actually saying, I need mercy.

[27 : 56] So, in believing our need of mercy, we need to realize that we need mercy not just for our wickedness, but also for our damnable self-righteousness.

Because both of them say, I don't need mercy from God. It's like food stuck in your teeth. We can see it so much more easily in other people than in ourselves. So, what we need to do then is to pray that God would reveal to us our need of mercy and trust that he actually desires to show you mercy. And desiring to show you mercy, he will show you your need of mercy. And that will be the sweetest thing for your soul. Next application, though, we don't just need to believe that we need mercy. We need to believe that God actually delights to show us mercy. Some of us, you don't need any convincing. That there's problems in your life.

In fact, you kind of feel like every single problem in the world can be traced back to you. And it's hard for you to actually believe that God really loves you.

[29 : 05] And he isn't just like, excuse me. He isn't just like contractually obligated to show you mercy. Oh, like the father didn't want to show you mercy, but Jesus died for you.

Oh, I guess I have to show it. No. That he actually longs to. That he loves to. He wants to show you his very heart. That God, description of Jesus in the gospel, he has seen you.

And his heart is full of compassion. And that moves him towards showing mercy to you. Mercy is not like a pie where there's only so many slices to be given away.

God's mercy is abundant and deep. You can't exhaust it. There is an ocean of mercy at the foot of the cross. So let's jump in.

Excuse me. Let's go back to the cocoa bean farmers. After I try to get this tickle out of my throat. You know, the interviewer, he's just asked these farmers, do they know what all these cocoa beans that they harvest and export, what they're used for?

[30 : 17] They're like, we don't know, I don't know, maybe food or something like that. And he says, he pulls out of his pocket this massive bar of chocolate. And he takes it to this one farmer. And he says, here, try it.

And the guy tastes it. He breaks off a little piece. And he goes, I didn't know that cocoa was so yummy. And immediately what he then does is he runs to all his other farmer friends.

And he gathers them around. He says, come close. Come close. Here, touch it. Break off a little square. Taste it. This is what white people do with our cocoa beans. Can you believe it?

And one of them takes a bite and he's like, no wonder they love it and think it's so delicious. This is amazing. And they're all standing there and they're all just enjoying the beautiful taste of chocolate. And they're just like, oh man. And all of a sudden the first farmer who took the first bite, he stands up and he addresses the rest of these cocoa bean farmers. And he says to them, brothers, my fellow cocoa bean farmers, we know our labor is hard.

[31 : 24] Our work is hard in harvesting these cocoa beans. But now, now we have actually tasted of the harvest. We have tasted of its goodness.

So what should you do? And he says, continue, my fellow cocoa bean farmers, continue and labor. For those of you who have come and met the mercy of God in the cross of Jesus Christ, who have come to the end of themselves and said, I need mercy.

You can actually come and you can taste. This blessing of mercy is not a far off distant rumor. It is true. It has come to you in the person of Jesus.

So partake of it. This is why we took the Lord's Supper last week. Because we touch and we feel and we take in the mercy of God. We taste of its sweetness.

And we don't just stop there. But then that mercy fills us and we seek to extend it. So continue, my fellow cocoa bean farmers. Continue those who have been shown mercy and extending mercy.

[32 : 32] Because blessed are the merciful. Because they will be shown mercy. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together. Father, we give you thanks for the mercy that you show to us.

That while we were yet sinners, Christ saw us and had compassion and died for us.

That was the most costly compassion ever. That that is how you would use your might and your glory. To display mercy.

So Father, fill us. Fill us with this gospel. Help us never to turn away from it. But to press into it more deeply. To always desire to be hungry and thirsty.

Not just for righteousness, but the righteousness of mercy. And Lord, we pray that as we give it away, that we would believe that it would then be given back to us. That as we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, the rest will be added.

[33 : 36] That as we extend mercy, mercy is ours. Gobs and gobs of it, Lord. Convince our hearts of this. All for your glory, for our good, and the good of our neighbors.

We pray all this in Christ's name. Amen.