



**Series: The Upside Down Kingdom**

**Date: April 14, 2024**

**Speaker: Spence Shelton, Lead Pastor**

**Text: Matthew 5:7**

**Title: Blessed are the merciful**

### **Introduction**

We are in our series of sermons walking through the first few words of the first sermon of Jesus that we have on record. We've themed this series "The Upside Down Kingdom." The idea is that as Jesus reveals what life in HIS kingdom is like...it's such a stark contrast to the ways of this world that we live and walk around in that it feels almost upside down.

That is certainly going to be true about our verse today. We are just going verse by verse through the Beatitudes. We've got 3 more after this. Normally we go through a longer passage of scripture, but Jesus packed so much into each one of these we are taking a sermon to consider them on their own.

7 Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy. -- Matthew 5:7

The merciful. Talk about something in short supply in our day and age, right? This is the age of tolerant outrage and the angry clap back. It seems in the public square of ideas right now there is no room for mercy. Only outrage and I say tolerant outrage because in one of the most ironic developments in modernity...the people most filled with outrage seem to be the ones raging in the name of so-called tolerance. But in the public arena tolerance doesn't mean tolerance. It means full submission to a certain worldview. And if you refuse to submit to this worldview...outrage will come hurtling at you like some Max Holloway Haymakers.

Now interestingly, as this wave of outrage has risen...A wave of resistance has risen to meet it. This is the wave I'll call the Angry Clap Back where the proverbial bird is being flipped towards the tolerance agenda. For every song about love is love there's a Rich men north of Richmond. For every CNN there's a FOX. AND the volume turns up louder & louder. It's like Godzilla v Kong out there and Jesus says into that...

Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.

What a word for our day. It's not blessed are the tolerant. "Mercy" doesn't mean tolerance. And that's probably where many have misunderstood Jesus entirely. But it's also not blessed are the vengeful. No, Jesus says blessing...which we've said is the promised



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favor of God on the people of God... belongs to the merciful. They are the ones who will be shown mercy.

Mercy church I can't help but acknowledge the obvious thing sitting right in front of us that the name of our church is put right here in front of us in this word from Jesus. And that's going to inform our main idea and overall direction we take. Here is the big idea:

**Mercy is our identity, our calling, and our promised blessing**

**4 parts to the sermon. Definition, Identity, calling, and promised blessing.**

And maybe to guide us I'll give us a working definition. So, quick definition and then our 3 parts. How does GOD define Mercy? Let me use the verse of scripture that inspired the name of our church  
Some of you have heard me teach from this passage before but some of you are new to us so this is new to you. Listen up because this is who we are...

**10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. -- 1 Peter 2:9-10**

Once we were a bunch of very different people that were not ONE in any way. Disconnected from one another. And one of the most powerful things in

scripture is where he says BUT NOW...you are God's people. Now you are bound together. And what binds this group called Christians together? MERCY.

Mercy...specifically the mercy of God...is our binding agent. Our glue. Our uniform. We were chosen for this...made into his people by him. We didn't do anything other than RECEIVE what he sums up in a single word...mercy. That's the gospel in a word. And it brings us to our definition of Mercy I told you we'd come to:

**Mercy: The undeserved kindness of God toward sinners who rebelled against him.** We deserved to be held accountable for our sins, but he sent Christ to the cross in our place. Mercy. And you are welcome to receive that mercy and join this group of mercy recipients. THAT is mercy. That's part 1. Pretty quick.

NOW with that working understanding let's watch it come to LIFE in a parable of Jesus. I told you we'd see mercy as our identity, our calling, and our promised blessing. Well, we'll see Mercy as both Identity and Calling in this parable Jesus gives.

This is over in Matthew 18 starting in verse 21 and there are two scenes in it. Here's the set up and the first scene.

**21 Then Peter approached him and asked, "Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother or sister who**



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sins against me? As many as seven times?" 22 "I tell you, not as many as seven," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven.

23 "For this reason, the kingdom of heaven can be compared to a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 When he began to settle accounts, one who owed ten thousand talents was brought before him. 25 Since he did not have the money to pay it back, his master commanded that he, his wife, his children, and everything he had be sold to pay the debt.

26 "At this, the servant fell facedown before him and said, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you everything.' 27 Then the master of that servant had compassion, released him, and forgave him the loan.

Now, it's important to understand the meaning of the parable. And by the way, general rule of thumb for parables is that Jesus is trying to get across ONE idea. So, Peter says Jesus how many times do I gotta keep forgiving my brother? So, the parable is teaching on forgiveness. Thought we were talking about Mercy? Well, Mercy is the power from which forgiveness flows. It's also the power from which generosity flows. And charity. And patience. And peace. Mercy is the electricity flowing through the home & forgiveness is one of the light bulbs that it powers. There are others. And they are all powered through mercy.

So, Jesus says a king is settling accounts and one of his servants owes 10,000 talents. Without getting into exchange rates, the idea here is WAAAAAAAY more than he could ever pay back. Think \$10 Billion Dollars. He's a servant. There's Just no way he's going to pay it back ever. Well, since he didn't have the \$\$\$ the king says ok not just you but your whole family must be SOLD to pay the debt. Your payment is YOUR LIFE. Now that is a tough penalty, but it is the FAIR PRICE of his debt he has run up with the king. the king...in order to be a fair king...has to issue the penalty. If the servant walked in with this debt and the king said "eh, don't worry about it." No biggie...We wouldn't call that king merciful. We would call that being soft. We might even go so far as to say that is an unwise or unjust king. Can't run a kingdom like this. You'll go bankrupt. However, he didn't do that. No instead he showed the servant the magnitude of his debt first. This is the full cost of what you owe. And THEN, only then, did he forgive it. Without recognition of the debt, there is no need for mercy.

And Jesus' point in this parable is that **we are like the servant**. Listen if you struggle with forgiveness, this you gotta hear this. If you struggle with patience. If you find it HARD to endure the faults of others. You gotta hear this. If you feel like the lights aren't coming on in the house of your Christian life...listen up



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Jesus is saying WE ARE THE SERVANT! That's who we are in the parable.

**Mercy Identity: We are receivers of God's immeasurable mercy through Jesus.**

In Jesus' parable God is the king, we are the servant. And when we sinned against God...which is choosing our way over his way...we incurred a debt. And we just kept on sinning. Kept on rebelling against the God who loves us and created us. And the cost of breaking that relationship... is our lives. It's death. That's Romans 6.23. Because our sin is against an infinitely holy God the payment is death. We have to sit in that. See I think the biggest problem for some in our community is that we don't have a sin problem. Like yes, we've sinned BUT generally we have been good. Let me give you an analogy to illustrate:

Courtney and I are celebrating 20 years of marriage this coming summer. July 9. What if on our anniversary I prepared a speech for Courtney? A love note. And we are at a nice dinner, and I say Babe I just want to tell you how much I love you. I love you SO MUCH that I have been faithful to you 98% of the 20 years we've been married. 98%! That's an A+ in any class. That's hall of fame average. Only 2% unfaithful. Over 20 years! And I sit there and look at her like...AREN'T YOU IMPRESSED?

What do you think her reaction will be? "OH WOW! What a husband! Blessed am I among women!" NO.

Some of you know Courtney well and you know she's about to throw some hands right there in the middle of the restaurant.

Why? Because 2% unfaithful is 100% UNFAITHFUL. The same is true with our sin. And you gotta understand one single sin is an act unfaithfulness by a rebellious sinner towards God. And the penalty God says, is death.

And what did God do in response? God did not treat our sin like no big deal. He didn't just wave it off like it didn't matter, or it wasn't really our fault. If Courtney shrugged her shoulders and went back to eating...you'd think OH...she must not care about him at all.

God loves us so he didn't just shrug his shoulders and forget about it. He didn't minimize our sin. Sin should never be casually dismissed or swept under the rug.

Instead, he acknowledged it and at Great Cost to himself he chose to forgive us by taking our debt and placing it on his son.

**16 For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. -- John 3:16**

10 billion worth of debt. YOU COULD NEVER PAY IT. And the justice of God Met up with the MERCY of God on the cross. Where Jesus paid for your life with his. SO now you can go free. You can walk free from the



penalty of your sin. THIS IS MERCY! Maybe your response today is to receive that mercy of God. The gift of forgiveness of your sins and eternal life. What love! I'm going to give you a chance to respond to that love today.

THIS IS OUR IDENTITY! THE MERCY OF GOD! The undeserved kindness of God poured out on sinners like you and me. Instead of racking up a debt of sin we are standing in the riches of God's mercy as adopted sons and daughters of the king of kings. THAT IS YOUR IDENTITY. Needing forgiveness and receiving it.

NOW comes our calling. Blessed are the merciful. The merciful can't give mercy until they HAVE mercy to give. But now we move from Identity into our calling to give mercy. And to do that we keep reading this parable from Jesus.

28 "That servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him, started choking him, and said, 'Pay what you owe!'

Ya'll - 100 denarii is a miniscule amount. Think \$1.50. The point is a sharp contrast between the 10k talents. He's been forgiven 10 billion dollars. And his first interaction after that is seeing a guy that owes him 1.50.

29 "At this, his fellow servant fell down and began begging him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you

back.' 30 But he wasn't willing. Instead, he went and threw him into prison until he could pay what was owed. 31 When the other servants saw what had taken place, they were deeply distressed and went and reported to their master everything that had happened. 32 Then, after he had summoned him, his master said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 Shouldn't you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' 34 And because he was angry, his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he could pay everything that was owed.

Now at this point in the parable you gotta imagine Peter being like...THAT'S ABSURD. THAT WOULD NEVER HAPPEN. And you can see Jesus agreeing with him. Exactly Peter. It is crazy right? The ONLY WAY THAT COULD HAPPEN is if the servant somehow immediately and completely forgot the greatest act of mercy that he'd ever experienced. It's absurd except...this is exactly what is happening in you that led to the question you asked me that started this whole parable. How much do I have to forgive? How far should my mercy really extend?

35 So also my heavenly Father will do to you unless every one of you forgives his brother or sister from your heart." -- Matthew 18:21-35

He says the one who receives GREAT DIVINE mercy from God and yet lives a life that doesn't extend



meager human mercy... the only explanation is that they never really received that mercy from the king to begin with.

Here's why this parable is so helpful to us. It puts our own experience in receiving mercy back in front of us as the motivation for extending mercy. Remember, forgiveness and mercy aren't synonyms. Forgiveness is light, mercy is the electricity.

**7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.**

-- Matthew 5:7

And you could think...Oh man. This one is tough. I'm just not prone to it. And I want you to think about this - if you are a Christian, you are far more familiar with mercy than you might realize. **MERCY IS YOUR IDENTITY! IT'S IN YOUR BLOOD BECAUSE IT'S IN HIS BLOOD.** You've got it running in your spiritual veins because it's how he created a new heart in you.

Here's the way Ian Duguid says it in his book hero of heroes.

**Our hearts are only moved to mercy to the extent to which we remember and ponder the depths and richness of God's mercy.**

- Ian Duguid

Maybe the way we can say it today is that you can't give what you don't have. You can't be to others

something you aren't. And if our **beatitude says blessed are the merciful...then you must first know mercy.**

**The best thing we can do to "be merciful" is rehearse the mercy of God towards us.**

This is why we celebrate communion regularly here. It's to draw us back to the mercy of God. It's why the gospel is preached every week here. To draw us back to the mercy of God. Because I'm convinced you will only show mercy to the extent you are overwhelmed by the mercy of God shown to you. You are called to be merciful because you are the recipient of Mercy. So let me ask you...

Just starting with the parable. Is there somebody you need to forgive? Maybe today you need to hear that YOU committed a \$10 Billion dollar crime and were forgiven. And compared to what you did to God, the "crime" they committed against you is \$1.50.

**Mercy Calling: Give some measure of God's immeasurable mercy to others.**

Oh man I'm not trying to minimize THEIR Sin I'm trying to help you see how BIG your sin is in God's eyes. Listen this is your take home today. Who do you need to show the mercy of forgiveness to? I want to tell you a rather extreme story that will help you and also connect to our final part of the sermon...the promised blessing.





That WHEN you extend mercy...as our beatitude says...you will receive mercy.

Ya'll know who Corrie ten Boom was? She was a Dutch watchmaker who was imprisoned in a concentration camp in Nazi Germany. She and her family were Christians, and they were imprisoned for helping Jews escape from the Nazis. They were a part of the Dutch underground which was somewhat of 1940s version of the underground railroad from the American civil war days. She and her father and sister were put in the concentration camp and both her father and sister died there. So, you can imagine, she was wounded and hurt. Her sister's last words to her as she died in that camp were "There is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still." So here she is a believer with serious pain of loss but hope in Christ & carrying that legacy of faith from her sister & father...

Anyway, she tells the story of meeting a former SS officer from the Ravensbrück concentration camp - after she had spoken at a church in Munich in 1947. She writes:

"He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time... He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. "How grateful I am for your message, *Fraulein*," he said. "To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!" His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal (*rehab facility she started for concentration camp survivors like herself*) the need

to forgive, kept my hand at my side. Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them... *Lord Jesus*, I prayed, *forgive me and help me to forgive him*. I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could now. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. *Jesus*, I cannot forgive him. Give Your forgiveness. As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand, a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me."

In that moment Corrie ten Boom, a middle-aged survivor of Nazi terror, committed an act of not hateful revenge, but instead an act of faith. You can see it in her words. And in so doing, she pointed to - and in a small but significant way SHE tasted, she experienced, she received - the mercy of Christ. The merciful are shown Mercy.

AS you extend mercy to others you will be shown mercy. It's the kind of deeper mercy that can only be experienced through giving it. When you forgive your spouse OUT of an awareness of God's forgiveness of you...a barrier BETWEEN you and your spouse is torn down and your love for your spouse starts to GROW! That's MERCY!

**Mercy's Promised Blessing: giving God's mercy is the door to receiving more of God's mercy.**





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Listen there's no other way to say it! Now the way to abuse that is to hear it as if God OWES you and you've figured out a secret formula to GET from God. It's not that. Instead, what happens is when you give mercy away, you experience mercy from God in a deeper and richer way. It's as if God expands your heart.

Because, for example, you forgive someone and in some small measure you experience the love God has toward you. That's not all though. What are other forms of mercy? Other lightbulbs that the electricity of mercy runs to in the house?

What about generosity? When you understand all you have is a gift from God...and then you choose to freely & cheerfully give towards. God's work in the world by giving to the local church. Or you choose to give to a friend in need. What happens is in some small measure you experience what it was like for God to give his son to you. You RECEIVE mercy.

When you stand up to evil. MS & HS students - maybe its standing up to the bully in school. Adults maybe its standing up for what's right. Not in an angry clap back but in a righteous resistance...man you experience the love of God who stood up against evil on behalf of his people.

When you give your TIME to serve others - to serve those who can't serve you in return. THAT is when you

experience in some small measure the heart of the one who became a servant for you.

Some of you are looking for a spiritual breakthrough and I'm telling you it's in SHOWING MERCY. You need to flex your mercy muscles because they are actually the door to increased intimacy with God himself.

And maybe the church will be the people known for mercy. Not ideological compromise NOR angry clap back. But instead, humble mercy. Standing on the unchanging word & giving our lives to demonstrate the unchanging love of God. And we will be shown mercy.

As we close the question is one we need to really sit with.

**My Next Step: In what way is God calling me to give mercy?**

Transition to Communion - Worship teams are getting in place to lead us. Our campus pastors will come to lead us through communion but first I want to invite you into a moment of response. In what way is God calling me to give mercy?