



# The Trinity Pulpit



## Learning to Kneel Matthew 5:7; Ephesians 2:1-5

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“Mercy! Mercy! Mercy!” That is what the crowd shouted at the end of one of my favorite movies, *Braveheart*. It ends with a crowd turning from calling for a man’s death to calling out for mercy. William Wallace, the great freedom fighter of Scotland, played by Mel Gibson has been arrested by England’s king after being betrayed by his own countrymen. He will face execution and if he is willing to swear allegiance to King Longshanks of England, he can have a quick execution. However, if he does not swear allegiance he must be tortured before his death. As William Wallace arrives in the courtyard for his execution the crowd spits on him, throws food at him and hurls insults. Who can blame them? He is their sworn enemy; yet, as they witness his torture and his courage, the crowd’s demeanor changes. No longer calling for his death or hurling insults the people called out for mercy.

Why do they change their demeanor? It is in the moment that the enemy becomes another human being and they witness human suffering. It is in the moment when they might imagine their own suffering and torture, in that moment mercy is the cry.

Jesus says “Blessed are those who show mercy, for they will receive mercy.” These words sound much like Jesus’ instruction about how we should pray. That we might


be forgiven as we forgive. Mercy for others, our own mercy, and the experience of mercy are ultimately tied together. Not because our actions somehow bind God’s actions but because when we show mercy, we experience God and God’s mercy becomes evident in our own lives.

What does it mean to show mercy? Let me suggest that it has to do with two movements we make toward others. The

first is to sympathize. Mercy is the act of sympathizing with others. Most of the time when we think of sympathy we think of a feeling of empathy. We witness the hurting of another and we feel sorry for them. We watch someone going through a health crisis or a disappointment and we feel sorry. This type of sympathy means “to feel

or to have an emotional response.” However, sympathy is more than emotion; it is really an action.

The word *sympathy* means “to join with another.” It is really the idea of walking in another’s shoes. It is the mental and intellectual endeavor to truly identify with the hurt and pain of another. It is more than feeling sorry or empathetic; it is the action of the mind that causes us not only to feel the pain and see the suffering but to respond to the situation. To



***“Blessed are the  
merciful, for they  
will be shown  
mercy.”***

***—Matthew 5:7***

show mercy is to act. Blessed are those who show mercy. Mercy is not just a feeling but an action.

This means that when we see someone in need we cannot simply walk away. How many times do we see someone hurting and feel sorry for them, but that is as far as it goes? How many times do we recognize someone in need, feel sorry for them, and think “I should do something” or “I should make a phone call” or “I should ask what I can do for them” or “I should act”? However, I do not act; I remain silent; I put off my action because of my own busyness. I should act but I just feel.

Yet, mercy is action. Blessed are those who show mercy or who show the actions of mercy.

This also applies to the idea of forgiveness. There might be someone who has wronged me – at first I am angry, then resentful and maybe even bitter. Yet, they ask for forgiveness and for a moment I might feel I should forgive them but that feeling passes. Feelings come and go. But mercy is an intellectual act. It is to walk in the shoes of another. It is to enter into their pain and sorrow; so when someone asks for forgiveness, I do not trust my feelings but I act; I show mercy.

There is a second action and that is kneeling. The word *mercy* actually has a picture that accompanies it. It is the picture of stooping down to another’s level or kneeling before them. To show mercy is to leave our rights and our power behind and to stoop down or kneel down in the presence of another. This action is especially helpful in the area of forgiveness. The act of stooping or kneeling is an action we must take when we forgive. If we have been wronged, we say we have every right to be mad, angry or resentful, to not forgive what that person did to us. So, most of the time the way we deal with this is we withhold our forgiveness and we enjoy our anger and bitterness. Yet, mercy requires stooping,

or kneeling. It requires us to let go of our rights and instead practice mercy.

Jesus tells a story about a king and a servant. The servant owed a debt he could not repay, so the servant went before the king and begged for mercy. The king was so moved by this servant’s plea that the king forgave all of this servant’s debts. The man walked away completely forgiven. However, on his way home this servant met a fellow servant that only owed him a small sum. When the first servant demanded repayment, the other servant asked for mercy. Yet, instead of showing mercy the first servant had the man beaten and thrown into prison. When the king heard of this man’s actions he called him to account. The king asked how this man, who had been forgiven so much, could not learn to forgive so little. The result was that the first servant was thrown in to prison and dealt with severely. Jesus says “So it will be with you if you do not learn to forgive.”

Mercy leads us to the action of forgiveness. It causes us to stoop or kneel down, let go of our rights and power, and forgive.

Max Lucado tells a story about a man named Daniel. Daniel was a man who had worked his whole life to save money to open his own gym. It was all he ever wanted. He and his brother were going to go into business; they talked about it and they dreamed about it. Finally, after many years of hard work and saving, Daniel had saved enough to have a down payment on a building and to open his own gym. He asked for a loan from a bank to finance his new endeavor and they agreed, if he could get a cosigner. Daniel’s brother agreed. So the bank did the paper work and everything was agreed upon; the bank called and told Daniel his check was ready. When Daniel got off from work he drove straight to the bank to get his check and for his dream to come true. When he arrived to pick up the check he was told that his brother had already received the


check and had used it to pay off his house's mortgage. Daniel was incensed. He went to his brother's house to beat him up. The anger in Daniel was not only simmering, it was at full boil. He pounded on his brother's door only to have his brother answer the door holding his youngest child in his arms. Daniel would never hit his brother in front of his children, but Daniel told him that one day, when he saw him in the future, he would kill him. Daniel went back to work at his gym and had to try and pay off his debt. Daniel's life's dream was ruined by his own brother.

A few years later Daniel met a missionary where he lived and after a few years of friendship Daniel became a Christian. It changed his whole life but his resentment for his brother continued to be his companion. Then Daniel saw his brother one afternoon, but his brother did not see him. In that moment, Daniel's feelings of betrayal and hatred started to emerge. This is what Daniel wrote about this experience.

When I saw him, I felt my fists clench and my face get hot. My initial impulse was to grab him around the throat and choke the life out of him. But as I looked into his face, my anger began to melt. For as I saw him, I saw the image of my father. I saw my father's eyes. I saw my father's look. I saw my father's expression. And as I saw my father in his face my enemy again became my brother. Daniel walked toward him and grabbed him and his brother winced expecting the worst but instead of a punch the brother received mercy. Daniel grabbed him and hugged him. It was an act of mercy. It was a moment when he forgave as he had been for-

given and a moment he stooped, he knelt, he acted with mercy. When he saw the face of his father, his enemy became his brother. That is what mercy can do.

Jesus said "Blessed are those who show mercy, for they will receive mercy." Does this mean we are forgiven only because we forgive? No, it means that in the moment we show mercy we receive the gifts of mercy. What are the gifts of mercy? When we show mercy, we experience the very presence of God. When we show mercy, we experience a very Christ-like moment. Just as Jesus showed us mercy, when we show mercy we experience, if only for moment, what God experiences when God forgives and shows mercy. When we show mercy, we also experience mercy in that we are freed from the things that would steal life from us.



***“Mercy causes us to stoop or kneel down, let go of our rights and power, and forgive.”***

When we live lives that lack mercy, we are suspect to actions and to emotions that will steal life from us. When we refuse to practice mercy, something happens in our lives. We begin to be filled not with forgiveness and the spirit of Christ but with an ever-growing sense of resentment and anger. When we are wronged and we do not forgive or show mercy, there is a process that begins in our lives. First it is just resentment. We resent the person who has wronged us. We begin to seek revenge against the other. We relish the thought of them getting what they deserve. Soon, our resentment and hopes of revenge give way to bitterness. This bitterness becomes a permanent part of our lives. Whenever we hear their name or we are reminded of their actions, we respond with a bitterness that is not suitable for a Christian. Finally, this bitterness gives way to real chronic anger. This anger becomes a

part of our lives – it takes our time, our energy, and even our physical well being. The last stop of this process is true hatred. True hatred causes us to lose all perspective. We objectify another and of course they can do nothing right, never do anything that is worthwhile. We no longer see them as people who deserve God’s love, God’s blessing, or forgiveness.

There are so many people who live life filled with this process festering in their lives. Yet, Jesus would say “‘Vengeance is mine,’ thus sayeth the Lord.” Why? Because revenge, anger, hatred, resentment, and bitterness all steal life from us. Most of the time we are the only ones that suffer as we spend our time plotting and hoping for revenge.

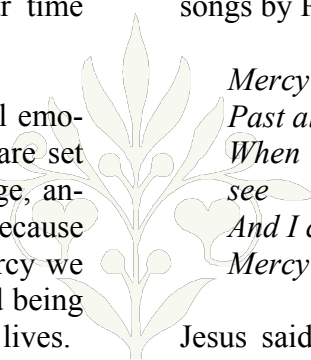
Yet, mercy releases all of these harmful emotions and actions from our lives. We are set free from bitterness, resentment, revenge, anger and hatred. Mercy is our blessing because when we show mercy, and practice mercy we experience God’s blessing of mercy and being set free from that which would steal our lives.

How much time have you wasted hating one who wronged you? How much time have you


spent wishing, hoping and sometimes praying for the demise of another? How much time have you wasted living with bitterness? When you practice mercy you receive mercy. You are set free to live.

Today we come to the Lord’s Table and we are reminded of the example of Jesus in regards to mercy. Ephesians tells us that because God was full of mercy Jesus died for us. The table reminds us of the actions of mercy. We were, by our nature, objects of wrath, but because God is love and rich in mercy, God stooped down – knelt down – in Jesus Christ and made us alive.

One of my favorite Christian Contemporary songs by Phillips, Craig and Dean says:



*Mercy came running like a prisoner set free  
Past all my failures at the point of my need  
When the sin that I carried was all I could  
see  
And I could not reach mercy  
Mercy came a running for me.*

Jesus said “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”

<sup>1</sup>Max Lucado, *The Applause of Heaven* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1990) 114-116.

