

Norman C. Schwab
Yacolt Ev Free
November 18, 2001

**Give Thanks for Mercy
Matthew 5:7**

In Reader's Digest, Jim Williams of Butte, Montana wrote about one late night when he was driving too fast and saw the flashing lights of a police car in his rearview mirror. As he pulled over and rolled down the window to his station wagon, he tried to search his mind of a good excuse for his speeding. But when the patrolman came up to the car, he said nothing. Instead he merely shined his flashlight in our faces, then on my 7 month pregnant wife, then on my sleeping 18 month old in the car seat. Then back to me uttering the only words of the encounter. Son, you can't afford a ticket. Slow it down. With that he returned to the his car and drove away. Sometimes mercy triumphs over law. Most of us at times need mercy. Some of us need mercy more than others. But most of us need to realize our need for mercy more than we do. For if could fully understand how merciful we have been treated, we would not only be incredibly more thankful people, but we too would treat others with greater measure of mercy.

Do you need an antidote for a bitter heart this morning? Do you need a remedy for a cynical attitude during a season that is supposed to be marked by thanksgiving? Do you need a prescription for an unforgiving spirit? For the delicious desire of revenge seeking? Have we caught ourselves casually gloating over the misfortunes of others this past week? Laughing at the results, the misery due to others sin? Have we put on the formal three piece suit of "serves them right"? Do we refuse to relax our death grip on that grudge? A family member you may even be dreading to dine with this week? A business associate you just won't forgive? If any of those touched a nerve my guess is that its been pretty difficult for you to be in an attitude of thanksgiving, for thanksgiving will only flow out of a heart that has received mercy from God....and knows it. The proof that mercy from God is known is in the way God's mercy is reflected toward others? Are you ready for the prescription this morning? This verse may lead you to great freedom and thanksgiving.

Turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 5 verse 7. The fifth beatitude Jesus teaches to his disciples is there Matthew 5:7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." Happy are the merciful, Satisfied and spiritual fulfilled are the merciful. Jesus speaks these words of wisdom to his disciples. Speaks these words during a time of ancient culture when mercy was not fashionable. The Romans and Greeks saw mercy as a sign of weakness. They admired courage, justice and discipline. They had little time or use for showing mercy. One of the Roman philosophers was quoted saying "Mercy is a disease of the soul." According to Aristotle slaves were nothing more than living tools. Just as a broken hammer could be tossed into the garbage heap, so also a slave when he could not work or became old was disposed of. The values of the day ripped into the flesh of the culture with often devastating results. Babies were not treated any better than slaves and if a handicap child was born, if it happened to be an unwanted girl, it was left to die on the rocks. As far as enemies go..mercy to an enemy was unthinkable. The only good enemy would be a dead enemy. So into this cultural value Jesus says the words. "Blessed are the merciful. Blessed and happy are those who are full of mercy.

We probably think were far better at showing mercy these days then way back when these words were first spoken. I would like to think that 2000 years of this truth has had some affect on our world. The united states is famous for helping out and rebuilding countries after we blow them to bits. We may give some mercy to the underdog, but we sure don't do much mercy for the top dog or the equal dog. What did Jesus mean when He called us to live as people full of mercy? Why is that such a strong value he wants for the people who are called to His kingdom?

I think we need to first begin to understand what the word means. Mercy. What is it? Mercy is a translation of a Hebrew word, Hesed. It is sometimes translated in our English Bibles as lovingkindness, a loyal love, compassion. It carries with it the idea to get into someone else's skin. Almost like superman putting on that skin-tight garment. Its understanding the other persons perspective. But its more than a feeling. Mercy is a desire to be kind to the suffering, the condemned. It is a response to peoples need that understands the hurt, feels the pain but also moves to do something about it, to soothe and cure the hurt. Mercy

desires to relieve the miserable. Mercy is compassion for people in need, dealing with the pain and misery that results from sin. Mercy from God to us involves God not giving us what we deserve. In other words, no hell. God in mercy responds to our misery and extends relief.

Grace is very similar to mercy as it is a subset of God's love, but its slightly different. Grace is favor to those who don't deserve it. Theologians call it unmerited favor. While mercy is God not giving us what we deserve. Grace is God giving us what we don't deserve. Grace deals with sin, God comes along and says, "I will wipe your slate clean so you can be a new person and live fresh and clean." What a gift we don't even come close to deserving. In grace God deals with the sin and guilt itself. In mercy God deals with our misery of the results of our sin. Grace says "here is heaven". Mercy says "You don't have to go to hell"

Kindness is also a subset of God's love and that is God giving to us even when we are not in need. The blessings God gives us even when we really don't even need it. Its like spreading an extra layer of icing on top of our cake. Its an extra scoop of ice cream on our already blessed life. Kindness is God's gifts to us even beyond our need. Has anybody enjoyed God's kindness this year? Isn't it His kindness that woos us to love and thank Him? Its his grace that gives us the ability to thank and praise him. It is our understanding of the incredible mercy of God shown to us that causes us to be merciful in kind toward others and offer thanksgiving to Almighty God.

Jesus doesn't specify to what kind of people he is calling us to show mercy to. Mercy seeks out need and works to extend relief from misery. It could be that Jesus had those who were enduring terrible tragedies in mind. Much like those families who have suffered from the September 11th destruction of the World trade center towers. Much like the traveler to Jericho who was beaten up by robbers until the "good Samaritan" came along to help in the face of his tragedy. Maybe Jesus had in mind those who were hungry and sick. Maybe the loners and outcasts that Jesus had befriended and helped and healed. It could also be that when Jesus calls us to be full of mercy, or merciful, he is talking about those who have wronged us. There are those times that justice cries out for punishment, but mercy cries out for forgiveness. Just like the young father who was pulled over for speeding, there are times Jesus

calls us to a radical mercy that the world just shakes their head in wonder over. A radical mercy that stands out quite prominent in the dog eat dog world we live in. God is merciful and continually shows mercy, Jesus calls we who are citizens of His kingdom to show mercy to others in need.

So, how do we begin to pursue this kingdom value of mercy? First, we must see our own need for mercy. If we have already decided that we have no need of mercy then we will have a very difficult time extending any kind of mercy to other people. Before we have any chance of showing mercy we must see our own desperate need for the mercy of God. Aren't you glad the mercy of God doesn't run out on us. Aren't you glad God's mercy doesn't have an expiration date?

In Luke 18 Jesus told a story about two people. One was a Pharisee, one from the most religious group of the day. He was praying in the temple thanking God that he was not like other people; the swindlers who rip people off, the adulterers who were sexually loose, or even like that tax collector standing over there. The tax collector, who were viewed with reason as basically an evil IRS guy gone bad. He was unwilling even to look up to heaven, but was beating on his chest saying "God be merciful to me, the sinner." Jesus asked who left the temple right before God? The one who sees reality that they are in desperate need of God's mercy. This is also in line with the progression of the beatitudes. First beatitude. Blessed are the poor in spirit. First we must know how spiritually bankrupt we are before God. Second, Blessed are those who mourn, who beat their chest in confession before God as they see their sin grieving God's very heart. Blessed are they who are gentle who find their strength sourced in God and exercise their power under control. Those who hunger and thirst God will reward with more and more satisfying spiritual food. These then are ready to act in love and compassion toward those around them in need. If we want any chance of growing in the area of mercy, we must first see how much we ourselves are in need of mercy. We then will give thanks to God that his mercy never runs out, it never expires, it is in fact everlasting no matter if we were objects of mercy who should have known wrath. That fact ought to fill us with unspeakable joy.

Psalm 136 repeats a theme that is found all through out the Bible connecting thanksgiving and mercy. "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, His mercy endures forever." In fact it repeats it so much that one might get the idea that God wants us to remember, His mercy toward us. Turn with me to Psalm 136. I know we have a number of different translations and may use the word lovingkindness, or love. But I like the King James here that uses mercy. For his mercy endures forever. Try that. I will be the soloist and all of you will be my back up singers and we read portions of this Psalm. All you need to do is shadow my line with the phrase, "for His mercy endures forever" PSALM 136 Are we beginning to see our need for mercy? I sure am glad God's mercy for me never wears out. May my mercy for others take on some of that same lasting quality.

First point for those in pursuit of the kingdom value of Jesus 5th beatitude. We must see our own need. Second. We must know that mercy in more than a feeling. Mercy is compassion in action. In the parable of the good Samaritan Jesus made it pretty clear that mercy was not just feeling compassion but moving to do something about it. Mercy exists when one moves to alleviate distress. In Luke 10 Jesus asks which of the three men was a neighbor to this Samaritan traveler who was beaten up and robbed? Was it the Priest and the Lawyer who were too pious or busy to stop and help? No. It was the one who was a recognized enemy who had mercy on him, and bandaged him up and carried him to a resting place and paid to have him cared for. That's mercy. Compassion in action. I'm sure the priest and the lawyer had plenty of feelings of compassion for the beat up man in the road. Mostly they probably were glad it wasn't them beat up and robbed and that they had not better stop too long and help or they might be the next victim, they didn't want the hassle or things might get messy. Mercy isn't afraid of getting dirty. Mercy doesn't care about the hassle. Mercy sees a need and acts on it. Mercy is compassion in action.

It was a dark winter evening in 1935 when the irrepressible major of New York Fiorello LaGaudia showed up at night court and gave the judge the evening off taking over his bench. That night a tattered old woman charged with stealing a loaf of bread was brought before him. She defended herself saying that her son in law had deserted them, the children are sick and she is starving. The shopkeeper refused to drop

charges saying, "Your honor this is a bad neighborhood, she has got to be punished to teach the other people a lesson. LaGuardia sighed and said to the old woman. "I've got to punish you; the law makes no exceptions. Ten dollars or ten days in jail. yet even while he was making this pronouncement he drew out a ten dollar bill from his pocket and threw it into his hat saying. " Heres the 10 dollar fine which I now remit and furthermore, I am going to fine everyone in this courtroom 25 cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Bailiff collect the fines and give them to the defendant. The next days New York newspaper reported 47 dollars and 50 cents were turned over the a bewildered grandmother. Making forced donations were a red-faced storekeeper, 70 petty criminals and a few new York policemen. Mercy is far more then a sad emotion. Mercy is compassion in action.

Are you willing to pursue mercy with a vengeance? It begins with seeing our own need for mercy. Second we must act, for mercy is compassion in action. Third. Mercy is not a scratch your back deal. Our giving of mercy does not depend on the other persons response to our mercy. We offer mercy even if we get it shoved back in our face. Now we may get wiser in how mercy is offered the next time, but mercy always acts in love whether or not we get the response we intend. Its not a deal...I give you mercy so you show me mercy or at least act like your thankful for the mercy I have given you. Mercy is not a "You scratch my back and then I'll scratch yours kind of a deal." It doesn't depend on the other persons response.

Last Monday night our family played a game called Aggravation. The object of the game is to move your marbles around a playing board. There are plenty of opportunities to bounce another players marble back to the starting point. This is where the name aggravation comes in. Its maddening to get almost home only to be bumped all the way back by another player. So, the talk begins to try and build alliances. Similar to the Survivor show. I'll be kind to you if you be kind to me. I won't knock you out, if you promise not to knock me out. The opposite tends to happen in our Aggravation game. Hey, you bumped me back, I can't wait to go and toast your marble.

When Jesus said "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." He wasn't talking about being merciful in order to obtain mercy. That is true to a certain point, but as we discovered in our game of mercy. The scratch your back kind of mercy only lasts so long until the alliance is shattered on the board of convenience and victory. This is not a do to others and then will do unto you. Look at it from the mercy we receive from God. If we think that we can somehow merit Gods mercy by acting merciful toward others....then we are in big trouble. You don't want to go there. No one can measure up to the impossible standard of being merciful enough to gain God's mercy. Our salvation is NOT by works. Ephesians 2 makes it crystal clear "By grace are you saved by faith and not of yourselves it is a gift of God NOT of works lest anyone boast." Look at me, Look how merciful I am that is why I received mercy and salvation from God. NOT! Titus 3:5 "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but because of his mercy He saved us by the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."

We can't earn God's mercy. God's grace is a gift not because of what we do but because of who he is. By the very definition of mercy...we can't earn mercy from God or other people. Mercy is given to people who don't deserve it, to those who deserve far worse. We can't buy mercy. We are the objects of mercy who should have known wrath.

So what does this verse mean then. Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy. If sure sounds like if we aren't merciful toward other people we aren't going to be on the receiving end of mercy. Heres the point Jesus was making. Our granting mercy toward others is the evidence that we have received mercy from God. This is point number four. Mercy given proves that mercy has been received. When we show mercy toward others, it proves that we are right with God. Its proof that we see and understand our own need for mercy from God. Those who are forgiven will forgive others. Those who receive mercy will be merciful toward others. Mercy given comes as a natural result of mercy received. The Christian goes the extra mile for others because God acted toward us being rich in mercy.

This doesn't mean that the Christian who acts in mercy toward another won't at times experience feelings of bitterness or anger toward the one who has wronged him. But he no longer is held in bitterness

grip. Those reoccurring feelings allow for continued forgiveness and a continued sign of God's grace to you and you to them. Regardless of the severity and offense done toward you. I remember attending an Easter sunrise service at the Memorial Coliseum where Corrie Ten Boom shared about an unexpected meeting with a guard from the Ravensbruck concentration camp, where her sister died and she herself had been subject to horrible things. It was at a church service in Munich that she saw him. She could not forget the former S.S. guard who stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center. All of a sudden the horror all came flooding back, the mocking men, the heaps of clothing, her sisters blanched face. This former guard came up to her as the church was emptying beaming and bowing. saying "How grateful I am for your message faulein just to think that He has washed my sins away. He thrust his hand out to shake mine. and I who had preached so often to people the need to forgive kept my hand at my side. Even as the angry vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Jesus she prayed please forgive me and help me forgive this man. She tried to smile. She struggled to raise her hand, But she couldn't find even the slightest spark of warmth or charity. So she prayed again silently. Jesus I can't forgive him. Give me your forgiveness. She says as she finally took his hand, the most incredible thing happened. All through her shoulder and along her arm and out to her hand a current seemed to pass from her to him, and an incredible, unexplainable love for this stranger overwhelmed her. Mercy and forgiveness is possible even for the most grievous of wounds By those who realize how much they themselves have been forgiven.

The Christian is free to forgive and act in mercy toward those who simply don't deserve it. There is nothing that moves us quite like that knowledge that we have been forgiven and shown mercy. Nothing proves more clearly that we have been forgiven than our readiness to forgive others. If I'm forgiven...then I shall be merciful. If I have been shown mercy...then I shall be merciful. Are you merciful toward others? If I am not merciful then there can only be one explanation, I have never understood that mercy and grace of God. Never realized how impoverished I really am. Never mourned my dark sin self. Never truly

humble before God. Never really very thirsty for righteousness...just all too content to play along with the Christian game. Are you ready to be merciful? For those who have received mercy, shall be merciful.

Thanksgiving Day talk from Abe Lincoln

"It is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God; to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations are blessed whose God is the Lord. "We know that by His divine law, nations, like individuals, are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world. "May we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war which now desolates the land may be a punishment inflicted upon us for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole people? "We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown. "But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. "Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us. "It has seemed to me fit and proper that God should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and one voice, by the whole American people. "I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday [now the fourth Thursday] of November as a day of Thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens."