

**The Sermon on the Mount
Blessed Are The Merciful
Matthew 5:7**

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Well, we welcome you back today, and to our continuing study of the Sermon on the Mount. I invite you to turn there with me. Our Lord's most famous sermon—the longest sermon of Christ's that is recorded in Scripture, and we're slowly working our way through this magnificent sermon of His. And it's our goal to simply understand it as he intended to communicate it to us. Let me remind you, as I speak to you, that I don't stand above you. Physically, I might, simply to be seen and heard, but spiritually, I don't. We all sit, as it were, below the word of God. And so we all, even as I teach, my own heart is confronted by what I teach and explain. And so you need to know that, and I am personally affected by the truth that I explain to you. And it's my desire that the Spirit would work in your heart and life as well, as you hear the words—not my words—but ultimately an explanation of the words of Christ our Lord.

When I was in college, I developed my first appreciation for the works of William Shakespeare. And yes, I do believe they are his works. But in Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*, a young man named Antonio takes out a substantial loan. And the terms of the loan are this. If he fails to repay the loan, which is seen as a very unlikely thing, the lender, sort of jokingly but behind the scenes having a vendetta against Antonio, says, if you fail to pay, then I get to take a pound of your flesh. And I get to take it from wherever I want. His intention is to take it ultimately, if the loan defaults, from his heart and kill him. Through a series of unfortunate events, Antonio loses all of his fortune and all of the potential to repay the loan. At that point the lender, a bitter man named Shylock demands justice. And for him that means he wants his pound of flesh. He wants Antonio dead. This is what Shakespeare has Shylock say. "The pound of flesh which I demand of him is dearly bought. Tis mine and I will have it." In response to Shylock's demand before the court, Portia, Antonio's attorney, replies with these famous lines. If you're unfamiliar with Shakespeare, you potentially have heard these lines. "The quality of mercy is not strained. It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath. It is enthroned in the hearts of kings. It is an attribute of God Himself. An earthly power doth then show likest God's, when mercy seasons justice. Therefore, though justice be thy plea consider this, that in the course of justice none of us should see salvation. We do pray for mercy, and that same prayer doth teach us all to render the deeds of mercy." God's mercy, Shakespeare is saying, whether he understood it in it's fullest implications or not, God's mercy is our only hope of heaven, and if we have experienced God's mercy, we will display that same quality of mercy to others.

The fifth beatitude, that we come to today, says exactly that. Our lord says "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount with eight qualities that define the character of those who are truly His—those who are actually in His spiritual kingdom. If you want to know whether or not you're a Christian, then go through the checklist, if you will, that our Lord gives us in these eight qualities, and ask yourself if those qualities are found in your life. If they are, then be encouraged. Jesus says you're one of His. If they're not, then regardless of what profession you might make of being a follower of Jesus Christ, according to Christ Himself, you don't belong to Him. So it's a wonderful test, really, of whether or not we are truly Christians.

Now, as Jesus lays out these marks of those who are truly His, He begins each of them with the word *blessed*. The word Jesus uses, as we've already discovered translates the Hebrew word *esher*. *Eshere* describes a person who is, not happy emotionally, but a person who is in an objective state of health, spiritually. You can be physically healthy and not be happy. In the same way, you can be spiritually healthy, regardless of what your emotional state might be, and Jesus is helping to define those who are spiritually healthy. In the beatitudes, Jesus declares that these people and these people alone, are in a state of spiritual prosperity. That is, they are in His kingdom. They belong to Him. They have a bright future, an eternal hope.

Now to this point, we've examined the first four of the beatitudes. Look at them with me, verse 3 of Matthew 5. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, (*Jesus says*) for there's in the kingdom of heaven." Jesus is telling us, as we discovered together, that every true Christian has an awareness of his personal spiritual poverty before God. If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, then you are painfully aware that nothing you are, nothing you have done, can earn you any acceptance before God. You are aware that spiritually, you are utterly bankrupt. You have nothing God wants. There's a second beatitude in verse 4. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" Every true Christian mourns over that sin, mourns over his own personal sin and that spiritual poverty, and he also mourns over the presence and power of sin in the world as a whole. He mourns sin wherever he finds it, whether in his own life, or in the lives of others. He doesn't laugh at sin. He doesn't think it's a big joke. He mourns it. In verse 5 the Lord gives us the third beatitude. "Blessed are gentle (*or meek might be a better translation there. Blessed are the meek*) for they shall inherit the earth." Every true Christian has a spirit of meekness or submission to the will of God, to the word of God, and because of that, it affects how he treats others. He treats others with a humble, gracious, and gentle spirit, even when they wrong him. Because he understands his own sin, he is able to be gentle with others. The fourth beatitude is in verse 6. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Jesus says every true Christian is marked by a consuming concentrated desire for righteousness. Not only to have a right standing before God, given to him by grace alone, but also to have right conduct and right

character that conforms to God's will and God's law. He longs for comprehensive righteousness, as if he were dying of starvation or dying of thirst. In the same way he craves righteousness.

Now that brings us to the fifth of the eight beatitudes, and the one we want to study today. Look with me at Matthew 5:7. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" According to Jesus, those who are truly spiritually healthy are characterized by the quality of mercy. What does that mean? Well we can unlock Jesus' meaning in this beatitude by understanding three key concepts that Jesus includes in this very brief but pithy statement. Three key concepts will open up our understanding of what Jesus intends here. So let's look at those concepts.

The first key concept that lies just under the surface of Jesus' statement is this: the divine pattern of mercy. Obviously Jesus didn't invent the idea of mercy. Instead He's building here on the foundation of the Old Testament. Mercy is a word that's common in both the New Testament and the Old Testament, but it is especially frequent in the Old Testament. And our Lord was very familiar with the Old Testament. As God, of course, He is the one who is behind those words and expressions. But, as man, our Lord studied and learned the Old Testament scriptures thoroughly. He quoted them often, and He used them constantly to argue His case from. And so it's no surprise that here He is again, taking this concept from the Old Testament. If you were to go back to the Old Testament and study this word *mercy* in its various forms, you would find that mercy is used in the Old Testament overwhelmingly, not of a quality in men as shown to other men, but as a quality that resides primarily in God. Now, as I've pointed out to you already many times, all believers manifest all eight of these beatitudes—these qualities. But except for the first one, poor in spirit, they are also all true of God as well. While God has no personal sin, we saw in the life of Jesus, He mourns sin, the sin that's in the world, and so forth through the other seven. So the first would not be true of God. The others are true of God. The reason we manifest these attitudes is that we as believers have been re-created in the image of God, and so we reflect these qualities that describe Him. At the heart of what God is like—understand this—at the very heart of what God is like by His own self-revelation, is this quality of mercy. You want to know what God is like? God says, I'm known by my mercy. And by the way, just to give you the big picture, the primary word groups in scripture that convey this truth we're talking about in verse 7 is obviously the word *mercy* and the other word, that's a synonym and is often use similarly, is the word *compassion*. Mercy and compassion. They're a pair together that basically describe this same quality.

So go back with me to Exodus. Let me show you how important this is to God. Exodus 33. Now, you remember the context, chapter 32 of Exodus is the story of the golden calf incident. That's when Moses was up on the mountain; he'd led the Children of Israel out to Sinai. While he's on the mountain, the people, because of their familiarity with the idolatry that they experienced in Egypt, they say: we want, Aaron, you, to make us a golden calf. And we're going to worship the true God of heaven by means of that idol. This was a violation of the very nature

of God. And God is so angered that He tells Moses to step aside, and He's going to destroy the entire nation, and He'll build a new nation from Moses. And Moses, you remember, intercedes with God for the people. And God relents, which was obviously His plan all along, and now we discover why. It's because it's His nature to be merciful.

So at the end of that, look at Exodus 33:18. Moses said, "I pray you, show me Your glory!" He asked God for two things at the end of this chapter. He says, God, I want to see a visible display of your glory, and I want You to proclaim Your Name to me. I want You to tell me what You're really like. And so God says this in response. Look at Exodus 33:19. God says, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, *(there's the visible display--and here's the verbal display of who He is)* and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show compassion on whom I will show compassion." God here says, listen, you need to know that I am merciful. I am compassionate. But I determine that choice sovereignly. Nothing outside of Me influences that decision. And of course Paul quotes that verse in Romans 9, where he's arguing for divine election. So, it unfolds just as God has promised that He will. And we get to the revelation of who God is, down in Exodus 34:5.

The Lord descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon *(or called out)* the name of the Lord *(As He revealed who He is--Verse 6.)* Then the LORD passed by in front of him *(there's that visual display of God's glory)* and He proclaimed *(here's the verbal display of the glory of God, the character of God. Here's who I am. He says My name is)* Jahweh. *(That means 'I am'. And then He says)* I am God." Now let Me tell you what I'm like. "I am *(and notice the very first quality is)* compassionate." *(The reason the Children of Israel were not destroyed, although they deserved to be destroyed, was because God is by nature a God of compassion, a God of mercy. He goes on to say)* "and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness; who keeps steadfast love for thousands, *(that may mean, instead of thousands of people, for thousands of generations)* who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin: *(God is by nature a forgiver)* yet *(don't think this is softness on God's part)* He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.

In other words, I'm going to inspect the generations of those who hate me to see if they continue to hate Me, and I'll respond to each man as he deserves to be treated, unless I choose to show him mercy. In response to this, verse 8, "Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and to worship." He's overwhelmed with the character of God.

But what I want you to see is that God, when He first reveals Himself--this is the first real revelation of His character--the very first thing He tells us about Himself is that He is by nature full of mercy, full of compassion. This is who God is. And He shows this mercy in a variety of

ways. He shows it to all. Psalm 145:9, "the Lord is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works." He shows it to His own—to those who truly belong to Him and fear Him. In Luke 1:50, "His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him." God even shows mercy to those who hate Him, and who are unbelievers. In Luke 6, Jesus says, "God Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" It is God's mercy, believer, that lies behind your salvation. You understand this? If you dig down to what is it in God that moved Him to save you, to spiritually rescue you from the penalty your sins deserve, you would find it is His mercy. In Ephesians 2:4, Paul writes, after he describes who we used to be, he says "but God, being rich in mercy. . . (made us alive spiritually) by grace you have been saved." Titus 3:5. "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy," And the passage we read just a few minutes ago in 1 Peter 1:3. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope" If you're a Christian today; if you have a hope of heaven; if you know God through Jesus Christ; it is because God is by nature merciful.

In fact, God's mercy is the ultimate ground of why He chose you in eternity past. That's what Paul says when he quotes Exodus 33:19 that we looked at a few minutes ago in Romans 9. Right in the middle, in the heart of the passage on election, he says, listen, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy" It was my sovereign choice. In fact, look at Romans 9, because Paul adds a little commentary to that text. Romans 9:15. Speaking about election, he says is it unfair for God to choose? For Him to have chosen Jacob but not Esau? Verse 15. No, absolutely not, for He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion". It is my sovereign choice. So then, verse 16—here's Paul's commentary. It, what's it? God's gracious choice to save. "it does not depend on the man who wills (*in other words, human choice is not the reason you are a believer today*) nor the man who runs, (*human effort isn't the reason you're a believer today*) but on God, who chose to have mercy." Incredible reality. It is not the exercise of your will. It is not your spiritual effort. It is God's mercy, absolutely free of obligation that is given solely according to His sovereign choice. "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy"

If you want to see the mercy of God in living color—or better yet, (in more contemporary terms) if you want to see the love of, and mercy of God shown in high definition three-dimensional perspective, then look at Jesus Christ. You see this throughout His ministry. Read the gospels. You see it displayed in a lot of different ways. You see Jesus showing mercy even toward people's physical needs and hunger. In Matthew 15:32, Jesus calls His disciples to Him and said "I feel compassion for the people, because they've remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat; I do not want to send them away hungry for they might faint on the way." They had brought probably a day or two's provisions with them, and had eaten those because they'd stayed long enough to hear Christ and His continued ministry of teaching, and Jesus has this compassion—this mercy—even for their physical needs. It's incredible. The eternal God was

worried about their physical hunger. And He should, because God always does. He opens His hand, the Psalmist says, and satisfies the desire of every living thing. He's always concerned in mercy toward people in that way. He's concerned about physical suffering. There are a lot of examples in His miracles, of healing. But one stands out to me in Matthew 20. There were two blind men sitting by the road. One of those, Bartimaeus. Hearing that Jesus was passing by, they cried out Lord, have mercy on us. Show us mercy. And everybody in the crowd says, listen, would you guys just be quiet? You're interrupting this famous teacher. And they cried out all the more, Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us. And the text says, "Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him" You see His mercy in caring for people's physical hunger and caring for their physical suffering. You see it even in His concern for their poverty. I don't know if you've thought about this or not, but it's clear from the gospel records that Jesus and His disciples maintained a money bag, a treasury of gifts that were given to them. And out of that they often gave money to the poor. In fact, you remember, on the night of the Last Supper? That's what they thought Judas was going to do. They imagined that he was leaving, when Jesus says go and do what you're going to do. They thought Jesus was directing him to go and give some money out of the purse that they had, to the poor. This was a constant practice of our Lord and His disciples.

But the biggest expression of the mercy of God you see in the life of Christ, is toward people's spiritual needs. And again, you see this throughout His ministry. One stands out to me, though, in Mark 5:19. You remember the demoniac of Gadara. Here's a man whose life couldn't get any lower. He was living alone, naked, in the tombs, cutting himself with stones. He was a deeply troubled man, demon possessed. His life was as low as it could get. And Jesus steps in and changes everything. And here's what He said to him. He said, "Go home, and report to your people how the Lord had mercy on you." So the truth that undergirds this beatitude is the reality that there is in God the Father, there is in God the Son, there is in God the Holy Spirit, a pervasive quality that moves Him to feel our misery, and then to actually act to relieve it. I love what A.W. Tozer writes in his little book *The Knowledge of the Holy* on this attribute of God's mercy. He says "When through the blood of the everlasting covenant we children of the shadows reach at last our home in the light, we shall have a thousand strings to our harps, but the sweetest may well be the one tuned to sound forth most perfectly the mercy of God." It lies beneath everything.

So there's the first key component that lies behind the beatitude we're studying--the divine pattern of mercy. I want us to secondly consider this: the key concept of the believer's practice of mercy. And here we come to the beatitude itself. Look at Matthew 5:7. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" Now, obviously, the key words are the two words merciful and mercy. They come from the same Greek root, just as our English words do. But notice the first word is an adjective. Blessed are the merciful. It's not describing those who occasionally do acts of mercy. Instead, it's describing a person who can legitimately be

described as a merciful person. Now that is an absolutely crucial distinction, because unbelievers can and do show mercy. For example, you remember after the shipwreck of Paul there in the end of the book of Acts. In Acts 28 he says that "The natives of Malta showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all" They responded to the disaster, even those unbelievers, with mercy, kindness. But we see this in our day as well. Every time there's a natural disaster, people rally to help those who are hurting. Unbelievers can be generous in helping the unfortunate--those who are suffering. Why is that? Well, theologically it's because of the residual image of God. Man was originally made in the image of God according to the early chapters of Genesis, and although that image was terribly marred at the fall, man still retains some of the shadows of that image. Faint reflections of the image of God still exist. So whenever you see unbelievers showing mercy, understand that biblically, that is simply an expression of the residual image of God in them. But here's the key. Mercy does not generally characterize the entire life of an unbeliever. When they express who they really are, they are not merciful. Paul puts it like this in Romans 1:31 when he's describing the nature of all men. All of us before we were in Christ, and all of those who remain outside of Christ. He says they are by nature unmerciful. On the other hand, Jesus says those who belong to him and to his kingdom are, as God is, characterized by this quality.

So what exactly is mercy? What are we talking about? What is it that every believer has and should continue to manifest? Well let me give you a couple of definitions. The leading Greek lexicon defines the word this way. "kindness or concern expressed for someone in need" I like another definition a little better. It's one by John Frame in his book on the character of God. He calls it "a sympathetic view of another's distress motivating helpful action. It is sympathy joined to action" It's the two together. Now, just to be clear, we need to distinguish between two similar biblical words—the words *grace* and *mercy*. We sometimes use them interchangeably, and that's okay, but there are differences that are significant, particularly as we try to understand this. Grace is God's goodness to those who deserve only punishment. Mercy is God's goodness to those in misery and distress. Grace is a response to objective guilt that sin creates in all of us. Mercy is a response to the misery caused by sin, in our lives and the lives of others. Grace brings forgiveness for sin's guilt. Mercy brings relief from sin's misery. So then, mercy is the quality that moves a person to respond to the misery, the suffering, the pain of others in order to relieve it. That's mercy. A synonym for this word, as we've already noted, is compassion. Now, it begins with a merciful heart. Jesus said blessed are those who are by nature merciful. And then, when you see a person in a miserable condition, mercy responds emotionally to that person. It responds with sympathy, it responds with empathy, but true mercy doesn't stop there with the emotion. True mercy always takes action. Don't for a moment imagine that that warm concerned feeling you get when you see a child who's starving, or a person in need—that that warm feeling is mercy. That's not mercy. You are not being merciful at that point. Mercy includes both the feeling of empathy and sympathy for those who are in pain or misery, but true

mercy takes the next step and actually acts to relieve the misery and suffering—whatever form it takes.

That raises an important question. How does this quality express itself. Listen carefully. When it comes to both God's mercy toward us, and the mercy that we are to show others, it responds in three ways. Here's how mercy responds. First of all, mercy responds to the misery of sin and guilt with forgiveness and restoration. We are to extend to others, and we do if we're believers, the same mercy we've been shown, by being quick to forgive. You see this in the life of Joseph. In fact, turn back with me to Genesis 50. You know, we love the story of Joseph and it looks really good on flannelgraph, until you really start thinking about it. Okay, here's a family racked by such hatred, that Joseph's other brothers decide, we're going to kill him. I'm not saying like we say it, you know you say it to yourself, like, if you do that again I'm going to kill you. No, I mean really kill him. Like shed his blood—take his life. They have determined to do just that. And Reuben, the oldest son talks them out of it and says listen, you don't want his blood on your hands, so let's just throw him in a pit and sort of let nature take its course, and then it'll be God who did it. Now, we're told his intention was to rescue Joseph later, probably to make himself look good in the eyes of his father from whom he had already lost a good measure of reputation. We don't know for sure. But while he's gone, Joseph's in the pit. The brothers are eating a meal, and they're talking about this whole problem, and Judah is helpful and says, O listen, you know I like the idea of Joseph dying, I think that's really good, but we don't benefit personally from that. What if, instead of killing him, we sold him as a slave? Don't do this at home, boys and girls. What if we did that? Then we can profit from this. This is how much they hated this guy. And they did it. They sold him as a slave. And folks, we read it in a few pages there on the pages of Scripture, Joseph spent more than 15 years in slavery. That's what they did to him. Now look at Genesis 50:15. "When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, (*uh oh*) they said, 'What if Joseph bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!'" That's realistic isn't it? I mean, that happens in the real world. The mitigating influence of the father is out of the picture. Now, I'll give them what they deserve. He was in a position of authority; obviously he could do it. "So they sent a message to Joseph saying, your father charged us before he died, saying, Thus you should say to Joseph, please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong." Now, we have no reason to think they're lying here. It's very possible that this note did exist. Because they go on to express true repentance. "Now please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." They ask for his forgiveness. We sinned against you. Forgive us. And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. And then watch what happens. Verse 18. "his brothers also came and fell down before him and said behold, we are your slaves." What had they done to Joseph? They'd sold him into slavery. Here's real repentance. They're saying listen, here's how we're going to make up for what we did to you. We're now your slaves.

But Joseph said to them, Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. So therefore do not be afraid." (*and he not only says, I'm not going to kill you, but he says*) I will provide for you and your little ones. So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them

There's what forgiveness for the misery of sin looks like. This is extending mercy to those who sin against us. And I don't care how badly you've been sinned against. The chances are, those of us who are sitting here today, have not been sinned against as badly as Joseph was. And that's how he responded by God's grace.

Turn over to Matthew. Our Lord makes a similar point in a parable in Matthew 18. You remember the story. There was a king and two servants. One of them owed the king an absolutely unpayable debt. He couldn't pay it in his lifetime; he couldn't pay it in multiple lifetimes. It was impossible, and the king simply forgives it. And then he leaves the king's presence, finds someone who owes him a very payable debt, payable within a year or two's time by the ancient world's standards. And he says, no, I'm going to throw you in prison. Pay me, and he will not forgive him. And here's the response in the parable. Look at Matthew 18:32. Here's how the king responded. Summoning the one who wouldn't forgive the small amount,

his lord said to him, you wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you? And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.

We are to forgive, regardless of how horrible the sin might be, we are to respond to that sin with mercy.

Corrie ten Boom, in her book *The Hiding Place*, describes an unexpected encounter with one of the Nazi guards from the concentration camp where she and her sister were held, at Ravensbruck. That's where Corrie's sister Betsy died. That's where Corrie ten Boom herself was subjected to horrible indignities in that concentration camp. This is what Corrie writes. "It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him. A former SS man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time, and suddenly, it was all there. The room full of mocking men. The heaps of clothing. Betsy's pain-blanching face. He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. How grateful I am for your message, fraulein, he said. To think

that, as you say, He has washed my sins away. His hand was thrust out to shake mine, and I who had preached so often the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side. Even as the angry vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man. Was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him. I tried to smile. I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing—not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again, I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness. As I took his hand, the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand, it seemed a current passed from me to him while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me." That's the spirit of forgiveness that mercy we've been shown should breed in each of our hearts, for those who sin against us.

There's a second expression of mercy. Mercy also responds to the misery of need and poverty with practical help, in other words, assisting those who are in need. Helping the poor for example. This is throughout the Bible. Proverbs 14:21, ". . .he who despises his neighbor's sins, but blessed is he who is gracious to the poor." Proverbs 14:31 "He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker, but he who is gracious to the needy honors Him." You remember when Nebuchadnezzar was confronted by God and told that God was going to make him insane and drive him from his throne, this is how Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar to repent. Daniel 4: 27. "break away now from your sins by doing righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor." In Isaiah 58 when God describes the repentance that ought to characterize His people. They were busy fasting, they were busy sacrificing, and He said listen. Let me tell you the kind of fast I want. I want a fast where you show mercy to those in need. I'm afraid as American Christians, and particularly as conservative Texan Christians, we can allow our politics to override the clear commands of Scripture. We are to be merciful by responding to the misery of need and poverty with practical help. This is so important that God even gives a spiritual gift according to Romans 12:8 to some, even though it's a command for us all. And in fact, showing this mercy in this way to those in need is a test of our faith. In 1 John 3:17 John writes, "whoever has the world's goods, (*that's most of us here*) and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" You know what John's saying? Listen, if you're not responding practically to the needs of others, and you have means to do so, then don't even think about yourself as a Christian. It's impossible. The love of God doesn't abide in you.

There's a third manifestation of mercy. Mercy responds to the misery of suffering with compassion. Look at Matthew 25. Our Lord tells the story of a future judgment day. Matthew 25:31.

“when the Son of man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him. (*And He's*

going to identify those who belong to Him and those who don't. So how do you go about that? Verse 34) The King will say to those on His right, Come you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (How do you know those who were chosen from the foundation of the world. Jesus:here's one way. Verse 35) I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited me in; naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me. The righteous will answer Him, Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed you, or thirsty, and give you something to drink?. When did we see you a stranger, and invite you in, or naked, and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison, and come to you? The King will answer and say to them, Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me."

These people are not getting into heaven because they showed mercy. They're getting into heaven because they were chosen by God. He chose to show them mercy. But the way you can identify those God has chosen is that they are by nature merciful, because He's made them that way.

Mercy can be exercised by forgiving those who sin against us, by visiting those in the hospital, by being involved in jail ministry, by caring for the homeless or the poor, by ministering to the handicapped, by reaching out to those in our lives who are in need in various ways, those who are emotionally suffering through some trauma in their lives, or physically suffering and sorrowing because of the death of a loved one. There are a lot of different ways mercy can be shown, but where's a true believer, there will be mercy. How do you respond? How do you respond when someone sins against you. Do you get angry, do you get bitter, do you hold a grudge? Do you nurse that? Do you plot out revenge, even if you never carry it out? Or do you understand the misery of your own sin and therefore are willing to extend mercy and forgiveness to others? How do you respond to those who are needy and poor? Do you write them off as lazy and undisciplined, deserving of what they get? Or do you try practically to help them? This doesn't mean that you give money to every person who asks. Obviously we're responsible to be good stewards of our resources. But here's what it does mean. Do you intentionally seek out opportunities to help those who have needs that you're aware of—those in your life—either through the benevolence fund in our church, or personally yet, or better yet, a combination of both? Do you feel sympathy and empathy toward the misery of those who are suffering, and do those emotions move you to do something, at least to pray for them regularly, and if there's a way you can alleviate their suffering, to do so?

The key concepts in this beatitude are the divine pattern of mercy, the believer's practice of mercy, and briefly, there's one other. Christ's promise of mercy. Here, we get to the promise at

the end of the verse. "Blessed are the merciful, for they (*and the pronoun here is emphatic, they and they alone*) shall receive mercy." Like the other promises in the beatitudes, this one is describing not what man will do to us, but what God will do. God Himself will extend mercy to the one who is merciful. Now, don't misunderstand. Our showing mercy is not the ground of God's showing us mercy. We just a few moments ago read Romans 9 where God says "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy. It's not of the one who wills or the one who runs". So this is God's choice. It is instead a simple condition. God decides that He will show mercy, not because it's deserved but He will show it where there is mercy. Here's what Jesus is saying. Those who are truly merciful are the spiritually prosperous. They belong to My spiritual kingdom, they've experienced God's mercy, and they manifest that reality by extending mercy to others. And here's the promise. So they will continue to enjoy God's mercy in this life, and they will stand before God someday, and there, on the day of judgment, they will experience God's everlasting mercy. You will remember the opposite is true as well. Remember, Luke tells us that Jesus, when He pronounced each beatitude positively, He pronounced a negative woe. He doesn't tell us what the woe was there, but based on how the others are constructed, it would have been something like this. Woe to those who are unmerciful, those who refuse to show the mercy of forgiveness, those who will not act to relieve the need and poverty of those in their lives, those who do not respond to those who are suffering with compassion, and help, for they will not experience God's mercy for eternity. A sobering reality. That's exactly what James says, by the way. Listen to James 2:13. "For God's judgment on the day of judgment will be merciless to the one who has shown no mercy." That is a very frightening thought. Absolutely no hint of mercy from God.

Now, as we've worked our way through this text, I've applied it in various ways, but I want to end by giving you a couple of things to consider. Very briefly. First of all, use this beatitude to examine yourself to see if you're in the faith. Because Jesus says it's a litmus test of the true Christian. Those who are in His spiritual kingdom are characterized by this quality of mercy. Are you? As you look at the definition I've given you as we've walked our way Biblically through this definition, ask yourself this question. Do those who know me best think of me as a person who can be described by the adjective merciful—full of mercy? If so, then take heart, because according to Jesus, you're truly in His kingdom, you belong to Him. But if not, listen, you have no hope outside of Christ, because Jesus says if you're not characterized by mercy, when you stand before Him at the judgment, He will show you absolutely no mercy. You'd better not wait till that time. You'd better get alone with God today and repent of your sins and embrace Jesus Christ and His death and His resurrection as your only hope. As believers, we must actively look for ways to express mercy to others. Colossians 3:12 says, "as those who have been chosen of God. . . put on a heart of compassion. . ." You need to actively and I need to actively look for ways to express those qualities—those actions in the lives of others. Blessed are the merciful.

But there's one other lesson that I love from this text. Jesus responds to us with this very quality. Because the exact form of this Greek word translated *merciful* in Matthew 5:7 occurs in only one other place in the New Testament. Look at it with me briefly as we end our time together. Hebrews 2:17.

Therefore He (*that is Christ*) had to be made like His brethren in all things, (in other words, He had to be made fully human, just like us in every way except for sin. Why?) so that He might become a (what?) merciful and faithful high priest (in order). . .to make propitiation for the sins of the people (that is to satisfy God's wrath for our sins. And, the end of verse 18) . . .to be able to come to the aid of those who are tempted."

Look at chapter 4 verse 16. Because we have a high priest who understands us—he was made like us. Verse 16. "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive (*what?*) mercy and find grace to help in time of need" Listen, believer, or if you're here today and you're an unbeliever and you're willing to humble yourself before God. If you will come to God you will find Him to be a God of mercy and grace.

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for that great encouragement. Lord, there are many of us here today that, while merciful is not the perfection of our lives, we can still look and see that we do express mercy often as a characteristic of our lives. Father, encourage us. Thank You that by this we can know that we belong to Christ. But Father, I pray that You would help us to grow in it—in the expression of mercy in our lives. May we grow more and more into the image of our Lord and into Your image, O God, You who are by nature merciful. Father, I pray for the person here today who, as he or she looks honestly at their lives, have to admit that they don't consistently live a life characterized by mercy. Father, help them to see themselves as You see them. Don't let them live in the dreamworld of imagining they're Christ's, they belong to Him, when in reality, there's no life of mercy; there's no evidence that conforms to Your word and that confirms Your work in their lives. Father, I pray that today would be the day when they would rely on Your mercy; when they would get alone with You and cry out as so many have done, as most of us have done, and as so many in the Scripture have done, Lord to cry out for Your mercy. May they echo the cry of the tax collector at the temple that day in the story Jesus told, in crying out, be merciful to me the sinner. And Lord, thank you that the person who humbles himself like that will always find You merciful. We bless you O God that in Your mercy and grace You saved us and made us Your own. Help us to extend that mercy to others. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen