

# Yearning for Grace and Mercy

September 12, 2021

Matthew 5:6-7

We are studying our way through the Greatest Sermon Ever Preached, the Sermon on the Mount. We have just barely gotten started. We are in the section commonly known as the Beatitudes. I know I have stretched some of you by suggesting that this list of attributes is much more than commonly thought. This is the basic description of every person in the Kingdom of God AND the process of how God has taken them there. They are not random, they are purposeful. They are orderly, and they all come as a result of God's blessing, not the cause of God's blessing. It is not that God looks over His creation, finds people with this particular attribute and then chooses to bless them. No, in this context, the particular attribute in the way it is used here only comes to a person as a blessing from God. He is the source.

It is designed to describe ALL believers, not elite believers. These are not noteworthy attributes that some have. They are attributes, blessings from God that all believers have as a result of God's work in their lives. In other words, as described here, if I find myself resonating with the attribute, my thoughts ought always be turned to "Thank you, God!" rather than "I guess I'm doing well in this area." Such attributes are evidence of God's work, not our achievement.

So far, we have seen that the process begins with recognizing our spiritual poverty (poor in spirit), then our lamenting or mourning over that spiritual poverty, then our recognition that help for this problem can only come from God as His gift to us. We cannot demand it, earn it, buy it. We come meekly before Him, humbly before Him as the giver of such gifts. This is where we have been. This is where we pick up this morning.

Today, we take this process one step further by hungering, thirsting for that which we lack. Again, it comes to us as a blessing from God when we passionately yearn for whatever it takes to have right standing before God as much as we yearn for the daily needs of life like food and water. When we find

ourselves hungering and thirsting for righteousness in that way, we can know we have been blessed by God. He is at work in us. We will unpack that in a few minutes.

Then we will begin a shift. Blessed are the merciful. For the first time, the attribute is not recognition of that which we lack, but recognition of that which we HAVE: mercy. Now, this one is going to require some careful thinking so I urge you to listen closely and follow along. It is this beatitude about mercy that convinces me that we are on the right track. We have the proper understanding of these beatitudes.

So, follow along with me as we read today's text, Matthew 5:6-7. It's short so pay attention. READ.

Main point: It is a sign of God's blessing when we passionately yearn for God's grace and mercy.

Citizens of the Kingdom know they lack that which they need to be right before God, they know it comes from God and they desire it with all of their being, as much as life itself. When they receive it, they instantly recognize it as a gift from God rather than an accomplishment of their own. They have been blessed!

So, as we go through this short text, I urge you to think deeply about both the process of becoming a believer and the attributes that continue to characterize the Christian. The perspective given here is essential to understanding the Christian and the life Christians are to live. (2 parts)

## I. Blessed people are desperate to be right before God. v.6

It is not enough to know that you simply fall short, that you are lacking, and that you have no way of making up for your lack. It is necessary that you desperately yearn to be right with God. Getting to the point of yearning to be right before God comes to us as a blessing, a sign that God is at work in our lives.

v.6- “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Once more, we see the same pattern. I summarize it for those who have not been with us these past two weeks. Each listing begins with a declaration of blessing. As I’ve already noted, the blessing is not a result of the attribute, but the cause of the attribute. God does not choose to bless those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. No, the fact that we hunger and thirst for righteousness displays God’s hand of blessing upon us. Without that hand of blessing, we would not be this way.

After the pronouncement of blessing is the description of the attribute. We’ll get to this one in a moment. Then there is the promise associated with the blessing, all overlapping and pointing to inclusion in the Kingdom, or the granting of eternal life. The promise is the same, utilizing different word pictures that correspond to the attribute. Here the promise for those who hunger and thirst is that they will be satisfied, or they will eat their fill and drink until they can drink no more. That is the pattern.

So here, the sign of God’s hand of blessing is that the person hungers and thirsts for righteousness. Let’s take this further. Hungering and thirsting are common terms to describe the knowledge that you lack something essential. You have to have food and drink to live. You can only survive for a short while without food or water. Food and water are absolutely essential to live. It is ongoing, meaning the need for food and water is continual. It is not as if you can eat once and never have to eat again, or drink enough that you will not need

to drink again for a month. No, it is daily, constant, essential and when lacking, all consuming.

Let me put it this way: when I am hungry, don't stand between me and the buffet line! Or as I tell people, "Don't worry, I am never lacking food. I won't allow it. I will always find a way to satisfy my hunger." It is similar with thirsting. I learned long ago that I must never go anywhere without taking water or drink with me. I remember working in a hot field far from the house, with no water around. I resorted to drinking out of the creek. I was thirsty. I vowed never to put myself in that situation again. I always bring water.

Here, though, the hungering and thirsting is for righteousness. Okay, pay attention. Righteousness is one of those words we use, think we understand, but rarely take the time to unpack. We spent most of our study time in our Wednesday night Bible study on this term. Righteousness is the STUFF you need to be right before God, the golden ticket perhaps. As Holy God, you cannot stand before Him without condemnation unless you bring righteousness with you. You have to have something that shows you qualify. You can't have any unrighteousness and you must have righteousness. Unrighteousness can be thought of as the stain stuck to you when you sin. You have blood on your hands. That is unrighteousness. You can't have any of that and stand before God. Your hands must be clean. That one is easier for us to understand. I John 1:9 says that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins AND CLEANSE US OF ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS. Right?

But the opposite is also true, we MUST have righteousness, the lasting imprint of being, of having or doing something that God counts as pure and holy. If you think in accounting terms, you can't have anything in your liabilities column and you MUST have something in your assets column.

But this is the problem. We learned in the first beatitude that none of us naturally has anything in the asset column. We ALL have many things in the liabilities column. We are ALL spiritually bankrupt. That is the truth.

So here, it is a sign of God's hand of blessing on us that this situation bothers us so much that we are desperately yearning to rectify the situation. We

are passionate about being right before God. We care more about this issue than anything in life. We don't want to go another day until the situation is fixed. We are desperate. Again, the natural man, your neighbor perhaps doesn't seem to care. It doesn't bother him. He is not concerned about being right before God. The only time he might care is when he comes face to face with death or watches as someone he knows and loves suddenly dies. All of a sudden the issue matters. But I've also seen it time and again where such a natural man turns away from God in such a situation, blaming God for the tragedy, claiming He is unfair. No, it is not natural to hunger and thirst for righteousness. The natural man is content with his own righteousness and willing to take his chances.

But for the one who is blessed by God to passionately yearn for a solution, God promises satisfaction. Notice once more that the verb is passive. Someone is providing the satisfaction. Again, it is a divine passive: God is providing the food and water. It is no coincidence that Jesus is said to be the Bread of Life and provide Living water. Yes, there is a connection here to the feeding of the 5,000. They ate "and were satisfied." They ate all they could and had leftovers, 12 baskets full!

Yes, the picture of the Kingdom here is that God provides the nourishment for eternal life...and you never have to worry about having enough. He lavishes it upon us. You don't ever have to worry that He will decide to stop giving it. He never runs short. He doesn't give it out in small bites but spreads before us a banquet feast and invites us to eat our fill. His own will be satisfied!

As before, this is not only how one comes to faith, but how the believer lives. He knows His status before God is only due to God and he guards it with a passion. He is not secretly squirreling away a stash of his own righteousness as insurance just in case. He daily and always acknowledges that without Jesus...I'm toast! He is my righteousness! He gives me status before God. I live knowing how badly I need what only He gives to me. He is my Savior. That is hungering and thirsting for righteousness. The psalmist puts it this way, "As the deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God." (Ps. 42:1)

What about you? Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness? Are you completely dependent on Jesus to provide it for you or do you think you have

some of your own? Are you SELF righteous?

II. Blessed people know their standing before God comes through His mercy.  
v.7

This is the beatitude that convinces me we are on the right track. Because if we take it the way so many take it, God is unmerciful, and if I know anything about our God, it is that He is merciful!

7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Let’s begin here by noting that this attribute represents a change. For the first time, it lays out something we have, we have an abundance of it. Such a person is characterized as filled with something, here mercy. This is the opposite of lacking something, spiritual poverty. Something here has flipped. This blessed person is filled with a good thing, he is merciful.

Now we need to define mercy. Mercy is not getting what you deserve. It is the flip side of grace. Grace is getting what you don’t deserve. You get the good thing you did not earn or deserve. That is grace, a gift. Mercy is not getting the bad thing that you do deserve. You deserve punishment and you don’t get it, that is mercy. So, merciful then means to be full of mercy. Just as graceful means to be full of grace, so merciful means to be full of mercy.

So, if the common understanding of these beatitudes is true, then the person who is full of mercy will be shown mercy, right? And since such a person is on the receiving end of mercy, it is safe to assume the giver of the mercy they receive is God himself, right? Under this common understanding, then, God shows mercy only to those who are merciful. But that would mean God is not merciful! That would mean He required us to be merciful first. And that is just not true! He is merciful to us BEFORE we have deserved such mercy. By

definition that is true. God shows His people mercy...before they deserve it. Otherwise it is not mercy.

So, this cannot describe a person who happens to be merciful and God chooses to bless him. God would not require us to be merciful in order for Him to be merciful. Instead, the opposite is true. Blessed is the man who demonstrates the hand of God by being filled with mercy. Being merciful is evidence that God is at work in your life. Being filled with mercy means we extend to others better than they deserve. We withhold exacting punishment or revenge for injuries suffered. Once more this is not natural.

Let's put this to the test. A car passes you at a high rate of speed and cuts back right in front of you. He zooms out of sight while you regain your composure. Then you come over a hill and you see him pulled over by the state patrol. What is your immediate reaction? Mercy toward him or snickering that he got what he deserved? Yes, we would ALL have a sense of satisfaction that he got what was coming to us. The truth is that we are not by nature merciful. We have mercy only toward those we think deserve it or are perhaps innocent. That, by definition, is not mercy!

So here, such mercy is not just an attitude but a direction, a desire and willingness to take action. It is not merciful to just feel sorry for people. The parable of the Good Samaritan makes this point. The only one lifted up as being merciful is the Samaritan who stopped to actually help the wounded man. It is not just an attitude, but a willingness to act on that attitude. So, to be filled with mercy means it happens often, with strangers, with enemies even. That is not natural.

And so, the fact that such a person is identified as being merciful tells us that God has been at work to make him that way. It means he recognized that God has been merciful to him in saving him from his spiritual predicament and granting him righteousness even though he did nothing to deserve it, and so likewise God causes him to extend such mercy to others. We see this played out in the parable of the unforgiving servant, whose huge debt has been cancelled by the king and yet he goes out and demands payment from his fellow servant for a relatively tiny debt. The fact that he wasn't merciful to his fellow servant

showed he had no concept of how merciful the king had been to him. If he had, he would never have treated his fellow servant harshly. People who have received mercy and get it will extend such mercy to others. That is the concept here.

The promise associated with the attribute it to receive mercy. Once more, this refers to God's promise to allow entrance into His kingdom of people who do not deserve it. He promises to do so. And yet, the word picture of entrance into the kingdom fits. The person who understands just how merciful God has been with him in saving him from his sins is promised to receive the mercy of God. He gets in the kingdom. He receives eternal life. The person who never gets to the point of understanding just how merciful God has been to him in offering to save him will not receive such mercy from God. You must understand what a big deal it is that God has forgiven you of your sin, taken upon His Son your Unrighteousness and given you His righteousness. This is a necessary and universal step in becoming a follower of Jesus.

It also describes how the believer lives. He regularly thanks God for His mercy. He prays that God's Spirit will work in him to make him even more merciful. He resists the temptation to want justice for others and mercy for himself. He rejoices in the fact that his sin burden has been lifted from him, freeing him to show mercy to others.

Now, I pause for a moment to deal with reality. There are some of us who are more prone to mercy than others. I know that when we do those spiritual giftedness tests, there are some (like me) who are at the bottom on the mercy scale. We all know some "mercy people" who just can't help themselves. They are overwhelmingly merciful. I wish I was more merciful. It would make my life more pleasant as a pastor. I tend to be the person who has to deal with people's sin, and the hard work of cleaning up the mess. I sometimes wish I could be the one who just wants to hug everyone and tell them things are going to be okay. Yes, there are some who are more gifted in the area of mercy. But I also know that the level of mercy I do have in me is ALL as a result of God's mercy, His work in me. Just think how unmerciful I would be if not for Jesus!

If we believe this passage is the Word of God, then what should be different about our lives?

1) We will see our relationship with God as essential as the food and water we consume.

2) We will recognize that we lack any basis to have such a relationship.

3) We will desperately, passionately pursue a right relationship with God through His Son, Jesus who makes it possible.

4) We will demonstrate that we get it by confessing our failures to Him rather than hiding from Him and by extending mercy to those who have not extended mercy to us.