

THE NEVER ENDING MERCIES OF GOD

A SERMON

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This afternoon we are going to be looking at the teaching of Jesus in what is known as ‘The Beatitudes’. The Beatitudes are 8 blessings which Jesus gives during his message we know as ‘Sermon on the Mount’. And this afternoon we’re going to focus on just one of them. So, if you have a bible, please turn to Matthew 5, I’ll read from verse 1 to 12. I’m going to be reading from the NIV translation.

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. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Matthew 5:1–12 (NIV)

As I said earlier we're going to focus on just one blessing, mercy. However, before we jump in, lets spend a moment thinking about the Beatitudes as a whole. Darrell Johnson, who serves on the leadership team at The Way, pointed out in a sermon a few months back that the word "blessed" can be thought of as "bless you". So it could read, "Bless you who are poor in spirit," or "Bless you who hunger and thirst for righteousness," or in our case, "Bless you who are merciful." The 'blessing' could be thought of as being 'in sync' with what Jesus is doing. And what He's doing is bringing the Kingdom of Heaven near. But before we go to far off track, lets return to our specific text. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. (Matthew 5:7).

What comes to mind when you think of the word "Mercy"? We have three kids, and when I asked them what they thought about then I said the word "Mercy" they immediately said the endurance game "Mercy". You may know it... The idea is that you lock fingers together with another person and twisting your wrists attempt to make them shout for "mercy". Not recommended unless you partially like pain! Webster's dictionary surprisingly offers a complex different definition. It says 'mercy' is Mildness or tenderness of heart, which causes a person to overlook injuries, or to treat an offender better than they deserve; and to forbear punishment, and inflict less than justice warrants. What an interesting definition, Tenderness of heart, overlooking Injuries, forbearance, and inflicting less than justice warrants. This is mercy.

But what else comes to mind when you think of 'mercy'? For me, I immediately think about God's grace. You could in fact say 'Grace' and 'Mercy' are two sides of the same coin. 'Grace' is getting what you don't deserve, forgiveness, friendship with God, and eternal life. Whereas 'Mercy' is not getting what you do deserve, condemnation, enmity with God, and eternal punishment. So I ask you, "Are our lives defined by mercy?" "Are we merciful to others?" and "Are we merciful to ourselves?" In other worlds, "Are we by nature merciful?"

As I've thought about mercy this week, it seems to break down into a number of key areas. First we'll look at God's mercy to us, God's past mercy, Present mercy, and finally God's future mercy. We'll finish by looking at how we show mercy to others. Let's begin with Past Mercy.

Throughout the Old Testament we see God's ongoing mercy to His people. Even when things go sideways, sometimes very sideways, God is merciful. Let's look at a number of examples together.

The obvious place to start is beginning of Genesis. Here we read about the creation and fall of man. Listen to what God said to Adam and Eve in Genesis chapter 2, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” (Genesis 2:16–17). However Adam and Eve didn’t listen God, and we so often do, they choose their own way. Instead of listening to God, they listened to the lies of the serpent, the devil. “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” (Genesis 3: 1). The devil suitably twisted God’s words, leading to mistrust and ultimately rebellion. So they took the fruit and eat, and then realizing what they had done, running and hide from God. Sin showed them who they really were, and ashamed of their nakedness, their sin, they tried to cover themselves. But God, in his grace, reached out and had mercy on them. God comes to them, pursuing them, calling for them, “Where are you?” Here we don’t see a God of anger and wrath, but a God of love, a God of grace, a God of mercy. He could have punished them, even killed them, isn’t that what they deserved, and what He said would happen? But instead He came and clothed them. He told them of the one who was to come, the serpent crusher!

Another amazing story of God’s mercy and faithfulness is found in 2 Samuel. Here we read about David, God’s chosen king, undoubtedly the greatest king in the history of Israel. However, after living a life filled with God’s blessing he made a huge mistake. Many of you will know the story. David sees a beautiful woman, Bathsheba, bathing naked and decides he wants her for himself. Despite the fact she was already married David has her brought in and they sleep together. And to make matters worse he gets her pregnant. When things continue to go wrong he covers up his sin by having Bathsheba’s own husband assassinated. So God sends the prophet Nathan to confront David in his sin. To bring him face to face with what he’s done. And in his conviction, David cries out, “I have sinned against the Lord.” (2 Samuel 12:13). But instead of punishing David, God instead had mercy on him. Forgives his sin and allowing him to continue to rule over God’s people.

Lets do one more Old Testament example. The book of Judges tells the story of how God lead Israel to the Promised Land, and when they got there, God told them to drive out the Canaanites who lived there. The Canaanites were a Godless nation, morally corrupt, entangled in children sacrifice, and generally living evil, godless lives. However, Israel didn't driving them out. Instead they started adopting the Canaanites cultural and religious practices. And because of this God allowed the Canaanites to be conquered and oppressed Israel. Eventually the Israelites saw the error of their ways, repented, and turn back to God. So God had mercy on them. He raise up a Judge, like a tribal chief, and though them the Israelites would began to turn back to God. However this was often short lived. After a while Israel would again begin to follow the practices of the Canaanites and the whole cycle of sin would begin again. Scholars tell us that this pattern probably when on for nearly 200 years. What is amazing about this story is that through all this time, God continued to have mercy on His people. Even though they sinned, and turned away from God over and over again, God had mercy on them, constantly recused them from their oppressors. Through these stories we see that God by his very nature is merciful.

In Exodus 34, God said to Moses, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...” . (Exodus 34:6). The God of the Old Testament isn't a God of wrath as some people think, but a God of love, of faithfulness, and of mercy.

But God's mercy isn't just found in the Old Testament. We also see plenty of mercy in the New Testament too. One well-known story is found in the Gospel of John. Here in chapter 8 we read the account of 'The Woman Caught in Adultery'. The story begins with the scribes and the Pharisees bringing a woman before Jesus who had been caught in the act of adultery. The scribes and Pharisees wanted to trap Jesus, so they remind Him that based on the law, the woman should be put to death. But instead of address the women's sin Jesus says to the people, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” (John 8: 7). The scribes and Pharisees knew they were not without sin, and so one by one they left. Eventually, left alone with the woman Jesus asked, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She answered, “No one, sir,” So Jesus declared, “Then neither do I condemn you, go now and leave your life of sin.” (John 8:10–11). It wasn't that Jesus didn't think her sin mattered, it obviously did. But rather, He was reorienting her life, reorienting her to a life of holiness, a life centred around God's kingdom. Where He could have held to the law and condemned her, Jesus instead showed mercy, He showed love. This is another beautiful story of that shows God's unending mercy.

However the place we see God's mercy the most clearly, the place where we see God's love fully on display, is at the cross. We have all failed to love God with all our heart and soul and mind. To keep His commands, to live they way He calls us too. We like the women we read about, we too deserve God's judgement and punishment. But because of His great love for us God sent someone to stand in our place. On the cross God's only son, Jesus Christ, died took our place. He took our sin upon himself, He received God's full punishment for our sin, sin which we deserved.

But God does not only show His mercy through the cross, In fact the writer of Lamentations reminds us, The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22–23). His mercies never come to an end. His mercies are new every day for us. God is faithful, even when we are not. So God has been faithful to us in the past, but what about now?

This brings us to our second point - Present Mercy. This is God's mercy that we see each and every day. The stories of the past, remind us about how God relates to us today. With the story of Adam and Eve we are reminded of God's mercy when we fall into temptation. Sometimes we know something is sinful, but we are tempted all the same, and sometimes it leads to sin. But when we turn to God, repent, and asking for forgiveness, He has mercy on us. He comes to us with arms open wide, ready to forgive. He covers our shame with his grace, reminding us our sins have been forgiven, that Christ died in our place, and that we are clothed with His righteousness. Let us not run from God, but instead run to Him, turning away from sin and towards God, into His arms of mercy!

As we remember the story of David and his sin against Bathsheba we are reminded that sometimes God uses others to show mercy and grace towards us. After David had sinned, tried to cover it up, God sent Nathan the prophet to confront him. Just like this, God sometimes sends people into our lives to confront our sin and ultimately show God's mercy to us. I remember a situation when I was in my early 20's when a friend confronted me on a movie I was watching. He had come in at a particularly point in the movie which was filled with violence. He confronted me on what view chose and I was so convicted. God showed His mercy to me through my friend, and that changed my viewing habits for life. This is God's mercy to us. Even when we don't realize or acknowledge our sin, He still purses us, calling us to turn to Him and repent.

In the story of Israel we are reminded of God's constant mercy to us, even when we find ourselves caught in the same sin over and over again. We were reminded of God's constant, ongoing mercy towards them. And this should bring us great comfort. Probably like me, you have one or two sins you just can't seem to shake. It feels like you are stuck in a cycle of sin, repentance and then sinning again. If that's you today, God wants to remind you of His unfailing love towards you. Christ death on the cross covered all your sins. Past, present and future. When you feel like you can't keep going, God's mercy continues to rain down on you. His strength continues to sustain you, and let us remember, we can never out-sin God's grace towards us.

Finally the story of the woman caught in adultery is another amazing example of God's mercy even when we are actually caught in sin. He doesn't throw the first stone, or drag us before the judgement seat. Instead Jesus stands in our place. Speaking mercy and love over us. Reminding us again that through the cross our sin has been forgiven. And Psalm 103 reminds us, ...as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:12). God has forgiven our sins, and He will remember them no more. He doesn't grow tired of us, throwing us aside, eventually giving up on us. Instead he reminds us of His love for us seen at the cross.

Listen to how Charles Spurgeon describes it, There is nothing little in God; His mercy is like Himself - it is infinite. You cannot measure it. His mercy is so great that it forgives great sins to great sinners, after great lengths of time, and then gives great favours, and great privileges, and raises us up to great enjoyments in the great heaven of the great God.

You cannot out-sin God's grace. You cannot run from his mercy. You cannot hide from his face. God is always there for you. In every situation, every day, always.

This then leads us onto our final point, Future Mercy. God has promised to be faithful and merciful to us throughout our lives. In Psalm 23 we read Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (Psalms 23:6). Paul reminds us, ...he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6). Sometimes we feel like going our own way, We stay towards the broad road, but God in His mercy shows us again the narrow path, directing our steps like a lamp to our feet. Through God's amazing grace He will keep us until that final day. And His grace continues to renew and strengthen us. When we fall down, God will pick us up. When we run to Him, God forgives. And one day, He will bring about the fulfillment of all things.

Listen to these words from the book of Revelation, Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” (Revelation 21:1–5).

So all of this begs the question, "If God has been so merciful to us, how should we respond to others?" Remember Jesus' words, Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. (Matthew 5:7). Given how merciful God has been to us, how can we be anything but merciful to others? Remember the words of Jesus as He taught us to pray, "Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Matthew 6:11–12). We are called to forgive just as Christ has forgiven us. And even when we are tempted to feel someone else's sin is unforgivable, listen to the words of a well know pastor, "When I become bitter or unforgiving toward others, I'm assuming that the sins of others are more serious than my sins against God. The cross transforms my perspective. Through the cross I realize that no sin committed against me will ever be as serious as the innumerable sins I've committed against God. When we understand how much God has forgiven us, it's not difficult to forgive others."

If we want to know how to become merciful we need to first look deep at our own sinfulness. Only after truly looking at how sinful we are, and how much God has forgiven us will we see what true mercy is. Now its important to remember that 'forgiveness' is not the same as 'reconciliation'. We are called to forgive but sometimes reconciliation isn't possible or even wise. Forgiveness does not call me back into a abusive relationship or dangerous situation. Forgiveness is a heart posture and can be done without putting us in harms way. And I want to acknowledge that sometimes, some people have been sinned against in ways I can not understand. In those saturation forgiveness can be extremely hard. If that's you we'd love to pray and care for you. God understands your pain and has the power to heal and renew.

However for many of us that isn't the case. And we all need to remember that we are sinners saved by grace. Only when we understand this can we fully forgive others and show mercy. When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment He said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." and "Love your neighbour as yourself." (Matthew 22:37–39). To fully love our neighbours, we are called to forgiveness, to show mercy, to show the cross.

So as we begin to wrap things up let us remember, We are blessed as we are merciful to others. Throughout the scriptures God has shown mercy to His people even when they directly rebelled against Him. Through Christ's death on the cross we see God's greatest act of mercy, Jesus, God's own son, taking our sin upon Himself, allowing us to receive God's full forgiveness, and be clothed in Christ's righteousness. God continues to pour out His mercy towards us each day, both in the mundane and the more extreme moments of our lives. And in the final day God will usher in the new Heavens and the new Earth, and we will experience full renewal and restoration.

So by way of application, if you have never put your trust in the saving work of Jesus Christ, today is the day. Myself or anyone here would love to chat to you afterwards if this is something you'd like to do. If you are already saved, this is another chance to thank God for his scandalous grace and ongoing love and mercy toward you. And finally, we are called to forgive, and be merciful to each other. If someone has come to mind while I've been talking this morning, give them a call and start the process of forgiveness. And if that's not possible then just let God know that you've forgiven them, just as He's forgiven you.