

THE BEATITUDES: Our King — His Kingdom — His Citizens

6. Blessed Are the Merciful

Matthew 5:7

I know that working through these first four beatitudes has been challenging to say the least. I came across something Ray Ortlund said this week that was so encouraging to me in the vision for this series:

I know of no more urgent questions in our nation today than these two:

1. What is real Christianity?

2. Why do we Christians think that our churches represent real Christianity?

Rather than assume that we do, let's open up the New Testament and examine whether we do.

HERE'S THE DEAL — The Beatitudes (and the whole of the Sermon on the Mount) **are not** teaching us how to get into the kingdom. The Bible makes it clear that entrance to God's kingdom is only by grace, through faith in the Jesus. The Beatitudes (and the whole of the Sermon on the Mount) **are not** teaching us how we stay in the kingdom. The Beatitudes **are** a description of the character — the “*way of being*” — of the man or woman who by faith has embraced Jesus as Savior and King — the life that **results from** genuine salvation and **leads to** flourishing!

Then in my stack of reading in preparing for our study in this next Beatitude, I came across these words of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

*Our Lord is depicting and delineating the Christian man and the Christian character. He is searching us and testing us, and it is good that we should realize that, if we take the Beatitudes as a whole, it is a kind of general test to which we are being subjected. **How are we reacting to these searching tests and probings?** They really tell us everything about our Christian profession. And if I dislike this kind of thing, if I am impatient with it... if I dislike this personal analysis and probing and testing, it simply means that my position is entirely contrary to that of the New Testament man. But if I feel, on the other*

hand, that though these things do search and hurt me, nevertheless they are essential and good for me, if I feel it is good for me to be humbled, and that it is a good thing for me to be held face to face with this mirror, which not only shows me what I am, but what I am in the light of God's pattern for the Christian man, then I have a right to be hopeful about my state and condition. A man who is truly Christian, as we have already seen, never objects to being humbled. The first thing that is here said about him is that he should be 'poor in spirit', and if he objects to being shown that (he is spiritually bankrupt), then (poor in spirit) is not true of him.

*That is why these Beatitudes are so searching. They tell us, in effect, that as we live our ordinary lives, **we are declaring all the time exactly what we are.***

PREFACE — Once again, let's frame our study of this next Beatitude with this reminder: Jesus is the Savior King of an everlasting Kingdom. He has an agenda; a government that reflects and expresses His character. He has ways — He has values — that simply don't fit with the ways and values of fallen culture — in fact His Kingdom is radically counter-culture. His ways — His values are **formed in and expressed through** the lives of the men and women who have embraced His rule. **It is through the transformed lives** of redeemed men and women that the ethos of the Kingdom of heaven invades the earth!

As we have unpacked the first four Beatitudes, we've observed that there is a **progression** and a **continuity** in the **formation** of these *attitudes* — the *character* — the *way of being* that mark His Kingdom and His citizens. Each leads to the next and presupposes the one that has gone before.

**Matthew 5:2–6 (ESV) ²And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:
³"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Entrance into His Kingdom — and the life that flourishes — **begins with a way of being** that Jesus calls *poor in spirit*. Poor in spirit = discovering that we are spiritually bankrupt before the Holy God of heaven; we have nothing with which we can commend ourselves to Him — no means of earning right standing with Him — and unless God makes the way for us to be reconciled to Him, we are forever lost.

³Blessed are the poor in spirit is followed by **⁴Blessed are those who mourn.**

AGAIN — radically counter-culture to the world that cannot connect flourishing with weeping. But this beatitude flows from and builds upon the first. We are **undone** by our spiritual condition. It breaks our heart that we presumed to live for our own kingdom and our own glory. It breaks our heart when we see the depth of our own sin. It breaks our heart that we broke His heart a million times.

The *way of being* that grieves over my own sin is where I discover **His** glorious POWER to do in my life what I could have never done for myself. When we were powerless to make ourselves right with God — God acted to save us. The Gospel tells us that

***Romans 5:6: 8-9 (NLT)** ⁶When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners.... ⁸But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. ⁹And since we have been **made right** in God's sight **by** the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation.*

***Psalm 32:1–2 (NKJV)** ¹Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered. ²Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

That is when I can say: “It is well with my soul!” *That* is the place of makarios — flourishing — the place of true happiness that is independent of happenings!

But the Beatitudes don't stop there. The Gospel tells us that the moment we trust in the finished work of the cross of Jesus to make us right with God a miracle happens! We are born again into a living relationship with God who IS life! We not only receive new life from Jesus and in Jesus, the Holy Spirit begins to conform us to the heart and the ways of our Savior and King!

⁵Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Meekness is the result of having a true view of myself (poor in spirit) which changes my attitude and conduct in dealing with others. True meekness is an unassuming humility that rests in the truth of the goodness and sovereignty of

God (Ps 37:7). This means that the meek person does not have to have everything done their way — doesn't need to demand their rights. Like Jesus, they are willing to deny self in order to submit to the final authority and rule of the Father.

Last week saw in [Matthew 5:6](#) that the citizen in the Kingdom of God has a deep, desperate, profound and persistent *[hunger and thirst for righteousness](#)*.

D.A. Carson — *“...those who have studied Matthew’s use of the term increasingly recognize that “righteousness” here (and also in verses 10 and 20) means a pattern of life in conformity to God’s will. The person who hungers and thirsts for righteousness, then, hungers and thirsts for conformity to God’s will.”*¹

Put another way — a deep and desperate, profound and persistent desire to be conformed to the heart and ways of the King

Martyn Lloyd-Jones — *Can I say quite honestly and truly that I desire above everything else in this world truly to know God and to be like the Lord Jesus Christ, to be rid of self in every shape and form, and to live only, always and entirely to His glory and to His honour?*²

The 5th Beatitude presupposes the preceding four. Follow me.

[Matthew 5:7 \(ESV\)](#) *[Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.](#)*

MERCIFUL IS HOW GOD INTRODUCES HIMSELF!

When the men and women heard Jesus say *[“Blessed are the merciful”](#)* they would hyperlink back to the most quoted and reused verse in the Hebrew Bible: **[Exodus 34:6-7](#)** (see Numbers 14:18; 2 Chronicles 30:9; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 116:5; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nahum 1:3). It is there that YHWH reveals Himself to Moses.

¹ Carson, D. A. (1999). Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10 (p. 23). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

² David Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Studies in the Sermon on the Mount (p.99). Eerdmans Publishing Company

*Exodus 34:5–7 (ESV) ⁵The LORD (YHWH) descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. ⁶The LORD (YHWH) passed before him and proclaimed, “YHWH, YHWH, a God **merciful** and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”*

THIS IS HUGE — What matters above everything else is who God is. The world is trying to find the life that flourishes by starting with who man is. The blessed life/happy life is wrapped up in you being you — you expressing the true you. The world is broken today because our first parents decided that they could flourish in the world apart from God. They chose to not be defined by who God is. That didn’t work well at all. Despite what fallen culture says, what matters most is not who you are. What matters most is who God is. The flourishing life is the life that begins with and derives from who God is. Every *way of being* in the Beatitudes that results in flourishing is the expression of who the King is — His heart, His ways.

When God tells His name to Moses (and in Biblical times names spoke of character and identity) **the very first word** He uses to describe himself is **merciful**. In fact — the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX / Septuagint) uses the same Greek adjective used in *“Blessed are the merciful.”* It is the word *eleos*. Only in **Exodus 34:6** it is *polyeleos* — the pre-fix *poly* meaning *much*.

The first thing He says is that He is **merciful!** Not just *merciful* — He is *much merciful, very merciful, — full of mercy* and gracious.

We cannot miss the significance of this. Think about it. Most all of us have been in a social situation or an interview when we’re asked to introduce ourselves by stating our name and saying a few things that would give people an idea of what we’re about; who we are. Here in **Exodus 34** God declares His name — YHWH — and then makes it clear what He is all about. The first thing He says about Himself is that He is merciful, very merciful, full of mercy and grace.

Merciful is part of who He is. What He does flows from who He is.

Because MERCIFUL is who our God is, we should pray that this Beatitude will forever change our minds about the way we think of God. That even in the most difficult moments of life we will think of Him as *merciful, very merciful, full of mercy and grace*.

REMEMBER — The Kingdom of God is the expression of the King.

Because MERCIFUL is who our God is it should not surprise us that Mercy is what He desires to see in His people.

Hosea 6:6 (NKJV) ⁶For I desire mercy (eleos) and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

I believe that the Beatitudes are Jesus expounding on **Philippians 2:13**

Philippians 2:13 (NKJV) ¹³for it is God who works in you, both to will and to do for his good pleasure.

Because MERCIFUL is who our God is, we should pray that we would *hunger and thirst* to know our **merciful** King, *hunger and thirst* to be like Him — so that our *way of being* would express His way of being. So much so that we would be a merciful people.

Eugene Peterson — *“The Church is to be a colony of heaven in the country of death”.*

So much so that the first thing that would come to people’s minds when they think of us would be: *Those people are merciful, very merciful, full of mercy. That person is merciful, very merciful, full of mercy.*

WHAT MERCY IS NOT

Merciful does not mean tolerance. *Merciful* does not mean, “Oh, That’s okay!” When we want to understand the meaning of *merciful*, we need to remember that this adjective is applied to God Himself. So, whatever I may want the word *merciful* to mean, that meaning must also be true of God. So immediately we know that *merciful* does not mean tolerance. *Merciful* does not mean, “Oh, That’s

okay!” The Bible tells us that God is merciful; but God is righteous, God is holy, God is just. Our interpretation of *merciful* must include all that.

Psalm 85:10 (NKJV) ¹⁰*Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed.*

We can never think that being merciful can be at the expense of truth. That’s not true mercy.

WHAT MERCY IS

There is a very close relationship between grace and mercy — but we need to see that there is also an important distinction between mercy and grace.

Grace is shown to the undeserving; mercy is compassion to the miserable.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones — *“the best definition of the two that I have ever encountered is this: `Grace is especially associated with men in their sins; **mercy is especially associated with men in their misery.** In other words, while grace looks down upon sin as a whole, mercy looks especially upon the miserable consequences of sin. So that mercy really means a sense of pity plus a desire to relieve the suffering.”*³

D.A. Carson — *it appears that **grace** is a loving response when love is undeserved, and **mercy** is a loving response prompted by the misery and helplessness of the one on whom the love is to be showered. Grace answers to the undeserving; mercy answers to the miserable.*

Richard Lenski — in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew helps us see the distinction between Grace and Mercy

Charis (grace) always deals with the sin and guilt itself. The noun eleos (mercy) and its derivatives always deals with the pain, misery and distress produced by sin in the world.

³ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones. *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (p.99). Eerdmans Publishing Company

Lenski has more to say but I want to hit the pause button to ask a question: Do I have compassion or contempt for those whose lives are destroyed by their own sin? Do I have compassion or contempt for those whose sin destroys others?

Back to Lenski —

*Grace extends pardon; Mercy extends relief. Grace cleanses and reconciles while Mercy cures, heals and helps.*⁴

Thus, **the synonym** for **mercy** is **compassion**. Back to **Exodus 34:6-7** — the word *merciful* in the Hebrew language is *rachum* which can be translated *full of compassion*.

Exodus 34:6 (CSB) ⁶*The Lord passed in front of him and proclaimed: The LORD—the LORD is a **compassionate** and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth,*

MERCIFUL = COMPASSION + ACTION

Merciful is not just an emotion, but a practical response to need.

Jesus doesn't specify the kinds of people we're to show mercy to.

It might be for those who wrong us. **Mercy** includes a desire to **remove the wrong** as well as **alleviate the suffering**.

Micah 7:19 (CSB) ¹⁹*He will again have **compassion** on us; he will **vanquish our iniquities**. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.*

Daniel 9:9 (CSB) ⁹*Compassion and **forgiveness** belong to the Lord our God, though we have rebelled against him*

It might be for those overcome by some catastrophe, or those who are the victims of the sinful actions of others (like the traveler from Jerusalem to Jericho who was assaulted by robbers). It might be the hungry, or the sick, or the outcasts

⁴ Lenski, R. C. H. (1961). *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (p. 191). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.

and outsiders. Jesus was constantly acting to relieve those very people of their misery.

I've been asked on more than one occasion: "What should I be doing?" "Why aren't you telling us what to do?" Here's my primary answer: Every man and woman who has come to know Jesus is a part of His merciful mission in the world. Some of your involvement in His mission will be done as a part of the vision and mission of the community of believers God sets you in. But the vast majority of your part in the mission of Jesus is done outside of these walls. We gather on Sunday morning and Monday night for corporate worship and for the teaching of the word — so that you will be *thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17)*.

As a rule, we know when our families or close friends are hurting/in distress. As a rule, nobody has to tell you what to do when your best friends are hurting/in distress. But we need to live with our eyes open to the world God has placed us in at work, at school, in our neighborhoods, and in the larger community of Metro (those who are outside of your circle of friends). We live in a world filled with people broken by their own sin or the sins of others. Sometimes their brokenness might be painfully obvious. So, when I see the miserable consequences of sin all around me, I need to ask the question: *Do I feel compassion?* But that is just where mercy begins. It doesn't end there.

Most of us are familiar with the parable of The Good Samaritan. Jesus told the parable in response to a question. At the end of the parable Jesus asked his questioner:

Luke 10:36–37 (CSB) ³⁶*"Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"* ³⁷*"The one who showed mercy to him," he said. Then Jesus told him, "Go and do the same."*

QUOTE: Handbook on Matthew — *Mercy* is defined as having a feeling of sorrow over someone's bad situation and trying to do something about it.

People who are *merciful* can be said to be “kind” or “forgiving,” or to be “people who take pity on others,” “people who **show** mercy to others.”⁵

Mercy is tied to being “poor in spirit” and “meek.” To be poor in spirit is the acknowledgement that I am a sinner. To be meek is to acknowledge to others that I am a sinner. To be merciful is to have compassion on others, because they are sinners like me, dealing with the misery of sin. If I am lacking compassion it traces back to a deficiency in the very first beatitude.

MERCY IS A MARK OF NEARNESS TO THE HEART OF GOD

The nearer you get to the heart of the King the more merciful you become, because our King **is** merciful. The degree to which *I hunger and thirst after righteousness* is the degree to which I will be merciful.

Matthew 5:7 (ESV) ⁷Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

WHAT JESUS IS NOT SAYING

Jesus is not saying that we can earn God’s mercy by performing acts of mercy. He cannot be saying that because ¹ that would be in total contradiction with the rest of Scripture that teaches salvation by grace alone (Ephesians 2:8, 9) and ². If our receiving mercy could only be merited by being merciful none of us would ever be truly forgiven because none of us perfectly meet this standard.

Jesus is not saying that if we fail to show mercy in even one situation, that He will not be merciful to us. The warning is not for those for who have acted in mercy but struggle with bitterness. The warning is not for those who find forgiveness difficult because they have been recently offended and are still so wrecked that they cannot properly respond. This warning is for those who have no desire to forgive.

WHAT JESUS IS SAYING

⁵ Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992). [*A handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*](#) (p. 112). New York: United Bible Societies.

Jesus is saying that mercy is a two-way street. We cannot receive **mercy/compassion** from God and yet withhold it from others. If you are a Christian it is because God is very **merciful/compassionate** — full of **mercy/compassion**.

It is God's mercy/compassion to be emptied of your pride and brought to poverty of spirit. **It is God's mercy/compassion** to be brought to mourning over your spiritual condition. **It is God's mercy/compassion** to receive the grace of meekness and to become gentle. **It is God's mercy/compassion** to be made hungry and thirsty after righteousness.⁶

I pray we will be utterly wrecked in the most glorious way by the fact that God is full of merciful compassion. God looked at the world that rebelled against Him — in all of its misery — with compassion. When we were organizing our lives without God and against God – God looked at us with compassion. God looks at us as we fail Him — and when we wound one another — with compassion.

Jesus is saying that being merciful is evidence that we have received mercy.

*1 Timothy 1:16 (NET) ¹⁶But here is why I was **treated with mercy (eleos – compassion)**: so that in me as the worst, Christ Jesus could demonstrate his utmost patience, as an example for those who are going to believe in him for eternal life.*

It is so radical to think of how full of compassion Jesus was for Paul. He understood how miserable Paul was — *“It's hard for you to kick against the goads — you're miserable fighting against Me and hurting my people. And he was **polyeleos** — full very merciful — full of compassion — And he acted to rescue him.*

Jesus is saying that forgiveness demonstrates whether we have been forgiven.

If we refuse to be merciful, we have never really understood the grace of our King. We are outside grace and are unforgiven.

⁶ Guzik, D. (2013). Matthew (Mt 5:7). Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik.

I pray God that as we see that MERCIFUL is who you are, that we would see who you want us to be — full of mercy.