

The Sermon on the Mount

DEVOTIONAL STUDIES FROM THE
MEN'S MORNING FELLOWSHIP

Matthew 5:7 *Blessed are the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.*

Jesus is on the mount describing what every Christian ought to be like. Jesus embodied these characteristics as a Spirit-filled man. What was always true of Jesus as a man is potentially true for each of us as humans every day.

Here is another way of looking at it. I am a Christian because I've been born-again. Thus the beatitudes ought to describe me; I ought to be manifesting them as characteristics. They are my being, my attitude. If I am not manifesting them... I've gotten derailed somewhere along the line.

These beatitudes are building upon one another. Conscious of my spiritual poverty before God, I mourn for my sin. My true and honest assessment of myself leaves me both meek and hungering after a practical, day-to-day righteousness. As I am experiencing more-and-more what it means to be righteous, I cannot help but be **merciful**.

Righteousness, remember, is being right with God, and then living rightly every day. It is to be like God; and that is why I cannot help but be **merciful**, because God is full of mercy toward me and everyone else.

I am **merciful**, because it is God's nature and my new nature.

It would help to get a handle on mercy. Mercy is often paired with grace. Here are two of the common ways of describing it:

1. Grace is getting what you don't deserve; mercy is not getting what you deserve.
2. Grace looks at sin as a whole; mercy looks upon the consequences of sin.

A good, working definition of mercy is *pity in action*. You have a genuine pity for the miserable effects of sin – whether a person deserves them or not; then you look for ways to relieve them.

The story of the Good Samaritan illustrates mercy. Others saw the beaten and robbed man, but for one reason or another did nothing to relieve his miserable condition. Only the Samaritan put pity into action and showed him mercy.

God, of course, is the ultimate example of mercy in action. The Father saw our terrible, fallen condition and had pity on us. He acted upon that pity and sent Jesus – voluntarily, I might add – to relieve our distress. Jesus saves us and sends the Holy Spirit to comfort us. It is a merciful God we love and serve.

I think we all understand what I've been saying. What we have trouble with is the phrase that says, **for they shall obtain mercy**. It sounds, upon first reading, as if Jesus is saying that only if I am merciful toward others will God be merciful towards me. It sounds conditional.

By the way... There are a couple of other places where we seem to have this kind of dilemma:

1. In the Lord's Prayer, when He is teaching us how to pray, Jesus says, **Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors**.
2. Then there is a parable of the wicked servant who is forgiven a great debt but refuses to forgive a smaller debt owed to him. He is imprisoned by his master.

First of all, if forgiveness and mercy are conditional, **then no one could be saved!** Forgiveness and mercy would be impossible. I could never forgive others enough to earn my own forgiveness; or be so merciful that I deserve mercy.

Second of all, if these things are conditional, **then salvation itself is not by grace, but by works**. We know from studying all of Scripture that we are indeed saved by grace and *not* by works of righteousness – like forgiving and being merciful.

Being merciful is not something I must do to earn my salvation. It is something I am because I am saved. I may get derailed from it; but, when I do, I do not lose my salvation.

We still have not answered the question, though, of what Jesus means when He says, **they shall obtain mercy**.

There are two lines of thought that make sense to me. One has to do with my present need; the other with my future reward. Let's talk about my present need first.

I need God's mercy every day of my life. I still sin. I am still a sinner. I will need God's mercy right up until the time I stand before Jesus Christ at His Bema to be judged. Then, finally, everything not of God and not fit for Heaven will be purged from me and I will be fit for eternity – both physically and spiritually.

So here is what I think Jesus was saying about obtaining mercy. I'm a Christian. By definition I have already obtained mercy. I am merciful to others precisely because I am a Christian. But I also continue to obtain mercy throughout my life, because I still sin. And I continue to be merciful. And so on and on.

In other words, these two phrases describe two aspects of my Christian life. I continue to obtain mercy from God in my need; I continue to be merciful toward others because it is God's nature and my new nature.

It's not a conditional phrase. It's not saying, *If you don't show mercy, you won't receive mercy*. It's saying you have received mercy and you therefore extend mercy, and you continue to do both for your entire life.

What if I am not showing mercy? Well, then, as I've indicated twice, I have somewhere, somehow been derailed. I am living the Christian

life on a fleshly level. I am living as a legalist. I am living as a carnal Christian.

God saved me by grace through faith. He was merciful to me – to us – while we were yet sinners. With His nature within, we can be merciful to others. If we are not... It is because we are choosing the flesh and not yielding to the Spirit.

What about the Lord's Prayer and forgiving our debtors? Or the wicked servant who would not forgive the small debt owed him, and was therefore cast into prison?

Let's take the wicked servant first. The passage is in Matthew 25. The context there is Jews who believe they will be saved by keeping the Law. They are professing to believe in God, but trusting in their own righteousness. They were never saved to begin with.

What about the Lord's Prayer? God has forgiven you; you can therefore forgive others. If you do not forgive others, you are being fleshly and carnal.

There is also a future aspect that helps us understand how it is we will **obtain mercy**. In 2Timothy 1:16, 18, we find the Apostle Paul writing, **The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus. . . . The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day.** In Jude 21, the saints are also exhorted to be **looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ** - this refers to the ultimate acknowledgement of us as His own redeemed people at His second coming in glory.

As I mentioned, we will one day stand before the Lord for judgment. If I have lived in my flesh, as a carnal Christian, withholding forgiveness and refusing to show mercy... I will not **obtain** reward as I might have! Those sinful, fleshly attitudes will be burned as wood, hay and stubble. I will suffer loss of rewards. I will be saved... But so much that might have brought glory to Jesus will be burned-up instead.

Think of it this way: Being **merciful** is pity in action. It involves works of kindness and love towards others. As a motive for my actions, it inspires the kind of works that will be rewarded at the Bema of Christ.

Thus, to the extent I am **merciful**, I shall – at the Reward Seat –
obtain mercy.

Thanks be to God for His mercies that are new every morning!



