

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy

Recap: What have we learned so far in the beatitudes?

The first 4 beatitudes reveal a spiritual progression: blessed is the person whose heart has felt spiritual bankruptcy, see themselves as poor as they truly are and come to grieve over their sin. As a result they are meek: submitting everything to God - trusting Him and His timing and treating others with humility and gentleness knowing that everything is under His sovereignty. Finally they desire to be filled with His righteousness - a longing to see God's eventual and eternal triumph over evil and recognise that by striving with God's grace to be holy doing what is right and just, they themselves play an important part in bringing this about.

So, how does this affect our attitude to other people? Jesus now goes on to talk about the ways that this will be expressed outwardly. A person filled with righteousness overflows, firstly, with *mercy*.

What is mercy? What does it mean to show mercy? Can you give examples?

*What is **often** our motivation for showing mercy to others? With the progression that we've seen in the beatitudes so far, what **should** our motivation be?*

Often we show others mercy because we want to receive it back from them, or boost our own egos by thinking we are very merciful. But this isn't to be our motivation. If we truly realise our spiritual poverty, then we'll realise that we don't deserve God's mercy and we'll be so bowled over by it that we want to show others some of that mercy. Those who show mercy to others receive it...from God. Jesus illustrated this in the parable of the unmerciful servant.

Read Matthew 18:21-35

What were Peter's motives in asking his question in v21? What effect would Jesus' answer have had on him?

In the parable what was the master willing to lose? How did the master display the character and heart of God?

It's interesting to notice that the servant doesn't ask the master to cancel his debt - rather he asks him to be patient and give him more time to pay it back (v26).

Thinking about what the debt in this parable represents, what does v26 show about the servant's attitude? Had he realised his poverty of spirit?

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The master completely cancels the servant's debt, showing him more mercy than he had even asked for. You might think that the servant would have truly appreciated this, since it was more than he had expected, but...

How did the servant's behaviour (v28-34) reveal his true attitude towards the master's forgiveness? How does that reflect on us as we respond to God?

What do the outcome of the servant's actions and Jesus words in v35 mean for us? (See Matt 6:14-15)

The beatitudes are more about character than conduct. They show us what a heart transformed by God looks like in practice. We may feel that we can never attain these standards. We do not always live lives that show a heart transformed, but rather than be intimidated by Jesus' words we should remember that: 'it is God (not us) who works in you to will and act according to his good purpose' (Philippians 2:13) and that 'his divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness' (2 Peter 1:3). We can't transform our own hearts, only God's Spirit can do that as we strive to live more like Jesus. But be encouraged – God will give us His Spirit if we ask for Him! (Luke 11v13)

...for you will be shown mercy

In what ways will we be shown mercy by being merciful? (See Proverbs 11:17,24 and Luke 6:38)

Why do we find it difficult to show mercy? What are the risks?

Reflect

In the light of how God treats us, are there any people you need to show mercy to, or situations which require you to be merciful?

Mercy fits in perfectly to Jesus' growing jigsaw puzzle of what a true Christian looks like in the beatitudes. So far we've seen that we should realise our spiritual poverty, seeing our sin as God sees it, and mourning over it, leading to repentance. Next we are meek, realising that everything is under God's control, and submitting it to Him, but desiring His righteousness in our lives and in the lives of those around us. Now, we are to be merciful to others, as we realise just how great God's mercy has been to us – how he has completely cancelled our debt to Him and forgiven us all our sin. Next we are going to see how our hearts should be pure like God's...

