

# Sermon on the Mount: Blessed Are the Merciful

by J. Glyn Owen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of mercy and how it emerges in the soul of a man as he becomes humble and meek, and how it is a key aspect of the Beatitudes.*

**Duration:** 46:25

**Scripture:** Matthew 4:23-25, Matthew 5:7, Matthew 6:12, Mark 3:1-6, Mark 8:22-26, Luke 5:12-13

**Topics:** "Sermon on the Mount"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of being poor in spirit and the importance of recognizing our own spiritual condition before God. The speaker emphasizes that the New Testament is not just concerned with outward actions, but also with the attitude and heart behind those actions. He gives an illustration of a man who offers sympathy and money to someone who has lost their horse, highlighting the difference between genuine compassion and empty words. The sermon also touches on God's mercy and his persistent pursuit of his wayward people, despite their sins and rebellion.

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## Transcript

...was most appropriate as we come to the table of our Lord, as it would be appropriate at any other time. We look therefore at Matthew chapter 5 verse 7. Blessed, said Jesus, are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy, or they will obtain mercy. Now in these beatitudes spoken by our Lord to the disciples and to potential disciples that surrounded him on the hillside about two thousand years ago, we have the divine blueprint for happiness or blessedness, happiness of the true order.

I indicated at the beginning that I don't really like that word happiness in this context because it is based upon the verb or the word hap, and its corresponding verb, and it suggests that blessedness might depend on what happens to us on our circumstances. Well it doesn't. Our Lord assures us in these beatitudes that blessedness is fundamentally a matter of character, of being what God requires us to be in the first place, and then of doing what God has called upon us to do.

And it is in thus becoming what he desires us, and in doing what he wills for us, that is where we find the blessedness of God himself here upon earth. Heaven comes down into our hearts and occupies our spirits only insofar as we grow in the knowledge of God and in obedience to him. Now we've already noticed how our Lord's teaching cuts right across what were then contemporary concepts of happiness or of

blessedness as well as of the means of procuring the same.

He really turns the tables upside down when he insists that blessedness is something very special that men had no idea about, apart from the revelation given in himself and in the prophets and the apostles who succeeded him. Neither did men know how to discover true blessedness. Now it will be seen that the progressive development of thought and experience outlined in the Beatitudes seem at this point to take a new turn.

You have only to look at the words before you and you'll see how we're really coming as it were around a bend, if we may so speak, in the development of thought here. Up until now the person envisaged by our Lord has been altogether concerned about his condition of soul before God. The experience of the person involved thus far could in some senses be compared with that of a man who is charged in a court of law.

He's so conscious of himself or of herself as the case may be. Everything turns in upon me. I am being charged.

I have to give an answer. I am the focus of attention. That's really what we have in the in the opening verses.

God is turning the searchlight upon us and in the awareness of that we have to plead that we are poor in spirit. And as the searchlight continues upon us we begin to mourn and to weep. And that makes us meek.

And arising out of the sense of meekness coming into our souls by the Holy Spirit then we begin to hunger and to thirst after righteousness. And now you notice we take this other turn. When a man has been made meek by the grace of God and has begun to hunger and thirst after righteousness he now begins to look out upon other people.

Sooner or later it has to come. Christian experience begins by concentrating upon God and God's relationship to me and my relationship to God. What I am in the sight of God.

God and myself. But sooner or later the Lord will lift up my eyes and say to me now you gotta look around. And if you're right with me you have to be right with others.

You have to be right with my people. And you have a duty to perform to all men and women of every nation, every clime, everywhere. You have to be very careful how you act towards men and women around you.

You have to learn to be merciful. And that's where we're at this morning. There is something in the grace of God, something akin to electricity.

The grace of God is loath to get in where it cannot get out again. Electric current does not easily come in unless it can pass through. And the grace of God is like that.

Coming into a man he will pass through a man. And you and I cannot possess the fullness of the blessing of God unless we are channels of blessing, conductors of the divine power and of the divine light and energy into a needy world. Now as briefly as we can this morning I want us to look at mercy first of all in the Old Testament then in the New.

Then we're going to look at the manner in which he who discovers mercy in his own heart will be shown mercy by God. Mercy as envisaged in the Old Testament, very briefly, one of the things that we have

tended to forget, almost completely to forget, is the infinite difference made in the world by the revelation of God in the Old Testament and in the New. We have allowed liberals of various kinds to bluff us and to blind us to the fact that one of the significant features of the Old Testament is the mercy of God.

Of course God is judge. Of course God is sovereign everywhere whether it be in the Old Testament or the New. There is no significant difference between the sovereignty and the justice of God in the Old Testament and in the New.

You read the book of Revelation as some of us are doing in these days and you will find that God is just and terrible in holiness and majesty and sovereignty there as he is in other places in the Old Testament. God is just everywhere at all times because it is part of his nature. But into the Old Testament and into the world of the Old Testament there came this amazing revelation of the mercy of God, that our God was a merciful God.

I don't really think that we as professing Christians have taken this with sufficient seriousness. The world and Western civilization in particular has been very much influenced by the Judeo-Christian religion that we take so much for granted. It's amazing how much we take for granted that we've lost the sense of the glory of God and especially of his mercy.

We have rebelled against God and we have wandered far from his ways. We have shown contempt for his laws. Nevertheless you and I are living in a day when we are still drawing upon a capital, a spiritual capital, that gives an amazing flavor to life which men and women did not have before the revelation of God in the Old Testament and in the New.

And we need to remember that we see sometimes ungodly people, people who do not name the name of God and do not love him, doing things which are almost Christian-like. Where did they get the impetus? As I understand my Bible, I believe that that impetus comes ultimately from the revelation of God especially in his mercy and of the manifestation of his common grace, if not his saving grace. So that you will find today many people who call themselves humanists, who call themselves this that or the other, doing ostensibly Christian deeds.

And they do it because they're still drawing upon a capital of spiritual power and spiritual influence. Haven't you noticed sometimes if you have an electric fire on in the room, you switch it off, there's a glow there long after you've switched it off. Have you noticed it? I often think that is a parable.

There are myriads of men and women who only had the fire of God burning in their homes 50, 60 years ago. But there's still a glow, there's still an influence, there is still something that is coming down the years. It is not saving, but it is an influence.

And we in our Western society are still drawing upon the capital of our fathers. Now I want to go just to remind you, not to go back to the Old Testament particularly, but nevertheless we're moving into that era. Let me just remind you of the kind of world into which Jesus came.

Do you know for example that in Plato's Republic only the children of the best unions were allowed to live? Did you know that? Now we're talking with some about some of the great minds of pre-Christian days. Aristotle likewise insisted that deformed children should be abandoned immediately and not reared, don't waste time on them. Seneca attributes the then contemporary habit of destroying sickly children to sound reason.

That was the world into which Christ came, that was the Old Testament world. Moreover if a child was thus treated, how much worse was a slave treated? Now there were exceptions in Israel where there is where there is a revelation of the God of mercy as well as of judgment. But outside of Israel the plight of the slave was but the plight of a thing.

You could do as you pleased with your own slave. He had no rights, she had no rights, she was just a thing or he was just a thing. Something of that same merciless approach to life has prevailed even to modern days when the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the revelation of God in the Bible is not accepted.

I remember reading in one of the commentaries a reference to a very famous English surgeon in his day, Sir Henry Holland, who was serving in a certain country where eye complaints were very prevalent and people were losing their sight due to the climatic conditions. And on one occasion when he was home in Britain, he opened his heart and he said that the most horrifying, the most terrifying aspect of contemporary paganism to him was this. That when he after much heart-searching had to break the news to a patient in his hospital that he was going to lose his sight, in nine cases out of ten all those around him would have a jolly good laugh.

They'd enjoy it. There was a sadism that crept through the souls of men and said Sir Henry Holland, I only find one thing to make a difference, and that is the grace of the Lord. And when modern man turns away from the God of grace, well you know as well as I do what happens.

We have our Dachau, we have our Buchenwald and fascist and communist tyrannies all over the world and we don't need to go quite as far as that. We have people bashing babies near at hand. We've all the cruelties coming back again of the ancient world.

Over against that the God of the Old Testament is a God of mercy. Not only mercy, he's a God of justice too. And he, don't forget, as the creator of life and the sustainer of life has the right to terminate life.

He's the only one. But he was a God of mercy. I was fascinated to be reminded this last week of the three main words that are used in the Old Testament to describe the mercy of God.

The most familiar word describes what Professor Norman Snaith refers to in these words. The steady persistent refusal of Almighty God to wash his hands of his wayward people. Israel sins against God and against the covenant and God goes after her and he sends his prophets and he sends this person and that person and he goes out of his way to come after this rebellious people and he will not let her go as mercy.

When he has every reason to apart from the reason of his own heart and his own grace. The second word stresses the gracious favor of a superior to an inferior. All undeserved.

God the creator, God the Lord condescends to have mercy upon a worm like me. That's mercy. And the third to me is the most startling of all.

The Hebrew verb racham comes from a root which is related to racham which is the word for the mother's womb, a woman's womb. God has womb love, womb compassion. A feeling that a mother has for a child and only a mother.

This is what the Old Testament teaches us. This is what the Old Testament tells us. God was planning all the way through the Old Testament to send the only begotten of his bosom to save an ugly sinning world.

Why God? Oh, I have womb love for my creature still. As Karl Barth puts it, our personal God of the Bible is a God with a heart. Indeed he is.

Thus it is that God is a God of mercy. Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens, and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Says the psalmist, I will trust in the mercy of the Lord forever.

Yes, blessed be God. He's trustworthy. Now when we move into the New Testament, what difference does it make? Well, according to the New Testament, the elements of persistent heartfelt compassion continues.

God is always loyal to his covenant purposes. He never gives up. When God has begun a good work in your soul, he continues it.

Here Francis Thompson was quite right when he spoke about the hound of heaven. Daring language, there's no question about that, but he knew what he was about. When God is on your heels to save you, he will seek you, he will come into the wilderness, he will go to all kinds of lengths to bring you to himself.

And anybody who has a grain of that mercy in him will do the same, in some measure. Not that the merciful person is morally free and easy and doesn't care to argue the toss with people, doesn't care to show people that they're wrong. No, no, no, no.

He will have a conscience, all right, if he is a man of God or if she is a woman of God, he will have a conscience, she will have a conscience. But at the same time, there will be this compassion in the soul. The very life of God, the God of the Old Testament and of the New, the very life of God in the soul of man will mean that sooner or later there must emerge in me something akin to his mercy.

In the New Testament, there is great stress upon the fact that mercy is an attitude before it is an action. Sometimes we can't do anything for people to alleviate them, but we should be merciful even when we cannot. Now, this feeling of concern for people is not adequate, of course, where we can do more.

We should always be aiming to do that which is required of us, but the attitude is important. You see, the New Testament is not simply concerned with our doing the right things, but doing the right things in the wrong way, in the right way. I have an illustration of that.

I read in P.T. Trevelyan's book, *The Life of John Bright*, he relates an incident from the father, the history of the father of John Bright, going back now many years when they traveled in their buggies with their horses, and John Bright's father met an accident on the road. He had a lovely horse drawing his buggy, and the horse was killed. The horse was killed, and a group of people met, and there they commiserated with this poor man that he'd lost his buggy, lost his horse, and one man came around and he said, well, I, he says, am sorry and sympathetic five pounds.

This is English money, not the dollar. How much are you sorry? He said to the others, you see, it's so easy to say I'm sorry for you, to have an attitude which I can put into words and use the right cadences and show that, yes, oh, I'm terribly sorry, but how much does it cost? I'm sorry five pounds. Five pounds was a lot in those days.

How sorry are you? And they were standing there, the whole crowd of them, that didn't offer anything. Brothers and sisters, this is the mercy of God. It's a compassion in the soul.

It's a care in the spirit, but it's not a care that is confined to one attitude. It puts its hand in its pocket. It will walk.

It will go. It will run. It will do.

It will act. It's very, very close to grace. It's interesting that in his epistles to Timothy and Titus, particularly the apostle Paul, does not only speak of God as our Lord Jesus Christ in terms of their love and grace, but also mercy.

He's the God of grace and mercy. But what's the difference, you say? Archbishop Trench has put it like this. The grace of God, his free grace and gift, is extended to men as they are guilty.

Guilty. His mercy is extended to them as they are miserable. You see, as God looks upon us this morning, he distinguishes between two things.

One, some of us may be still guilty before God. We've never had our sins forgiven. We are under judgment.

We are like the prisoners in the condemned cell. We've broken the law of God, and the wages of sin is death, and we're awaiting the sentence. And one day it will come.

God looks upon a world under sentence, and that's his grace. He sends his Son into the midst, and he sends men and women to proclaim what the Son has done and what God offers through his Son by the Holy Spirit. That's the God of grace.

Thinking of men lost in sin. Now, the mercy of God is, God is looking not simply at their guilt, but along with the guilt, the misery of men. All the miseries of men.

They're sad. They don't know what to do at the beginning of a day, and they don't know how to sleep as the night comes on. All the burden is crushing, and God is not only concerned with a sin that damns us, but with the misery that pursues us, and that's his mercy.

How does mercy emerge in the soul of a man? Well, this is what the Beatitudes will tell us. I think we understand how mercy is born in the soul of man if we just follow the movement of thought in the Beatitudes. It can only be done as insofar as God has dealings with us.

That's how our fathers used to speak of it. Is God having dealings with you these days? Do you really meet God? Does he come to meet you? Does he talk to you? Does he speak to you? Does he check you? Does he speak to you from his word? Does he make this old book the platform upon which he stands and speaks to you? Is he dealing with you? Mercy comes in due course. It is born in the soul in due course.

When I begin by seeing that I am poor in spirit, bankrupt, lost, that I cannot save myself, I cannot straighten the divine reckoning books, I cannot straighten out the ledger, I cannot put things right with God, it must start there. Then as I go on from there and I am grief-stricken, not just because I've been found out, not just because I know that God knows all about me, no no, but I am grief-stricken because of the kind of person I've become by sin. Because as a creature of God I've spoilt my life and spoilt myself and I'm touching other lives and I'm spoiling them.

And wherever I go I somehow disseminate, I pass on something of the sin of my soul and the influence of my evil life and I weep. And that makes me humble, that makes me meek. That's the progress of the beatitude.

And the meek man is the very humble man. You see, the meek man is the man who has seen that he has no rights before God, only the rights that God has given him out of sheer grace. He cannot plead merit before God or right at all.

But he's condemned, he's a lawbreaker, he's guilty. And therefore he doesn't expect God to make him the center of God's thoughts and the center of God's deeds. Until a man comes here, you see, where we generally live is somewhere here.

We feel that God's no good at all unless he makes us, makes me as the individual, the center of his thinking all the time. And unless God really causes his world, his universe to revolve around me, there's no place in my life for God. That's the sinner thinks.

You judge God by his usefulness to man. Ah, but when you've seen yourself to be poor in spirit and you've begun to weep for your sin and you become a meek man or a meek woman, everything's changed. Now the center of the universe is God and I see that I was made for him, whether it be in joy or in sorrow, whether it be through suffering or not, whether it be here or there, I was made for God.

My life has only meaning insofar as it serves my God and my creator. This makes a man humble and meek. And so he doesn't get angry with people now.

He can say like Joseph did even to those whom ill-treat him, you meant evil but God meant well and he sent me beforehand beforehand to do something that would be of value to you as well as to other people. That's mercy. That's meekness.

And then a man is brought to hunger and thirst after righteousness. Righteousness before God to be justified before him. Righteousness is a principle of life so that a man does that which is right in relation both to God and to man.

Now as a man moves in this direction, says our Lord Jesus I believe according to the inference here, he will discover something new in his home. He'll begin to become less concerned with himself and he'll begin to think of others and he will see that he isn't only dependent upon God for mercy, he must show mercy to others. My friends the only Christianity we know is a Christianity which exhibits mercy from beginning to end in life and in death.

Now this is very very startling. You follow the footmarks of our Lord Jesus Christ and I tell you it will stagger you. Wherever he went and saw people in need his heart went out to them.

Wherever he went and saw people in need his heart went out to them. Right from the baptism of John. You know if you go back to the end of Matthew chapter 4 there just before the Beatitudes, Jesus went throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

News about him spread all over Syria and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pains, the demon possessed, the epileptics and the paralytics and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed

him and he has mercy on them. Now can you see the point? Jesus looks at a man in a synagogue.

They've gathered as you were good people are gathered here this morning and Jesus saw in the synagogue a man with a withered hand. We can't forget about that man and get on with the sermon surely. Oh no he couldn't.

He said to that man what's the matter with your hand? I'm concerned about it. Get on with your sermon man. Get on with the service.

Don't linger. Don't make it too long but I'm concerned about the man's hand and so you can go through the gospels. He sees people that are blind and he takes time with them and he's gentle with them and he puts his hands on their eyes and you can go through the whole book.

You see he didn't just look at them and he didn't just hurl healing at them through the air and said be healed but don't come too near to me. He cared. He touched the leper.

He touched the leper. To me one of the most glaring and one of the most wonderful illustrations of this of course is that day when he went into the city of Nain. Do you remember? Luke chapter 7 I think and he goes into the city of Nain and hears a funeral ceremony coming out.

Now you don't normally disturb funeral processions and here they're coming and our Lord knew that the chief mourner was a woman and a widow woman and that the boy in the casket, there was no casket like ours of course, was her only son and the blessed son of God knew it. Well let them pass, let them go, let the dead bury their dead. Oh no not he.

Stop he said to the people, stop he said and as if he was a crazed man he turns and speaks to the to the corpse and he says young man I say to you arise. When he arose he gave him back to his mother. That's what he was concerned about all the time you see mercy.

He thought of the widow. The bread earner's gone. You don't get a check from the government every week or every month or every year in those days and he thought of the widow.

He was concerned he had mercy on the widow when he gave him back to his mother. You see what I'm getting at. This is the God of mercy revealed in the old testament come in the new embodied in Jesus.

I felt for people. Do you feel for people? I must close the nature of the blessedness which the merciful inherits. What is this quality? What is the blessedness that comes to us? Blessed are the merciful for they shall find or be given or be shown mercy.

I have to hurry through this. I hope I don't say what is improper or unworthy in so doing. There are two main interpretations of this.

The first sees this statement in close connection with two other passages namely the phrase in the Lord's Prayer forgive us our sins or transgressions just as we forgive them that are trespassed against us and again linked up with the parable of the cruel servant in Matthew 18 who had been forgiven an amazingly large debt by his master then went out and found somebody who owed him a little trifle. He wouldn't forgive him. He wouldn't have mercy on him at all.

He would squeeze the last drop out of him like a deadly Shylock. Now are these passages connected? Well on the face of it it might seem that these passages including our text are connected and suggest that

we can only be forgiven or receive mercy if we have already first forgiven other people and some people go on to interpret this as a kind of tit-for-tat. You can only be forgiven by God if you have forgiven others and on the basis of your forgiveness of others some people interpret it as if to say we earn our forgiveness by forgiving other people.

Well now that would completely run counter to all that the New Testament says about grace and evidently it cannot be that. What then does it mean? Let me try and crystallize it. I think that what it means is this.

You and I cannot receive mercy and cannot receive forgiveness unless we are repentant, penitent and one of the essential characteristics that will be expressed if we are really penitent concerning our own sins is that we are prepared also to forgive the sins who are penitent after doing a wrong towards us or to us. John Stott summarizes it in this way. This is where he says we are not forgiven because we are able to forgive other people period but what our Lord is referring to is something different.

This is not because we can merit mercy by mercy or forgiveness by forgiveness but because we cannot receive the mercy and forgiveness of God unless we repent and we cannot claim to have repented of our sins if we are unmerciful towards the sins of others. Now this is touching a very raw spot perhaps in our lives. There is someone that you cannot forgive.

He or she comes and asks your forgiveness and shows penitence but you cannot forgive and you cannot forget. What you mean is you will not forgive and you will not forget and that proves says John Stott and I think this is the correct understanding of this passage. It means that I've never really repented of my own sins.

If I had really repented of my own sins then I would see that there is no sin that man can commit against me no wrong he can do to me that is worthy of comparison with what I had done against God my sin against God. In that sense I can only receive pardon when I am myself forgiving because my being a forgiving person means that I am penitent repentant broken in heart and contrite. However I must mention in closing that there is another thought that may well be here and some of the older expositors were very strong on this that it is only in the act of showing mercy that I qualify to enjoy the mercy of God.

There is a difference so some of them say and I believe they're right in God having forgiven us and our enjoying God's forgiveness in God having had mercy upon us and our capacity to to believe it and to receive it and to enjoy it and to have peace and certainty on the basis of it and they would stress that possibly what our Lord wanted to get across here was this if you want to enjoy God's mercy and God's forgiveness and find peace and contentment and hope on the basis of it then you've got to allow the grace of God so to work in you that you equally delight with God in having mercy upon other people not because that will earn the favor of God but it capacitates us to receive of the infinite grace of God into our soul.

Brothers and sisters in Christ we stand today not only under the light of the word but in the glare of Calvary the great act of divine mercy as well as of grace and I think of our Lord there bleeding on the cross tortured his body twisted and wounded and scarred and I think of him having a thought first of all for his mother that's down in front of him and thinking about where is she what is she going to do when he dies and he calls upon John and he says John there's your mother mother he says there's your son look after her John that's mercy but I go further I think of this blaggard of a man on his left or on his right this scoundrel of a man that is according to himself a guilty a guilty murderer and guilty of much else and here out of his anguish he cries to the Savior and says Lord remember me when you come into your kingdom and Jesus has time for him even in the midst of his pain and his anguish such anguish on the spiritual

level has no man ever experienced and yet he thinks of him and he says today he says you shall be with me in paradise oh can you see it this is the mercy of God overflowing the heart of the incarnate Son on all hands even even to his death is Christ living in you is the spirit of Christ given to us then sooner or later we shall not only be concerned to men insofar as they are guilty before God and need a Savior we shall be concerned about their burdens and their wounds and their lacerations and their being without food and without clothing and without justice and without a hundred thousand other things and the compassion of the Lord will begin to blossom in us and as it does we shall find that we are able to enter into the full enjoyment and this is the blessedness you see really to enjoy God's mercy to us feast upon it live upon it God grant it God grant it to every soul in our service today if there's someone outside of it I pray you I plead with you do not leave the sanctuary today this is a day of grace without turning to us God not only to tell you afresh of what it means but to make it real to you pray and wait in your pew in your seat and pray pray that you may enter into the enjoyment of it all and thus of life everlasting because this is life let us pray oh Lord our God grant that your word may both penetrate into the depths of our beings and there go on to work in us to perfect that which you have begun forgive us that we have not grown more in grace than we have forgive us that we so often staunch the incentives of the spirit within us almighty God as we come to your table help us help us to see again what your mercy really is and may the overflow come through to us as we partake of the bread and of the wine may we partake of the realities that they symbolize and our spirits be strengthened to serve you in a manner that is acceptable to you through Jesus Christ our Lord amen

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