Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Happy Are the Merciful
Scripture: Matthew 5:7
Code: 2202

Turn with me to Matthew chapter 5 and we'll continue our study in the Beatitudes, and let's read through the first 12 verses. "And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain and when He was seated, His disciples came unto Him and He opened His mouth and taught them, saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all men are of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets who were before you."

If you've been with us for our study of Matthew, you know that this is the manifesto of the king. Matthew presents Jesus Christ as king and here we hear the king present the manifesto of His kingdom. Now, we've been saying that this is a twofold presentation. Our Lord is telling the truth about how you enter His kingdom and how you live while you're in His kingdom. Only the poor in spirit enter. Only the mourners enter. Only the meek enter. Only those who hunger and thirst after righteousness enter. And once they enter, they continue to be poor in spirit, mournful, meek, and hungering and thirsting after even more righteousness.

And here we come to the fifth, verse 7: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." Beloved, I would say again, it's the same twofold thing. In order to be in God's kingdom, you must be one who seeks mercy. And when you are in God's kingdom, you will be one who gives mercy to others. In other words, mercy is also a characteristic of those in God's kingdom, being merciful.

Now, the religion that Jesus faced in His day was shallow and superficial and external. And we learned that the Lord was looking at a kind of Judaism which was very, very much ritualistic and on the outside, not the inside. The Jewish leaders thought they were secure and that they would surely be inhabitors of the kingdom. They thought they surely would be the leading ones in Messiah's rule because they had a certain formalized, external, self-righteous religion. They were proud, they were indifferent, they were selfish, they were self-seeking, and they believed that because of their superficial acts of "righteousness," they would surely be the choice ones.

But the fact of the matter is there was nothing happening on the inside. In fact, our Lord said to these same people, “On the outside, you’re white and clean, but on the inside, you’re full of dead men’s bones.” And that is why back in chapter 3, if you’ll note it for a moment, when John the Baptist arrived upon the scene, his message was very directed to this issue. In verse 7 of chapter 3, when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come for baptism, he said to them, “Oh, generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth, therefore, fruits befitting repentance.” In other words, they had the external, but they didn’t have the stuff on the inside that indicates real repentance. “And think not to say within yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’” In other words, don’t count on your external racial identity to save you.

“I say unto you, God is able out of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham, but now also the ax is laid to the root of the tree; therefore, every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but he who cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear. He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire, whose fan is in His hand and He will thoroughly purge His floor and gather His wheat into the granary, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” Now, John the Baptist was speaking of judgment. He was speaking of a tremendous judgment of fire that would come on those who had nothing more than an external religion, who were going through the religious motions but had none of the eternal reality. That was to be judged by God. The ax was falling. The fire was beginning to burn. And Jesus confronts this external, self-righteous, selfish crowd of Jewish leaders and people as well and says to them what really matters is what is on the inside. The poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure at heart, the peacemakers. Those are all internal qualities. He bypassed all of the supposed credits that they had mounted to their own cause on the outside and went right to the heart of the matter.

Jesus Christ always puts the emphasis on the inside. Oh, He’s not unconcerned with action. He is concerned with action but only as it is produced by what’s inside. The fruit of righteousness on the inside will produce the right action. But you can falsify the action without the reality and that’s legalism. What Christ wants is true action based on true attitude. Jesus wants action that springs from right character. And by the way, from– 6th chapter right through the 7th chapter of the Sermon on the Mount, it all deals with action. It all deals with things we do or say or things we think. But the premise on which it’s all built is the right kind of heart attitude, and that’s what He’s talking about here. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has well put it this way, “A Christian is something before he does something.” “A Christian is something before he does something.” To be a child of the king, to be a subject of the kingdom is, first of all, to possess a certain kind of character. A character of brokenness, a character of mourning over sin, a character of meekness, a character of hunger and thirst for righteousness, a character of mercifulness, a character of purity of heart, a character of a peacemaker.

You see, we are not meant to control our Christianity; our Christianity is meant to control us. And legalism is us controlling Christianity. A true spirituality is our Christianity controlling us, and that's what Jesus was after. He didn't want us to control certain external activities; he wanted God in us to control those. And so the principles that Jesus gives here are not superficial, they're not on the edge of life, they're deep down inside. And being a true Christian means there can be no veneer, there can be no façade. Christianity is something that happens to us at the very center of our being and then it controls the very heart and from there it flows out to the activities of life. God has never been interested in superficiality. God has never been interested in only the blood of bulls and goats. God has never been interested in all of the meaningless spiritual activity unless the heart is right. And I go back to Amos chapter 5 so often in my mind where God says, "Stop your worship and stop your sacrifices and stop your music. Your hearts are not right," and that's what God is always after. God is concerned with the motives, the insides that produce the right external acts.

Now let's go back to Matthew 5 and see where we are. Jesus confronted a bunch of externalists with some devastating statements. He hits them right at the most vulnerable place in the first Beatitude when he says, "What you need to do is be spiritually bankrupt. You need to recognize that you are destitute and debauched beggars who have nothing good to bring to God, and your only hope is that you would see the beggarliness of your condition and that you would cower in the darkness of a corner and reach out a hand as a beggar who couldn't do anything for himself." And, boy, that was really obtuse to those Jewish people. And then He says further, "You must not be glad and satisfied about your self-righteousness. You must weep great tears about your sinfulness. You must be a mourner. Further, you must not be proud because you have kept certain laws. You must be meek before a holy God. Not only that, you must not be smug about your self-righteousness, but you must realize you are starving for a lack of righteousness and you must hunger and thirst for that."

Now, let me kind of connect this to number five in the Beatitudes. These first four Beatitudes were entirely inner principles. They dealt entirely with an inner attitude. They dealt entirely with what you see of yourself before God. But now, as He comes to the fifth Beatitude, this, while being also an inner attitude, begins to reach out and touch others. There is a manifestation in this that is the fruit of the other four. Where it is true of us that we are broken as beggars in our spirit, that we are mournful and meek and hungering and thirsting after righteousness, we will find ourselves being merciful to others as a result of it. Someone has said, "They who in their poverty of spirit acknowledge their need of mercy begin to show mercy to others. They who mourn their sin begin while they mourn to wash their hearts clean so they are also the pure in heart. And the meek are the ones who are always making peace. And they who hunger and thirst for righteousness are ever willing to be persecuted for righteousness' sake."

Do you see how the first four line up with the last four? The first four are the inner attitudes and the last four are the things they manifest. Where there is poverty of spirit and you realize you're nothing but a beggar, you're going to be willing to give to somebody else who's nothing but a beggar, and so

you'll be merciful. And where you are mourning over your sin, you will wash your heart pure with the tears of penitence, and you will be the pure in heart. And where you are meek, you will always be a peacemaker, because meekness makes peace. And where you are hungering and thirsting for righteousness, you will be willing to be persecuted for righteousness' sake. So we've made a transition now. Now we're going to talk about the character that is manifest when that inward attitude is there in the first four Beatitudes. When you have those first four, there are going to be four characteristics of your character that will be made manifest, and we'll see them as we study these last four areas in this wonderful introduction.

Now, let's look at what it means to be merciful. Verse 7, Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." And as we look at this one simple statement, I want you to know, people, this is so profound that there's no way that I can begin to cover it all. You know, it's very simple to preach when you just have a little bit of material because you just hit your point and hit your point and hit your point and expand it a little bit and you're okay. But when you've got just a Bible-full of material, it's very difficult to pick out what's best. This concept of mercy runs from one end of Scripture to the other. From one end of God's history since the fall of man to the time of the consummation. It is a gigantic reality, but I want to see if we can draw together at least four aspects of mercy for our study tonight. Four aspects: the significance, the source, the substance, and the sequel. Significance, source, substance, sequel. What is the significance? In other words, what does it mean to be merciful? It says in verse 7: Happy or blessed are the merciful. What does it mean? Boy, I'll tell you, to begin with, that was a literal jolt to the Jews of that day. They were merciless and the Romans of that day were merciless. They were very proud, egotistical, self-righteous, condemning, they looked down on others. And what Jesus was saying really touched the inside need of their hearts.

Now, you know, there are a lot of people who've tried to use this Beatitude in kind of a humanistic way and you hear people say, "Well, blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy" and they use kind of like a human virtue. "Well, if you're good to everybody else, then everybody else will be good to you." You know, Shakespeare, in *The Merchant of Venice*, has a speech given by Portia. I remember seeing this when I was in college. And Portia says this: "The quality of mercy is not strained. It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the earth beneath. It is twice blessed. It blesses him that gives and him that takes. 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest. It becomes the throned monarch better than his crown." Shakespeare says it is the most becoming thing a king can wear, to be merciful.

Now, even the Talmud recognizes that there's some sort of magnanimous human virtue in mercy. And the Talmud says that Gamaliel said this: "Whenever thou hast mercy, God will have mercy upon thee. And if thou hast not mercy, neither will God have mercy on thee." And it seems to be sort of built into human thinking that if you're just good to everybody, everybody will be good to you. Or if you are good toward God, God will be good toward you. Now, that's more true. I'm not sure about the first

one. You hear people who want to raise money say, “Well, if you’ll send us money, I’ll promise you you’ll get it back.” Many people see this is some kind of a give-and-take, and even people who look at it theologically like Gamaliel did, apart from Shakespeare, who looked at it purely humanly, think, “Well, if I do this for God, God’s going to do this for me.” You know, it’s like you’re putting God on the spot.

One writer paraphrased the verse by saying this: “This is the great truth of life. If people see us care, they will care.” Want to bet? Unfortunately, it’s not that simple. It’s far more than a human platitude. I agree with Gamaliel. If you bring God into it, there is a certain reciprocation. If we are honoring to God, God will care for us. But the world doesn’t work that way– believe me. In fact, the Roman world didn’t know the meaning of mercy. In fact, if you want to hear what they thought of it, all you have to do is recall that the Roman philosophers said mercy is “the disease of the soul.” In other words, mercy was a sign of weakness. Mercy was a sign that you didn’t have what it takes to do what really should be done. The Romans glorified justice and they glorified courage and they glorified discipline and they glorified power, and they looked down on mercy because mercy was a sort of a weak thing to do, to show somebody mercy. When a child was born into the world, the father had the right of *patria potestas*. He could take the child and he could just– they would hold the child up and if he wanted the child to live, he held his thumb up; if he wanted the child to die, he held it down. The child, if the thumb went down, was immediately drowned. There was no mercy. If a Roman citizen didn’t want his slave anymore, he could take out a knife and kill his slave and bury him and there was no recourse. So you see, if you’re talking about Roman society, that kind of platitude doesn’t cut it.

It isn’t simply the idea that if you’re merciful to everybody, then everybody’s going to be merciful to you. That’s wishful thinking in a Roman society, and I’ll tell you something else: It’s wishful thinking in our selfish, grasping, competitive society. You know, in our society we could say, “You be merciful to somebody else and he’ll step on your neck.” That doesn’t always work. But the best illustration of the fact that it’s not just a human platitude is our Lord, Jesus Christ. He proves once and for all that it isn’t a human platitude.

Jesus Christ came into the world and was the most merciful human being that ever lived. Jesus Christ came into the world and never did anything to harm anybody. Never. Jesus Christ came into the world, He reached out to the sick and He healed them. And He reached out to the crippled and He gave them legs to walk. And He reached to the eyes of the blind and they saw and to the ears of the deaf and they heard and to the mouths of the dumb and they spoke. And He found the prostitutes and the tax collectors and those that were debauched and He drew them into the circle of His love and He redeemed them and He set them on their feet. He picked up the sorrowing, He wept with them, and He took the lonely and He made them feel like they were loved. And He took little children and He gathered them into His arms and He loved them. Never was there a human being who ever lived in the face of the earth with the mercy of this one.

Once He was going along the streets and a funeral procession came by, and He saw a mother weeping because her son was dead and who would care? No son, no husband. And Jesus reached out in the midst of the funeral procession, stopped the casket, put His hand on it, and raised the child from the dead and gave him back to his mother. In John chapter 8, some men had caught a woman in adultery and they dragged that woman into the presence of Jesus, and He looked at that woman after He had talked with her and after He'd confronted her accusers and He forgave her and He said, "Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more." What mercy.

He ate with tax collectors, He ate with sinners, and when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eat with the tax collectors and the sinners in Mark chapter 2, verse 16, they said to His disciples, "How is it that He eats and drinks with publicans and sinners? He runs around with the riffraff." From start to finish, the life of the blessed Lord Jesus was one of constant mercy. He was merciful to everyone. Listen, I'm telling you something, people: Mercy given doesn't mean mercy returned. You can't work that human platitude in Jesus' case. You know what? He was the most merciful human being that ever lived and they screamed for His blood and they slammed Him to a cross and they nailed Him there. That's not a human platitude. Doesn't make it. That's not what it's talking about. If mercy carried its own reward, they wouldn't have nailed the most merciful being that ever lived to a cross and spit in His face and cursed Him. The most merciful one who ever lived received from the people to whom He gave mercy no mercy at all.

Two merciless systems, the Roman system and the Judaistic system united to kill Him. All you have to do is look at Rome and you can see how merciless they were. Look at the Caesars. The totalitarianism of unmerciful Rome was joined by the intolerance of a merciless religious system to which Jesus was a threat, and they took His life. No, mercy talked about here is not some human virtue that brings its own reward. That's not the idea. It isn't that you'll be merciful to others and they'll be merciful to you– no, no. You say, "Well, what then does the Lord mean? What is the significance?" Well, beloved, just simply said, it's this: You be merciful to others and God will be merciful to you. That's what it's saying. God is the subject of the second phrase. God will give you mercy. We're not talking about something that's human.

Now let's look at the word itself and we'll say more about that. Let's look at the word "merciful." *Elemnes*. The word is only used twice in the entire New Testament. Once it is used here and once it is used in Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 17, and there it says, "Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like his brother and that he might be a merciful and faithful"– what? – "high priest." Christ is the great illustration of mercy. He is our high priest who intercedes for us, and it is from Him that mercy comes. The verb form, however, is used many, many times in the Bible. It is very, very common. It is common in the Old Testament, Septuagint, the Greek edition. The Hebrew synonym would be *chesed* and it is also very common. The word simply means to have mercy on – now listen – to succor the afflicted, to give help to the wretched, and to rescue the miserable. It's a very broad

idea.

Anything you do that is of benefit to someone in need, that's mercy. Very broad idea, we think of mercy so much in terms of its aspect of forgiveness in salvation, but it's a very broad term. It means compassion in action. It goes beyond compassion. It goes beyond sympathy. It means compassion in action, sympathy in action toward anyone who has any need. And when our Lord talks about it here, the real *elemnes*, the real stuff, is not a weak sympathy which carnal selfishness feels but never does anything to help. It is not that false mercy which really indulges its own flesh in salving of conscience by giving tokenism. It is not the silent, passive pity which could be genuine but never seems to be able to help in a tangible way. It's not any of those superficial things. It is genuine compassion with a pure, unselfish motive that reaches out to help somebody in need. That's what it is.

In other words, Jesus was saying to them, "The people in my kingdom aren't takers, they're givers. The people in my kingdom aren't condemners, they're mercy givers. The people in my kingdom aren't the ones who set themselves above everybody, they're the people who stoop to help everybody." And by such words, Jesus was hitting them right where they were. They were elevating themselves, self-righteous, they wouldn't bother to give anything to anybody. In fact, there's one story Jesus tells about a man who wouldn't even give the necessary funds to care for the life of his mother and father because he said, "Ah, I've already devoted it to God in a religious act and I dare not break my vow to God." And our Lord said, "You are in deep trouble. You have exchanged the commandment of God to honor your father and mother for a tradition you've invented yourself." And they were good at it. They were merciless, even to their own parents.

But our Lord says if you're a member of His kingdom, you're going to be merciful, full of mercy. It doesn't just mean to sympathize. It doesn't just mean to feel compassion. It means to actually get in the skin of another person, to actually get right in and think their thoughts and feel their emotions and then care for them in a very tangible way. Mercy is when I see a man without food and I give him food. Mercy is when I see a person begging for love and I give them love. Mercy is when I see someone lonely and I give them my presence. Mercy is meeting the need, not feeling it. It goes beyond that.

Now, let me compare it with several words so you'll understand its significance. First of all, "mercy" and "forgiveness." I'd like to compare those two words. Would you think with me about that? Mercy and forgiveness. Is mercy forgiveness? Is forgiveness mercy? And how are the distinct? Now, I want you to keep your hats on and think with me, okay? In Titus 3:5, it tells us that by His mercy or according to His mercy He saved us. So, that's important now. Mercy, then, is an element that is there at salvation. In Ephesians chapter 2, it tells us that "God who is rich in mercy has redeemed us, made us alive." So mercy is behind the scenes in salvation. It is God's mercy that makes Him save us. It is God's mercy that allows Him to redeem us. So mercy is behind forgiveness, no question. So we do want to talk about mercy and forgiveness together because they belong together.

In Daniel chapter 9– I think it's verse 9, I'm guessing, so I hope I'm right, but Daniel 9:9: "To thee, yes, to the Lord our God"– and I love this– "belongs"– listen– "mercies and forgivenesses." Isn't that good? It links them together. So mercy and forgiveness do belong together. Psalm 130, by the way, also beautifully and wonderfully links those same things. "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, oh, Lord. Lord, hear my voice. Let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication. If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, oh, Lord, who shall stand?" This is a confession of sin. "But there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the Lord and my soul doth wait and in His word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning. I say more than they that watch for the morning. Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy."

Now, here's an individual confessing sin, seeking forgiveness, and knowing that forgiveness comes from the fountain of mercy. So mercy and forgiveness are linked. We cannot think of mercy without its expression in forgiveness. We cannot think of forgiveness without its source: mercy. But listen, people, forgiveness is not the only expression of mercy. Don't narrow down mercy to just a soteriological thought or a salvation reality. Mercy is infinitely bigger than just forgiveness. That's part of it. But listen, Psalm 119:64 says, "The earth is full of thy mercy." Genesis 32:10, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies." Second Samuel 24:14, "Thy mercies are great." Nehemiah 9:19, "Thy manifold mercies." Psalm 69:13, "The multitude of thy mercies." So mercies are far larger than just forgiveness.

Forgiveness is an act of mercy, yes. but there is much more. I can be merciful to someone when I forgive. But there are many other ways I can be merciful that don't necessarily involve forgiveness. In Lamentations, maybe the most beautiful of all the passages, it says this: "It is because of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not, they are new." How often? "Every morning great is thy faithfulness." God's mercies are infinite. But what about mercy and love, how do they compare? We're getting now a definition. We're dealing with the significance of mercy. That's point one. How do we compare it with love? Well, let's back up. Forgiveness flows out of mercy, mercy flows out of what? Love. Why has God been merciful? It is based on love. But God, who is rich in mercy– why? For His great love wherewith He loved us. You see the sequence? God loves and love is merciful and mercy is forgiving, among many other things. And so love is behind mercy, but love is bigger than mercy, if you can imagine this.

You say, "Now wait a minute. You said mercy was bigger than forgiveness." That's right. Mercy is bigger than forgiveness and love is bigger than mercy. Because love can do a lot of things, a lot more than just show mercy. Because mercy presupposes a problem and love can act when there isn't a problem, right? The Father loves the Son, the Son doesn't need mercy. The Son loves the Father and the Father doesn't need mercy. The Father loves the angels and the angels love the Father and neither one of them need mercy. Love is bigger than mercy. Mercy is the physician. Love is the friend. Love acts out of affection, mercy acts out of need. Love is constant, mercy is reserved for times of

trouble. But there's no mercy without love. But love is bigger than mercy.

It's a tremendous thought isn't it? You see how God's great love funnels down to our need under the category of mercy. There's a whole other category, too, when we're righteous and don't need mercy, he still loves us. He'll love us throughout all eternity, we don't need mercy anymore. But love funnels down to us in this life through mercy ,and mercy narrows down to that one thought of forgiveness, but it's much broader than that, too. Could I add one more thought? Or maybe two? What about mercy and grace? People say, "Well, is mercy like grace?" and "Is grace like mercy?" Well, yes and no. Now listen, you're going to really get a theological exercise, so hang on. The term "mercy" and all of its derivatives– listen– always deal with elements of pain and misery and distress. Always the result of sin, whether it's individual sin or just the sin of the world, just the problem of being in a sinful world. You see, mercy always presupposes problems. It deals with the pain and the misery and the distress. But grace deals with the sin itself. Mercy deals with the symptoms, grace deals with the problem.

You see, mercy offers relief from punishment. Grace offers pardon for the crime. You understand? First comes grace and grace removes the sin and then mercy eliminates the punishment. They're different. You know, in three of his letters– and he never does it in a letter to a church, he only does it in letters to individuals, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus, Paul says "mercy and grace and peace." Mercy and grace are different. Mercy eliminates the pain and grace grants a better condition. Let me give you an illustration. The Good Samaritan, right? He's lying– the man's lying on the side of the road, he's been beaten to the point of dying, he's been robbed, and the priest goes by and walks along and doesn't want to get involved. And the Levite goes by, doesn't want to get involved. All the sudden, a half-breed Samaritan comes by and he sees this poor Jew all beaten and maimed and so forth, and he goes over and he cares for him. You know what mercy does? Mercy relieves his pain. Mercy pours oil in his wombs and mercy binds up his wounds. And mercy relieves the suffering. And you know what grace does? Grace goes over and rents him a room so he can live in an inn.

You see, mercy deals with the negative and grace puts it in the positive. Mercy takes away the pain and grace gives a better condition. Mercy says no hell, grace says heaven. Mercy says I pity you, grace says I pardon you. So mercy and grace are two sides of the same marvelous thing. And God offers mercy and grace. And then there's another comparison you have to make and that's between mercy and justice. People say, "Well, if God is a God of justice, how can He be merciful?" If you look at it that way, if God's a just, holy, righteous God, can He just negate justice? Can He say, "Well, I know you're a sinner and I know you've done awful things, but oh, I love you so much and I have so much mercy, I'm just going to forgive you"? Can He do that? Yeah, He can. You know why? Because He came into the world in human form and died upon a cross, and at the cross when Jesus died– don't ever forget it– justice was satisfied.

Did you get that? God said there would be no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood and God said there had to be a perfect sacrifice to bear the sins of the world, and Jesus was that and

justice was satisfied. And now mercy does no violation to justice. I'm not– when I talk about the mercy of God, it's not some foolish sentimentality that excuses sin. Listen, we got too much of that going on, even in the church. The only time God ever extended mercy to anybody was when somebody paid the price for the sin involved. There is a kind of a false and phony foolish sentimental mercy that wants to just cancel out justice and "Don't make people pay for anything" and "Don't let them think that they're not being acceptable" and just sort of gloss it over. King Saul spared King Agag. That was a sentimental kind of mercy that violated God's holiness. David, in a sentimental, counterfeit mercy shown to Absalom, let him off easy and sowed the seeds of rebellion in his heart that were ruinous. Don't you ever forget it.

And God will never violate the truth of His justice and His holiness to be merciful. He will be merciful, but only when truth has been dealt with. If Absalom had repented and had accepted the truth of God, then the mercy would have been real, but it was nothing but sentimentalism because he never acquiesced to the truth. And there are people in the church, you know, who sin and they do things that are evil and against God and they don't really ever acknowledge the sin and they don't ever really deal with the evil and yet they want the mercy. Look at James chapter 2 for a minute, would you? James chapter 2 verse 10. A very important word, James 2:10: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point is guilty of all. For he that said, 'Do not commit adultery' also said, 'Do not kill.' Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law." In other words, James says if you break any of God's laws, you're offending the whole thing. You're guilty of all of it. "So speak ye and so do ye as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty."

Now listen to verse 13" "For he shall have judgment without mercy that hath shown no mercy, and mercy rejoices against judgment." Just that first line, "He will have judgment without mercy." Listen, there will be on God's part a merciless judgment on people who do not accept the truth. And the truth, of course, is the sacrifice of Christ. We're not talking about sentimentality. I'm not telling you that if you sin your life away and never acknowledge Jesus Christ, God's going to be merciful and accept you. That's not true. You will have judgment without mercy. And I believe that the only time God can really give mercy is when the truth has been accepted. Only when we accept the sacrifice of Christ or as Christians who've done that, if God is to be merciful to us, then we must confess sin as sin and repent and turn from it, and then we'll know His mercy.

So mercy is special. It is more than forgiveness. It is less than love. It is different than grace. And it is one with justice. It is more than forgiveness, less than love, different than grace, and one with justice. To sum up the significance of being a merciful person, listen to this: The merciful not only hears the insults of evil men, but his heart reaches out to the very same evil men in compassion. The merciful one is sympathetic. He is forgiving. He is gracious. He is loving. He's not so sentimental that He will excuse evil. He's not so sentimental that He will allow for sin to go unpunished or unconfronted just because somebody is kind of sad or tragic. No, mercy means you reach out in sympathy and total forgiveness and love and grace when truth is accepted. Psalm 37:21 says this: "The wicked borrows

and pays not back, but the righteous shows mercy." We're going to be merciful to those who accept the truth.

You know, if my son– and this has happened in our family– comes to me and says, "Dad, I did something wrong and I'm sorry," I'll be merciful. But I've told my children since they were little, "If I found out that you haven't told me the truth or you haven't admitted something that you've done, there won't be mercy, there will be punishment." You're dealing with the attitude to the truth, not some sentimentality. But where there is a dealing with the truth, we are to be merciful and gracious and loving and forgiving.

It was mercy in Abraham after he had been wronged by his nephew Lot which caused Abraham to go and secure Lot's deliverance. It was mercy on the part of Joseph after being treated so badly by his brothers that caused him to accept his brothers and meet their needs. It was mercy in Moses after Miriam had rebelled against him and the Lord had given her leprosy which made Moses cry, "Heal her now, oh, God, I beseech thee." It was mercy in David which caused him to spare the life of Saul. Mercy. That beautiful characteristic that says we reach out to forgive and to care and to help and to lift people up. We don't lord it over them. We don't step on their neck. We don't push them down. We don't think we're something superior.

In contrast to that, in Psalm 109, we read about the person without mercy. He talks about the wicked who have no mercy. And he says down finally in verse 14 of Psalm 109, "Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the Lord and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out. Let them be before the Lord continually that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth." Why? Oh, God, why would you be so judgmental? Why so condemning? "Because he remembered not to show mercy. He persecuted the poor and the needy that he might even slay the broken in heart."

I told you a few months ago that God has always identified with the poor and the needy. In fact, our Lord Jesus said in that great sermon on Olivet, He said, "Someday when the judgment comes, I'm going to say to you, 'You know why you're going to be out of my kingdom? Do you know why you're not going to be a part? Because when I came to you, you didn't give me what I needed. When I was naked, you didn't clothe me. And when I was hungry, you didn't feed me. And I was thirsty, you didn't give me to drink.'" And the people will say, "Wait a minute– we never saw you." And the Lord is going to say to them, "Well, any of my people that you saw were representatives of me, and when they came, you didn't feed them and you didn't give them water and you didn't give them clothes. And if you've done it unto the least of these, my children, you've done it unto me."

Listen, God identifies with destitute people. And the merciful are those who reach out. Not those who grasp and take. God help us somehow to be able to overrule the inundation of a corrupt society that tells us to get everything we can get and hear the voice of our God who tells us to give everything we can give. We are to be merciful. If somebody offends you, be merciful. If somebody does something

against you, be merciful. Be compassionate, be benevolent, be sympathetic. If somebody makes a mistake or a misjudgment or if somebody fails to pay a debt or return something they've borrowed or something, be merciful. That's the character of the kingdom.

And by the way, in Proverbs 11:17 it says, "The merciful man does good to his own soul, but he that is cruel troubles his own flesh." You want to be really miserable, then be merciless. You want to be happy, be merciful. Proverbs chapters 12, in verse 10, it says, "A righteous man regards the life of his animal, but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." What he's saying here is righteous people are even merciful to animals, and the wicked are cruel to everything.

Romans 1:31. I want you to see a characteristic of a godless society. This is the description. Verse 29 says, "They are filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, whispers, back biters, haters of God, insolent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents without understanding, covenant breakers without natural affection, implacable, and"– what's the climax of the whole list?– "unmerciful." You say, "You mean that's the big sum of the whole thing?" That's it. Unmerciful. But listen, people, for those of us who have received mercy, how could we be anything but merciful? What did you deserve? How can you demand to be cruel to somebody when you needed mercy so desperately from God? And that takes us to our second point, very quickly, the source of mercy. Who is the source? Well, you know who it is, it's God. It's God. God is the source of mercy. It is a gift from God. Now. let me tell you something. It's only for the people who've gone through the other four Beatitudes. It's only for the poor in spirit who mourn their sins and stand meek before a holy God and hunger and thirst for His righteousness, and when they receive His righteousness, when they receive His gift of mercy for them, then they can be merciful.

Listen, people, mercy is not a normal human attribute. You'll never make it happen. It doesn't work. You be merciful to people and they'll be merciful to you. Don't believe it. Now and then some might, but that is not a normal human attribute. The only way to be a merciful person is to have within you the God-given mercy, and the only way to have God-given mercy is to have the righteousness of God that comes through Christ, and that's what Jesus is saying. Unless you come by this path to the place of hungering and thirsting for righteousness and you be filled by God, you'll never know mercy because mercy is part of His filling.

There are lots of people who want the blessing, but they don't want the belonging, you know? They want the blessing, not the blessor. They're like Balaam. You know, Balaam the false prophet. He said– you remember his prayer? He said, "Let me die the death of the righteous." And he said, "Let my last stand be like His." And an old Puritan said he wanted to die like the righteous, he just didn't want to live like the righteous. And there may be some people who want mercy, but they don't want it on God's terms. And the only people who have mercy are the people who qualify under the first four Beatitudes, those who have come with a broken and a beggarly spirit before a holy God and sought

His righteousness that comes only in Christ. And when God gives us His righteousness, with it comes a capacity for mercy.

Listen, God is merciful and we possess God. Ephesians 3 says, “We are filled with all the fullness of God and His mercy shows through us.” God has two kinds of attributes. Did you know that? What we call absolute and relative, two kinds. For example, you say, “What are His absolute attributes?” God is love, God is truth, God is holiness. And if nobody ever lived, He’d still be love, truth, and holiness. If you were never born, He’d still be love, truth, and holiness. But when you and I came into the world, those absolutes took on a relative character. And His truth became faithfulness to us. His holiness became justice and His love became grace and mercy. Those are the relative attributes that spring from His absolute nature. His love became mercy and grace. Beloved, God is the one rich in mercy and He is the one who gives it and the only one. In Psalm 103:11, the psalmist said, “As the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear him.” We fear God. We come to Christ and God gives us His mercy. And thus does our Lord say in Luke 6:36, “Be ye therefore merciful as your Father is merciful.”

So God is the source. God is the only one who can give us mercy. The supreme act, obviously, of God’s mercy was the cross. There’s no act that can rival that for mercy. Jesus comes to the cross. He gets inside the skin of man. He’s merciful and that’s what made Him a merciful high priest. Dr. Barnhouse put it this way: “When Jesus Christ died on the cross, all the work of God for man’s salvation passed out of the realm of prophecy and became historical fact. God has now had mercy upon us. For anyone to pray ‘God, have mercy on me’ is the equivalent of asking Him to repeat the sacrifice of Christ. All the mercy that God ever will have on man, He has already had when Christ died. That is the totality of mercy. There couldn’t be any more, and God can now act toward us in grace because He has already had all mercy on us. The fountain is now open and it is flowing and it continues to flow freely.

And we speak of it, don’t we?– sometimes when we say, “He saw me ruined in the fall, He loved me notwithstanding all. He saved me from my lost estate, His mercy, oh, how great.” And we correctly sing “Mercy there was great and grace was free, pardon there was multiplied to me, there my burdened soul found liberty”– where?– “at Calvary.” There was God’s act of mercy. Did you know Micah 7:18 says He delights in mercy? He was merciful to us on the cross and when we received Christ, He gives us His mercy. God is the source of mercy.

Third, the substance of mercy. What does it mean to be merciful? And I’m just going to quickly tell you this. I’m going to skip some things I have. But I want you to just get the simple thoughts. Substance of mercy. “What do you mean by that, John?” Well, I mean, this: How do I make practical this thought? How does my life become a merciful life? Oh, so many Scriptures– so many– Romans 15, 2 Corinthians 1, Ephesians 4, Colossians 3, Galatians 6, Matthew 5, Matthew 6– call us to be merciful, call us to be merciful ever again and again and again. Say, “How can I be merciful?” First of

all, in a physical way. First of all, you can be merciful in a physical way. Say, “How?” Giving a poor man money, a hungry man food, a naked man clothes, a man without a bed, a bed. By changing a grudge into forgiveness. Oh, there’s many ways. The Old Testament is loaded with them– loaded with them– ways that we can show mercy, bigger than just forgiveness, meeting needs of all kinds.

You know, in Deuteronomy 15:8, “But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him and surely lend him sufficient for his need in that which he lacks. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart saying the seventh year, the year of release is at hand, and then I be evil against thy poor brother and thou givest him nothing that he cry unto the Lord against thee.” Even when you know you’re going to lose your slave in the next couple of months, give him anything that he needs– give him anything that he needs– even if it’s the year of release, give him anything that he needs. Even if you know the debt will have to be removed because in the year of release, all debts were cancelled, give him what he needs. That’s mercy.

When somebody wants something, I pray to God if they ever come to me, I give it to them. I never ask anything of anybody because mercy gives to meet a need. So in the physical, there are so many, many ways. Mercy never holds a grudge. It never retaliates. It never is vengeful. It never flaunts somebody’s weakness. It never makes something of someone’s failure. It never recites a sin. St. Augustine was so merciful to others that he had in his dining room a big beautiful table, and he always invited people to come to his table who had no place to eat. And he fed them there and he had something engraved on the top of the table and this is what it said: “Whoever loves another’s name to blast, this table’s not for him, so let him fast.”

So we are to be merciful not only to the physical but to the reputation. Surius, a Jesuit– and I’ll never forget reading this. Surius, the Jesuit, reported that Luther, Martin Luther, learned his theology from the devil and died drunk. Slanderous. People who have no mercy to others betray themselves. Listen, people, if you’re a Christian, if you’ve hungered and thirsted after righteousness, you’ll be merciful. You will be merciful. Aelian, the Roman writer of natural history, in his history writes about an interesting animal. He said that in India he heard about a griffin, G-R-I-F-F-I-N, and that was interesting because no one had ever heard of a griffin before, and he described it this way: “It had four feet like a big beast and wings like an eagle.” And said Aelian, “It’s hard to classify. Only the gods know.” And I thought to myself, “It sounds to me like a lot of phony Christians. They claim to fly but their feet are fast to the earth.” They’re griffins, professed sons of the kingdom, but never get out of the dirt. Listen, the vindictive, self-righteous, defensive person protecting only himself is like the priest and the Levite who went on the other side of the road. Phony religion. So there’s a lot of ways you can show mercy to people physically.

Well, what about spiritually? And this is the climax. What about spiritually? Let me give you four suggestions, very quickly. First of all, by pity. Pity. St. Augustine said, “If I weep for the body from which the soul is departed, should I not weep for the soul from which God is departed?” We cry a lot

of tears about dead bodies. I wonder what we do when it comes to souls. If I, as a Christian– listen. If I, as a Christian, have seen and experienced mercy– and boy, I have. I experience it every day as God continues to cleanse me and forgive me. If I, who had no righteousness but was poor in spirit, if I, who stood mourning over my sin in a beggarly and hopeless condemnation, if I, wretched and doomed and meek, if I, hungering and thirsting for what I must have and couldn't get, if I, who was given then mercy and pity from God's great heart, do not let that same mercy flow to others, what kind of inconsistency is that?

I hear Stephen in Acts 7:60 saying to God, as they cast the stones and crushed his life out of his body, "Lord lay not this sin to their charge." "Oh, God, don't hold them accountable for this." He was pitying their souls, you see. It's Jesus on the cross. "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing." That's pity. And you and I must look at the lost with pity, not lording it over them or thinking ourselves better.

Secondly, I believe we can be merciful to men's souls not only by pity, but by what I'll call prodding. By prodding. Say, "What do you mean by that?" Second Timothy 2:25 tells us, "In meekness, instructing those that oppose Him, if God perhaps will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." In other words, "prodding" means to confront people about their sin in order that God might give them forgiveness. You see, they've got to hear the gospel. You know, it says in Titus 1:13, "Rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith." If you don't rebuke people, they won't be sound in the faith. You know, I can care for your soul by rebuking you. I can care for the soul of a sinner by rebuking that sinner to his face. That's not unloving. Cruelty says nothing, you see? In Jude 23, at the end of that marvelous book, it says there are some people that you have to save with fear, snatching them out of the fire, hating even the garment that is spotted by the flesh. Some people you've got to snatch out of the fire. That's not hatred, that's love.

And I get accused of not having love a lot. I get criticized for a lack of love, and somebody even said that to me this morning after my message. That's not uncommon. But beloved, it is not a lack of love. Mercy prods. You see, mercy prods because there's got to be the confrontation about sin before there can ever be a realization of sinfulness.

Third thing: I think we care for the souls of people mercifully when we not only prod and pity, but when we pray. The sacrifice of prayer for the souls of those without God, for the souls of believers in sin, is an act of mercy. How merciful you are can be indicated by how faithfully you pray for people. Do you pray for the lost? Do you pray for your neighbors? Do you pray for people without Christ? Do you pray for the people who are Christians who are walking in disobedience? Your prayer is an act of mercy for it releases God's blessing.

And lastly, by preaching. I believe that when you preach the gospel, that's the most merciful thing that you can possibly do for the soul of someone. And so I say you can be merciful to a person's soul by

pity, by prodding, by prayer, by preaching. God wants merciful, people.

Finally, we've seen the significance, the source, the substance; finally, the sequel. You say, "If I'm merciful, what happens?" Blessed. "Blessed," said our Lord, "are the merciful, for they shall obtain"– what?– "mercy." Oh, what a beautiful thing. Do you see the cycle here? Do you see the cycle? God gives us mercy, we are merciful, and God gives us more mercy. Fantastic, the cycle of mercy. And by the way, it's the emphatic pronoun again, they only, they alone obtain mercy. They only. That's not a new truth in the Bible. Second Samuel 22:26 says the same thing. "It is the merciful who receive mercy." James 2 and verse 13, identically, the very same thing. James 2:13, "For," it says, "he that hath shown no mercy shall have no mercy." It's the same truth in Matthew chapter 6 in our future studies– we'll get to it– "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." And verse 14, "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you." It's the same thing. It's there in Psalm 18. It's there in Proverbs 14. It is those who are merciful who get mercy.

Now, I want to warn you right here, and this is really critical. Some people think this how you get saved. This is the error of the Catholic Church, that you satisfy God and God gives you mercy when you do merciful deeds. And that spawned a whole pile of monasteries and monks, and the whole shooting match came out of a misrepresentation of this term. This is not the way you earn salvation. Many in the Catholic Church have missed that. And they think that if they just do deeds of mercy and deeds of beneficence and if they just give themselves to the poor and the needy, they will then receive saving mercy. No. The point is not that. You do not get mercy for merit. Otherwise, mercy wouldn't be mercy, right?

Mercy can only apply where there is no merit or it isn't mercy. So you can't have mercy for merit. What is meritorious is deserving of reward, not mercy. No, mercy is given because mercy is needed even by those who show it. The key is in Matthew 18 where the man brought his servant in and he said, "Listen, you pay me everything you owe me." And the man said, "Oh, I'll pay you everything." And then the master said, "Well, on second thought, I'll forgive you. You're forgiven." And the man who had just been forgiven something he couldn't pay in his entire lifetime ran out and found a guy who owed him a little bit that could have been paid, and he grabbed him by the neck and he said, "Pay me everything you owe me or I'll throw you in prison." And what's the picture? You see, here you have the true master being God. He offers mercy to this servant, but that servant never really was converted. He never really accepted the salvation offered him. He never really took that mercy because he never confessed his sin. He never related it to the truth and so mercy and truth never kissed each other. It was phony mercy. It never worked in his case because he never admitted his sinfulness. And it's obvious, because when he turned around and had an opportunity to show mercy, what did he do? He strangled the guy and threw him in jail.

And what our Lord was saying in that parable in Matthew 18 is this: When somebody shows no mercy, they prove they've received none. On the contrary, this verse is saying if you are one who

shows mercy, you give evidence of one who is receiving it. That's what He's saying. That man in Matthew 18 never had true mercy. That's why he couldn't give it. But the one who has received mercy gives it and receives more and receives more. Oh, what a beautiful thought. He is saying the one who has received mercy will be merciful. The one who has received forgiveness will be forgiving. That's what He's saying.

And you know what's so wonderful about it? If you are a merciful person, you are because you've received mercy, and God gives you more mercy. Every time you sin, He forgives. Every time you have a need, He meets the need. He takes care of your clothing, your food– we'll see that later in the Sermon on the Mount– He just pours mercy upon mercy upon mercy to those who show mercy because they've received from the merciful God. I guess we could say what we've been saying all along: Look at your life. Are you merciful? If you're not, good possibility you're not a Christian, because those who show mercy are those who've received it and continue to receive it from the hand of God.

What about this: They shall obtain mercy. Some people think it just means the judgment in the future. I don't believe that for a minute. I think it's a now and a future. We receive it now. David cried over and over, "Be merciful to me, oh, God, be merciful to me, oh, God, be merciful to me, oh, God," and he wasn't talking about the future, he was talking about the present. In Psalm 86:3, he said, "Be merciful to me, oh, God, for I cry unto thee daily." And what did Psalm 23:6 say? "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me"– in the future? Is that what it said? "Goodness and mercy shall follow me"– when?– "all the days of my life."

And God's Son is a merciful high priest. And the mercy is for now– oh, and for the future also. In 2 Timothy 1:16, we see the future, where the apostle Paul says– and it's a beautiful prayer for Onesiphorus. "He often refreshed me and He was not ashamed of my chain. The Lord give mercy to the house of Onesiphorus." I think Paul there is perhaps looking ahead to a judgment, looking ahead to the salvation day. But there's more than just that. No wonder the Psalmist said, "I will sing aloud of thy mercy." Let's pray.

Father, we thank You tonight for giving us time in Your Word. It's been a full, rich night, and God, I'm so grateful for the patience of these people. I share so many things in my heart and I just trust Your Spirit that they're purposeful and direct. Lord, I have such a deep love for your Word that I don't like to miss anything. I just pray, Lord, that You will have used it to the greatest extent in the lives of these people. Make us merciful, oh, God. May we not be corrupted to be selfish, but may we know that we of all people who ever lived were desperately in need of mercy. You gave it to us. May we not be like that man who took it from his master and never gave it to another. May we not be counterfeit Christians, but may we give evidence of being real, because we are merciful. And then in turn, we know the constant benediction of Your continued mercy. And so, Father, we give You ourselves. Make us merciful in a world that is merciless for Jesus' glory. Amen.

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