

# Blessed Are The Merciful

by Tim Conway

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**Scripture:** Luke 10:25, James 2:14, Matthew 25:31, 1 Corinthians 15:10, John 13:35, Ephesians 2:8, James 1:27, Amos 5:24

**Topics:** "Mercy", "Compassion in Action"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Matthew chapter 5, we're dealing with what is commonly known as the Beatitudes. Those blessings that come at us at the very beginning of this letter. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Lord Jesus Christ is delineating true Christianity for us, is what He's doing. We find ourselves in verse 7 today. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Let me ask you this. What is mercy? In fact, if I were to ask you to very specifically define it. See, we have an idea.

There's a lot of words that we have a good idea, we use them. And we have a good feel for what they mean, but if somebody asked you to actually write down a definition, you might, it might not come so quickly. And if I asked you to differentiate between mercy and grace, you know, sometimes those roll off our lips almost synonymously.

And you get that feel in the New Testament as well. You do get the feeling that grace and mercy are somewhat synonymous at times. Paul, you know, we had the pastoral epistle read in our hearing today.

Do you know that Paul begins all three of the pastorals different than he begins all his other epistles? Anybody know what the difference is? It's how he greets them. If you're reading, say, Ephesians, do you know how he greets the people? Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ. Grace to you and peace.

What's interesting in the three pastorals is he says grace, mercy, and peace. So how would we distinguish between them? Sometimes they're relatively synonymous. But if we were going to try to differentiate, I do like to see what the lexicons say.

Here's what they say. This is not exhaustive. But here's what it says about mercy.

To be greatly concerned about someone in need. That's mercy. To be concerned about someone in need.

Or, kindness toward the miserable. So it's somebody that's got need. It's somebody that's misery.

It's somebody that you want to relieve from the misery they're in. Joined with a desire to actually relieve them. So it's not just the impulse to show pity.

It's not just driving by the guy and feeling... You know, you look from afar and you feel like, Oh, I feel sorry for them, but you don't do anything. No, it's actually connected to this desire to relieve them. Whereas grace, let me give you some lexical definitions of grace.

Favor where it's not obligatory. Kindness bestowed upon the undeserving. Undeserving, not obligatory.

So, if there is a distinction between them, it's kind of like this. If you want to look at grace, it's love that is bestowed upon the undeserving. That would be grace.

Focus on the undeserving. They're guilty. Whereas mercy is love that is bestowed.

And it's prompted by the misery of the one upon whom it's given. So what we would basically say is this. Grace answers to the undeserving.

Mercy answers to misery. And I know that we are undeserving because of our sin and our guilt. And that is what brings misery upon us.

So I know they're very closely connected. Jessica, what is the Spanish word for mercy? Misericordia. Now, I've always remembered that because you know what? Drawing from the Latin, which is where Spanish comes from, Misery is actually in the word for mercy.

And that's how we can connect it. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. It's people that have a disposition to want to relieve the misery of others.

Mercy is especially associated with men in their misery. Grace is especially associated with men in their sin and in their guilt. But here's the thing.

This is critical. When Jesus says blessed are the merciful, you can see this. Even when you draw on those lexicons, that they are very quick to point out.

Now, if you go look at, say, Arthur Pinck. Pinck did a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount. He is going to very readily point to that reality.

That look, the idea of mercy is that which actually produces action. It's not just a feeling. It's that which compels us to actually do something to free up those who are in some kind of sorrow.

Some kind of pain. Some kind of misery. That's the issue.

It's a desire to relieve the suffering. And that is essential to what merciful means. It's the feeling that results in the action.

Now look, the world seeks to insulate itself from the suffering. That's a common thing for mankind to do. And I'll tell you, Christians can do it too.

And this is what I'm concerned with. Do I know that people out there, they're like, I got my problems. Leave me alone.

Don't bother me with your problems. I got enough of my own. Is that the mindset of the world? Yes, that's the mindset of the world.

But you know what concerns me? It's Christians that can hear this preached. Blessed are the merciful. Amen.

We applaud it. And you know what can happen? We can live our little cloistered lives. Where, yes, in our very safe vehicle, we drive to a relatively safe supermarket.

We buy our relatively safe food. We drive back to our very safe protected home. And we drive to our protected church building.

And we come back. And you know what? We can applaud it. You can look back in history.

Or you can even hear about missionaries that are off in some difficult place. You can hear about what we're hearing come back from Myanmar these days. And you know what? You can applaud it.

And we can be ever so much like the world that just wants to insulate itself from the pain and the calamities of others. And that's what I want to address today. Listen.

There's a text that years ago jumped out at me from Job. Job says this. You know, Job was trying to vindicate himself.

If you remember, Job's three friends were basically saying, Well, Job, you wouldn't be in this situation if you hadn't really messed up. I mean, Job, come on. Be honest.

The reality is you took advantage of the poor. And you know what? To vindicate himself, he says, No. I was a father to the poor.

I had the poor at my table. And listen to what he says. He says, I searched out the case that I did not know.

One translation says, I investigated. You know what that says? This isn't just, I happened to look over and I saw somebody in need and I stopped and helped. This is like, you know what? I'm going to go to where I know there are needy people and I'm going to go search out the cause.

In fact, I may take a trip. And you know, I hope we get to the place where that's the case. Where we're doing exploratory trips.

Where some of you are traveling places. Not necessarily even because you'll ever become a missionary in those places. I love to see people from here go to Lebanon, go to Nepal.

And it's not necessarily that you're going to even go there to do some kind of ministry there. But to go there and see. You go stand on the streets of Calcutta.

And you look at a little orphan on the train station platform. No parents. He's begging.

He's got his older brother that's somewhere who cares for him. They sleep down there at night. And you smell the smells.

And you see the sights. And you recognize. I mean, something happens when you look at a man who's a cripple.

He can't walk. You make eye contact with him. You know you can hand him a coin.

But you can't speak his language. You've got the gospel. He doesn't.

He's in some kind of Hindu, horrible, wretched system. And the guy's going to die and he's going to go to hell. And you see this.

But you know what? We can insulate ourselves from this. This is what we're dealing with. Because Jesus says, Blessed are the merciful.

They inherit the kingdom. They inherit. They're going to be the recipients of this mercy.

Now look, this is a searching statement. Blessed are the merciful. They shall obtain mercy.

And just like with all these other beatitudes, you recognize what's happening. I mean, basically Jesus is describing and delineating what a Christian man, what Christian character actually looks like. Look, like I've said before, I'm being searched.

I'm being tested. Just like you are. I may be the one preaching.

I may be standing up here. But you know what? I first have to sit and have this hit me. This isn't just about sitting down and creating a sermon.

I have to face this test too. This is searching. Because it's got to do with each one of us.

Because what he is saying is, if you are not merciful, if you are an unmerciful person, remember who's on the left. I was hungry and you didn't feed me. I was thirsty.

And you know what's not going to work? Never saw you. Lord, when did we not? You see, a godly man like Job says, no, I don't only respond to what I see. I actually go looking for where the widows might be found.

I go looking for where the orphans might be. So, we need to realize this. Each one of us is being tested here.

These tests reveal everything about our Christian profession. What's the test? Am I merciful? And I'll tell you something else that can happen. If a church begins to build up momentum, doing deeds of mercy, if a church begins to build up momentum, taking notice of those searching out the cause, sometimes you can sit in the corner and actually not participate, not be moved to action, and almost feel like, well, you're part of a church that does these things.

No, no, no, this is individual. Because listen, on Judgment Day, it's not going to be the whole church. It's going to be each of us individually.

I was hungry and you fed me. This is the kind of test that we're facing. Am I moved by the misery of others? By the suffering of others? To where there's a desire to relieve that misery? Is the anguish, the sorrow of people, is it real to me? Jesus, when Jesus went out, He saw a great multitude, and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick.

This is the thing you find about the Lord Jesus, when it says that He had compassion. It wasn't just a feeling that He kept up here. You know, we can feel compassion, we can feel pity, and then not do anything.

Or we can hear a story, you know, you can get emotional, you can get stirred up, and then you don't do anything. Jesus did something. He healed the sick.

Jesus called to His disciples, to Himself said, I have compassion upon the multitude. You know what He did, He fed them. Being merciful has to do first and foremost with what we are.

You recognize that. This is not just about the actions that we do. The merciful.

Blessed are the merciful. It doesn't say, blessed are those who simply do some merciful actions. It's who we are.

You see, that's the thing about being a Christian. It starts with who we are, not what we do. A Christian is something before he does anything.

Something happens to him. Do you realize, when we dealt with the new covenant, did you catch that? I will cause them to keep my statutes. I am going to put my spirit in them.

I am going to give them a heart. I am going to give them one heart and one way. I am going to do this.

I am going to change them. I am going to put my fear in them. I am going to do this.

You see, do you recognize this about Christianity? Christianity is something that controls us. Christianity is something that lays hold of us. It's not just about a list of things that we do.

That is not biblical Christianity. We are Christians first. Our actions always flow out of that.

Christianity is something that, I mean, this is something that we really have to recognize about true biblical Christianity. It does things to, basically we are acted upon by something from outside of us. By the God who says, I will, I will, I will.

That's it. Source of every activity is Christ at work in me. What does scripture say? It is no longer I. Who is it? Who is it that lives my life? Isn't it me? Paul? I mean, isn't that just, what do you mean it's not you? No,

it's Christ who lives within me.

You see, He is being acted upon. This is how scripture speaks. It says, it's God who works in you to will.

Now, think about the will. The will isn't the action. The will comes inside of us and leads to the action.

We will first, we do second. You see, mercy. Mercy is, we have a feel, we have a will, and then we act.

Well, what's Paul saying? Well, if somebody feels these merciful tendencies, and it works on their will to where it comes out in action. Did you hear Sharif reading in that third chapter? Do you remember those words about need? I mean, basically, what Paul is exhorting folks to do is meet urgent needs. Did you catch that? How does it come about that Christians react to urgent needs? Well, first, something happens inside of us.

It's happening with regards to our perception, and our will, and our feelings, and it comes out. But do you recognize where this comes from? It's God at work in us. It's not me.

It's Christ living in me. This is what we find. Christianity controls a man from within.

And we looked at all those new covenant promises. Why are these Beatitudes so searching? Well, they're searching because they tell us who and what we are. Because the Lord is basically speaking to each one of us, and saying, look, the pathway to heaven is being trod by merciful people.

They're the ones that end up there. That's clearly what He's saying. Blessed are the merciful.

They shall obtain mercy. You know what He's saying. If you're not merciful, there's no mercy.

I guarantee you this. Hell is inhabited by the unmerciful. And heaven is inhabited by the merciful.

So, what we have to ask ourselves is this. All those I wills, you heard them. Are you a product of that? Can you look at those I wills and say, yeah.

Now, I know I'm not perfect, but I'm a product of those I wills. I see the reality. Because listen, if God says He will, He will.

And the reality is, if you've got all these I wills that are behind the new covenant, and you don't see that God is doing those, that's problematic. That's why this is so searching. So, the whole of our life is basically an expression, a proclamation of what we really are.

These things force us to look at ourselves. Blessed are the merciful. It really forces us to look at ourselves.

We don't want to despise this. We don't want to neglect this. Now, listen, the real problem raised by this beatitude, tends to be the promise attached to it.

What's the promise? What's the promise to the merciful? They'll receive mercy. I mean, basically, can you see in that? That is a promise of mercy. That's a promise that, no hell, because I'm going to receive mercy.

No, see, mercy delivers from misery. The greatest misery imaginable for us, is to be cast into the lake of fire. I'm going to be delivered from that misery.

That's what mercy is. Misericordia. Misery.

I'm delivered from it. This is big. This is important.

But the real problem is this. Listen, you and I understand cause and effect. Right? You know what I mean? Something, something, something runs into my car, and my car veers off, and runs into the tree.

There's cause and effect. You hit somebody, and there's the effect of that being hit. I mean, you put two chemicals together, that are explosive together, and you get the effect.

There's an explosion. The reality is, we understand like, if-then statements. Anybody that's into programming, the reality is this.

If this is true, then this will be true. That is the kind of thing that we're being dealt with. We all have this idea, you know, if you eat your dinner, you will get dessert.

We understand statements like that. But this is somewhat problematic. Because, if we're honest, basically what this is saying is this.

If you want what you want, then you better do what God wants. I mean, that's basically it. God, Jesus Christ, is looking, and He's basically saying, mercy is something I, that it's required of His people.

And He's basically saying, there's not going to be any. We recognize this. If I want mercy from God, I better make sure I'm merciful to others.

There are other passages that sound very similar to this. And you know what? My fear is this. You can be so grace-wired, that you don't hear these.

And you say, well, it doesn't really matter. No, you better believe it matters, because what Jesus is saying is, merciful people inherit the kingdom. They get mercy in the end.

They escape the misery. And all others don't. That's what He's saying.

So you don't want to just dismiss this because, well, you know, we're saved by grace. But we do need to wrestle with this. Listen to some other verses.

If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. You know that. If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

This also comes from the Sermon on the Mount. So here's the obvious issue. People say, well, doesn't that plainly teach works? Forgive, and you get forgiven.

Show mercy, you receive mercy. Here's one from Mark. Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive your trespasses.

Now look, if we're honest, it sounds like God's mercy and forgiveness are contingent on us first showing. Does everybody agree with me that that's what it sounds like it's saying? You better believe that's what it sounds like it's saying. Because that's what it is saying.

I mean, if we're totally honest with it, what it sounds like it's saying has got to begin with me. That's what it sounds like. I've got to do something first.

Now look, one of the very important things that we want to do when we're trying to wrestle through Scripture is we want to compare Scripture with Scripture. And so let's take a verse that Sheriff read to us. I don't want to have you turn there, but just listen to it.

Actually, this was not. You read one from Titus that was a perfect example, but I'm going to read one from 2 Timothy. God who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works.

See, we know that, right? Not according to our works. He saved us, He called us, not according to our works, but according to His purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began. Or what's the most well known? For by grace you have been saved through faith.

And that what? Yeah, it's... I mean, look, the reality is, it says that we're saved by grace, through faith, and that not according to yourselves. It's the gift of God, not a result of works. So that no one may boast.

See, that's the issue with grace. No boasting. But listen, if we're honest, well, doesn't it sound like it's saying I've got to forgive people to get forgiven and I've got to show mercy to get mercy? Doesn't it sound like, well, basically, isn't Jesus setting us up to feel like, well, we've got to do these things? And so, I mean, we're trying to be honest with this.

No boasting. No boasting. When something is not of yourself, not according to your own works, that's where no boasting comes in.

And so, listen, what you don't want to do is you don't want to dismiss what Jesus is saying, but you also have to recognize that you don't dismiss what Paul's saying. Whatever Jesus means, it can't be a place of boasting. If the Lord Jesus is teaching that I have to purchase mercy by showing mercy, then obviously he's at odds with the Apostle Paul.

That would be by works. Because basically what would happen is this, I show mercy and now God owes me. That is precisely what grace is not.

So, what if the Lord is actually teaching that yes, we indeed are saved by grace. The grace is not according to works. Absolutely not.

What if he's actually teaching that God's grace will always produce merciful people. Now here's a verse that I want you to look at. Go to 1 Corinthians 15.

This is, in my estimation, one of the most important verses concerning grace in our Bibles. 1 Corinthians 15.10. Listen to the Apostle Paul here. 1 Corinthians 15.10. This is a very well-known chapter on the resurrection of the dead.

But listen to what Paul says. But by the grace of God. Listen, often times, grace simply gets defined as favor to the undeserving.

That type of definition. One of the things you never want to forget is this. Grace should have power somewhere in the definition.

Grace is powerful. Grace does things. Listen to this.

By the grace of God, I am what I am. This is Paul speaking. His grace toward me was not in vain.

Now look what the grace did. I labored more abundantly than they all. Now see, you could say that sounds like it's boasting.

And that's the opposite of grace. No way. You see, the same thing for a merciful person.

It's not boasting when it comes from the same source. Look at this. Yet not I. See, I labored more abundantly than they all.

Yet not I. Well, that sounds like Paul in Galatians, right? It's I live, yet not I? Well, Paul, what is this? Are you you or are you not you? I mean, this sounds crazy. But we understand this. It's the grace of God which was with me.

You see, we all ought to be able to talk like this. We all ought to be able to recognize that, listen, you know what Christians should be able to do? Jesus says this, Blessed are the merciful. You are the only ones that are going to receive mercy.

And you know what we ought to be able to do? We ought to be able to go look in the mirror and say, I have been acted upon by God in a way that I have a merciful strain in me that wasn't there when I was lost. And you can recognize it and you can say, I am merciful by the grace of God. I labored in mercy, even sometimes more than others.

See, that doesn't mean that the people that labored less than him weren't objects and recipients of that grace. We recognize, sometimes the grace in me doesn't match the grace in you. There can be special gifts of mercy.

But the reality is this, every one of us ought to be able to speak exactly this way. By the grace of God, I am merciful. Because I'll tell you, if you're not merciful, you don't inherit the kingdom.

If you're not merciful, you don't get mercy. If you're not merciful, the end is going to be bad. You see what grace does? See, so often we say, that's how it works! No, it's not works, it's grace.

You say, what? Now I'm confused. Listen, grace acts on us. Grace, God says, I will forgive their transgressions, but he also says, I will put my spirit in you, and that is a spirit of love.

And see, that's part of the grace. You see, when we think grace, we think gift. What it's saying is this, if you're merciful, it's a gift.

You don't boast in gifts. What Paul recognized is, wow, I am not that old Pharisee. Something has changed in me.

In fact, I recognize I'm outrunning, not only the vast majority of Christians, I'm outrunning all the other apostles. And yet it's not me. It is me, but I know the source of it isn't me.

It's the grace of God, that I am what I am. Now listen, that's what this is all about. And you don't ever want to be wrong on it.

But see how searching it is? Because I recognize what I'm really dealing with here, is the, listen, the grace of God doesn't just forgive sins. The grace of God unleashes the raw power of God into the life of a sinner. And transforms them from unmerciful people into merciful people.

You see, that's why Jesus can say, blessed are the merciful. They're going to receive mercy. Because this is what the grace of God does.

This is how it moves. Now listen, what I'm going to do is take you to the place in Scripture that is probably our Lord's greatest discourse on showing mercy. And it is found in Luke chapter 10.

And it is that parable of the Good Samaritan. So let's go there. Let's go to Luke 10.

You see brethren, we don't want to ever read things like this and say, well, I thought we were saved by grace. You see, if you say that, I'm going to say exactly. But you better know what grace is.

You see, the problem is, most people have this errant idea that grace just simply means, oh, my guilt got pardoned. Well, it does mean that. But you see, the grace of God does more than just forgive.

Not that that's a small thing, but that's not all it does. Where you find a merciful man or a merciful woman, be assured, nothing but the grace of God did that. That's what I want to see.

I greatly desire to see that in our church. Not so that you have something to boast in, or we collectively have something to boast in, but when you find merciful people gathering together and coming up with really creative, merciful deeds, well, then we can come into the prayer meeting and not say, oh, look how great we are. No, what you do is you say, hey, brethren, it is no lack of humility, if it's true, to say we are even outrunning other churches when it comes to mercy.

There's nothing wrong with being able to say that as long as the next thing, and this has to come from the heart as well, but you recognize, wow, we don't have anything to boast in. God did this. God did this among us.

I'm really hoping that God will unleash some years, like lots of years, decades of mercy from this church that have never been unlocked before, so much so that we can see it and we can recognize it and we can say, wow, God did that. God did that. Now look, Luke 10, if you run right to verse 36, just so you all know that I'm not taking you into some portion of Scripture that doesn't apply to what we're talking about, look at Luke 10, 36.

This is at the end of this whole ordeal and this parable of the good Samaritan. So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves? And the lawyer said, he who showed mercy. You see, mercy is our, that's our theme, blessed are the merciful.

Here's a merciful man in the story. He showed mercy on him. Jesus said to him, go and do likewise.

Okay, so this parable, as much as anything that has to do with mercy in the Scriptures, it's going to force professing disciples of Christ to ask ourselves some hard questions. Again, we stand in the mirror. This is a test.

And you see, the lawyer, he meant to put Jesus to the test. You ever notice that in Scripture? That when people came to test Christ, they ended up being the ones tested? That's always the issue. Let's dive in.

Look at verse 25. Behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested him, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? You remember, the rich young ruler asked the same question. What do I have to do? I find it absolutely interesting that when people asked, what must I do to obtain eternal life? In both cases, this lawyer and the rich young ruler, do you know where Jesus ended up? With the second of the two

great commandments.

Isn't it interesting? When the first great commandment is to love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. And the second commandment, second, that's down line from one. And yet, that was the one that he ended up telling the parable about, the one that he ended up going after the rich young ruler with.

Same question. What must I do to obtain eternal life? Two great commandments. Take him to the second.

Why? Why not talk to them about loving God? I'll tell you why. John tells us why. Because people say, I love God.

That's a hard one to prove or disprove. And you know what the problem is? Typically we've created a God of our own imagination that we get along quite well with. That's the reality.

And John realizes it. You know what John says? You say you love God, who you have not seen. But check out your brother over here, who you have seen.

How are you doing with him? See, if you say I love God, but you're not loving your brother, what does John say? He uses some pretty strong language, John does very often. He says, if someone says I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar. Boy, John likes liar language.

John did not hesitate to call people liars. For he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? See, that's the issue. I find that very interesting, that our Lord took people in this direction.

And we can take ourselves there as well. So, he says, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? Verse 26. He said to him, what's written in the law? What is your reading of it? That's always a very effective way to teach.

Ask people questions. So he answered and said, it's the lawyer answering, who's testing Jesus. He says, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.

And he said to him, you have answered rightly, do this and you will live. Now see, right there we get kind of upset and a bit put off at times when our Lord does that as well. Right? What do I do to obtain eternal life? Well, Lord, why didn't you give them the answer that we will give people? Believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll have eternal life.

You'll be saved. You didn't take them to the cross. You didn't do anything.

You told them to keep the law. Well, because the law exposes us. And you see, he felt it.

That's why immediately afterward he sought to justify himself. That's what it says. When you start talking about showing mercy to people, you want to see people start defending themselves and justifying themselves, including in the church.

This is a place. This is searching. Jesus is saying the mercy of God is going to be showered upon those who show mercy.

And you know, we can start rationalizing. You start arguing. You want to justify yourself.

And that's what he wanted to do. He said, you've answered rightly. Do this and you will live.

But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, and who is my neighbor? You see, he was feeling it. And so, what was he trying to do? I mean, two great commandments. Love God.

Love your neighbor. Okay, let's focus on love your neighbor. Who is my neighbor? What's he trying to do there? I'll tell you what he's trying to do.

He's trying to get Jesus to define the second great commandment in terms that he somehow could reach. One of the things Jesus is trying to do here is he's trying to lay this guy bare. Because really what this is supposed to do is produce the first beatitude.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. You see what he's really wanting to do is show the guy his bankruptcy. And the guy feels it.

That's why he's trying to justify himself. He wanted to admit his own spiritual bankruptcy. And that's always the issue.

Listen, this is important. First, Jesus always wants us to see how broken we are and then he fixes us. He wants us to see how unmerciful we really are.

That's what he was saying. You know, to the rich young ruler, he said, love your neighbor. He said, all these things I've kept, okay, go give it all to the poor.

You see, go give it to your neighbor. And then he walked away. Because the reality is he never really loved anybody.

Oh, he may have tithed, he may have given his grandmother something before. You know, the Gentiles do that. The Gentiles will pat their own child on the head.

But you see what's happening here. We ought not to be surprised that our Lord takes men to look at themselves through this lens of how they treat their fellow man. And you know what he's doing? This lawyer was religious.

And we get the religious people here as well. I mean, whether it's true or false, we tend to gather here. And what our Lord does is he goes directly after just that smug, complacent, comfortable religious person who wants to protect himself from the needs of other people.

And you know, we can cloak ourselves in Reformed theology, in Puritanical theology, in singing old hymns, which by the way, I really wish we were singing a whole lot of newer hymns. But hopefully that'll happen when we have our own building. But listen, we can cloak ourselves in all of this guise when we have the right doctrine.

We have orthodoxy. You know, we stick to the confessions. And yet, he's exposing us.

Was Jesus being unnecessarily demanding? Not at all. Because I'll tell you this, unless your faith really believes that he's Lord, he's King, and surrenders to him, it's not genuine faith. And that's what he said to the rich young ruler.

Look, I'm Lord. You're asking me about eternal life. You go sell everything.

And you come follow me. You'll have treasure in heaven. But he wouldn't follow him because he didn't really believe Jesus was worth it.

He thought his treasures were more worthwhile. Unless we really believe that Jesus is Lord and we surrender, we haven't truly believed. A life of mercy.

Listen, you know this. A life of mercy can be demanding. And it can be expensive.

And it can be uncomfortable. That's the reality. And our willingness to follow Christ in this is telling.

It's a sign of our submission to the Lordship of Christ. Okay, so here we are. We're at the parable itself.

Now listen again. We're being tested by all this. So listen.

Verse 30. Jesus answered and said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance, a certain priest came down that road.

When he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise, a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.

So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, poured on oil and wine, set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, Take care of him. Whatever more you spend, when I come again, I'll repay you.

So which of these do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves? And he said, He who showed mercy on him. Then Jesus said to him, Go and do likewise. Now I understand, that in this day, that Jesus was telling this story, the road from Jerusalem to Jericho descended about 4,000 feet.

It went through all sorts of crags and rocks and caves, lots of places for villains and thugs and thieves to hang out. Much like a dark alley in a rough part of the city. On that road, you know what we find? You know what Jesus spells out for us was on that road? Misery.

There was suffering, there was sorrow on this road. Naked, wounded, half dead. Oh, but thankfully, look! Here comes a priest.

And if that's not enough, look behind him. Here comes a Levite. Oh, good.

Helps arrived. Or not. How do we explain this? Watch these guys.

They must have missed him. That's it. They didn't see him.

Maybe the thieves left him half dead off the road there. Oh, wait. It says they did see him.

In fact, it says they both saw him. They sidestepped past. Ah, no help.

Be careful how fast you condemn these two guys. See, he's talking about us. Be careful.

Because this is where we live. This is where we are at. How do we respond? When it's a story, we can somehow detach ourselves from it.

But you don't want to do that. Consider being in the city center. I don't know if there's bad alleys.

You look down some dark alley over there. And what? You see a groaning man on the ground. Somebody's obviously beaten him.

And it's a dark, rainy night. I mean, wouldn't it be better just to get out of here? We'll go home. We'll call the authorities.

The authorities. Aren't they the ones supposed to take care of this? I mean, certainly that would be the wisest thing to do. We don't want to presume upon the Lord.

You see an old lady broken down. It's like, well, I can't stop. I've got to get to the prayer meeting.

Isn't that what the priest and the Levite were doing? We've got to get to our religious thing. I mean, after all, it's dark. She's probably got a son.

It doesn't matter. It's really a dark, scary part of town. Rainy night.

I mean, I'm already late. And who is this? Who's the guy helping? I mean, we like to say, oh, the Good Samaritan. But you recognize what Jesus is saying.

Blessed are the Good Samaritans because they're the ones in the end. They're the only ones. They're the only ones that fall into the camp of the blessed.

The Good Samaritan. This is the true Christian. Here he comes, the Samaritan.

And you know the thing about it is he faced the same dangers that the priest faced, that the Levite faced. Do you know that's always the case? You see, if we think, well, we're not going to help people until it's just right, until it's just safe. Does anybody recognize that this world is not really a safe place to live in? And see, one of the problems is that we constantly are seeking safety.

And when you seek safety in your family life, and seek safety in your church life, and seek safety in your workplace, and so everything is safety. Everything is within these well-confined boundaries of safety. And you know what you can do? You can end up creating a very artificial world.

Because I'll tell you, there's a lot of suffering out there. There are a lot of half-dead people on streets out there. But one of the problems is we like to corral ourselves into this little insulated realm.

And brethren, I'll tell you, I'm not mitigating the fact that there's needy people in Middleton. One of the reasons that I don't want our church to meet there, one of the primary reasons, and I'm not praying against getting the building. I think that that would be a great provision for us right now.

But one of the reasons I have not wanted to meet there is because quite honestly, Middleton is a very relatively safe Manchesterian suburb. I'd rather get somewhere that's a bit more rough. Why? Because what that does, the more we move out, this is one of the things, I wanted our church in San Antonio inner city, one of the worst, and then I recognized, well, if we're going to have the church meet there, we better go live there.

And then other people moved there. And then you get a bunch of Christians living in a very rough part of town. And you know what happens then? You get a guy who's willing to live next door to drug dealers and to begin to take the Gospel to him and the next thing you know, that guy's with his family out on the mission field because that's what happens.

Because basically you begin to recognize needs and you begin to reach out to the suffering and then the next thing you have, what's the Samaritan do? The Samaritan didn't just come along and reach out a hand and help the guy do his feet and go on his way and make God bless you and be on your way. You know what he did? He basically stopped, he gave him his time, he gave him his animal, I mean he allowed his animal, you know animals get wore out. You have a horse, you have some kind of mule, you have some kind of ox, they can only work so long, they get tired, you've got to rest them, he throws this guy on there, he put oil, he put wine, you know what this is? This is a full orb'd mercy.

It wasn't like I've got to get somewhere. He gave this guy, he went to where the guy was going to stay in this inn, he took care of him there, he gave money, I mean it was the whole deal. And what happened? Here's one of the things you want to see about this whole ordeal.

Do you remember the question that was asked? Who is my neighbor? Well you know, that actually is probably the way any of us would ask that question. Why? Why? Because the commandment is this. Love your neighbor as yourself.

So the obvious question that we might ask would be, makes total sense, that if you want to justify yourself, you'd ask who's my neighbor? I'm supposed to love my neighbor, where do I look? Who is this neighbor? But notice what Jesus does. Here's the thing that I would ask you. Who would we expect the neighbor to be in the story? Who? Who's my neighbor? Well, when you give the story like this, and there's a guy that's half dead in the road, wouldn't you expect the half dead guy to be your neighbor? And you know when Jesus gets done with this, that's not who the neighbor is.

Have you ever noticed that? Jesus turns this whole thing on its head. Look at verse 36. So which of these three do you think was neighbor? If you're looking for the neighbor, he says, don't primarily worry about who your neighbor is.

Give yourself to being the neighbor. Just spun the whole thing. This is the test Jesus hits his lawyer with.

It's a test he puts each of us to. And you know both James and John hit us with this as well. We mentioned somewhat John, but listen to this again.

James and John do the same thing their master did. They use mercy as a test. John says this, whoever has this world's goods, sees his brother in need, shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and truth.

Christians who talk a lot and have great plans, that's a good place to start. But what he's saying is, you've got to carry these things out. That's what mercy does.

And if it doesn't happen, how can you say the love of God abides in you? Then James comes along and he says this, what is a prophet, my brethren, if somebody says he has faith, but doesn't have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily bread, you know what he's saying? He's saying the same thing I hit you with before. If you're going to say, I have faith, he says, okay, yes, the true Christian is saved by grace through faith. But remember, that grace also turns us into loving, merciful

people.

And that's what James is saying. If you say you've got the kind of faith that is not brother, sister, to compassion, it's no good. It's dead.

He says, if a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, depart in peace, be warmed and filled, but you don't give them the things which are needed for the body, what is it? Prophet. Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Can I tell you this? Our church right now, see you drove here.

You live in neighborhoods. Do you recognize all the people you're driving past? Do you know if you could look into these homes throughout Manchester and throughout all these places? We're surrounded, especially in these days. It's true all the time.

We are surrounded by the unemployed, by the underemployed. We're surrounded by immigrants. We're surrounded by students from other countries that are probably living in dorms downtown who probably are extremely lonely.

They've left their family. They've left their friends. We've got singles.

All you have to do is be a single and not want to be a single. And you know, the single of the world, they can kind of go out and gratify them. You've got lots of singles here that just shack up with people.

But you know if you're a Christian and you're a single and you're trying to honor the Lord, that can be a very tough. And one of the places that folks in the church might want to reach out is there. And we're surrounded by the divorced, by unwed mothers, by the elderly.

You're talking about somebody who's really suffering during these COVID days. It's the elderly. We've got people with mental disease.

We've got people that are prisoners, the dying, the sick, disabled, widows, orphans, suicidal. Do we want to reach these neighbors with the gospel? Or should we rather ask that searching question right from this parable? Who among us is going to be a neighbor? And this is biblical Christianity. See, we can't say the love of God is in us.

We can't say the love of God is in this church. We can't say that our faith is genuine even. Unless this, this is not some social gospel.

This is not some appendage to the real thing that, well maybe it's good, maybe it's not good. This is at the center of defining biblical Christianity. Are we going to prove to be a neighbor? For our faith to be genuine.

It's got to give active expression to these kinds of things, to these deeds, coupled with evangelism and discipleship. Undoubtedly. Mercy.

Think about it. To the full range of human needs and sorrow and suffering and misery. This is one of the reasons why we ought to be thinking about those little unborn children.

They're being torn about limb by limb. Can somebody here rise up and try to protect them? To try to see their mothers converted so that they might not slay their children in the womb? Can somebody recognize that you've got people that are incarcerated? And you say, well you know, they committed crimes.

Brethren, listen.

The test of true faith. Each of us are faced with this question of the necessity of mercy to the very existence of our Christianity. That's what Jesus is saying.

This tests it. Is the grace of God there? Jesus sees care for the poor, care for the hurting, care for the misery, the relieving of this misery, as part of the essence of being a genuine Christian. I remind you again, I keep coming back to this, but Matthew 25 shows us that on judgment day, that's precisely what Jesus is looking for in genuine Christianity.

And he says, I was in prison. You guys over here did not visit me. And now, depart from me.

And they went into everlasting punishment. You see, that's the difference. These guys over here, I was a stranger and you took me in.

You see, this is what delineates between the true and the false. And so often, this is not comparing us to Muslims. So often in scripture, what you have is comparing true Christians with those who are not.

See, it's like everybody was here in the church. Everybody was in the same net. The net is hauled out on that day, and it separated the good from the false.

And one of the places we start is just where this lawyer was. If we look at it, and this exposes us and shows us our bankruptcy, it shows us that we really have not cared for anybody, then you know what? You take that to the Lord. Look, we're not saved by works.

We're saved by grace. But if you can look in your, you've had this hope that your sins are forgiven, but you have to be honest that you don't see the grace of God at work in your life to produce this kind of mercy, then you know what? Connect the dots. Because the reality is, if God's grace is not active in your life to produce this mercy, then it's not active in your life to have forgiven your sins.

And you don't want, you're only deceiving yourself to run down that road. But you see, we can ask, where does all this stop? Lord, where does mercy start? Where does all this mercy stop? I mean, look, you can't possibly mean that I'm supposed to get involved in everybody with regards to their misery and hurting and needy, or you say, Lord, I'm not very good at that. I'm very awkward.

I feel backward. Lord, that's not my gift. Lord, I'm not a pastor.

I'm not a deacon. I mean, that's, that's, Lord, I don't want to presume. I don't want to go down in a dangerous part of the city.

I mean, I could get hurt. I don't want to be presumptuous like that. Something might happen to me.

Lord, my money's limited. I mean, you know that. I barely have enough for me.

I barely have enough for the family. I mean, isn't the government supposed to do that? Isn't somebody else supposed to do that? Plus, Lord, aren't these people in this condition because they've basically been irresponsible? I mean, isn't that it? They've been lazy. Aren't the needs of this world miserable and poor, just too overwhelming? Lord, who is my neighbor? And in the end, you know, we've got lots of, this, this, this, this is how we can think and talk and rationalize.

Look, what's going to make our church powerful to focus its attention on the deep, deep, deep miseries? We've got our Jericho road out here. It's all around us. And the half-dead are scattered out there.

They're out there. And brethren, you know, we can content ourselves with singing Christmas carols, sending some money to a faraway nation. But that's not, that's not the sense.

Because what Jesus does is he basically says, you see this Samaritan? Go and do likewise. That's what I'm looking for. Yes, good to visit people in nursing homes.

It's good to send money to support missions in faraway places. We don't want to stop doing that. Listen, brethren, one of the things we need to recognize is the world has never been a safe place.

And if you've got eyes to see, this world is increasingly becoming unsafe for Christians. So, oh, they might kill me. Did Jesus say they wouldn't? Did Jesus say that if we seek to imitate him and do what he did, that it would be safe? That's not what he said.

In fact, you know what he said? He said, guys, I'm telling you this so you won't fall away when it gets hard. That's what he said. I'm telling you this now, so that when this happens, you'll hold.

Your faith will hold. They're going to kill you. And they're going to think they're doing God a service when they do it.

Brethren, all on the altar, oh, we can sing the song. We sing numerous songs where we talk like this. But brethren, this is where the rubber meets the road.

What's going to unleash this radical mercy like this? What is it? What we don't want to do is cloister in our compounds. I'll tell you this, one of the greatest ways to start is open your eyes. You see, the first thing you have to do is see it, and then stop.

Don't just walk by. Stop, and hold out your hand. And one of the things to do is see it.

You'll never be burdened by things you don't know about. You'll never have a burden for anybody in Africa unless you start to look at the pictures and find out what's going on. This is one of the reasons I like when this blasted lockdown gets lifted, one of my desires from the very beginning is I want to have men stand in the pulpit here, and even ladies.

Oh, I'd love to get Rebecca here and have her talk to you with tears and tell you firsthand about these things. I plead with you, you that are merciful, because if you're a Christian, this describes you. Stop, and look.

We've got people beat up, stripped half naked like this. This is a world full of demons. If you have eyes to see, read your Bible.

Demons make sport of people, causes extreme misery, the injustice, the oppression, racism, the depressed, the lostness all around us, misery. You've got drug addictions, you've got disabilities, you've got abortion, and just lies. We can camp in the comforts of a very fictitious world where the truth is.

We look around and we say, well, you know, where we're at, we don't see a whole lot of suffering like that. If you can say that, it's because you have not searched out the cause of the needy. Because I'll guarantee you this, typically all you have to do is walk to your neighbor's next door, or two doors down, or three doors

down, and you can begin to find people that are suffering.

Well, just pray God will help us. Father, this is your word, blessed are the merciful. Lord, that grace of God that made Paul what he was, I pray that it would be very active and evident.

Father, I have to believe that you preserved this church through some difficult days, and that you've held these brethren together, and you brought myself and Ruby here. I have to believe, Lord, in the way that you've preserved us, it causes me to have this great hope and this great expectation that you're going to just unleash the power of the Spirit of God through the brethren here, and unleash such acts of mercy in the days to come. Lord, please, may that be the testimony that our church is merciful, and give us, with that mercy, the humility always to be able to recognize that it's you, it's not us, it's the grace of God at work in us, and that it was not in vain.

Lord, please, unleash the power of your grace in this church, so that it would not be in vain. Just like Paul said there. Help us, Lord.

We confess. We know it. We have not always loved our neighbor as ourself.

We have not always loved the brethren as we ought. We have not always responded to every need. Lord, help us.

Help us. You tell us that we are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. Those of us that are Christians.

And Lord, we would ask you, please, work that image in us more deeply, more thoroughly. Unleash the power, that raw power of your grace. Show us the extents of the power of grace.

Create in us, not only a clean heart, but a merciful one. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Okay brethren, you are dismissed.

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