

Blessed are the Merciful

From the series, "the King and I – Matthew Tells us About the King of the Universe"

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Introduction

I saw an amazing movie a while back. It came out in 2018 and was entitled, "I Can Only Imagine". It's the story of a singer named Bart Millard from the group, "Mercy Me".

In the opening scenes of the movie, we see Bart as a little boy. He has dreams of being an astronaut one day. His dreams are so real that one day, he gathered all kinds of junk from around his neighborhood. He took all the junk and built himself a model of a spaceship that he could ride in. You could tell he worked hard, and you could tell he was very excited about his creation. Kids can do that when they dream.

Then it came time to show off his creation. Now, what would most parents do then they saw something like that? Most people would let a little boy dream. In fact, maybe they'd join in. They'd say, "Hey, that's great." "That's a really great spaceship you have there."

Then, Bart's father came home. Do you know what he did? He said with a harsh voice, "What is this?" "There will be no foolish dreaming here." He then proceeded to tear his son's spaceship into pieces.

What are you thinking right now? You're probably thinking, "That's a pretty crummy father". Well, it gets worse. Bart's dad got drunk and beat Bart and his mother.

Eventually, Bart's poor mother couldn't take it any longer, so she packed up and left. Unfortunately, she left without Bart. Bart had to grow up alone with his alcoholic, abusive dad. Bart later described his dad as a "monster".

Let's fast forward to the end of the movie. I won't tell you the whole thing, but through a long string of events, Bart eventually became good friends with his father.



Movie poster for "I Can Only Imagine"

How could that be? How could a man become friends with a monster, much less a monster who abused him as a child? We'll talk more about that later.

For now, we're working our way through the Gospel according to Matthew. We're in a section I'm calling the "Christian Manifesto", a group of radical teachings for disciples of Jesus Christ. It's in Matthew chapters five through seven.

Let's read what we've studied so far.

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. He said:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." (Matthew 5:1-6)

And our verse for this session: Matthew 5:7

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."

"Blessed are the merciful". What does that mean? Mercy is another one of those words we hear all the time, but if we were to ask a hundred people for a definition, we'd likely get 100 different descriptions of what the word is thought to mean. We see it all over the place. We see it on hospitals. We see it on some churches.

The man we just talked about, Bart Millard, formed a musical group called "Mercy Me". When he was asked why he chose that name he said that when he told his grandmother he was starting a band, she said, "Well mercy me, why don't you get a real job?"

What does that word, "mercy", mean? And why is it important for a disciple of Jesus?

Let's find out.

I. The meaning of the word "Mercy"

To start, let's look at the definition of the word, "Mercy". According to "Lexico", the online Oxford Dictionary, mercy is: "Compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm."

That's not a bad start. When scholars work to create a dictionary, they often look at how words are used in the modern day. For us to understand a word used in the Bible, we need to look

around the Bible to see how it's used. I'd like to suggest that when you see the word we translate as "mercy" in the Bible, it's more limited than the folks at Lexico suggest.

To associate mercy with compassion is correct, so let's talk first about the "compassion" part. Compassion is what you may feel when you see someone in need. They're hurting. The fact that they're hurting stirs something inside of you. That feeling makes you want to help.

But you know something? Compassion doesn't make you do anything. It might, but not always. ***You can choose to not do anything when you see someone else hurting.*** You can have all the feelings in the world, you can feel compassion, but it doesn't always result in action. It's when you take action that you're showing mercy. So, compassion is a feeling. Mercy is an action. ***That's important.***

So, a better definition of mercy is: The ***action*** that someone takes after they see a person who is hurting or vulnerable and they feel compassion.

This is why you'll see a number of different definitions for mercy when you look at different sources. Many sources today tend to look at those actions, and the various circumstances surrounding them, when they try to define the word mercy.

For now, let's stick with this definition. Again: Mercy is: The ***action*** that someone takes after they see a person who is hurting or vulnerable and they feel compassion.

Once we understand the pure definition, we can look at the kind of actions that surround the word. In particular, we're going to look at the kinds of actions that come from God when he shows mercy.

II. Things Associated with Mercy from God

A. Forgiveness

The first thing we need to look at, among the things associated with mercy is **forgiveness**. As we've looked at this passage of Scripture that I'm calling the "Christian Manifesto", Matthew Chapters 5-7, we've said that Jesus often references the Old Testament, and in particular, the book of Psalms. Let's look at Psalm 51.

- 1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 For I know my transgressions,

and my sin is always before me.
4 Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.
(Psalm 51:1-4)

This is King David writing about a time when he sinned against God. He committed the terrible sins of adultery and murder. Although he has hurt others horribly, he says that his sin is against God.

Question: What should God do when someone sins against him by hurting someone he, God, cares about? God is a judge, the ultimate Judge, a great protector of Justice. According to David in verse 4, God the judge should do what any judge does in a trial: He should declare a verdict. Based on the evidence of David's life, God should declare that David is "Guilty!"

What should happen to someone who is guilty of murder? That person should suffer death.

David however pleads with God. David says, "I know that I have sinned. You would be right to judge me. You would be right to render a terrifying sentence against me. But instead, God, please show mercy."

The Source of Mercy

Why does David think that God would do this? He started his request in verse one: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love (Psalm 51:1(a))"

Here's an important principle: ***The source of God's mercy is his love.*** Humans can show mercy for all kinds of reasons. For God, his mercy flows from his loving heart.

After appealing to God's love, David then follows with this: "...according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Psalm 51:1(b)"

So, as we've said, mercy is the action that takes place after someone feels compassion. God feels compassion, so he shows mercy. One way he does that is by forgiving people when they ask.

Before moving on to the next point, let's consider a few things.

- David is asking for mercy.
- He's asking God to forgive.
- He's acknowledging his sin.
- He's basing his request on God's love and compassion.

There are different things associated with mercy. One of the most important is the forgiveness of sin. But this kind of mercy is only shown when people do what David did. **He asked.** He acknowledged God's goodness, his love and compassion. Then, David acknowledged his sin.

This is another vitally important point: **God does not simply forgive everyone.** Without these four things, no one can be forgiven of sins.

Once you've done this, once you've asked for forgiveness, we need to ask, "How can God offer forgiveness?" I mentioned a minute ago that God is the ultimate Judge. Can a good Judge just let anyone go without a penalty being paid? The answer is, no. A penalty must always be paid then there is guilt. A good Judge must demand that penalty.

That's where Jesus comes in. When Jesus died on the cross, he paid the penalty for our sins.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. (1 Peter 1:3-4)

Through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, God can be both the ultimate judge and the ultimate giver of mercy.

Invitation

As always, there are different kinds of people listening today. Have you received God's forgiveness for sin? If you have, be patient for just a minute.

If you haven't, here's what you need to do: You must ask God to forgive you. You must recognize that he is loving and compassionate. Because he is loving and compassionate, he wants to forgive you! However, you must acknowledge your sin. You must admit that you've sinned against God, and that he would be right to judge you. Finally, you must realize that God can do this, because Jesus died to pay the penalty for your sins. If you do these things, you can receive God's mercy through forgiveness, now and for all eternity.

If you want to learn more, please contact us:

- You can visit: www.TrinityTeaneck.com
- Or, you can visit: PhilBrainerd.com

Let's move on to something more that comes with God's mercy.

B. Spiritual Healing.

So, God offers us forgiveness. Does it stop there? Does God say, “OK, now you’re forgiven. Go away and don’t bother me anymore.” No! There’s more.

David writes more in Psalm 51

- 7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
9 Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.
10 Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
11 Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
(Psalm 51:7-12)

Let’s look at some things that David was pleading for when he approached God.

In verse 8: “Let me hear joy and gladness”. For David, real joy always meant that he was worshiping and serving and enjoying God. ***So, David was asking for spiritual healing.*** Because he sinned, he lost his joy in the Lord. He pleaded to get it back.

Sometimes we pastors have to show tough love. If you’ve lost your joy in the Lord, or if you’ve never had it, maybe it’s because you have sin in your life. Ask God to show you if this is true. If it is, then confess your sins. Here’s what the apostle John says:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9)

If you confess your sin, God will forgive. Then, you can be like David. Ask God to give you back the joy of the Lord.

He goes on: “Let the bones you have crushed rejoice”. David had not received the full penalty for his sin, but God allowed him to get the point where he was physically breaking. The weight of sin was crushing David. He asked for that to be removed.

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (v 10)

David knew that he had allowed impure motives into his life. He asked God to renew his spirit so that he could get back on track.

Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. (v 11)

David was afraid that he would lose the power of the Holy Spirit in his life. Once again, David pleads for mercy. When God shows mercy, he generously gives us the Holy Spirit.

In Titus it says:

...he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior... (Titus 3:5-6)

Finally, in Psalm 51:

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. (v 12)

So once again, David pleads that God would heal him spiritually. He wants to return to the days when he felt the joy of the Lord. He wanted to get back on track worshipping and serving God.

If David could do all of this through God's mercy, you and I can, too. We can experience a) forgiveness of our sins, and b) spiritual healing. All we need to do is ask.

II. Our Reaction

What is our reaction to this? Why is mercy important for disciples of Jesus? Let's look again at what Jesus said:

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. (Matthew 5:7)"

Jesus says that if you want to be one of his disciples, you need to understand this. You must understand mercy and show it to others. If you do, there is a reward: You will be shown mercy.

Again, what does this mean? What does it mean for us to be merciful? And, what does it mean that we will be shown mercy?

A. The Source of Mercy for us.

Before we say anything about the way that we should be merciful, we need to understand its source. We learned earlier that when God shows mercy, it comes from his loving and compassionate heart. In order for us to show mercy, we must ask God to give us a heart like his. We must ask him to pour out his Holy Spirit in our lives.

This is where all the things we've learned so far come together. We must be poor in spirit: We must understand our own spiritual bankruptcy. We must mourn our sin. We must become meek; we must understand that we have no power unless God gives it to us. And we must happily understand that we need help from God. We must begin to hunger and thirst for righteousness. Only after all these things take place can we understand mercy and show it to others.

If we see mercy as something that's easily done, something that we mark off a checklist in order to earn God's favor, we will fail. And when we fail, we will be crushed by the burden of attempting something that is impossible without God's help.

B. The Action of Mercy

We said earlier that mercy is: The **action** that someone takes after they see a person who is hurting or vulnerable and they feel compassion. Now that we've learned about mercy and now that we've learned its source, we're ready to see what it looks like to practice it.

1) Forgiving Others

The most obvious kind of mercy that God shows to us is forgiveness when we ask him. So surely, the most obvious kind of mercy for us comes when others ask us to forgive them.

We started our session by talking about the life of Bart Millard. We learned that Bart grew up with an abusive father. We also learned that Bart one day became friends with his father. How?

Along the way, Bart met some Christians. They shared with him how he could be forgiven through Jesus Christ. He accepted the sacrifice of Jesus and began to see changes in his life. Nevertheless, he still felt pain because of all the abuse he received from this father.

One day, he was in the home of his father. He came downstairs and saw a complete breakfast on the table. He father had worked hard to prepare it. Bart asked, "what is this"? His father said, "I want to make things right". It didn't happen right away, but Bart eventually realized that his father had humbled himself and asked to be forgiven. So, Bart did it. He forgave his father.

When he did, wonderful things happened. Bart invited his father to receive the mercy and forgiveness that only comes through Jesus. Bart watched his father change. Eventually Bart said

that his father became the godliest man he knew. Imagine that, Bart's father became the godliest man he knew! This experience changed Bart. He later said, "My dad was a monster and I realized if the gospel could change that dude, the gospel can change anybody..."

One day, Bart's father died from cancer. Because of his experiences with his father and others who heard the gospel, Bart wrote the song, "I can only imagine". It's a wonderful song about what it will be like when all of God's people arrive in heaven one day. When Bart sang that song at a premier concert, he said he was given a vision where all the people in the audience faded away. The only person he could see was his deceased father listening from heaven. In reality, the concert hall was filled with thousands of people, but in his heart, Bart sang that song to his father.

When God's mercy and forgiveness rule people's lives, the most horrible of abuses can be forgiven. Monsters can become godly people. Adversaries can become friends.

2) Healing Others

There's a second part of mercy that we can show. We said that God offers both forgiveness and spiritual healing. These come only when people ask. But God offers another kind of mercy. This kind of mercy he offers to all of mankind even when we don't ask.

"He (God) causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. Mathew 5:45"

God looks over our world and sees the rebellion and sin, and evil. But he still loves us and feels compassion for us. So, he sends that sun and the rain so that we can grow food and feed our families. He wants the disciples of Jesus to be like him.

We can't heal people's spirits as God can, but we can bring healing and relief physically into their lives. The classic example of this is the story of the Good Samaritan. It's found in Luke 10:25-37. We don't have time to read it and analyze it in detail, so I'll encourage you to read it later.

For now, a quick summary: A man is walking down the road one day when criminals rob him and beat him almost to death. Two men, both religious leaders, walk by. They ignore the dying man. A third man walks by who feels compassion for the wounded man and helps him. He gives the man first aid and then takes him to a local inn where he pays for the man to stay a while until he is healed. Jesus says that this is mercy and he tells us to do likewise.

This is an important story. We said earlier that mercy is the action that people take after they feel compassion for someone. There are two people in this story who walked by. Did they feel compassion? They might have. They might have said, "Look at that poor man". If they felt any compassion, they stuffed it down and did nothing.

I'm afraid that emotion alone does nothing. This is a temptation of our modern world. Our TVs are full of images of hurting people. We often hear people say, "Isn't it a shame that no one is doing anything about that." We're encouraged to feel angry about the fact that there are hurting people in the world, and that others aren't doing anything.

However, the only thing that matters is when **we** do something. We must allow God to move our hearts. We must open our wallets and our checkbooks and give of our time; not wait for others.

Now, we're not God. There are a lot of hurting people out there. No one can help everybody. But I think disciples of Jesus ask God to show them what they can do. We must take care of our families and those close to us first (1 Timothy 5:8). But after that, perhaps God will give us the resources to help at least someone.

If you've not sure who to help or how, my strong recommendation is to seek out Christian groups like Compassion International, or Samaritan's purse, or local organizations like a nearby Crisis Pregnancy center. If you want some advice, come talk to me. I'll be happy to point you in the right direction.

Conclusion

We've learned today about mercy: The **action** that someone takes after they see a person who is hurting or vulnerable and they feel compassion. We've learned that mercy first comes from God when we ask him to forgive us, and when we ask him for spiritual healing. We've learned that there is a reward when we learn from God and become like him. Those who show mercy will be shown mercy themselves.

As a note: This is not always a physical thing. You've all heard the saying, "What goes around comes around." Well, that's not always true in our broken world. Sometimes, people do wrong and escape the penalty. Sometimes, people do right, and they don't receive an earthly reward.

Sadly, there's no better example than Jesus. He spent his whole life showing love and mercy to people. The world rewarded him by falsely accusing him of a crime, beating him, and nailing him to a cross. His reward in heaven though, is great. He will be rewarded by seeing all of God's people in heaven someday. Millions of people will ask God for mercy, and they'll receive it because of the price Jesus paid for all our sin.

Jesus tells his disciples to seek God's help in being like God. After receiving mercy from God, we must show mercy to others.

If we do, maybe we'll see wonderful things like monsters who are changed into saints, just like Bart Millard's father. Maybe we'll be able to sing wonderful songs of God's mercy. If not on earth, certainly we will all sing of God's mercy one day in heaven.

So, remember the words of our Lord: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."

