



good shepherd  
presbyterian church

## **The Blessing of Mercy**

Matthew 5:7; 23:23; Psalm 145:8-12,17-18

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My first year of college my brother, who was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, came to visit me. I had class or something and he asked if he could take my lime-green VW Rabbit out to go somewhere. When we met back up in my room later he looked devastated and said, "Something happened." As an aside, and as something we both laugh about now, my first response was, "Is it my keyboard?!" (I had just purchased a new keyboard – the musical kind.) And he said, "No, it's your car." Apparently while driving (very fast) the wind caught the hood and it slammed it up against the windshield, breaking it. He drove all the way back to campus with it up and his head out the window. Anyway, he was waiting for the hammer to fall... which it totally could have. I could have made him pay for it – emotionally or financially. I had the right to do that, but I showed mercy. I know that if it had happened to me, I would have longed for mercy!

Today we are talking about the blessing of mercy. Jesus includes it as a blessing in his teaching in Matthew 5. Remember that he is teaching those who follow him with the backdrop of the "crowd" just down the mountain. We are not just to line up to receive God's blessings; rather, we are to take them and share them in the world beyond these walls.

### **Mercy and Justice**

First of all, mercy can simply be compassion and kindness. It translates the Hebrew concept of *hesed*, which is a rich and multi-faceted word describing one of the main ways we experience God. When the Good Samaritan took care of the wounded man, he was showing *hesed*:

compassion and mercy. So that kind of love and care of others is at the heart of this blessing of mercy. But I also want to focus in on a particular kind or sub-set of mercy today.

Sometime this week I realized the strong connection between mercy and justice, or between mercy and righteousness. The two are often mentioned together, including right here in Matthew 5. Consider last week's verse together with the one from this week:

*"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." (Matthew 5:6-7)*

Or several other times justice or righteousness are paired with mercy:

*"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others." (Matthew 23:23)*

*"He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)*

So which is it? Does God desire justice and righteousness? Or does God desire mercy?

Let's consider God's own example:

*"[God] saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit..." (Titus 3:5)*

It is both! God desires us to do what is right, but not without mercy. That was the problem the scribes and Pharisees got into. They kept all the rules and laws and lost sight of "weightier provisions" of the law, the

foundation and reason FOR the laws: justice AND mercy AND faithfulness.

What God demonstrates and desires for us is that justice and mercy exist together. I'm not going to say 'balanced' because that suggests a formula of 40% justice and 60% mercy, or whatever. It takes both to even make sense of the other. In fact, how does mercy even make sense if there is not something rightly or justly *deserved* that is forgiven or paid? It's like the difference between saying "no big deal" and "it was a big deal, but I forgive you." The second takes full account of justice AND mercy.

There are also situations – I'm thinking of crimes and repeated injustice, where it is not a mercy to dismiss the injustice. If anything, the greatest mercy IS the route of justice, that what is right might prevail and the person involved learn from and repent of their actions.

All that is to say that mercy is not some wishy-washy niceness in every situation. It is rooted in God's own mercy, which we've seen is a compassion and mercy that does not ignore or lose sight of what God says is right and good.

### **The Blessing of Mercy**

It probably isn't a hard-sell to convince anyone that receiving mercy is a blessing. But that's not what Jesus says here. He says that those who SHOW mercy are blessed. And the blessing is that they will also receive mercy. We often have that turned around. We might be convinced to show mercy because we have experienced it ourselves. And that is true. But Jesus turns that around. Those who show mercy are blessed.

It sounds a lot like the end of the way Jesus taught us to pray, interestingly enough in the next chapter of Matthew:

*"Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Matthew 6:12)*

Jesus teaches us to pray that and we do so nearly every Sunday! We actually ask God to show us mercy and forgiveness to the degree that we have done so! I wonder how many of us realize the implications of that prayer!

Micah 6:8 helps us balance all this out nicely. Remember what the Lord desires and requires? It is to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. Realizing the challenge of holding justice and mercy together and knowing that God is paying attention should drive us to that third trait: humility. God help us!

### **The Blessing Challenge**

So as we turn to the blessing challenge this week, I want to encourage you to focus specifically on mercy. But let's turn it around this week to match what Jesus is saying. I want to challenge you to be open to and look for someone to whom you can show mercy. And it does not, should not, be a big obvious bestowal of your gift of forgiveness. That's makes it about you. But consider where you might show a thoughtful mercy or forgiveness, fully aware that it is not deserved, but possible. I would encourage you to do so quietly and humbly. And then toward the end of the week, reflect on how God has shown mercy to you. Perhaps focus on the Lord's Prayer this week, especially digging into those lines about forgiveness. I'd love to hear from you about what you discover!

In gratitude for God's mercy, Amen.