

Blessed are the Merciful

(English Standard Version throughout, except where noted)

There's one particular part of the Bible that always astounds me. In fact, I walked into a bookstore on one occasion and picked up a commentary on this particular section of the Bible. I looked at the size of the book in my hand and then opened it up to see how many pages were in it. This wasn't a small book. It was an oversize book: a book the size of *Vision* magazine. Six hundred and fifty pages are dedicated to just three chapters of the Bible! In that particular commentary series, it is, in fact, one of their largest commentaries. In other words, these three chapters have a lot to be said about them! There is, in fact, a lot to be said about them!

The section of the Scripture is the Sermon on the Mount: a very dense section of Scripture which is LADEN with instruction that really needs to be mined in order to be understood. Over the past few years I have given a number of sermons on the beatitudes. Today I would like to deal with what is ostensibly the shortest of the beatitudes (by a letter or so). I would like to spend approximately the next hour discussing a very short verse of the Bible - because we come to that with various pre-suppositions that the Bible does not necessarily support.

Matthew provides a very simple statement that we can easily read over without considering the full impact of what is being said. It's one of those things that many of us have probably committed to memory at some point along the line. As we think about the beatitudes at the present time, we can probably scroll through them. "The first one is about the meek inheriting the earth, then there is the poor ... etc, etc."

Matthew 5:7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

We all would like to receive what we think is mercy. But the question really is, what is mercy, and how do we go about fulfilling the condition that is set to receive mercy? How do we be merciful? What is involved in being merciful? What is the characteristic of being merciful? From what examples can we learn to be merciful?

Most of us would probably make a translation of our own, to say: "Blessed are those who forgive for they shall be forgiven." That is our understanding of verse 7. Our understanding of the term "mercy" and that of a person being merciful, are shaped by the way we use the terms. Most times we use the term "mercy" or "merciful," we use it in a very legal sense. The legal profession would use the term in "a forensic" sense. That is not surprising when you consider the etymology of mercy, from which "merciful" is derived. Miriam Webster provides this background:

"Etymology: Middle English, from Anglo-French *merci* [which today means 'thank you'], from Medieval Latin *merced-*, *merces*, from [older Latin still which means] 'price paid,' 'wages,' from *merc-*, *merx* merchandise ..."

We derive words like "merchandise" from the same Latin root from which we derive our word "mercy." So if we trace the etymology back, we come to a very legal term in the Latin language. What is our first usage?

"1 a: compassion or forbearance shown especially to an offender ..."

We are talking legal language here ...

"... or to one subject to one's power; also: lenient or compassionate treatment <[a person] begged for mercy> ..."

We have the application of the term being "imprisoned," rather than receiving the death penalty, as an act of mercy:

"... b: imprisonment rather than death imposed as penalty for first-degree murder."

That is an act of mercy. We have other usages of the term as Miriam Webster notes:

"2 a: a blessing that is an act of divine favor or compassion

b: a fortunate circumstance ...

3: compassionate treatment ..."

I think there's a Catholic order known as the "Sisters of Mercy." They have nothing whatsoever to do with the legal world. They are very much involved in the medical world and providing care for people.

Our view of mercy is so often shaped by the words of Shakespeare. Shakespeare, in his play *The Merchant of Venice* made a great play about mercy and the way in which it is juxtaposed to justice. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock, the Jew, was demanding payment from Antonio, who was not able to pay at that point in time.

Eventually it ends up in a court case before the Duke of Venice. Portia, who is playing the part of the lawyer in the case, said to Shylock before the duke, "Then must the Jew be merciful," because Antonio can't pay. He doesn't have the means to repay his debt.

Shylock responds to Portia by saying, "On what compulsion I am asked, tell me that?"

To this, Portia replies with the famous lines,

"The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath; it is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes."

She goes on to talk about the greatness of mercy. A little later on in her lines, Portia juxtaposed against justice. To Shylock she says this of mercy:

"Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
That, in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy;
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy. I have spoke thus much
To mitigate the justice of thy plea."

Here, Shakespeare presents to us in a very eloquent manner the whole idea of mercy being juxtaposed against justice, that we are all not worthy of God's favour, that each and everyone of us stand on this earth in need of God's mercy if we are going to have salvation. That is absolutely true.

But I would like to suggest to you that that is not all Jesus Christ said, when He said, "Blessed are the merciful because they shall obtain mercy." They are noble words, noble sentiments - and they have probably shaped our thinking very much of the aspect of being merciful and of receiving mercy.

I would like to let you in on a surprise. Maybe it's not so much of a surprise after listening to Shakespeare. No human being has been recorded in God's Word with the characterisation of being merciful! There is no example we can go to in God's Word of, say, King David, where God has described him as being a merciful man. He may be "a man after God's own heart," but he is never spoken of in terms of mercy. It doesn't mean to say that he knew nothing about the quality of mercy, or knew nothing about being merciful, but he is not described in that way.

The only person described by this term in the New Testament is Jesus Christ! It is not surprising that He is the only One who is described as merciful because if we go back to the Old Testament Scriptures, no one is described as being merciful except the Eternal!

What we are talking about here in this verse is not a quality that comes to any of us naturally. This is a quality of godly character that we must take on as part of our own character. It has to become internalised within us and shape our thinking process so that we think as God thinks, rather than as man thinks.

Matthew 5:7 "Blessed are the merciful ..."

The term that is translated "merciful" is used only one other time in the New Testament. It is used of Jesus Christ. It talks about Jesus Christ becoming something for our benefit.

Hebrews 2:14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,

15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

16 For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.

17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

18 For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

This is talking of Jesus Christ becoming a merciful High Priest so that He could pay the price for sins. This aspect of sins is very essential to the aspect of mercy. But there's a lot more to it than just mercy.

In Christ's time, as we will see, people understood the need for mercy to be extended to their own lives - and not just in the terms of forgiveness of sins. Although people knew about the need for mercy, the example of people being merciful to one another is very rare in the pages of God's Word. In fact, the lack of being merciful is the result of being cut off from God.

The apostle Paul talked to the Church at Rome about the natural state of humankind being cut off from God:

Romans 1:28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips,

30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,

31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Where is the lack of being merciful here? Actually, the last word, the word that has been translated "ruthless" is simply best translated as "unmerciful." They don't have it. If you are cut off from God, there is no way you can have mercy. You can go round forgiving people as much as you like, but you are not going to receive God's mercy just on that basis.

You may have a certain aspect of mercy, you may be merciful in one particular way, but not be fulfilling what Jesus Christ set out there.

Interestingly, these characteristics in Romans 1 are all very self-centred. All of these terms that Paul uses to describe the human condition are all very self-centred. What can a person get for themselves?

Is a ruthless person concerned about others? He or she may SAY they are, but in reality they are not. They are only concerned about themselves.

In the New Testament, the only person who is described as being merciful is Jesus Christ Himself. So to comply with this beatitude, we have to become Christ-like. We have to understand how WAS Jesus Christ merciful? How is the Father merciful? In what ways is He merciful - and how can we inculcate that into our lives?

As I said earlier, we have an interesting situation in the New Testament, because the people understood that there was a need for mercy. It's an interesting study to do. For instance, if we look in Matthew's gospel:

Matthew 9:27 And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, "Have mercy on us, Son of David."

These men were blind. They realised that their condition needed mercy. They needed mercy applied to their condition.

On another occasion, when Jesus had gone into the district of Tyre and Sidon:

Matthew 15:22 And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon."

She wanted mercy. It's rather interesting, that here, a Canaanite woman from the area of Tyre and Sidon had an understanding that the son of David could provide mercy for her and help her in the situation she faced. She had a daughter who was severely oppressed by a demon.

A couple of chapters later, after the Transfiguration, Jesus Christ with James, Peter and John, came down to the foot of the mountain to join the rest of the twelve.

Matthew 17:14 And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and, kneeling before him, 15 said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water."

He goes on to describe the situation that he faced. These people were facing enormous personal trials. It was not something that could immediately be traced to their own doing. They realised they needed mercy to be granted to them.

Matthew 20:29 And as they went out of Jericho, a great crowd followed him. 30 And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" 31 The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"

Rather interestingly, in literally each of these cases, with one exception, the concept of mercy is linked to the Son of David. These people did not see the Son of David as being a purely HUMAN individual. The title, the Son of David, was not just a human title. We know that Prince Charles is the son of Queen Elizabeth. But there was something more to this term, Son of David, as we will come to see.

As I have already mentioned, in the Old Testament, the only One who has mercy is the Eternal. In other words, this Son of David was related to the Eternal in some way in terms of these peoples' minds. It's an interesting piece of study to consider - as to where they came by this. How did they come to understand this? It's not something I can answer for you today - maybe another time, after a little more study, a little more understanding of these things.

Yes, Matthew uses mercy in the traditional way we understand mercy. In Matthew 18, we see a servant who asked for mercy because he wasn't able to repay his debt. Maybe this was the imagery that Shakespeare used for the Merchant of Venice. The lord said:

Matthew 18:33 And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?'

Here, the aspect of mercy is involved in the repayment of debt. Not only Matthew, but James also sees it in that light. This aspect of mercy does have a juxtaposition to justice. James told the Church:

James 2:13 For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy ...

If we want to be judged correctly, if we want to have mercy granted to us instead of the actual judgment of God's law, then we do have to show ourselves merciful. James finishes by saying:

13 ... Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Like many other subjects, the expressions that we find discussed in the Bible are oftentimes a lot more nuanced than the way we use them in our normal everyday lives. To be merciful is a lot more nuanced than the way we normally think of it.

How do we then come to understand what being merciful is all about? With only two usages of the expression "merciful" in the New Testament, our starting place has to be in the rest of Scripture.

In Exodus 22, the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek term that is translated "merciful" is given. It is interesting that the translators don't even translate it as "merciful," because, to a certain extent, they are trying to provide somewhat of a nuance of being merciful. After the Ten Commandments have been given, the Eternal gives to Moses the statutes and judgments in which some interpersonal aspects are provided:

Exodus 22:25 "If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a moneylender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him.

He is talking about dealing with other people who are less fortunate than ourselves. Then He adds another dimension to this:

***26 If ever you take your neighbor's cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down,
27 for that is his only covering, and it is his cloak for his body; in what else shall he sleep?
And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate (merciful).***

The aspect of mercy involves COMPASSION on God's part. God looks out for those who can't look out for themselves. They are His care. So the very first expression of God's mercifulness to His creation is given here in terms of someone who lacks in terms of this world: totally unlike the unmerciful attitudes of mind that were expressed by Paul in Romans 1. The English Standard Version describes them as being "ruthless."

Our God is not a ruthless God! He is concerned about the NEEDS of people - and not just their sins. He is concerned about their needs and the situations they find themselves in for which they may not be responsible.

Moving on from Exodus 22, Exodus 34 sets the scene for much of what is written in the rest of the Old Testament about being merciful. This is the occasion in which Moses desired to see the face of God. The Eternal told him, "You're not going to see My face. You will see My hinder-part." He had to help Moses realise that seeing the FORM of God was not the important thing. The most important thing about the Eternal is coming to understand His very character - or, to put it in the modern vernacular: what is His nature? What is He like?

Exodus 34:4 So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first. And he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone.

5 The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD.

Moses wanted to see God. The Eternal proclaimed His name: "This is what you need to learn about Me."

6 The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

Moses, as he could only do in a situation like that (and as we would do in a situation like that):

8 And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. 9 And he said, "If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance."

In this section, the Eternal describes Himself as being merciful. He also talks about forgiveness. He also talks about pardoning iniquity. He uses different words in each case. In other words, being merciful is not just about forgiving sins. It is more than that. It is talking about the care and concern that God has for His creation!

Let's look at some other examples. I think that the next one is one of the central Scriptures to the entirety of the Old Testament because it helps us understand who and what God is, the type of character that He is - and, by extension, the type of people we are to BECOME with the aid of God's Holy Spirit. It is only with the aid of God's Holy Spirit that we can develop these spiritual qualities.

This particular self-manifestation of God runs throughout the entirety of the Old Testament. There are about another 12 occasions in which David or the prophets or the writers of the Psalms take from this particular Scripture - and address God's character and what sort of Being He is.

We won't go through all of those today, but it is worthwhile picking on a few of them. This aspect of compassion is very well expressed and set out for us in Psalm 78. It talks about God's wondrous works for the people and the way in which God had to deal with them in the wilderness.

Psalm 78:31 the anger of God rose against them, and he killed the strongest of them and laid low the young men of Israel.

38 Yet he, being compassionate (merciful), atoned for their iniquity and did not destroy them; he restrained his anger often and did not stir up all his wrath. 39 He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and comes not again.

God was merciful to them, not just because of their sins, but He understood the frailty of these people. They were like a wind - a puff from God and they are gone! There was nothing to them. He understood that very, very well. So here, He talks about being compassionate to them. The Hebrew word would be more correctly translated as being "merciful," rather than being "compassionate." Once again, I think the translators are trying to provide somewhat of a nuance, knowing the way in which we look upon the aspect of mercy in this day and age. God didn't stir up His wrath.

Psalm 111 also talks about God's great works.

Psalm 111:1 Praise the LORD (the Eternal)! I will give thanks to the LORD (the Eternal) with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation. 2 Great are the works of the LORD (the Eternal), studied by all who delight in them. 3 Full of splendor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever. 4 He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered ...

Why? It is because ...

4 ... the LORD (the Eternal) is gracious and merciful.

All of His works, the way in which He saved people, the way in which He has intervened in the lives of human beings is an aspect of God's mercifulness, His care for His creation.

5 He provides food for those who fear him ...

His mercy extends to taking care of the needs of His creation.

5 ... he remembers his covenant forever.

This aspect of being merciful is very much couched in covenant language. It is part of God's covenant with His people. When WE are merciful, we also are displaying those qualities of God's covenant with one another, with other people.

Joel uses this term "merciful" in the way we would traditionally understand it: of wickedness and forgiving sins. This passage is also set in terms of the covenant:

Joel 2:12 "Yet even now," declares the LORD, "return to me ...

We are talking about repentance, returning to the covenant relationship with God.

**12 ... with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
13 and rend your hearts and not your garments" ...**

"Get caught up with what is inside, not the externals."

13 ... Return to the LORD your God ...

Why? Is it because He can forgive?

13 ... for he is gracious and merciful ...

This is something that is well worthwhile appreciating. In the Hebrew, the aspect of God being merciful is closely linked with another characteristic, that of being gracious. Literally every one of these verses which draw on Exodus 34:6-7 don't just talk about mercy or mercifulness by themselves. They couple it with "gracious." God is gracious AND merciful. They are coupled together, one after the other after the other. There are about 11 occasions where the term "merciful" is used, drawing on Exodus 34:6, where the two terms are linked together. Psalm 78 is one of the few occasions in which it is not used.

In fact, if you look at the Hebrew words, I find it very difficult to understand the real difference between these two Hebrew words. They are totally different Hebrew words. There is no question about that. But what is God getting at by using these two words together here?

I think that there is an aspect that is well worthwhile appreciating in terms of mercy. Just as the English word "mercy" has an etymology back into legal language, the Hebrew word that is translated "mercy" or "merciful" has an etymology - but the Hebrew origin is not in the legal world at all! It is in the world of nurture. The word for "merciful" is linked to a noun for the female womb: with the ideas of care, protection and well-being. The etymology of the words comes from totally different worlds. One is supposed to be the epitome of care, of nurture, of well-being for a child as it grows and develops. Our English word comes from a very harsh, cruel world. God's mercy has a very different association to it than that which we apply in this day and age.

Oftentimes, the Hebrew word that is translated "merciful" in English, comes from another of the qualities that God used of Himself in Exodus 34: the word *chêsêd* which means "steadfast love." That is the best way of describing it in terms of English.

Let's look at this aspect of the child and the care in that way. In Isaiah 49, Isaiah poses a rhetorical question for us. It doesn't need an answer.

Isaiah 49:14 *But Zion said, "The LORD (Eternal) has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me."*

"I am cut off. I have no hope in this world." But Isaiah retorts, under God's inspiration:

15 *"Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb ...*

Here we have a play on the words. Does she have no compassion or mercy on the son of her womb? These two items are very closely linked together.

15 ... Even these may forget ...

A woman may have an occasion in which she forgets. Certain circumstances lead to that. But Isaiah responds:

15 ... yet I will not forget you.

"My mercifulness towards you is such that I am not going to forget! You are part of My thinking, part of My being. You are part of My plan! You are wrapped up in it. You can't escape from it!"

God's mercy towards us is very much involved in terms of a covenant relationship. It is very much linked with compassion and graciousness. It is very much involved with our calling.

In Romans 9, Paul quotes from Exodus 33, talking about the calling that God has given to His people:

Romans 9:14 *What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!*

15 *For he says to Moses (quoting from Exodus 33:19), "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."*

16 *So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.*

Rather interestingly, Paul, in chapter 9 sets out the fact that God calls people! At times, because we use Church-speak today that is not found in the Bible, people wonder: "Can you support this idea of the plan of God from the Bible?"

I think that we very clearly can from Romans 9 and 10. I spoke to some of you at the Feast about it. Romans 9 is dealing with our calling, the fact that God calls some people. He calls the weak of the world.

If you think that 1st Corinthians 1:25-26 doesn't apply to you, in Romans 9, God talks about the way in which He does use the weak. In fact, sometimes He even has to create the weak. He decides who He is going to call! Paul is making that abundantly clear to the Church in Rome. "This isn't a freebie for everybody today." No, it is who God calls.

The apostle Paul is quoting the Eternal from Exodus 33:19 and pointing out that God has mercy on whoever He wishes to have mercy. He has compassion or graciousness on whoever He decides to have graciousness. By having mercy and graciousness towards them, He draws them into His plan! He makes them part of His purpose! Is it for themselves alone? No, it is for the benefit of ALL humanity who eventually will have the opportunity of being part of the plan of God.

When we are talking about having mercy, or being merciful, we are talking about expressing the mind of God towards His creation. How does God see His creation? Is it with care? Is it with compassion? It certainly is! God's mercy is expressed in that way. The forgiveness of sins is ONE of the ways in which God shows His mercy, but His mercy begins before that!

It is the goodness of God that LEADS us to repentance in the first place, of coming to see the need to be forgiven! Is that not part of God's mercy towards us? Isn't part of God's mercy towards us that He has a plan whereby all humanity are going to have the opportunity of coming to the knowledge of the truth and having the opportunity of having their sins forgiven - and not just having their sins forgiven, but coming to understand the very character of God and build that within their own lives?

What does it say for us? How did Jesus Christ give us examples of being merciful? Jesus Christ gave us wonderful examples of being merciful by healing people. It was an act of mercy towards those people, or towards those people's offspring. It was His desire for them.

Let's notice another example of Christ being merciful. He was in Jerusalem. It was a matter of days or hours before He was taken away to be crucified. What would be my thoughts in that situation? I think it would be very easy for your thoughts to be on yourself. "Can I endure this? Can I tolerate the pain? What is it going to be like?"

During this period of time, Jesus Christ had His thoughts elsewhere. He gives us an example of being merciful. He said to His disciples and those who listened to Him then:

Matthew 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!"

Is that an attitude of compassion towards those people? I think it is! Christ is expressing a merciful attitude towards those people. He just desires the best for them. He wants them to have the best, but He says, "You would not."

"That is what I would have loved for you to have: to be part of My plan, but on the other hand ..."

38 See, your house is left to you desolate.

But that's not the end of it ...

39 For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

... quoting from Psalm 118. He looked forward to the time when they WERE going to listen, and mercy could really be given to them.

In talking of mercy in Romans 9:25, the apostle Paul quoted from Hosea 1. It is a rather interesting extension to this whole aspect being merciful. One of Hosea's children was named *Lo-ruhamah*. It meant, "not having obtained mercy."

Hosea 1:6 And she conceived again and bore a daughter.

Then God said to him:

"Call her name Lo-Ruhamah,

For I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel,

But I will utterly take them away.

At the beginning of Hosea 2, those who didn't receive mercy, now receive mercy.

Hosea 2:1 (King James Version) Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ruhamah.

No longer are they called *Lo-ruhamah*. They are now called *Ruhamah* - meaning "having obtained mercy." God desires people to be part of His plan. He wants people to have a part in His whole purpose for humanity.

When we talk about mercy and God being merciful, someone is bound to ask, "What about the mercy seat?" That is a problem with the English language - because in Hebrew, the term "mercy seat" has nothing to do with *ruhamah* or *râcham*. The Hebrew word is *kappôreth*. It means, "to make an atonement." I think that 25 times in the book of Exodus, to this day the English faithfully translates it as a "mercy seat." But in reality, it would be better translated and described as an "atonement seat." But mankind doesn't know anything about atonement! Mankind doesn't understand the purpose and the plan of God.

Mercy and being merciful is not just about a relationship with justice. Justice has a part in it. It has an application to mercy as our current usage denotes. But mercy is so much larger than that! It has to do with our sense of caring for one another in the way in which God the Father and Jesus Christ and the whole heavenly host care for us!

When we are told to, "Be merciful," who is it to be expressed to? Does the heavenly host NEED our care? I think not. What can we do for them? What can we do for the Father? What can we do for Jesus Christ? It's an impossibility. There's nothing that we can do with our own hands that they don't have already! Isaiah described it very well. All the silver and the gold belong to God.

Isaiah 66:1 Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?

2 All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

There's nothing we can do physically for God. Ultimately speaking, the aspect of being merciful is to one another! In so doing, we are showing God that we ARE of a contrite and a humble spirit and that we DO tremble at His words: because we want to treat one another in the way that God has treated us, with the same care and concern that the Eternal and the Father has for each and everyone of us. If we see another person, what do we want them to be?

"Go to hell"?

No, if that's our attitude towards other people, we don't understand about being merciful! It's as simple as that. Yet that is the attitude most people have towards one another: "Why can't you get out of my way?"

Think of the situations in the home. How would our marriage problems be helped if we sought to be merciful to one another? That may involve forgiveness towards the other person. But more than forgiveness ... what if we thought about the other people in the home as much as we thought about ourselves? What if we thought about them in terms of their involvement in the Kingdom of God? Would it change the situation?

Let me tell you one thing it would do: it would change your attitude towards the other parties - because you wouldn't see them in hostile form.

How does the Eternal see your mate or whoever may be the cause of the problems or grief in your life? How does God see your mother-in-law? Mother in laws seem to be the "whipping boy" all the time! It won't make this person disappear. We would love to put "vanishing cream" on all of our problems and have them disappear.

God doesn't work that way. He wants us to learn His character. He wants us to learn the attributes of His character. Being merciful is one of those attributes He wants us to apply to one another, to have the care and concern for another person equal to the care and concern that you see God has for you.

That's a challenge because that's NOT the way we normally think - but it's the way that God WANTS us to think. It's the attitude He wants us to have towards one another.

If you see someone sinning, does it burn you up because those people are cutting themselves off from what God would want to give them? Is your concern as much for what they are missing out on, for what they are cutting themselves off from, as for what they are doing? Think about it. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Being merciful is an act of showing to other human beings who are created in the image of God, in the image of the God Family, the very QUALITY of the God family, the sense of care and concern that the Father and His Son have for their creation, for the work of their hands.

I guess we could go beyond that. It is not just other human beings who are created in God's image. God seems to have care and mercy for His whole creation. Should being merciful also shape our ideas and our concerns about God's creation and what we do it?

Being merciful is, above all else, an act of recognition that we, of ourselves, are not complete - that we need the very character of God in our lives to relate both to our Father, to His Son and to others as well.

If we can recognise that shortcoming within our own lives, we will receive mercy from our Father. We will receive increased care and concern.

The book of Proverbs speaks to this when it tells us that whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them, will obtain mercy. We should realise that we don't always see things the way God sees things. We have to learn. We have to grow to be like God, to think like God. This means that we have to change. We have to change the lives we have and the thought patterns that we have. If we can recognise that about ourselves, we will obtain mercy.

So what about it? Blessed are the merciful, because they will obtain mercy. Does Portia get it right? She does in part. It is very eloquent, but she misses out on the fact that the care and the compassion of the Father is the whole REASON for forgiveness that forgiveness is only one aspect of many that exist in terms of being merciful.

We need to examine those Scriptures and appreciate a little more fully the way in which God is merciful to us, the way in which God is merciful in calling us into His body, enabling us to have a part in His plan. We need to appreciate the fact that that plan will exist for all humanity as they are called and they respond to that plan.

... *Peter Nathan*
27 Oct 07

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