

# The Mercy Spiral

*The Beatitudes*

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**Bible Text:** Matthew 5:7  
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Our brief but potent text this morning comes from Matthew 5:7 and I invite you to turn to Matthew 5:7 as we continue our study of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel. Matthew 5:7 is our simple and direct text for this morning and in the providence of God, it is a wonderful text to prepare our hearts for the communion that lies ahead at the end of the service. Matthew 5:7 says,

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. This comes in the middle of the section known as the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:3-10, which we have said on multiple occasions is describing the character of one who truly belongs to the kingdom of God. You could say that this describes, these Beatitudes describe the inner heart motions of the one who is a true Christian. Absent the presence of this kind of character, it is obvious that a man is not a Christian; that he is still in his sins and he is still under the domain of Satan and headed for the awful eternal judgment of God which emanates from the abyss of his great being and so these are matters of great significance.

Look at Matthew 5:3 just to remind you of these things from time to time. Matthew 5:3 says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And in Matthew 5:10, it says, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." So acting as bookends, those two verses connect and join together all of the eight Beatitudes to describe the multifaceted reality of someone who has been born again; someone who belongs to the kingdom of God; someone to whom God has imparted a new nature that is like after his own. And this is something that is exclusive. There are no exceptions. The idea is that theirs and theirs alone is the kingdom of heaven. In other words, this marks the things of the Beatitudes mark everyone who is a true Christian, everyone who belongs to the kingdom of God, and it is them and them alone that belong to the kingdom. Someone to whom this character is alien, is foreign, is unfamiliar, is not true in their hearts, is someone who is not a Christian no matter what else they may say about themselves. You see, the Beatitudes are a ticket away from self-deception to those who will read them, study them and receive what they teach deeply into their hearts; to those who would say, "I'm not going to excuse myself. I'm not going to run away from these."

You know, one of the great challenges in reading the Beatitudes and one of the things that I would encourage you to do today as you're listening to God's word, as you study and review notes perhaps throughout the week, is that you would ask God to help you avoid the pride and self-deception that we all tend toward that would say, "Oh, do you know what? This is describing the way that I already am." Even as Christians we can fall into that and we kind of congratulate ourselves and say, "Oh, well, I'm kind of like this. I'm like this and it doesn't challenge me." Well, when you understand what the Beatitudes are truly teaching, you realize that even as a maturing Christian they challenge your life and you need to feel the weight, the impact, the challenge, the conflict that the pure word of Christ brings to you and into your heart and that's going to show up very much as we see what this Beatitude has for us this morning.

Now, just by way of context...by the way, let me just step back and reemphasize for just a moment that caution, that warning that I just gave, is just really really important. It's so easy to read these and just assume that everything is okay in your soul. When you really understand them, you realize that these Beatitudes, better stated, Christ himself is addressing your heart and rebuking it at very profound levels and so what you want as you study the Beatitudes, as you sit and listen to the preaching of God's word over time from the Beatitudes as we're going through them here, you don't want to be satisfied or content until you start to say, "Do you know what? I see how this is addressing me." And you say, "Oh, wow, this is profound." Then you're starting to understand them, but don't be content until something of that is going on in your heart in response to God's word.

Now, just by a little way of review here, we've gone through the first four Beatitudes already, we're plowing through them week by week, and the first four Beatitudes have a vertical dimension to them. There is a God-ward focus, you could say, to the first four Beatitudes. Oh, they have implications humanly but there is a primary focus; to say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," is to recognize spiritual bankruptcy in the presence of God, that I have no merit before him. I don't deserve to be in God's presence. Who am I a sinful creature, to be in the presence of the holy Creator, one of infinite self-existence? Who am I to be in the presence of one like that? He's of a different magnitude than I am. And so you start to realize your spiritual bankruptcy and that leads to the mourning described in verse 4 that recognizes and grieves over the sin that is in your life, in your heart, the sins that you have committed and the sinfulness of your character. You say, "Oh, when God is like this, it grieves me that I am different from him. Not that I want to be God but just that I fall short of his glory, that grieves me." And yet in the Gospel, you learn to trust in Christ. It produces in you a gentle spirit that is rooted in trusting God and you hunger after righteousness. You hunger for that which you lack. You know, when you get physically hungry, it's because you lack food in your system that you draw energy from, and the Christian, the true Christian, the one who belongs to the kingdom, hungers after that righteousness of which he still falls short.

So there is this vertical dimension to the first four Beatitudes that take place and it's wise to slow down and to not be in a hurry and to ask yourself, "Do I see something of that moving in my heart? Does sin bother me?" Or can you sin without indifference? Can you

be a slave to alcohol or lust or all kinds of things and just say it's okay? I know of somebody who was in an adulterous relationship and he said, "It's okay. Do you know what? God is going to forgive me." No, that's not the case. That's not the mark. That's not the speaking of a man who is truly saved because when you are sinful and you are truly in God's kingdom, it grieves you, you mourn over it. You don't brush it off as if a holy God was obligated to forgive you because you're going to do what you want. The kingdom of heaven does not work that way. It's a kingdom of grace, yes, but it is also a kingdom of righteousness and only those who desire righteousness and turn from sin have any reason to believe that they are in a kingdom that is marked by righteousness and grace from a righteous and gracious God. So we just need to stop the self-deception and we need to stop the excuses and the self-justification that goes with that kind of mindset. The Beatitudes address all of that in this vertical dimension of the first four in verses 3 through 6.

So now we go on in verse 7 and we come to our text today and now in verse 7 you start to see how Christian character works itself out on a horizontal level; how it plays out especially in this verse with the sense of the way that we relate to men, and it is a very searching verse as well. As I've said in the past, I'll say again, I don't mind repeating myself. This is not an aspect of old age yet. Maybe I'll be repeating myself in private conversations and you can say, "Oh, he's getting old," and that's okay, you can say whatever you want, but in the pulpit when I repeat myself, it's because some things just need to be said over and over again. We are studying the words of Jesus Christ here. We are studying the words of the eternal Son of God who has infinite wisdom and infinite knowledge. We should expect that when someone with that great of a mind speaks to us and addresses our heart, that it's going to search us in a way that is not superficial. So as we come to God's word, we realize that this is going to address us in a very significant and in a profound way.

Let's look at the verse one more time and then we'll get into it. Verse 7 says, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." Now, let me just say at the start what this verse is not saying to clear up any possible misconception beforehand. This verse is not telling you how you can receive the forgiveness of your sins. It is not that by doing acts of mercy that you obligate God to forgive your sins. That's the wrong way to understand this verse. We don't do good to men and then come to God and say, "Here are the good things that I've done. Now give me mercy in response." That's not the case. You all know Ephesians 2:8 and 9: we have been saved by grace through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, lest anyone should boast. So Jesus here is not contradicting the whole tenor of Scripture and saying, "If you want mercy, go out and be merciful." That's not the point. That's not the sequence. That's not the flow of thought here at all. Even in the immediate context, beloved, remember the whole starting point of the Beatitudes are the poor in spirit, those who are spiritually bankrupt. I have no merit of my own so Jesus four verses later isn't contradicting what he started the whole sermon with, was he? Let's give him the benefit of saying he's going to be consistent in what he says and so he's not speaking about, "Here's how you can have your sins forgiven, go out and be merciful and then come back to God later." No, he's teaching something much different, something far more profound, actually.

You can write this down if you want. Jesus here is teaching a very simple but profound point. What he's saying is that mercy flows from one who has truly been redeemed. The one who has truly been saved is someone who is going to show mercy to others because the principle of God's mercy is such an overwhelming motivation; to recognize that God had compassion on you in your sin changes the whole way that you deal with everybody in life. It overwhelms you and because you have been the recipient of a greater mercy in your own life, then your whole disposition is to be merciful to those around you. It's not to take that and cause God to do something with you, it is a response to the mercy of God that you show mercy to others.

So what we're going to do here is we're going to answer three questions about this text as we spend our time together, and the wonderful thing of it is that this is all going to prepare us for communion at the end of the service as well. I love it when providence dovetails those kinds of things for us. Let's answer this first question: what is mercy? What is mercy? If only those who are merciful receive mercy, then it's important for us to know what mercy is. Let me give you a very simple definition that is not designed to be technical but it is more than sufficient for our purposes this morning: mercy is compassion in action for people in need. Mercy is compassion in action for people in need. So mercy is an expression of sympathy, you might say, with those who are suffering. It is sympathy, it is consideration for those who have need, who have struggles, who are in trouble. Mercy sympathizes with those who are suffering and – watch this – it's not simply an emotional feeling, a cheap emotional feeling that says, "Oh, I feel sorry for all the hungry children in Africa," and leaves it there and then congratulates yourself on, as the world does, in its sense of self-congratulation. No, what mercy does is this: mercy goes further. That motivation, that sense of compassion for those who are suffering goes further to the point that it does what is in its power in order to relieve that suffering. So mercy starts with an inner sense of sympathy for those who are in need and then it shows the integrity of the sentiment by saying, "I'm going to do what I can to relieve it." Mercy is compassion in action for those who are in need. It reaches out to help. It is more than a feeling. That's so crucial because to recognize that principle, to recognize that it's more than a feeling, that there are actions that flow from that mercy, that merciful sentiment, is that which would divide those who deceive themselves by trusting in their emotions and those who act on it and show that it's actually a reality in their heart.

And mercy can be found in different ways. Let's start with the mercy of God and then work our way through something else. And here's the point, here's the point, beloved: if you are a Christian, you are a Christian solely because, in one sense, maybe better stated, you are a Christian as a result of the fact that God had compassion upon you in your sin. Your sin brought guilt upon your soul that cried out for divine justice, for divine vengeance against your violations of a holy God. And God saw you in that helpless condition and had compassion upon you, had mercy on you; saw you in your spiritual need and then what happened, so to speak, the Lord Jesus acted in response to your need, had compassion upon you and left the glories of heaven in order to march to the cross of Calvary in order to lay his life down to shed his blood for your sin, to offer a sacrifice in

your place so that the guilt that you carried and needed punished, he took upon himself and received the punishment so that you could go free. That's mercy. Oh, that's mercy, for Christ, the great exalted one, to say, "I see that person in sin." It was within the power of Christ, within the resources of his deity in order to act upon that and that's what he did.

Look at Ephesians 2. You will see this so clearly. Mercy originates with God. It was God's idea. It was God's character. It was an infinite attribute of his to be merciful, an unchanging aspect of his nature that God is a merciful God and now you sit here today as a Christian walking in the wake of the benefit of his mercy on your life. Ephesians 2. We start with a God-centered perspective on this mercy. Ephesians 2, beginning in verse 1, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." Christian, we just read your spiritual history. This is biography for you. This is what you were like: dead in sin, dominated by the devil, doomed to suffer the wrath of God. Righteously, rightly, God could have judged you, been the end of it, never looked your way again, and you would have spun into eternal orbit of judgment and that would have been right, that would have been the right thing, that would have been the just thing. It would have been just for that to happen based on your own merit.

But look at verse 4, "But God," but God did something and look at it, look at the verse here, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." There you were dead in sin and under the chains of demonic influence, belonging to Satan and his kingdom, a child of the father of lies, unable to do anything about it, and what happened? If you're a Christian, God was rich in mercy on you. He had compassion on you in your spiritual need and he saved you by his power. Not out of your works, not out of your righteousness, out of his grace, his mercy, his love. He showed mercy on you and delivered you completely, fully and eternally from your miserable condition and from that miserable eternity which you rightly deserved. That's what God did. You see, he had compassion on you. He showed kindness to you that you did not deserve. He showed love to you and he did so at personal cost, at the cost of the Incarnation; at the cost of 33 years walking on this earth living a perfectly righteous life; at the cost of Calvary, at the cost of death, at the cost of his own shed blood. Jesus Christ, the wonderful eternal Son of God had mercy on you. Rich mercy that he shared on you. Saved you when you didn't deserve it. You see, that's compassion. In the simplest terms, in terms that a child could understand: you had a profound spiritual need, Jesus Christ had profound compassion toward you, and in a profound act of self-sacrifice, met that need at his own great personal cost, and that is why you can be here today as a Christian, it's because Christ, God, is merciful, and had mercy on you when you did not deserve it. So that gives us a sense of the vertical dimension of mercy.

Now, to see this word being used in other places and to see the breadth of how it speaks, speaking that mercy is compassion in action for people in need, let's look at something

completely different and go back to the book of Matthew to Matthew 9. We've seen that God had mercy on us vertically in our sin and what we want to do is we just want to get a sense of how this word is used elsewhere so that we have a sense of the sphere in which this word is used. In Matthew 9:27 Jesus was in the midst of his public ministry and in Matthew 9:27 it says, "Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out, 'Have mercy on us, Son of David!' When He entered the house, the blind men came up to Him, and Jesus said to them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' They said to Him, 'Yes, Lord.' Then He touched their eyes, saying, 'It shall be done to you according to your faith.' And their eyes were opened." Notice that in their blindness they had a physical need and they cried out for what? "Lord, Jesus, mercy! Have mercy on us!" They appealed to the compassion of Christ and asked him, believing that he had the power to do it, "Relieve our physical suffering of this blindness," and they appealed to mercy as the grounds of their request. "Lord, we're blind. Won't you feel compassion toward us and use what you are able to do to relieve our suffering?" And Christ did just that, the point being that mercy is not simply something in the spiritual realm, it's something that is manifested also in the physical realm.

Let's look at one other passage as we ask the question: what is mercy? Look over at the book of Jude, if you would, and we need to see this as well because in the book of Jude what you find is this: you find that this concept of mercy has a defining impact on the way that we relate to others in spiritual need; how we relate to those who are in sin; how we relate to those who are struggling spiritually. And it is not with a sense of condemnation against them, it is not with an attitude of spiritual superiority saying, "I wonder when they're going to get their act together." That's not the point. That's not the spirit of salvation. Beloved, we need to drink this in deeply even as a church.

Look at verse 20, Jude verse 20, he says, "But you, beloved," sometimes people wonder why I use that word so often when I speak. Here it is, it's the way Scripture speaks to believers. Of course, I think every preacher should have that sense of love for those to whom he addresses and so, beloved, as we look at Scripture here today, let's see what it says to us. "But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life." There is that word "mercy" again. We're expecting future mercy from God, that he's going to show greater compassion to us. You know, if you're afraid of death and you fear the act of dying, understand that the Lord is going to be merciful and have compassion on you in that moment of severity in your life. Of course he is, he's merciful. He has compassion on your need and so there is no reason to fear the act of dying. He's going to have mercy on you then and then he's going to have mercy on you and show compassion to you throughout all the halls of eternity. It can't go wrong for us when we're in the hands of a merciful God. But look at what he goes on and says in verse 22 and how this plays out in horizontal relationships in the context of the body of Christ. Verse 22, "have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh."

Beloved, one of the aspects of church, one of the aspects of the biblical ministry, is that God will bring people to us who are struggling spiritually: struggling with doubt, struggling with sin, struggling with issues in their lives. And from a perspective of maturity, you might be tempted to look down on them and say, "What's the matter with them? Why can they not get their act together?" And in doing that, all of a sudden the spiritual problem is not them at all, it's you for not being merciful, for not having compassion, for not having a sense of sympathy toward them that would do what you could to help and strengthen them along the way. Mercy is supposed to define the nature of biblical ministry. Why? Because we are all the recipients of mercy to begin with and having received a greater mercy and our guilt and shame from a holy God showing mercy and compassion on us, then we say, "Oh, I get it. This mindset defines the whole way I look at everything."

What is mercy? Someone has a need, someone meets the need. It's not complicated. You see a need, you want to be merciful, here you go. You see a need, you meet the need. Don't get wrapped up into all kinds of emotional self-introspection, "Do I feel this or not?" You know, be real practical about it. Praise God that he has shown mercy to you, that he had compassion on you in your sin and say, "Now, do you know what? When I see a need that is within my power to meet, I'll meet it, and I'll let that be a response to the mercy that God showed to me." That's what mercy is. Someone has a need, someone who has the ability to help meets that need.

Let's answer a second question about this passage, about this principle, this concept of mercy. Question 2: why should you be merciful? Why should you be merciful? You know, as you think about it, you realize that this whole concept of mercy has the potential to be kind of inconvenient; that all of a sudden what others are going through somehow, and it's in your sphere of relationships and sphere of your influence and all of that, all of a sudden you realize that this brings responsibility to you. Why would you do that? Why would you engage that? Why would you live that way? Why would you bother? Well, you bother, brother, sister, you bother because you're responding to a greater mercy that was shown to you. Why should you be merciful? Here's the answer: you should be merciful in your fundamental character because God has been merciful to you. You should be merciful because God has been merciful to you. Do you realize that we're not talking in deep, profound, complicated, Latin, theological terms? We're talking in basic terms, basic understandings, basic principles of right and wrong that anyone can understand. If you have received mercy, you should be merciful in response. You were guilty but in mercy Christ died for you. You were headed for hell and now you are headed instead for heaven. The hinge on that was the mercy of God, the compassion of Christ on your soul and now, here's the way that you think about life, here's the way you think about yourself, beloved, here's the way that you think about the purpose of your existence: I received mercy. I can do nothing else but be a merciful person in response to that. Because God showed mercy to you, now that principle of mercy operates in you.

Go back to Ephesians and the word "mercy" is not used specifically in this passage but you'll see the ethical imperative of it, the necessity of it, the way that you think. You know, remember that we said that this verse is working itself out in horizontal ways,

horizontal dimensions and in Ephesians 4:32, you see that horizontal dimension expressed in the phrase "one another." So in verse 32, the Apostle Paul, having expounded in the first three chapters of Ephesians the great nature of salvation that God has given to us says in verse 32, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other," look at the principle that he grounds it on, "just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." God has forgiven you. God has saved you. God showed mercy on you therefore what do you do? Beloved, this is not rocket science. This is not something complex that only a seminary professor could understand. This is basic life righteousness. This is a basic principle of what is right and wrong. God was like that to me, God forgave me, then by disposition I should be a forgiving person in response.

He goes on in chapter 5, verse 1, "Therefore be imitators of God." Follow the example of God that he showed to you. Imitate it. Imitate it. Do what God did to you. He forgave you, forgive others. He showed mercy and compassion to you, show mercy and compassion to others. Show that you appreciate it by multiplying it in your life. Chapter 5, version 1, "be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma." Again and again and again Scripture tells you, "Think about how Christ has dealt with you. Think of the mercy and love and forgiveness that he has given to you and let that now become the motivating force that defines your relationships with others."

Here's the way it works, beloved. I like to use this term on this verse: there is what I like to call a divine spiral in mercy. A divine spiral. Mercy came down and then it spirals out into others like this, here's the way that you should think. This is fundamental Christian thinking. This is 101 how do I live as a Christian. This is the ABCs of Christian character, really, and yet it's at the most elementary principles that you and I fail and fall short but here's the way that you think about this spiral. You say, "I'm a Christian. God had mercy on me." Okay, great. Now let's think about what that means. That means that God first was merciful to me in my salvation, you say to yourself. You recognize that mercy. You're thankful for it. You appreciate it as the undeserved gift that it was to you. You recognize that and then in turn you extend that mercy to others and it becomes a self-reinforcing cycle. As you walk through life, you're sharing this mercy and suddenly you stumble into sin or you have a great physical need or a problem that you can't solve and you cry out, as the blind men to Jesus did, "God, have mercy on me! Have compassion on me in this suffering! Have compassion on me! I have sinned against you, won't you wash me and cleanse me from sin? Won't you help me through this difficulty in life?" And what do you find? You find that God in compassion does just that. He ministers to your need. He refreshes your memory, your understanding of the mercy of Christ on the cross and you say, "Ah yes, my sins are forgiven." And that earthly difficulty, that conundrum that you were facing, solves itself and works itself out and the pressure and the angst that you were feeling about that God relieves by a merciful dispensation of his providence in your life and you say, "O God, you were so good to me again. You had compassion on me. God, I'm so grateful that you did that, that you lightened my affliction, that you have cleansed me from my sin," and your spirit is renewed and you go out and all of a sudden you're just once again fresh and you want to deal with others like that in your personal relationships and this cycle just repeats itself



over and over again. The mercies of the Lord are new every morning. God continually finds new ways to show mercy and grace to us in ways that we never expected. So as you're walking with Christ, walking in the light of his word, you see these things, it refreshes your heart and it softens it, beloved. It softens your heart. It makes your heart tender. Having received such kindness from God, it makes you want to be kind in your own disposition. Do you see the inevitable connection? These things are locked together. You don't find one without the other.

So here's another way to express it: God's mercy in your life gives birth to mercy through your life. He refreshes you and you show more mercy to others, and God refreshes you again, and do you know what? That just goes on and on as an energetic principle of Christian living and it continues until he flings open the doors to heaven and receives you into his glory. Then you say...I think when we're in heaven we forget everything behind because we're overwhelmed by the glory that consumes us when we're there. But just speaking kind of metaphorically, when we arrive in heaven if we have any sense of looking back, we're going to look back and say, "Man, that mercy was astoundingly great and it's like a whisper in the wind compared to what God has given to me now. This is so much kindness. This is so good. This is so inexplicably wonderful, inexpressibly, ineffably great." All as a result of the fact that God showed compassion to you that you didn't deserve.

So why are you merciful? How could you not be when such compassion has manifested itself from the throne of God into your life? You see, beloved, this is really practical. Mercy from God begets mercy in the life of the redeemed so that – oh – so that your impulses toward mercy reveal your character. It shows what you're really like. It shows to some, the absence of merciful impulses would show that they are not even saved even though they know a lot of theology: hardhearted, stern, "Don't mess with me," kind of person. That's your character? How could you possibly know anything about the mercy of God? Ah, but someone has wronged you and, "I want to be forgiving. I see that person in need. They're struggling spiritually, I want to help them. I want to care for them. You know, it's not that they are hard and defiant and resistant and coarse and opposed to the holy things of God. They welcome those things but, man, are they struggling. Let me help them." This is how it manifests itself. Mercy begets mercy and so your impulses in these realms reveal your character. They show what you're really like.

Let's answer a third question. Oh, and this one is tough. It's tough to deal with this but it's in Scripture. The third question is this: what happens to the unmerciful? What happens to the unmerciful? What happens to those who don't have an impulse of compassion in action toward those who are in need? What happens to them? Oh, it's not pretty. People who show no mercy will face the wrath of God. People who show no mercy will face the wrath of God.

Go back to Matthew 5:7. Let's look at the text again. "Blessed are the merciful." These are the people who are on the receiving end of divine favor. They are blessed. They are merciful in the way that we've been talking about. Why are they blessed? "For they shall receive mercy." They will receive mercy. The idea in the original language is that it is

them and them alone. No others are on the receiving end of God's mercy. They don't even belong to the kingdom because this is essential to being a true Christian. It's an essential part, it's an essential aspect of actually being in the kingdom of God. Think about it with me, beloved: is God merciful? Yes, he is. Therefore and if Christ is God, and he is, and Christ is merciful, and he is, then what is the realm of his kingdom going to look like? It's going to be a kingdom of mercy. And what are the citizens of that kingdom going to be like? They're going to be merciful. They're going to reflect the mercy of the realm in which they exist. They're going to reflect the mercy that is intrinsic to the nature that God gives them in conversion. They're going to reflect the mercy of their King. These things are inevitable. This is the only way it could be. The "they" is emphatic. Only the merciful will receive mercy from God.

And now let's step back and say the hard things. You would want a doctor to tell you if you had cancer, right? I mean, you need to know if there is spiritual disease. You need to know if there is physical disease so it can be treated, you need to know if there is spiritual disease so that you can deal with that and, beloved, let's just state this really clearly and directly: some people, you can decide if this applies to you, some people have been wronged in their lives maybe by family, maybe my business associates, maybe by neighbors, whatever, they have been wronged and in that corner of their life they hardheartedly refuse to forgive. "I am not going to let that go." Resentful. Hateful. Bearing the grudge, nursing it and clinging to it like a death grip. Wronged and yet refusing to forgive. Saying that, "I'm a Christian but in this corner of my life, uh-uh." You see, beloved, the Scriptures, the Lord Jesus Christ go to that dark closet of your life where you say, "uh-uh," and Scripture says, "yes," and goes right there and addresses it with penetrating clarity and explanation.

Look over at Matthew 18. Jesus spoke to this with utter clarity in a way that is sobering, challenging, and should motivate you to renew your sense of a forgiving spirit with those angry feelings and grudges that you brought into the room today. Matthew 18:21. I don't often do this but I'm going to read an extended passage as an illustration. We need to weigh the Lord Jesus' thoughts on this principle quite clearly. Jesus spoke about this at length. This is the topic that is before us in Scripture. We should hear what our Lord says about this.

Matthew 18:21, "Peter came and said to Him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.'" Don't keep count, Peter. Then he goes on and he gives a parable that explains the principal that we're talking about here this morning and so you could look at this and say as we read this parable, here is Jesus giving his own commentary on the principle of Matthew 5:7. We don't need a William Hendrickson to explain this passage to us, he was a Reformed commentator, in case you didn't realize that, we've got Jesus' own commentary on what this principle of mercy means.

Let's hear what he says. He says, "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he had begun to

settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him." That is an incalculable debt of many lifetimes. Ten thousand talents was brought to him. "But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.' And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt." Stop there for just a moment. He saw a need, he met the need. He graciously forgave that debt that was rightfully his to demand payment of and says, "I forgive you. Go your way. Go in peace." Ah, you just love the king. You are stunned by the generosity of the king. What a generous act that a king who had the right to demand repayment and imprison this man sets him free and writes it all off. Oh, what a king. It's evident that Christ is giving a self-illustration here, isn't it?

But look at what the slave did with that, verse 28, "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii," like three months' wages. He owed the king a debt of multiple lifetimes that he could never repay, he finds somebody who owes him three months of wages. You can work that out. You could pay that off. But what did the slave do? "He seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.'" Offering the same grounds of asking for compassion that that slave asked from the king. What happens? Verse 30, "But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed." He did the exact opposite of what the king did with him.

Verse 31, "So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?'" Do you see the word "mercy" there? "I had mercy on you. How could you withhold it to someone else on a much lesser matter than on what I forgive you?" Verse 34, "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him." Verse 35, "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

Look at verse 32 with me again. Look at how he addresses him, "You wicked slave. You wicked slave. You claimed mercy from me, you asked compassion from me and I freely gave it to you and you went out and did that? There's only one word to describe it, that's wicked," so Jesus says in the parable. Beloved, do you see that the same principle is applicable to us right now in this room? Those of you who are Christians, "I'm a Christian. I have received the mercy of God," but you claim the mercy of God but you won't extend it? You won't show kindness to someone in need? You won't forgive a lesser debt when you've been forgiven an eternal debt by the hands of a merciful God? Do you know what Scripture says to a man or a woman like that? Scripture says you are wicked. You are deceived. You don't know the first thing about life in the kingdom of God. Let that sink in. All of a sudden what Christ has done for you today he has brought and elevated that issue in your mind and has put his finger on it and says, "I want you to

deal with this now because the time of grudge and resentment and retaliation is over," if you name the name of Christ. You cannot be that way and maintain your claim of being a Christian. It does not work that way. You see, men and women are profoundly mistaken to think that they can be Christians and simultaneously maintain a relentless, continuous, unforgiving heart. That's not the kingdom. That's not the way it works. That's not its reality. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." Unmerciful people do not receive mercy from God.

James in his letter took it even further. Look at James 2:3. Scripture is not ambiguous on this point and there are no excuses. There is no pass on this and you say, "But you don't know." I don't need to know. You see, it's like someone comes and says, "But you don't know what happened. I cannot forgive that person." To which I respond, "That's not the point. The point is that you don't know. You don't know the surpassing nature of the abounding grace and mercy of God on sinners to talk like that. You can't talk that way with an understanding of grace, of mercy, of Christ. You're the one who doesn't understand it." Look at what James says, James 2:13 in his very direct, blunt style, he says, "judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment."

Beloved, what do you want your judgment to be like? Do you want God to be merciful to you? Do you want him to show compassion, cleanse you and overlook the many ways that you have sinned against him? Do you want that? Do you desire that? Realize that on a human dimension, you manifest that in the mercy that you show in the relationships around you, and that if you love your grudge more than forgiveness, oh my goodness, what's going to happen to you? What's going to happen to you if you're like that? This is awful to think about. Judgment will be merciless to those who have shown no mercy. Is that what you want? Is that earthly grudge, that earthly loss, that earthly sin that was committed, is it so great that you'll cast yourself into eternal hell for the sake of being able to clutch onto it? Is it worth that much to you? Martyn Lloyd Jones says this and I quote, "The grace of God is such that when it comes into our hearts with forgiveness, it makes us merciful. We proclaim therefore whether we have received forgiveness or not by whether we forgive or not. If I am forgiven, I shall forgive. If I am not merciful there is only one explanation, I have never understood the grace and the mercy of God. I am outside of Christ. I am in my sins and unforgiven."

Beloved, don't go there. And if you're there, get out. Nothing is worth missing the mercy of God over. If this has convicted you, take a fresh look at the Redeemer who shed his blood to save sinners just like you. Humble yourself to the point of being willing to say, "Lord, maybe I've never been saved all this time but your word has exposed my unforgiving, unmerciful heart. Have mercy on me." Maybe you're a Christian and you realize, "Do you know what? I have stepped in that direction." Stop and repent and come back to Christ and the Christ who has been merciful to you at the start, he'll be merciful to you again. The whole reason that he brings this to all of our attention is just so he can show more mercy to you, to convict you. And as a church, do you know what the demeanor of our church should be for people who are struggling, people that are weak, people that are doubting? Impulse not one of judgment, not one of condemnation, one of

mercy. Galatians 6 says, "restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, each one looking to himself lest you yourself be tempted." This goes everywhere. It's the nature of the Beatitudes. It's the nature of the word of God.

Let's pause for a moment before we go to communion.

*Father, what a challenge. What a wonderful thing to remember your mercy in our lives, that you saved us from our sins. For some of us, saving us from our own miserably unforgiving ways, that angry spirit, and changing us into someone new. We thank you for doing that, Lord. Take what we've seen today from your word, take these words from Jesus and apply them skillfully to our hearts. Comfort those who are convicted but in a way, Father, that brings them to true repentance, true mercy, to a point where some would say, "Do you know what? I'm going to go and make a phone call as soon the service is over. I'm going to call that person whether they will hear me or not and say, 'My friend, I'm so sorry.'" But now, Father, we put those things aside for just a moment in order to pivot toward communion and to remember the Lord's table, this powerful reminder of the mercy that you have shown to us in our sins. Father, your word says that in Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace which he lavished on us. Father, we come to this table remembering a lavishing of mercy, a lavishing of compassion, the sinless Son of God offering up his body and blood to save us from our sins. We thank you for that and pray that this time would be a time of grateful meditation as we remember your Son. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.*