



The Manifesto of the King, Part 5: Blessed are the Merciful

Series: Matthew: The King and His Kingdom

Matthew 5:1-12 (v. 7)

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Introduction

As we have studied the beatitudes, we have seen that these words from Christ create for us a picture of what the true Christian, the true follower of Christ really looks like. These beatitudes are not given to us as commands to follow but are instead presented to us as a description of what a Christian really looks like. Now this description, these attributes of a Christian are not exhaustive – Jesus doesn't list all of them here, but they are essential. They are an antidote to the posturing and pretense and the lack of definition that that plagues modern Christianity. Not only that, but these beatitudes serve as a good measuring stick for us and for the genuineness of our profession of faith in Christ.

So far, Christ has described for us the character of the disciple. The true disciple, Jesus says, is poor in spirit...He mourns over his sin...He is meek... This is the character of the disciple. Last week we saw the pursuit of the disciple – he hungers and thirsts for righteousness and we saw that it is, in reality, a hunger and thirst for Christ Himself. So we have seen the character of the disciple, the pursuit of the disciple, and now we are going to see in these next three beatitudes, the conduct of the disciple. Here in verse 7, Jesus tells us that a disciple is merciful. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." (Matthew 5:7, ESV) So let's understand what Jesus is saying by starting with the precept.

1) The Precept: Blessed are the merciful (v. 7a) If true Christians are merciful in their conduct, then we need to understand what mercy? Where does it originate from? What does it look like?

What is Mercy?

Well, beloved, mercy finds its origin in the character of God. Mercy is one of the essential attributes of God. In Exodus 34, when Moses was desiring to see the glory of the Lord and the Lord told Moses that there was no way that he could fully behold God's glory and live, we read these words: (Exodus 34:5–7, ESV) We find here that God is a merciful God and in His mercy He is long-suffering and patient and He is forgiving, though He does not overlook sin.

The 103 Psalm gives us further insight into the mercy of God. (Psalm 103:8–14, ESV) God is a merciful God. He sees us and he knows our need. He shows compassion to those who fear Him. He is merciful to sinners.

God is by nature a merciful God and it is this loving mercy in God that moved Him out of compassion and love for us to act to save us. Paul talks about this succinctly in Titus: (Titus 3:3–7, ESV)

Moved by our plight and our very real need, God out of his rich mercy, sent His Son Jesus Christ to deliver us from the destruction that our sin had earned for us. It was not because we were worthy, not because we were beautiful and to be desired – rather we were fools and rebels, slaves to sin, filled with hatred toward God and toward one another. We were guilty – we stood in need of mercy. It is the guilty who need mercy. Out of mercy, God the Father justified us by His grace – He declared us not guilty -- when He poured His wrath for our sins upon His Son in our place so that He could forgive us and lavish the blessings of His love upon us. Out of mercy, God the Father judged our sin on the head of His holy Son, not overlooking our sin but destroying its record against us, so that He could clothe us with the righteousness of His son and pour His favor and blessing upon us. Moved by mercy, God the Father acted to meet our real need in the best way possible. In fact, we can see the relationship of mercy and grace here, although I am not sure that a hard and fast division between the two is helpful. But if you are looking for that then we might be able to say that mercy is the motivation and grace the instrument. The compassion of God – His mercy toward our horrific condition moves Him to act toward us in a gracious way, in a way that we do not deserve, to save us.

But God's mercy toward us is even more than that. God's mercy reaches to all of our weakness and our everyday needs. That is why Jeremiah would write: (Lam 3:22-23, ESV) Every good thing that we receive from the hand of God is the result of His mercy.

So what we see is this, mercy is compassion in action that moves to meet real need in the best way. It is compassion that leads to action. It is at the heart of God's character. And the mercy that is evidenced in the life of Jesus' disciples is the result supernatural grace that is imparted to our hearts by the Spirit of God when we are born again and as we grow in Christ. In our case, mercy is compassion that is righteously expressed in action to meet the needs of other sinners. In this fallen world, there are a multitude of opportunities to demonstrate true compassion, to demonstrate true kindness and goodness to other sinners like us. This life of expressing mercy toward others finds its motivation in the mercy of God toward us.

Mercy's Motivation

The motivation to be merciful to other sinners is found in the rich mercy that God has showered upon us. Because of God's great mercy to us, we, as the children of God, are to demonstrate mercy as well. True mercy is extended because of Jesus' redemptive work; in the name of Christ. It flows from a consciousness of the fact that God has saved us from our sins and the dreadful consequences of those sins when we did not deserve it; when we actually deserved the exact opposite. The mercy extended by Christians is rooted in the awareness of our own desperate need and so it always points to Jesus and exalts Him, not ourselves. Because we have received the mercy of God, we are to be conduits of His mercy to the world, to the people, that are around us.

In fact, this call to be merciful cuts right to the quick of our claim to follow Christ. Mercy is not talking about it, or preaching about it, or reading about it, or thinking about it. Mercy is more than a feeling; it is compassion in action, rooted in the truth of God's character and of the gospel. So how, then, is mercy expressed? This list, of course, is not comprehensive but it is a place to start.

Expressions of Mercy

Mercy expresses itself in a concern for the eternal welfare of others. God's mercy moved Him to act to save sinners from hell. For that reason, mercy must warn sinners of their condition before the Holy God. All sinners who do not know Christ as Savior and Lord are living dead men and are under the condemnation and wrath of God whether they know it or not. There is no second chance, no possibility of deliverance apart from Christ. For that reason, the greatest act of mercy, above all others, is to preach the gospel clearly and faithfully and to call sinners to repentance and faith in Christ. It is to point to the mercy of God to sinners that caused Him to send forth a Savior. And the merciful preaching of the gospel requires that we preach the gospel as a fellow sinner who has been delivered from death by the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ, who has been appointed to God's service, though formerly a blasphemer, having received mercy from God despite being the foremost of sinners as a living example of God's patience and grace. (cf. 1 Timothy 1:12–16, ESV) The great doctrine of election is precious to us, and we love it but it can never be allowed to cause our love for people to be chilled. We cannot be content to sit down, or stand idle, and believe that the decrees and purposes of God will be fulfilled. So they will, but it will be through merciful Christians who bring others to Jesus.

True mercy expresses itself in the concern for people's souls. Men need the gospel more than anything. But even so, our gospel must have words and works. Words and works – both. True mercy cares for the physical needs of others, but cares for need of their souls supremely. Do you have a heart of compassion, and not superiority, to those who are around you? We are not called to just dispense the gospel in some cold, mechanical, calculated sort of way. Do you plead with sinners to repent and turn to Jesus knowing that God by His mercy has saved you from you're your own wickedness, sin and His eternal and just wrath

Mercy expresses itself in active sympathy toward others who are suffering. Just looking at the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, we can see that in the ministry of Jesus Christ, mercy in action was a prominent feature. He reached out to the sick and healed them. He enabled the crippled to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak. He expressed mercy to tax collectors, prostitutes, debauched people, and the downtrodden. He fed the hungry. He cared for the brokenhearted. Our Lord wept with those who were in sorrow, and made the outcast like the lepers feel loved. He gathered little children in His arms and loved them. There was the widowed woman that was following a coffin of her son, Luke tells us the story: (Luke 7:11–16, ESV) Mercy expresses itself in active sympathy, seeking to alleviate the suffering of others – it

can take all sorts of forms: caring for the physically infirm; giving food to the hungry; providing for those who are struggling financially through no fault of their own; teaching English to someone who is from a foreign land; sharing the pain of one whose marriage is collapsing or has collapsed; bearing with the one who has lost a spouse or a child; who has heard the dreaded diagnosis of cancer or some other disease, getting involved in the life of a student who is trying to make heads or tails of their lives – mercy, compassionate action and care. Mercy expresses itself in active sympathy toward others who are suffering always pointing to the true comforter who is God in Christ and the true comfort of His gospel.

Mercy expresses itself in true forgiveness. True mercy delights to forgive and especially the repentant. Christians are called to forgive everyone who sins personally against us and to entrust judgment to God. Paul writes in Romans 12, starting in verse 19, (Romans 12:19–21, ESV)

But especially, mercy delights to forgive the repentant. The merciful have a heart that seeks a complete reconciliation; that is willing to repeatedly extend genuine forgiveness to a repentant brother. It is unfortunately commonplace for people to speak of forgiveness and then turn right around and cancel out those words by their actions -- by bringing it up again and throwing it back in a person's face. Sometimes they permanently label them by their sin. But God promises: "For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." " (Hebrews 8:12, ESV)

True mercy forgives as God forgives. True mercy does not: bring up the matter again; hold a grudge; or, spread the matter around to all sorts of people. Mercy comforts the repentant sinner and seeks His restoration, while arrogance and a lack of mercy beats him up and drags him down.

The mercy of forgiveness is so important to Christ. (Matthew 18:21–35, ESV) Withholding forgiveness is defined by Jesus as "wickedness". What did the Master expect? Mercy. That's the point. The one who has received mercy and knows it freely gives mercy.

Mercy expresses itself in compassionate giving to meet the needs of others. People that talk about how much they care, but offer no real help at all, do not have real biblical mercy. Scripture is clear about this (1 John 3:17–18, ESV; James 2:15–16, ESV) The merciful do not say

merely say that they sympathize, and hope others will help; but they give of their goods according to their ability, joyfully and cheerfully to alleviate another's needs. They are not like some rock stars and movie stars or athletes who have some benefit concert or cause or foundation to try to get other people to give their money instead of giving from their own pocket. Mercy expresses itself in compassionate giving to meet the needs of others but always pointing to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. " (2 Corinthians 8:9, ESV)

Mercy expresses itself in intercessory prayer. Whether it is praying for the repentance and restoration of brothers or sisters who fall into sin, praying for the sick that God would heal them, praying to God to provide for the needs of friends and loved ones, interceding for the lost that God would grant them grace to be born again and to believe the gospel, or praying for our enemies – mercy expresses itself in intercessory prayer that cries out to God in faith. True mercy longs to see the ravages of sin defeated by the mercies of God and so cries out to Him knowing that only God can change the heart and restore fallen brothers, that only God can heal the sick, can provide for needs in this fallen world, or can save sinners. If we have a heart of mercy toward others, then one of the best expressions of a heart of mercy toward them is to pray fervently on their behalf, entrusting them to God.

Mercy expresses itself in patience. Mercy expresses itself in patience and in longsuffering toward one another. Paul wrote to the Ephesians: (Ephesians 4:1–3, ESV) Many professing Christians display an astonishing lack of mercy toward others in this respect. They refuse to give others room to grow and mature in Christ. One of the real applications of mercy is in the area of patience with one another in the body of Christ. Imagine if Jesus would have corrected the disciples for every single sin or every little thing they had wrong. The gospels would be one long rebuke.

Mercy understands what is worth confronting and what is an issue of maturity that will take care of itself as the Word of God is brought to bear in the lives of their brothers and sisters. Mercy allows people room to grow and doesn't pigeonhole people. Mercy shows charity in matters of secondary importance and gives others room to grow in Christ. True mercy refuses to define people by one statement or one action but is patient and trusts in the power of the grace of God to change and refine His people. Paul told the church in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 5:14, ESV) A lack of mercy-driven patience with others give birth to a whole host of sins: cynicism, bitterness, anger, pride, and a false sense of superiority.

Mercy expresses itself in caring for the souls of brothers and sisters in Christ. It is true mercy to care for the souls of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul encourages us in Colossians 3, in the context of the church: (Colossians 3:16, ESV) At the heart of that command is care for the souls of one another. It is true mercy that teaches the truth of God's word to one another and seeks to see the gospel bear fruit in the individual lives of those in the body of Christ. Likewise, It is true mercy that refuses to overlook or ignore besetting sin, but instead seeks to compassionately confront sin in the lives of a brother or sister for the sake of seeing them set free from the entangling tentacles of sin and its consequences. And that is the key, to compassionately confront sin with the desire to deliver the one who is entangled. Merciful correction is delivered with kindness, patience, and gentleness.

The key thing is this. True biblical mercy must always be rooted firmly in the gospel and ultimately point to Christ or it isn't biblical mercy; it's just mere human benevolence. So, mercy reveals a life and heart and soul that have been gripped by God's grace and delivered by His mercy. But let me show you the two things that above all will kill mercy.

Religiosity and pride kill mercy

The two things that will kill mercy quicker than anything else are religiosity and pride – two hallmarks of the Pharisees. Let me just illustrate this quickly.

Look at Matthew 9:10-13 with me. (Matthew 9:9–13, ESV) What's the point of Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees? They talked a good game and that was it. They were religious on the outside but their religion was skin deep. How different they are from Jesus. Here in Matthew 9 Jesus saw sinners as sick and miserable people in need of a physician, they needed the mercy that comes from God and Jesus was a friend of sinners to show them mercy, to bring them to God.

All the Pharisees saw when they looked at the same people were possible contaminants to their supposedly holy lives. Looking at Christ with the sinners, from their haughty and prideful perspective, all the Pharisees saw was a ceremonial problem of Jesus contaminated by eating

with sinners. They contented themselves with their version of holiness and righteousness and being enslaved to their own ideas of religion and impressed with their own self-righteousness and feeling themselves to be in no need of mercy, they had cold, dead, lifeless hearts as evidenced by their lack of mercy toward anyone. They looked down their noses at everyone. They were sucked into their own little religious world of rules and religiosity – self-exalting, self-congratulating, exclusive and void of life.

Jesus pressed the point home in Matthew 23:23-24 when he said, (Matthew 23:23–24, ESV) The opposite of mercy is preoccupation with things of far lesser importance. It is when your religious desires are used up after you decide whether you are single or double predestinarian, whether you like hymns or praise music, what preacher is reformed enough, or who your favorite preacher is. The whole point is that there is more to living faith than simply debating theology and being consumed with the peripheral issues of Christianity. True faith in Christ, true religion if you will, should lead to mercy poured out on others in the name of Christ. The Pharisees were prideful, arrogant, self-congratulatory and exclusive jerks and so they knew nothing of true mercy and so missed out on the great promise of Christ...

2) The Promise: For they shall receive mercy (v. 7b) What is the meaning of this promise? Not surprisingly, some have taken these words and run to a works based righteousness. They see the mercy that we are to express towards others as currency with God. Give mercy to others; get mercy from God. But that is not the idea here.

A believer's acts of mercy are not the grounds for receiving mercy. We cannot earn mercy from God. Instead, what Jesus is getting at here is that the reality of true salvation will be evident in the life of true Christians and those who are merciful demonstrate the reality of their faith and those who have true faith will receive mercy on the final day. Those who exhibit mercy in their behavior are demonstrating the reality of their faith and those who have true faith will receive mercy on the final day. We see much the same thing in Jesus' description of the final judgment in Matthew 25. (Matthew 25:34–40, ESV) These works are evidence that you have been saved. Their mercy is not the cause of God's mercy. But God's mercy implanted in their hearts by the Holy Spirit has made them to be merciful. They have tasted of the mercy of the Lord and they cannot help but be merciful.

3) Mercy matters

The key to becoming a merciful person is found in this. The fuel of mercy is the deeply felt realization and belief that you owe everything you are and everything you have to God's undeserved mercy to you. That is where our desire and willingness to express and extend mercy with our words and deeds comes from. We feel overwhelmed by God's mercy and His grace that brought us salvation through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, mercy and grace which sustains and empowers our sanctification in the present and mercy and grace which promise joy for all eternity. Overwhelmed and amazed by the mercy and the grace of God, we are moved to act in mercy toward other people. Reminding ourselves daily that we do not deserve the riches of God's mercy, yet reminding ourselves of His love and kindness and His grace to us will draw us to experience and enjoy the fullness of God's undeserved love to us in Christ, and will drive us to deal mercifully with other people out of a deep humility and gratitude toward God. It is the realization of God's incredible, incalculable mercy and grace to us that drives us to mercy toward others and especially to those in the body of Christ.

Two Questions

1) Have you received mercy?

2) Are you merciful?

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