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Presentation Transcript
Mercy
October 7, 2010

This is a series on the beatitudes. It's the fifth one – *Mercy*. We're studying the linkage between the beatitudes and also the linkage between each beatitude and the corresponding biblical holiday that God provides for us in the Bible.

We realize that many people – even Christians – are not familiar with these days. Nevertheless, they are in the Bible – both Old and New Testaments – and it's perfectly clear in the picture of the New Testament of the apostles, who were personally trained by Jesus Christ, observing all of these holidays year in and year out for decades after Christ died. It's an amazing thing that happens when we discover and begin to observe these holy days that God gave the Israelites and also the New Testament church. We suddenly start to get in touch with the specifics of God's plan.

I have a booklet here, written by my friend, Guy Swenson. It says, *If God So Loved the World, Why Are So Many People Going to Hell?* You keep the holy days and you'll understand the answer to that question. It's a big dilemma for modern Christianity. We're supposed to have this loving God, and yet, if you don't accept Jesus' name in this life, that's it for you. People really still believe the presentation made in Dante's *Inferno*. Dante was probably a very nice Italian gentleman that ate too much pizza too late at night and look what happened. Everybody is still going along with that. Just a little facetious today, but not too bad, I hope.

So today we're on the fifth beatitude, which is mercy. In case you're coming in late, let's read the other beatitudes previous to that. We're in Matthew 5, verse 3.

Mt. 5:3 – *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.* And then, today's beatitude: *Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*

What do the words mean? *Blessed are* means *happy are you*. Everybody wants to be happy, right? This is how. *Mercy* – in the New Testament, there is a word that means

merciful in the face of a moral offense, as when Jesus ran off the Pharisees who were condemning the woman that was taken in adultery. And there is a word that means *to help people who are in want physically* – or in some other kind of personal need. A good example of that would be the good Samaritan, who took care of the man who had been beaten up on the street and robbed. But this word is different from both of those words. This is a general word that covers *all* aspects of mercy. So it means *everything that has to do with mercy*. God's big on all kinds of it.

It's interesting that it says that those of us who *are* merciful will be shown mercy. There's no real need to translate that, because it means just what it says. If we want God to cut us slack for our sins, when it comes time to enter into His kingdom, then we need to begin cutting others slack for theirs. I know a lot of people say that we're all covered by Christ's sacrifice. Well, that's true, but it says that people who are covered by His sacrifice, and really take it seriously, are merciful people. So this beatitude is a *prerequisite* to entrance into the Kingdom of God. So when God tells us He will only show mercy according to the mercy that we have dealt out, that is a *serious* boundary around the Kingdom of God. Only merciful people will be a part.

So the attitude, mercy – it *is* an attitude that we have – what is it? Well, I think one way to explain it – one aspect of it – is to take care of people who are lacking. We saw that there is a work in the New Testament for that. In Matthew 25, Jesus gives us a parable of the judgment. And He likens it to when a king comes and everybody is kind of buttering him up, you know, because they want what he has to offer. And this king divides everybody up into two groups. He calls them the sheep and the goats. In one category, he's got all the people who took care of the poor and the people who were imprisoned. It talks about people giving a cup of cold water to the thirsty – stuff like that – dealing bread to the hungry throughout the Bible. Some people have kind of reduced that to a metaphor. And I'm sure that is a metaphor in the sense that there is much more to taking care of people than just feeding the hungry or taking care of those who are in prison. But it is *not* metaphorical in that we *must do* those things, as well, as a part of the whole package. I wouldn't argue with anybody about that, but I do have five bucks that says you have to take care of the poor if you want to be in the Kingdom of God.

So when have we done that lately? When have we helped people that were in need – that couldn't do things for themselves? Well, that's a question for us, isn't it? That needs to be a part of our life.

It also has to do with spiritual needs – people's *spiritual* needs. God made us relational beings, didn't He? That's really all about us, eventually, coming into a relationship with Him forever. That's about as spiritual as it gets, isn't it? So God tells us that we have to practice relationship here on earth. So that *is* a spiritual activity, even though you can do it outside of church and you don't have to talk “churchy,” or doctrine, or any of that stuff to be spiritual in that way. Most people just don't understand that relationship is a spiritual activity. Family is relationship and God says that He is our Father. It's all tied together.

I'm working with a teen, who was sent to live with distant relatives by her single parent mom. And about a month after she arrived, her mother committed suicide and left this girl, essentially, alone in the world. And because she has been disappointed so much by *both* her parents, she's learned not to feel her feelings. She can talk about how she feels, but you can't see it on her face or in her body language. It's completely out of reach for her. So week by week, we've been exploring what's going on internally with her and we're using a very powerful therapy called EMDR to get to it. We go through all this terrible stuff – all the guilt, all the isolation, all the fear and the feelings of abandonment and rage – week after week and not a single tear. One day, when her session was over, I just felt so bad for her and, as she was walking by, I put my hand on her shoulder to pat her and she immediately wrapped her arm around me and laid her head over on my shoulder – kind of molded into my side. All of us hug people all the time and we know what a social hug is. This was not a social hug. This was a hug that said, "I really need help." That's what really helped me to realize how much hurt was going on inside that little calm exterior I was looking at week by week, and how desperate she was for comfort and for relationship from somewhere. I asked her, "Is there anybody that you know here that will cuddle you, and snuggle you, and hug you, and hold you, and let you talk about what's going on?" And she said, "No, I don't know anybody like that." Well after that, I made a big effort to be a lot less therapist and more like a father. She's gradually starting to get in touch with all of those feelings. And I think also knowing that I'm going to stick with her to the end of her treatment and take care of her – because that has *not* been her experience in life with parental figures – I think that's going to help her find the courage to face the challenges that she has to face. And really what that is is modeling godly love for her, isn't it? God is consistent with us and He tries to take care of us, if we'll let Him.

Of course, the therapy room is the easiest place to do that well. It's a lot harder to do it in the real world, but she is experiencing a little bit of what that could be like for her. I see that as a very intensely spiritual activity – not the kind of thing most people think of as spiritual, however. And yet, taking care of people that are hurting, taking care of people that are hungry, people that are isolated – like prisoners – people that have been put down and mistreated, those are the people that are going to be on the right side of the column when it comes time for the Kingdom, aren't they? It also has to do with forgiving the sins of other people.

Last week, an eighteen-year-old told me that when she was nine, her father would often make her take off all her clothes and stand in the middle of the living room on one foot, while she had to stick her finger in her ear, and stay there for hours sometimes. Now, when you hear things like that, what do you want to do? I have a lot of ideas about what that guy needs, but I'm not going to give him any of those things. I'm going to let *God* take care of him. And I'm going to take care of his daughter. If I did give him all those things I've thought about, I'd probably get in big trouble. That's one reason I'm not going to do that. And the other reason is that I know that God can do a much better job of it than I can. And he deserves the very best. So I'm going to help his daughter recover from the humiliation and the rage she's experienced at his hands, so that when God

begins to draw her, her relationship with her father won't get in between her and God, because that *can* do that.

We see lots of sins in the world, don't we? Lots of problems, lots of bad behavior, lots of hurtful behavior. And it's easy to sit in judgment of people like that and to condemn them. But rather than thinking we're better than others, we just need to let go of that and realize that we are one of the many people who sin everyday, and that we are *all* problems that God is trying to solve.

Probably that man who humiliated his daughter was beaten viciously by his father and mother repeatedly when he grew up. He was twisted in childhood. I'm not making an excuse for his behavior, because there isn't any, but there is a *reason* why he's like that. So he needs to be brought to repentance and to receive a healing of his heart, as well, doesn't he? He's got to change. So we all see things like that all the time, and we need to let God take care of those things and we need to do what we can to help the victims and even, sometimes, the perpetrators.

There's another kind of forgiveness that I think we need to talk about, too, and that's when people have directly sinned against us and we have been damaged in some way. Let's look in 1 Peter 2, and verse 23. This is talking about Christ.

1 Pt. 2:23 – *When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate. When He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.* See, that's how we're supposed to live. We're supposed to live in a state of mercy, because it's been extended to us, and a state of righteousness, because Christ died for our sins and we would want to give those up now. *By His wounds you have been healed.*

So there's the example. But how do we accomplish that in everyday life? Have you ever noticed that, sometimes, when people wrong us, it's easy to let go of it and move on. And then, at other times, we can't seem to find a way to do that. What is the difference? Have you every wondered? Well I think it has to do with the amount of loss that we experience – the amount of hurt that's been done to us, the amount of damage.

I was talking to a young woman the other day, who had a boyfriend. And he really did a number on her. She's a nice-looking, young woman. And she said that when she goes by a mirror, she almost gets sick to her stomach – to look at herself – because this guy over – I don't how long they were together – made so much fun of her and criticized her so much, for the way that she looked, that she's got a distorted image of her own appearance. He really did a number on her psychologically. She suffered some severe psychological damage as a result of the way he treated her. She's having a really hard time letting go of that, because of the amount of damage that was done.

If you think about that way – if you think about the losses that are inflicted on people – and on us – that might be a way to understand why it’s hard to forgive some people of the things they’ve done to us and why others are not so much of a problem.

Quite often, when we suffer, we get angry. When we find ourselves angry, we need to realize that that is not really the real feeling there. The real feeling is *underneath* that and it’s the hurt that we’ve experienced from suffering the loss. So we not only want to get rid of the anger and let go of that, but we have to face the pain of the losses that have been inflicted upon us. Many times we like to blame other people for our anger. And it’s true that others do inflict losses on us – sometimes they do it deliberately and sometimes inadvertently – but, in the end, we are the only ones who maintain that. Sometimes we maintain the hurt because we’re too weak to do the work on the heart. Sometimes we’re too prideful to let other people help us. Sometimes we’re too fearful to trust somebody to help us. But, at any rate, once damage is done, we are the ones that maintain it. We are the only ones that *can* remove it.

Have you ever seen any of these TV shows where somebody, maybe, raped somebody, or beat somebody up, and they’re in prison, and then they get out, and they’re so repentant, and they go and try to express regret to the person. It doesn’t really do much to help the victim. The victim has to do that work internally. That’s the only way it can be undone. It might be a little bit helpful, but it doesn’t really do that much. The victim has to work through all of that.

The other thing that I wanted to bring out about mercy as an attitude: when we ask what mercy is, we say that it’s taking care of others, and it’s forgiving people, and not holding grudges, and all that, but it’s also something else. Mercy is *good* for us. It’s a shield. It protects us from something. We can only experience mercy from God if we extend mercy to others. Right? So extending mercy to other people protects us from the wrath of God and the full effect of His righteous judgment on us. It’s sort of the law of attraction at work, isn’t it? What goes around comes around. Be merciful and draw mercy to ourselves from God.

But it also is a shield in another way. Let’s go to Matthew 24:12.

Mt. 24:12 – *Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold. It says, “many,” in the King James. I like that better. He who stands firm to the end will be saved.*

So this is a prophecy about the state of humanity toward the end of man’s allotted time on earth. We’re told that there is going to be a lot of sin, a lot of lawlessness. Every time we see that, there’s a lot of damage and loss. And if we’re not able to let go of it, we’re likely to become embittered and cold.

Think about all the people you’ve known over the years who have become disillusioned and embittered with the church that they’re in. They see things that are wrong and they can grow bitter. And unless they can extend some mercy, and just let go of it, then their

anger is going to consume them. But, if we can do that – if we can extend mercy – as a habit to other people, then it's not possible to be offended – to be embittered. You just have to learn how to let go. The way to do that is to deal with the internal work – stuff that goes on with us – that prevents us from letting go of it – from the hurt.

So how does this beatitude connect to the previous one? Well, if I asked you the question, “What are the four steps we must take to grow in mercy?” what could you say – after listening to the first four presentations in this series? Well, you could say, “The first step in becoming a merciful person is to have poverty of spirit, and the second, mourning, and the third, meekness, and the fourth, hungering for righteousness.” Because they're the foundational steps that you take to become a merciful person.

I used to administer a personality assessment and there was a scale there for mercy. And it was weighted 70/30, so that 30 percent of the questions had to be answered merciful before it would really call you that. The point is that we all like to think of ourselves as merciful, when, in actual fact, if we are answering specific questions, we are not as merciful as we think most of the time. This is very important for us, because it is a very important issue.

So how does one become *more* merciful – since we all think we are already? Well, understanding that without God, we're nothing – becoming poor in spirit – is the first step. And then, in our ignorance of God and all things spiritual, we have done a great amount of hurt to ourselves and others. We caused the death of Jesus Christ. So it's not just an intellectual awareness that we are nothing without God and totally ignorant about His ways, but it's an emotional one, as well. God wants us engaged with our whole being.

I was talking to a man sometime ago, who had finally sobered up enough to realize that he had done incredible emotional damage to his children. He's now seeing his oldest child become more and more like him – angry, addictive and disrespectful – and he's afraid his son will suffer even worse than he has. And while he was telling me all these things, he broke down and cried. He *mourned* his own foolish behavior and the damage he'd done to the people that he loved the most. He's mourning. This gut-wrenching awareness of his own spiritual failings and damage has caused him to seek help and to become teachable, which is the biblical definition of meekness. He's willing to listen now. And he acknowledges that he needs help.

Where are you in that? Where are you along that path? So all of this leads to a desire to become better people – like this man is – to be like God – to do the inner work and become less angry and more calm, and more patient, and more humble, and more accepting, and more loving, which is the aim of the law of God. He hungers and thirsts for righteousness.

Once we start trying to do that, we soon realize that is a lot easier said than done. And we're just like all of those other lawbreakers that we've been condemning all along. And we realize that *none* of us is good, and we *all* have faults and failings, and there's no room to judge or condemn other people. And that leads us to an attitude where we're

willing to let go of the hurts and the offenses done, hoping that the hurts and offenses that we have done will be let go of, as well. So it's time to treat others with mercy, as we also want to be treated.

So we can see that there is a direct progression – a direct connection. And if we find ourselves lacking in mercy, we now know where to look to solve that problem. We can go back. We can trace back.

Do you remember what God said to...let's see, which church was it? The Ephesian church? "I know what you used to do and how far you have fallen, and I counsel you to repent and *do the first works*, so that when I come, you'll make it." (Jacobs paraphrase) That's how we do the first works. We go back and we start at the beginning of the progression and we start doing that work again. We go back to the beginning – to when we first met God and rebuild our relationship with Him.

So how does all this relate to the salvation plan then? Well, the fifth biblical holiday, or holy day, is the Day of Atonement. Can we find a connection between this day and mercy? Well, mercy is just stamped all over this day. The Day of Atonement means *at onement* with God. The previous holy day is the Feast of Trumpets and that pictures the return of Christ. We know that after He returns, He begins to establish His government on the earth, and He begins to draw people to Himself – people that have resisted Him for thousands of years. He begins to set the earth on a course toward peace and prosperity and spiritual knowledge, instead of ignorance. And at that time, people will turn to God and He will forgive their past foolish resistance and welcome them.

We think, "Well, those people that are alive when Christ returns don't have anything to do with the ones that went before." That isn't really true. You think about Eastern Europe and the attitudes that the Christians and the Muslims there have toward each other. They have hated each other for over a thousand years, because of the atrocities that they have both inflicted upon each other. So there's a long history of traditional hatred. In Eastern Europe, to be a Christian means that you hate Muslims. And to be a Muslim means that you hate Christians. That is going to be true when Christ returns, as well. There's an historic animosity between Christ and most of the people in the world.

Do you remember a few weeks back, when we were talking about Moses being the most meek man? He had a father-in-law, who was the the priest of Midian, didn't he? Jethro. I think I mentioned that Midian was the tribe that drew Israel away from God toward pagan gods. God ascribes that to them more than any of the other Gentile tribes in the region. God is also very clear in the prophecies that He has not forgotten that wrong that has been done. It's interesting to note, however, that during the reign of Jesus Christ on earth, that the lambs offered in the temple will come from Midian. God is going to extend mercy. They're going to repent and turn toward God and be forgiven. And they're going to be a part of this. They're going to be involved in it. Their sheep are happily going to be accepted, because, I guess, they're really good at doing sheep. I realize that some may have become sidetracked at this point, thinking about the realization that when Christ returns, He will rebuild the temple and start the sacrifices of animals again. Everybody

will keep the Sabbath and the biblical holy days. Hey! Sorry. I'm just telling you what it says. I do think, however, that this points towards a necessary shift in some of our theologies – perhaps a reduction in the word *legalists*. And the word *judaizers* might be in order.

Over the ages, the Christian church has murdered multiple thousands for doing the very things that Jesus Christ did when He was alive and will do again when He returns. And until every person that hates those practices repents, they're not going to have any part in what God has for them in the world tomorrow. You wouldn't want to be a part of that thinking, would you? No, I should hope not.

There's something else that happens on this day in the future. Since the very beginning, there's been something *between* us and God, working against us. And if you read the first chapters of Genesis, you will find what it is. We were subverted away from God, in the beginning, by the devil. And in Revelation, one the very first things that happens after Christ touches down on the Day of Trumpets – pictured by that day – is what the Bible calls the *binding of Satan*. It says that an angel will come with a great chain, and bind him and throw him into a lake of fire. Of course, fire can't hurt him, because he's not made of physical stuff. If you weren't made of physical stuff, it couldn't hurt you either. So it means that he's going to be restrained away from all the physical people during that time – one of the greatest acts of mercy that is *ever* going to be done in the whole history of the world!

I want you to notice, too, that, as we think about this progression and this holy day, and how God starts out working with just a few people that are His at Passover and Unleavened Bread and Pentecost, and now He's engaging the entire world, there's also a turning out away from something that's small to something that's big, as we progress through these beatitudes. At first it's about *us* alone, in our relationship with God, and the damage we have done. And then it starts turning toward a hungering for righteousness, where we encounter other people in their own behavior. But this one moves beyond inward awareness and an awareness of the around and extends itself into the world in acts of kindness. It's something that we start doing that goes out *away* from us. It's a turning of attention out toward other people. That's exactly what's going on in the holy day plan at that time, too. The first four holy days are holy that you could call personal holy days, in a way. And then, these are more global in their approach and outlook.

Mercy – definitely a kingdom skill that we're going to need at that time. And, if we hope to be there, we will have to extend lots of it, as does God, while He rebuilds the earth.

Most Christians have never thought much about the beatitudes. We've pretty much ignored them. We read over them. We hang them on the wall, maybe, but we don't really think about what they mean. We think about outward things, like going to church, and contributing money, and social things – stuff like that. But when we turn our attention to the beatitudes, they turn us toward the state of our own heart, because they are *attitudes* that God wants us to have. And it causes us to look at the condition of our heart and the condition of our relationship with God, and the condition of our relationship with other

people. And they show us what we must accomplish, if we intend to live with God and be productive members of His family. They go beyond obedience to the commandments and point us toward the *end* goal of what God wants us to do with our obedience. And that is what He has for us to do *internally* – what kind of *person* He wants us to become.

Well, we have two more beatitudes, two more holy day and two more presentations. Look for them in the near future.