

LBWY. [Turn to LENT: Describe lent. Year is speeding past, Lent – slow, look, listen. Mercy ---- Lent]

Blessed are the merciful. For they will be shown mercy. I hadn't realized when we started this series, how much in each sermon, we would be diving into a word's meaning. Last week, for example, we looked at the word Righteousness in the NT, and in particular how Jesus uses it in two beatitudes. And we listened to how we should hear JUSTICE as part of our understanding of what Jesus is describing.

I thought – gosh, sometimes I'm so naïve. I thought that this one, number 5, Blessed are the merciful! I thought, here – we won't be talking Greek and Hebrew! I don't want to come too languagey.

But I'm stunned. As I've lived with this text now for a few weeks in preparation for this sermon, here to – Blessed are the merciful, I find – we need to hear and pay attention to the word mercy, and the richness of meaning that has been lost to us, and where we miss the fullness.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. May the reading of the text and the meditations on it bring you comfort and encouragement

[pray//Series // outline: quick Def / 2<sup>nd</sup> clause, → first clause-definition]

SERIES - # blessed. // entrance to the SOM // Cannot separate // gospelized humanity. Gospel Saturated. // Frame and Flow.

Quick definition – kindness to those in need – REGARDLESS of the cause, mercy does not ask [Good Samaritan] cancel debts [unforgiving slave – Matthew 18:35!!,

Let's pay attention to the second clause of the beatitude: **They will receive Mercy**. As we have paid attention in the previous 4 beatitudes, the position of the word *theirs*, or *they* – is EMPHATIC. Theirs is the kingdom. They will be comforted. They will inherit the earth. And the emphatic position, is like saying, JOE'S is the shirt. It's his shirt, and ONLY his shirt. Blessed are the meek, they will inherit the earth, they, and only they will. And we have explored that meaning of exclusion for each beatitude. For the meek – only they will inherit the earth, because those who aren't meek are grabbing!! You can't inherit something you grab after, so it makes sense, only the non-grasping meek will inherit the earth.

Now then, this Sunday, Blessed are the merciful!! They will receive mercy. *Does the emphatic emphasis on they* mean that, ONLY they will receive mercy? IF I am not merciful, will God withhold mercy?? We resist hearing that, of course, because we do not believe God operates in a tit-for-tat, quid-pro-quo – you do this, then I will do what you need.

But Jesus presses this point to where it is uncomfortable!

Later in the sermon on the mount, chapter 6.14-15, after telling the disciples how to pray, Jesus says to his disciples: *If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

And James, 2. 13: *Judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy!*

Based upon the biblical witness that corroborates the idea of exclusion – I think we can conclude that Jesus is being exclusive here! Blessed are the merciful, they, and ONLY they will receive mercy.

Jesus is not saying, that you have to earn your forgiveness. Or that to struggle to forgive means your not Christian. What is the case, as Darrell Johnson recognizes, is that if you are someone who does not forgive, and does not show mercy then when you come to God to ask for mercy and forgiveness, you are not – in actual fact - asking for mercy and forgiveness. OH, you may be using the words! But you are not asking for mercy.

What happens, when you refuse to cancel someone else's debt? Or when you do not give kindness to someone who is in genuine need? You are saying they must pay their debt, first, before you will be reconciled to them. They must earn their redemption. They must pull themselves out of the ditch they are in.

If you treat others that way, then, when you are in the presence of God you are either – thinking that you *have* paid your debt, *or* you think you **can**, or you think you aren't even in a ditch. Oh you may use the words, God forgive me, I'm a sinner, have mercy on me. But if you aren't willing to forgive others, you aren't asking for mercy, your seeking to justify yourself to God. Look how good a Christian I am. Look how much I've done for your kingdom. Look how much I've given. Let's trade that for mercy for me. If I ask for mercy but do not give mercy, I don't not actually live in the reality of a sinner before God who needs mercy.

There is an attitude where we like to hold a grudge, cherish it, fondle it and feel the bitterness. We *like* holding it. We don't want to give it up. I like to go to bed at night thinking of all the ways they've made me mad, and how good I am and how bad they are. We can resist the beatitude – we can resist becoming merciful.

When the Gospel saturates a persons life, they will become merciful. They cannot help it – if the gospel comes into the neighbourhood, moves in, and dwells in all spaces in all dark corners then MERCY flows out. Blessed are the merciful for they dwell in mercy!!!

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But now. Let us go deeper into Mercy. On the face of it, the word means something along the lines of a debt forgiven – you used to owe me twenty dollars, I forgive the debt, you now owe 0 dollars. Mercy has taken place. Or, mercy can mean – the care for someone in need. In the bible we see that to be merciful means to care for the poor, the downtrodden, and those who have great need. That also, is mercy.

But I think Jesus is calling us to more. You see, the word MERCY here, is tied to a very big concept or theme from the old testament. In the world before and around Jesus, mercy and compassion were seen as weakness. But the writers of the old testament, the Jewish prophets and sages and historical writers developed the theme of LOVING KINDNESS.

The theme of LOVING KINDNESS is all over the old testament, it is found in the word, HESED. I think it may be the biggest and most important theme!! This word is translated by the Greek word ἔλεος. And the English word, MERCY. But it isn't just mercy as a transaction. HESED, means so much more. Jesus was raised a Jew, and deeply steeped in the language of HESED.

This word is found throughout the Old Testament – more than 240 times. It is used to communicate kindness, mercy, and compassion. And it seems to be VERY relational. This isn't about random acts of kindness. This is mercy and love in tight, woven relationships. How will you deal with the person before you? Will you use loving kindness based upon the relationship their grandfather had with your great grandfather? That is HESED. Most of the references are connected to God. Certainly humans can show HESED, but it is a divine attribute we reflect.

It is God's loving kindness, God's faithful love, his Steadfast Love, God's unflinching love. God's mercy and grace and love that goes beyond what is demanded by duty. God's HESED chases after you. [PSALM 23] – surely goodness and mercy will follow me all of my days.

HESED is relational. It is **covenantal**. HeseD isn't just God's predisposition towards love. It is his covenantal love. Now covenant is different than contract. A contract would be, take care of the earth, if you do it wrong, you'll be punished. There would be stipulations in terms of where limited liability lies, and a good contract would have opt-out clauses, termination agreements, and that sort of thing. Not so a covenant. Here, it is about embracing unlimited responsibility. There are no limitations, and no out clauses. Covenants form the foundation of God's relationship with us, HESED is key. Let's take a quick look at some of the covenants in the bible.

When God created the earth, there was a creator-to-created covenant that was begun. It is not super clearly stated in Genesis, we only have parts to it – but God has covenanted with creation to bless it, and he does. In that early covenant, humanity is given the responsibility to represent God as image-bearers, as his stewards on earth. There begins then, a covenant between humanity and creation. Again, it isn't explicit – but there is a mutual covenanting between humans and earth, where earth will bear good fruit for humans and humans, will in turn steward the earth well and faithfully with loving kindness. If we fail, there will be consequences, but the covenant will not be broken. There is no out clause.

When God spoke to Noah, God made a covenant. I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you; and with every living creature on earth, I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth. And this is the sign of the covenant, I have set my BOW in the CLOUDS. His BOW. His bow now points at him!!!! His destructive weapon points at himself.

Covenant when parties aren't equal, means more responsibility for the stronger party.

God then makes a covenant with Abraham. Abraham, you will be a father of many nations!! And through you, one will bless all nations!!! And then, God sealed the covenant with Abraham through a ritual, Genesis 15. Animals are split in two, and then between the animals, it is supposed to be the smaller party to the contract – if I should fail to keep the terms set in the agreement, may I be like these animals!! But no. Not in God's covenant. God, walks between the animal parts as a smoking pot. God will bear the cost of this covenant, he will bear the consequences if Abraham's descendants break faith with God.

Are you beginning to get a sense of God's faithful love? Do you know what his HESED looks like? Would you want to cast yourself on his mercy, his covenantal love?

Then Moses comes, leads the people out of Egypt to Mount Sinai. Moses represents the people to God in the formation of a new covenant, and before that covenant is even ratified – the people have broken the covenant and worshiped a golden idol. But, after some consequences, God restores the people and makes a covenant with them. And the covenant has this line in it – you likely know it well: I am the Lord your God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Showing HESED to the thousandth generation. 1000 generation. 40000 years. That's God's Mercy. That's his Steadfast love. That's his unfailing love. You are within 1000 generations of someone who loved God, yah? God will show his unfailing love to you!! You can call on him, on the basis of his HESED. The psalms have 120 references to HESED. O Lord, turn and deliver me because of your UNFAILING LOVE.

When Jesus says MERCY, it is likely here that he means the unfailing love of a covenantal relationship. Later in Matthew, chapter 9 – when accused of eating with unrighteous people, Jesus responds and says, “go learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’” Jesus is quoting Hosea, who finds that the people are being very religious, oh, they are saying all the right words!! But they are not living in and out of the covenantal love of HESED. God desires HESED, not Sacrifice. If God said to us, I desire mercy, not sacrifice – and we hear mercy as we are used to hearing it. Then God is saying to us, I desire here – relationship with other people, horizontal, instead of here – sacrifice – relationship in the vertical. Wouldn't it make more sense for God to be saying, I desire you to relate to me in this way vertically, rather than this way vertically. The one – sacrifice, relates between us like a contract, and it stinks, and it feels like you're trying to buy me and control me. I desire HESED, not sacrifice. Relate to me covenantally!!! Not religiously.

Now, for the beatitude – Jesus is here describing the people who have been saturated by the gospel. And Jesus eventually forms a new covenant with them, in his blood. *Is it likely, that Jesus, steeped in the Old testament HESED*

Blessed are the merciful, they will receive mercy. Blessed, right one, in sync are the one who relate to God and to others covenantally!! They shall be the ones and the only ones, who receive and live in covenantal love!!!

Blessed are those who live in relationship to all human beings on the basis of covenantal love. Right on!! They are in sync with the kingdom of God. The kingdom of the one who *always* looks to reveal to us his loving kindness, his steadfast love, his mercy unending.

VS contract. Contract. Trying to get most for you. Fairness. Give and take. Tit for tat. Contract – business. Get what you can.

COVENANT: loss of covenant faithfulness destroys life. Contracts – secular covenants.

Covenants – if politicians used covenantal relationship instead of contractual. Canada – Government covenant with indigenous people.

Today – covenant vs self-care, self covenant.

Contract – you messed up, now we take you for all we can in the contract – consequences of contract break, only matter if someone can enforce them.

Covenantal love and mercy from the kingdom of God, stretches so broadly. We treat the earth out of our covenantal duty as the steward, as God's ambassadors to all creation!!! We have a covenant with the earth and our economic DESIRES must come second to our covenant.

We have a covenant with all human beings, in which *all* humans are covenanted together as image bearers. We must love our neighbours, as our selves. The way we love them, should be as though we were them and we wanted to love ourselves. *No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as any manner of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.*

We are covenanted with our fellow human beings. When the gospel takes a hold of your life, saturates your whole life. You *will* deal with your fellow human being out of covenantal love and mercy. A mercy that goes beyond duty, beyond contract. Blessed are those who dwell in the COVENANTAL LOVE OF GOD with all people, for they will receive the Mercy, the covenantal love of God.

And we are covenanted with our spouses. This is no mere contract, this is no mere alliance of convenience or pleasure, this is a covenant where love and mercy go beyond duty and rights. Blessed are those treat their spouse with the covenantal love of God, mercy upon mercy; for the will receive and dwell in the mercy of God.

And we are covenanted with our brothers and sisters in the church. Through baptism, you join into the body of the faithful believers. You enter into a covenant. No mere contract of shall and shall nots. No mere contract of expectations, but a covenant. One where mercy, and love will go beyond the letter of the law, beyond duty.

John 13, Jesus says, A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. If you covenant with one another. If you have HESED, unfailing love and mercy for one another – you will fulfill my commandments and your light will shine and they will know the glory of God if you covenant with one another. Church membership is meant to be a sign of us, covenanting with one another. Linking arms and saying – we will love one another through and through, and beyond.

In North America, and I think this has been happening in Europe already – the idea of covenant is bygone. It is dusty. It is a relic from a age past.

Last Supper – NEW COVENANT --- BLOOD --- cross.

Blessed are those who live life the covenantal love way. They get it, they're in on the secret – they're living the GOSPEL SATURATED LIFE.

~~BRING IT~~ BACK TO THE BEATITUDES --- poor in spirit. Mourning. Meek. Hungry and thirsting for righteous justice. Mercy.

WHY DO WE RESIST:

Something better comes along

Avoid conflict, prefer to just change scenery rather than deal with conflict.

It feels good to break covenant – no one breaks because it feels bad to break, we break when it feels good to break!

[HOW TO GARDEN covenantal relating:](#)

[Take time to experience the fullness of meaning of our covenantal practices.](#)

New covenant. Blood. Seal the covenant. Mercy.