

April 7, 2002 by Steve Brandon



The Teaching of Jesus Christ - The Blesseds (Part 2)

Matthew 5:7-9

5. Blessed are the merciful (verse 7).

6. Blessed are the pure in heart (verse 8).

7. Blessed are the peacemakers (verse 9).

This morning we will continue in our exposition of the Sermon on the Mount with our second look at the Beatitudes. Two weeks ago, we began our study of this famous section of Scripture by looking at the first four "blesseds." This morning, we will look at the next three "blesseds." Like last time, my outline this morning will be quite simple. Three "blesseds," three points. Last week, we began with point #1. This week, I will begin with point #5 (as we are in part 2 of our message). Again, with each of my points, I would like to ask two simple questions of the verse. "Who is blessed?" and "Why is this person blessed?" These questions are in accordance with the pattern of each of these verses.

5. Blessed are the merciful (verse 7).

Question #1: Who is blessed? It is the merciful who are blessed. Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

When you think of mercy, what do you think about? I think about my brother. Many of you know my brother Stu. He is two inches taller than I am. He is built like a rock and continues to lift weights to keep it that way. But he wasn't always that way. He is four years my younger. I used to be able to take him, pin him to the floor, and demand of him that he would cry out, "uncle." Then, I would be merciful to him and let him go. This is mercy (i.e. the letting him go, not the pinning him to the ground).

Let me give you a picture of mercy, as the Bible paints it.

1. Mercy is helping those who have no other resources.

You can see this if you take out your concordance and search for the word mercy. You will be astonished at how many people came up to Jesus and said, "Have mercy on me."

On several occasions, Jesus encountered blind men along the road, who cried out to Him, "**Have mercy on us**, Son of David," because they wanted to see. Only Jesus could help, so they cried for mercy (Matt. 9:27; 20:31).

A woman from Syrophenicia came and pleaded with Jesus, "**Have mercy on Me**, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed" (Matt. 15:22). She had no resources at her disposal. She was at the end of her resources. So she came to Jesus and pleaded mercy. Jesus even began to turn her away, saying, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ... It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (15:24,26). To which she replied, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." She had no resources. So she pleaded mercy.

A man with a demon possessed son pleaded with Jesus, "Lord, **have mercy on my son**, for he is a lunatic, and is very ill" (Matt. 17:15). This man couldn't do anything. Jesus disciples couldn't do anything. So, he was pleading mercy to Jesus.

In each of these instances, these people had no resources at their disposal. They were utterly desperate. In their cry for help, they cried for "mercy." You might think of mercy as "helping beggars."

2. Mercy is kindness and compassion to those who have wronged you.

On one occasion, Jesus told another story of a certain man who had been forgiven a debt of ten thousand talents (Matt 18:24), which is far more than he could ever hope to pay in his life-time (more than \$10,000,000). He refused to forgive a small debt of another (i.e. \$10,000) (Matt. 18:28). Jesus summed up the story by asking, "**Should you not also have had mercy** on your fellow slave, even as **I had mercy** on you?" (Matt. 18:33). This man, who was indebted this large sum, had no resources to pay his creditor. The creditor had every right to sell him into slavery for the money he took from him, yet he had mercy on him. He refused to have mercy on the man who didn't pay him back a small sum. Mercy is kindness and compassion on those who have wronged you (in this case, financially).

On another occasion, Jesus told the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. In this story there was a man with two sons. One of them demanded the half of his father's inheritance that rightly fell to him. He then took the money and went and squandered it all in sinful living. In returning home, the merciful and loving father took him back and rejoiced exceedingly over his return. Though he wronged his father greatly (i.e. taking half of his father's possessions), his father was merciful and compassionate to him.

On still yet another occasion, Jesus told a story of a certain man, going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, who fell among robbers, was stripped, beaten, and left half dead (Luke 10:30-37). A priest saw the man and passed on the other side. A Levite saw the man and passed on the other side. A Samaritan (who was hated by the Jews), saw the man, felt compassion for the man, came to him, bandaged up his wounds, and brought him to an inn, took care of him (physically and financially). The Bible says that **this man "showed mercy** toward [the other]" (Luke 10:37). This Samaritan, though perhaps not personally wronged by this man, went across cultural bounds and extended kindness and compassion to this man. This is mercy.

In each of these stories Jesus told, the point of emphasis was that the merciful person is the one who is compassionate, gracious, and kind, even when others have been wronged. You might think of this aspect of mercy as "caring for your enemies."

There are many practical areas for this today. Cultural tensions are very real and very difficult to overcome. Yesterday I was told about a church here in Illinois that experienced major attendance problems a few years back. It was considering selling it to a predominantly black church. The town was up in arm and didn't want the sale of this church to go through. This man told me of the hatred of his mother toward black people, because of what happened in her neighborhood years prior to this. The merciful one is the one who extends help to those who have wronged you (even as a social group). I hope that you love black people. I long for the day when we may see people here at Rock Valley Bible Church of all culture and colors.

3. Mercy is love extended to one who deserves punishment.

The great picture here is of our salvation in Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 2:4, it says that it was **the richness of God's mercy** which extended His hand of love in the salvation of men. These are those who were dead in trespasses and sins. These are those who lived in the lusts of the flesh. These are those who were children of wrath. These are those who deserved the punishment of God.

In Titus 3:4-5 Paul writes, "When the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but **according to His mercy**, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy spirit. These are those who were foolish (Titus 3:3). These are those who were disobedient (Titus 3:3). These are those who were enslaved to various lusts and pleasures (Titus 3:3).

Peter says it like this, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who **according to His great mercy** has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). It was appropriate then, for the tax-gatherer to cry out, "**God, be merciful** to me, the sinner!" (Luke 18:13).

You might think of this expression of mercy as "loving the unlovable." Paul said that while we were enemies against God, it was then that He reconciled us to Himself (Rom. 5:10).

This is a picture of mercy.

Question #2: Why is this person blessed? Verse 7 simply says, "for they shall receive mercy."

There are some who would take this reason and keep it entirely on the human level. They would advocate that this blessing is simply the natural response of others to those who are kind. In other words, they say, "If you are kind to others, they will be kind to you." While this is often true in experience, there are great difficulties with this interpretation. Who was the most merciful person ever to walk the planet? It was the Lord Jesus Christ. Were people merciful to Him? No. The religious leaders hated Him and put Him to death on the cross.

For this reason, I believe that it is best to take this "blessed" on the divine level, rather than the on the human level. "For they shall receive mercy from God!" Jesus is saying that it is those who are characterized by mercy who will be shown mercy at judgement day.

Why will this be so? "Is this a salvation by works? Do we earn his mercy by our mercy? No, because an "earned mercy" would be a contradiction in terms. If mercy is earned it is not mercy; it's a wage. Be assured, if we get anything good at the judgment it will be mercy, 100% mercy!" (John Piper, from a sermon preached on Feb. 23, 1986 at Bethlehem Baptist Church).

The key to understanding why it is the merciful who will receive mercy comes from the first four blessings and Jesus' words in Matthew 18 -- the story I already alluded to, regarding the man who had been forgiven a great debt. Is this not Jesus' point? "You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?" (Matt. 18:32-33). Those who are poor in spirit, who mourn for their sin, who are meek, and who hunger and thirst after righteousness are those who will enter the kingdom of heaven. They will enter precisely because they have properly understood themselves to be empty and needy of God's mercy. This type of person will cry out to God, "be merciful to me, the sinner" (Luke 18:13). As God has promised, "I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more" (Heb. 8:12). Then, **those who have received mercy from God, cannot be anything but merciful toward others.**

I must point out here that the "blesseds" turn a corner here. The first four "blesseds" refer to the person who notices and acknowledges his own emptiness before the Lord. This is the common theme in being poor in spirit, mourning, meek, and hungering. But beginning with the fifth "blessed," we will see that it is God's work in the heart of an individual which can only be responsible for the driving influence in their life to act this way. If you know His mercy, you will be merciful. You might think of these next three "blesseds" as describing the results of an individual when he has acknowledged his emptiness and God has filled up his lack, like a cup. Then, what is in will flow out. In this case mercy.

Church family, remember that Jesus is describing kingdom citizens. They are characterized by being merciful. Are you merciful with your wife? Your husband? Your children? Your co-workers? If you are not a merciful person, my exhortation to you this morning is not to "be merciful." Rather, I would urge you today to think of God's mercy in Christ Jesus. Do you know of His mercy to sinners? Have you come to a

place of brokenness over your sin and cried to God for mercy? Have you received mercy at the cross of our Lord and Savior? This is the path to being merciful.

If you have received of his mercy and if you are a citizen of His kingdom, should you not also have mercy on others? Kingdom citizens are merciful, because they have experienced God's mercy to them. **Listen soberly to the words of James 2:13, "Judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy."**

Let's look at our next blessed.

6. Blessed are the pure in heart (verse 8).

Question #1: Who is blessed? Verse 8 says, "Blessed are the pure in heart."

In His teaching, Jesus was always interested in the heart. I will give you only a few examples from the many I could show you. Look over at Matthew 5:28, "everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already **in his heart**." Jesus isn't simply concerned with those who don't commit the physical act of adultery. He is concerned with adultery in the heart!

In Matthew 6:21, Jesus addresses the issue of materialism. Notice how he penetrates to the heart, "where your treasure is, there will your **heart** be also." Jesus doesn't instruct people to avoid money, per se. He instructed them by guiding their heart (i.e. their affections).

Matthew 15:8, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and scribes who were interested simply in externally keeping their traditions. He said, "This people honors Me with their lips, but their **heart** is far away from me." They might be saying the right things, but their heart is not in their sayings. Jesus is concerned with the heart.

I will give one last example: Matt. 22:37. Jesus is asked what the greatest commandment is. He replied, "to love the Lord your God with **all your heart**, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." Notice how the greatest commandment deals with your internal attitude and affection for God. It isn't merely a focus upon your external obedience to God, but rather your heart.

The internals matter to God. You don't have to trace far in Scripture to see this. "God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the **heart**" (1 Sam. 16:7). "God examines our **hearts**" (1 Thess. 2:4). God desires "truth in the **innermost being**" (Ps. 51:6).

With this statement of blessing in Matthew 5, Jesus says that those who are pure in heart are blessed. This word describes one who has a clean, sanctified, unmixed, unpoluted, single-minded heart. Jesus is describing the person who has a heart that is not intent upon evil, but intent upon good. Yet obviously here in these statements of blessing, Jesus isn't speaking about the one who has never sinned or been polluted or defiled in his heart. The one who is poor in spirit (verse 3) has acknowledged his own spiritual bankruptcy -- his own spiritual poverty -- his own need for a transformation. The one who mourns (verse 4) mourns for his sin. This is the one who cries with David, "**Create in my a clean heart**, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10).

Jesus is simply speaking of the one who has pure and simple devotion in his heart before the Lord. Jesus is describing the one who doesn't simply concern himself with the outward technicalities of how he should live, as if attempting to meet some sort of standard of external righteousness, like the Pharisees. Rather Jesus is describing the one whose concern is for a heart's devotion to the Lord, which manifests itself in purity of life. Listen to David again, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my **heart** be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer" (Ps. 19:14). Paul said, "the goal of our instruction is love **from a pure heart!**" (same word).

Question #2: Why is this person blessed? Jesus says, "for they shall see God" (verse 8). This has been called, "The whole object of Christianity ... to bring us to the vision of God, to see God (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, Vol. 1, p. 112). "Seeing God" is the blessed hope -- "the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus" (Titus 2:13). When Jesus returns, "we shall see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2). Eternity "ends" with the glory of the Lord illumining every place (Rev. 21:23). Prayers for revival are often simply cries to God, "visit us, O Lord!"

Who can see God? **Only** those who are pure in heart. Several scripture passages teach this. "Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood, And has not sworn deceitfully" (Ps. 24:3-4). The writer to the Hebrews says that without holiness, "no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

Yet, we consistently see in Scripture that those who come into the presence of the Lord are overwhelmed with their own sinfulness before His holiness. You can somewhat compare it to appearing before an authority figure in your life. The dread of every child is the announcement at school, "Will Bobby Jones please report to the principal's office." As the child walks down the hallway of the school, thoughts are racing through their little mind, "What did I do? Did I do something good? Did I do something bad?" If the child remembers how there was a scuffle in the playground during lunch, the child comes with fear. If the child has been repeatedly disciplined by the teacher, the child comes with fear. Even if the child hasn't done anything bad (at least what they can remember, anyway), there is often a fear in coming to the principal's office.

It can be a terrifying thing to come into the presence of somebody in authority, who can make your life miserable. It's like appearing before your boss at work. It's like appearing before father or mother. It's like getting a letter from the Internal Revenue Service a month after filing taxes! If you have pleased them and done everything they have said, it is a joy to be in their presence. If you have dis-pleased them or done something wrong, it is terror. I can remember on several occasions making blunders at work and being called into my boss' office to talk about the situation. It was never very fun.

So it is with God, only infinitely worse. To see God with your sin before you is a terrifying thing. That is why it is **only** the pure in heart who will see God. This is why the testimony of Scripture has holy men crumbling before the presence of God, agonizing over their sinfulness. The Jews knew of the impossibility of having a pure heart apart from God making it pure. Listen to Proverbs 20:9, "Who can say, 'I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin?'" The only ones, who can claim a pure heart this morning, are those who have transformed by the Spirit of God through faith in the Son of God. This is why Jesus pressed the necessity with Nicodemus, "you must be born again" (John 3:7). This is Paul's emphasis in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

So, I ask you, "Is this 'blessed' describing you?" Do you have a changed heart? Do you have a pure heart? Has God transformed your heart? Without a pure heart, you will be banished from the Lord. If this doesn't describe you, cry to God for Him to change you and for Him give you holy desires.

Remember that these "blesseds" are indicatives, not imperatives. These are descriptions, not commands. Again, I keep coming back to this, because it is important. Jesus isn't commanding people to have pure hearts. He is describing those in the kingdom as those who have pure hearts.

7. Blessed are the peacemakers (verse 9).

Question #1: Who is blessed? Jesus said in verse 9, "Blessed are the peacemakers."

The meaning of this word isn't too difficult to understand. It simply describes the person who seeks to make peace with others. This is what you get when you combined the two words, "peace" and "maker." The difficulty with this "blessed" is not its meaning, but its area of application.

There are some who would simply place this statement on the **human level**, as if to say that this blessing applies those people who are the reconcilers of the world. The one who makes efforts to bring the two sides to the table and unite them to live peacefully with one another. There are others who want to place this statement on the **divine level**, as if to say that the only peace that will ultimately last is the peace that is made with God. In effect, this statement is turned into a blessing of those who are evangelists. **I believe that you need to combine these two thoughts.** Yes, there is a "human level" peacemaking that is being discussed, but there is also a divine level that transcends the human peacemaking efforts.

I believe that this "blessed" is speaking on the **human level**. Look over at verse 44. Jesus said, "I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (verses 44-45). I connect verse 9 with verse 45, because the same result occurs:

Verse 9, "... for they shall be called sons of God."

Verse 45, "... in order that you may be sons of your Father, who is in heaven."

This is all about being "sons of God." In verse 44, Jesus is saying to be at peace with your enemies. Love your enemies. Or, as Paul said, "As far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men" (Rom. 12:18). This is a sign of being a child of God, that on the human level, you are actively seeking peace with others. Furthermore, you are actively encouraging others to do the same.

Yet, there is also a sense, where this cannot be the only sphere of application. It must also be speaking of the **divine level**. Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). Jesus went on to describe how family members will be set at odds with each other because of their love to Jesus Christ, which surpasses all family love. In the greatest sense, the only way to achieve peace with others in this life is when the God of peace reconciles both parties to Himself.

So, how do you ultimately make peace with others? By spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ and reconciling people to the God of peace (Phil. 4:7; 1 Th. 5:23; 2 Th. 3:16; Heb. 13:20). It is only as you are reconciled to God, that you can spread a message of peace to the world. So, being a peacemaker cannot simply remain on the human level. That is why I said that it must include both the human level and the divine level.

Who can be a peacemaker? Only genuine citizens of the kingdom, who know true peace. They are the only ones that understand genuine peace. You who have experienced peace from God are able to dispense that to others.

Question #2: Why is this person blessed? Jesus says, "for they shall be called sons of God." In other words, Jesus says that the sons of God are peacemakers. So let me ask you this, "Are you a peacemaker?" Or, are there constant conflicts in your relationships with others? How about right here at Rock Valley Bible Church? Are you at peace with those involved here? When you sense tension in our body, do you go after it and seek to make peace?

I think especially within the church, this perspective of making peace is so important. Men, we will see, beginning next week in Equippers with our study of Ephesians, the grand importance of unity within the body of Jesus Christ. God has declared to the world that he has reconciled two radically different groups of people, the Jew and the Gentile into one body, called the church. It is a sham when those who have experienced peace with God aren't at peace with one another, but rather, at war.

Making peace isn't establishing a cease-fire. In the middle-east today, there is great conflict and tension. The Palestinians are at war with the Israelis. For years, they have sought peace. In recent years, they have had seasons of truce, but they have never known peace with each other. At times, they have agreed to a cease-fire, but a cease-fire isn't peace, it is a truce. I fear that often in the church of Jesus Christ, its members have agreed to a truce, a cease-fire, rather than peace.

I ask you again this morning, "are you a peacemaker?" In your conversations are you usually brought together or apart? Are your words abrasive, or are they like glue. Are there tensions in relationships that you have willingly allowed to foster, rather than seeking peace in them? Can you say, "As far as it depends upon me, I am at peace with all men?" (Rom. 12:18). Have you done everything that you can do to create peace in your relationships with others?

Now, there is a point in which we will not experience peace with others. Jesus said that He didn't come to bring peace, but a sword that will divide people against each other (Matt. 10:34ff). There will be a point that we have done all that we can do to reconcile with others, but the sword of Jesus will always be between us.

What is "the sword of Jesus"? The gospel of His Son is the sword. In Matthew 10, Jesus was instructing His disciples before he sent them out to preach "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This is good news! Yet, this is the thing that divides and creates hostility. When you put forth God's holiness to others and the need to repent and find forgiveness in Jesus Christ, a division will be created. There will be those who hate the message, because they love their sin. They will hate you, because you wield the sword of Jesus, the good news of His saving work, which men simply don't want to hear.

And so I ask you, "is the gospel of Jesus Christ the wall that divides you and those with whom you have no peace?" I know that many of you, especially with those in your own family have experienced this tension and division. Try as you might, the gospel stands in the way. If that is the case, that's fine. It is the sword that Jesus brought about this division. You have done all that you can do to create peace, but the gospel stands between you. **But if there is anything else, other than the gospel, you're not a peacemaker.** However, please remember, that you still need to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (verse 44). Even if there is no peace between you, you must continue to demonstrate love.

Again, I remind you, my exhortation isn't for you to be a peacemaker. Colin Powell is travelling tonight to the Middle East seeking to make peace between Ariel Sharon and Yasir Arafat. I'm not telling you to be a Colin Powell. Jesus isn't saying, "be a peacemaker." He is simply making the observation that the sons of God will be peacemakers.

My exhortation is simply this. Do these "blesseds" describe you? Because kingdom citizens ...

- ... are poor in spirit.
- ... mourn for their sin.
- ... are meek.
- ... hunger and thirst for righteousness.

God will fill such people. As He fills them, kingdom citizens will be ...

- ... merciful.
- ... pure in heart.
- ... peacemakers.

Church family, I don't exhort you to be a Colin Powell, I exhort you to be a child of the King. Then, you will exhibit these characteristics in your life. They will be true of you. You will be a peacemaker.

This morning, once again we have the opportunity to participate in the Lord's Supper. In preparing for this, I read the passage in 1 Corinthians 11, where Paul gives directions to the church regarding this ordinance. I have read these verses again and again and again, but never noticed their relationship to this entire idea about being a peacemaker. I was astonished by these verses this week.

1 Corinthians 11, which is often read in conjunction with the celebration of the Lord's Supper, Paul writes, "But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse" (**verse 17**). Paul was speaking here about church assemblies -- when the church gathered together. He said it wasn't for the better, but for the worse. Church was bad! It would have been better for them not to have come!

In **verse 18**, Paul continues, "For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that division exist among you; and in part, I believe it." The reason why it was for the worse was because there was not unity in the church. In light of today's text, you might simply say, "there were some who were not peacemakers." Rather, they allowed their divisions to fester and boil and manifest themselves. They weren't those who were poor in spirit, mourning, meek, or merciful. Rather, they preferred to stand up for their own rights, their own freedom, their own selfishness.

The next verse shocked me: "For there must also be factions among you, in order that those who are approved may have become evident among you" (**verse 19**). In other words, the factions within the church were necessary, because the **factions caused the genuine peacemakers to become apparent to all**. The factions created an environment in which the genuine peacemakers, sought to be at peace with all men, but were refused peace by those who were not interested in peace. Those not interested in peace were not "sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). It became evident among the Corinthians who was genuine and who was not, by the manner in which divisions were treated.

It is appropriate for us to participate together in the Lord's Supper. Our text has prepared us perfectly for such an occasion. Kingdom citizens are merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers. Our service this morning gives us tremendous opportunity to "examine yourself" (1 Cor. 11:27). Has God filled you with mercy or do you use your position to strong-arm people into satisfying your own desires? Is your heart pure before God or are you harboring unconfessed sin before Him? Are you one who seeks peace with others or do you find constant tensions in your

relationships with others? If these questions have convicted your heart that you are not a kingdom citizen, please do not participate in our celebration this morning.

We are not a perfect community. Yet, by the grace of God, when we sin against one another, we will be quick to reconcile with others, by the overflow of His mercy in our lives. The Psalmist said, "behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1). May that be the expression of Rock Valley Bible Church as we express the unity of our faith in Jesus Christ by celebrating the Lord's Supper together.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 7, 2002 by Steve Brandon.
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