

Merciful Receive Mercy

HANNAH, ONE OF ELKANAH'S TWO WIVES, was weeping bitterly and in great distress. The other wife, Peninnah, was her rival and provoked Hannah bitterly to irritate her (1 Sam 1: 2-6) because Hannah could not have any children. This happened year after year, each time they went to the house of the Lord. One year as Hannah was pouring her heart out in prayer, she promised God that if He gave her a son, she would dedicate her son to Him all the days of his life and a razor would not touch his head. God was merciful to Hannah and He gave her a son (1 Sam. 1:19-20). His name was Samuel. He would eventually become a judge, priest and prophet. After her years of suffering, years of weeping and years of anguish, God covered over the emotional scars with tears of joy. Our God is a merciful God and He desires that everyone become like Jesus. Jesus' fifth beatitude teaches us another quality of true Christians,

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. (NASB) Matt. 5:7

HERE IS MERCY. Have you ever experienced a failure at school, at home or at work? I have, and on many occasions I would worry about what might happen to me. When I fail "big" I find myself asking God for mercy. In this beatitude, Jesus says that I will receive mercy if I show mercy. Mercy is something that most of us want to receive. So what kind of mercy does Jesus say will be reflected in a Christian's life?

By mercy, Jesus does not mean someone who is easy-going nor does it have the idea that "everything is always okay." It does not have the idea of justice, peace or love. The Greek word Jesus used for merciful is ELEEMON. It means more than just compassion for someone. Mercy (ELEOS) is a feeling that occurs when you are moved by the suffering of an undeserving person and in some way you emotionally share in that person's suffering (see Appendix A).

The Holy Spirit has given us many illustrations of mercy in the New Testament. In the gospel of Matthew, ELEEMON and ELEOS occur only 11 times. Two of these times Jesus tells us, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (NASB) Matt. 9:13 and 12:7. Most of the time we find men and women pleading with Jesus to show mercy. The first passage is Matt. 9:27,

And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out, and saying, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" And . . . the blind men came up to Him, and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord. Then He touched their eyes . . ." (NASB) Matt 9:27-29

Jesus responded to the cry of these two blind men. They asked for mercy ELEOS and Jesus gave them sight. The next time ELEOS occurs in Matthew is,

And behold, a Canaanite woman came out from that region, and began to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." (NASB) Matt 15:22

The next occurrence of ELEOS is,

Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic, and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire, and often into the water. (NASB) Matt 17:15

And again,

And behold, two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, saying, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" (NASB) Matt 20:30-31

The New Testament never tells us that bankers, politicians, doctors or the religious leaders asked Jesus for mercy. They did not think they had needs. Those who asked for mercy were those who could not help themselves: four blind men, a demon possessed daughter and a lunatic son. Yet, Jesus showed mercy to others as well: to an adulterous woman, a woman at a well, to lepers and to a Roman soldier whose ear was cut off. God shows mercy to those who suffer.

GOD'S MERCY. Luke 1:50 says that God shows mercy to those who "are fearing Him." There are some people in this world who do not really care if there is a God until they are in real trouble and then they reach out to God for mercy. God's major act of mercy is forgiving the sins of spiritually blind men and women. None of us can help ourselves here! We are born spiritually blind and nothing we do will please God. Romans 3:11-12 says that no one seeks for God and no one can do any anything to please God. We are all going to hell (John 3:18-20). Titus 3:5 tells us that God saves us not because of any good deeds we do, but because He is merciful. You see we cannot help ourselves, yet He chooses to show Christians mercy. There is nothing here for Christians to boast about. This is God's big act of mercy.

To Christians, God continues to show us mercy at times of great personal need but NOT just when we want it. Hebrews 4:16 tells us to draw near to God "that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (NKJV)." Did you

notice that He "helps" in "time of need?" The Greek word used for "help" has the idea of "rushing to us to help us go through the trouble" and "time of need" has the idea of "at the strategic time" (see Appendix B). You may ask, "What kind of help does Jesus offer?" The answer is that He hurries to help us through our difficult times at just the right time. Not at the time we want. He may leave you blind for awhile. He may leave you in pain for awhile. He may let you suffer. He may allow your marriage to struggle or leave you childless, like Hannah, for awhile because He is growing you spiritually (James 1:2-8. But at the right time - at the best time - He will heal your eyes, relieve your pain or heal your marriage. God is in the business of healing broken hearts. We do not deserve what we receive from Him. He is merciful . . .

YOUR TURN. Are you merciful? Is there someone in your life who is suffering and needs help? Someone who cannot help him/her? If you know of someone, you can show them mercy . . .

Did you know that God even wants you to show mercy to your animals? Proverbs 12:10 says,

A righteous man regards the life of his animal, But the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. (NKJV) Prov. 12:10

God says the wicked are cruel but not the righteous. God cares about how we treat our animals.

Mercy for the poor is another passion of God. Prov. 14:21, 31 says,

He who despises his neighbor sins; But he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he. He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, But he who honors Him has mercy on the needy. (NKJV) Prov. 14:21, 31



When you see a poor person on the street, at a store or near your home, how do you respond to him/her? God cares more for the poor than many Christians do. As a Christian, you have one of two choices: to show mercy or not to show mercy. If you always have a reason for not showing mercy, then James 2:13 has a message for you,

“For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy.” (NKJV) James 2:13

SUMMARY. We have seen in our previous studies that the beatitudes describe a true Christian. Jesus was merciful. He cared for the suffering and helpless and He wants His disciples to be like Himself. Jesus had a pattern of life of showing mercy to the poor, widows, orphans and others. Come, be like Jesus . . . follow your master!

Appendix A

Merciful and Mercy

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THE GREEK words that Jesus used for merciful and mercy were ελεημων and ελεος. These two words occur 29 times in the New Testament. They have essentially the same meaning. A simple meaning for these words is “to have compassion.” But the actual meaning is richer and deeper. They sometimes had the idea of showing favor to another or to have compassion plus a degree of being sorry for another. To show mercy was like giving a gift. It was sympathy for another’s misery. The Stoics considered mercy a sickness of the soul - it was unworthy for a sage. A sage should not show mercy.

MEANING. The best meaning of these words is “a feeling experienced by one who is moved by the sight of another’s suffering and in a way shares in their suffering.” There are

many in our life who need mercy. There are many in this world who are desperately poor.

SUMMARY. Probably the best example of God’s desire to show us mercy is,

“Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” (NKJV) Heb. 2:17

I am emotionally moved by this verse because it shows that Jesus really cares about me and others. He was made like us so that He could be declared our merciful and faithful high priest. A priest who shows favor - favor we do not deserve!

Appendix B

“Help in Time of Need”

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In Hebrews 4:16, the Holy Spirit says that God shows us mercy to help us in the time of need. This is one of the most fascinating phrases in the New Testament. It unlocks the meaning of key verses about how God helps us in difficult times of trouble.

TO HELP. The English word for “help” in Hebrews 4:16 is the Greek word *βοηθεια*. It occurs ONLY two times in the New Testament - here in Heb. 4:16 and in Acts 27:17. Acts 27:17 gives us the best sense of its meaning. You will not see the English word “help” in the verse because the word is translated as “cables,” or “ropes.” The “ropes” were used to keep the boat from breaking apart in the terrible storm. The boat in Acts 27 was in danger of sinking, so they took the boat into a port and lashed it with cables. The word has the idea of rushing to provide supportive help.

STRATEGIC TIME. The English phrase “in time of need” is the Greek word *ευκαιρια*. This is another very unusual

Greek word and it ONLY occurs here in Heb. 4:16 and one other place, Matt 26:16. In Matt 26, the Pharisees have made a deal with Judas. They will give Judas 30 pieces of silver to betray Jesus and now Judas must watch for the opportunity or the best time to make good on his deal and collect his money. The Greek word *ευκαιρια*, or “opportunity in Matt 26:1,” means “the best time” or “strategic time.”

SUMMARY. Jesus is merciful. He waits for the best time to help us and then He rushes to help. He helps us through the trouble. He does not necessarily take the trouble away.

As we navigate our ships on the stormy waters of life, we run into trouble and there are times when we are near sinking. But He is watching us. He is waiting for the right time to take us into port. And then He acts. Often He lashes ropes around us to keep us together - to help us through the storm and He puts us back out at sea.

Our God is an awesome God. He is working in us to make us holy - to make us like Himself.