

Happiness Through Showing Mercy

Matthew 5:7

Pastor John Miller

We come in our study of The Secret to Happiness to our fifth Beatitude, found in Matthew 5:7. Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

The word "blessed," as we have discovered, means "O how happy." It has the idea of the approval or the favor of God. Nothing is more important than living a life that blesses or pleases God. I want my attitudes, my actions and my words to all bring joy to the heart of God. I want the applause of heaven, and so should you. These Beatitudes describe the kind of attitudes that God's people should have that bring the applause of heaven.

Jesus spoke these words to a world that didn't admire the subject of mercy. In the Roman world of Jesus' day, they admired justice, judgment, power and the strength of the Roman Empire, but they did not admire mercy. In the Greek empire, philosophers actually taught that mercy was a disease of the soul. So it was the reality of Christ coming into the world and the Christian influence that brought a world that was more merciful, more compassionate and more kind. We would live in a really cruel world today if it weren't for the influence of Christ and the mercy of God. It's the Judeo-Christian influence that brings compassion and mercy into our world. But it's much the same today as it was then as we look around our world: it's merciless. There are people who are cruel, unkind, thoughtless and they lack compassion.

But Jesus makes it clear that all those who live in the kingdom of heaven are marked by mercy. As I pointed out in the first Beatitude in verse 3, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," and the last Beatitude in verse 10, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," all the Beatitudes between these two bookends describe what it means to live in the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God. How are those marked who live in the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God? They are marked by mercy. Jesus said that we will be people of mercy.

There is a progression in the Beatitudes that leads to being merciful. The first Beatitude in verse 3 says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." It starts with seeing myself spiritually bankrupt. It means that there is nothing in me to commend myself to God. I don't have anything to bring to God. We sing:

"Nothing in my hand I bring

Simply to His Cross I cling."

So we are spiritually poor.

Now seeing myself as poor spiritually, I mourn, verse 4. That's the second Beatitude: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." So I am poor, I mourn over my sinful condition and then it leads to meekness.

Meekness is power under control. “I’m empty, I’m destitute, I mourn and I come broken and humble, and I submit to God, to His Word and to His hand upon my life.”

Then notice Beatitude number four, in verse 6: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.” I’m empty, I’m mourning, I’m meek and then I hunger for God to fill me with His righteousness. So these Beatitudes are progressive.

Now we see a turn in the Beatitudes. Beginning in verse 7—“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy”—we turn outward toward others. The first four Beatitudes are inward: I’m poor, I mourn, I’m meek, I hunger for righteousness. God then fills me with His righteousness. Now, and only now, am I in a position to be a dispenser and a giver of mercy and compassion to others. If it is anyone who should be merciful, it is those who have these Beatitudes in their life.

So the first four Beatitudes are inward, and the next three are outward. I’m able to show mercy toward others, I am pure in heart and I become a peacemaker. Then the last Beatitude is that I am persecuted by the world.

You want to know why I am persecuted? Because the world doesn’t value these things. God’s kingdom is contrary to man’s kingdom. When we live out these Beatitudes, we are going to be swimming upstream, against our culture. We’re going to be fighting against the culture around us, so we’re going to be persecuted. But Jesus said, in verse 10, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

So now we go from the inward to the outward in my relationship to others. I should be showing mercy.

I want to ask three questions. The first question about verse 7 is: “What does it mean to be merciful?” If Jesus said, “Blessed...”—or “O how happy”—“...are the merciful,” we need to understand what it means to be merciful. It’s a very vast subject, and the word “mercy” is very difficult to translate or to define. The basic idea of the Greek word translated “merciful” is “to have mercy; to give help to the wretched” and “relieve the miserable.” That’s a broad, general definition of mercy. It’s the idea of compassion in action. So mercy is compassion for people in need. When someone is hurting, when someone is going through a difficulty, when someone needs help, mercy reaches out to be that arm of God extended. Jesus is saying, “Blessed...”—or “happy”—“...are we when we are compassionate.” Some translations have “gentle toward the miserable and the helpless.”

The word “merciful” is also closely related to the word “sympathetic” or “to show sympathy.” It means “to experience or to suffer with.” If I’m sympathizing, then I am feeling your pain, I am feeling your sorrow, I’m feeling your hurt, I’m feeling your loneliness, I’m feeling your trouble. The world actually has the connotation of “getting in the skin of” or “feeling something.” We use the expression “walk in someone’s shoes.” So that’s what it means to be merciful: to feel and to literally get in their skin, to be compassionate and understanding about their situation and their

plight and what they're going through.

The Bible teaches that God is merciful. In 2 Corinthians 1:3—one of my favorite verses—Paul said, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.”

Just a little footnote here: when the Bible uses the word “Father,” quite often it has the idea of “generator” or “source.” I’m the father of four children, so I’m the father or generator or source of these four children. So when He’s the Father of these mercies, it means that mercy comes from God; it’s generated out from God. So if it weren’t for God, there would be no mercy, but God is a God of mercy.

The second question I want to ask about this verse is: “What are the marks of the merciful?” What does a merciful person look like? What does a merciful person do? We’ve learned that mercy is compassion in action. Number one, mercy is compassion for others. What does mercy look like? It looks like compassion. Pity, however, is more the emotion. Compassion is the action. Someone said, “Pity weeps and walks away. Compassion comes to help and stay.” It’s one thing to have pity, but it’s another thing to have compassion. Compassion rolls up its sleeves, helps out and ministers to those in need.

In Luke 10, Jesus gave the parable of the Good Samaritan. It was about a man who took a journey from Jerusalem down to Jericho. It was a dangerous road in those days. As often would happen, he was jumped by some bandits and thieves. He was mugged, beat up, robbed and was left laying along the roadside. Jesus was telling the story and said that the first person to come by and see this poor, pitiful man was a priest. He was a very religious, Jewish man. But he actually walked by on the other side of the road and didn’t help this poor man. The next person to come along and see this man in his pitiful plight was a Levite. He also was a Jew and didn’t help the man; he passed on the other side of the road, as well. Then the third man to come by was a Samaritan.

You ask, “Well, what’s the big deal about him being a Samaritan?” Jews hated Samaritans. Now it’s inferred or believed in the story—and I think rightly so—that the man who was robbed was Jewish. And the priest and the Levite were Jewish. But now along comes a Samaritan. That would be like being mugged in L.A., you’re lying in the street and need someone to help you and a Hells Angel comes along. You think, Can’t it be a pastor or a minister or a clergyman?! The clergyman walked right by him, but the Hells Angel, the good Samaritan, helped him.

But these Samaritans were despised by the Jews and were looked down upon. The racial prejudice between the Jews and the Samaritans—and it went both ways; the Samaritans also hated the Jews—was greater than anything we’ve ever known in history. It was much worse than the prejudice we have in our country today.

So the minute the listeners to this story Jesus was telling heard this, they would get angry.

They would think, What's this Samaritan going to do? Is he going to kick him while he's down? The Bible says the Samaritan got off his donkey and poured oil on the poor man's wounds, bandaged him up and put him on his own donkey. He took the man to an inn in the city of Jericho and paid the innkeeper. He said, "I'll be gone for a couple of days, but this will cover his stay. If I owe you anything more, when I come back I'll pay you. Please take care of this man."

Then Jesus turned to the crowd as He was telling this story, and He sees they are upset, because now the Samaritan is the hero of the story. Jesus asked them, "Which of these three men is his neighbor?"

By the way, Jesus told this story in response to a man asking Him who his neighbor was. Jesus said, "Love God and love your neighbor as yourself." The man then asked Him, "Well, who is my neighbor?" So Jesus then told this story of the good Samaritan.

So Jesus turned to the crowd and asked, "Which of the three—priest, Levite or Samaritan—is neighbor to the man who was wounded?" The crowd had to admit—they didn't want to—that it was "he who had shown mercy." They used that same word—"mercy."

You know what Jesus meant when He said, "Blessed are the merciful"? He's talking about the good Samaritan. You want to be blessed? You want to be happy? Show compassion. Show mercy. Help others in need. All the time in His earthly ministry, Jesus was showing mercy and compassion. We want to be like Him.

Here's another story of mercy. Jesus gave sight to blind Bartimaeus, Luke 18. It is one of my favorite stories. Blind Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, sat by the roadside begging. When the crowd was going by, he asked, "What's happening?" because he couldn't see. He was told, "It's Jesus of Nazareth!" So blind Bartimaeus yelled, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!" Then he yelled it out even louder. Those in the crowd around him said, "Shh! Be quiet, blind man! You're a nuisance. You're interrupting." Then Bartimaeus yelled even louder than before.

I love that picture. One of my favorite paintings from Bible stories is Bartimaeus crying out in his rags with blinded eyes, "Have mercy on me!" Jesus heard his cry and stopped. He said, "Tell him to come to me," so they went to Bartimaeus and said, "This is your lucky day, dude!" (That's not in the text; I just put "dude" in there.) "He's calling for you!" So Bartimaeus was brought to Jesus, and Jesus said, "What do you want Me to do?" Bartimaeus said, "Lord, my eyes—that I might see!" And Jesus reached out and healed his blinded eyes. His eyes were opened and he could see. Jesus showed him mercy. He helped Bartimaeus in his pitiful plight.

In another story, Jesus raised the widow's son of Nain, in Luke 7. She was a widow who only had one son, and he died. He probably was in his teenage years. In those days they didn't have social programs to provide for widows, so she would be very destitute. This one boy was her only hope of livelihood, and now he's dead. As the procession was coming out of the city, the Bible says that the Lord saw her and He had "compassion" or "mercy" on her. Jesus said to

her, "Do not weep." He went over, stopped the procession and raised the widow's son from the dead and gave him back to his mother.

Jesus also had compassion on the hungry crowd, in Matthew 15. He fed them because He was moved with compassion for the crowd. So when we see people who are blind and hurt and hungry, we need to be moved with compassion.

So here is test number two: Do I show mercy and compassion toward those who are miserable and distressed? Toward those who are in need? In 1 John 3:17, it says, "Whoever has this world's goods and sees his brother in need and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

I know this is hard to digest, but if you don't show mercy, then it's questionable whether you're a Christian. How can you be a Christian and not show mercy? God has shown you mercy. The attitude is that God has been merciful to us, so we should be dispensers of mercy toward others. We were poor, miserable, wretched, naked and blind, and God saved us, healed us and restored us. Now we need to show mercy and compassion to others.

The second mark of the merciful is that they are kind in their judgments of others. So they are compassionate to the needs of others, and mercy is kind in its judgment of others. In Matthew 7:1-5, a passage so often misinterpreted, opens with Jesus saying, "Judge not, that you be not judged." I can't tell you how many times that when I share Scripture with people showing them their behavior is wrong, they say, "Don't judge me, bro!" (That's my hippie interpretation.)

"But wait a minute. I'm not judging you, bro. I'm just telling you that what the Bible says is that what you're doing is wrong. Your adulterous affair, your infidelity to your wife, is sin."

"Well, don't judge me, man."

"I'm not judging you. I'm just telling you what the Bible says." So it doesn't mean that we can't make a distinction between right and wrong.

So what does it mean? Jesus is saying, when He says, "Judge not, that you be not judged," that we are not to have a critical, censorious, fault-finding attitude. That's what the word "judge" there means. All you do is criticize, nit-pick, fault-find and you're critical. Sadly, some Christians have this. They're like little Gospel Gestapos; they go around busting people. They're "sin-sniffers" and "flesh-finders." God's police. We just develop this kind of critical, fault-finding attitude. There's no compassion or mercy, even over someone who has fallen into sin.

One of the things that has struck me about this Beatitude is that even someone who falls and has sin I'm to have compassion for. I'm actually to say, "If it weren't for the grace of God, there go I." In Galatians 6:1 it says that "If a brother or sister is overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual restore them in a spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted." That word "restore" is like setting a broken bone. Do it gently, lovingly and compassionately.

So when Jesus said, "Judge not, that you be not judged," He goes on to say that "You have a board hanging out of your eye, and you're telling someone with a sliver in their eye, 'Let me help you get the sliver out of your eye.'" He says, "You hypocrite! First get the board out of your own eye. Then you can see clearly how to get the twig or the speck out of your brother's eye." So don't be critical and fault-finding. The merciful man looks for the best in others instead of the worst. He or she is slow to condemn and quick to commend.

Ask yourself, "Do I show mercy toward those who have fallen? Or am I judgmental and critical and fault-finding?" "Blessed are the merciful."

Here's the third characteristic of a merciful person: they forgive others. So number one, if you're merciful, you're going to be compassionate toward the plight of suffering people; number two, you're not going to be judgmental or critical; and number three, a merciful person forgives others.

What better story to illustrate that than Joseph. He was despised by his older brothers. Jacob had 12 sons, and Joseph was the youngest. He was the favored son of his father, so Joseph's older brothers were jealous of him. One day the dad sent Joseph out to see how his older brothers were doing watching the flocks out in the fields. When they saw their brother coming, the older ones were filled with jealousy and hatred toward Joseph. They were going to kill Joseph, but instead they threw him into a pit. They argued over what should be done to him. Then one of the brothers said, "Look! Here comes a caravan on its way to Egypt. Why kill him, when we can make money off of him?!" So they actually sold their little brother.

Can you imagine when your kids come home and you ask them, "Where is your little brother?"

"We sold him. We bought some popsicles." Talk about a dysfunctional family!

"You did what?!"

"We sold our little brother."

But Joseph's brothers did far worse than that. Before they sold him as a slave in Egypt, they took off his coat of many colors, which was a point of contention, they ripped it, covered it with goat's blood and took it to their father. They asked him, "Do you recognize this?" And Jacob's heart was broken. He knew that was Joseph's coat and he was surely dead. It was torn by some wild beast. So Jacob began to wail and mourn. All the time, the brothers knew it was a lie and that their father's heart was broken. I don't know how they could maintain that lie.

Joseph gets taken down to Egypt and gets hired by Potiphar. Joseph gets a decent job and gets elevated to head steward over Potiphar's household. Potiphar has a very dangerous wife. You could call her a "cougar." It's the Hebrew word before we used it. She checked out this young Joseph and said, "This boy's really handsome." She began to tempt Joseph, but Joseph is resisting her. She is alone in the house with him and grabs him. She actually says, "Let's go to bed." It's called the subtle approach.

Some guys would be thinking, Joseph, what more do you want?! That's awesome! But Joseph said, "How can I do this great sin and wickedness against God? How can I sin against God and my master and you, his wife?" Then Joseph ran out of the house, but she had grabbed his coat. She lied and said that Joseph tried to force himself on her. "He tried to rape me." Joseph then was imprisoned in a dungeon and was forgotten.

At that point, you'd say that Joseph has pretty good grounds for being bitter at God. You talk about being ripped off: lied about, thrown in prison, hated by his own brothers. But Joseph kept his faith in God; he kept his focus on God.

Through the interpreting of a dream of a butler, Joseph was exonerated and exalted up to second position under Pharaoh. He had interpreted Pharaoh's dream about the famine and the corn, so Joseph became the dispenser of all the grain and the corn during the ten years of famine. Joseph was actually the prime minister of Egypt, the greatest nation of the world at that time.

Then during the famine, Joseph's brothers and family had to come to Egypt, which was the bread basket of the world, in order to get food. To get the food, they had to go through Joseph. Joseph was sitting on the throne, he has all of his Egyptian garb on, he had matured over the years, so his brothers didn't recognize him. He knows them, but they don't know him. You talk about an opportunity to get vengeance, this was it!

I'm one of those guys that when I watch a cowboy movie and the good guy gets the bad guy at the end of the movie, I say, "Hit 'em! Punch him in the face!" (You can pray for me.) "Don't just let him go; at least beat him up a little bit! Smack him around!"

But Joseph looks at his brothers, and the Bible tells us that he went into a back room and he sobbed and cried, because he had a sympathetic heart. Joseph was sorry for them and sad for them and he was going to show mercy upon them.

But he messed with them a little bit. I love the story. Joseph took the younger brother, put him in prison, they all freaked out and they had to go tell their father. They also had to bring another brother with them to Egypt. Joseph wasn't trying to punish them; he was trying to find out where their hearts were. Simeon finally said, "Take me. Our dad has a broken heart. We can't go back and tell him another son is lost." That's when Joseph realized his brothers had a heart-change. That's when he said, "I am Joseph." They must have thought, We're dead!! You're Joseph and we're history. Then Joseph uttered those beautiful words: "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." Don't you love that story?

How could Joseph have so many bitter experiences and not become bitter but rather become sweet? It's because he always kept his eyes on God. He always kept his focus on God. He saw the bigger picture, that God knew what He was doing. He said, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good."

You might look at your life and look at the bitterness and the hardships and the people who

have abused you or mistreated you. But the truth is that if you keep your focus on God, you can learn to be forgiving toward others. Nothing demonstrates more that you have experienced God's love and grace and mercy and forgiveness than when you extend love, grace, mercy and forgiveness to others.

Jesus told the parable of the unmerciful servant. He had been forgiven this huge debt, but the minute he had been forgiven his debt, he went out and found someone who owed him a lot less and he said, "Pay me what you owe me!" But he wouldn't be merciful. He went back to the master, and the master said, "I heard you were unforgiving toward someone who owed you a small debt, even though I forgave you such a large debt. Why is it you would not show mercy? I showed you mercy, but you didn't show mercy to another." Then the master threw him in prison.

Unforgiveness is a prison. Some of you are in prison right now. It is a prison of your own making. It is a prison of bitterness and unforgiveness. If God has been merciful to you, then you are to be merciful to others. You are to have compassion on them and forgive them. The Bible says, "Be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving one another even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you."

So ask yourself, "Am I forgiving toward others?" The fifth Beatitude is the perfect corrective for all those who are caught in bitterness and unforgiveness.

The fourth mark of the merciful is that when I am merciful, I am most like God. When you and I are merciful, when we are compassionate, not judgmental or critical or fault-finding but rather loving, giving people the benefit of the doubt and forgiving others, we are most like God, most like our Father Who is in heaven.

In Micah 7:18, the prophet asks, "Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity...because He delights in mercy." The Bible tells us God's mercies are great, 1 Kings 3:6; God's mercies are plenteous, Psalm 86:5; God's mercies are tender, Luke 1:78; and God's mercies are abundant, 1 Peter 1:3.

God's mercies are higher than the heavens, Psalm 103:10-14. Here the psalmist says, "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust." That's such a beautiful picture of God's mercy. He knows your frame; He realizes that you are but dust. So God has not dealt with us after our sins. As the heavens are high, His mercy is great. "And as far as the east is from the west, He removed our transgressions from us."

The Bible says that God's mercy is "from everlasting to everlasting." And here's another great verse on God's mercy: Lamentation 3:22-23 says, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not

consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.” It’s not possible, but were it possible to exhaust the mercies of God, when you get up every morning, they’re all brand new again; there’s a whole bunch of new mercy for us. Isn’t that a cool thought? We would be dead right now, you wouldn’t be in church right now, if it wasn’t for God’s mercy. God has saved you by His mercy and by His grace.

Now what is the promise to the merciful, in verse 7? “...for they shall obtain mercy.” “Blessed are the merciful...”—that’s the present tense, the act of showing mercy. Why? Because, or the rationale is—“...for they shall obtain mercy.” Jesus puts the rationale in the future tense.

We don’t merit, earn or deserve God’s mercy. You can’t do anything to cause God to say, “Okay, they earned it, they deserve it; they showed mercy, so I’m going to show mercy to them.”

Chuck Smith used to put at the top of his school test papers, Matthew 5:7. So the teacher would get at the top of his test papers, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” That’s pretty smart.

But it doesn’t work that way with God; just because we are merciful doesn’t mean God’s going to be forgiving us of our sins. This Beatitude means that there is a sense in the future, when we stand before God, that we are judged for the way that we live. Make no mistake: we won’t be judged for our sin, but we will be judged for our service. We sometimes forget that. Every one of us, as Christians, will have to give an account to God of what we did with our gifts and abilities, our time and our talent that God trusted us with at the bema, the reward seat of Christ. If we have shown mercy, then God—future tense—will show mercy to us.

You ask, “Well, how can God show us mercy when we are sinners? We’re guilty. We’re deserving of God’s just punishment and wrath.” That’s a good question. It’s a theological question. The answer to the question is the Cross. In the Cross of Jesus Christ, we see God’s love, God’s grace and God’s mercy. It all starts with God’s love. God loves you. Then it continues with Him sending His Son to die on the Cross for you, so that you can be saved by His grace. Grace is unearned, undeserved, unmerited favor. Grace is God giving us what we don’t deserve. Mercy is God not giving us what we do deserve.

You ask, “How can God be merciful to me and not judge me for my sin?” Your judgment was put on Christ; He died in your place. When Jesus died on the Cross, He took your punishment, your penalty and your judgment. Then His righteousness is given to you as a free gift. That’s how God can still be just yet justifying the unrighteous. God can be just and righteous in being merciful to you and me. God can still maintain His justice. So God is not only a God of mercy, but He is a God of love, justice and righteousness. All of those things come together in the Cross of Jesus Christ.

You know how we are saved? The Bible tells us in Titus 3:5: “...not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us...”—how did He do it?—“...through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.” God, in His mercy,

washes you of your sins, forgives you and makes you His child.

Let's pray.