

“EXTENDING AND RECEIVING MERCY”

**I. Introduction**

- A. As we move into the second half of the Beatitudes today, we begin to see a slight shift of emphasis.
  - 1. The first four Beatitudes emphasized that Christians acknowledge their spiritual impoverishment and respond to it with humility and a desire to grow in righteousness.
  - 2. The last four Beatitudes build upon this by focusing more on the Christian’s character as he relates to other people.
  - 3. And the first item in this second group is a quality that clearly grows out of the first set: every Christian should be known as a person who shows mercy to others.
- B. In this evening’s sermon, I want to look at this Beatitude in three sections.
  - 1. First, we will consider what mercy is.
  - 2. Second, we will explore why Christians should be merciful.
  - 3. And lastly, we will reflect upon the implications of what Jesus says about the promise of future mercy.

**II. What Is Mercy?**

- A. As we consider what mercy is, it will be helpful to take a few minutes to clarify some of the things that often get mistaken for mercy.
  - 1. Being merciful is not a matter of being easy-going, tolerant, or open-minded.

2. Mercy is not about accepting people as they are and refusing to make moral judgments concerning what is right and what is wrong.
  3. God exhibits mercy perfectly, but he is certainly not tolerant or easy-going.
  4. God's mercy is in perfect harmony with his commitment to what is right and true and good.
  5. This leads Martyn Lloyd-Jones to say that "If I can think of mercy only at the expense of truth and law, it is not true mercy, it is a false understanding of the term." [99]
- B. Another thing that often gets mistaken for mercy is the idea that the forgiveness that we extend to others should be unconditional.
1. The Scriptures do tell us that we need to forgive others as God has forgiven us, but God's forgiveness is not unconditional.
  2. God does not forgive people who do not show repentance, and neither should we.
  3. It is true that Jesus prayed on the cross for God to forgive those who crucified him, but we have to remember that that was not a declaration of absolution but a prayer.
  4. If God forgave any of those people, he did so by producing repentance in their hearts.
  5. God does not forgive the unrepentant.
  6. Of course we should not use this as an excuse to hold grudges against people.
  7. We always need to fight against bitterness
  8. We always need to be ready to extend forgiveness.

9. But true forgiveness can only take place when there is repentance and reconciliation

C. Having considered a couple of things that mercy is not, let's turn now to think through what mercy is.

1. In its most basic sense, mercy is a matter of showing compassion to those who are suffering.
2. Lloyd-Jones explains that there is a distinction between mercy and grace, noting that "Grace is especially associated with men in their sins; mercy is especially associated with men in their misery." [99]
3. Of course, all of the misery that people experience can ultimately be traced back to sin.
4. The cause of an particular person's suffering might be their own sin, the sin of others, or factors that stem from living in a fallen world.
5. Mercy has to do with our response to the misery that sin brings into people's lives.
6. This is where we continue to see the logical progression in the Beatitudes.
7. As John Stott points out, there is a close connection between being meek and being merciful: "For to be meek is to acknowledge to others that *we* are sinners; to be merciful is to have compassion on others, for *they* are sinners too." [48]
8. The mercy that we extend to others is mindful of the fact that we are no better than anyone else.

D. A merciful person is someone who is so moved when they see others in distress that it is as if the pain of others is their own pain.

1. This causes them to look for ways to relieve the distress that others experience.

2. Mercy often involves bearing others' burdens when their lives have been broken by sin or by suffering.
  3. This is what Paul is talking about in Galatians 6 when he tells us to "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2)
  4. Think about the burdens that people in this congregation are experiencing right now.
  5. And as you ponder this, ask yourself how you might be able to extend mercy to your brothers and sisters in this body of believers.
  6. In what ways can you bear the burdens of your fellow Christians?
- E. As far as the specifics of showing mercy, here are a few concrete things that we can put into practice.
1. First, we need to listen to people if we are going to be merciful to them.
  2. We are often so busy with our own lives that we fail to take time to really listen to others.
  3. But it is only by listening that we will begin to get a sense of the burdens that people are bearing.
- F. Second, we need to actually help people.
1. This might seem obvious, but it is easier said than done.
  2. It is seldom convenient for us to help people.
  3. It gets in the way.
  4. It cuts into our time.

5. It complicates things.
  6. As Calvin puts it, our attitude is often one that says, "Leave us alone... Let others suffer in silence. We don't wish to be burdened." [*Sermons on the Beatitudes*, 41]
- G. A third way to show mercy is by giving to others.
1. We see a moving example of this in the early church, when the Christians in Acts 2 sold some of their possessions in order to be able to take care of the needs of their fellow believers. (Acts 2:44-45)
  2. God wants us to be generous toward those in need.
  3. This is an important way of showing mercy.
- H. And lastly, we can show mercy to people by speaking God's truth to them.
1. We need to remember that the most pitiful state that a human being can be in is to be estranged from his or her Creator.
  2. This leads Lloyd-Jones to say that we should "see everybody who is in a state of sin as one who is to be pitied." [Lloyd-Jones, 103]
  3. Take pity on those who are still lost in their sins and those who are straying from the truth.
  4. As it says in the letter of Jude, "have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh." (Jude 22-23)

### III. Why Christians Should Be Merciful

- A. Now that we have spent some time thinking through what mercy is, I want us to take a few moments to consider the main reasons why Christians need to be merciful.
1. First, we should be merciful because our God is a merciful God.
  2. When the Lord passed before Moses on Mount Sinai, he revealed himself with these words: "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." (Ex. 34:6)
  3. As Christians, we have been created anew after the likeness of this God of mercy.
  4. The mercy that is an essential aspect of God's character should be reflected in our lives.
- B. Another reason why we need to show mercy to others is because God has shown mercy to us.
1. Jesus emphasized this in his parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18.
  2. In that parable, the servant's master forgave him a debt that he never would have been able to repay, but when that servant came across another servant who owed him a small amount he had him thrown in prison until he could pay the debt.
  3. When the master was told about this, he summoned the first servant and said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" (vv. 32-33)
  4. We see the same principle in the Lord's Prayer, where Jesus instructs us to ask God to "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Mt. 6:12)

5. Of course, these passages are not saying that our being merciful is what causes God to be merciful to us.
  6. They are only telling us that the mercy that we show to others stands as evidence that we ourselves have truly understood and received God's mercy.
  7. When we understand that we owe our lives to Christ's mercy, we will be merciful in our relationships with others.
- C. A third reason why we should be merciful is because people need mercy.
1. Sin brings all sorts of misery into people's lives.
  2. There are countless opportunities for us to try to alleviate this misery, far more than we could ever begin to address.
  3. We can't do everything, but we can do something.
  4. There are people all around us who are ignorant of God's truth, people who are living selfish and self-destructive lives, people who are overwhelmed by sadness or pain or life's demands.
  5. Do we have compassion on these people?
  6. Do our hearts break for them?
  7. Do we try to bring those whom we can some measure of relief?
  8. That is how our Lord wants us to respond when we see people in misery.

#### **IV. The Promise of Future Mercy**

- A. We turn now to consider what Jesus says about the reward that is promised to those who are merciful to others.

1. He says that the merciful “shall receive mercy.”
  2. Notice that Jesus puts this promise in the future tense.
  3. He is talking about the mercy that we will receive on the day of judgment.
  4. On that day, all will be laid bare before God’s holy gaze.
  5. And those who were merciful in this life will find that the Lord will take pity on them and welcome them into glory in the world to come.
- B. As I said earlier, Jesus is not saying that our being merciful is the thing that causes God to be merciful to us.
1. Such a notion would be in direct contradiction to the gospel of grace.
  2. The fact that we are merciful to others is itself a blessing that is bestowed upon us by God.
  3. When we receive the mercy of God into our hearts, his mercy makes us merciful to others.
- C. As we consider how we measure up to Christ’s call for us to be merciful, we will have to admit that we fail in many, many ways.
1. None of us is anywhere near as merciful as we should be, or even as merciful as we could be.
  2. God’s law always exposes our inability to measure up to his holy standards.
  3. This should humble us and make us all the more grateful for the mercy that God extends to us in Christ.
  4. As much as it hurts to be reminded of our failings, Martyn Lloyd-Jones is right when he says that “A man who is truly Christian... never objects to being humbled.” [96]



D. We stand in constant need of God's mercy.

1. We need God's mercy each and every day of our lives.
2. Whenever you confess your sins to the Lord, and I hope you do so every day, you are seeking God's mercy.
3. And whenever you do that, you should also take a few moments to ponder the greatness of the mercy that God extends to you in Christ.
4. He doesn't just forgive you the seven times that Peter suggested when he asked Jesus how many times he should forgive his brother.
5. God forgives you times without number.
6. "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning" (Lam. 3:22-23)
7. The more you marvel at the depths of God's mercy to you, the more natural it will be for you to be merciful to others.
8. The one who knows that he has been forgiven much will love much.
9. With that in mind, let me close now with these thoughts from John Newton:

"when we have said all we can of the abounding of sin in us -- grace still more abounds in Jesus. We cannot be so evil as he is good. His power is a good match for our weakness. His riches are a good match for our poverty. His mercy is a good match for our misery. We are vile in ourselves -- but we are complete in him. In ourselves we have cause to be abased -- but in him we may rejoice. Blessed be God for Jesus Christ." [cited in *Extravagant Grace*, 173]