# The Constitution of the Kingdom

*A 33-Session Journey through the Sermon on the Mount & the Sermon on the Plain*

## SESSION SIX — Blessed Are the Merciful

*Part One: The Blessings of the Kingdom · Texts: Matthew 5:7; Luke 6:36*

### The Texts

> **Matthew 5:7** *Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*
>
> **Luke 6:36** *Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*

## The Blessing That Loops Back

Mercy is the thing we most want to receive and are strangely slowest to give.

Every one of us knows the ache of needing mercy — the held breath when we have failed, the hope that someone will not give us what we deserve. And every one of us knows how the hand closes when it is our turn to give it — how quick we are to want justice for others and mercy for ourselves. In this sixth blessing Jesus ties the two together and will not let us pull them apart. "Blessed are the merciful," he says, "for they will receive mercy."[1]

It is the only Beatitude that loops back on itself. The merciful receive mercy. And that little loop is either the most transactional, frightening thing Jesus ever said — or it is a window into how mercy actually works, where it comes from, and why we cannot hoard it. It is the second one.

*Let's search the Scriptures together.*

## A Turn in the Blessings

Notice, before we go further, that something shifts here. The first four blessings described a kind of emptiness — the poor, the grieving, the meek, the hungry. They were all, in their way, about our need: postures of the open, empty hand held out to receive. But beginning right here, with mercy, the Beatitudes turn outward. Mercy, then purity of heart, then peacemaking — these describe not our emptiness but what begins to flow out of us once the Kingdom has filled us. The blessed become a blessing. Those who received mercy become the merciful. This is the hinge of the whole list: the current that ran into us begins to run through us, and out toward others.

[1]Unless noted, Scripture is quoted from the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition (NRSVue), the base translation for this course.

## What Is Mercy?

So what is it? We tend to shrink "mercy" down to leniency — letting someone off, going easy. But the biblical word is far richer and far more active than that. The Greek is *eleos*, and behind it stand two of the great words of the Hebrew Scriptures. One is *chesed* — steadfast love, covenant faithfulness, the loyal lovingkindness God shows his people again and again and again. The other is *rachamim* — compassion, a word built from the Hebrew for womb: the gut-deep, motherly ache you feel in your body when someone you love is suffering.[2]

Put those together and you get something bracing: mercy is not a soft feeling, and it is not mere permissiveness. Mercy is love with its sleeves rolled up. It is compassion that moves — that stoops down, enters another's misery, and does something about it. Mercy is what love looks like when it meets suffering and refuses to walk by.

## The Two Faces of Mercy

Mercy reaches in two directions, and the merciful go both ways. The first face is compassion toward the suffering. When Jesus wanted to show what mercy looks like, he told of a man beaten and left in a ditch, and a despised Samaritan who stopped, and bandaged, and paid. "Which of these," Jesus asked, "was a neighbor?" The answer: "the one who showed him mercy." Mercy, first, is that — the crossing of the road, the stopping, the tending of a wound that isn't yours.[3]

The second face of mercy is forgiveness toward the guilty. Where compassion meets need, forgiveness meets wrong — it releases the debt, cancels what is owed, refuses to make someone pay forever for what they did. Both are mercy. The merciful are those who both bind up the hurting and let go of the guilty — who neither walk past the ditch nor keep the ledger.

## "Just as Your Father Is Merciful"

And here Luke tells us where all this mercy comes from. He does not say, "be merciful because it is good policy." He says: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." Mercy is not first something we manufacture; it is something we have received, and then reflect. We are merciful because we have been shown mercy — endlessly, patiently, at cost — by a God whose steadfast love never runs out.

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[2]The Greek eleos ("mercy") stands on two great Hebrew words: chesed—steadfast covenant love, loyal lovingkindness—and rachamim—compassion, built from rechem, "womb": a visceral, motherly ache for the one who suffers. Mercy is thus not mere leniency but active compassion, love that stoops to help. See the standard lexica and W. D. Davies and Dale Allison on Matthew 5:7.

[3]Mercy reaches two directions: compassion toward the suffering—Luke's own illustration is the Good Samaritan, "the one who showed him mercy" (Luke 10:37)—and forgiveness toward the guilty, the releasing of a debt.

Hear one beautiful detail. In Matthew, this same teaching ends, "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Luke renders the very same thought as, "Be merciful, as your Father is merciful." Which tells you something about the God of this Kingdom: his perfection is his mercy. To grow up into God's likeness is not to become flawless. It is to become merciful.[4]

## The Loop, and Why It Isn't a Trap

Now back to that loop that troubled us at the start: "for they will receive mercy." And this same reciprocity runs all through the Sermon — "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors"; "the measure you give will be the measure you get."

Hear clearly what this is not. It is not a transaction. Jesus is not saying you purchase God's mercy by being nice enough to earn it — that would unravel grace entirely, and grace is the ground we are standing on. It is something deeper and truer than a bargain. Mercy is a current, not a coin. It only exists in motion. And the one who refuses to give mercy has, by that very refusal, closed a fist around the mercy poured into them — and a closed fist cannot feel the water still running through the open hand.[5]

The unmerciful do not fail to receive mercy because God has grown stingy. They fail to receive it because they have stepped out of the stream. You cannot hoard mercy; it is not that kind of thing. It stays alive in you only as it flows through you to someone else. To withhold it is to dam the very river you were meant to live in.

## The Hardest Mercy

We should name the hardest reach of this, because Luke's "be merciful" is the climax of "love your enemies." Mercy, at its furthest stretch, extends even to the one who has wronged us — and that is the costliest mercy there is.

But let me say clearly what this does and does not mean, because these words have been misused to wound. Mercy is not the same as pretending harm did not happen. It is not telling the abused to smile at their abuser, or the oppressed to stop seeking justice. Mercy and justice are not enemies — the God who is endlessly merciful is also the God who sets things right, and mercy never asks the wronged to call the wrong "fine." What mercy refuses is not justice but

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[4]Luke roots mercy in the imitatio Dei: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (6:36). Matthew's parallel reads, "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (5:48). Set side by side, they suggest that for the Gospels God's very perfection is God's mercy—and to grow into God's likeness is to grow merciful.

[5]"They will receive mercy" is relational, not transactional; it does not purchase grace. The Sermon returns to this again and again—"forgive us… as we forgive"; "the measure you give"; the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:23–35). To refuse mercy is to close one's hand around the mercy already given and step out of the current one must live in. See Glen Stassen and David Gushee, Kingdom Ethics.

vengeance: the bitterness that would rather see the other destroyed than healed, the hatred that slowly turns us into a mirror of the one who hurt us. And for the deepest wounds, this kind of mercy is not a switch you flip on command; it is the slow work of years and grace. But it is where the Kingdom is always pulling us — toward the day we can release even our enemy, and be free.

## Freedom for Others

Put it to our thread, and it hardly needs translating — because mercy is freedom for others in its purest form. It is spending yourself on another's suffering, or releasing another from a debt they owe you. So ask with me: whose suffering am I being invited to actually enter this week — not walk past? And whose debt am I still holding — what grievance, what grudge, what ledger — that I could, by grace, begin to release? *Freedom for others may cost us the satisfaction of the grudge — what can we lay down?* And remember, as you count the cost: it is only ever the mercy we ourselves have already been shown.

## Around the Table — For Discussion

- Which comes harder for you — wanting mercy, or giving it? Where do you most want justice for others and mercy for yourself?
- Mercy has two faces: compassion for the suffering, and forgiveness for the guilty. Which comes more naturally to you? Which do you avoid?
- Luke says, "be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." Where have you received mercy you did not earn — and how might that memory loosen your grip?
- We said mercy is a current, not a coin — that a closed fist cannot receive it. Where might your hand be closed?
- Freedom for others may cost us something. Whose suffering are you being invited to enter, or whose debt to release?

## This Week — A Practice

Two movements, the two faces of mercy. First, compassion: find one person's suffering this week and enter it — not with advice from the far side of the road, but with your presence and your hands, the way the Samaritan did. Second, release: name one debt you have been holding — one grievance, one grudge — and begin, by grace, to let it go. And hear this gently: if the wound is deep, forgiveness is the slow work of years, not a task to finish by Sunday. Take one honest step and trust God with the pace. Then bring back what you found. Mercy, like the whole of this Kingdom, is learned in the doing.

## Looking Ahead

Next session, a blessing with a promise that stops you in your tracks: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” We’ll ask what a “pure” heart actually is — not a spotless one, but a whole and undivided one — and what it might mean that the single-hearted are the ones who get to see the very face of God.

## Benediction

So go this week with open hands — open to receive the mercy that never stops being poured out over you, and open to let it run straight through to someone else. Cross the road. Release the debt. Refuse the grudge that would slowly turn you hard. And trust that the God whose very perfection is his mercy is not finished being merciful to you. Blessed are the merciful — for they, with open hands, will feel the mercy still flowing.

*Love, practiced — not just professed — reveals the Kingdom among us.*

Blessings,
**Pastor Mick Finch**

SESSION SIX

# Introduction Video Script

*Single presenter, to camera · target 5–6 minutes · warm, steady, unhurried*

*[Begin still.]*

Welcome back to the table. Let me start with something true about all of us: mercy is the thing we most want to receive, and we're strangely the slowest to give it.

You know the ache of needing mercy — that held breath when you've failed, the hope that somebody won't give you what you've got coming. And you also know how fast the hand closes when it's your turn to hand mercy out — how quick we all are to want justice for other people and mercy for ourselves. And in this sixth blessing, Jesus ties those two together and won't let us pull them apart. "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy."

It's the only Beatitude that loops back on itself. The merciful receive mercy. And that little loop is either the most transactional, frightening thing Jesus ever said — or it's a window into how mercy actually works. It's the second one. Let me show you.

*[A note on the shift.]*

First, notice something shifts here. The first four blessings were about our emptiness — poor, grieving, meek, hungry. Hands held out to receive. But starting right here, the Beatitudes turn outward. Mercy, then purity of heart, then peacemaking — these are about what starts to flow out of us once the Kingdom has filled us. The blessed become a blessing. This is the hinge: the current that ran into us starts to run through us.

*[What mercy is.]*

So what is mercy? We shrink it down to leniency — letting someone off. But the biblical word is so much bigger. The Greek is eleos, and behind it stand two great Hebrew words. Chesed — God's steadfast, loyal, covenant love that never runs out. And rachamim — compassion, a word built from the word for womb, the gut-deep ache you feel in your body when someone you love is hurting. Put them together, and mercy is not a soft feeling and it's not permissiveness. Mercy is love with its sleeves rolled up — compassion that stoops down, enters somebody's misery, and does something about it.

And it reaches two directions. When Jesus wanted to show mercy, he told about a man beaten in a ditch and a despised Samaritan who stopped and bandaged and paid. "Which one was the neighbor?" "The one who showed him mercy." That's the first face — compassion for the suffering. The second is forgiveness for the guilty — releasing the debt, refusing to make someone pay forever. The merciful do both. They don't walk past the ditch, and they don't keep the ledger.

*[Where it comes from.]*

And Luke tells us where all this comes from. He doesn't say be merciful because it's good policy. He says, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." We don't manufacture mercy — we reflect it. We're merciful because we've been shown mercy, endlessly, at cost, by a God whose love never quits. And here's a beautiful thing: in Matthew this same line reads, "Be perfect, as your Father is perfect." Luke says it, "Be merciful." Which tells you something about God — his perfection is his mercy. To grow into his likeness isn't to become flawless. It's to become merciful.

*[The loop, carefully.]*

Now, that loop that worried us — "for they will receive mercy." Hear what it's not. It is not a transaction. Jesus isn't saying you buy God's mercy by earning it — that would wreck grace, and grace is the ground we stand on. It's deeper than a bargain. Mercy is a current, not a coin. It only exists in motion. And the person who refuses to give it has closed a fist around the mercy poured into them — and a closed fist can't feel the water still running past the open hand. The unmerciful don't miss out because God got stingy. They've stepped out of the stream. You can't hoard mercy — it stays alive in you only as it flows through you.

*[The hard reach — careful, pastoral.]*

And I have to name the hardest reach, because Luke's "be merciful" is the climax of "love your enemies." Mercy, at its furthest stretch, reaches even the one who wronged us. But hear me clearly, because these words have been used to wound: mercy is not pretending the harm didn't happen. It's not telling the abused to smile at their abuser, or the oppressed to quit seeking justice. Mercy and justice aren't enemies. What mercy refuses is not justice — it's vengeance: the bitterness that would rather see someone destroyed than healed, the hatred that slowly turns us into a copy of the one who hurt us. And for the deep wounds, this is the slow work of years and grace, not a switch you flip. But it's where the Kingdom is always pulling us — toward the day we can finally set even our enemy down, and be free.

*[The thread and the practice.]*

So here's our question this week — freedom for others: whose suffering am I being invited to actually enter, not walk past? And whose debt am I still holding that I could begin to release? And remember as you count the cost — it's only ever the mercy you've already been shown.

Two things to practice. First, compassion: find one person's suffering and enter it — not advice from across the road, but your presence and your hands, like the Samaritan. Second, release: name one grudge you've been holding and begin, by grace, to let it go. And gently — if the wound is deep, that's the work of years, not the weekend. Take one honest step, and trust God with the pace.

Next time — "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." We'll ask what a pure heart really is: not a spotless one, but a whole and undivided one.

*[Slow. Land it.]*

For now, go with open hands — open to receive the mercy that never stops pouring over you, and open to let it run straight through to someone else. Cross the road. Release the debt. And trust that the God whose very perfection is mercy is not done being merciful to you.

*Love, practiced — not just professed — reveals the Kingdom among us.*

Let's search the Scriptures together.

**Blessings, Pastor Mick Finch.**