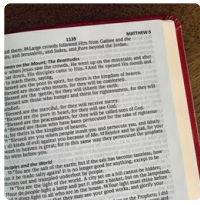


# OpenTheo

## The Merciful (Part 1)



### The Beatitudes - Steve Gregg

In "The Merciful (Part 1)" by Steve Gregg, the speaker discusses the importance of mercy and its biblical roots. He explains that being merciful means forgiving others and extending grace, just as we have received mercy from God. Gregg emphasizes the practical implications of showing mercy, such as being charitable and patient with others. He concludes by noting that mercy is essential for obtaining mercy from God.

## Transcript

Let's turn to Matthew chapter 5 once more. This is the text for this entire series of studies in The Beatitudes. Matthew chapter 5 contains the most complete list of The Beatitudes.

There are shorter... well, there's a shorter list of Beatitudes in Luke 6, and there are other scattered Beatitudes in the ministry of Jesus and elsewhere in the scriptures. But this particular cluster of statements, Jesus chose, apparently, to introduce the greatest sermon ever preached in the estimation of many, and that is what we usually call the Sermon on the Mount, because Jesus was seated on a mountain when he addressed his disciples with these words. This set of Beatitudes, in some respects, is a summary of the entire sermon.

I have often been strongly tempted to try to find some way to artificially make the successive paragraphs of the sermon unpack the successive Beatitudes, but it doesn't work quite that neatly. It isn't quite so tidy as that, but it is the case, nonetheless, that the things that Jesus says in these statements are generally clarified, amplified, illustrated, and driven home in the remainder of the sermon. As we shall see, especially in tonight's Beatitude, very much of what we find in this fifth Beatitude is expanded upon and amplified and illustrated in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount.

It is Matthew 5, 7 that we're looking at tonight. It says, Now, all of the Beatitudes have their origins in the thought of the Old Testament. That is to say, Jesus didn't originate any novel ideas in these Beatitudes.

Some of them are little more than just a restatement of a verse of the Old Testament

Scripture. Others summarize what was taught in the Old Testament. Jesus was a great teacher, but innovative teaching was not his specialty.

He didn't innovate anything. Everything he taught had been taught before. You can find every teaching of Christ in the Old Testament, whether in the Psalms or in the Proverbs, in the Law, or in the Prophets.

And this particular statement, Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy, is very much a theme that runs throughout the Old Testament, as we shall see, and the New. Mercy is a very important thought, and we have in other series on these Friday nights talked about mercy. For example, when we were talking about cultivating Christian character, we have a study in that series where mercy was somewhat discussed.

I don't intend to duplicate tonight what was said there. I want to talk about the Beatitude itself and what Jesus is trying to get across here. Now, when Jesus said, Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

This sentence is structured like all the Beatitudes. A certain class of people are said to be or they are pronounced to be blessed. And it is said why they are blessed.

Now, in every case, the group that is spoken of, whether it's the poor in spirit or those who mourn or those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, whatever group it is. There is some privilege that is said to belong to them, and it can be said that that privilege not only accrues to them, but it accrues only to them. That does not accrue to others.

It is not as if the kingdom of God is going to belong to the poor in spirit and to those who are not poor in spirit, too. It is not the case that those who do not mourn shall be comforted along with those who do mourn. And it certainly is not the case that the unmerciful will obtain mercy along with the merciful.

When Jesus said, Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy, he could have as easily said, and many other statements of Scripture as much as say it, Blessed are the merciful, for they alone shall obtain mercy. The unmerciful will not. James said, Judgment shall be without mercy for him who has showed no mercy.

And of course, James was alluding to this beatitude, as James alludes frequently to the Sermon on the Mount in his epistle. But judgment shall be without mercy to those who have shown mercy. Now, we need to take those things into consideration when we form our theology of salvation, because it's so much a temptation to package a salvation message neatly and attractively that can be memorized by a child in a few minutes time.

And this for the sake of mass soul winning and so forth. And I grew up in not only an evangelical Christian home, but in an evangelistically oriented home, very much wanting to see people saved and very actively trying to get them saved in my, even in grammar

school, but especially in high school and junior high. I tried to get people saved, but I must confess that the gospel message as I was taught it did not contain this element.

And as I presented it, it did not either. The gospel, as I understood it, was something like, you know, you need to accept Jesus into your heart so you can go to heaven and be saved. But mercy from God is conditional.

And the Bible didn't say it's conditional upon accepting Jesus into your heart. As a matter of fact, accepting Jesus in your heart is not even mentioned in scripture. The concept is not.

Well, if the concept is there, it's disguised in other words, because there is no there is actually no place in the Bible that speaks of inviting Jesus into your heart. Unless, of course, it's the famous verse in Revelation three, 20. Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

But it's very questionable whether he's knocking at a heart's door there. It's the church door, you know, likelihood that he's knocking at that. But in any case, we have often soft peddled the gospel and not made it clear to people that in order to have a relationship with God that saves, you must have a transformation of your attitudes and a transformation of behaviors.

Now, you don't get saved by changing your behavior. You get saved by repenting of your sins and believing on Jesus Christ who forgives your sins. But when it comes to obtaining mercy, it's not just a one shot deal.

You don't just obtain mercy one time and then it's all over. You know, you've got mercy for the rest of your life. It's very clear in Scripture that you can obtain mercy on one occasion, but because of unmercifulness at a later time.

Lose it. This is taught by Jesus as well as the other voices in Scripture, but none is so authoritative as that of Jesus. If you look at Matthew 18, this is not even in your notes.

I sometimes ignore the notes altogether, but I will not ignore them through the entire message. I do want to go through them in Matthew 18, beginning at verse 21. It says Peter came to Jesus and said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me? And I forgive him up to seven times.

And Jesus said to him, I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to 70 times seven. Therefore, Jesus said, the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents.

This amount of money is an incredibly large amount of money. There are different authorities that give different values to a talent. For instance, if it's a talent of silver,

obviously a talent is a measurement of weight.

So obviously a talent of silver would be a very different amount than a talent of gold. But this 10,000 talents is said by most to be equivalent to millions of dollars. This is a huge, huge debt, which the ordinary person could never pay.

And it says, but as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold and his wife and children and all that he had and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, Master, have patience with me and I'll pay you all. Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.

There's no question this man received mercy. He didn't even ask for mercy. He said, just give me time and I'll pay the debt.

The king says, forget it. I'll just forget the whole thing. Can you imagine the weight that would be off of that servant's shoulders walking in before his king? The king says, OK, you owe me a few million bucks, as I recall.

And if you can't pay, I'm going to sell your wife and your children, you into slavery. It's going to change your life big time. And he says, you know, you know, suddenly his whole life, you know, flashes before his eyes and it's all over now.

And he says, please give me some time. And he says, how about if I just forgive the whole debt? It's gone. You don't owe me anything.

Can you imagine the relief that would be felt by that guy receiving that mercy? Obviously, I mean, Jesus intends that this is a picture of us receiving mercy from God. We have been forgiven by God. But then, of course, it goes on.

It says, then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him and forgave him the debt. Verse 28. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 denarii, which is only a small amount of money.

I think someone said around 50 bucks. I'm not sure of the exact amount. It doesn't matter for the sake of the illustration.

And he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, pay me what you owe. So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, have patience with me. I'll pay you all.

And he would not, but went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servant saw what had been done, they were very grieved and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you begged me.

Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you? And his master was angry and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due him. Then Jesus says this. So my heavenly father also will do to you if each of you from his heart does not forgive his brother his trespasses.

Now, here's a man who obtained mercy. Was this person a Christian in the terms of the illustration of her? Was he was he say, was he forgiven? Well, what did the master say in verse 30 or verse 31? Actually, it's further down than I thought in verse 32. Then his master, after he had called him, said, you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt.

Was he forgiven? Yes, he was. He was a forgiven person. His debt had been forgiven.

He owed nothing. He was a free man. He was saved.

He was justified. He obtained mercy, but he didn't just put that mercy in his back pocket and carry it the rest of his life and go to heaven with it. As a matter of fact, he didn't seem to get there.

He was forgiven, but he did not show mercy when he had opportunity to do so. He refused to show mercy. And it says in James, based on this beatitude, we're saying tonight judgment will be without mercy for those who have shown no mercy.

And this man showed no mercy. And so what the king do? He called him back and said, I forgave you, but I'm not forgiving you again. I'm going to I have not forgotten your debt.

I'm going to put it back on you. You're back in debt to me and you're going to debtor's prison until you can pay it off. Now, that story is is pretty scary in itself.

But, you know, some some parables. You can't take every detail of them, you know, as an illustration of a spiritual truth. There are some parables that it's a long story with one one thing in it that illustrates one truth.

And the rest is all stage scenery in the parable. However, if we wonder what is the message, what is the spiritual truth that Jesus wants us to get from this parable? He doesn't leave it in enshrouded in mystery at all. He tells us as soon as he finishes the story, said this is what my father will do to you.

What? This man gave the governor's tort to the torturers and said, you are not forgiven anymore. You obtain mercy, but you didn't show mercy. So you have lost mercy.

Now, if that somehow tweaks our understanding of theology about salvation, let Jesus be the one to tweak it. I mean, let there be none less than Jesus as an authority to shape our understanding. Now, there is plenty in Jesus teaching and in the rest of Scripture to convey this.

Now, let's talk, first of all, about our need for mercy, because Jesus said the merciful shall obtain mercy. Do I really care to obtain mercy? Is that really is that a good incentive to me to be merciful? Do I need to be do I need to obtain mercy for anything? What do I need mercy for? Well, we we have a debt just like this man had a huge debt he could not pay to his king in the Sermon on the Mount. And also later on in verse in chapter six and verse twelve, Jesus instructs us to pray apparently on a regular basis because the model prairies is when you pray, pray in this manner.

How often does he want us to pray? Just once, twice in our lifetime? No. In one place, he said men ought always to pray and never to think. So whenever you pray, pray like this.

And among the things you should be praying on an ongoing basis is forgive us our debts as we forgive those who are indebted to us. We are entitled by Christ's decree to pray for forgiveness on a daily basis. Apparently we need it on a daily basis.

However, we are only commissioned, only authorized to ask for forgiveness conditional on what? As we forgive. Only the merciful can obtain mercy. Now, you might say, well, it's not Steve like you're saying.

You're talking about being saved by works. No, you're being you're saved by mercy. Showing mercy to others is not works.

It's grace. If you've obtained grace, then you should possess grace. You should be graceful.

You should be gracious. A person who has no grace hasn't received any, has he? Many people claim that they're saved by grace, but they don't have any grace. So how can they be saved by it? Now, some might think, well, Steve, you're manipulating this.

When we say we're saved by grace, we mean we're saved by God's grace toward us. OK, I agree. That's exactly right.

But on what authority do we cut out the rest of what the Bible teaches that once we have received grace, we are to be people of grace. We're to be people animated by grace. So that as we have obtained mercy, we extend mercy as naturally.

As God did toward us. And you say, well, that sounds like a hard thing to do. The disciples said that to, you know, Jesus said over in Luke 17, if your brother sins against you seven times in one day and seven times he comes, says, I repent, forgive him.

And you know what the disciples said? Lord, increase our faith. They cast out demons, healed the sick, raised the dead. Before this, they'd seen everything.

But when you said forgive your brother seven times a day, they said, Lord, you better increase our faith for that. He didn't say they didn't increase our works because it's not a

matter of works to forgive. It's a matter of faith.

Do you believe that God has forgiven you? How could you not forgive someone else? How could you not extend mercy? We are indebted to God. And Jesus said we are authorized by him to pray, forgive us our debts and to apparently expect that forgiveness. But what if somebody is indebted to me? And in this case, I'm not thinking in terms of financial debt, although we could not exclude that entirely from consideration in terms of showing mercy.

But but of course, our debt to God is not a financial one. We say forgive us our debts. It doesn't mean that we owe God money like we haven't paid our tithes for a few weeks or something, you know, so forgive us our tithe debt.

Now, he's talking about our indebtedness to God in that we owe it to God to give him what he's got, what he what he deserves from us. What does he deserve? Well, he observes our full obedience. We are his people.

We're the sheep of his pasture. It is he that has made us, not we ourselves. He owns us.

He deserves to be obeyed all the time. Jesus said, why do you call me Lord? Lord, you don't do the things that I say. What we owe God is perfect obedience and nothing less.

And if we have not given him perfect obedience, if there's been any one moment of any day of your life where you did not love the Lord, you've got all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and all your mind, which is the great commandment. And where you did not love your neighbors, you love yourself. Then you have broken his commandments.

You are indebted to him. How are you going to pay that debt back? You can't. Like that man in this parable.

He had a debt that was millions of dollars. He could never pay it in a lifetime. Neither could you.

You can't pay the debt you owe to God. So what do we do? We say what Jesus said to say, forgive us our debts. Forgive us of this infraction, this violation of your rights.

God, you have rights to us that we have violated. We have violated your rights by not obeying you all the time. Forgive us this debt.

In just the same manner as we forgive people their debts to us. Now, their debts to us might be financial, but might not be. If a person borrows money from you, do you have to automatically forgive them that debt? Not really.

Although if they asked you to, that would be something seriously to consider. In fact, I would dare say that if anyone asked me to forgive them a debt that they owed me, I

could not withhold that forgiveness of that debt. I've been forgiven too much by God to withhold that.

Although, of course, forgiving your brother in most instances is not a financial transaction. It's more often that you think they owe you more deference. They didn't honor your privileges and rights.

They didn't do what you thought they should do to please you. And they wronged you. They committed some injustice against you, some cruelty, some violation of your trust.

And in that you feel that they are indebted to you because they did not pay you what they owe you, which is good behavior. They owe it to you to treat you good. And therefore, you're holding the I owe you against them.

But we are to forgive them if we are to be forgiven by God. Now, what does God owe us? We owe God something, but we can't pay it. What does God owe us? Well, He owes us our wages.

God's not one of those unjust employers. The Bible always speaks harshly of employers who withhold wages. Well, God always will see to it that we will receive our wages.

And since we have violated His commandments, we have sinned. And the Bible says the wages of sin is death. So that's what God owes us.

Of course, everyone knows that from Romans 6.23. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. But what we owe God is perfect obedience. What He owes us is death because we haven't paid that debt.

We deserve to die. We deserve not only to die, but to go to hell. And the Bible says the soul that sins, it shall die.

Or the wages of sin is death. It is talking about a spiritual condition. It's not merely talking about physical death.

Because even righteous people who are forgiven still physically die. Even after God forgives you your sins, you'll still physically die. That's not the death that is the wages of sin.

Because once you've been forgiven, you don't have to pay those wages. Or be paid them. God owes it to us to send us to hell.

Unless, of course, He can forgive us. And that's, of course, what He managed to do. In sending Jesus and putting Him forth as a propitiation for our sins.

To cover as a sacrifice of atonement. So that He could be just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus. Now, do we need mercy? Absolutely.



We have an unpayable debt. And all that we are owed, unless we obtain mercy, is damnation. We deserve to go to hell.

Every one of us. If anyone here doesn't believe that they deserve to go to hell. You're in serious trouble.

Because in order to come to Christ, you have to really believe that you need Him. You have to be a beggar in spirit. Poor in spirit.

You have to know that you're in desperate condition. A. W. Tozer said, Anybody who really and truly believes that he deserves to go to hell probably won't end up there. But he says, it's a guarantee that anyone who believes he deserves to go to heaven won't end up there.

If you think you deserve to go to hell and really believe that, you could still end up there. But you probably won't. Because you will cry out to God for mercy if that weighs upon your conscience.

As much as it would to a rational person. You'd probably cry out to God for mercy. But anyone who thinks they deserve better than hell, they're not going to get any better than hell.

There is no mercy for those who are not poor in spirit either. But once we have obtained forgiveness. Once God has given us mercy.

We need continuous mercy. Unless we can live the rest of our lives without ever sinning again. And I haven't met anyone who's done that.

I've met some people who claim that they've gone a long time without sinning. And maybe they've gone longer than I have without sinning. That's a good possibility.

But I haven't met anyone who's convinced me that they haven't sinned for seven years. Although I've heard people say they haven't sinned for seven years. They're usually redefining sin in order to be able to make that statement.

And I wouldn't want to redefine sin in order to try to decide whether I'm sinning or not. I'd rather go by God's definitions. Because on the day of judgment, that's the one that's going to count.

Well, the principle that if I do not show mercy. That I will not continue to benefit from mercy from God. Is taught in many places in scripture.

Let me just give you a few scriptures initially about this principle of reciprocity as we could call it. And then I want to talk about what mercy is and how it is shown to others. How we show mercy.

How we are to be merciful. In Luke chapter 6, we have something like a parallel to the Sermon on the Mount. And in verse 31, Jesus said, And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.

We recognize that as the parallel of Matthew 7.12. Sometimes called the Golden Rule. But to expand on that in terms of human relations. If you look at verse 37.

Jesus said, this is Luke 6.37. 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 will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, run over, women put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

This is a principle that Jesus states. The way you measure it out to others. What you dish out to them.

And in whatever implement you do so. Whatever size spoon you use to dish out your treatment of others. That same size spoon will be used to dish it back out on you by God.

And therefore, he says, if you don't judge others unrighteously, then you won't be judged unrighteously. If you don't condemn others, you won't be condemned. If you forgive, you'll be forgiven.

Now, you might say, well, see, that's a really strange doctrine of salvation, it seems to me. Because where does the whole idea of, you know, you have to believe in Jesus come in? Well, it underlies the whole thing. You cannot live a life of graciousness toward others unless you have obtained grace.

And that grace comes through faith in Jesus. Only after you've really become a Christian. Do you have the spirit of grace dwelling in you? Who can truly make you forgive as you hope to be forgiven.

If you are not regenerated, you only have a wicked, self-centered heart. And any appearance of generosity and mercy on your part is manipulated, is self-serving. There are many people who are not regenerated who seem very generous and very kind and very merciful to other people.

But the Bible indicates that unless they've got a new heart, they're still operating on their old heart. Which can only do things that are self-centered. And you can count on it.

They are showing kindness to others because they're manipulating the situation. Maybe they've learned to do this as a habit. Maybe they seem like they're always generous and nice.

But that's the way they manipulate people so that they get what they want. To have the

kind of forgiveness that has no strings attached. That just forgives and shows mercy and is gracious in the same way we hope God is toward us.

Requires that we have a new heart. We have to be regenerated through faith. We have faith in Christ.

He gives us a new heart, but a new heart is new. And it operates differently than the old one. The old one was totally self-centered.

And if someone violated our rights, we couldn't help but be angry or irritated. Even if we learned to conceal it because it was not socially acceptable to manifest our hostility. But only by receiving the love of Jesus through regeneration can we possibly be merciful in the sense that we must be merciful to others.

If we want God to be merciful to us, it's a reciprocal thing. I've several times quoted already tonight James 2.13. It's in your notes there. James said judgment shall be without mercy for those who have shown no mercy, for him that has shown no mercy.

So, I mean, that's pretty clear. And he's obviously reframing the statement in this beatitude that we're studying tonight. In Revelation, we have some examples of this reciprocal principle in God sending his wrath upon the wicked in these visions.

John has recorded for us. In Revelation 16 in verses 5 through 7, after the rivers and springs of water are turned to blood, he says, I heard the angel of the water say, you are righteous, O Lord, the one who is and who was and who is to be, because you have judged these things, for they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due.

And I heard another from the altar saying, even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are your judgments. God gives people, really, what is just. Unless you, of course, receive mercy.

But he has already made it clear, you receive mercy only if you are also a merciful person. In Revelation 18, verses 6 through 8, this is with reference to the judgment of Babylon. It says, an angel or some voice in heaven cried out these words, render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works.

In the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her. In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow. For she says in her heart, I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and I will not see any sorrow.

Therefore, her plagues will come in one day, death and mourning and famine. She will be utterly burned with fire, et cetera, et cetera. Now, the same measure that she used to treat others will be measured back to her, only double in this case.

But Jesus said the measure that you use will be used to measure back to you. God reciprocates in kind. In Matthew 25, we have that well-known parable, the sheep and the goats.

And the sheep are those people who are saved. And they go into eternal life after this judgment that is described here in this parable. The goats are not saved, and they go into everlasting fire at the end of this parable.

But the distinction between the sheep and the goats is described in an interesting manner. Jesus, when he taught, was apparently not aware of our evangelical norms of presenting the gospel. Because he never did it quite the way that is popular to do today.

He did not say, for example, Then shall the judge say to the sheep on his right hand, Enter into the joy of your Lord, because you believed in Jesus Christ and said the sinner's prayer. And to the goats he'll say, You neglected to believe in Jesus Christ and neglected to say the sinner's prayer. He doesn't even talk about that issue.

He says to the sheep, he says, I was hungry and you fed me. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick or in prison and you visited me.

I was homeless and you took me in. And they'll say, when did all this happen? And he'll say, well, inasmuch as you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it to me. That is, as you were showing mercy to the needy, you were doing that to me.

And therefore, I welcome you into my home now. And to those who are the goats, he says, I was naked, you didn't clothe me. Hungry, you didn't feed me.

Homeless, and you didn't take me in. And they'll say, we don't recall seeing you in those conditions and failing to minister to you. He says, well, inasmuch as you didn't do it to the least of these, you didn't do it to me.

What is this? What's the difference in these two categories? Some were merciful. Some were unmerciful. Now, once again, we don't expect every aspect of the theology of salvation to appear in every comment on it, in every parable.

Jesus is not denying here that we're saved by faith. But he is making it very clear. We will be judged by works.

And by the way, that is stated by every author in the New Testament, practically, that we will be judged by our works. And Christians say, I don't understand. How can I be saved by my faith, but I'll be judged by my works? Quite simply, because faith produces works.

The kind of works that you do consistently show whether you have faith or not. It's an infallible test. On the Day of Judgment, many will no doubt say, well, God, you know, I

had faith.

I heard the gospel and I believed it. I believed the Bible. I went to church.

And he'll say, well, I never recognized you. And they, if that's all that there is to it, they're going to say, well, this is unfair. I thought I was saved by faith.

And those people over there, they're saved by faith. Why am I not saved by my faith? Well, God, he ought to have just said, well, let's take a look at what you did. We'll see whether you had faith or not.

Because if a man says he has faith and has not works, his faith can't save him, said James. Or Paul said the same kind of thing. Paul said it's not circumcision or uncircumcision that saves a man.

It's faith that works through love. The faith that works. The faith that produces behavior.

There's no behavior. There's no faith. And therefore, the sheep and the goats are judged for their behavior.

They are saved. Those are the ones that are saved are saved by their faith. But their faith was manifest in behavior.

And that particular behavior was mercy and generosity and compassion on those in need. And this is consistently taught throughout Scripture. Mercy is certainly not an innovative concept for Jesus to introduce.

It was one of the primary concepts of the Old Testament. Along with justice, justice and mercy very closely linked in the Old Testament Scriptures and the new. But it is definitely on God's short list of mandatory things that he requires of people.

Mercy. In Micah 6, 8. The prophet says he has showed you, oh man, what is good and what the law requires of you. It's not really that long a list of things.

Just before, by the way, he says this in the earlier verses, the first seven verses of Micah chapter six. The Jewish people against whom God's complaint has been registered by the prophet. They they they ask, well, what does God require me anyway? Does he want to bring ten thousands of rams to sacrifice to him? Should I sacrifice my firstborn to him? Does he want me to bring rivers of oil and offer them to him? These were all sarcastic remarks as if to suggest, you know, God's unreasonable.

What does he want me to give more than I can give? And it's in answer to those questions that Micah says in chapter six and verse eight. He has already showed you, oh man, what is good and what he requires of you. And it's really quite simple.

There's three things to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Those three things. That's it.

To do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly. Hosea. In a similar kind of vein, in chapter six and verse six quotes, God is saying, I will have mercy or I desire mercy rather than sacrifice.

More than simply to offer sacrifices. God desires that you be merciful. Jesus quoted that that verse in Hosea six, six, twice in his ministry that we know of.

Once when he was eating with the tax collectors and sinners in the house of Levi, the publican, and the Pharisees were outside grumbling. And apparently they may have spoken to some of Jesus disciples. But he said, why does he eat with with tax collectors and sinners? And Jesus, knowing what they're saying, he turned them said he said, well, those who are well do not need a physician, but those who are sick.

But he said to them, go and learn what this means. I will have mercy and not sacrifice. He's quoting Hosea six, six.

Interestingly, he said to the Pharisees, go and learn what that means, because that was their own phrase that they would use in chastising someone for being apparently ignorant of what the scripture said. When someone asked them a question that the Pharisees thought was a particularly dumb question, they preface their answer, saying, go and learn what this means and quote some scripture. Well, Jesus turns to the Pharisees, the scripture experts themselves, says you better go and learn what this means.

God said, I will have mercy rather than sacrifice. And then that's in Matthew nine, three chapters later, Matthew twelve. They're criticizing the disciples because because they're picking grain on the Sabbath and eating it, rubbing it in their hands, eating it.

And Jesus comes to his disciples rescue. And he says to the Pharisees, if you had learned what this means, I will have mercy, not sacrifice. You would have not condemned the guiltless.

He quotes that twice. And they didn't learn what it meant. He first says, go and learn what that means.

If you had gone and learned what that meant, like I told you to, you wouldn't be making the same mistake again. They made the same mistake many times because their religion was one of ritualism, externalism, sacrifice, ceremonial cleanness and uncleanness, festivals and rituals and so forth. And Jesus said, don't you ever read your own scriptures? God said he cares more about mercy than he cares about this whole sacrificial system.

It's not new with Jesus. It's an emphasis in the Old Testament. In Jesus, though, it is

found also in Matthew twenty three, twenty three, when he rebukes the Pharisees again, he says, you hypocrites.

He says, you actually paid tithes of mint and anise and cumin and you neglect the weightier matters of the law, like justice and mercy and faithfulness. Whenever there's a short list of things important to God in the Bible, mercy always makes the final cut. It's always in the short list.

It's always one of the very top priorities. And no wonder if you cannot obtain mercy from God without being merciful. No wonder God so frequently emphasizes his demand that you be merciful.

Well, what is mercy anyway? Mercy, I think we have I think we have probably the very best biblical answer to that question. In the example frequently of Jesus in the Gospels, there's a phrase that occurs again and again. It's especially in Matthew, but it's also kind of Mark.

And that is the expression moved with compassion. Jesus moved with compassion. In fact, in that parable we read in Matthew 18, just at the beginning, it says the king, when the man fell down, said, give me time, I'll pay off.

It says the king was moved with compassion and he forgave him the debt. Jesus on one occasion was moved with compassion, so he fed the multitudes. He was moved with compassion, so he healed their sick.

He was moved with compassion, so he did things that they needed done for them. Now, this expression moved with compassion, I've given you in your notes all the occurrences of it in the Matthew and Mark. But the expression is a really interesting and helpful one because there's two parts to it.

There's the compassion, and that's a feeling. Compassion is a feeling. The English word compassion comes from two particles.

Com from the Latin means with, and passion means suffering. And that's why we call Easter week Passion Week. It's the week of suffering for Jesus.

Compassion means to suffer with. But when you have compassion, you're not necessarily physically suffering with someone. It's a sympathy.

It's an empathy that you feel toward them. You feel pity for them. You suffer affliction in your heart.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians chapter 10, I believe it was, he said, in addition to all the afflictions of beatings and shipwrecks and all that other stuff I've suffered, he says besides all this, there's that which I experience daily, the care of the churches. He says,

who stumbles and I don't burn. He has compassion.

He feels sorrow for those who are fallen. He feels sorrow for those who are lost. To feel pity is compassion.

But Jesus didn't just have compassion. The Bible says he was moved with compassion. And it's one thing to have a feeling.

It's another thing to let that feeling move you to action. Jesus moved, and his motions were animated by his compassion. To be a merciful person, as Jesus is, is to be moved with compassion.

It's not enough just to feel something. Compassion without action is not mercy. You know in the story of the so-called good Samaritan, this guy was traveling from Jericho to Jerusalem, or from Jerusalem to Jericho, I forget which direction he was going.

I think he was going down to Jericho. And he fell among thieves, got beat up, got robbed, was left half dead, half naked. And a priest went by, a Levite, and they saw him in that condition.

They didn't do anything. Now, did they feel anything? I don't know. We've seen too many dramatizations in kids' books and so forth.

It's sort of like imagining what the innkeeper in the Christmas story was thinking. He's not even in the Bible, but every Christmas play has the innkeeper in it. There's not even an innkeeper mentioned in the Nativity stories.

But likewise, did the priest or the Levite, when they saw this guy, did they feel something? We don't know. I mean, the story is made up. But certainly, we are not required to believe that they felt no compassion.

What is significant is they did nothing. They may have felt a great deal of pity, but they didn't do anything. Then comes a man, and we don't read about his feelings, we read about what he did.

He poured oil in the man's wounds. He wrapped his wounds. He put them on his own beast.

He went and paid for his lodging. He took care of him. And at the end of the story, Jesus said to the person who had asked Him the question that had led to giving this parable, He said, Now which of these three men was a neighbor to him that fell among thieves? And the answer was, he that had mercy on him.

That's the wording of the answer. The one who had mercy on him. Well, what was mercy? Mercy wasn't just feeling pity.



It's possible that the priest and the Levite had that kind of mercy. The man who did something practical to help him, that was the one who showed mercy to him. To be merciful means more than just feeling something.

James said in James chapter 2 and verses 15 and 16, he said, If a man has faith and has not works, what does it profit? He says, if a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say to them, depart in peace, be warmed and filled, notwithstanding you give him not the things that are needful to the body, what does it profit? In other words, you may wish him well, but if you do nothing for him when you're in a position to help, then it doesn't profit. Your faith has no works. That's what he's saying.

It's interesting that that illustration is given in the context of, if a man says he has faith and has no works, because the works are works of mercy, and they are the proof that faith is genuine. Says James and certainly agrees with the rest of Scripture. In 1 John chapter 3, we have a similar kind of scenario, similar kind of illustration given by a different writer.

But in 1 John chapter 3 and verses 17 and 18, John said, But whosoever has this world's goods and sees his brother in need and shuts up his heart from him, his heart feels something, but he kind of closes the door so his heart doesn't spur him to any kind of action. He does nothing for the person. He says, How does the love of God abide in that man? Then he says, My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

It's an active thing to love. If you see your brother have need and you have the wherewithal to help him, and you don't allow yourself to help him, that's not mercy. How does the love of God dwell in you? It doesn't, is what's implied.

Now, just as to have compassion without action is not acceptable to God, likewise to have action without the right motivation of mercy is not acceptable to God. That's what Jesus says in the beginning of Matthew chapter 6, when he talks about giving your alms to the poor. He talks about doing your charitable giving.

Certainly that's an act of mercy, is it not? Well, here's what Jesus says on it in Matthew 6, 1. Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men to be seen by them. If you do it to be seen by them, that's your motivation. What are you doing? Charitable deeds.

You're showing mercy, are you not? It's merciful actions. But you're doing it for the wrong motivation. You're not really moved with compassion.

You're moved by a desire to be recognized by men. That's not acceptable. He says, if you do it, otherwise you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

In other words, God is not paying attention. Or if he's paying attention, he's not approving. And he goes on to give an example of giving in such a way that your left hand doesn't know what your right hand is doing.

The idea is to make pains to avoid wrong motivation in your acts of charity. Just as it is wrong to feel pity and do nothing, it's wrong to do something but without the pity, without the true motivation. Remember what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13? If I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, that's mercy.

But do not have love, that's the motivation. It's nothing. It counts for nothing.

I am nothing. So, the motivation has to be right and the action has to fit the motivation. It has to suit the profession of compassion.

You can talk about compassion, but if you show no compassion, if you do nothing for those who are, toward whom you have this pity, then it's not normative. It's not what the Bible is calling us to do. It's not being the merciful person.

Mercy has very practical ramifications. In Proverbs 15, in verse 8, it says, The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight. The sacrifice of the abomination, if you make some kind of sacrificial gift to the poor, but your heart is not motivated right, it's an abomination to God.

Many people offer sacrificial gifts when pressured under some kind of an appeal. But, if their heart is not in it, if they say, well, they better appreciate that I'm giving this kind of money, or something else. If it's not something given out of pure mercy and love and compassion, it is not acceptable.

It's a sacrifice, but it's not an acceptable sacrifice. Likewise, a similar verse in Proverbs 21, 27. It says, The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination.

How much more when he brings it with a wicked intent? Bringing a sacrifice to God, giving something material up for the sake of some godly purpose to help the poor, let's say. If it's done with evil intent, it's not acceptable. It's an abomination to God.

An abomination is a strong word, not a weak one. Now, what is mercy then? It's being moved with compassion. You have to have the compassion and you have to be moved.

Or else you're not merciful in the biblical sense. Mercy also is an action that always involves the surrender of personal rights or privileges. This is illustrated by the teaching of Jesus later in the Sermon on the Mount.

Later in the same chapter, actually. Matthew, chapter 5. And verses 38 through 42. Jesus said, You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

But I tell you not to resist an evil person, but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn

the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him too.

And give to him who asks you and turn, excuse me, from him who wants to borrow from you, do not turn away. What is this saying? This is saying you need to be merciful. You see a poor man, he asks you for money, help him.

You see a man who needs you to carry something for him for a mile, help him. You can't go two miles. If someone feels like you owe them something, they're going to sue you for it, give them what they think you owe them.

And give them more than what they think you owe them. If someone is aggressive towards you and you deserve to hit them back, you can give up your rights and let them hit you again. This is mercy.

Now, this isn't all there is to mercy. Mercy isn't just standing there and becoming a human punching bag. But mercy does mean this, that to be merciful as Jesus is, you are not defensive of your rights.

Jesus said you've heard that it was said an eye for an eye, truth for truth. This is the legal code of Israel. It's the most righteous law that's ever given to anyone.

It means that if someone knocks your tooth out, you deserve to knock his tooth out. If he knocks your eye out, you have the right to knock his eye out. In the court of law in Israel, they would allow this.

It was considered to be your right. But if instead of striking back, you turn the other cheek, what are you doing? You're giving up your right. You're surrendering that right in order to be merciful.

Instead of giving him what he deserves, you give him better than what he deserves. That's mercy. And that mercy costs you something.

It costs you your other cheek. If he's after your coat and you give him your coat too, it costs you something. He doesn't have the right.

He might have the right to your coat. He at least thinks he does or else he wouldn't take you to court. Maybe he's right.

Maybe he does have the right. But he certainly doesn't have the right to your coat. Give him that too.

Mercy is a disposition of surrendering rights. Someone asks you for money. Well, you've got the right to spend your money.

You earned it. It's yours honestly. No one has the right to take it from you unless it's in

exchange for goods or services.

I mean, no one has the right to just walk up and say, give me your money. But when someone says, you got any money? And Jesus says, give to him that asks you. What's he saying? You've got a right to your money.

That guy doesn't have any. You give him a right to it at your own expense. You surrender some of your rights to your stock.

Now, that's not an easy attitude to live with on a consistent basis because we're not only conditioned by culture, but we're also innately inclined to defend our own rights. But if Jesus had that same commitment to defending his rights, we would still be all lost today. He was rich, but for your sakes, he became poor.

That you through his poverty might become rich, it says in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Jesus had the right to stay in heaven. He didn't have to come down here. Once he was down here, he had the right to call legions of angels to deliver him.

He didn't do that. He gave up his rights. And the Bible says we're supposed to walk in his steps.

We're supposed to be like him. We're supposed to be merciful like he was merciful. So mercy always involves the surrender of some rights because the very definition of mercy is someone owes you something and you're not exacting the price from them.

When the king was owed millions of dollars and he showed mercy to the guy, it cost the king something. It cost him millions of dollars to forgive that debt. That's what mercy is.

It's costly to the person who extends it. But it's not as costly as refusing to do so. In 1 Corinthians chapter 6, Paul illustrates this same principle in a very down to earth practical situation where Christians in Corinth apparently were having the audacity to, when they had complaints against each other, actually they were using the courts to sue each other, which obviously is the exact opposite of what Jesus had to do in a situation like that.

And in 1 Corinthians 6, 7, as part of Paul's rebuke to them for this misbehavior, he said, now therefore it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? He means against yourself. Why do you not rather let yourself be cheated? King James says, let yourself be defrauded.

How many of you are in the mood to be defrauded, to be cheated, to allow yourself to be wronged when you could have a case against them in court? Well, how to adjust our thinking. This is the teaching of Jesus, this is the teaching of Paul. He says, if someone's wronged you, you're going to go to court against them? Think again.

Why not just let them defraud you? What? What kind of cockamamie idea is that? It's God's ideas, it's not a cockamamie idea. It's what Jesus taught. It's just the fact that Christians don't practice it doesn't make it a bad doctrine.

It's still biblical. The fact that you'll find Christians suing other Christians in court all over the place in our society doesn't mean that this doctrine of Christ is not a good doctrine. It just means there are people who say, Lord, Lord, and don't do what He said.

And they're going to be very surprised on that day when He says, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall I enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who do the will of my Father in heaven. And so, mercy means I'm willing to be defrauded, I'm willing to take a loss so that someone else can be better off for it. Now, someone's going to say, well, if you adopt that as a common, as a regular policy, you know, you're just going to be an enabler.

See, we got all these new psychobabble words now in the church, an enabler. An enabler is someone who does what Jesus says and forgives and doesn't stand up for his own rights. He's also these days called a codependent.

Codependency is considered to be some kind of a mental health problem. It's just what Jesus said to do. It means that you don't demand your rights.

You are willing to accept wrong against yourself. You're willing to continuously accept wrong. I received a very unhappy letter to me today.

I don't know what day it was. Sometime last week, I guess, near the end of my radio program, a lady called up and she was calling from a phone booth in the rain. And she was telling me that she was abused by her husband and what she was doing.

Well, I mean, that's the kind of thing you need more than a few minutes to say. And I had four minutes before the program was over. And I said, well, I can't really talk to you, as this deserves to be addressed right now, but let me give you a scripture.

And I gave her a scripture. And she said, thank you. And I haven't heard from her since.

I wish I had. I'd like to know more about what's going on. But I got a letter today from a lady who had been very terribly abused in a previous marriage.

She and her children both. Very, very horribly violent man. They had been married.

She had been married, too. And she was very, very angry at me for giving this scripture to the woman. She said, I was very offended that you gave this woman this scripture.

She says, I don't hold it against you that you didn't have time to talk to her more at the end of the program. She says, you gave her this scripture. She says, that was very offensive to me.

Well, let me show you what the scripture is I gave her. It's in 1 Peter chapter 2. And beginning at verse 18, I told her to read 1 Peter 2, 18 through chapter 3, verse 6. And that passage says, servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable.

If because of conscience toward God, one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when, if you do, when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this end, you were called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow his steps who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in his mouth.

Who, when he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten. But he committed himself to him who judges righteously, who himself bore our sins, his own body on the tree that we haven't died.

The sins might live for righteousness by whose stripes you were healed for you were like sheep going astray, but now have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls. Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives. When they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear, do not let your adornment be merely outward.

So the main part here was I just asked her to read these passages. I thought they were relevant to her situation. Some people get offended simply to recommend that you read the verses relevant to your situation because the Bible is so offensive to our modern way of thinking.

Who would dare suggest that a woman or a man would be doing something commendable before God if they stayed in a situation where they suffered harsh treatment, unjust harsh treatment, innocently? Well, I will say this, and just so no one takes my position wrongly, I do believe there are times when abuse can become, you know, crosses the line to criminality. And the woman who wrote me the letter, by the way, her husband should have been put in jail, the way he treated her and her children. I mean, her pastor knew of it.

She called the pastor. The pastor should have called the police, and the pastor instead just told her to submit. See, I believe there are times when we do have to submit to harsh treatment, and it can be very harsh treatment, and we should be willing to, if we're innocent before God, to just say, well, if this is what I have to do, I'll accept it.

But there are forms of abuse that are criminal, and whether it's a woman's husband or some total stranger, the man should be reported to the police, and that's what God ordained the authorities to do, is to punish criminals. And she wouldn't have had to

suffer so much abuse, nor her children, had she followed that particular principle of Scripture. But nonetheless, much of what people call abuse is not criminal.

It's just unpleasant. And for us to absorb injury, when we could retaliate, but we don't retaliate, that's being merciful. That is costly to us.

Mercy is costly. It always involves surrendering your personal rights or privileges in some way. In James, chapter 5 and verse 6, we quoted this a couple weeks back on another of the Beatitudes, James said to the rich, he says, you have condemned and you have killed the righteous, and he does not resist you.

He could, but he doesn't. He doesn't stand up for his rights. Now, there are degrees of mercy.

We'll talk, well, we won't talk tonight. We're about done tonight. But I want to talk some more about mercy.

I'm going to have to spread this out. This is a big enough biblical topic. We're going to have to spread it out over a couple weeks, I guess.

But there is also a breadth of mercy we need to consider, and that is that mercy is not to be shown only to people, that it's easy to show mercy to. In speaking on this subject in Matthew, chapter 5, verses 43 through 48, Jesus said, you've heard that you should love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say you need to love your enemies.

You need to do good to those who persecute you. You need to bless those who curse you. This is showing mercy.

When the person deserves your cursing and your retaliation in all justice, but you don't give it. But you don't do it just to your friends. He says you need to be like your father.

He's merciful to those who are not good. He says he caused the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. He causes the sun to shine on the evil and on the good.

God is not only good to those that are good to him. And he says at the end of that verse, that section, he says, be perfect as your father in heaven is perfect. Actually, in the parallel in Luke, it says, be merciful even as your father in heaven is merciful.

Your mercy needs to be as broad as God's mercy is. And that is part of the teaching of scripture on mercy. I want to talk more specifically about how mercy is exhibited in various circumstances.

Next time I've used up my time too quickly tonight, and we're going to have to stop there. But we'll finish out what's on these notes next time.