



“Taking It Easy” - November 3, 2019

OPEN

Welcome to a new month! In this month’s edition of the *Light Magazine* there is an article, “[Immersed In Kingdom Work](#)” which tells about the Immerse ministry training program, of which our church a part. Immerse is about “contextually demonstrated mastery.” This is also what the Beatitudes are about – being changed for life in the Kingdom of God. Not theoretical knowledge, but living realities of the Christian experience.

We are currently examining eight Beatitudes from Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount” (Mathew 5, 6, 7). And remember, the whole of these blessings has a significant “bookending” – a truth that binds all of these together.

This bookend is: “theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (vv. 3, 10). Dallas Willard notes that we live in a “God bathed” and “God permeated” world. We must not relegate the Kingdom of God to just “there and then”. It is also “here and now.” (*Divine Conspiracy*, HarperOne, 1997, 61)

What does it mean to live in the present reality of God’s Kingdom? It means that we are transformed or “kingdomized” into the realities of His reign. Each of the blessings describes an important – but not isolated nor independent – quality of life in God’s Kingdom.

- To be poor in spirit is to be aware of our deep need
- To mourn is to grieve over the gap between God’s desire for this world and the state it is in
- To be meek is to reflect the character of Christ, which is power under control
- To hunger and thirst for righteousness is to be shaped for life in God’s Kingdom. As David challenged us last week, “*We cannot expect to perform well when we have not taken the time to become spiritually fit.*”

DIG

Our theme today is the call to be **merciful**. In Matthew 5:7 we read,

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

[1] Blessing Number Five

How is there a blessing to being merciful? Does this not put us at risk of being exploited? Jesus made it clear that our experience of mercy is tied to extending mercy. If we are going to do that, we need to understand mercy better.

1. Linguistically

One way to understand “merciful” as Jesus give it in Matthew 5:7 is to look at the definition. It means “full of pity, merciful, compassionate.” This term is often used in the Bible to describe man seeking and God granting His favor, even when it is undeserved. It points to all the benefits we receive in Christ, offered because God acts compassionately towards us, despite our sin, and offers redemption because of Christ’s blood (see Romans 5:8).

2. Theologically

Mercy is at the very core of God’s character. Nehemiah 9 records a special occasion in Israel’s history. The wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt. The law was read. And on October 31, 445 BC, the people gathered in solemn assembly and confessed their sin. The Levites led in a prayer, reflecting on the relationship between God and His chosen ones. “*They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them...But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them.*” This is who God is. He defines mercy.

3. Naturally

It is natural to seek God’s mercy. When King David came to terms with his wickedness he cried, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.” (Psalm 51:1 ESV) In a few instances in Matthew people cried, *Kyrie eleison* (“Lord, have mercy” – now a part of many liturgies).

Facing weakness a father came to Jesus and said, “*Lord, have mercy on my son, for he has seizures and he suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him.*” (Matthew 17:15-16 ESV) We understand mercy because we seek it!

4. Experientially

In Matthew 18:21-35 we read the parable of an unmerciful servant. Though he had been forgiven so much, he would not forgive a paltry debt. So the mandate to be merciful cannot come from personality but from God’s grace. When we do not live in Christ we are “*without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful...*” (see Romans 1:31). However, when we grow deeper in God’s grace, we will learn to extend mercy to others.

Where do we see mercy active in our world today? One place is in youth baseball. Have you heard of the “mercy rule”? The mercy rule allows for the game to be called once a large number of runs has been scored by one team. It is to “have mercy” on the other team.

However, does mercy factor into our day-to-day relationships? Are we “kingdomized” in being merciful?

[2] Mercy Begets Mercy

In Matthew 1 we read the genealogy of Jesus and in the older English Bibles we read “*Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob...*” and so forth. (v.2) “To beget” means to produce offspring. Abraham not only begat Jacob. He also shows us how mercy received can give birth to mercy – offered to others.

In **Genesis 12** we read about God’s intention to choose and to bless Abraham. However, when he went to Egypt he dealt with others without mercy. He lied about the identity of Sarah and opened her up to shame and harm. He caused God’s punishment to fall on Pharaoh. Clearly, God was being merciful to Abraham in this situation. And he would learn later (Genesis 22) in offering Isaac that God provided His mercy at the cost of the Lamb of God.

In **Genesis 18** we observe the occasion in which Abraham learned about God’s intention to punish the people of Sodom. How did Abraham act? He interceded for the people of Sodom, especially in view of his nephew Lot, who lived there. What made the change in Abraham’s life? He offered mercy because he had experienced God’s mercy.

REFLECT

In ***The Merchant of Venice*** we have one of the most dramatic scenes written by William Shakespeare. All is tense in the court while the cruel Shylock prepares to have his “pound of flesh” from Antonio. Then the character Portia speaks these words: “*The quality of mercy is not strained; it droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath.*”

In other words, mercy is not forced but to be freely given. Are we being kingdomized in regards to this matter of freely offering mercy to others? As you reflect on this question, consider three benefits of mercy.

- ***Mercy is foundational***

By God’s mercy we have hope! “Therefore, since God in his mercy has given us this new way [of the Gospel], we never give up. (II Corinthians 4:1). In one of his songs, Steven Curtis Chapman posed this question: *Where is the hope, where is the peace? That will make this life complete? For every man, woman, boy, and girl, looking for heaven in the real world.*

He answers this later in the song: *It happened one night with a tiny baby’s birth. God heard creation crying and He sent heaven to earth. He is the hope, and the peace, that will make this life complete.* Are we helping people to see the hope that is in the Kingdom of God? We do so by being merciful.

- ***Mercy is demonstrable***

In Colossians 3:12-13 we read, “*Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.*” NLT

Not only do we see Kingdom qualities being integrated in this passage. In addition, we learn that being merciful must be done “as per” Jesus. In her speech, Portia also says this of mercy: “*It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings, it is an attribute to God himself; and earthly power doth then show likest God’s when mercy seasons justice.*” When we offer mercy, we reflect and demonstrate the mercy of God to this world.

- ***Mercy is reciprocal***

We know that mercy benefits the one who receives it. However, it also blesses and enhances the lives of those who are willing to offer mercy to others. Even when we pray the Lord’s Prayer we are committing to both receive and to extend God’s mercy to others: “*...and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.*”

In fact, our failure to forgive others hampers our own forgiveness! (see Matthew 6:12,14-15) In Portia’s words: “*It is twice blest; it blesseth him that gives and him that takes.*”