

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 5:7 - 5th Beatitude



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the fifth beatitude from Matthew 5, focusing on the theme of compassion. He emphasizes the importance of being moved by compassion towards others, as this is a key aspect of Jesus' teachings. Gregg also explains that how we treat others will ultimately be measured back to us. He concludes by emphasizing the importance of forgiveness and humbly seeking God's mercy.

### Transcript

Today we'll be looking at the fifth beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 5. There are eight altogether, and in the previous days of this study, we have been looking at the first four. The fifth beatitude is found in Matthew 5 and verse 7. Jesus said, Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

There's a strong inference here that only they shall obtain mercy. Now, you might say, well, Jesus doesn't really say that only the merciful will obtain mercy. He just says that merciful people will obtain mercy.

He does not say whether unmerciful people will or not. Well, it is certainly implied that only the merciful shall obtain mercy. Not only implied in this verse, but it is stated outright by Jesus elsewhere.

And it is stated elsewhere in Scripture. In fact, James is the one epistle in the New Testament that quotes the Sermon on the Mount, or alludes to the Sermon on the Mount, more often than any other epistle. In that short epistle, James, in five chapters, alludes to or quotes the Sermon on the Mount at least 20 times.

And one of the places where he does so, he alludes to this beatitude. In James chapter 2, he says in verse 13, For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. That's James 2.13. He's obviously alluding to this beatitude.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. And James says, judgment shall be without mercy to the person who has shown no mercy. And that means, of course, when

you are judged, if you've not been merciful, the judgment that you receive will be without mercy.

Jesus taught that in a number of ways, and maybe we'll have a look at some of them. It also is a concept that is found in the Old Testament, that mercifulness is an attitude and a disposition, and a way of life, which God is pleased to bless, and that the person who is merciful to others is one that God will be merciful to. And so, mercy is something we need to be taking a look at here.

What does it mean to be merciful? Well, mercy is similar, if not identical, to the word compassion. To have mercy towards someone is to have compassion toward them. But we might think of compassion as something that resides in the heart merely.

Where actually, mercy is an active thing. Jesus was asked once what the great commandments were. And one of the commandments, he said, were the great commandment, were to love your neighbors as yourself.

Now, the scribe who asked him the question knew that there were certain people that he himself did not love, and therefore he hoped that they might not be considered neighbors, because God requires him to love his neighbors. And so he was trying to define neighbor in such a way as to exclude his responsibility from loving people whom he could refer to as not his neighbor. So he said to Jesus, well, who is my neighbor then? And Jesus told the story that we all know, which we usually call the story of the Good Samaritan.

Here a man was traveling in a remote region. Thieves fell upon him, beat him up, took his goods, left him for dead. He was in really bad shape, and certain people passed by on the road later and saw him in that condition.

A couple of people passed by without helping him at all, but one man came along and was moved with compassion for him, and practically helped him. He poured oil in his wounds, he bound his wounds, he put him on his own beast and took him to an inn. He paid for him to be lodged and fed there.

This man cared for the needy man. Now, Jesus told the story, and then he said to the scribe, who had initially asked the question, he said, which of these men was a neighbor to him who fell among the thieves? And the answer that was given was, he that showed mercy to him. Now, mercy, what did mercy involve here? It meant dressing the man's wounds.

It meant using your own money to pay for the man to lodge and eat who was in need. In other words, mercy in the Bible refers to something active. Jesus is often spoken of in the Bible as a compassionate person, but there are a half a dozen times or more in the book of Matthew alone where it says of Jesus that he was moved with compassion.

Now, that's an interesting phrase. Compassion is the feeling of mercy, of sympathy, of empathy with somebody. But Jesus was moved with compassion.

If you have compassion in your heart, but it doesn't move you to action, then it's no good. It says in the book of James, if a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you is saying to him, be warmed and filled, but you don't give them the things needful to the body, what does that profit? That's in James chapter 2, it says that. In other words, you may see a person in need and feel some compassion for them, but if you don't do something for them, what good is that? If you have compassion, but it doesn't move you, if you're not moved with compassion, then you are not a merciful person in the sense that the Bible describes normative mercy.

Now, there's two situations or two contexts in which mercy is called for. One is in the context of personal misery, as we've mentioned. That is where a person is poor, a person is needy, a person is afflicted, a person is simply unfortunate.

Now, mercy in that case is shown by helping that person with their need, giving to them if they don't have what they need. Now, of course, there are times when we don't ourselves have enough to help all the persons in need. There are times when our hearts do go out to people that we simply don't have the resources to help.

But at the same time, if you do have the resources, and you don't help, then there is reason to believe that your compassion is deficient. Now, John said in 1 John 3, if you have this world's goods, and you see your brother has need, and you don't help him, how does the love of God dwell in you? Now, notice that condition, if you have this world's goods. So, mercy is seen, first of all, with reference to human misery.

Something practical is to be done for people in need. That's what mercy is. When Jesus saw the multitudes who were hungry, and by the way, they pursued him.

He was traveling across the Sea of Galilee to get away from them so he could get a little bit of R&R, and they pursued him and got to the other side of the lake before he did. And although he was hoping for some respite, when he saw them, it says he was moved with compassion. And so he taught them, he gave of his time, he healed their sick, and later that day he fed them because they were hungry.

Now, that's the compassion in action of Jesus. That's what mercy is. In the Old Testament, it says that he that has mercy on the poor is lending to the Lord, and the Lord will repay him.

In other words, blessed are the merciful, they shall obtain mercy from God. Now, mercy, therefore, is compassion shown in a practical way to persons who have personal need, poverty, sickness, pain, grief, whatever. Human misery needs mercy.

Now, we need mercy too. And when we are in need, when we are poor, when we have a

special thing to which we wish to cry out to God for help, you know, Jesus has said, judgment is without mercy to those who have shown no mercy. If you are not a person who shows mercy to others, then do not expect God to feel some obligation to come to you when you have need of assistance, when you need a handout, when you need healing, when you need something from him.

If you are not a person moved with compassion toward others, then don't expect God to be moved with compassion to you. Now, some might say, well, wait, God's at a higher level than we are. His mercy is unconditional, etc., etc.

No, the Bible does not say His mercy is unconditional. It's quite clearly His mercy is conditioned on your having mercy. Let me read you something Jesus said about that.

In Luke chapter 6, verse 37 and 38, Jesus said, Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

Give, and it shall be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, men will put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

That is the same standard that you use in dealing with other people when they are in need. Well, God will use that standard to deal with you when you're in need. And this is taught not just in a few places in Scripture, but it is the consistent teaching of Scripture.

When people say that God's mercy is unconditional, I do not believe this is true, because Jesus didn't teach that it was true, and the apostles didn't either. Let me tell you the other aspect of mercy. I mentioned that mercy functions in the context of human misery, but there's another time when people need mercy, and that is in the context of human guilt.

When you have done something wrong, you need to be forgiven. And yet, no one owes you forgiveness. God does not owe us forgiveness, and no one else owes you forgiveness.

If you wrong them, well, the standard of justice is an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. If someone strikes you on one cheek, the standard of justice is that you strike them on one cheek. However, if you're merciful, you don't give people what they deserve.

You forgive them. You turn the other cheek. And therefore, when you forgive others, you are extending mercy to them.

And if you forgive others, you see, this is giving them something they don't deserve. You're being compassionate. You're considering, you know, what do I want people to treat me like when I've blown it, when I've committed a sin? What do I want God to treat me like? Well, I had better, if I hope for the mercy of God in forgiving my sins, I need to

forgive other people's sins.

The merciful shall obtain mercy. Now, Jesus taught this in no uncertain terms in many places. We just read a moment ago in Luke chapter 6 where Jesus said, Condemn not, and you will not be condemned.

Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Okay? You forgive. That's being merciful.

You will be forgiven. That is, you will obtain mercy. Now, Jesus stated it in very strong terms in chapter 6 of Matthew when he was talking about prayer.

And he says, among other things, when you pray, say, Forgive us our debts or our sins as we forgive our debtors, that is, those who sinned against us. Now, notice the request. Jesus said to his disciples, Pray like this.

You ask God to forgive you of your sins in the same way that you forgive others their sins against you. Now, that's, you know, do I want God to forgive me in the same way that I forgive others? Well, whether I want to or not, that's exactly what he's going to do. That's what Jesus said.

In fact, after he finished giving this model prayer in Matthew 6, he makes these comments as a tag at the end in verse 14 and 15. This is Matthew 6, verses 14 through 15. Jesus said, For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Quite clear. There's no two ways about it.

God will not forgive you if you don't forgive others. Why? Because your mercy shown to others is a condition that God requires for you to obtain mercy. Now, let me just say something more clearly, because I think people can make a mistake here.

One could get the impression that by showing mercy, you earn mercy from God. That is, that if you forgive others, you have earned God's forgiveness of you. This is not the case.

You can't earn mercy. It's in the very nature of mercy that mercy is undeserved. If it is something that is deserved or earned, it's not in the category of mercy.

So how can mercy be conditional if it's not earned? Quite simply, a person can forgive all they want, but they have not earned any forgiveness from God by doing so. That's not the same thing as God saying, If you don't forgive people, I won't forgive you. You see, God's forgiveness comes to us because He is merciful and He loves to forgive.

He sent His Son to die for our sins so that He would have a good excuse to forgive, so that our sins could be placed on Jesus and God could treat us in a way as if we hadn't committed them. That's what He really wants, is to show mercy. But He can also say,

there are obstacles that will prevent you from obtaining this free gift of mercy.

One of those obstacles is an ungenerous spirit yourself. Now, it doesn't mean that by being generous you earn God's generosity toward you, but it does mean that by being ungenerous, God says, You are not one of those that I choose to show mercy to. God chooses to show mercy to those that are merciful.

But that doesn't mean that if you are merciful, you have somehow a claim on God's mercy because of it. As if now you've done all that is required to pay for it, you don't pay for it by being merciful. You simply qualify for it, or let me put it this way, you simply disqualify if you aren't merciful.

I could say to somebody that I will give them my house so long as they don't turn it into a brothel. Well, someone might say, well, if I don't turn it into a brothel, then I deserve to have your house. No, that's not true.

It's still up to me to give the house to whoever I want to or to withhold it. No one deserves my house just because they're not going to turn it into a brothel. It's mercy or generosity of me to offer it on those terms, but I am stating a term under which they cannot have it.

I'm not saying that by meeting these terms, you deserve to have it. It's simply that you will not obtain it on these terms if you turn it into a brothel. Okay, well, God says, my mercy you cannot earn, but you can certainly disqualify yourself for it.

If you will not show mercy to others, then you will disqualify yourself to receive mercy from me. And this thing Jesus didn't say once or twice, but I find it three or four or five times in the teaching of Jesus, this thing, it's consistently throughout the scripture. It's amazing to me how many Christians seem to think that God's mercy is unconditional.

There obviously are conditions attached that he states, and he states them quite clearly. Look, for example, at Mark chapter 11, verse 25, Jesus said, whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.

Again, a statement could not be more clear, it seems to me. That being merciful in terms of forgiving others is a requirement. That if you do not meet that requirement, God will not forgive you of your trespasses, of your sins.

And therefore, if you are holding resentment, if you have an unresolved bitterness towards somebody that you have not forgiven, if your spirit is not clean towards somebody who has wronged you, then you, according to Jesus Christ, this is not my opinion, this is what Jesus said in the plainest of terms, you will not be forgiven by God of your sins while you remain in this state of mind. Now that may sound strange, but I,

frankly, I don't make this stuff up. As a Bible teacher, I'm not at liberty to make up truth, I'm only here to teach what it says, and that's what it does say.

So you will not be forgiven by God while you are holding outstanding resentment and unforgiveness towards somebody else. Now you might say, but how could I forgive this person? That person has done me so much wrong. I simply can't forgive them.

Well, the point is, a merciful person can forgive and will forgive. It is a choice you make. Now you might say, but I can't stop feeling these resentful feelings toward the person.

Well, you may have to work on that. Feelings don't change instantly, but decisions can be made in a moment. You can decide right now before God that you will forgive whoever it is that you have up till now not forgiven.

You cannot necessarily guarantee that you won't feel some of those old feelings, but you can do this. You can forgive, and then whenever any feelings of resentment reassert themselves, you need to remind yourself that I have forgiven that person because I hope to be forgiven by God. And because I hope in the mercy of God, I will not be less merciful to another person than I hope that God will be to me.

One way you can reason with yourself quite justly is that whatever wrong has been done to you by another is minuscule. Immeasurably small. Negligible compared to the wrong you have done God.

Your sins against God have been a multitude. Your sins against God have been a tremendous affront to Him. You might say, well, I never killed anyone, never robbed any banks.

No, but there's one great commandment. Sin is, the Bible says, sin is the breaking of the law. So the greatest sin is the breaking of the greatest law.

Well, what is the greatest law? Jesus said the greatest commandment is that you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength. And love your neighbors as yourself. Now, let's just take that first one.

Have you loved God every moment of your life with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your might? Of course not. You have not. Well, how many, what percentage of your time have you spent not loving God with all your heart and all your heart? I mean, there may be very little of your time you ever have loved Him completely, and maybe you never have.

But even if you are a lover of God, even if you are a Christian who generally loves God, I dare say you've spent a good portion of your life, not only the part before you were converted, but even a good part of your life since you've been saved, loving things, too, having other gods before Him, having other gods in His presence. You have not loved

Him supremely. Now, if sin is the transgression of the law, and therefore the greatest law, when transgressed, is the greatest sin, then you have committed great sin, and you've committed it regularly and repeatedly and continuously, and it's been an affront to God.

The Bible says God is angry at the wicked every day. You have been a cause of provocation to God every moment that you have not loved Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And if you pretend that you have loved Him with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, it doesn't lessen His anger anymore because He knows better, and so should you.

Now, you've got plenty to account for before God, and yet the Bible says that when you turn humbly to God, and you repent and say, Oh God, be merciful to me, a sinner. God, through Jesus Christ, forgive my sins. Cleanse me by the blood of Jesus that was shed for my sins.

When you turn to God in that humble crying for mercy, His mercy is free and instantaneous. Now, if He can do that for you, who have sinned against Him all your life, can you not have just that modicum of grace and mercy toward the person who has done some harm to you? Even if their harm has been protracted and long-term or has been very severe, it cannot even begin to measure up to the wrongs you've done to God. And yet God has freely forgiven you and will freely forgive you if you call out to Him and if you forgive others.

Blessed are the merciful. They shall obtain mercy. What a blessing that is.

How fortunate those people are who have the mercy of God upon them because all human beings must obtain the mercy of God or perish without it. We all are sinners. We cannot stand before God and say, I have never sinned.

I deserve to go to heaven. All of us are pensioners on the mercy of God. And how blessed are those who obtain it.

David said, and this is perhaps what Jesus is alluding to in Psalm 32, He said, How blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven. How blessed and happy is he against whom God does not impute sin. You're a blessed person if God's mercy is upon you.

If you know for a fact that when you stand before God, you are right with Him because you've repented of your sin, you've cried out to God for mercy, and you are taking Him seriously every moment of every day. And He is your love and He is your confidence. If He is your Lord, then His mercy will be upon you.

But if He is your Lord, you must forgive. And if you do not forgive, He will not forgive you. So said Jesus.



James said it this way, Judgment is without mercy to those who show no mercy. Jesus put it this way, more positively, Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Mercy is exhibited in positive acts of compassion, both toward people in misery who can be helped and toward people who are in guilt who need to be forgiven.

We need both from God. And we need to extend both to others, or else we shall not have it from God. Thanks for joining us today.

We'll take this up again tomorrow.