

Sunday, October 25, 2020 | Kingdom Manifesto

Matthew 5:7 | Mercy for the Merciful

After WWII, Corrie ten Boom traveled throughout Europe trying to heal communities with the Gospel. Amazingly, she would preach forgiveness for the Nazis even though her own sister, Betsy, died at the age of 59 in Ravensbrück [Rha-vins-brook] Concentration Camp in 1944.¹ Effectively, anytime she came to a town which had ostracized and shunned those who had supported Hitler and the Third Reich, she'd try to bridge the gap and start the process of reconciliation. Many had ratted their own neighbors out during that awful war and so this proved to be a difficult task. Especially considering that communities like these were, in fact, *more* resentful of their own neighbors than anyone from Germany.

In her book, *The Hiding Place* she describes how she met with mixed results. But little did Corrie know that in 1947, as she was traveling telling Betsy's story, that she herself would be brought face-to-face with one of her *own* Nazi captors. I'd like for you to hear how she describes this extremely tense moment in her book.²

Today, we're not going to be talking about forgiveness per se. Instead, we'll be talking about the general principle of giving someone something that they do not deserve. Whether its forgiveness, aide or just a kind gesture we have all experienced, or have shown to others, unmerited grace. It goes by many different names, but generally speaking we can refer to it as "mercy". Mercy is that unmerited favor meted out to others.

Now, I have never been in a situation in which I was urged to forgive someone like Ms. Boom. However, there have been many times in my life where I was urged to offer up kindness without hope of reciprocation. Conversely, I have been shown such mercy in my life, both from God and others, that I could never claim I am here today by the strength of my ability alone. I am a product of mercy as much as merit. But of the two, I have been given far more unmerited favor than that which I have earned through hard work.

But before we dive too deep into this principle, we must first read through the beatitudes. It is time to memorize.

READ: Matthew 5:1-12 (NKJV)

¹ Wikipedia contributors, "Betsy ten Boom," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Betsy_ten_Boom&oldid=984193584, (accessed October 25, 2020).

² Boom, Corrie Ten, *The Hiding Place*, (Chosen Books, 2006), p. 247-248

¹ And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. ² Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

³ “Blessed *are* the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed *are* those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.

⁵ Blessed *are* the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.

⁷ Blessed *are* the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.

⁸ Blessed *are* the pure in heart,
For they shall see God.

⁹ Blessed *are* the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ Blessed *are* those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Jesus says, “**Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.**”

It is not by accident that Jesus puts this beatitude right after talking about “hungering” and “thirsting” for divine rightness. God’s mercy and God’s justice are inextricably linked to each other in such a way that makes them complementary to one another (cf. Rom. 3:26).³ In fact, mercy not only yearns to forgive the guilty but she also seeks to alleviate the suffering of the needy. These two actions are clearly motivated by an unshakable grasp of justice and rightness.⁴ They are not mutually exclusive and they cannot be divorced from one another.

³ Turner, David L., *Matthew*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 2008), p. 152.

⁴ Carson, D.A., *Matthew*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew and Mark, Volume 9, Revised Edition, General Editors Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan Academic, 2010), p. 164.

If the Bible teaches us anything, it teaches us that God's character is balanced by both perfect lawfulness and ample kindness (cf. Mat. 5:45). No doubt this comes as a shock to most everyone who hears it for the first time. Most people who do not know God think of Him as the man upstairs who'll yell at you when you've done wrong or they view Him as some ultimate hall monitor keeping track of each transgression.

In fact, those who first heard Jesus teach about God's love in the first-century looked at Him as a calf looks at a new gate.

READ: John 3:16-17 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Now, it is true. We would do well to remember that God is just. That He does not long abide wrongdoing and He will exact his judgement accordingly. However, God is also merciful. He is more than sympathetic to the plights of the guilty. Yes, God is *unprejudiced* in his judgments but He is also *unrestrained* in his forgiveness. Furthermore, to have one without the other is to have nothing really at all. This is exactly the point that C.S. Lewis was making in his book *God in the Dock*.

"Mercy, detached from Justice, grows unmerciful. That is the important paradox. As there are plants which will flourish only in mountain soil, so it appears that Mercy will flower only when it grows in the crannies of the rock of Justice: [but] transplanted to the marshlands of mere Humanitarianism, it becomes a man-eating weed, all the more dangerous because it is still called by the same name as the mountain variety."⁵

Mercy without justice is just as destructive as justice without mercy. The former destroys ignorantly without thought as to the rationale for why such condemnation has occurred. Whereas the latter destroys dispassionately without thought for the circumstances of the condemned. One is a venomous fiction, and the other a bullish reality, but the ends are the same: *destruction*.

Later, Jesus will be keeping company with the sort of people that no self-righteous Jew would ever keep company with. As was often the case, He received quite a bit of criticism for it. These critics actually came to the disciples looking for an explanation as to why he would associate with such an unseemly bunch. But before they could answer them, Jesus tells them,

⁵ Lewis, C.S., *God in the Dock*, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 2014), p. 336-337.

READ: Matthew 9:12-13 (NKJV)

¹² But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

In fact, Jesus Christ will later be far harsher with the religious elite for their insistence on piety over leniency when he says,

READ: Matthew 23:23-24 (NKJV)

²³ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. ²⁴ You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!

While religious piety is not unimportant, it cannot hold a candle to how much *more* important virtues like justice, mercy, and faithfulness are to God. It is like missing the forest for the trees. Or, as Jesus mockingly put it, the scribes and Pharisees might’ve been careful to take out even the tiniest of insects from their drinks, yet, all the while, they were devouring an entire camel with such vigor that would make even a lion blanch!⁶ Morality and mercy are both important. But, when it comes to our dealings with others, may we err on the side of mercy rather than judging others for their lax morals and so condemn ourselves in the process (cf. Mat 7:1-3).

EXAMPLE: Writing paper and spending more time on the font and form than the actual content.

In fact, it was because of moments like these two, that Peter would later write...

READ: 2 Peter 3:9 (NKJV)

The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

This is why it makes perfect sense that Jesus would speak about mercy after addressing this world’s need for justice. The world was already weighed and found wanting in God’s eyes. Because of this, God would soon condemn them. But what they...what we...needed more than condemnation was forgiveness.

⁶ France, R.T., *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 2007), p 874.

Now, as I talked about two weeks ago, of all the beatitudes, I found that ‘blessed are the meek’ to be the most difficult to wrap my head around. Well, this one, ‘blessed are the merciful’, is quite possibly the most straightforward of all the beatitudes. No one was confused when Jesus said that those who are merciful will themselves receive mercy.

In fact, typically my habit has been to explain to you what Jesus *didn't* mean before telling you what he *did* mean. However, with this one, there is barely a need for an explanation. We already have a pretty good grasp of what Jesus' meant.

Interestingly, like meekness, showing mercy towards others was regarded as weakness by some ancient philosophers.⁷ But despite this, acts of mercy are aplenty in our messed-up world. In the modern era, we even have a name for it: “pay it forward.” And I'm not referring to the 2000 movie with the same name starring Kevin Spacey, Helen Hunt, and Haley Joel Osment.

Essentially, we tell our kids that one good turn deserves another. A neighbor will return a kind gesture to his neighbor. One door will be held by one person only to have the next door held by the one who just walked through. Often, someone's order will be paid by the car in front of them in a drive-thru lane. Moreover, even though many are not Christians, most have quoted Jesus' golden rule at some time in their life: *do unto others as you would have them do unto* (Mat. 7:12).⁸

However, when Jesus is talking about mercy here in the beatitudes, he's not just referring to some random act of kindness. That's part of it. But it is not the whole of it. Jesus is also indicating an ***inclination*** for graciousness. The ones He is talking about are literally ***bent*** in such a way that mercy is their default and not vengeance.⁹ They set aside their claim to revenge. They gladly give up their right to retaliate. They are ***predisposed*** to feelings of forgiveness and take to it like a fish to water. Meaning, it is their ***natural proclivity*** to be in a state of mercifulness towards others.

And, here me, this is not because they will receive mercy ***from*** others. That is not the point. They are merciful because they will receive mercy ***from*** God.¹⁰ He is the reason—the motivation—for all good deeds. Anyone can return good for good. It takes a special person to return good for nothing at all. And the name for such a person is called a “Christian” (cf. Mat. 5:38-48; 1 Pet 3:8-22).

⁷ Keener, Craig S., *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1999), p. 169.

⁸ France (2007), p. 168.

⁹ Morris, Leon, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1992), p 100.

¹⁰ France (2007), p. 168.

This is why Paul admonished the Romans to...

READ: Romans 12:21 (NKJV)

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Why would he say such a thing? Because past, present, and future hurts are all healed at the cross. This means we are to give our starving enemy our food; to give our suffering enemy our clothes; to give our fighting enemy our cheek; to give our offending enemy our forgiveness; to give our cursing enemy our blessing; and to give our threatening enemy our love. **Aside from loving one another (cf. Jn. 13:35), the key characteristic of a Christian is that they return virtue for vice.** This is because God's gracious nature has invaded and infected our hearts. It has so transformed it that we are unlike anything this world has ever seen. We are more like God than we are like those around us.

It is for this very reason that part of the model prayer that Jesus gives his disciples instructs us to ask for forgiveness every day with the understanding that we will be forgiving to those who have also wronged us (cf. Mat. 6:12). In fact, in Matthew's account of the Lord's Prayer he also records how Jesus doubles down on this very principle after he's gone through the prayer.

READ: Matthew 6:14-15 (NKJV)

¹⁴ For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

And though I will not rehash his whole point here (*You can find a fuller treatment of this portion of the Lord's prayer on our website.¹¹*), suffice to say, the *forgiven forgive*. Or, in the context of our specific beatitude today, those who've received mercy will themselves show mercy to others.

Moreover, a Christian who harbors bitterness, resentment and maintains a spirit of unforgiveness towards another is doubtless a Christian at all (cf. Mat. 18:21-35). Meaning, that clinched fist is unable to receive the forgiveness that is freely handed to them by God. Those who exhibit a habitual spirit of unforgiveness *cannot* have a relationship with God. The hand by which we distribute forgiveness to others is the

¹¹ Hyrne, Ben, "Prayer: Part I, Matthew 6:9-11", June 24, 2020, <https://www.gracepointelife.com/sermons/prayer/>

same hand by which we receive the forgiveness of God. “An unforgiving heart is not in a condition that can accept forgiveness.”¹²

So, what’s the takeaway?

The merciful receives mercy.

READ: Ephesians 4:25-32 (NKJV)

²⁵ Therefore, putting away lying, “*Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,*” for we are members of one another. ²⁶ “Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, ²⁷ nor give place to the devil. ²⁸ Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. ²⁹ Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. ³² And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, **even as God in Christ forgave you.**

So, what’s the takeaway?

The merciful receives mercy.

How could Corrie ten Boom find it in her heart to forgive that Nazi concentration camp officer? How could she be so compassionate towards one who had a hand in the death of her own sister? Well, as you know, she couldn’t. There was not even an ounce of mercy, grace or kindness in her heart for that man. However, there was more than enough in the heart of God. And what she lacked, God more than compensated for.

We show unmerited favor to others because God has shown unmerited favor to us. The merciful show mercy to others and receives mercy from God. **At Calvary, every debt—both human and divine—was paid in full.** As such, mercy reigns supreme (cf. Rom. 5:20-21). *And no personal transgression can outweigh the universal gift of God.* No ill spoken word, no betrayal of trust, no self-centered act can excuse those of us who’ve received the free pardon through Jesus Christ.

The merciful receives mercy. The unmerciful receives no mercy.