*Introduction*

As we have been considering this great sermon of Jesus, the sermon on the mount, we have seen that we have been going on a journey, step by step, with a logical sequence, each step following on from the one before and leading to the next.

We have seen from this sermon, how we start the Christian life by realising that we are sinners and in need of Christ. The need results in us mourning over the way we are and repenting of our wayward lives and following Christ, realising that of ourselves we are nothing, but in Christ we are made perfect.

Last Sunday we saw the need for each of us to hunger and thirst after righteousness and that it meant in essence that we leave all that was worldly behind and strived, but not in our own strength, to be like Christ Jesus. We saw that at conversion we were filled by becoming righteous in Christ, but there was a need for us to go on being filled, being like the Psalmist:

***PS 42:1-2 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?***

These things are not optional extras in the Christian life, but expected of us by Christ, and the things that will make us truly happy. As we seek to be like Christ in everything we do, we will become content with our situation and know the blessing of God, whatever we are going through, whether it be good or bad.

Paul said:

***PHIL 4:12-13 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.***

These beatitudes, as well as not being optional extras, are not options either, by that I mean that the Christian is expected to seek all of them, not opt for some of them, like you do when you are at school, where you opt to do your best subjects, or the one that will be required for the job you want to do.

If we are to seek Christ and be like Him, then we have to seek ALL of the beatitudes, to not do so, means we are not true Christians. This sermon of Jesus is depicting the Christian man and the Christian character.

Jesus, through this sermon is searching and testing us and it is good for us to realise this. The beatitudes tell us everything about our Christian profession.

You may feel uneasy about them and in so doing become defensive about them, you would rather we did not talk about them, you may even want to talk about something else. If that is how you feel as the beatitudes probe and test you, then you are entirely contrary to the person that Christ wants you to be.

On the other hand, you may feel that these things search you and even hurt you, none the less you know that they are essential and good for you. It is good for us to look in the mirror of God and see who we really are and be humbled by the experience of it, but then not go away and forget about it, but to seek Christ and want to be like him all the more.

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

The question before us today is “Are we merciful?”

Just like we have seen with all the beatitudes that have gone before, here is the man to be blessed, the one to be congratulated, the one who is happy, the one who is merciful.

What does Jesus mean by this statement.

On a negative note, it does not mean a person who is ‘easy going’, as we put it.

There are many people today who think that being merciful is being easy going/

The easy going person is someone who doesn’t see things, or if they do, pretend that they didn’t . It is particularly easy to be like this in that age we live in where there is little belief in law or discipline and in justice or righteousness.

The idea today is that man should be 100% free minded, that he has the right to do just what he wants. The merciful position, many people think, is the one that looks at lawbreaking and says “What does it matter” Let’s carry on!

This type of person is the easy going, easy to get along with, who does not care if laws are broken or not and who is not concerned about keeping them either.

Clearly, this is not what Jesus means about being merciful, and we can say this with very good reasons.

The first reason is that if you remember at the beginning of our journey on this sermon we said that the beatitudes as a whole, could not be attributed to natural qualities. We are not talking about our natural ability to be merciful. We are not born merciful.

The beatitudes are for Christians and therefore come under the spiritual.

The second reason, and the one of utmost importance, for it not meaning easy going, is that mercy is applied specifically and specially to God Himself.

God is merciful. Therefore whatever I think being merciful is, I would have to apply to God as well.

So if I were to say that merciful is easy going, and that it didn’t matter whether I kept the law of not, I would then have to apply that to God himself, and that is unthinkable.

God is merciful, but God is righteous, God is Holy and God is just. So whatever our interpretation of merciful is, it must include all that.

**What is mercy?**

Mercy is probably best looked at in comparison with Grace. In most of his other epistles the Apostle starts off by saying ‘grace and peace’ but in his pastoral epistles he starts with ‘grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The best definition of the two that I have come across is this:

Grace is especially associated with men in their sins; mercy is especially associated with men in their misery.

In other words, whilst grace looks down upon sin as a whole, mercy looks especially upon the miserable consequences of sin.

So mercy really means a sense of pity plus a desire to relieve the suffering, or pity plus action.

There are many ways in which we could illustrate this but the best Biblical illustration would come from the story of the Good Samaritan.

On his journey he comes across a man who has been severely beaten by robbers. Others have gone by, we do not know if they pitied the man or not, but they certainly did not action that pity. But the Samaritan went over to the man and was merciful towards him, binding his wounds, caring for him, making provision for him.

He has a desire to relieve his situation.

But our greatest example of all of course, is that of Jesus himself.

The perfect example of mercy and being merciful is the sending by God of His only begotten Son into the world, and the coming of the Son.

He saw our pitiful state, he saw our suffering and despite of the law breaking, He was moved to action and brought us salvation.

Zechariah, when John was born prophesied:
***LK 1:72 to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant,***

 ***LK 1:76-79 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."***

This is more or less the definition of being merciful and showing mercy. The real problem, in this beatitude is raised by the promise “for they will be shown mercy”, and often this beatitude is misunderstood by many to mean “Well, if I am merciful to others God will be merciful to me”, they put it alongside the verse in the Lord’s prayer which says

***LK 11:4 Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.***

The condition on being forgiven is that we forgive.

Or at least that’s what we think it means.

The problem is this, if we take the attitude that we are forgiven only if we forgive, and if we were to be judged strictly on those terms, then no one would be forgiven or get to heaven, it would be impossible, in fact we would be condemning ourselves.

The second reason is that if we think like this, then we have to cancel the whole doctrine of Grace from the NT.

We can never again say that we are saved by grace through faith, and that not of ourselves; we must never read those passages that say ‘while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us’ or ‘when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God’.

You see if we were only forgiven when we forgive and judged in this way, all those amazing scriptures would be untrue.

Therefore we must look at the scriptures according to the scriptures and rightly divide the word of truth.

When we apply this means of testing scripture with scripture, it becomes quite simply.

What Jesus was really saying is this; I am only truly forgiven when I am truly repentant.

To be truly repentant means that I realise I deserve nothing but punishment, and that if I am forgiven it is entirely down to the love of God and to His mercy and grace and nothing else at all.

And to take it further, having realised this, then of necessity I shall forgive those who sin against me.

Now, having been through the beatitudes up unto this one, realising how helpless and sinful I am and how much I need the grace of God to change me. Having thirsted and hungered after righteousness and received all that God has for me, completely free.

Does it not follow that, if I have seen and experienced all that has gone before, that my attitude towards everyone else must be entirely and completely changed?

I should no longer see man as I used to see them, I must now see them through a Christian eye.

Each and everyone of them as victims of the strategies of Satan and the way of the world. We should feel for them, pray for them, help them,

Jesus knew this when he was on the cross he said

***Luke 23: 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."***

Stephen when he was being stoned said

***ACTS 7:60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.***

We do not forgive because we want to be forgiven, we are not merciful in order to obtain mercy. We do it because we have come to that position where we realise how lost and wretched we are, how we deserve nothing and mourn for what we are. We hunger for God and in Christ we receive the free gift of forgiveness through the shedding of his precious blood, and we show mercy to others because they are in the same position that we were but do not realise it and because they need mercy, and understanding and forgiveness too.

What right have we to demand anything for ourselves in the light of who we are, for we have undeservedly been given outstanding mercy and grace from God. Therefore we should be merciful to those around us, we should pity them for they are where we were, but we should also put that pity into action by providing them with the grace and mercy that we have been given.

Happy, blessed are the merciful for they will obtain mercy, and have already received mercy, to the glory of God. Amen