

**Sermon preached by Mr. Michael Bittenbender  
at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,  
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, January 19, 2020**

**THE BEATITUDES (5)**

**Matthew 5:1-12**

This morning we are going to take a look at the fifth beatitude, which is the sermon I was preparing for when I decided I'd rather have my appendix removed.

The Scripture passage that we have read each time we look at the beatitudes is Matthew, chapter 5, verses 1-12. Let us not forget the context of this passage. Jesus has called His disciples, they are His followers, and now He takes them away to instruct them on qualities and character traits that His followers must exemplify.

So please follow along as we give our reverent attention to the reading of his holy Word.

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him, and He began to teach them.

He said:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

The beatitude we are focusing on this morning is the fifth, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” As has been mentioned in previous sermons in this series, the

beatitudes are not isolated or independent from one another. Each one of the beatitudes builds on the previous, almost like a ladder. Now there is a small separation here where the first four deal with our attitude and position towards God, and this one breaks from that and instructs us on how to relate to our fellow humans. Not all of the final four instruct in this way but this is at least the first, and won't be the last that instructs us on our behaviors towards mankind. The ladder that Jesus is creating in the beatitudes, and particularly this fifth beatitude, "rest on grace," according to Charles Spurgeon, "and grace puts every rung into its lace. It is also grace that, in this place, has taught the man to be merciful and has blessed him and given him the promise that he will obtain mercy."

If you remember, the first beatitude being poverty of spirit, a recognition by man of his position before God, followed by those that mourn for their condition of sinfulness, which then leads to a stance of meekness, as no one has a foot to stand on in their merits towards God, then hungering and thirsting for all that God calls us to. Now we, in light of hungering and thirsting for righteousness, look to do what is right, good and honorable towards our fellow man. In speaking to this, Jesus says, "Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy."

The dictionary.com definition for mercy is, "compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm. Performed out of a desire to relieve suffering; motivated by compassion." Mercy is also often characterized by its differing from grace. Grace is receiving that which we do not deserve. Mercy is not receiving that which we do deserve.

Here are a couple of illustrations that may help us in our understanding of mercy. One such illustration is this: A father sought for pardon of his son from the first Napoleon. The emperor said it was the son's second offense, and so justice demanded his death. "I don't ask for justice," demanded his father. "I plead for mercy." "But," said the emperor, "he does not deserve mercy." "Sire," cried the father, "it would not be mercy if he deserved it, and mercy is all I ask for." "Well, then," said the emperor, "I will have mercy." And his son was saved.

Another illustration talks about Calvin Coolidge and his display of mercy to a burglar. Years after the death of President Coolidge, this story came to light. In the early days of his presidency, Coolidge awoke one morning in his hotel room to find a burglar going through his pockets. Coolidge spoke up, asking the burglar not to take his watch chain because it contained an engraved charm he wanted to keep. Coolidge then engaged the thief in quiet conversation and discovered he was a college student who had no money to pay his hotel bill or buy a ticket back to campus. Coolidge counted \$32 out of his wallet – which he had also persuaded the dazed young man to give back! – declared it to be a loan, and advised the young man to leave the way he had come so as to avoid the Secret Service! (Yes, the loan was paid back.) (*Today in the Word, October 8, 1992*).

Lastly, Robert Robinson had been saved out of a life of sin through George Whitfield's ministry in England. Shortly after that, at the age of twenty-three, Robinson wrote the hymn "Come, Thou Fount of every blessing. Streams of *mercy*, never ceasing." Sadly, Robinson wandered far from those streams and, like the Prodigal Son, journeyed into a life of carnality.

One day he was traveling by stagecoach and sitting beside a young woman engrossed in her book. She ran across a verse she thought was beautiful and asked him what he thought of it. “Prone to wander Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.” Bursting into tears, Robinson said, “Madam, I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds if I could enjoy the feelings I had then.” Although greatly surprised, she reassured him that the “streams of mercy” mentioned in his song still flowed. Mr. Robinson was deeply touched. Turning his “wandering heart” to the Lord, he was restored to full fellowship. (*Kenneth W. Osbeck, 101 Hymn Stories, p. 53*).

God delights in showing mercy, as stated in Micah 7:18 which says: “Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of His inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.” It is one thing to show mercy and it is an entirely different thing to delight in showing mercy. We can display mercy in a way that shows we do it grudgingly. For example, if showing mercy can be displayed by helping those in need, we can give out of our abundance to meet that need. But if we have an ulterior motive, perhaps in trying to get something in return, or we feel as though by giving to meet the need we deprive ourselves of something, we may not be in fact doing so willingly. The followers of God must delight in showing mercy as well. This is no easy feat. When the world demands justice, we are told to offer mercy.

One interesting point that the Bible makes regarding mercy is that mercy triumphs over judgment. James states this in his letter. James chapter 2, verse 13: “because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” Strong words if you are in the business of showing mercy but still holding on to judgment. Or perhaps showing mercy unwillingly, perhaps not delighting in it. If we are desiring of judgment, it will be given to us. I encourage us all to stop seeking judgment of others, but rather showing mercy.

When considering this beatitude, one might ask to whom are we to show mercy? John Stott points out that Jesus makes no indication whether the people needing mercy have been perchance overcome by disaster, like the traveler from Jerusalem to Jericho, who is attacked by robbers and left battered and bruised. He is passed by twice by other travelers before a man from Samaria has mercy on him. Or if it is the hungry, the sick, or the outcast, whom Jesus Himself regularly took pity on. Or if it is those who have wronged us as we cry out for justice. I believe it is clear in Scripture that God’s mercy extends to all of these people, and so must ours.

Graham Smith says that “mercy is love in action. It’s more than just feeling sorry for people. It’s doing something.” I struggle preaching on this because this is where rubber hits the road. The previous four beatitudes were attitudes we need to have towards ourselves and towards God. Being merciful is a great call to action. I have been in a mode of self-reflection asking myself where must I show mercy to those around me. I preach to myself up here each time I preach so know that as I challenge us to be merciful, I am in need of heeding my own words. How are we to be merciful to those around us? How do our actions speak to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ sitting in the pews, our siblings, our parents, perhaps extended

family, or our peers at school or our colleagues? How are we demonstrating mercy in each and every moment?

Let's take a deep dive into mercy to see how this looks day to day, moment by moment. I really appreciated Rev. Smith's words on this topic. He gave four of what he called "marks of mercy" indicators in our lives as to how we should show mercy to those around us., that these marks would be a sign to others that we are who Jesus tells us to be.

The first mark is: "If I'm merciful, I will be patient with those who are peculiar." I am not entirely sure why he designates peculiar other than that peculiar people could potentially be the hardest people to understand and have patience for. I would just simply encourage us to be patient with everyone, each and every person we come in contact with. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 encourages us to be patient with everyone. Who is it in your life that needs that extra measure of patience and in so doing, showing them mercy?

The second mark is: "If I'm merciful, I will forgive those who have fallen." All of us have fallen and are fallen. People disappoint us, they wrong us, they fail us. Are we holding on to issues as a bulldog holds onto a bone, refusing to budge or let go? That's not mercy.

The third mark is: "If I'm merciful, I will help those who are hurting." Proverbs 3:27 says "Whenever you possibly can, do good to those who need it" (Good News Translation). Jesus, in His earthly ministry, spent a great deal of His time helping those who were hurting. He healed the sick, restored sight and abilities, fed the hungry, and raised the dead to life. Our lives, as much as it is in our abilities, should reflect Christ's work on earth. When it is in our sphere of influence, we need to be taking action to help those who are hurting. It isn't enough to sit back and think someone else will take care of this. Paying taxes and therefore supporting welfare and those who need it is not the mercy Jesus is calling us to

John Wesley is famously quoted, and I am sure Pastor Neil has used this quote before, as saying, "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, to all the people you can, at all the times you can, as long as ever you can."

The fourth and last mark is: "If I'm merciful, I will do good to my enemies." This drives people crazy. The world says to get even. When we have been wronged, or are being attacked, get right back at those people. Jesus says nope, that's not My way. Luke 6, starting at verse 32, says:

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

Being merciful is not the means for salvation. We are not merciful in an attempt to gain salvation. We are merciful because we have experienced mercy from our Creator, the author of salvation. Even before we are merciful, we have received mercy. Even before we take our

first breath, we have received mercy. Romans 9:16 says: “It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.” The man Jesus calls to be merciful in Matthew 5 has already received the mercy he is being called on to share. We are merciful because Jesus commands us to be and it comes from an overflow from the heart of the mercy we have received from our Father.

We demonstrate mercy with kindness to those in need. The truly merciful are considerate of those who are poor. We demonstrate mercy with compassion for mourners. We demonstrate mercy with full forgiveness. Spurgeon recounts a story of a certain governor of Georgia, “in Mr. Wesley’s day, said that he would have his servant on board his vessels flogged for drinking his wine.” When Mr. Wesley entreated that the man might be pardoned on that occasion, the governor said, “It is no use, Mr. Wesley. You know, sir, I never forgive.” “Well then, sir,” said Mr. Wesley, “I hope you know that you will never be forgiven, or else I hope that you have never sinned.” We also demonstrate mercy when we show great mercy to great sinners, and finally we must show mercy to the souls of all men. We must anxiously long for the souls of all mankind to be brought to a saving faith in Jesus. We must work with everything that is in us, to reach out to the lost souls around us, showing them the mercy that has been shown to us. That they may walk in a life of faith, saved by grace.

How is God calling you, in your life, in your abilities, to show mercy to others and delight in doing so? The promise for doing so, is that we will be shown mercy. As we saw in James, if we do not show mercy, mercy will not be shown to us. Mercy is the better option. If anyone pleads for anything but mercy, justice and judgment await. And if you are like me, a great sinner, our just reward is death. So as is commonly seen in the gospel as people plead with Jesus, join me in asking the Lord, “Lord, have mercy on me.”