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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“MERCY ME” ~ Matthew 5:7

▣ Matthew 5:7: “**Blessed are the merciful,**” those who are forgiving and compassionate, “**for they will be shown mercy.**”

There’s my problem right there. Part of me is not convinced that I am in desperate need of God’s mercy.

It’s not that I imagine myself to be perfect. I think, say and do things I shouldn’t. I fail to think, say and do things I should. I know this.

Still, I asked the Lord into my heart decades ago. I have been forgiven, and I continue to confess my sins as the Holy Spirit convicts me. I am a recipient of grace.

Besides, I don’t wave placards that scream “God hates \_\_.” I don’t beat Beth or whip our daughters. I don’t gun down unarmed Black men. I don’t commit acts of religious terrorism. Judging by their conduct many people are worse than me.

Moreover, some have not earned my forgiveness and compassion. I’m talking about people I have known first-hand: bullies who shoved me and kicked me and often spat ugly names, but sometimes actual saliva; and the male neighbor who changed my life in a terrible way.

① I’ve been forgiven, ② I’m better than many sinners, and ③ there are some who don’t deserve my mercy. Maybe I can forgo the blessing of Matthew 5:7.

? Part of me finds this line of reasoning attractive. What about you? *Do you ever question your need for mercy?*

God save us! This kind of thinking is wrong on many levels, and we embrace it at our peril.

★ First, in regard to other sinners: I might, or might not, perceive their transgressions accurately. I never know the full story behind their actions. It is impossible for me to see into their soul and mind.

{2 Ti 4:1} Even when my perceptions are correct, I am not their judge. God “**will judge the living and the dead.**” “**It is the Lord who judges**” (Second Corinthians 4:4-5). “**Therefore, judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of people’s hearts.**”

{Dt 32:35} This includes those who have hurt me the worst. LORD YHWH himself declares, “**It is mine to avenge; I will repay.**”

★ Second, in regard to myself: I am not as good as I assume. I’m just not!

{Jer 17:9} I *am really good* at personal spin control: ‘I lost my temper because I was tired’; ‘I drove rudely because I was running late’; ‘I lied because they couldn’t handle the truth.’ When it comes to my own faults, my “**heart is deceitful above all things.**”

☹ {Ro 7:15, 18, 21; 12:3} “**What I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.**” “**I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.**” “**Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.**” The apostle Paul was writing to me when he counseled: “**Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment.**”

★ Third, in regard to the criterion for self-evaluation: the standard is divine holiness.

It's tempting to stack myself up against someone whose sins are especially flagrant. How comforting to remind myself that I'm not like them!

It isn't much more difficult to be complacent even when I am comparing myself to more mature Christians. No one is perfect, and if I look hard enough I can find some way in which I outshine them.

Woe to me! That is missing the point entirely.

{Is 64:6} What does Romans 3:23 say? **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of”** who? **“Of God”!** Put side-by-side with *his* ethical perfection and moral purity, I am **“like one who is unclean, and all [my] righteous acts are like filthy rags.”**

★ Fourth, in regard to salvation: justification is inseparable from sanctification.

📖 Strictly speaking, justification is when God acquits us of guilt and declares us to be righteous. In popular usage it is short-hand for the larger process of receiving forgiveness and eternal life.

📖 {Ro 8:29} Sanctification is being set apart for God and made holy in trust and obedience. In effect, it is being **“conformed to the image of”** Christ in inward character and outward behavior.

{Mt 12:33} Sometimes I act as if these are not related when, in fact, sanctification is justification in action. **“Make a tree good”** and it will bear **“good fruit.”**

{Joel 2:13} The Godhead **“is [merciful] and compassionate.”** The Son's ministry was an extended exercise in forgiveness and compassion. Hence, if God

acquits me of guilt and declares that I am righteous, I will be merciful to others.

In summary: ① I am not the judge of other sinners, ② I am not as good as I assume, ③ the criterion for self-evaluation is divine holiness, and ④ justification is inseparable from sanctification.

{Lk 18:13} **“God, have mercy on me, the sinner!”**

? *Is there any hope for me and others like me?*

Yes! There is hope! Amazingly, astoundingly, astonishingly, there is hope even for me and you!

Our hope is spelled “J-E-S-U-S”.

▣ Let's take another look at Matthew 5:7: **“Blessed are the merciful,”** those who are forgiving and compassionate, **“for they will be shown mercy.”**

I am focusing today on mercy as forgiveness. However, forgiveness is only half of Gospel mercy. The other half is compassion demonstrated in deeds of kindness and generosity. So, for example, Proverbs 14:21 and 31 caution that **“It is a sin to despise one's neighbor, but blessed are those who are [merciful] to the needy”**; and **“Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is [merciful] to the needy honors God.”**

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

**“The merciful” “are” “blessed”** (that is their current reality) and **“they will be shown mercy”** (that is an assurance for the future).

In the present they are already blessed.

📖 **“Blessed”** is not merely the religious equivalent of the word *happy*. The Messiah is not saying that acts of mercy generate subjective feelings of happiness for **“the merciful.”** Rather, he is saying that **“the merciful”** are favored by his Father.

📖 Also, Jesus is not a prosperity theologian. When he announces that God favors **“the merciful,”** he is not promising physical health, material wealth, and worldly success. (Actually, forgiveness and compassion can be costly.) He is pointing to greater benefits: seeing him (the Son) as he is, sharing in his life, and participating in his mission!

Therein rests hope for the present.

Allow me to explain. There are two people inside me: the old creature and the new creature.

The old creature does not recognize the Word made flesh, does not share in his abundant life, and works against his kingdom mission. As a result, he knows nothing of mercy. What is more he abhors it as weakness, resists divine mercy as an affront to his dignity and is merciless to others.

The new creature in me is different!

{2 Co 5:16; 3:16, 18} By the grace of God, I **“no longer”** **“regard”** Messiah **“from a worldly point of view.”** I see his merciful countenance and **“contemplate [his] glory”** **“with unveiled”** face!

{Jn 4:10; 6:51} By the grace of God I share Messiah’s life. I drink the **“living water”** and eat **“the living bread,”** his renewing, recreating, revivifying existence!

{Lk 4:18-19} By the grace of God I participate in Messiah’s mission of mercy, proclaiming **“good news to**

**the poor,” “freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind,”** working **“to set the oppressed free”** and proclaiming **“the Lord’s favor”!**

Are you hearing the pronoun “I”? Of the two people inside this is the real me, the substantial, eternal me!

The key thing is that the new creature is not “just” me; it is Christ in me. For (Galatians 2:20) **“I”** (the old creature) **“have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me”!**

{Mt 19:26} Therefore, I know mercy. I love it as the power of God, receive it as a precious gift from him, and pass it on to others -- even those bullies, even that neighbor! I do not hate them. I do not wish to punish them. My desire is that they have life, freedom and wholeness in Jesus. **“With God all things are possible”!**

■ **“Blessed are the merciful.”** In the present we see the Son as he is, share in his life, and participate in his mission. Not only so, **“the merciful... will be shown mercy.”** This is future assurance.

{Jude 6; Rev 11:15; 20:13} Messiah is speaking of **“the great Day”** when **“the kingdom of the world”** will be totally displaced by **“the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah”** and **“Everyone [will be] judged according to what they [have] done.”**

{Eph 4:18; Rev 6:17; 20:15} For those who are **“separated from the life of God”** it will be **“the day of...wrath”** and they will be **“[cast] into the lake of fire.”** That includes the merciless. The Son repeatedly warns about this. I will quote two texts.

Matthew 6:14-15: **“If you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”** The merciless will not receive mercy!

Matthew 7:1-2: **“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. In the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”** Ethical and moral discernment is essential; unforgiving, pitiless judgment is inexcusable.

The merciless will not receive mercy.

{Rev 2:7} **“Whoever has ears, let them hear”!**

{Eph 4:24, 30} But for those who have **“put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness,”** the Day of the Lord will be **“the day of redemption.”**

{Rev 20:3-4} God himself **“will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.’”**

▣ Matthew 5:7: **“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”** This is the Word of the Lord.