

Happiness and Mercy

Matthew 5:7

John Wesley visited General Oglethorpe when he was governor of the Colony of Georgia. The general mentioned an incident involving a man who had angered him and Oglethorpe remarked, "I shall never forgive him." Wesley answered, "Then I hope, sir, you never sin." Evidently Wesley was reminded of Jesus' teaching that those who are not merciful and forgiving will not be treated with mercy and forgiveness.

Living without mercy is the prelude of dying without mercy. On the other hand, living with mercy results in being treated with mercy. **As Jesus said it,** "Blessed (happy) are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."

The word Hebrew and Greek words for "mercy" appear more than 180 times in the King James Version of the Bible. 96 times they are translated "mercy," 38 times they are translated "kindness," and 30 times they are translated "loving kindness."

Jesus said in John 10:10, "I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly." **Jesus is saying that He wants to give us life that just overflows like an artesian well - spilling over all the time, and bubbling up with joy and happiness.** Abundant life! Joy-filled life! Victorious life! Triumphant life!

In our study of the Beatitudes we have seen the formula that Jesus has set forth that we might be the recipients of an overflowing happiness. We have seen that the first four principles deal with the inner man. **First we are broken in spirit.** **Then we mourn over the sinful conduct of our life.** Then we embrace meekness. **All this produces a deep hunger and thirst for righteousness.**

The first outward demonstration of what has been happening inwardly comes in the form of mercy. Mercy is the first external evidence the world can observe to verify that God is at work on the inside.

Mercy is not emotionalism. To be merciful is far more than the shedding of tears. **Of course, those who are merciful sometime weep.** **Jesus did not restrain his tears as Martha and Mary grieved over their brother's death.** Another time he looked at a city and wept over it. **There is something startling**

about this strong man's weeping. "Jesus wept," but he did far more than weep – he gave himself for whom he wept.

Mercy is not humanitarianism. Paul put it this way in 1 Corinthians 13:3, "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."

Mercy goes beyond handing out used clothes to flood victims or food to the poor. It is possible to give until you literally lose your life for some "cause" and still not have love. Acts of mercy that are void of an attitude of mercy are invalid. The mercy of which Christ speaks is far more than the mechanics of doing good.

The truth of the matter is that mercy is an attitude. Mercy is not something that can be "turned on and off" at will. Mercy is more than end-of-the-year giving to the church for tax purposes. Mercy, as demonstrated by Christ, involves the way a person truly feels. It is an underlying attitude of life. Mercy is to see others as Christ sees them and feel toward others as he feels toward them. In short, mercy is to have the attitude of Christ toward everyone.

Mercy, then, is action. If we have an attitude of mercy, we will perform deeds of mercy. When springtime comes it cannot be kept a secret. **It expresses itself through blossoming buds and singing birds.** And when the springtime of mercy is in our hearts, it makes itself known by acts of kindness.

When mercy is translated into action, we are kind and gracious in our judgment of others. We look for the best in other. We ask ourselves, "What circumstances led this person to make the decisions that he made?" In other words, redemption, not condemnation, will be our concern.

Listen to me very carefully, if Satan can remove mercy from the conduct of Christians, the Church will die. If we become so busy with buildings, budgets and baptisms that we lose compassion for the suffering stream of humanity that flows through our doors, we may as well close the doors. If we only minister to ourselves we are in trouble.

If there is no mercy in the house of God, then the glory of the Lord is departed. There is no peace, no joy, and no love. Without mercy the church is a tree with no fruit. **It is a well without water.** It is a cloud without rain. Without mercy, the church becomes nothing more than a religious country club. Without

mercy, the building should be burned to the ground before the congregation gets sued for false advertising!

The Greek word for "merciful" means "to be beneficial." It is God's will that every church be beneficial to those who walk through its doors. Those attending should go home in a better condition than when they came in, from having been in the presence of God's mercy.

The church is a healing force in a hurting world. It is a hospital for the battered and broken. It is a fortress of faith in a world of doubt and skepticism. It is a house of comfort where hope is reborn. It is a place of worship where God is revered, where His Word is proclaimed and where Jesus Christ is Lord.

Of all the principles of happiness that Jesus proclaims, this one is the most appealing, the most important and the most difficult.

Mercy is very appealing. And the more we recognize how desperately we need it, the more appealing it is. The 23rd Psalm concludes with this glorious line, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." Luke 1:50 says, "His mercy is on those who fear (trust) him." Ephesians 2:46 says, "God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us...made us alive together with Christ." Titus 3:5 says, "He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy."

The promise is there. It is for you. What wonderful news. What wonderful assurance. Our God is a God of mercy!

Therefore, with that thought in mind, we realize that mercy is important because it is the prime evidence that we are becoming like God the Father. We are never more like God than when we are showing mercy. Lamentations 3:22-23 says, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness." James 5:11 tells us that "The Lord is full of compassion and mercy."

Jesus said, "Happy are the merciful." Happy are those who dare to show kindness in a cold, jaded world. Happy are those moved by compassion to action. These are the people who shall obtain mercy from the God of all mercy.

But there is a problem. And the problem is that, in our human nature, we find it so easy to criticize.

One of the prime reasons it is so difficult for us to show mercy is because we are basically lovers of self. Selfishness short-circuits prayer and tarnishes everything it touches. A man wrapped in himself makes a mighty small package. A man who is self-centered is off-centered.

Mercy requires that we learn to love others, to value their welfare more than our own.

A man can have money in his pocket and not show it. He can have the musical skill of Beethoven and not reveal it. He can have the knowledge of Einstein and not expose it. But if a man has the loving mercy of the living God in his soul, he cannot help but manifest it.

Jesus made this statement in John 13:35, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another." In John 15:12 pressed home the same point, "This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you." And in 1 John 3:14 we have this startling statement, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." **Listen very carefully right here, you cannot hide it.** When a man is in a right relationship with the God of glory, the love of God will shine through his life as strong as the noonday sun. People, you simply cannot be right with God and be wrong with fellow Christians! This truth is seen in Galatians 6:1 where we have been told, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." **What does Galatians 6:1 have to do with mercy?** Mercy searches for a way to restore a fallen brother!

Those that have a calloused heart will look at the fallen brother and sneer. Those that are filled with self-righteousness will look at the fallen brother and say, "He got what he deserved." The heart that is filled with mercy asks, "What can I do to help?" **Listen carefully, one hug can make the difference between a heart that breaks and a heart that heals!**

When Paul first wrote to the believers at Corinth, he rebuked them for sexual misconduct, mismanagement of church funds and getting drunk at communion. You don't need a seminary degree to know those are some pretty serious sins.

But Paul reminds us that he is referring to a "brother", one who has been born again. And, in spite of their sin, we are not to judge him, condemn

him and damn him; but we are to forgive him and restore him. The man who has stumbled does not need to be pushed down further - he needs to be lifted up. **He does not need to be criticized and condemned.** A brother who has fallen into sin needs help, not judgment! Jesus gave us the example in John 3:17, "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." Listen to what we have been told in Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

Listen to me, child of God, none of us have a right to sit in judgment against our brother. The Word of God reminds us that the Lord God will judge all things at the appointed time. We do not know the circumstances which may have brought to pass the stumbling of a brother.

Did you know that the word "prejudice" means "prejudging," or making an evaluation of others before we know all the facts? Prejudice is a mark of mental, moral and spiritual weakness. The prejudiced person believes there are two sides to every question: his side and the wrong side. **Prejudice is a form of robbery: It robs the victim of a fair trial in the court of reason.** Prejudice is murder: It kills the opportunity for advancement for those who are its prey.

The sad truth of the matter is that the church is filled with prejudice. That sounds harsh, but it is true. Racial prejudice is still alive and well in many places. **Religious prejudice abounds.** Many people are far more proud of their religion than they are of Jesus. There is economic prejudice. **But let me tell you, ma'am, that when you kneel to pray in your satin designer dress, that scarred and fallen woman next to you is also the beloved daughter of the Lord.** And you sir, when you fold your diamond-studded fingers to pray, the Christian beside you that has lost all of his precious property because of bad management, is also a son of God.

Jesus was mighty, but He was also merciful. Philippians 2:5-8 says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." **Mercy drove Him from the balconies of a perfect heaven to a sin-saturated earth.** It was the love and mercy of God for fallen humanity in all of its sin, its misery, its darkness and its hopelessness that moved His heart to demote Himself from being the crown

Prince of glory to become the son of a Jewish carpenter living under Roman oppression.

It was mercy that compelled Him to kneel beside a prostitute in John 8:11 and say, "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more." The merciless religious mob wanted to kill her. But the merciful Great Physician wanted to save her.

It was mercy that caused Him to place His healing hand on the rotting flesh of lepers. It was mercy that drove Him to the pool of Bethesda to heal a man who had waited thirty-eight years to be made well. It was mercy that prompted Him to raise the widow's son back to life, transforming the funeral procession into a parade of celebration.

It was mercy that caused Him to weep over the city of Jerusalem and the plight of the Jewish people. It was mercy that compelled Him to lay down His life as a ransom for many, making eternal life possible for all who believe. It was mercy that formed the words of His blood-caked lips in Luke 23:34, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

The price of mercy is not rubies, diamonds, sapphires, pearls, gold or silver. Jesus made it very plain when He said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." The price of mercy is mercy.

Happy are those who demonstrate kindness in action. Happy are those whose self-centered lives have been crushed and reshaped by the Master's hand to be full of mercy. Happy are those who restore the fallen. **Happy are those whose love is greater than their prejudice.** Happy are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy!

The prescription for joyful living is very simple: If you want to be happy, love Jesus and love other people.

If you are not saved, why not?

Everyone please stand for prayer.

Father,

I am thankful for the love and mercy that You have shown to me. Give me the faith and courage to show the same kind of love and mercy to those around me. In Jesus' name. Amen.