

A CALL TO MERCY

Micah 6:8, Luke 14:12-14

Alfred Nobel was a Swedish chemist who made his fortune inventing dynamite and other powerful explosives. Nobel sold them to various governments the world over, and that's how he made his money. When his brother died, one newspaper mistakenly thought that it was Alfred who had died. It ran an obituary on Alfred, describing him as "a man who became rich from enabling people to kill each other in unprecedented quantities."

Reading *that* as the assessment of his life shook Alfred Nobel to his core. He resolved to use his fortune to reward accomplishments that benefited humanity. One of the many rewards he funded was the Nobel Peace Prize.

You know, Alfred Nobel had a rare opportunity: to look at the assessment of his life at its end, but to be given the chance to *change* that assessment as well. This passage from Micah gives you and me the same kind of opportunity. It tells us very succinctly what God expects of us as followers of Jesus Christ, and it provides us with a tool to measure how closely our values and priorities reflect those of God.

- ✓ To do justice
- ✓ To love mercy
- ✓ To walk humbly with God

In presenting this basic standard for us to follow, God gives us a shorthand prescription for a balanced spiritual life.

The word for “mercy” is the Hebrew word *hesed*, which means kindness or compassion. Let me begin by saying that showing mercy or compassion is not *optional* for Christians. It’s not something we do to earn extra credit. No, Micah tells us that God *requires* the work of mercy if we’re to attain a balanced life.

And in the New Testament, John says that showing mercy can be used as a test of genuine faith:

“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need, but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Let us not love with words, or tongue, but with action and in truth.”

1 John 3:17

Yet if we’re honest, we have to admit that our first response is to avoid showing mercy toward others. Especially those who seem undeserving of our attention. If we’re honest, we’ll admit that we prefer to have others serve *us*. With all we have on our “to do list” each day, the idea of taking time out to serve others seems counter-productive.

But that’s because God’s economy and the economy of the world are very different. Instead of only looking out for only ourselves, God tells us to have the same mind and attitude that Jesus had. And Jesus said, *“I am among you as one who serves.”*

So let’s explore that attitude of Jesus a bit. Philippians 2:5 spells it out:

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”

We rarely stop to appreciate the fact that Jesus *chose* to become poor and minister to the poor. Paul tells us:

“You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you – through His poverty – might become rich.”

2 Corinthians 8:9

- Paul means that Jesus, in becoming a human, literally moved in with the poor.
- He was born into a family that brought pigeons as their offering at His circumcision. Pigeons were the offering prescribed for the poorest families.
- As an adult, Jesus associated with, ate with, and lived with those who were the lowest classes of society, including the tax collectors, prostitutes, and lepers.
- He chose Isaiah 61 as the text for His first sermon, saying that His Father had anointed Him to preach good news – to whom? The poor.
- He taught that all people are spiritually bankrupt, calling us *all* poor.
“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

What does it mean to be “poor in spirit?” Martin Lloyd-Jones put it this way:
“It means a complete absence of pride, a complete absence of self-assurance and self-reliance. It is just this tremendous awareness of our utter inadequacy as we come face to face with God. That is to be poor in spirit.”

And what is the grace of God? That though we are spiritually bankrupt and lost, God has provided spiritual wealth for us. In fact He impoverished His own Son, so that His spiritual riches and righteousness could be given to us. The cross is the universal symbol of Christ laying down His life for the undeserving, the greatest example of showing mercy to the unworthy. The Bible says, *“While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us...”*

THE CALL TO MERCY

But now Jesus extends that call to you and me to show mercy! He says, *“He who would be greatest among you, let him be your servant.”*

And look at our text today from Luke 14. Jesus says:

“When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors. If you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind – and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Luke 14:12-14

Think back for a minute on the people you've invited over or invited out to dinner as your guests in the past year.

Would you agree with me that:

- they've probably had personalities we enjoy and easily get along with?
- we respect them for what they've accomplished in life?
- they entertain us and make us feel good?
- they're accepting of us?
- they're easy to be around and not very demanding?

We naturally choose to associate with people who have something to give us in return, don't we? But the command to love mercy means that we invite people who don't fit into these categories. That means that we invite the unattractive, the unsuccessful, the ones with rough edges in their personalities and those who are demanding.

You see, Jesus knew that:

- We usually choose to show kindness toward people who are in a position to return the favor.
- In fact we often show kindness with the motive of trying to get something in return, trying to advance ourselves in some way.

I. THE MORE WE UNDERSTAND GOD'S MERCY TOWARD US, THE EASIER IT IS TO SHOW MERCY TO OTHERS.

Author Max Lucado sometimes gives away money at the end of his sermon. Not to pay the listeners, but to make a point. He offers a dollar to anyone who will accept it. It's a gift.

He invites anyone who wants the cash to come and take it. It's interesting to see how people respond to the offer. Eventually someone stands up and says "I'll take it," and Max Lucado gives the dollar away.

Then he asks the congregation, "Why didn't you accept my offer?"

- Some say they were too embarrassed. The pain isn't worth the gain.
- Others feared that there was a catch, a trick.
- And then there are those whose wallets are fat. What's a dollar to someone who has a hundred?

One time the dollar went to a woman named Myrtle. A few days later Max Lucado ran into her. He asked her, "Do you still have the dollar?" "No," she answered. "Did you spend it?"

And Myrtle said, "No, I gave it away. When I returned to my seat Sunday, a youngster asked me if he could have it. And I said, "Sure. It was a gift to me. It's a gift to you."

You see, as simply as Myrtle received, she gave. As easily as it came, it went. The boy didn't beg, and Myrtle didn't struggle. How could she, having been given a gift, not give a gift in return?

Let me give you a helpful definition of what mercy is:

Mercy is spontaneous love that comes from experiencing the grace of God.

And the deeper the experience of the grace we've received from God, the more generous we become.

When you come to the point that you grasp God's grace in saving you while you were still in your sin –

When you understand that God's grace was given to you, though you were undeserving –

then you will have a heart of love for even the most ungrateful and difficult people.

You see, when a Christian sees alcoholics, homeless people, unmarried mothers, prisoners, prostitutes, or drug addicts, he knows that – in one sense – he's looking in a mirror. *Even* if his whole life has been as a respectable middle-class person. Because he says to himself:

"Spiritually speaking, I was just like these people, even if physically and socially I was never where they are now. They are outcasts. I too was an outcast."

For that reason, wherever the Gospel has gone out, Christians have emphasized works of compassion toward the needy. And so along with the Gospel, hospitals were started.

- Orphanages were created
- Rescue missions and soup kitchens were founded

- Charitable organizations were established

The hungry were fed, the naked clothed, and the unwanted rescued. Over in Acts 6, God established a special class of officers in the local church – deacons – to coordinate the local church’s ministry of mercy. You see, God *mandated* mercy and compassion as required work of each local church. Together they served to authenticate the faith of believers the world over. And it’s still true today.

II. GOD WANTS US TO PERSONALLY EXPERIENCE THAT IT’S TRULY MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE.

You know it’s interesting that God doesn’t use guilt to motivate us to show mercy toward others. Instead, He motivates us in a very positive way. He says that when we show kindness toward others, we *gain* more than we give away.

Do you believe that?

What is it that you gain?

When Jesus said, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive,”* He meant that when you give to others, you are being *changed* for the *better*.

Let’s look at the benefits to us when we show mercy to others.

1. It puts our own trials in perspective, which produces a heart of gratitude in us.

So often we compare our lot in life with others who are well off, and we end up jealous or envious. We focus on what we don't have and struggle to be content.

But talk to anyone from our church who has spent a week or two on a mission trip to Guatemala or Siberia or Africa, and ask them how it changed them. Over and over again you'll hear that they returned home to consider themselves *rich beyond measure*.

Before the mission trip they may have complained that they didn't have an iPhone or a new car or a fancy house. Or that they weren't able to go someplace exotic on vacation. But when they saw kids without *any* toys....When they saw:

- Entire neighborhoods of people with literally *no* possessions
- Kids playing ball without a real ball
- People attending a Bible study with no Bible

they'll be the first to tell you how their perspective has changed.

Closer to home, go visit someone in the hospital, and you'll discover that your own aches and pains are suddenly insignificant by comparison. Take a meal to someone who is dying and leaving behind a toddler and elementary age child – as well as a spouse – and you will appreciate what you have with your own family, imperfect as it may be.

Do you struggle with being content? One of the best gifts you can give yourself is to help with Community Connect next weekend. Sign up to be a

guide and help someone in need navigate through the various agencies that will be there. Or help serve a free lunch to the 1000 guests who will come. I promise you that you'll come away with a new sense of gratitude for all that God has given you!

2. Showing mercy sifts our motives for giving when we know we're not going to get anything back.

In our text from Luke 14, Jesus says in v.14, *"Although they cannot repay you, you will be blessed."* The idea is that we give to someone knowing full well that there will be no repayment in this life.

One of the strangest names in the Old Testament is Mephibosheth. (And I thought Tweedie was bad!) Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan and the grandson of King Saul. Do you remember when David was chosen by God to replace Saul as king when Saul continued to disobey? Saul tried to kill David, and eventually there was a battle that pitted David and the Philistines against Saul and the Israelites. Saul and Jonathan were both killed in battle, which left Mephibosheth an orphan at the age of five.

To make matters worse, Mephibosheth's nurse dropped him as she fled from the Israelites, and he ended up being lame for the rest of his life. Later on, David learned that Jonathan had a son who was still living, and he summoned Mephibosheth to the palace. David showed mercy on him, inviting him to eat with him at his royal table in the palace for the rest of his life! In addition, he gave him his grandfather's estate.

Think about it. Mephibosheth had nothing to offer David. And so it was from a pure motive of compassion that David showed mercy to Mephibosheth. Is there a Mephibosheth in your life? There should be several! And when you reach out to them, God will use them to purify your motives in giving.

3. It increases our understanding of what grace is when we help someone who is not in a position to give back.

You see, helping an undeserving person gives us a reminder of how God graciously moves into our lives. Because the needy around us are living symbols of our *own* helplessness and poverty – spiritually speaking. And we appreciate afresh how God initiated toward us.

4. We're promised the Lord's ultimate reward for us in heaven.

There is a direct continuity between this life and the next. What you sow in *this* life has a direct bearing on what you will reap in the next.

Because the truth is:

God sees.

God records.

- What you do.
- What you say.
- Even what you think.

Look at verse 14 again from our text. Jesus says, *"[Show mercy to all these people who can't pay you back]... and you will be blessed.*

Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Why? Because He promised in Matthew 25, *"Whatever you do unto the least of these my brothers, you have done unto me."*

The Apostle Paul tells us, *"The Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does."* Ephesians 6:8

So the day of Christ's return will be a day of issuing rewards. Jesus Himself says that God will look you in the eye and praise you with the words: *"Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master!"*

Showing mercy to others...God says that you're to experience it first hand. No one else can do it *for* you.

"He has shown you what is good and what the Lord requires of you. To do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. "

Micah 6:8

God invites you to learn to love mercy - to really *love* showing mercy to others. Especially the undeserving! And when you give to others, you will be changed for the better! With a little practice, you too will be saying from personal experience:

"It really *is* better to give than to receive!"