



The tribe of Issachar understood the times and knew what Israel should do  
Issachar Ministries UK seeks to be a people who understand the times, listen to the Lord and know what should be done

## ***Resourcing for Prayer Network*** **Spiritual Guidelines**

# **Teaching on the Kingdom** **The Sermon on the Mount (vi)**

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

**(Matthew 5.7)**

**Monica Hill**

**April 2017**

In this fifth Beatitude in Matthew's Gospel we turn to considering our relationships with our fellow men. It is of interest that there is no equivalent in either the blessings or the woes in Luke's account but this does not mean that it is not important teaching. At first glance, this could almost be seen as justifying deeds as a way into the Kingdom! Does it really mean that if we do many good deeds to others and put their needs ahead of our own that God will be merciful to us at the time of judgement? Perhaps we need to look at this promise more closely.

### **What do we Mean by 'Having Mercy'?**

First of all we need to recognise that this does NOT just mean that we need to do good to others - or even to ensure that we put the needs of others before our own. It is not a spiritual form of 'do-as-you-would-be-done-by': Jesus teaches us *'If you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that.'* (Luke 6:33) So, to 'have mercy' does NOT mean just to do good deeds: it rather means that we are to be merciful to those who do not deserve mercy ie those who have done something wrong or against the law. Even when sinners beg for mercy, their expectation is that true justice means that punishment must follow but God's forgiveness of our sins and his subsequent blessings are **totally underserved** - which is a definition of true mercy.

### **Who are the Merciful?**

Mercy as a value to be sought was always seen as a Judeo-Christian virtue. The Romans had four cardinal virtues - 'wisdom', 'justice', 'temperance' and 'courage' but did not include 'mercy' in any way - they rather despised it. The Greeks thought that mercy indicated a weakness of strength - Aristotle wrote that pity was 'a troublesome emotion'.

Even in today's world mercy is not seen as a virtue. Islam sees the Christian values of mercy and forgiveness as signs of weakness that can be exploited and the North Koreans also despise mercy and any vestige of weakness and feel that strength is the only value that counts.

To a Christian, mercy gives us an indication of the character of true disciples - those who have modelled themselves on the characteristics to be seen in Jesus. Although we are all sinners and we know that we do not deserve mercy, we also know that our God desires to be merciful to his children and we are promised God's full blessings. It comes to those who are striving to be at one with Christ and in many ways, although it is not listed in the fruits of the spirit in Galatians 5, it reflects the quality of a fruit, a clearly visible action produced by the first four beatitudes.

The merciful are those who want to draw close to God in their understanding of his nature and purposes and who then try to follow as closely as they can in their Master's footsteps. Luke 6:36 tells us *'Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful'*. As our close relationship with God grows and we allow his spirit to pervade our lives and mould our characters, it can be visible to others. Mercy grows in us as a result of our personal experience with the merciful God.

## What is Mercy?

We know that our Lord is a merciful God (Deuteronomy 4:31) and the Psalmist makes many requests to him to give mercy. In fact James goes even further in saying *'judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful'* (2:13). Jesus condemned the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:21-38) who having received mercy from his master did not show it to others

Proverbs 21:13 cites a practical example of this principle in action: *"Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard."*

There must be no condemnation of others for their sins if we are truly to show mercy to others. We need to deal kindly with those in need showing the kind of humility that recognises our own failings and our own need for mercy from our Father. When we accept that Jesus has forgiven our sins no matter how undeserving we are and recognise that we have fallen short of all that God wants us to be, our readiness to forgive others should come naturally and can be a powerful witness of his saving grace. Mercy comes to those who recognise that they do not deserve it, in the same way as we know that Jesus will deal kindly with us when we repent.

There is a saying that 'all Christians enter the kingdom with a limp' as we have all sinned and been forgiven. We may aim for perfection but, realistically and in our hearts, we know that we can never achieve it in this life - see the box for details of an historic group who did feel that they had reached perfection.

The Christian value of Mercy, linked with the giving and receiving of forgiveness, grows in significance to each one of us as our faith deepens and we experience it for ourselves. It often contrasts strongly with the values of the world around us but we know that is only in the Lord we can show true strength (1 Corinthians 1:27 and 4:10). We should rejoice that we have a merciful God who also encourages us to be merciful to others - and are thus able to reflect more of his glory and power.

## 'The Perfect Heresy'

Stephen O'Shea's book is subtitled *'The Revolutionary Life and Spectacular Death of the Medieval Cathars'*.

They were a group of Christians (believed to be heretical) from all walks of society, high and low, who flourished for a while 800 years ago in what is now known as the Languedoc in Southern France. Their beliefs brought down on them the wrath of Popes and monarchs and provoked a brutal 'Crusade' against them. The final defeat of the Cathars was horrific with mass burnings of men, women and children in the village of Montailou in the Pyrenees. It is said that this unleashed the Inquisition.

### Questions to ask

Did the Cathars no longer feel the need for forgiveness from God?

Why was there such a revolt against them by those who themselves showed no mercy?

*This paper comes to you as part of the Issachar Ministries Resourcing for Prayer e-mail in April 2017  
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**ISSACHAR**  
MINISTRIES UK

(C and M Ministries Trust)  
registered charity no 1029797

5 Shannon Court, High Street, Sandy, Beds SG19 1AG

Telephone: 01767 223270

Website: [www.issacharministries.co.uk](http://www.issacharministries.co.uk)

office e-mail: [info@issacharministries.co.uk](mailto:info@issacharministries.co.uk)