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Showing Mercy in the Capitol (The Sermon on the Mount) Matthew 5:1-12

None of the Beatitudes apply so directly to life and work in the Capitol any more than “Blessed are the merciful...” In a world of heated elections, divisive issues, lively debates, and constant compromise, actions can be taken, and words can be spoken that are hurtful and offensive. As a result, we recognize the tremendous need for an attitude of mercy and forgiveness in the Capitol. Jesus says those who are His followers will be merciful, but where does mercy and forgiveness in the face of such difficult circumstances come from? It is when we recognize the great mercy that God has shown to us that we cannot help but show mercy to others.

As we continue studying the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus’ introductory statements known as the Beatitudes, we come to these challenging words:

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”

The first three beatitudes show how a man must stand in his relation as a sinner to God--spiritually bankrupt, sorry for sin, and meekly humble. The 4th beatitude contains the promise of God's provision of righteousness for the man who comes to God. The remaining beatitudes reveal the transformed character qualities of one who has been touched by Christ's Spirit and is becoming progressively more like Christ. Jesus proclaims that one of these qualities is being merciful.

What is Mercy?

When we speak of mercy, we first look to Christ as the greatest example of One who was merciful. He died for our sins, showing us the greatest mercy possible. He asked His Father to forgive the very ones who were torturing Him and putting Him to death. He died for us, not because we deserved it, or earned it, but simply because of His mercy and love for us. This is perhaps best expressed by Paul in Romans: **“For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”.** (Romans 5:6-8) He did all this as an expression of His mercy and grace. And since He has shown such mercy to us, as His children and members of His kingdom, we will show mercy to others.

If we are to examine whether we have this characteristic in our lives, we must determine what Jesus means when He says we are to be merciful. In its basic literal sense, *mercy* means “to give help to the wretched, to relieve the miserable”. The essential thought is that mercy gives

attention to those in misery and need. There is an important distinction between mercy and grace. *Grace* is shown to the undeserving; *mercy* is compassion to those in need. As we study mercy throughout Scripture, we find the quality of mercy is expressed in two important ways.

Compassion and Meeting the Needs of Others

Mercy is having a heart of compassion and reaching out to meet the needs of others. While the synonym for mercy might be compassion, it is not simply feeling compassion. Mercy only truly exists when actions are taken to help those in distress. This may be towards those in physical or material need. It may mean reaching out to help or encourage those in emotional need or struggling with difficulties or trials as well.

Forgiveness

The Scriptures teach that another aspect of mercy is forgiving others. None of us has a problem with understanding mercy as relating to care and compassion with the needy, suffering, or less fortunate. However, the great challenge for us is to see how mercy relates to FORGIVENESS! When we are called upon to forgive those who have wronged us or abused us, then the issue of mercy becomes a much more difficult.

Jesus’ Illustrations of Mercy

We must always keep Jesus’ Beatitudes in context with the rest of Jesus’ teaching as well as the rest of the Bible. In later teaching, Jesus gave tremendous vivid illustrations of mercy and how it was to be expressed to others. These came in the form of two of His parables where He describes how mercy is to be shown both in compassion for others and in forgiving others who have wronged us.

The Good Samaritan

We are certainly familiar with Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10:30-37. In this parable, a man is beaten, robbed, and left for dead along the road. Two religious leaders passed by, ignoring his need. A Samaritan stops, and at great personal expense and involvement, cares for the man. He saw the man's need and responded internally with a heart of compassion. He responded externally by meeting his needs. He did all this even though he was considered by race and religion an enemy. An eye for distress, a heart of pity, an effort to help, all in spite of enmity—that's mercy.

It is not difficult for us to seek to show compassion through support to organizations that meet various needs or even through support of government programs providing for the poor and needy. What is more difficult is for us to become personally involved in helping and meeting the needs of others. This can get messy and can cost us in terms of time and personal involvement. To do so for those who have wronged us or with whom we differ is the very definition of mercy.

Certainly, each of us would agree that demonstrating compassion and reaching out to help those in need are admirable traits and something that each of us should strive to do. But Jesus goes on to teach that being genuinely merciful requires something of us which is much more difficult for us to do—forgive others.

The Unforgiving Servant

In Matthew 18:21-35 Jesus shared an equally vivid story to drive home the point of showing mercy in the form of the forgiveness of others. In this parable a servant owed his master an incomprehensibly huge sum of money. When the time came to settle accounts, the servant begged for patience, and the master **"felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt"** (vs. 27). Jesus goes on to tell how that he then went out and found a fellow servant who owed him a small amount of money. He seized him and demanded to be paid what was owed. When the master heard of this, he summoned the wicked servant and rebuked him: **"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?"** (vs. 32-33) Jesus sums up this dramatic parable with these cutting words: **"My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."** (vs. 35)

Receiving Mercy

Jesus says of the merciful that **they and they alone**, will receive mercy. Some have taken His words to mean that we can merit or earn God's mercy by showing mercy to others. This would be at odds with the rest of Jesus' teaching and with the rest of Scripture. The Bible teaches that salvation is only by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). What this means is that those who are truly God's children, and as such are objects of His mercy, will

themselves be merciful and will receive mercy in the end. Showing mercy is evidence that we have received mercy.

James touches on this important topic by teaching us that external demonstrations of mercy to others are an evidence of genuine faith. He proclaims that faith, without works is dead, or useless and questions whether such faith can save. **"If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."** (James 2:15-17) John also gives mercy and compassion for others as an evidence of genuine faith: **"But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?"** (1 John 3:17)

Conclusion

This leads us to two very piercing observations.

If we do not have mercy towards those who are physically or materially in need, we are not true believers.

If we do not demonstrate mercy by forgiving others who have wronged us, we are not really Christians. Mercy, as with the rest of the Beatitudes, is a quality which will be present in those who are members of God's kingdom.

This is not to say we will not struggle with being unmerciful at times, perhaps oblivious or uncaring towards the needs of others. It does not mean we will not have instances when we are angry towards others. But genuine believers will have a hunger to be merciful and will grow in this quality as we become more like Christ. When we do fail, then we will confess our sin to God, and He will be faithful to forgive us (1 John 1:9). As believers, when we recognize His ongoing mercy towards us, we will have a great desire to be merciful to others.

In this divisive day, the quality of mercy is best demonstrated by how we respond to those with whom we disagree the most, and perhaps, treat us the worst. We remember the mercy Christ showed. It is when we recognize the great mercy God has shown us that we cannot help but show mercy to others!

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDIES

Thursdays

8:00 AM Government Org. Conference Room (East Wing)

12:00 PM Senate President's Conference Room