**Beatitudes 5  
Merciful and blessed**

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Matthew 5:1-12, Luke 6:20-26

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

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We are trying to learn these sayings together:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are they that 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 receive mercy.

There is a spiritual law in today’s beatitude, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.” It seems very important to Jesus. Someone once called “Merciful retaliation.” And the law seems to have both a positive form, and a negative form. In the positive form, it’s something like: if are generous, merciful, graceful, loving towards others, you will receive the generosity, mercy, grace, and love you need. In the negative form, it’s something like this: If you are stingy or judgmental towards others, you will receive the failure and judgment you fear.

In this beatitude, we see the positive form: Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

But it’s all over the whole Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

Jesus says if you are angry and insult your neighbor, or leave bad feelings between you and another, you are liable to the harshest judgment.

Jesus calls us to love our enemies and not retaliate in revenge.

In the prayer that Jesus taught us, it says: Forgive us our sins, or trespasses, or debts, *as we* forgive those who have the sinned, or trespassed, or incurred debts against us. And the reason Jesus tells us to pray this way is that the heavenly Father will forgive *us* if we forgive *others*, and will *not* forgive us if we don’t forgive others.

This is serious stuff!

Jesus tells us very specifically not to act as standers-by and judge others. Here’s Matthew’s version:

Matthew 7:1-5 “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. **2**For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. **3**Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’seye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? **4**Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? **5**You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’seye.

That first section expresses both the negative and the positive form: Negative: “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged.” Positive: “For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.”

That second section, about logs and specks, ties it to a negative version of the previous beatitude about hungering and thirsting for righteousness. If we are hungering for God’s righteousness for ourselves, we’ll be fulfilled. But if what we’re mostly about is picking out others’ faults, things are not going to go so well.

Luke’s version has both the negative and the positive forms, with a delightful image of generosity:

Luke 6:37-38. “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; **38**give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

The image that came to mind for me was going to a foreign country and buying a lot of presents to bring back home. You try to fit everything in your suitcase, you push and prod, and move things around, you press down and sit on top of the suitcase so you can zip it up, and hope customs doesn’t make you open in on the way. Then, we you get home, you unzip the suitcase, and everything starts to pop out, and it spills all over. Those are the gifts waiting for us, if we show such generosity to others.

And isn’t the golden rule, also found in the Sermon on the Mount, an even more general spiritual rule? “Do to others, as you would have them do to you.” You want people to be gracious to you and your mistakes; do the same for others. You want people to not judge you; do the same for others. You want people to forgive you; do the same for others.

This spiritual rule, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy,” is very important to Jesus.

In fact, Jesus says there is a kingdom being prepared for us. The plans for such a kingdom go back a long time: from the “foundation of the world” God has been planning it. And we can be it’s inheritors.

This is what Jesus longs to say, as Matthew writes in chapter 25:

Matthew 25:34-36.  ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; **35**for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, **36**I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’

Generosity, Mercy, Grace, Forgiveness, Love are the keys to this kingdom; in an important sense, they are what the kingdom is made up of. It’s a kingdom of generous souls, a land of mercy and grace, a citizenry of love. Blessed are those who are part of it!

And my prayer is that we will live in the light of this spiritual rule, this blessing.

**Special Appendix**

I have usually read Gregory of Nyssa’s sermon on the beatitude I’ve preached on before preparing my sermon, but I didn’t this time. But I did read it afterwards! I was surprised at how much Gregory stresses that being merciful is to share the economic resources we have with those who have less. As I prepared the sermon, I focused more on the “forgiveness” and “don’t take revenge” side of mercy–though, of course, Matthew 25 is exactly about economic sharing.

I want to share one paragraph from Gergory’s sermon. Interestingly, the translator here translates the Greek word *eleeo* as “pity” rather than “mercy,” and uses “pitiful” to mean “showing pity.” Another translation I have uses *mercy*, though, and another translation uses *compassion*. This paragraph is from Sermon 5, and comes from Stuart George Hall’s 1998 transtion in Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes An English Version with Commentary and Supporting Studies. Proceedings of the Eighth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Paderborn, 14-18 September 1998).

What then is pity, and what is its function? How is the person blessed who receives again what he gives? 'Blessed are the pitiful,' he says, 'for they shall be pitied.' The obvious meaning of the text summons human beings to be loving and sympathetic to each other because of the unfairness and inequality of human affairs, since not everybody lives under the same conditions, whether of rank or of physical constitution or of other possessions. For the most part ·life is divided into opposites, sundered between bondage and slave-owning, wealth and penury, honour and contempt, bodily infirmity and health. So that equality may be achieved for the successful man and the failure, and so that 'what the prosperous lacks may be supplied, he prescribes for mankind pity towards those in greater need. The only way to make efforts to cure the distress of one's neighbour is for the heart to be softened by pity into making such an effort. The meaning of pity is the opposite of hardheartedness. Just as the hardhearted and savage person is unapproachable to those who come to him, so the sympathetic and pitiful is in a way softened by his disposition towards doing what is asked, becoming to the one in misery exactly what the distressed soul requires. Pity, if we are to explain it with a definition, is voluntary misery caused by other people's ills.

The standard translation of Gregory’s Beatitudes is by Hilda C. Graef. At least I think so (what do I look like, a Nicene scholar???). She translates the last sentence is translated as:

Mercy is a voluntary sorrow that joins itself to the sufferings of others.

I like that very much.

The Lord's Prayer. The Beatitudes / St. Gregory of Nyssa; Translated and annotated by Hilda C. Graef. Westminster, Md. : Newman Press ; London : Longmans, Green, - Ancient Christian Writers ; no. 18. 1954.