



from the desk of . . .

**Rande Wayne Smith**

D.Min., Th.M., M.Div.

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## **Blessings - 3**

### **A BLESSED ATTITUDE TOWARD PEOPLE**

#### **Matthew 5:1-12**

I've always enjoyed the old westerns. "Rio Bravo" ... "The Searchers" ... "Stagecoach" ... "Silverado" ... the "Lonesome Dove" series; I never tire of watching them.

How many of you remember the western, "The Good, The Bad, & The Ugly"? ... It was one of those  $\frac{1}{2}$  dozen cheaply made Italian films that helped make Clint Eastwood famous.

Well, "the good, the bad, & the ugly" not only was the title of that cowboy movie, but it also describes many of the people that you & I have to deal with every day, right? ... And, if not those,

then how about "the good, the bad, & the crazy"? ...

I had the opportunity this past week to spend a few days in VA with some very dear friends. Mike & Julie are 2 of the really "good" people that you'll ever meet. And each of you know individuals like them. You can close your eyes & picture those folks who are unselfish, thoughtful, & totally giving ... the good people.

They're the easy ones to get along with.  
Life is great when we're around them.

But ... there are also "the bad, the ugly, & the crazy" that we have to deal with ... & they test our Christian walk down to the very core.

And what's more, they can be found everywhere.

I'm talking about the busybodies, the antagonists, the complainers, the deadbeats, the whiners, the know-it-alls, the grouches, the crybabies, the users, the smart alecks. Once again, I suspect that all of you can put faces to each of those categories. They're all around us. They can't be avoided. And like it or not, we come in contact with them every day.

So, how do we deal with difficult people? ... For that matter, how do we deal with anybody in life?

Good, bad, or otherwise? ...

I love the story about the little boy who misbehaved during the evening meal. So, as punishment his Mom made him stay at the table once everyone had finished eating. As the rest of the family got up to leave the room, the little boy bowed his head & prayed,

"Thank you, Lord, for preparing a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies."

Okay, prayer is certainly one way to deal with people ... even though I'm not sure his was the right way to pray.

Well, this morning, as we continue on with the Beatitudes, Jesus tells us how to deal with difficult people ... in fact, how to deal with everyone.

So, listen now to Good News from Jesus, as recorded by Matthew, to you who have gathered here for worship at C.C.R.M.

Within your hearing comes the Word of the Lord ...

Jesus saw the crowds and went up a hill, where he sat down. His disciples gathered around him, and he began to teach them:

"Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor;  
the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!

"Happy are those who mourn;  
God will comfort them!

"Happy are those who are humble;  
they will receive what God has promised!

"Happy are those whose greatest desire  
is to do what God requires;  
God will satisfy them fully!

"Happy are those who are merciful to others;  
God will be merciful to them!

"Happy are the pure in heart;  
they will see God!

"Happy are those who work for peace;  
God will call them his children!

"Happy are those who are persecuted  
because they do what God requires;  
the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!

"Happy are you when people assault you and  
persecute you and tell all kinds of evil lies against you  
because you are my followers. Be happy and glad, for a  
great reward is kept for you in heaven. This is how the  
prophets who lived before you were persecuted."

(Matthew 5:1-12)

**May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the  
mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing  
devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen**

I don't know if you've noticed as I've read this  
passage from Jesus' Sermon On The Mount the past  
several weeks, but the Beatitudes can be divided into 2  
distinct categories.

The 1<sup>st</sup> 4 deal with our relationship with God. We're  
"spiritually poor" ... admitting our need for Him. We  
"mourn" ... seeing our sin in light of Jesus' sacrifice for  
us. Then we surrender to God's control, "humbling"  
ourselves, as we recognize our dependence on Christ.

And the result of those 1<sup>st</sup> 3 steps? ... Our "greatest  
desire is to do what God requires."

We want our lives to be pleasing to Him.

So, now that we know how to build a right relationship with God, Jesus turns our focus to the 2<sup>nd</sup> 4 ... how we can be true with one another.

He begins by giving us the "Law Of Direct Return" or, as some call it ... "The Boomerang Blessing." He says, "You'll be happy many times over when you show mercy to others, because then mercy will be shown to you."

Jesus is making the point that the amount of **mercy** we **show** to others will be directly proportionate to the amount of **mercy** that we will **receive**.

Let's begin by seeing what Jesus says about being merciful.

1<sup>st</sup> of all, we need to make sure we understand fully what Jesus means when He states ...

"Happy are those who are merciful to others."

Let's start by seeing what mercy is not. It's more than just having sentimental feelings. Feeling sorry for someone, being sympathetic, is a good quality, but it doesn't express the depth that Jesus is referring to.

In fact, Scripture teaches us that when we see someone in need, & only acknowledging the problem, but doing nothing to help them ...

then we've really done them no good at all. (James 2:15-16)

Having said that, mercy is also not just helpful deeds.

Some people equate mercy with kindness. And although being kind to one another is a Scriptural mandate, (Ephesians 4:32), once again it doesn't express the full meaning of mercy.

And mercy is certainly not justice. Justice is getting what we deserve. We talk in legal circles about "placing ourselves on the 'mercy' of the court." In other words, we know we deserve a certain punishment ... but we're hoping that there will be a relaxing of the penalty, a lesser verdict.

But even that does not fully define the depth of mercy.

The word Jesus uses is ἐλεήμονες, & it's rich in meaning. It's used to describe an attribute of God. Paul writes, "God's mercy is so abundant." (Ephesians 2:4) We read in Titus that we're "saved" by His mercy. (Titus 3:5) And Peter adds ... "Because of his great mercy he gave us new life by raising Jesus Christ from death." (1 Peter 1:3)

"Mercy" in its' root carries the meaning, "to wash over." In the Greek culture, wherein Jesus lived, it described the "whitewashing" of a wall, or "wiping out" an impurity, or "canceling" a debt.

So, mercy goes beyond **sympathy** to **empathy**. It's "**love in action**." We not only wash out the deed that was done against us, but, & here's the real challenge, we find a way to actually help the "guilty" person.

You see ... mercy is an action, not a reaction.

Maybe the key response for this Beatitude is ...  
we are to be forgiving.

But even forgiveness can be too shallow unless we understand that we not only wipe out the injury done to us by another, but we go the additional mile & actually help the offender. And that's where the rub comes. ...

It's one thing to say we forgive ...  
it's another to become actively involved in mercy.

"Mercy's" clearest definition is **Jesus Christ**. Our Lord didn't just sit up in Heaven & passively say, "Okay, whoever, believes in Me, I'll forgive." John 3:16 isn't, "For God so loved the world that whoever believes in His Son will have everlasting life." It's ... "For God loved the world so much that he ..." what? "(gave) his only Son."

(John 3:16)

John repeats that thought in his 1<sup>st</sup> letter ...

"God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world, so that we might have life through him. This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us & sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven." (1 John 4:9-10)

By His **action** He demonstrated **mercy** ...  
His whitewashing of our sins with His blood. (Isaiah 1:18)

So, how do we apply this principle in our everyday life? ... How do we practically demonstrate this action word, this mercy? ...

Well, here are 4 ways to evaluate ourselves,  
to see how merciful we really are.

1<sup>st</sup>, if I'm merciful, I'll be patient with those who are different. You see mercy produces **tolerance**. Scripture teaches ... "encourage the timid, help the weak,  
be patient with everyone." (1 Thessalonians 5:14)

But, what if those "differences" are offensive? ...  
How can we be patient with those who are obnoxious? ...

Maybe the best way is to recognize that most people are in some kind of "pain". Understanding that, we need to stop focusing so much on their external behavior & look more closely at their internal hurt. Because usually behind every peculiar action there's a need for attention, caused by loneliness, hurt, or depression.

(X) "Accept one another, then, for the glory of God, as Christ has accepted you." (Romans 15:7) So, if I'm merciful, I'll be patient with those who are different.  
I'll not be quick to criticize or judge them.

2<sup>nd</sup>, if I'm merciful, I'm willing to **forgive**.

"Be tolerant with one another & forgive one another whenever any of you has a complaint against someone else. You must forgive one another just as the Lord has forgiven you." (Colossians 3:13)

It's an interesting thing about forgiveness that when we're called to receive it, it's so easy & feels so right.



But when we're called to give it, it's so hard & feels so wrong. When somebody does something against us it doesn't seem natural to show **mercy** ... we want **justice**.

Now, sometimes the question becomes ... "How many times do we have to show mercy? ... How many times do we have to forgive those who've hurt us?" ...

which is exactly the question Peter once asked.

Jesus had just finished talking about how to handle personal conflict. If someone sins against us, 1<sup>st</sup> we're to go to them personally & try to work it out. (Matthew 18:15-17)

Again, that's the opposite of what we "want" to do, isn't it? "You mean, I've got to go to that guy who's offended me & try to make peace? ... No way! He's in the wrong; he should come crawling to me on his hands & knees, begging for forgiveness. Why should I initiate anything?" ... But Jesus says,

"if someone harms you in some way go to him or her."

Upon hearing Jesus' instruction, Peter apparently understands what he's to do ... he just wants to know how many times he has to do it! "Okay, Lord, I've got to work this out with the one who's done me wrong. I understand. But after he wrongs me, say, 7 times, I don't have to keep on forgiving the jerk, do I?"

It's time for eye for eye, or tooth for tooth, right?"

The rabbi's taught that we're to forgive 3 times but then, on the 4<sup>th</sup> time there was no forgiveness.

So, Peter must of thought of himself as really big-hearted ... volunteering to forgive 7 times!

But Jesus says, "No, not 7 times, but 70 times 7."  
 (Matthew 18:22) And the reason that blows Peter away is that Jesus isn't putting a quantity on the times a person should forgive ...

He uses #'s that the disciples understood as infinite.

Peter clearly understands that a merciful person doesn't limit the times he forgives.

And that forgiveness doesn't just apply to those who have sinned against us ... but to those who have made mistakes that we just cannot understand.

All of us have vulnerable areas of temptation. And maybe we can't understand how someone can have an ego problem, but they don't get why we struggle with gossip. Maybe we can't conceive how anyone could take drugs, but they cannot fathom our inability to deal with greed.

How do we treat the fallen? ... Merciful people are not critical of them, we extend forgiveness.

3<sup>rd</sup>, if I'm merciful, I'll **help** those who are **hurting**.

"Whenever you possibly can,  
 do good to those who need it." (The Proverbs 3:27)

Remember, mercy is practical assistance.  
 It's love in action.

If we only "feel" sorry for someone, when we have the ability to help ... we're not being like Jesus.

"If we are rich & see others in need, yet close our hearts against them, how can we claim that we love God? My children, our love should not be just words & talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action." (1 John 3:17-18)

I don't know about you, but those words stab me like a dagger. ... We don't have God's love when, if given opportunity, we don't "do" something!

John Wesley's (X) motto was ... "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, to all the people you can, as long as you can." That's Biblical.

"So then, as often as we have the chance, we should do good to everyone." (Galatians 6:10)

When someone is hurting,  
a merciful person wants to get involved!

Comedian, Flip Wilson, was once asked what religion he professed, & he responded ... "I'm a Jehovah's bystander!" A merciful person is not a Jehovah's bystander; they recognize those who are hurting, & if they can, they do something to help them.

Jesus is saying ... "Happy are those who get involved."

But, there's a 4<sup>th</sup> mark of mercy ... & this is the hardest of all. If I'm merciful, I'll do **good** to my **enemies**. ... And that's the one we want to skip, right?

Here's how Jesus puts it ... "If you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you receive a blessing? Even sinners do that! ... No! Love your enemies & do good to them; lend & expect nothing back. You will then have a great reward, & you will be children of the Most High God. ... (X) Be merciful just as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6:33,35-36) A tangible mark of spiritual maturity is when we can do good to our enemies.

Now again, that's exactly the opposite of what the world teaches. The world tells us, when people hurt us ... hurt them back. "I don't get mad ... I get even."

God says ... "No, that's being a reactor. Mercy is action, not reaction." In fact, Jesus teaches ... not only are we to forgive them, we're to do good to them.

Now, I know this is easy to stand here & talk about ... but it's hard to do. Jesus states that one of mercy's identifying marks is doing good to those who hurt us.

Paul echoes Jesus' command ... "If someone

has done you wrong, do not repay him with a wrong. ...

Never take revenge, my friends, but instead let God's anger do it. For the scripture says, 'I will take revenge, I will pay back, says the Lord.' Instead, as the scripture says: 'If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them a drink; for by doing this you will make them burn with shame.' Do not let evil defeat you; instead, conquer evil with good." (Romans 12:17-21)

Do you know the best way to destroy an enemy? ...  
Make him/her your friend. We can do that by doing good  
to them ... in spite of what they've done to us.

So, how do we apply this Beatitude? ... We're patient  
with those who are different, we forgive those who have  
fallen, we're helpful to those who are hurting,

& we do good to those who hurt us. That's mercy.

But it's also a tall order, & so we need some powerful  
motivators to help us accomplish it. So, here's 2 ...

1<sup>st</sup>, the reason to be merciful is because

**God is merciful to us.**

You see, the truth of the matter is, there are people  
who will mistreat us, who owe us & won't pay back, who  
are really "jerks". Do you know who I'm talking about? ...

But we need to remember, when we're having a hard  
time dealing with those individuals ...

the moments we've been "jerks" with God.

When I think of all the flack that God has taken  
from Rande Smith; all the times I've done things my own  
way, all the dumb stunts I've pulled, all the ways I've  
sinned; & yet ... God still loves me. (Romans 5:8) And if He  
can be merciful to me, with all that I've done, then,  
shouldn't I be merciful to others? ...

A 2<sup>nd</sup> reason for giving mercy is recognizing that  
we're going to need mercy **in the future.**

I'm painfully aware that I'm not going to be perfect when I pass, or when Jesus returns. So, I know I'm going to need mercy. "God will not show mercy when he judges the person who has not been merciful." (James 2:13)

In other words ... "we get what we give." Well, mercy is not getting what we deserve ... but what we need. So, we better be motivated to give mercy because we're going to need it.

That's why this is called "The Boomerang Blessing."

But, Scripture teaches that it works in the opposite way too. If we're not merciful we won't receive mercy.

Or as Jesus puts it ... the unforgiving are unforgiven.

"If you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive the wrongs you have done." (Matthew 6:15)

I can't speak for you, but for me, that's a sobering realization. Being merciful is obviously mighty important to God. And it better be mighty important to us too.

When we're merciful, we enjoy God's mercy.

So, let me ask ... what do you do when you're offended? ... Do you put the fire out, or do you heat it up? Do you get over it, or try to get even? Do you let your hurts heal, or do you let your hurts turn to hate? ...

We're talking about our responses now. I remember hearing once ... "Resentment is when we allow what is eating us to eat us up."

Resentment is the deliberate decision to nurse the offense until it becomes a growling grudge. You know, "grudge" is one of those words that defines itself.

It's very sound betrays its' meaning ... grudge.

And let's say we do get even; let's say we get them back. Imagine standing over the corpse of the one who has hurt us so deeply. ... Are we truly "happy" now? ...

Listen, without forgiveness, bitterness is all we have left. But mercy can set us free. (Galatians 5:1)

So, if you're resentful today, ask The Holy Spirit to heal your heart. Forgiving others allows us to be able to forgive ourselves,

& to remember how much mercy God has shown us.

Robert Schuller (X) tells this story about Bernice Schug. He met her when she needed work, & so they hired her as a housekeeper. She was a lovely woman, showering the Schuller's with love & poppy-seed rolls.

But no one knew of her hidden hurt.

One day she came to him & said, "Bob, I was reading the bulletin & I noticed that you're having a guest speaker next Sunday, who was a kamikaze pilot." Schuller nodded, telling Bernice that this particular individual had a tremendous story about coming to faith.

"That may be true, but my boy was killed in WWII by a kamikaze pilot & I don't think I can handle it."

Schuller understood, & told her that if she thought she needed to ... she could skip Sunday's worship.

Schuller writes: "The next week the Japanese pilot shared his story. His love & gratitude for Jesus shone from his black eyes. You could feel the love & release he had found. People were moved by his testimony.

"And when the service was over, I walked with him back down the aisle to the rear of the Church. Suddenly, as we approached the last pew, an older woman stepped out directly in our path. She stood firmly in front of the kamikaze pilot & blocked his exit. She looked him squarely in the eye & said,

'My son was killed by a kamikaze!' It was Bernice Schug.

"We all held our breath as she continued. 'I have seen how God has forgiven you your sins, & tonight, for the 1<sup>st</sup> time in 40 years, I've allowed Him to forgive mine.

Will you forgive my hatred for your people?'

"With tears in his eyes the pilot said, 'Will you forgive me for what my people did to you?' She threw her arms around this little Japanese man & they stood there holding each other, both of them crying & crying. Tears of joy ... because: 'Happy are those who are merciful to others; God will be merciful them!'"

So, my friends, that's the Word of the Lord ...

let's, you & I, "put it into practice." (James 1:22)

**MARANA THA**