

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL & THE PURE IN HEART

Week #3 of a 4-Week Series on the Beatitudes: "Attitudes of Being"

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Morning, everyone!

So this woman is really stressed and she's driving really fast and she's tailgating this guy. And the light turns yellow in front of him and he stops when he could have easily made it through the intersection. And she was just steamed! So angry she started leaning on her horn and yelling and doing obscene finger gestures. She was so upset that she missed getting through the intersection she dropped her cell phone; she dropped her make-up; and she just lost it!

And so in mid-rant, she hears a knock on the window of her car, and there's a very serious-looking police officer who asks her to get out of the car and to put her hands in the air. She argued, but he took her down to the police station. She was searched; she was finger-printed; she was photographed; and then placed in a holding cell for a couple of hours. And then another officer came and returned her to the booking desk, where the arresting officer was with her possessions.

Before she could say a word, the officer said, "Ma'am; I am so sorry. I am so sorry! It was my bad! I made a mistake; I'm very sorry. You see, when I pulled behind you, you were blowing on the horn so loud, and you were yelling and flipping this guy off and cussing a blue streak at him. I mean, your behavior was just crazy. And then I noticed a 'What Would Jesus Do?' bumper sticker, followed by another bumper sticker that says, 'Follow Me to Sunday School.' And then I saw the chrome-plated Christian fish symbol on the truck, so I naturally assumed that you must have stolen that car."

[Congregation laughs] Okay. So ...

So how many people ever had someone in your life that really ticked you off? And you could just lose it with them every time. Anybody have one of those? How many people have someone in your life that you really love, but you just don't see eye to eye? And sometimes you just don't understand how they think! Anybody? And how many people have ever had a hard time forgiving or accepting or even liking someone in your life? anybody?

You know, every one of us has some people stuff; some relationship issues and other stuff in our lives that we're all seeking to find guidance -- to find answers and solutions -- to improve our lives and make us a bit happier. We're all looking for answers. I think we're looking for more than answers; we're looking for easy answers. We're looking for the "snap-your-fingers-click-your-heels-and-blink-your-eyes" solution to a happier life. But as Winston Churchill said, sometimes easy is not an option!

There are answers. There is wisdom and there is guidance and solutions. But they take work! And often the work that we do not want to do. We say we want to take our lives to the next level. We say we want to have more fulfillment in our relationships and every area. But we aren't always willing to do the work that is needed.

We are in the third week of our four-week series on the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes contain the wisdom and the insights of Jesus' entire teachings with practical tools for the development and the unfolding of our soul. To help us shape and improve the quality and the experience of our lives, and to deepen our awareness and our relationship with God and ourselves and all life.

The Beatitudes are the first eight statements in Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount. And they really represent eight states of mind that -- when we attain them -- we will experience what the Beatitudes are, which means "the blessedness of life." But it takes work. It takes inner, deeper spiritual work.

So Week #1 we looked at ***"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"*** and ***"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."*** I'm not going to summarize today; I'll do that next week. But if you want to see it on YouTube or our website, you should check it out.

Last week we did ***"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth"*** and ***"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteous, for they shall be filled."***

A lot of these things don't come easy, because the translation from Jesus' language --which was Aramaic -- to Greek and then to English kind of literally lost some things in the cultural translation. These things are so much deeper, but they require us contemplating and investigating them on a more personal, meditative, profound way.

Today we're going to look at:

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy"

and

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Let's start with, ***"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall see mercy."***

You'll notice the previous four Beatitudes were: Establish one state of mind and you will get something else. You know, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall receive the kingdom of heaven."* Or *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."* It's almost like the opposite: you mourn, you get comforted; you hunger, you get fed.

But in the fifth one, it's actually: The same thing that you establish is the same thing that you're going to get. *"Blessed are those who are merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."* And that's a very interesting thing: that you'll get more of the thing that you create, that you demonstrate.

And tell me if these things kind of sound familiar structurally and in principle. *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."* How about, *"Forgive, and you will be forgiven."* Or, *"Give and you shall receive."* Or, *"Do not judge and you will not be judged."* Or, *"Do not condemn and you will not be condemned."*

If you really look at this, with all these statements Jesus is sharing an underlying universal principle that teaches how life works. It is the Law of Cause and Effect. It is the Law of Attraction; the Law of Mind-Action. What we put out into the universe, we will attract more of the very same thing. Like begets like.

And so what it is saying is also: Be careful of what you put out! Energies you put out towards other people; energy you put out toward yourself and life. Because those things will come back and manifest in our lives.

Now let's have a deeper look at why, specifically, Jesus chose merciful. *"Blessed are the merciful."* And because being merciful requires a lot of aspects of spiritual maturity and spiritual qualities and attributes. To be merciful requires that we're loving; that we're compassionate; that we're understanding; that we are forgiving; that we're willing to let go of resentments and the pain of the past. Mercy requires kindness and generosity and thoughtfulness. Mercy requires a desire to do good and desire to help others.

When you look at mercy and the fullness of what it means, it is a godly act of loving kindness in the face of actions that aren't always that kind back to us.

How many people ever had somebody do something not so nice or kind to you? And your first thought was not mercy? [Congregation laughs] You know? I'll be you thought, *"I'll get that dirty so-and-so back;*

they don't deserve forgiveness. They don't deserve my kindness." You smile as you visualize them choking on a chicken bone; you know what I'm saying? [Congregation laughs] That kind of feeling!

So mercy truly is a higher spiritual response of giving the grace of God in interactions and relationships that aren't always as healthy or positive as we'd like them to be. That when we're able to cultivate this level of godliness; of kindness; of goodness; of compassion, that same type of energy and goodness flows to us. What we put out that we will call back and attract to ourselves.

Interestingly, in Aramaic -- the language Jesus spoke -- mercy carries with it the concept of a womb or something being birthed from within. That mercy is something comes from deep within us that is birthed. And there's a level of depth and sincerity -- something genuine -- that is born of love that must come from us. This is a level -- when it's saying mercy -- it's saying it must be born from deep within us.

Being merciful is being merciful in thought; in feeling; in our hearts; and action. How many people have ever had someone do something nice to you, but you could feel that they were reluctant and their heart wasn't in it? Anybody ever have that? Anybody ever do something or say something nice to someone, but your heart was not really into it? That is not mercy! Mercy is given freely. Mercy is from a loving heart. It is the womb birthing something good that is from the very best of what is deep within ourselves.

Remember Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*? This beautiful line; it says:

"The quality of mercy is not strained. It droppeth as a gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath. It is twice-blessed. It blesseth him that gives and him that takes."

And what it is saying is that mercy comes from a place of peace and love and grace that is within us. And one of the powerful things about mercy is: When we exercise it, it can be so healing. It can be uplifting. It can be transforming. And it can bring reconciliation in relationships.

Have you ever had someone have mercy on you? Anybody ever experience some grace? Have you ever gotten more kindness than you actually deserved? And didn't it have an impact on you? Wasn't there a deep change ... not just a great feeling in the moment, but something profound and meaningful took place within us. That is the power of the mindset that Jesus is talking about that will help us move our lives to a higher level of fulfillment.

Here's an Aramaic translation of this particular Beatitude:

"Blessed are those who, from their inner wombs, birth mercy. They shall its warm arms embrace them."

A part of our spiritual work is to develop a mindset of mercy, because it is only when we develop mercy and compassion and care and kindness that we can increase our level of happiness; the harmony and connection in our relationships and families and communities and our world. It behooves us all to build a consciousness of love, compassion and forgiveness. It will not just make our lives better; it will make life better.

And so for those relationships where we don't click, those relationships where we have conflict; in those relationships, we need to birth mercy. We need to birth compassion and kindness and love. And it takes work! And it takes practice! And it takes time! But if we don't, we will end up birthing more resentment. We will birth intolerance. We will birth disharmony. We need to birth compassion and mercy in the areas where we hold judgement and condemnation. In the areas where we hold blame and grudges and desire revenge.

So let's do a little practice. I want you to think of somebody that you might have a little conflict with; that you may not have the most compassion for in this moment. See them in your mind's eye. Close

your eyes; take a deep breath; and just bring them into your heart. Take a deep breath. And just, we're going to say half-voice to ourselves, *"God is merciful and I am merciful."*

Together: [with congregation] *"God is merciful and I am merciful."*

Take a deep breath. See them in a bubble of light and love. And just send them love from your heart. In fact, send them love like you were their mom. Like you were their mother; like you were their father. Send them that kind of love. And as you send that motherly love, you invoke divine love to come into you and through you in a greater way.

The word "mercy" means "to allow something to flow through you." So take a deep breath and allow God's love to flow through you and flow through to that person. Send them love. Send them peace. Send them blessings.

And again, we say, *"God is merciful and I am merciful."*

Together: [with congregation] *"God is merciful and I am merciful."*

Take a deep breath. Amen.

So that process of birthing compassion -- of birthing mercy -- is something that takes time. But this type of practice is the kind of practice we need to go deeper. And to develop that kind of mindset will really take our lives to a higher level of fulfillment; a higher level of joy; a higher level of kindness and understanding in all of our relationships and within ourselves.

Last translation of this Beatitude from Aramaic. It says:

"Ripening in a healthy way are those who radiate womb-like love from the deepest place inside. They shall be reborn in love's creative stream."

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." Powerful consciousness and mindset to live by. Transformative on so many levels.

The second one is **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."**

You know, the heart in Eastern traditions really means the center of knowing; the center of balance; the center of wisdom; the center of guidance. That's what it means. To be pure in heart means to be centered in that very core of our being where we are one with God; where we are one with life; where we are at one with love.

In Aramaic, "pure in heart" conveys an idea to return to God; to return to oneness; to return to that nature of love that is within all of us. It is about living our lives whole-heartedly and centered in this place of oneness with the living activity and Spirit of God; the pureness of God; the wholeness of God that is in us.

And this whole idea of the heart thing: in the Bible, it's such a powerful, powerful symbol. It doesn't just mean this [points to his chest]; it means not just our feeling nature. It means the essence and the core of where we come from: the center of our being.

And here are these Scriptures that talk about the importance of heart:

"The greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. To love God with all your heart."

In Jeremiah it says:

"If you seek me, you will find me, if you seek me with all your heart."

And then in Psalm 51 it says:

"Create in me a clean heart, o Lord, and renew a right spirit within me."

Everything is talking about the importance of the heart: keep it clean; keep it open; to be centered in that place, because that's the core of our being. That is the essence of our truth and love and kindness and all good.

Psalm 37, Verse 4 says:

"Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart."

So all these things are pointing about spending time centering in the heart: the heart of God; and the heart and the essence of who you are.

Here's another Aramaic translation. It says:

"Aligned with the One are those whose lives radiate from a core of love. They shall see God everywhere."

Neal Douglas Klotz says this:

"We are reminded that life invites us to an unfolding process and not any fixed condition of outer purity. Remember when you found yourself so immersed in something that you lost track of time? You forgot yourself in the moment, being completely one in heart with another or with a goal. We were momentarily returned to ripeness in the same light of oneness from which we came. It is the heart that opens the windows between the worlds of self and soul in our lives. Heart enables us -- without grasping or holding on to outer experiences -- to see the world differently."

So this whole idea is that the more we center in God and center our hearts in our oneness with God, we will see life differently. It is the heart that gives us the opportunity to see differently. And to see differently, we have to do that work in here [points to chest]. And it's not easy; it takes time and effort.

You know, Jesus put it this way. He said:

"We have eyes, but do not see."

He said we have it ... but we have to do that work to get to the place where we can see through the eyes of love; through the eyes of good; through the eyes of possibility and wonder.

How many people have ever seen the play, *The Man of LaMancha*? Anybody see that? The Man of LaMancha -- Don Quixote? Alonso Quijano: he's kind of a kind of little crazy guy, but he becomes this knight, Don Quixote. And he sees beauty where people see ugliness. There's an inn; he thinks it's a castle. There's a kitchen server; he thinks she's like a queen or a goddess. I mean, people think he's just nuts. And here's my favorite line in the play. He said to his sidekick:

"Facts are the enemy of the truth."

[Congregation laughs] So there are a lot of facts, but can we see the truth. That's why it says do not judge by appearances. Do not judge by appearances!

There's another crazy guy who saw hope where people saw hopelessness. Who saw abundance where people saw lack. Who saw life where people saw death. And his name was Jesus! And the fact of that whole possibility is: When we are heart-centered, we're able to see good; we're able to see blessings; see beauty; see goodness in all of its various shapes and sizes.

I read a book many years ago called *What Makes the Great Great*. It was by a guy named Dr. Dennis Kimbro. He was interviewing all these very successful people to find out what made them great. And so

he was interviewing Wally "Famous Amos." Anybody remember "Famous Amos" cookies? Anyway, so he's interviewing him on a 12th floor, 13th floor Atlanta high rise. And so he's trying to ask him what made him so great. And [Wally] is trying to share and he said, "No, let me show you."

So he opens the drapes and looks down on downtown Atlanta. He says, "So what do you see out there?"

[Kimbrow] said, "Well, I see downtown Atlanta."

[Amos] says, "No, no! What do you really see?"

[Kimbrow] says, "Well, I see buildings and I see stores."

"No, no, no! What do you see?"

"I see people...." And after a while [Kimbrow] just gets frustrated and he says, "What do you see?"

[Amos] says, "What I see are possibilities. When I look out, I see possibilities. And to me, that's what makes you great: is what you can see."

So I ask you: When you look out at the world, what do you see? When you look at your life, what do you see? When you look at your relationships, what do you see? When you look at your level of happiness and fulfillment in your life right now, what do you see? When you look at your relationship with God and your level of spiritual connection, what do you see? When you look at your future, what do you see?

It is vital that we take time to spend centered in our heart. Because it's only when we are connected in the heart that we can see through the eyes of God. Can we see those possibilities.

This is a Sufi practice. And we're going to do it now, just for a minute. And what it is: Just quiet yourself. Close your eyes. And the whole goal is: Get so still and quiet that you can hear your heart and feel your heartbeat. [Pauses for quiet] Can you slow it down enough that you can feel your heartbeat? [Silence] That thing that circulates the blood, that gives us life. The heart that symbolizes the fullness of love. The heart that is the core and the center of our being. The heart that represents our oneness with God.

Take a deep breath. Put all your intention on your heart. Seek God with all your heart. Love God with all your heart. Delight yourself in God with all your heart. And you will begin to see yourself, others, life and this world with new eyes: eyes of hope; eyes of gratitude; eyes of joy and abundance.

Center one more time in your heart: "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*" Amen.

So every one of us wants a better life. We want a more meaningful life. And that is absolutely available to each and every one of us if we're willing to do the work. And it does take work!

This week, I want you to do at least two meditations: the meditation for mercy and the meditation for pure in heart. Just listen to your heart. Because it is through these states of mind that we will experience the blessing of the Beatitudes and the blessedness of life.

God bless you all!

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