

19. Blessed are the merciful

January 30, 2011

A sign was posted on a fence that was around a building. It read: "No Trespassing. Violators will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law." At the bottom of the sign, it had the name of the occupants of the building – "The Sisters of Mercy". Let's face it, mercy is NOT our natural human trait.

We'd love to have mercy from the Lord for our sins. I don't know about you, I do need it a lot from Him everyday because of my sinful nature. But what about extending the same mercy to others who offend us?

Our Lord Jesus mentioned about mercy in His profound sermon that is known as "The Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew chapter 5:

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

What is mercy? According to dictionary, it is "compassionate or kindly forbearance shown toward an offender, an enemy, or other person". In the Bible, mercy, compassion, and pity are running together in a very similar meaning. They are mentioned 345 times in the Word of God. Do you think that mercy is kinda important to God? If it is important to God, it should be important to us.

Dr. Dwight Pentecost, a great theologian said, "Mercy is God's ministry to the miserable", that's us without God. We should not only be mercy receivers from the Lord, but also mercy givers to fellow humans.

A. THE MISERABLES AT THE POOL OF MERCY

John 5:1-4 After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. 3 In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. 4 For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.

This pool by the Sheep Gate was located at the northeast corner of the temple in Jerusalem. It is known as 'Bethesda' which means 'the Pool of Mercy'. The worshipers of God brought their sheep to here and washed them before they took them to the temple and sacrificed them on behalf of their sins to receive God's mercy.

We don't know what feast this was and it really doesn't matter to us for this incident. But it was necessary for Jesus to attend to fulfill the OT requirements as a Jew.

This story about an angel coming down to the pool and stirring up the water so that the first one who went in could be healed may not be anything more than a legend. Or it could be true.

Think about the scene around this pool? Just about every inch around this pool would be packed with the people who were sick, blind, lame, paralyzed and many more. I am sure it was a very difficult sight for anyone to behold.

B. A MIRACLE ON SABBATH

John 5:5-9 Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" 7 The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me." 8 Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." 9 And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath.

Can you picture this scene with me? Jesus saw this man who had an infirmity thirty-eight long, lingering years. He had mercy on him. I wouldn't be surprised if Jesus intentionally stood between this man and the pool blocking his view to the water. Then the Lord asked him a question that seems so cruel and rather dumb, "Do you want to be made well?" What kind of question is this to a sick person who was at the Pool of Mercy to be healed?

At this point, the man with an infirmity probably glanced up at Jesus and then leaned around Him to keep his eyes on the water of the pool and answered, "No duh!" No, he didn't say that. I made it up.

This man didn't know Jesus from Adam, nor did he have any faith in Him. The only thing that mattered to him was getting into the pool before the others so that he could be healed.

Just as distance was no barrier to healing the royal official's son in chapter 4, so time of thirty-eight years was no obstacle for Jesus to overcome in healing the man with an infirmity.

I am sure that it was thirty-eight long years of misery, shame, embarrassment, and despair, but by the mighty power of Jesus, this man was healed in a split second.

No matter how miserable your life has been – I am not only talking about physical condition, but also spiritual condition. No matter how lame and limping you are spiritually, Jesus can change all that. The real question is: Do you want to be made well?

Please note the answer of this man in v7. The man's answer is basically, "Yes, I want to be made well, but I don't see how this can happen." The sick man does what we mostly all do. For many of us, we create a small God in our heads, a God who is limited by whatever "box" we try to put Him into.

Much to our surprise, some people don't want to get well spiritually. It's easy to become accustomed to life around the pool of misery. The people around there don't mind you being there with them since misery loves company.

You might be the one who is around that pool of misery without anybody from the church knowing – addicted to pornography, alcohol, drugs whether it is illegal or prescribed, never-ending worries, frequent anger issue, and whatever you are trapped into. You think that you cannot escape it, nor can your God rescue you because you've been that way for so long and you've put your God into a small box in your head.

But maybe, after years of inner spiritual poverty and misery, you're looking for a change, longing to be restored to everything God created you to be. If so, Jesus is the ticket out of the spiritual slum through His mercy. If you really want to get well, He will give you the mercy, grace, and strength to get up and walk.

Just as the Lord Jesus healed this man who had been in his infirmity thirty-eight years, He can do that to you as well.

Now I need to speak to the other group of people in this room. You are not around the pool of misery. You don't have anything that would chock the living daylights out of you day after day because the Lord blesses you with strong spiritual health. I am happy for you. But don't think that you have that great spiritual health so that you can flaunt it to others.

Go back to v6, please. Jesus compassionately saw this man who had absolutely no hope of his own. He went to him and extended His mercy on him.

Our Lord expects us to do the same. Mercy begins by how we see people – through the eyes of God's compassion. There are a lot of hurting people in this world. You will say, "I cannot help everyone in the world." No, but can you help someone sitting next to you, maybe in front of you, or behind you, or your brothers and sisters across this room? Ask the Lord to whom He wants you to share His blessings and mercy.

Stop thinking about yourself and your family only. Be a channel of God's mercy to the other family members of God.

It is impossible to know what your brothers and sisters in Christ are going through during our short greeting time at the service. Maybe you can invite someone from our church to a lunch – of course, you pick up the tap if you guys go out to restaurant or invite them to your home. Get to know them instead of rushing out the door as soon as the service is over. Hang around and let the Holy Spirit speak to you and you do what He says.

Love and mercy are the things the Lord wants us to give to others as we live as Christians, not just hear and talk about it.

You know, if we do this kind of thing and fill our church with the love of our Lord Jesus, we will not have enough chairs to accommodate everyone who wants to come.

The church isn't a parking lot for believers to do their Sunday morning duty, but it's a launching pad to do His will.

C. UNMERCIFUL RELIGIOUS PEOPLE

John 5:10-15 The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed." 11 He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'" 12 Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" 13 But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place. 14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you." 15 The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

Can you believe these Jews who generally were the Pharisees in the Gospel of John? They could have been careless about this man's well-being and the incredible healing miracle that was sent by God Himself. The only thing that mattered to them was that Jesus had the audacity to tell this man to carry his bed on the Sabbath. I am sure they thought, "Who does He think He is, God?" Why yes, He is, as a matter of fact!

In contrast to the two commands of Christ – "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind; You shall love your neighbor as yourself – the Pharisees had developed a system of 613 laws – 365 negative commands and 248 positive ones. By the time Christ came it had produced a heartless, cold, and arrogant brand of righteousness. As such, it contained at least ten tragic flaws.

- 1) New laws continually need to be invented for new situations.
- 2) Accountability to God is replaced by accountability to men.
- 3) It reduces a person's ability to personally discern.
- 4) It creates a judgmental spirit.
- 5) The Pharisees confused personal preferences with divine law.
- 6) It produces inconsistencies.
- 7) It created a false standard of righteousness.
- 8) It became a burden to the Jews.
- 9) It was strictly external.
- 10) It was rejected by Christ.

According to their rules and regulations, carrying anything that weighed more than the combination of two dried figs was considered a burden to bear. So making this formerly sick man to carry his bed is a total major violation of their Sabbath rules.

Oh, by the way, I read an article that the ancient Jewish people were not allowed to wear their false teeth on the Sabbath. I couldn't believe that they actually had false teeth sets 2000 years ago. If those false teeth fell out of one's mouth, picking them up would be considered as bearing a burden on the Sabbath. So you have to go around a whole day without teeth and saying your wife, "Kiss me, babe." While I'm on a roll, I ask you to guess where they got those false teeth. Remember, they didn't have plastic.

These Pharisees turned into a bunch of cold-hearted legalists, sin sniffers, and sin list-makers. Somehow they thought that it was their solemn duty and obligation to tell others how to live according to their own rules and they did with delight.

Some might say, "Well, pastor, that was the first Century. We no longer have legalists, sin sniffers around. We are living in the grace of God." Wouldn't that be great if that was true? We still have them. I don't think that we have them in our church. If we did, I would take them out to the desert. No, just kidding.

The most vicious people in the body of Christ are those people that make it all about self-made rules that apply to other people's lives. They don't care about showing mercy or doing good. And they'll find some out-of-context Bible verses to justify their behavior. And they really don't like the Book of Romans because it speaks so much about the grace of God.

By reading v14, we can tell this man's sin that he committed thirty-eight years ago caused him to have the infirmity. Jesus told him, "*Sin no more, lest a worse thing*

come upon you.” What can be worse than a 38-year suffering from a debilitating disease? Eternal suffering that is the result of unrepentant sin, that will be worse. St. Augustine once said, “If I weep for the body from which the soul is departed, should I not weep for the soul from which God is departed?” It would be too late for anyone to change.

D. APPLICATIONS

- 1) God is everything for those who deserve nothing.
- 2) Being like Jesus means being merciful to others, instead of being harsh with them.
- 3) We are in a dangerous place when we regard God’s mercy towards us as our right. If God is obliged to show mercy, then it is not mercy – it is duty. No one is ever unfair for not giving mercy.