



05 September 2025

Blessed are the merciful

The fifth beatitude Jesus gives us is,

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy”
(Matthew 5:7).

Grace and mercy are two of the most common terms in church language. But understanding them, how they are both alike and different is not always that clear.

Recall the old story of a blacksmith instructing a brand new apprentice in working with horse shoes. He told him, “I’ll bring the shoe from the fire and lay it on the anvil. When I nod my head you hit it with this hammer.”

Now that’s clear, isn’t it?

The apprentice did exactly as he was told, at least what he understood ... and it was the only time he ever hit the blacksmith on the head with a hammer!

For people in the first century mercy generally meant caring for, having pity for, responding to the needs of others. The Romans and the Greeks valued strength and power, and so did not admire mercy but saw it as a weakness, a character flaw. Some of their philosophers referred to mercy as “a sickness of the soul.”

The Jewish people of that time were a refreshing contrast as they valued mercy highly. But some of their teachers took it too far. They wrote, “alms [that is giving, being merciful to the poor] delivers from death, and shall purge away all sin.”

Mercy is part of God’s character. Jesus said “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36). Mercy, like grace, flows from God’s love. As King David prayed in Psalm 51,

“Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin” [1-2, NLT].

It is sometimes said, “God in His *grace* gives me what I do *not* deserve and in His *mercy* He *withholds* what I *do* deserve.” There is some truth here. But mercy is active, not passive. It, like grace, gives, not just withholds.

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In 1 Timothy chapter 1 verse 13 Paul testifies that God gave mercy to him,

“even though I was previously a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief.”

We receive mercy from God day by day. This is what God is like. And we are to be like him—to be merciful to others, and to keep growing in mercy.

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

Jesus is not saying that when we are merciful to others we will automatically receive mercy from them or others. Nor is He talking about earning favor or forgiveness, mercy from God. It is not some kind of mechanical formula by which God dispenses mercy. It is not a matter of mechanics. It is not a matter of the action itself, but of the heart. God chooses to act on the basis of our heart, which motivates the action of being merciful.

God gives mercy to believers to a far greater degree than we realize. God promises to bless believers who develop and live by the character of His Son, the character of the kingdom, with even more mercy.

Greater mercy for our struggles and our tough times.

Greater mercy for our problems and our pain.

Greater mercy for our failures and disasters.

Please notice again the progression that Jesus is laying out.

Living out the kingdom life starts with realizing our spiritual poverty, our spiritual bankruptcy. Realizing that we have nothing in ourselves to commend ourselves to God, to please God.

Then, seeing our spiritual poverty, at least something of the sinfulness of our sin, and to truly sorrow and mourn over our sin.

With that view then to be gentle toward others because of and by God’s grace.

And so then to see what we should and need to be, to have that deep hunger and thirst for righteousness, to be more and more like Christ.

That will lead us to be more merciful to others.

Yes, blessed, truly happy are the merciful, for they will receive mercy

Pastor Lyle