

## PROFILE OF DISCIPLESHIP

### IV. "The Blessing of Involvement– the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Beatitudes"

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#### INTRODUCTION

How long has it been since you looked at the world by hanging upside down? Maybe at this point it's more like hanging your head off the couch to see things upside down. Do you remember as a kid how fascinating it was hanging upside down from a tree limb or monkey bars– the sky was on the ground, the lawn was up where the sky belonged and the trees grew down? Hanging upside down causes us to see old things in new ways. Barbara Brown Taylor likens this to what Jesus is doing in the Beatitudes– a spiritual turning things on their heads. He is not saying,

“Blessed are the wise, for they shall not be fooled.”

or “Blessed are the strong, for they will be successful.”

or “Blessed are the wealthy, for they shall have everything they want.”

Instead, He gives us a list of losers: people at the end of their rope; the mournful; the meek– telling us that each condition is a doorway to blessedness, that is, happiness without regard to circumstances. Talk about turning things on their heads!

Previously we've noted that the eight beatitudes are evenly divided: **the first four** have to do with our inner life relating to God and the **second four** deal with our relationship with the outer world. The first four map out our coming to God. The last four define our ministry to the world.

Reviewing the first four:

1. We enter a relationship with God when we are “**poor in spirit**”– spiritually humble, recognizing our need, at the end of our rope.
2. Then we enter into repentance, **mourning** for our sin and the wrongness of the world.
3. Next, we're ready for the lordship of Christ reflected in **meekness**.
4. And finally, the **hunger and thirst**– the desires that will bring growth.

Now, we begin looking at the outflow brought about by the Christ-life dwelling within us. And, we shouldn't be surprised that this state of being richly blessed by God isn't just for our benefit. Our happiness depends upon sharing what God has so graciously and freely given to us in our hearts.

Mtt. 5:1-12

TEXT: “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (5:7)

*You're blessed when you care.*

*At the moment of being “care-full,” you find yourself cared for. (Msg)*

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” (5:8)

*You're blessed when you get your inside world– your mind and heart– put*

*right. Then you can see God in the outside world. (Msg)*

### **BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL**

As we begin thinking about reaching out to others, mercy is certainly a good beginning point. Every person on the face of the earth needs mercy. Every person wants mercy. Unfortunately, while we all desire mercy for ourselves, we can be quite reluctant to dispense mercy to others. Often we demand justice for other's goof-ups, transgressions, and failures. Whereas, if we were in those same circumstances ourselves, we'd be pleading for mercy. But Jesus says, merciful is the way to be.

Mercy is a needed quality in life as we interact with other human beings. We all get wounded and hurt by one another. People are stupid, inconsiderate, rude, selfish, forget, break promises and in countless other ways transgress against us. Sometimes we take the blows of maliciousness. Jesus says, happiness is found in responding to such wounds with mercy. This means overlooking minor offences and forgiving major ones. This is difficult, because we want to protect ourselves. One way to do that is to build protective walls of hatred and decide to have nothing to do with the other person. We want them to pay big time for the damage they've done to us so they won't do it again. If they hurt bad enough for what they did to us, they won't dare do it again. But the problem is, each hurt, small or large, brings more separation— more breakage of the bonds of relationships. And our lives become more and more isolated, lonely, and unhappy. What family can survive without countless extensions of mercy?

Edith Taylor was devastated when her husband, Karl, wrote her from Okinawa and told her they were no longer married. He'd written to Mexico and gotten a divorce and married a nineteen-year-old Japanese girl named Aiko. Edith was 48 years-old— betrayed, rejected, and alone. Then, a few years later, Karl was dying of lung cancer. He wrote Edith telling her about it, and that he and Aiko now had two daughters. He ended the letter with the question, "What will ever become of my wife and daughters?" What Edith chose to do is almost unimaginable. After Karl died, she invited Aiko and the girls into her home to live saying, "God took one life I loved dearly, but He has given me three others to love. I am so thankful."

Let me ask you, "Did showing mercy enable Edith to enter into a state of blessed happiness in God?" I think we realize the answer is yes. Mercy is life-giving and life-enhancing. The alternative lodged in anger and festering bitterness will never bring happiness. Tight-fisted, tight-lipped, steely-eyed insistence on justice is life-defeating.

How do we enter into such mercy-giving living? It is through Jesus. Jesus came to extend God's mercy to us, to forgive us all of our sins, so that we can enter into the abundant life He offers. God's mercy in our hearts is our source of motivation to be merciful. Eph. 2:4 describes God as "rich in mercy." Listen to how *The Message* puts that whole paragraph, Eph. 2:1-6: *It wasn't so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it,*

*all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It's a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, he embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah.*

Because of His unconditional love and our receiving mercy and forgiveness of all our sins; because of His interventions and rescuing us; because of His loving us when we were unlovable; because of countless blessings we don't deserve; we are then motivated to give the same to others. Romans 12:1 is the beginning of the practical application of our walk with Christ in that great book. It is the point where Paul moves from the theory, the way we are saved, to the way it is to affect our living. Phillips translates this, "*With eyes wide open to the mercies of God...*" Paul is emphasizing that because of God's action, His mercy to us, we are then motivated to live for Him. Paul then develops the practical implications of this for the next five chapters.

When we feel mercy drying up in our lives, maybe it is due to a faulty memory. Sometimes when I find myself getting harsh, and judgmental, I find the Holy Spirit reminding me of what God puts up with in me, and what He has and is forgiving me of. That changes my heart. Richard C. Halverson (the former chaplain of the U.S. senate) writes, "Allow the Holy Spirit the same freedom with the next person that he had with you." There is always a danger for those within the church to become hardened and more severe with others. Once we're "in" and forgiven, we can easily become more judgmental toward those outside if we forget God's great mercy extended toward us.

Mercy is a wonderful gift we can give to others. I once heard Jim Dethmer say in a sermon, "Mercy creates an emotional context in which life change can occur." I think he's onto something there. Do any of us do well when surrounded by harsh, critical, judgmental attitudes? When we mess-up or are less than we know we should be, what do we need to help us change? Aren't mercy and encouragement far more helpful? Is there someone around you that needs changing? Rather than criticizing or harboring judgmental attitudes, do what mercy would do. Paul admonishes in Rom. 12:8 to show "mercy with cheerfulness."

Mercy involves empathy— a feeling of identifying with the plight of the other person, a kind of getting into their skin. It is included in the golden rule, *Do to others what you would have them do to you* (Mtt. 7:12). But it is more than feeling. It involves action. If we want mercy, then we give mercy. Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan is a good example. The priest and Levite, passing by the beat-up man, may have felt sympathy and pity for him. Only the Samaritan is merciful— getting involved by stopping, taking personal risk, getting dirty, and giving of his personal resources. Here's where The Message captures the thrust of the Beatitude well:

*You're blessed when you care.*

*At the moment of being "care-full," you find yourself cared for.*

Justice is not incompatible with mercy. In fact, the two need to work together, otherwise there is

no backbone in sympathy and mercy. Consequences may still need to be faced. Unfairness may still need to be addressed. The forgiveness of our sins is not free. Jesus paid an unimaginable price on the cross for our sins to satisfy the need for justice. But, out of love, He bore it for us. That is mercy.

In each situation, we need to prayerfully discern what mercy involves. It always involves our personal forgiveness and never vengeance. But, consequences are often necessary to enforce—much as good parenting means following through with the discipline, even though it breaks your heart to impose it.

The happiness, the blessedness of this beatitude comes from two sources. **First**, it opens up the channels for us to receive more mercy. The more we give the more we get. If we are stingy with mercy, we will receive the same. But, if we orient our lives around giving out grace and mercy, there will always be more we receive. We know of people with chips on their shoulders, people who are harsh, judgmental, and critical. Are they happy? Their attitude is clogging the channels of mercy. **Secondly**, we are created for relationships. We are happiest when we are involved in other people's lives, giving and receiving love. But, for that to happen, we need to be merciful because we are imperfect and we live in an imperfect world.

**“BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART, FOR THEY WILL SEE GOD.” (5:8)**

How well are you seeing God in our world? This Beatitude tells us that what's inside our hearts affects whether or not we see God in our outside world. Or, as Eugene puts it,

*You're blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right.  
Then you can see God in the outside world. (Msg)*

Let me use a negative example to help us understand this. We've all met people who see sexual innuendos in everything— even innocuous comments they are able to twist into something sexually suggestive. They see sex everywhere. What does that say about their heart? Or, another example. Here's someone who is always referring to the cost of things. They are referring to how expensive this is or that— whether clothes, cars, houses, or whatever. It might be theirs or what others have. What does that say about what's inside? The person filled with self is constantly turning every conversation to them and their experiences. The angry person is constantly finding fault with everything and is telling us how the world is out to get us.

Jesus is telling us that sin, the basic ingredient of an impure heart, will keep us from seeing God in “the outside world.” Sin is what separates us from God. The more we get our inside world put right, the more we're going to see God. I can give personal witness to that. I can recall numerous times, where I've spent an extended time with God, often in a retreat setting, where with a sincere heart I've prayed with David, *Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there's any offensive way in me* (Ps. 139:23-24). Inviting the Holy Spirit to search our hearts for an extended time— perhaps even a day or two— can disclose ways we've covered over disobedience, ways we've rationalized our behavior and sins against God. Through confession and repentance, the Holy Spirit penetrates ever deeper into our hearts, cleaning out the garbage. After such a session, I've often been amazed at how different people and the world look to me. I see God everywhere. An act of kindness received is a gift from God. I see beauty in

people I hadn't noticed. You discern God guiding a conversation in direction toward something He has in mind. Even ornery people I see with eyes of Christ-love, longing for their deliverance. You're relaxed. God is in control. You see God's timing everywhere. It is like you are seeing beneath the surface of things. Nothing is the same. Elizabeth Barrett Browning captures the feeling:

*Earth's crammed with heaven,  
and every common bush afire with God.*

The word "pure" may not be too attractive to us today. The message today is that a slight mixture of wickedness is needed to make life exciting. The entertainment media glorifies the excitement of sin. St. Augustine expresses our ambivalence in his famous prayer, "Lord make me pure, but not just yet." Here's where we need to remember the reward. Wouldn't you like to live with the joy and peace of a constant awareness of the presence of Jesus in all things? How tawdry the sin-contaminated life looks in contrast.

The Greek word for "pure" used here also contains the element of single-mindedness. Kierkegaard expressed it, "To have a pure heart means to will one thing." We know what it is to have our minds and desires divided, pulled in several directions at once. Not only is it distressing and stressful, we are far from our best at anything then. We know the power of getting our energies and wills focused upon one great purpose. When we submit to our Master, Jesus', will in all things, our lives are filled with a deep peace and contentment. We know who we are and what we are about. With such surrendered hearts, we discern the Lord leading us in and through the every-day-ness of our lives. The more our hearts are one with His, the more we see Him leading us— and that is an exciting adventure. Everything has meaning and purpose.

How do we achieve this purity of heart from sin's contamination and the single-mindedness Jesus is speaking of here? It begins with our coming to Jesus in salvation. He enters into our lives through the Holy Spirit and begins cleaning up the mess, cleansing our hearts from sin. In 1 Jn. 1:5-7 we read,

*This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

And, the Greek tense for the blood of Jesus purifying us from all sin conveys a continuous, ongoing process. We cooperate in this process through paying attention to the Holy Spirit as He convicts us of new sins to confess and receive forgiveness for. In addition, God uses His Word. Martin Luther gives this helpful insight: "What is meant by a 'pure heart; is this: [a heart] that is watching and pondering what God says and replacing its own ideas with the Word of God." I like his description of this displacement process, purifying us. And one other important way God uses in this process I'll just mention in passing is the troubles and tribulations of life. Scripture repeatedly affirms the importance of our suffering in refining, purifying, and giving our hearts a single-minded focus.

**CONCLUSION**

Purity of heart and mercy work together. As our hearts are purified, we begin to see the world differently, and perceive where it is Jesus wants us to get involved in acts of mercy, showing His love. Mother Teresa, working in the Calcutta slums among the dying of India, summarizes this truth well for us.

*We all long for heaven where God is, but we have it in our power to be in heaven with Him right now— to be happy with Him at this very moment. But being happy with Him now means:*

*Loving as He loves,  
Helping as He helps,  
Giving as He gives,  
Serving as He serves,  
Rescuing as He rescues,  
Being with Him for all the 24 hours,  
Touching Him in His distressing disguise.*