

The Merciful

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[0 : 00] All right, we are going to read together from Luke chapter 10. So if you have a Bible, please turn with me to Luke chapter 10.

And then we're going to read verses 26 to 37. If you'd like to have a hard copy of the Bible, there's Bibles on the side and in the balcony as well. Feel free to get one of those at any time.

Luke chapter 10 verses 26 to 37. And this is God's word.

He said to him, What is written in the law? How do you read it? This is a lawyer standing up to put Christ to the test. What is written in the law?

How do you read it? And he answered, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself.

[1 : 00] And he said to him, You have answered correctly. Jesus said, Do this and you will live. But he, the lawyer, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, And who is my neighbor?

Jesus replied, A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and he fell among the robbers who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead.

Now by chance a priest was going down that road and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and he bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine.

Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an end and took care of him. And the next day he took out two Denarii and he gave them to the innkeeper saying, Take care of him and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.

[2 : 05] Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers? He said, The one who showed him mercy and Jesus said to him, You go and do likewise.

This is God's word. Let's read again from God's word Matthew chapter five, the Beatitudes once more. This is the word of God.

We read from the beginning of the chapter. Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up on the mountain and when he sat down, his disciples came to him and they opened his mouth and taught them, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

[3 : 14] Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Amen. This is God's word and as always, it's our prayer that he would bless it to our hearts and give us comfort and profit from it.

David Sol, the rugby captain in Scotland's Grand Slam, willing team, was asked to play in a charity golf match and on the very first tee, had a dreadful shot out of bounds.

To cover his embarrassment, he said to the carry, golf's a funeo game, to which the taciturn little glass-waging replied, it isn't he meant to be.

Now, we all know folk who disagree, whether something is just a bit of fun or deadly serious, whether something is a major priority in life or a very little consequence.

But those of us who listened in these last Sunday evenings to preachers open up to us these Beatitudes cannot be in any doubt at all just how important for Christian men and women these words of Jesus are.

[4 : 38] Because right at the outset of his most famous sermon, he sets out a balanced but varied description of what Christian men and women ought to be.

And it burrs repeating as it has been done that all eight of these characteristics are to be exhibited by everyone who follows Christ.

This is Jesus' description of the character of every citizen of God's kingdom. And it's significant that Jesus begins a sermon on the mount with these words, with the character of the Christian, with this emphasis.

Before he comes to Christians, prayer life or relationships or ambitions, he talks about the Christian's character.

And he's emphasizing what a Christian is before he moves on to what a Christian does. And of course, if human beings were perfect, there'd be no need for this.

[5 : 54] You know, we would simply live from the inside out and our outward conduct and behavior would simply be a reflection of our inner hearts and lives.

But with human nature being what it is, that is not the case and the symmetry between our inner life and our outer conduct is not always easy to achieve.

And the fact that Jesus' pattern is to emphasize being what we are before doing how we should behave should be enough to warn us that our inner life with God, with Christ, must be right if our outer conduct is to be acceptable to Him.

And Jesus only stressed this in the Beatitudes. You remember when he came across some religious folk who were just, just everything was appearance with them.

And he said, look, you are like whitewashed sepulchres. You have this nice outward appearance, but inwardly there is darkness.

[7 : 11] And also he comes at the end of the Sermon on the Mount back to this emphasis and says again, you know, on that day of judgment, he said, there will be many, many who will come and say, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name?

Have we, you know, in your name, we've done, we've cast out demons. We've done many wonderful works. But Jesus said, I will say to them, I never knew you depart from me.

So it's clear from his word that God judges us not so much by what we do as by our reasons for doing it.

And it's particularly important to understand this when we come to this fifth Beatitude, blessed are the merciful, because it really has to do with how we treat other people, how we treat everyone else.

And our difficulty is, and it has to be said, many, many Christians act as though their problem with God is their behavior, you know, they're doing wrong things, got to do right things, behaving badly, got to start behaving well.

[8 : 34] And that is just absolutely wrong because, look, our outward behavior really flows from what's going on in our hearts inwardly.

Bad behavior starts within. It comes from the heart. Jesus himself said that. Do you remember, it was preached on recently, you remember the religious leaders were giving Jesus the sight, well, and Jesus himself a hard time because they were eating without the ritual washing of hands and they were getting all worked up about that.

Jesus, look, you've got this wrong. It is from within, from out of the heart of man, perceived evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders.

This is why our hearts need to be changed. This is why for the natural man and women, our hearts need to be transformed. They need to be made over again.

And the brilliant thing is that the message of the gospel, that's why it's good news. Because Jesus has made it possible for us to change.

[9 : 48] Every one of us, when we truly repent, when we genuinely grieve us for what we've done, rebelling against God, disobeying His word, when we genuinely repent and when we ask God for mercy, for forgiveness, and we receive and accept that by faith, then He changes us.

He gives us a new heart. He gives us a new life. And there is a new center of gravity to everything we are and everything we do because our lives become centered on Jesus and not on our sails.

And in our hearts, the motive for doing what we do has changed. We will behave as those who want to obey, who want to please, who want to honor our Savior, Jesus Christ.

We will not behave as those who think that what we want is all important. So we mustn't ever forget that before God, the test by which all our conduct will finally be judged is motive.

Why do we do what we do? And of course, in this, as in so many other things, the Pharisees afford us a very clear example, don't they?

[11 : 23] They remain the world's most dismal religious failures, not because doctrinally they were in error, not because they were lukewarm and casual, not because they lived dissolute or decadent lives.

They're problem-lay and the motives are what they did. Yet they prayed, but they prayed to be seen as men. They gave generously, very often, to the temple funds.

But it was, as Jesus rebuked them, it was to avoid their duty to their family and their parents. And of course, they judged sin, but they judged it in others.

And they did that self-righteously and with hard hearts. So how do we avoid this problem as Christians, as we live and the years go by, that we don't fall into the trap of thinking that outward behavior is, as long as that's okay, we're okay?

Well, I think we make sure that we understand the importance of what the wise man said in the book of Proverbs, when he said, guard your hearts with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.

[12 : 59] And we need to go again and again, day by day, to the cross, seeing our Savior Jesus and remembering what He did, what it cost, and what it meant, as Cory was explaining to the boys and girls.

And then it would probably do us good every so often to go to Paul's letter to the Christians at Corinth and to that 13th chapter of his first letter.

You know where he talks about love, God's love, the love that we should exhibit. And he says, love suffers long and is kind. Love does not envy or boast.

It's not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way. Love never fails. Beautiful words, lovely words.

But of course, Paul goes on to say that the very best, the very highest religious behavior counts for nothing with God.

[14 : 05] It's futile if it's not motivated by love. So when we are converted, when we have the new life of God in our soul, we have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts.

We must constantly nourish and feed it by reading the word of God and bathing it in prayer, remembering, spirit of life is not mechanical.

Yes, we know justification was an act. But our spiritual life, our ongoing life with God is organic.

Just as a flower can blossom and flourish, so it can wither and decay. And so it is with our spiritual life. We need to constantly nourish and feed it and value it, our inner life, above all other things so that our desires and affections, our speech, our conduct all flow almost automatically from hearts of love.

It just comes out. It's an instinct. There's a phrase that's come to be used a lot recently where people talk about a default position.

[15 : 23] And I think they mean that when somebody is suddenly faced with a crisis or a choice or need to do something, they fall back into the position that's comfortable.

It's instinctive to them. And when I was trying to think of an example of this, the only one I could think of, if you'll forgive a person, was when I was young, small at school.

My mother would too often probably come in at, you know, who walked a mud over the kitchen floor? You know, who broke the cup in the kitchen?

You know, who left that wet tile in the bath? And I would instantly say it was Michael. He was my younger brother. And I wasn't a Christian then, you know, I'm just saying.

But it was an instinct. Now for us as Christians, our instinct, amongst all the other things, ought to be when we see someone in need, whatever the circumstances, to be to reach out and to help them.

[16 : 39] Because our hearts, you know, we ought to be having within us that tender, loving spirit that takes the heart, the misery we see in other people.

You know, people who are in pain, they're in grief, they're anxious, they're in distress, broken heart, whatever.

Our automatic reaction ought to be as Christians, just to reach out and to help. And you know, as always, it's Jesus to whom we look when we want to know, what will that look like in practice? What will that be like for me day by day? Well, there's at least two main ways. We will be merciful. We will be showing mercy when we show forgiveness.

And we'll be showing mercy when we show compassion. A.W. Toesher, the American author, wrote, When we children of God leave the shadows of earth and reach at last our home in the light, we shall have a thousand strings to our hearts.

[18 : 01] But the sweetest may well be the one thing tuned to sound forth the mercy of God. For it is because of God's mercy alone that we shall be there.

And that's right. We know that, don't we? It's because of God's mercy alone that we will be in heaven.

And it's by His mercy and grace that we enjoy spiritual blessings here on earth. And we're assured of an eternity of spiritual blessings in heaven.

Because on the cross at Calvary, Jesus procured forgiveness for us, forgiveness for our sin, so that we are justified before our heavenly Father.

So He has shown us forgiveness, and now He asks us to show forgiveness in turn. But it isn't easy.

[19 : 08] It isn't easy. Even though we all realize that forgiveness is at the very root, the very foundation of our faith and our life with God, it's hard to forgive sometimes.

Because it conflicts with our sense of justice. Derek dealt with that a few Sunday mornings ago when he was preaching about anger.

And if I could use an illustration, if you're ever fortunate enough to go to that area of outstanding natural beauty, the Glens of Antrim, and there's an amazing walk down Glen Arif from the Glenhead right down to the sea along the side of the river, and you pass the waterfalls.

And about halfway down, they have built a little viewing hut out over the river. You go right over the river, so you're standing over the river, and you're looking back up at the waterfalls and the river coming down.

It's amazing. I think the Americans copied it at Niagara Falls, somebody told me. But anyway, it's this amazing sight. But here's the thing. There are four panes of glass as you look back up.

[20 : 26] There's one that's clear and one that's red, one that's blue and one that's yellow. And although as you look through there, you see the same scene.

It looks unbelievably different. It takes a moment or two to grasp that I'm looking at the same thing that I looked a moment ago before that other window, through that other window.

And if it's not irreverent to say, God is like that when he looks on us. The humanity, the men and women that he made in his own image, he looks down and he sees the sin.

He sees our rebellion, our selfishness, our cruelty, our unbelief, how we disobey his word, we blasphemous name, we profane his day, and justice, his justice requires payment.

And Jesus did that on the cross at Calvary for you, for me. He did that. So God's justice was confirmed.

[21 : 43] But he also looks down and he sees us in our sin, in our misery, how we hurt each other. But we're lost, we're fallen, we're not happy.

And so because he is a God of love, he offers a new life in Jesus Christ. And again, at the cross, Jesus provides that for us.

So if you're a Christian this evening, and I think this is important, God has dealt with justice on your behalf, on your account.

And every other human being that has lived or will lived, God will deal with them. His justice will take care of them. You and I do not need to worry about it.

Some will go to Christ and some will not. They will pay for their own sins, the ones who don't. But God's justice is dealt with.

[22 : 46] But the forgiveness, the forgiveness lives on, because God has not only forgiven us, but he wants us to forgive others.

In 1987, in Innes-Gillan County, Firmana, the IRA exploded a bomb at a Remembrance Day service that killed 12 people and injured many others.

One of those who died was a 20-year-old nurse, Mary Wilson, who was attending the service with her father. Just a day after she died at the War Memorial, Gordon Wilson was interviewed in his home.

Hospital bed where he was recovering from severe injuries. And he was asked about his feelings for the killers. And this is what he said, I burl will will, I burl grudge.

Dirty sort of talk is not going to bring her back to life. Mary, she's in heaven and we shall meet again. I will pray for these men tonight and every night.

[23 : 58] Gordon Wilson was a Christian and he forgave the men who killed his daughter. Contrast that with, I know it's a fictional thing, but Rabbe Burns poem, Tam Ashanter, you remember when Tam is out carousing with his drinking pal, Souter Johnny, and Rabbe Burns paints the picture of Tam's wife at home by the hearth, nursing her wrath to keep it warm.

The two different approaches to forgiveness. Do we forgive or do we not? Look, men and women, there are things in the Bible that are difficult for all of us, you know, and to get our heads around. But this is not one of them. You either forgive or you do not forgive. You either imitate our Savior and Lord by forgiving and you enjoy His daily blessings, or you do not forgive and you harbor and you carry baggage, resentment, bitterness into all the days of your life going forward.

The famous officer man, C.S. Lewis, wrote on one occasion, to be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.

That's it. And how many places of work, how many communities, how many homes would be better, happier, more pleasant places if grudges and resentments and feuds and differences were all put away.

[25 : 55] And please do not bring confusion into this matter of forgiveness. You know, don't bring other people into this and say, but, you know, she hasn't said, sorry, he hasn't made restitution.

They're still carrying on with it. Just forget about that. You know, you're not responsible for other people's actions.

You and I, we cannot make other people behave rightly, but we can. We must follow the example of our Savior when He forgave.

On the cross, He asked His heavenly Father, those accusers, those detractors, the people who crucified Him, He asked for forgiveness for them.

If we're serious and if we have that tender, spirit-filled heart of love, we will learn to forgive and then we will be merciful when we show compassion.

[27 : 04] Yet again, Jesus is our teacher. Remember the times in the Gospels when it records great multitudes came out to Him and He taught them and He healed them and He fed them sometimes.

And the Gospel writers read, because He had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. His heart went out to them and there were individuals as well.

Remember the leper comes to Him and Jesus had compassion on them, Mark says, and heals them. The widow whose only son had died and said he had compassion on her.

And He brought the boy back to life. And of course the stories that He told. Remember the prodigal son, the young man's coming back to his father, broken.

And it says, the father had compassion on them and ran to meet him. And then this story of the Good Samaritan that we read.

[28 : 09] And again, that man acted out of compassion. If we could think about that just for a moment or two. That story was told in response to a very profound question.

The lawyer said, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And this was Jesus' story, referring Him to the law. And then when He quizzes Him again, telling Him this story and then asking.

And the man has to admit at the end, the one showed mercy was the Samaritan. And Bishop J.C. Ryle, the famous Bishop of Liverpool, in his commentary on this parable just puts it simply but brilliantly.

He says, if these words of Jesus mean anything, what Jesus said, go and do likewise. A Christian ought to be ready to show kindness and brotherly love to everyone that is in need.

And just love all men and be kind to all whenever occasion requires. And he's exactly correct. Whatever the servant.

[29 : 26] And there are folk in need that will be brought to your door at different times and in different ways. And their needs should trigger within us, within each of us, the desire to help and to be compassionate.

Because that story of the good Samaritan, it's not really a story of bad men who were robbers and religious men who were busier.

It's a story between two sets of people. The robbers, the priests, the Levi, selfish. Selfish. Number one, the Samaritan, selfless, reaching out in compassion to that man. And remember, many folk are willing to help others. We see it day and day late. We know that. But they stop short of where we as Christians ought to go.

[30 : 27] They'll help if it's convenient. It doesn't require too much of a commitment. If it doesn't really interfere with their plans.

But Jesus says, we're not to be like them. We are to show love, compassion, help in every circumstance.

Now, very quickly, what that will look like practically. Again, look to Jesus. What did he do? What did Jesus do?

Jesus took your place. He took my place on the cross. When we see someone in need, let's just ask ourselves, if I was in that man's situation, what would I want?

Or if I was in that woman's position, what sort of help would I be looking for? And then we will know what we should do.

[31 : 29] So see it, Virgin, and I say this because I find it irritating. I don't know about anybody else.

But of course, I'm forgiving. But I find it irritating when people do good things, but they want you to know they're doing good things. And you can see it on their face.

This is costing me a lot to do this. I hope everybody realizes that. This is what, you know, don't be like that. Do what you do, Joyful.

Help people with a smile. See it, Virgin. He was lecturing students for the ministry, men who were going to become ministers. And he said, I love the sort of minister whose face invites you to be his friend.

The sort on whose face is written the word welcome, not beware of the dog. So let's show forgiveness.

[32 : 32] Let's show compassion. Let's be merciful in that way. And each morning as we rise to begin a new day of grace, remember, our God is a God of mercy.

Our Savior is the Lord of mercy and the Holy Spirit longs to work mercy and compassion in our souls. And as we remember that, let's pray that we have large hearts, tender hearts, loving hearts, so that we can go forth into however many days the Lord has planned out for each of us to help were and when and whoever we can, because we will never be more like Christ than when we show mercy.

And we will also bring glory to His name when we do. Let's pray for a moment. Grace is God, we thank you that you are a God of mercy.

And in mercy, you have saved us and in mercy, you day by day bless us with innumerable blessings.

So Lord, we come to you now and we just pray for the help of your Holy Spirit that you would help us to love the Lord and serve the people, to love the people and serve the Lord.

[34 : 07] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.