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

The Only Way to Happiness: Be Merciful
Scripture: Matthew 5:7
Code: 90-193

The Only Way to Happiness: Be Merciful

Let's open our Bibles to Matthew chapter 5...Matthew chapter 5, the Beatitudes. As I mentioned to you this morning, a book has come out called The Only Way to Happinesswhich I think is available in the bookstore and out in the tape center over there in the patio as well, which sums up all the teaching that I've done through the years on the Beatitudes. That's a fitting time for the book to be reissued. I didn't know the publishers were going to do that but they did it, unbeknownst to me, right in the middle of our going over these Beatitudes which we really haven't taught in...well, it's been nearly twenty years, I think, since we really dug in to the Beatitudes.

What a joy it is to look at Matthew chapter 5. This is really, as I said this morning, the seminal teaching of Jesus about true spirituality. This is the bottom line instruction about what it means to belong to God, what it means to be in His kingdom, what it means to be saved. And Jesus put all the emphasis on the inside. Sadly the Jews of His day had put all the emphasis on the outside. The religion that Jesus faced in His day was shallow, it was superficial and it was external. The Jewish leaders thought that God was pleased with the outside, their apparent external self-righteousness, their formalized religion. They were proud about it. They were self-centered about it. And Jesus demantled it.

Jesus did essentially what John the Baptist said He'd do. John the Baptist predicted that when Jesus came He would come in a destructive way. In Matthew 3 John the Baptist was preaching down by the Jordan. In verse 10 he says, "The axe is already laid at the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that doesn't bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." He was...he was anticipating the imminent arrival of the Messiah who would lay the axe of divine judgment against the tree of formal religion. And He would cut down that external religion that was so utterly displeasing to God. And again I say, Jesus put all the emphasis on the inside, not just action but attitude, not just conduct but character. The emphasis is not on what I do but what I am. Certainly He is concerned about action but that action which springs from righteous character. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote many years ago, "A Christian IS someone before he DOES anything." It all starts with who we are.

And to be a child of the King, to belong to God's kingdom, to be a Christian, to be a saved person is to possess a certain kind of nature, a certain kind of disposition, a certain kind of character that is defined in these Beatitudes. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones also said, "We are not meant to control our

Christianity, but rather our Christianity is meant to control us." And it starts from the inside and works its way out.

And so, Jesus in addressing the Jews of His day went right for the heart, identifying for us the fact that salvation, or Christianity, is something that happens to us at the very center of our being. As you heard earlier, it is...it is something which occurs that could be called a new creation. It controls everything we are at the innermost part of our being and flows out from that point. Jesus was not interested in external religion. He was not interested in formal religious ceremony anymore than God was. He was not interested in superficial works with wrong motives. He was interested in pure transformed hearts. He characterized the Jews as sepulchers or graves painted white on the outside, but inside full of dead men's bones.

In addressing the issue of a real salvation, a real religion, a true knowledge of God, Jesus speaks to matters of the heart. And we've already gone through the first four of these Beatitudes. He talks about those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are gentle, or better translated meek, meaning humble, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Those are characteristic inner principles that operate in the life of those who belong to God's kingdom.

People in God's kingdom recognize their bankruptcy of spirit. They recognize that they cannot do anything to please God. They recognize that they are sinful, they are wicked, they are hopeless and helpless and they can't do anything about it. And they mourn about that. There's a sadness and a sorrow about that. Consequently there is a humiliation about it. There's a shame that comes with it that produces meekness. And then there is an expressed hunger and thirst for the righteousness they know they don't possess.

It is also true, according to the fifth beatitude, that those people who belong to God's kingdom are by nature merciful. Verse 7 says, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy." In some ways the first four beatitudes sort of connect up with the next four, verses 7, 8 and 9 and then in verses 10 and 11 you have the eighth one. You can look at it this way, those who are poor in spirit acknowledge their need of mercy and are willing to show mercy to others. Those who mourn over their sin desire to wash their hearts clean with tears of penitence and they become the pure in heart. The meek or the gentle are those who spontaneously make peace because their own agenda is not the issue, they're concerned about others. And those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are willing, if you look at verses 10 and 11, to be persecuted for the sake of righteousness. So there's some wonderful parallels in these Beatitudes as they unfold.

But tonight we're going to look at this fifth beatitude that we find in verse 7, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy."

First of all, let's talk about the significance of being merciful. That is to say, what does it really mean? What are we saying here? This is a magnificent human virtue admittedly. It's wonderful to meet a merciful person. Shakespeare, for example, spoke about mercy in the well-known speech by Portia in The Merchant of Venice. He wrote, "The quality of mercy is not strained," that's a rather famous line. "It dropeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place 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," so wrote Shakespeare extolling the great virtue of being merciful.

Even the Talmud, which is a codification of Jewish law, records this saying by Gamaliel who was no less the notable teacher referred to in the book of Acts, a great, great Jewish teacher. And Gamaliel said about mercy, "Whenever thou hast mercy, God will have mercy upon thee. And if thou hast not mercy, neither will God have mercy upon thee." Again he was extolling the virtue of mercy as a path to blessing.

Now it is easy then to see the virtues of this sort of human attribute of mercy as some path to immediate blessing. That is to say that some people see this virtue of showing mercy as a way to force God's hand to make us prosperous. You hear sometimes this kind of thinking in money-raising schemes where people say, "You show mercy and you give money to us and we'll promise you that God will pay you back...and maybe some have said...even ten fold."

One writer paraphrases this beatitude this way. "This is the great truth of life. If people see us care, they will care for us." Is that what it's all about? Is it all about being kind on a human level so that you can intimidate people into being kind back? Is it all about somehow forcing God's hand?

Unfortunately it isn't that simple. The issue is far more than a human platitude. It is far more than a little formula that somehow works its way out in life. It would be nice to think of the fact that this is the great truth of life. But the fact of the matter is, it's not. And the fact of the matter is you may find yourself on the human level being merciful to people who are in return merciless to you. The issue is far more than a human platitude.

In fact, it was the Romans who didn't admire mercy at all. The Romans admired justice. The Romans admired revenge. They admired vengeance. They admired discipline. They admired power and strength and they thought mercy was an evidence of weakness. In fact, some philosophers at the time of the writing of the New Testament said that mercy is a disease of the soul. It's evidence of a sick person. And, any successful person would be ashamed to be called merciful. It was a sign of weakness.

Frankly, that's not unlike our time, is it? Being merciful, being forgiving, being kind, being gentle with people, overlooking their transgressions, showing them great and magnanimous kindness no matter what they might have done to you is a sign of weakness today.

In ancient times it was that way. In fact, slaves, women and many children were treated like useless garbage. And a master could maim or kill any of them anytime at his own discretion. And it was some kind of show of male strength to do things like that. And, I think today the idea that if we care, others will care...just doesn't fly either. Our selfish, grasping, vengeful, competitive, litigious society is marked by lots of things but mercy isn't one of them.

Furthermore, understanding the substance of mercy is...is not just the simple idea that if you're going to be merciful to somebody else, somehow they're going to make you rich, they're going to make you happy, they're going to make you prosperous, or they're going to be merciful to you. And the best illustration of that is Jesus. Was there ever anyone more merciful than Him? He showed mercy to the sick. He showed mercy to the crippled and the blind and the deaf and the dumb. He showed mercy to the poor. He showed mercy to the outcasts, the prostitutes, the riffraff, the sorrowing, the lonely, the unloved. Once He stopped a funeral procession and He didn't even know the people personally but He stopped that procession to touch the casket and restore a young man back to life because He was so grieved at the sorrow of his widowed mother. He was merciful in John 8 to a harlot and said, "Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more." He ate with tax collectors and sinners, a definite sign of His mercy toward the outcasts. Mark 2:16 says, "When the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eat with tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, `How is it that He eats and drinks with publicans and sinners?'" From start to finish one would have to say that Jesus' life was a life of mercy.

And, listen, if somehow there was some kind of principle that mercy carries its own reward, it never worked out for Him. If this was some inviolable human operative, form of truth that worked as truly as laws of science work, they would never have nailed the most merciful man who ever lived to a cross and spit on Him in the process. In fact, the most merciful person who ever walked the earth received from men no mercy at all from the very ones to whom He showed mercy. Two merciless systems, the Roman system and apostate Judaism, mercilessly came together to kill the merciful Son of God. The totalitarianism of merciless Rome was characterized by intolerance, and joining them was the merciless Pharisaic external Jewish apostate religious system that couldn't tolerate Him because He spoke the truth. And without mercy they came together to execute Him.

What is then the Lord saying here? He's not giving us just some principle of human life that sort of always works. What is He saying? What is the significance of this?

Well we have to look a lot higher than the human level to see the answer. This mercy does not refer to some natural human emotion. It doesn't refer to some sort of earthly operative principle. It refers to a mercy which grows out of a relationship with God. We're talking about something that's not human at all, it's divine. We're moving out of the kingdom of darkness, out of the kingdom of men, out of the kingdom of this world in to the kingdom of God. We're talking about a kind of mercy that's

operative in God's kingdom, not in man's kingdom.

Now let's look at the word itself. The word "merciful," eleemones(?), is used here and in Hebrews 2:17 in this form. The verb form is very common in the New Testament and used often in the Old Testament Greek Septuagint. It's a very common word in the Greek. It comes from eleeo, it means to have mercy on. It means to care for the afflicted. It means to give help to the wretched. It means to rescue the miserable...very broad idea but the intent of the word is pretty clear from those various options. It has to do with sympathy. It has to do with compassion. And here we're talking about something that is divine. This is the real thing. It's not some weak sympathy which carnal man can sort of grant by the sheer milk of human kindness, we're talking about something beyond that. It is a genuine, true and pure, divine compassion with unselfish motives that reaches out to help someone who is wretched, miserable, needy, poor.

The Hebrew word for mercy is a beautiful word used very often in the Old Testament and sometimes the Hebrew word is translated in the Septuagint by the Greek word, eleeo, it's the word chesed. It really is untranslatable. It...it...you can hardly reduce it to one word but most often the Old Testament writers in most translations intended to say what I think the English word lovingkindness expresses. Lovingkindness embraces a motive and an action and it is often translated lovingkindness. It does not mean simply to feel sympathetic. It does not mean simply to feel compassionate. It refers to the ability to literally get inside someone else's skin until you think their thoughts, feel their emotions, understand their pain. It is more than a passing wave of pity. It is...it is an empathizing, it is a deliberate act of feeling their suffering and seeking to relieve it.

Perhaps one way to get at it is to see it in comparison with other words. It is linked to, for example, the word forgiveness. Titus 3:5 says, "According to His mercy He saved us." So mercy was behind forgiveness. Forgiveness is the fruit of mercy. When God looked at us with compassion and affection and sympathy, when God, as it were, God in our skin, Jesus incarnate, came into the world and suffered all the things that we suffer, yet did not sin, was tempted in all the ways that we are, there was a great sympathizing and He became for us a sympathetic and merciful Savior. Mercy then was behind forgiveness. In Ephesians 2, "God...verse 4...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." He saved us because of mercy. Mercy is an attribute of God that led to forgiveness. Mercy is God's sympathy toward the suffering, the outcast, downtrodden, the miserable.

Our God, according to Daniel 9:9, has compassion and forgiveness. Out of His compassion comes His forgiveness. Psalm 130 expresses the same great reality.

I think sometimes we think of mercy as God withholding judgment, and it is. But the reason He withholds judgment in mercy is because He has forgiven our sin. So mercy is linked to forgiveness. But that's only one aspect. There are many more mercies than just forgiveness.

Psalm 119:64 says, "The earth is full of Thy mercies." Genesis 32:10, "I am not worthy of the least of all Thy mercies." Second Samuel 24:14, "For His mercies are great." Nehemiah 9:19, "Thy manifold mercy." Psalm 69:13, "The multitude of Thy mercies." Forgiveness is an expression of God's mercy, but it isn't the only one.

Listen to Psalm 145:9, "The Lord is good to all and His mercies are over all His works." I mean, you can look anywhere in God's created world and find His mercy expressed. Lamentations 3:22, "The Lord's lovingkindnesses, or mercies, indeed never cease for His compassions never fail." And where there is compassion, there is mercy. "They are new every morning, great is Thy faithfulness." Verse 32 says, "He will have compassion according to His abundant lovingkindness." And His compassion is expressed in His forgiveness and much more. All the gifts of grace, all the gifts that God gives us, all the good gifts are expressions of His compassion and sympathy and mercy.

Mercy is also linked, secondly, to love. As I read for you earlier Ephesians 2:4, "According to His great love wherewith He loved us, He was therefore mercy...merciful." So mercy flows into forgiveness but out of love. It starts with love, becomes mercy, becomes forgiveness. Love is more broad, more extensive than just mercy.

Thomas Watson wrote, "Mercy properly respects them that are miserable. Love is of a larger consideration. Love is like a friend that visits them that are well. Mercy is set just for the miserable, love is bigger, but mercy is an expression of love. Mercy, we might say, is a physician for the sick, love is a friend to everyone. Love acts out of affection. Mercy acts out of compassion. Love is constant, mercy is for times of misery. Love and mercy are different, but inseparable. Mercy and forgiveness are different, but inseparable. If you're going to be merciful, you're going to be forgiving. If you're going to be merciful, you're going to be loving.

And then there's mercy and grace. Grace is another word that plays in to this discussion. The term eleeosand its derivatives always deal with what we see of pain and misery and distress which are the results of sin, while grace deals with the sin itself. Mercy looks at the misery sin produces, grace looks at the sin itself. God gives grace for our sin and mercy for our misery as a result of sin. Grace is charis, grace offers pardon for the crime, mercy offers relief from the punishment. Grace comes first and renders us no longer guilty, mercy comes second and delivers us from the punishment. Again, mercy and grace are different, they're different concepts but inseparable. Mercy eliminates the pain and grace grants a better condition.

And then there's mercy and justice. They go together. They have to as far as God is concerned, He cannot be merciful if in some way it violates His justice. Mercy, remember when it comes from God, is a holy attitude like all His other attitudes. It doesn't negate His justice, or His holiness. It is not some shallow sentimentality which disregards iniquity and ignores justice. That's a false and unholy

mercy which wants to conceal justice. But God in order to be mercy...merciful and show mercy had to express His justice, as we all know, and He poured out His justice on Christ on the cross satisfying the requirement of a just and holy God and a just and holy law which had been violated in order that He might be merciful to the miserable sinners who had fallen under judgment for the violation of that law.

So, mercy fits together with forgiveness though its different. It fits together with grace though its different. It fits together with love though its different. It fits together with justice perfectly though it is also distinct. The truth of the matter is, if we got what we deserved we would get judgment without mercy. That's what we would get. We would get judgment without mercy and we would deserve it. In fact in James 2:13 it says, "Judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy." Mercy triumphs over judgment. If you're a merciful person you won't be judged. That's another way of James saying if you are a merciful person because God has been merciful to you...in other words, if you have divine mercy granted to you as a child of God, you demonstrate that you are one who has escaped judgment. But justice has been satisfied, punishment has been made in Christ. We could say then that mercy is more than forgiveness, less than love, different than grace and not apart from justice.

To sum up our discussion of the significance of mercy we'll define it in some very practical terms. The merciful not only bear the insults of evil men, but their hearts reach out to those very evil men in their misery because they know they will perish in their sins. Merciful people will not only bear the insult, and not just, you know, stiff upper lip, grit your teeth and endure the insult, but rather their hearts reach out to those people who are being merciless because they understand the terrible misery they're in. The merciful are willing to be insulted and willing to be persecuted as it comes up later. They are sympathetic with those people who even attack them. They're eager to forgive. They are sympathetic with the afflicted. They are gentle to the weak. They are forgiving to everyone who abuses them. They are considerate of the fallen. They are generous to the poor. They are gracious to the offensive, and so forth. And they remember, of course, that they are the recipients of divine mercy and greatly in need of it, so are quick to share the same.

It's much like the parable in Matthew 18, isn't it? Where the man who was a king called his governors to him and one man had embezzled all his money and had nothing to show and the king says he's going to be punished. And the man falls on his face and pleads and the king is merciful and forgives him the entire debt. That's a beautiful picture of mercy. But the man who had just been forgiven went out and found somebody who owed him a pittance, strangled him and threw him in debtor's prison until he paid everything and himself refused to be merciful. And the parable ends with the Lord calling in that unmerciful man and chastening him until he learned to be merciful. The Lord will chasten you who have received mercy if you do not grant mercy. You who were miserable and blind and naked, like all the rest of us sinners, you who deserved nothing and God in His great love was merciful to you and forgave you your entire debt against His holy justice, you must be merciful to

others. God changes your heart by His mercy, intending to cause you to be merciful to others.

Psalm 37:21 says, "The righteous shows mercy and gives."

It was mercy, wasn't it, in Abraham after he had been wronged by his nephew Lot.

It was mercy which caused Abraham to treat Lot the way he treated him. It was mercy on the part of Joseph after being treated so badly by his brothers. It was mercy on the part of Joseph to make sure his brothers' food was all provided. He forgave them and fully met their need.

It was mercy, wasn't it, in Moses after Miriam had rebelled against him and the Lord had given her leprosy. And Moses went to the Lord seeing the misery of Miriam and said, "Heal her now, O God, I beseech You," Numbers 12. That's mercy.

It was mercy in David, wasn't it, which caused him to spare the life of Saul. That's mercy.

And in a world of merciless people who are all consumed with self-protection, making sure everything is the way they want it for them, God had deposited kingdom citizens who are truly merciful and compassionate.

Man, frankly, without mercy is evil. He's evil. Man without mercy is hostile. Man without mercy is angry and we're seeing it in full view today. The absence of mercy just rips and shreds and tears all of the tenderness out of a person. It creates nothing but hard surfaces and sharp edges. But for those of us who have come to God in Christ to receive mercy, we have been called to show mercy, to be compassionate, benevolent, sympathetic when we see others in weakness, misery and need.

Now let's talk about the source of being merciful. The source, basically, is God because, you see, when we come to this fifth beatitude in verse 7 we've had to go through the first four. The people who are merciful are those who have realized their spiritual bankruptcy, mourned over their sin, meekly come before God knowing they offer nothing, and demonstrated a hunger and thirst for righteousness they know they don't possess and only God can grant.

In other words, that's...that is the pattern of salvation throughout all of redemptive history. If you were in the Old Testament, people ask me this all the time, how did an Old Testament person become saved? Christ hadn't yet died, Christ hadn't yet risen, they couldn't confess Jesus as Lord and believe in their heart that God had raised Him from the dead and thus be saved, as Romans tells us, so how could they be saved?

The answer was right in the very path of those Beatitudes. Instead of being spiritually proud, instead of being spiritually self-sufficient, instead of thinking you had achieved salvation by your works, you are bankrupt of spirit, you realize that you have nothing, you are literally poverty stricken when it

comes to any claim to righteousness. You are morally, spiritually bankrupt. And in that condition you have mourned. There's an overwhelming sadness about your hopeless condition and there is also a great meekness, a shame about it that humiliates you. And in that condition you cry out to God, hungering and thirsting for a righteousness you know you don't have and don't earn. That's how people in the Old Testament were saved. When they came to the place where they said...I can't keep Your law, all I do is violate Your law, I am bankrupt, I am unworthy, I am shamed, I am humiliated. O God, if I am to possess righteousness, You have to give it to me.

That was like the Luke 18 publican beating on his breast. The Pharisee is saying, "Oh, I keep this and I do this, and I abide by the ceremonies, and I tithe all that I possess, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I'm not like other men, even like this publican." The publican has got his head down, he's beating on his breast, he won't even look up and he says, "God, be...what?...merciful to me a sinner." He's crying for mercy. That man was bankrupt. That man was mourning. That man was meek. That man was hungering and thirsting for righteousness. That man reached out and received mercy. The source of mercy is God. The merciful are the people of the first four beatitudes and they have come to God and hungered for righteousness and in mercy God has granted it to them. They have a deep awareness of their need of deliverance, their need of righteousness. They see how sinful they are, how miserable they are, how desperate they are. And they come seeking mercy.

This is so important to understand salvation cause it's the same now. A lot of people say...Yeah, I want Jesus to fix my life. Raise my hand, or sign a card, or come forward in a meeting, or call up a TV station. Yeah, I want Jesus to fix my marriage. Yeah, I'm...I don't want to go to hell, I want to go to heaven. I'd like...I'd like my life to be different than it is and I'd like Jesus to fix my life.

And, they're never converted genuinely because the path is indicated here. You have to come to the place of moral bankruptcy, realize the shame of your own life and hunger and thirst for a righteousness not yours and cry out for mercy from God. It's a sin issue.

When I wrote the book on The Gospel According to Jesusand I was castigated and battered around from pillar to post for years and some of it's still going on, many of those who took issue with me took issue with the fact that one needed to come to an overwhelming sense of sinfulness and repent before he could become a believer. Still boggles my mind that anybody could conclude any other than that. The whole issue of coming into the kingdom is all about seeking righteousness which you don't have, granted to you by the mercy of God out of the compassion of God who sees your miserable wretched condition, understands its eternal consequence and in mercy and grace reaches out to provide forgiveness.

A lot of people want, sort of want the end blessing bypassing the real heart work. Balaam, the false prophet, said, "Let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end be like his." It's not that easy, Balaam. You want to die the death of the righteous and you want to end up the way the

righteous end up, then you come to God bankrupt in spirit, grieved over your sin, shamed and hungering and thirsting for a righteousness you know you don't possess and can't earn. A wise old Puritan said, "Balaam wanted to die like the righteous, he just didn't want to live like them."

If we want the reality of mercy in our lives from God, there's a path and the path is there in those Beatitudes. God then is the source of this mercy. Ephesians 2:4, "God who is rich in mercy..." Psalm 103:11, "As the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him." Luke 6:36, "Be ye thankful, merciful as your Father is merciful."

I think it is, in the Psalms the Scripture says God's mercy endures forever. Psalm 62:12 says, "Unto Thee, O Lord, belongs mercy." Similar things all through the Psalms, Psalm 86; 103; 111; 112; 116, 145; elsewhere. God is the source. We're not talking here then about some natural human law that operates, some principle. We're talking here about a divine work. God is the source in Jesus Christ. As it were, God got inside the skin of man, feeling, seeing as man does. The supreme act of God's mercy was to become man and to show His sympathy and His compassion and His love and His grace and His mercy by dying in our place.

Dr. Barnhouse, Donald Grey Barnhouse wrote, "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. This is the totality of mercy, there couldn't be anymore. God can now act toward us in grace because He has already had all mercy upon us. This fountain is now open and flowing and it flows freely from the cross.

We sing of this mercy sometimes when we sing these words, "He saw me ruined in the Fall, He loved me notwithstanding all. He saved me from my lost estate, His mercy, O how great."

"Mercy there was great and...what?...grace was free. Pardon there was multiplied to me. There my burdened soul found liberty, at Calvary." The mercy flood was turned on at the cross and it flowed forward and it flowed backward and on the basis of the work of Christ to satisfy the justice of God, God was free to pour out mercy to His own.

And so, we have received from God mercy. "Every time you draw your breath," write Thomas Watson, the Puritan, "you suck in mercy. Every bit of bread you eat, the hand of mercy carries it to you. You never drink but in a golden cup of mercy."

What he was saying was it's mercy that you live. It's mercy that you will live forever.

Thirdly, the substance of being merciful. Now we know that we have received mercy, but what is it about being merciful? I believe that this springs out of the mercy of God toward us. I think that's pretty obvious. We don't need to say a lot about that. God has demonstrated mercy to us and we have had a clear and marvelous transforming understanding of mercy and we have been called to the same mercy. We who have received mercy have been called to give it. "Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy." There's kind of a cycle here. You receive mercy when you cry out, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, you then become the givers of mercy who from God receive more mercy.

By the way, when you became a Christian you didn't move into the category from the undeserving to the deserving. You're still undeserving and so am I, right? The fact of the matter is, we're as sinful now and unworthy and undeserving now as we ever were so that every good and perfect gift the Father gives us is a gift of mercy. There's a cycle here. You cry out for mercy, God gives it, He transforms your heart, you become merciful, you give it and He pours out more mercy.

This...I suppose...is really the sum of all of our salvation. "I urge you therefore, brethren," Paul writes in Romans 12:1, "by the mercies of God." And what are they? Everything in chapter 1 through 11. Everything that God gives His own, everything in justification, everything in sanctification, everything in glorification is in the category of the mercies of God. They are all expressions of His compassion. They're all gifts of His sympathy. They're all attributable to the fact that He cares for the needy, that He's compassionate toward the miserable the wretched. And His mercies, I read you earlier in Lamentations, are new...how often? Every morning...every morning. Everything you have fits in the category of His mercies.

And you look at the Pharisees Jesus was talking to, they had took a totally different approach to life. Their idea was to beat the poor down harder. Oh they would do alms in the temple which eventually flowed to the poor, but they would blow a trumpet announcing they were going to do it because it was all done to call attention to them. It didn't express any mercy. It didn't express any sympathy, or compassion or love for anybody. It just sought the applause of men. They were deeds of mercy theoretically, but actually they were deeds of vain glory, conscience salving. Same can happen today.

I would say to you, a true child of the King is going to have to empty himself of selfishness before he will empty his hands of alms. He's going to have to lay himself in the dust first before he'll raise the needy out of it. I mean, it just seems so very basic. God has been merciful to us, we have then become the merciful. It is the...it is the severest kind of twist on your salvation to receive all of God's mercy and then be merciless, lack compassion to those who are sinful or wretched or poor and needy, suffering, even those who persecute us.

This is so substantial, so essential that I read you earlier in James where it says if you're not going to be merciful, James 2:10 to 13, God won't be merciful to you. You want to put yourself in a position to be disciplined like that man who was forgiven in the parable of Matthew 18, then hold back mercy from people and God will bring discipline on you. What an unbelievable twist to receive all of His mercy new every morning and grant none to someone around you.

As believers we continue to recognize our spiritual bankruptcy. We continue to grieve over our sin. We continue to feel the same and guilt of those things we do that dishonor the Lord. We continue to hunger and thirst for righteousness in the sense that we want to pursue being more like Christ and manifesting more of His righteous character. And we are continually the merciful who from the hand of God as those in His kingdom receive new mercies every morning.

It also would include what Jesus said in the next chapter when He was talking about prayer, chapter 6 and verse 14. "If you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgression." You want a miserable life? Be unforgiving. That will make you miserable.

I'm telling you, since I wrote this book on forgiveness, I've been doing a lot of radio interviews, I do these one-hour radio talk shows all across the country live. And people call in and ask these questions. And I...when I wrote the book on forgiveness I knew it was a big issue, but in our church we understand the Word of God and we understand spiritual attitudes but there are so many people in Christian churches around the country who have bought in to the sort of cultural thing that you don't forgive anybody, you get your pound of flesh, you sue them or you identify them as somebody that's abused you or wounded you and made you into a victim or traumatized you or your children, and you hold that grudge perennially and whatever. And I get in to these talk programs and, I mean, it is astonishing to hear some of the things that these people bring up.

I was on a program in New York and this lady came on and she said, "Well, Pastor MacArthur, I want to ask you a question." She said, "I have...I just can't forgive this certain person."

And I said, "Well how long has this gone on?"

She said, "Ah, for two years."

And I had been talking about how not forgiving produces bitterness and steals your own joy and what's the point? And I said, "Well what did this person do?"

"Well, this is my son's Little League coach."

I thought, "What? What did he do? Put him eighth in the lineup instead of second? What do you mean your son's Little League coach?" I didn't say that to her but I thought...what? Two years...two years this has been eating at her.

She says, "Because of what this child...what this man did to my child, I can't forgive him."

Now what do you think that...what message does that send to that child? What's going to happen in the child's...to say nothing of this woman? You mean, nobody told her about mercy?

And on the other hand, I talked to a lady on the same program. She said, "I want to tell you I have been completely freed by understanding God's forgiveness. My husband left me," she said, "ran off with another woman and I now...this is like five or six years ago...and I have to share my children with him." And she said, "I forgave him for what he did from the heart and I know that because all I ever do is pray for his spiritual well being. All I ever do is pray for God to get a hold of his life, for God to save him and then God to bless him."

And I said, "That's evidence that you've truly forgiven from the heart.

She said, "What makes it hard is we share the children and every time they come back he has done everything he can to poison them against me and against the Lord which readdresses the issue of forgiveness all over again." But she said, "I've had such a taste of what it is to forgive and the joy of granting mercy that God has given me the grace to continue to give it to him."

I always think about my brother-in-law Duane Rey who was serving on the pastoral staff here. His son Tim was a big strapping guy, a great athlete. He was a volleyball player at Cal State Northridge and a wonderful Christian young man. I think he was nineteen years old, wasn't he, Patricia? Or twenty, I think nineteen...twenty? Anyway, he was working in a market over here in Sun Valley and he was trying to...he was doing his job as a student, just working part time. And a drug addict came in to hold up the market and put a gun in front of the checker and Tim tried to intervene and he was murdered on the spot.

And, I mean, I can't think of anything worse than having your son murdered or your daughter murdered. And I'll never forget, within a matter of a couple of weeks, of course they caught the guy very rapidly and he's still serving a life sentence, of course, but Duane went to the jail to see him because he wanted to let him know that he forgave him and he wanted to give him the gospel of Jesus Christ so that he could be saved. He rejected the gospel. But that's the essence of mercy and that's what God does for us undeserving sinners, and that's what God asked us to grant to others.

It means there's no retaliation. There's no vengeance. There's no holding the grudge. There's no slandering someone else. There's no gossiping against someone else. There's no flaunting someone else's weakness, someone else's failure, someone else's sin. There's no relishing someone else's deprivation and your wealth or prosperity.

Augustine made a great issue out of mercy, so much that on...he had some words engraved on his dining room table. This is what was engraved on Augustine's dining room table. "Whoever loves another's name to blast, this table's not for him, so let him fast." Sometimes I think that ought to be on our dining room tables. We get to talking about people there, don't we? Sometimes it's not very merciful.

Sirius(?) who is a Jesuit reported that Luther learned his theology from the devil and died drunk. Not a very nice thing to say about somebody. But he was angry at Luther and so he said he learned his theology from the devil and died drunk. That's merciless even if he disagreed. People like that don't give evidence of having transformed lives.

Alian(?) who was a Roman writer of natural history in his history reports that in India there was something called a griffin, g-r-i-f-f-i-n. And this animal had four feet like a beast, but it had wings like an eagle. You can see it in mythology, the griffin. It was hard to classify because they couldn't decide whether it was a fowl or a beast and the old legend was that only the gods knew. So it is with those who profess to fly on wings to heaven but have no mercy. Flap as they will their feet continue to lick the dust of earth.

And it is possible that merciless people may profess to be kingdom citizens, but in reality are not. Vindictive, self-righteous, defensive, self-protective, people who lack sympathy and compassion, forgiveness, they're like the priests, you remember, and the Levite who hurried on, you remember, on the Jericho road they hurried on past the beaten man. We need to show mercy.

First of all and foremost, beloved, we need to show mercy to the souls of sinners by giving the gospel to them, right? That's the most merciful thing you can do. We need to show mercy to people by prodding them toward righteousness. We need to show mercy to people by helping meet their needs. We need to show mercy to people by praying for them. We need to show mercy to people by pardoning them.

So, we could say we need to show mercy by preaching the gospel. We need to show mercy by prodding them to mercy, if they're disobedient. We need to show mercy by prayer. We need to show mercy by pardoning.

And the sequel in the end, and we'll finish with this, verse 7, "And they shall receive mercy." "They shall obtain mercy." What is that? Ongoing mercy from God. I don't know about you but I...I really do

want all of God's mercies poured out on me. This is not saying you can earn your salvation, you're going to get God's saving mercy if you act merciful. This means that if you have been made into a merciful person and you act mercifully toward others as James 2:13 said, which I read earlier, when you're merciful God will pour out mercy on you. It's not that your acts of mercy are meritorious for salvation, but you shall obtain mercy. It doesn't say you shall obtain salvation, you'll obtain mercy. You'll get mercy. But you don't get mercy from merit or it's not...what?...not mercy. You can't earn mercy. Mercy is giving you what you don't deserve. God will be merciful to you if you're merciful to others.

Again and again David cried out, "Be merciful to me, O God," Psalm 86:3 he said, "Be merciful to me, O God, for I cry unto Thee daily." And these words, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." No wonder the psalmist said in Psalm 59, "I will sing aloud of Thy mercy."

Father, we do acknowledge with gratitude from the heart Your mercy in Christ and then new every morning. We praise You for Your continued mercy. Your compassions never fail. Great is Your faithfulness. We are literally flooded with the mercies of God which become the motivation for the dedication of presenting ourselves to You. Make us ever to be the merciful who have received mercy that we might receive even greater mercies, that we might praise You all the more. Thank You for this great truth in Christ's name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2014 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).