



ASKING BETTER QUESTIONS -  
THE SERMON ON THE  
MOUNT 5



**Blessed are the merciful, for they  
will be shown mercy. (Mt 5:7)**



# Initial Questions

- What does it mean to be *merciful*?
- What does mean to be *shown mercy*?
- Who to be *merciful* to?
- Who is showing the *mercy*?
- Anything else?



# Mercy – what is it?

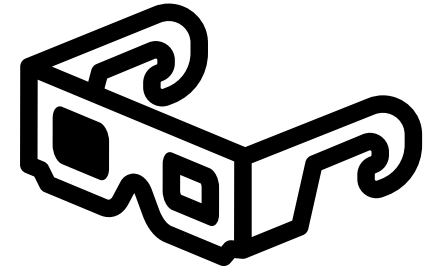
- While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Mt 9:10-13)
- What do we learn about mercy from what Jesus said?
- Mercy = moving towards people who are in need.
- You can **learn** to be merciful.

# Mercy – what it isn't

- At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.” He answered, “Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. Or haven’t you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent? I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, *‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent.* For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”
- What difference does Jesus' Lordship make?
- Significance of "Haven't your read?"
- What is Jesus' point?



# Two views



## View A

- *“Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath”.*
- You are breaking the rules.
- Human need not in view.
- Rules trump human need.

## View B

- Haven't you read...
- Interpret the rules in light of the whole of Scripture.
- Consider human need.
- Mercy trumps sacrifice.

**Reflection: Do I tend to be more View A or View B?**

# Mercy in the Bible

**For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and  
acknowledgment of God rather than burnt  
offerings. (Hosea 6:9)**

- What does God really want?
- Where does mercy and acknowledgment of God reside?
- What about the practical bit, how does that fit in?





# Mercy in the Bible

- Though I were innocent, I could not answer him; I could only plead with my Judge for mercy. (Job 9:15)
- Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer. (Ps 4:1)
- LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. Have mercy on me, LORD, for I am faint; heal me, LORD, for my bones are in agony. My soul is in deep anguish. How long, LORD, how long? (Ps 6:1-3)
- Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love: according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. (Ps 51:1)

# Good Samaritan (Lk 10)

Context: Loving your neighbour as yourself (Lk 10:28)

Q: Who is my neighbour?

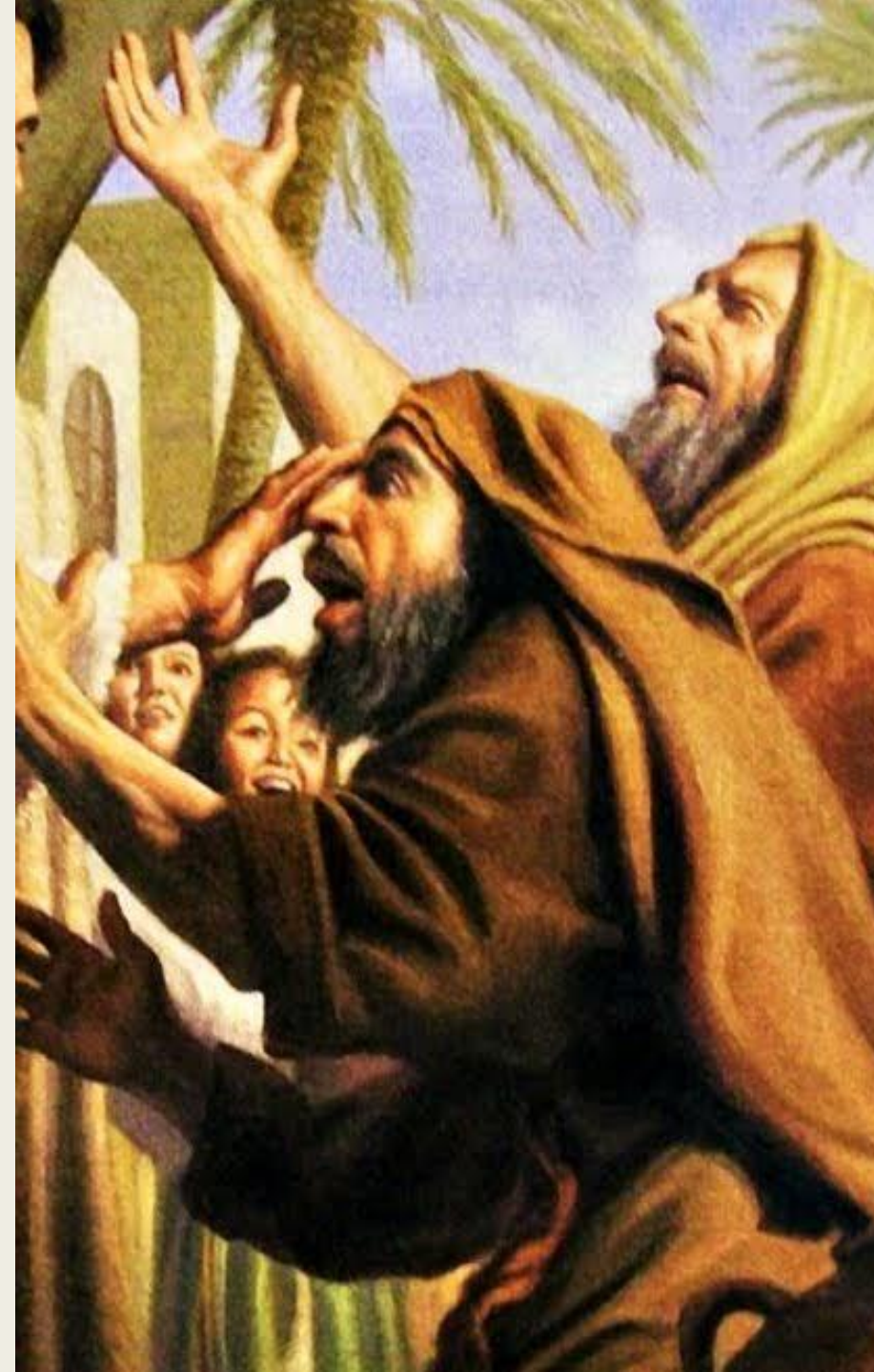
A: ???

*Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Lk 10:36-37)*

- Thoughts?

Art credit: Daniel Bonnell





# Mercy – what it is

- As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” Jesus stopped and called them. “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. “Lord,” they answered, “we want our sight.” Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him. (Mt 20:29-34)
- What do we learn about mercy here?
- Why did Jesus ask “what do you want me to do for you?”
- Why was this healing considered to be merciful?
- What would this look like for those who can't perform miracles?

# Mercy – what it is

- The poor plead for mercy, but the rich answer harshly. (Prov. 18:23)
- The poor have no prospect of repaying their debt.
- How do we think about, talk to and respond to the poor?



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poor

/pɔː, pʊə/

*adjective*

1. lacking sufficient money to live at a standard considered comfortable or normal in a society.

"they were too poor to afford a telephone"

Similar:

poverty-stricken

impoverished

necessitous

beggarly

in penury

penurious



# Mercy and Grace

- What is mercy? How does it differ from grace? The two terms are frequently synonymous; but where there is a distinction between the two, it appears that grace is a loving response when love is undeserved, and mercy is a loving response prompted by the misery and helplessness of the one on whom the love is to be showered. **Grace answers to the undeserving; mercy answers to the miserable.** (D. A. Carson)
- What do think about that?

# Mercy and Grace

- The noun eleos (mercy) . . . always deals with what we see of pain, misery and distress, these results of sin; and charis (grace) always deals with the sin and guilt itself. **The one extends relief, the other pardon; the one cures, heals, helps, the other cleanses and reinstates.** (Richard Lenski)
- To forgive and to be forgiven, to show mercy and to receive mercy: these belong inextricably together, as Jesus illustrated in his parable of the unmerciful servant. Or, interpreted in the context of the Beatitudes, it is ‘the meek’ who are also ‘the merciful’. For to be meek is to acknowledge to others that we are sinners; to be merciful is to have compassion on others, for they are sinners too. (Stott)
- How does all of this impact your understanding of this beatitude: Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy?

# Receiving Mercy

- The one who is not merciful is inevitably so unaware of his own state that he thinks he needs no mercy. He cannot picture himself as miserable and wretched; so how shall God be merciful toward him? He is like the Pharisee in the temple who was unmerciful toward the wretched tax collector in the corner (Luke 18:10ff.). By contrast, the person whose experience reflects these beatitudes is conscious of his spiritual bankruptcy (Matt. 5:3), grieves over it (5:4), and hungers for righteousness (5:6). He is merciful toward the wretched because he recognizes himself to be wretched; in being merciful he is also shown mercy. (D. A. Carson).
- How do we see ourselves? In need of mercy or not?





**So I know what mercy is,  
but what does "being merciful" mean  
and what does it look like in my life?**

# Mercy – What to think about...

- Mercy is a practical response to human need, not a feeling.
- We can learn how to be merciful.
- Getting “tuned up” to notice needs and opportunities to show mercy.
- Jesus doesn’t seem to think in terms of “those who deserve it”.
- Being merciful is part of following Jesus.



# What Jesus is promising

*Jesus is promising that God's mercy will be shown to the one who understands how mercy works.*

*Agree or disagree? Anything else?*

In your own words

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

How would you say it in your own words?



# Reflection

- How do I understand what mercy is now?
- What does it mean to be merciful?
- Do I find being merciful desirable?
- Do I need mercy to be shown to me?
- What would “being shown mercy” be like?
- How can I cultivate a merciful heart?