

Beautiful Attitudes: *Compassion*

Matthew 5:7 [1st Congo](#) 10.7.12 Morgan Young

We're in a series called "Beautiful Attitudes" as we're looking at the Beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5.

I want to give us some background on this passage (Beatitudes)--because I think it's easy to gloss over these verses--we've read & heard them a lot:

Blessed are the poor in spirit...

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn...

⁵ Blessed are the meek...

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...

⁷ Blessed are the merciful...

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart...

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers...

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness...

I think we want to gloss over these, because for the most part, they are cultural virtues.

Even people who aren't following Jesus would say:

"Good to mourn with people.
Good to show mercy.
Pure heart is a good thing.
We need more peacemakers."

Jesus has made such an impact on the world, that even people who aren't into Jesus are into what He taught in the Beatitudes! Jesus' teachings are woven into the culture and people don't even know it.

But let's go back to the time when Jesus taught the Beatitudes...

Culturally the high values of that day were: wealth, power, strength & authority.

Do you hear the force in those values? Wealth, power, strength & authority.

Last week when Jon taught on humility--historically humility was NEVER a virtue until Christ's death on the cross. At the time when Jesus was walking around in the Middle East, humility was a character flaw! Humility was WEAKNESS.

At that time people valued Wealth, power, strength & authority.

And Jesus says, No-- what's really important--it's showing mercy, being humble, having a pure heart, being a peacemaker.

And let's look at it the Beatitudes from the disciples' point of view:

Jesus' popularity is starting to get crazy.

He is the talk of the town.

He's drawing crowds of hundreds and thousands.

He's talking about God ushering in a new kingdom through himself--

the disciples hear "kingdom" and they think words like wealth, power, strength & authority.

So it's very likely the disciples are feeling important, proud--thinking that being w/Jesus is going to give them prestige and the opportunity for receiving money and power.

In the cultural context, Jesus promising to usher in a new kingdom would have lead the disciples to expect fame and fortune.

Jesus probably senses this--and so Jesus had the first "come to Jesus meeting" ;-)

He took the disciples up the mountainside to explain to them what they should really expect and strive for.

And this is where Jesus teaches through these beatitudes: these new counter-cultural attitudes. And again--Jesus' impact on our world is so profound that these beatitudes sound somewhat normal to our society.

But when Jesus elevated things like mercy, humility and peace as he talked to the disciples and as the crowd eventually found Him & trickled in--it sounded INSANE.

(SELAH)

Last week Jon taught out of **Matthew 5:6. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled."** And he taught that if we will embrace humility--(I love that word, humility means in essence, to lower our self.)

Jon said if we will humble our self before God--make him high, and us low--we will then have an appetite for the right things--we will hunger for things that make Jesus smile.

And as we humble ourselves to God, and He gives us God-honoring desires or hungers, it's only natural that one of those new desires is to be merciful.

And that's what we're talking about today, Matthew 5:7

God blesses those who are merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

Matthew 5:7 nlt

I love how *The Message* brings some freshness and new perspective on passages we're very familiar with. Check out The Message version of this same verse:

"You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for."

Matthew 5:7 The Message

This word "blessed" that's all through the beatitudes--it means the experience of hope and joy regardless of our situation.

It comes from God--He bestows it to us--gifts it to us.

And our circumstances might not change--it doesn't mean God will fix everything around us. But He will bring joy and hope maybe IN SPITE OF what's going on around us.

"Blessed" means hope & joy--a gift from God to us.

And in our verse today:

*God blesses those who are merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.*

Mercy is a pretty broad term. It means:

forgiveness for the guilty and compassion for the suffering and needy.

Forgiving people who have done wrong.

Helping people in trouble or in need.

And I want to be clear to point out--the way Jesus lays out these beatitudes, lets us know that if we want mercy from God, we need to dispense it to others.

When I read this verse this week,

*God blesses those who are merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.*

It really hit me in the face--it got my attention. Know why?

Because of this election season we're living in.

It looks to me as I watch news channels like Fox News & MSNBC and social media, that whatever Christians believe politically (either side) it comes across as merciless. Christians seem to be proclaiming their politics in a way that it's my way or the highway. In a way that seems mercy-less.

One side says, "People need to help themselves."
Other side says, "We need to help people to no end."

And God says, work hard...AND--- show mercy to those in need for you will be shown mercy.

I am not here to make any political statements; I am here to proclaim Jesus statements. And Jesus says to us work hard...AND--- show mercy to those in need for you will be shown mercy.

And just to make this idea of helping people in need a little messy, Jesus doesn't lay out a plan for how long you help someone, or what to do with people who don't want to work, and Jesus doesn't say to find people who are WORTHY for you to help.

Jesus simply tells us to help people in need.

*God blesses those who are merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.*

(SELAH)

If I can be honest, I have typically struggled with the idea of giving money to people in need. Why? My stupid analytical mind.

I see a need and I say, "*What's my measly drop in the bucket going to do about this?*"

Along those lines, I want to share some interesting science about that:

Researchers at Carnegie Mellon University did a study to discover how and why people respond to the needs of others.

They did a bogus survey first—"If you take this survey we'll give you \$5." They did just as a way to put 5 one dollar bills into the hands of people.

Then shortly after that, those people with the 5 \$1 bills were handed an envelope with a charity request for "Save the Children."

Half of the letters featured statistics about the problems facing children in Africa.

The other half of the letters told about the needs of a 7 year old girl named Rokia.

On average, the statistical letter generated \$1.14.

The letter about Rokia generated \$2.38—TWICE as much.

Psychologists call this the "drop-in-the-bucket-effect."

Which means if we feel overwhelmed by the scale of a problem, we probably won't do anything about it.

Researchers theorize that focusing on statistics actually short circuits a compassionate response in our brain, by shifting us into an analytical frame of mind. And when we think analytically it hinders our ability to act compassionately--to be merciful.

Do you do this? I do. It's easy to hear statistics about Haiti or Africa or about our own city and think, "*Like MY money's gonna FIX the problem?!*"

But the truth is--- my money might just fix one problem...might help one person.

The truth is God has called us into something that's not easy and does not have simple solutions. And God has called us to be generous with what He's given us.

He's called us to be merciful--NOT in how we feel, "Oh, I feel mercy for those kids..."--but in our actions--DOING something for those kids.

To be merciful is to offer grace and tangible help.

The truth is God isn't concerned about all the people we can't feed or can't help. He's obsessed with who we CAN feed—who we CAN help! How do I know that?

"Then the King (Jesus) will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison and you visited me.' ...I

tell you the truth, when you did it to ONE of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!"

Matthew 25:34-36, 40 nlt

In that parable, Jesus does not talk about overwhelming statistics. He shows how tangible mercy--doing something for ONE person, matters to God.

SELAH

Back at Carnegie Mellon University-- they primed one group to think analytically by asking them one of those story problems we all hated in school: "*An object travels at 5 feet per second, in how many minutes does blah-blah-blah...?*"

The other group they simply asked to write down one word to describe how they feel when they hear the word, "baby."

The group that thought about "baby" gave twice as much money as the group that was doing math.

Researchers concluded that *the mere act of calculation reduces compassion--reduces our capacity for mercy.*

In other words, showing mercy to someone requires us to keep our BRAIN from getting in the way!

Which means if we approach helping people in need as a numbers game, from a statistical approach, from a logical mindset---we probably won't do anything close to what God wants us to do.

SELAH

(LAST moment of Science)

There was a simple study done of college students who were asked 2 questions:

1. How happy are you?
2. How many dates did you have last month?

There was no real connection between the level of happiness and the number of dates.

Then the researchers flipped the questions:

1. How many dates did you have last month?

2. How happy are you?

All of a sudden there was a strong correlation!
Why?

The students focused on their dating status, and focusing on how few or how many dates they had, reduced or increased their level of happiness.

Psychologists call this the “focusing illusion.”

In other words, our focus determines our feelings and our mindset.

Are we focused on what we have or what we don’t have?
That’s the difference between gratitude and greed.

Are we focused on this earthly life or God’s Kingdom?
That’s the difference between selfishness and showing mercy.

If we focus on the needs of others, we’ll discover that we have more than enough—
enough to share.

If we hang on to the here and now, we’ll try to hang on to everything we have.

If we focus on eternity, we’ll look for opportunities to dispense mercy.

Psychologists call it the “focusing illusion.”
Jesus calls it,

“Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.”

Matthew 6:21 nlt

Like I said, I am one of those guys who has been guilty of saying,
“That’s too big of a problem, what’s my drop in the bucket going to matter?”
“That person has problems. My time or money isn’t going to fix them.”

Jesus says, *“I pour out gifts of hope and joy to my people who help those in need.”*

Jesus says, *“Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.”*

Jesus expects me to help those in need, period.

SELAH

Here's something interesting. We look at the vast needs in the community and in the world and say, "I can never fix it--so why try."

But I don't operate that way in other areas of my life and you don't either. (Show you what I mean.)

We don't say things like:

I can't be the next Phil Mickelson or Michele Wie, so I'm not going to spend any money on golf...(spend plenty of time & \$\$)

I'll never own a designer show home, so I won't spend any money putting all those HGTV ideas into my house...(spend plenty of time & \$\$)

I'll never be Bob Villa (Norm Abram) so I won't spend any money on power tools...

I'll never be the next Ansel Adams so I'm not going to spend any more money on photography gear...

But when it comes to mercy and compassion, I've said,

"That problem is a mountain, not a mole hill, so what's the use?
Why should I give anything to that?"

SELAH

In these beatitudes, God calls us to DO things.

To show compassion, be merciful, forgive people who've done wrong. Not just to FEEL mercy for people, but actually ADMINISTER mercy.

GIVE to someone in need. *Feed, clothe, provide.*
And to be grace to the guilty.

And let's not forget the first word in each of these passages: BLESSED. Or "God blesses those who..."

The last time I was here I shared about my trip to Haiti last year, where we were attacked and I was shot through the leg.

Before the trip to Haiti I was asking all my stupid logical questions:

Is this really worth me spending all the money for a \$700 plane ticket plus expenses? Is that really going to help people in Haiti?

When I add up all the money our team of 14 are going to spend, is this really worth it?

And now, knowing that 4 people were shot and went through the most hair-raising time of their lives, you may wonder, was that really worth trying to bestow mercy on people in Haiti?

*God blesses those who are merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.*

Dozens of Haitians came into saving grace relationship with Jesus through our team's involvement with that crusade.

God affirmed me in a supernatural way as Chris Herr & I held the door that night. He told me once and for all: *Morgan--you have what it takes...*

As horrific of an experience as it was--NOT ONE person from our team would trade it for anything.

(TMI?) Every night that I wear the shorts I wore that night--with 2 bullet holes--it reminds me of how God rescues. How He loves. And how He blessed me that night in the midst of us trying to bless the Haitian people.

Somehow this amazing God blessed *everyone* on our team even through a hideous life-threatening shootout. Somehow everyone on our team wouldn't trade that experience for anything because of how God blessed us...

SELAH

As we close in on this election...
and we are tempted to be judgmental...
tempted to be self-righteous...
tempted to be too much like the merciless people on Fox News or MSNBC...

(Beg you!)
Let us live out of the Beatitudes...
let us live out of Jesus...

let us be open to how God wants to use us- to be people who are merciful...be people who help those in need and offer grace to the guilty. →

Let us be people who make it clear we are Jesus followers--not just in word or church attendance--but in our compassionate and grace-filled actions.

Let our focus be Jesus so that He can show us people or situations where He wants US to extend tangible mercy and compassion.

Let our merciful actions make it CLEAR to all, that our unparalleled leader is Jesus.

(Read pg 33-34 *Senior Partner* from [PRIMAL by Mark Batterson](#)--inspirational)

*God blesses those who are merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.*