

Lesson 5: The Rules of the Kingdom Blessed Are the Merciful

⁷ Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Matthew 5:7

Introduction:

So far, spiritual poverty is blessed with entrance into God's Kingdom. Those who mourn are blessed with comfort. The meek inherit the earth; those destitute of righteousness gain complete fulfillment. Now mercy rules in God's Kingdom.

Jesus does not introduce a new rule of Law into the Kingdom, however. Mercy has always held a prominent place within the attributes of God. In Exodus 34:6-7, God introduced Himself not as predominantly holy, or sovereign, or wise, or powerful, but as merciful, gracious, and long-suffering.

And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. ⁶ And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, ⁷ Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. Exodus 34:5-7

Mercy, as defined in Strong's Concordance, is an "outward movement of compassion that alleviates misery." It is linked to the covenantal love God shows despite the recipients' unworthiness. Incidentally, the idea of mercy assumes deserved punishment is imminent.

Though today's culture might think mercy overlooks or ignores sin, God's mercy acknowledges the punishment sin deserves. However, the rule of His Kingdom does not relish the punishment for wrongdoing. Rather, it delights in the mercy God desires to show to those who recognize their own dreadful condition and seek His gracious forgiveness. Those who have truly understood their rescue from deserved condemnation will freely offer the same mercy to others in this new Kingdom. Mercy takes the human mentality of us-versus-them, good-versus-evil, righteous-versus-unrighteous, and places all humans on a level playing field of condemnation before God, with an extended rope of rescue at the ready to both grip and give to another.

Study Questions:

1. From Exodus 34:6-7, how many does God promise to be merciful toward? In contrast, how many will experience His chastisement?
2. Often, God's wrath and mercy are presented as a perfect balance, but the previous verses demonstrate a ratio of 1000:4. If there were no rule of law or accountability, evil would go unchecked. However, God's mercy far outweighs His wrath. How does this ratio affect your view of God's mercy and His wrath?

3. Consider the inverse of this blessing. "Cursed are the unforgiving, for they will remain unforgiven." How does unforgiveness curse the life of one who nurtures it?
4. In a previous lesson, we discussed the two streams of Pharisaical teaching during the time of Jesus: the Law and Love. Which side does Jesus lean more toward? Can you think of any times when the religious leaders upheld the Law above mercy?
5. If God exacted from us what we deserved, what would be the outcome? (See Romans 6:23)
6. Jesus did not advocate for overlooking or ignoring rebellion toward God's Laws, which is how some view mercy. Read Matthew 18:23-35. In verses 24-25, what does the King require from the servant after he confronts him?
7. What does the King do after the servant asks for mercy? (v.27)
8. After the forgiven servant demands payment from one who owed him far less, the King finds out. V. 34 records what the King then demands. What is the servant's punishment?
9. Mercy requires confrontation and an opportunity for repentance. Confrontation is much more merciful than ignoring a person's wrongdoing. Matthew 18:15-22 records the process of reconciliation among believers. Write the steps of Biblical reconciliation.
10. Why is mercy more compassionate than simply ignoring sinful behavior?
11. What are some ways believers must do a better job of demonstrating mercy in today's culture?