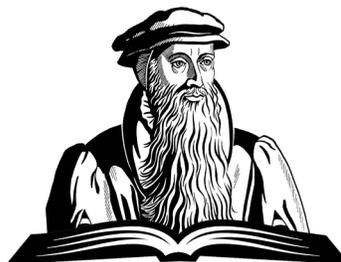

VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: THE BEATITUDES

LECTURES 7: THE FIFTH BEATITUDE

Lecture Presenter: Rev. A. T. Vergunst



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

John Knox Institute of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

© 2021 by John Knox Institute of Higher Education

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means for profit, except in brief quotations for the purposes of review, comment, or scholarship, without written permission from the publisher, John Knox Institute, P.O. Gox 19398, Kalamazoo, MI 49019-19398, USA.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Authorized King James Version.

Visit our website: www.johnknoxiiinstitute.org

Rev. A. T. Vergunst is minister of the Gospel at Reformed Congregation of Carterton, New Zealand, a congregation of the Reformed Congregations of New Zealand.

www.rcnz.org

Module

THE BEATITUDES

10 LECTURES

REV. A. T. VERGUNST

1. Introduction
2. Overview of the Beatitudes
3. The First Beatitude
4. The Second Beatitude
5. The Third Beatitude
6. The Fourth Beatitude
- 7. The Fifth Beatitude**
8. The Sixth Beatitude
9. The Seventh Beatitude
10. The Eighth Beatitude

Lecture 7

THE FIFTH BEATITUDE

TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 7

Dear friends, welcome to our next study of the Beatitudes as they are given by our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 5:3–12. Today we will consider the fifth Beatitude, “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” May we all be as Mary, sitting at Jesus’ feet, to hear what He has to say to us in this Beatitude. In the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus stated a simple but very effective truth with which I want to begin. He says later in Matthew 7:17–18 [that] by the fruit you shall know a tree. Now that’s not only true about trees, but it’s also about people in general and about believers in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. How you act, both in public but mostly in private, reveals who you really are. James, building on this principle of Jesus Christ, applies that also to faith in James 2:17. He writes there, “Even so faith, if it has not works, is dead being alone.” So again, by the fruits you shall know the tree. Why do I begin the study of the fifth Beatitude with drawing your attention to the fruit of faith? It’s because in the fifth Beatitude, the Lord Jesus changes His focus slightly in the description of the new man—the man of His kingdom. In the first four [Beatitudes], the poor in spirit, the mourning, and the meek and also somewhat in that fourth one, the hunger and thirst, Jesus is highlighting the inner exercises and the attitudes of the heart. As I said before, claiming to be a Christian without finding these experiential matters within your heart is as baseless as claiming to be a musician simply because you own a piano. So in the last three Beatitudes, the Master draws attention to the *outward* fruits of holiness.

Now these outward fruits, of course, must not be separated from an inward root, an inner attitude, but these three last ones certainly have a much more outward dimension. In other words, because a person is merciful, therefore he acts in mercy. The heart is merciful; therefore the fruit is mercy. It is therefore groundless to claim to partake in the heart-renewing ministry of the Holy Spirit when there is not a transformation of our heart that flows over in our walk and talk, the evidence of a life of holiness. So let me highlight therefore, at the beginning of this lecture, a most fundamental doctrine of the work of salvation through Jesus Christ, and that doctrine is the union of Jesus Christ with believers. Over 100 times the New Testament emphasizes the union of the two. Probably the clearest and most easy picture of that is the vine with the branches in John 15. To be born again is to be like an engrafted dead and barren branch into the living vine, Jesus Christ. That act of God is the beginning of the new life. It’s a sovereign act. It’s a gracious act of a powerful God. That’s something we have as little control over as our own natural conception. The fruit of this union with Christ is that we all change, and that change is that we more and more will begin to look and to act and to speak and, deeper, to think like Jesus Christ. Maybe in this connection I may refer to a missionary story I read the other day. It’s about a missionary who preached among the African natives. As this preacher was preaching about Jesus Christ, the African natives responded excitedly with, “We know Him, we know Him!” This perplexed the missionary. “Why do you know Him? How do you know Him?” Upon enquiry how they did know Him, they answered this: “As you preached Jesus Christ, we remember the doctor who worked among us for years. He was very much matching the description you gave of Jesus Christ.” That’s the point, union with Christ will transform us. Now this transformation isn’t an instant thing. It’s a gradual, lifelong growing in which Jesus Christ Himself will, through His Spirit, bring His own work to perfection, for each believer, each Beatitude man or woman, boy or girl, is the workmanship of Jesus Christ; and what He has begun, He will finish perfectly. That’s why the doxology in the last verses of Jude’s epistle (vs. 24–25) are very comforting. He says, “Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.” Now why is that so comforting? It’s because every one of these Beatitude people, in their own estimation, if you ask them, they make barely a beginning, they feel, in the life and walk of holiness or Christ likeness. But if there is a beginning, then what is that beginning? Now the next three Beatitudes answer that question, as Jesus has chosen three marks that identify this beginning of the transformation of a life.

So in this fifth Beatitude, we will focus again a little differently than the others—first, on the heart of mercy,

then on the hand of mercy, and thirdly, the promise to the merciful. So first, let's consider the heart of mercy, "Blessed are the merciful." In Luke chapter 6:36, Jesus directed His disciples with this command, "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." So what is implied in that statement is that the Father is merciful. Now mercy is a revelation of God's innermost being of love. Friends, God is essentially love, He's not just lovely. He *is* love, that is His essence, and this glory of God is a major theme in the whole of the Scriptures. Biblical experts tell us that there are over a thousand different forms or emphases of the word "love" found in the Scriptures, such as love, of course, and loving and lovingkindness, and grace, mercy, goodness, kindness—those are all words related to this love. If you listen to Jesus' words in John 14:17, His last words on earth, He uses the word "love" 33 times in that passage.

As you page through the Scriptures, you'll notice how the Bible authors, inspired by the Spirit, added the most beautiful adjectives to the adorable attribute of love in God. Some of those are great or plenteous or tender or abundant, or from everlasting, or unspeakable love, or infinite—all to emphasize this glory of God's love. Now, often we use the words "mercy" and "grace" interchangeably, and that's not correct. There's a distinction. Though both are the revelations of God's love, mercy and grace are not exactly the same. They are the same in that both grace and mercy are completely undeserved and unmerited from our side, but they're also different. God's grace is His goodness to those who are guilty—grace/guilty. God's mercy is His goodness to those who are miserable or needy. That's the difference. They're both goodness but with a different object; one is the guilty given grace, the other is the miserable and needy given mercy. So therefore, mercy in the Scriptures is more often correctly associated with compassion, with kindness, with tenderness, with pity. For example, take the one great key passage about God's character in Exodus 34:5–7. It is an answer that God gives to Moses, who pleaded with God, please "show me Thy glory," Lord, let me see Thee. God answered that, not with seeing, but with hearing something. He gave a sermon on His own name. Now notice what is first in this very glorious description of God's glory in His own words. God opened His sermon with the attribute of mercy. Here are the words from Exodus: "And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful (first one) and gracious," and then He continues on with all the other glorious attributes of Himself, exemplifying His mercy, His holiness. Let's for a moment walk alongside with Jesus in His last weeks of His life and on the way to the cross. Notice His emphasis on mercy, on compassion when He sees the misery, the needy people around Him. First thing He shows of that mercy is when He sees the city of Jerusalem. He begins to sob—He wept seeing the city that soon would experience deep misery. The Savior is moved with compassion. Then on the way to the cross, as He's hauling that cross, He sees the women weeping, weeping for Him, and He stops, and He tells them "don't weep for Me, weep for yourselves, and weep for your children." He's moved with compassion to others. As they finally nail Him to the cross and lift Him on that painful cross, hear His mercy as He prays, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). So [was] His mercy, His compassion, His kindness; and fail not to notice that in all these instances, He is moved with compassion or mercy toward people that are hostile or people that are hurting Him or hurting themselves.

Now all this leads us to one conclusion. As Thomas Watson says somewhere in his writing, "Mercy is the darling attribute of God," or the attribute closest to His heart. Now what happens? When we are united to Jesus Christ in the act of [being] engrafted as the branch into the vine, or regeneration, what happens? The Spirit of God begins to dwell within us. As fruit of that, we become partaker of the divine nature. We begin to show a likeness to our Heavenly Father, who has compassion and mercy in His heart, and now we will have that in our heart. Friends, saving grace is *always* transforming, it transforms our character. It will fill us with a merciful, compassionate tenderness to others; that is the visible, the sensible, the touchable side of salvation. So that's the heart of mercy.

Let's now consider the hand of mercy. Jesus says, "Blessed are the merciful." He's not just calling attention to our *heart* of mercy. He's here speaking about the *act* or the hand of mercy. "Blessed are they that *are* merciful," that begin to manifest this mercy in their walking, in their talking, of their daily life in relationship to others. Now the more you reflect on how God stooped down to our wretched and needy condition, the more we reflect on how He spared not His Son the incredible, immeasurable death of the cross, to open the way to show and exercise mercy to us; the more you reflect on how He gave you the gift of faith in His provision of righteousness, the more you are going to ask this question, "Lord, what can I do? What can I do back? What can I render for such great benefits that Thou hast showed toward me? What can I do for Thee?" Now God's answer dovetails exactly with the inner design that is glowing within us. He says, "Be ye merciful." Not only in your heart, have these feelings of compassion, but be merciful in your hand, in your deed, in your actions, as your Father in Heaven is merciful.

Let's use just a few examples of this merciful or compassionate Beatitude in action, and now you can see why such a person is a blessed person. I think again of Moses, the great leader of the Israelites through the wilderness.

He was moved with compassion in Exodus 32:31. The context of that moment is incredible. Israel did it—did what?—they committed adultery on their honeymoon. The sounds of Sinai have hardly died down, and they're dancing around a golden calf, and substituting that for the God who spoke to them and brought them out of Egypt. Understandably, God is angry. God says to Moses, "Moses, I'm ready to wipe these people off the earth." Instead of Moses saying, "Good, Lord, I agree," Moses falls on his knees, though he's livid with the people for what they have done, and he offers this amazing plea to God. Here it is he says, "This people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin," and he stops. "And if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written." That's a striking example of mercy. Moses was moved with the wretched future of Israel, and he is willing to endure anything that this people may be spared. "Blessed are the merciful." Let me give you another example in Jesus' ministry of the hand of mercy as found in Luke 10. Jesus is dealing with a very self-justifying lawyer who is asking Jesus finally a question again in the sense of justifying himself with "who is my neighbor?" That's the question, you can read it yourself in Luke 10. Jesus then gives the parable of the good Samaritan. He draws attention to one of the most despised neighbors of the Jews, the Samaritans. In this story, He makes the priest, the Levite (the church leaders) walk past a wounded traveler dying of his wounds. He makes the good Samaritan stop, risk his life, sacrifice his time and money to show mercy to a stranger. That's mercy. The last example of mercy is Deacon Stephen. While stoned to death out of hostility by the Jews, he pleaded with God, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:60). Now though his clothes are showing more and more the stains of blood of the stones thrown at him, his attitude of heart was more and more merciful as he dies. That is merciful. Jesus says, "Blessed are the merciful." These people are the people who want to share the Gospel with family and friends, with neighbors, with coworkers. Why? Because they've experienced the mercy of God in their own wrecked lives, and they want to share it. Why does the merciful do this? Why do they want to share what they have experienced with others? I'll let Thomas Watson answer us as he beautifully comments, "God's salvation birthed tenderness in us, and as it melts the heart in a godly sorrow towards God, so it melts the callous and the selfish hearts in feelings and desires of compassion toward others." Therefore it is vain to claim to be a Christian, a Beatitude man or woman, to belong to Jesus Christ, when there is no compassion with those who live a wretched life of misery and poverty and injustice. If we can pass them by as the Levite and the priest did, then we don't know God. John wrote in 1 John 3:17, this very litmus test of spirituality, "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

So then thirdly, let's look at the promise of mercy. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." In no way is the Lord Jesus here teaching that salvation is somewhat based on being merciful to others, [as though] you are merciful, and *therefore* you will obtain mercy. That thinking would totally contradict the entire message of the Gospel of grace. Listen to Ephesians 2:8, where Paul says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God;" not only the faith but the grace to salvation, it is all gift of God—nothing earned. So even our best works of mercy, if God would look at them through the standards of His perfection, then they're not perfect. They're not pure from sinful motivations or from proudful reflections. Therefore, according to God's holy standard, even our best mercies fall short, and therefore can never be the basis for obtaining mercy or grace. That would contradict the entire Gospel message. What the Lord Jesus is teaching is a beautiful principle in the kingdom of God. It is the principle, worded in Psalm 19:11, that "in the keeping of them [His commandments] there is a great reward." Jesus promises that the ones who act out mercy in unconditional love, or in sacrificial love, or in a non-judgmental love, they shall obtain mercy. That's the simple Biblical principle—what you reap, that is what you sow. For example, in Proverbs 11:25, "The liberal (that means the generous) soul shall be made fat (shall be increased): and he that watereth shall be watered also himself." Second Corinthians 9:6 emphasizes also this principle [that] what we sow, we shall reap. Paul writes there, "But this I say, he which soweth sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall also reap bountifully." Once more, in Galatians 6:7–8, Paul writes to the Galatians, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh (in the interest of himself and of his own life) shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit (spiritually focused on serving and loving devotionally) shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." Friends, we all can see that connection. If I am unmerciful, what do I reap? I reap distance, I reap coldness, I reap bitterness. But if I am merciful, and I sow that in my action, I will reap joy and peace and harmony and closeness. See how "blessed are the merciful" in that way, as they sow mercy, they are getting the return of mercy. "They shall obtain mercy", and not only in our relationship with others, but they shall also obtain mercy in a closer walk and communion with God, for in the keeping of God's commandments there is an exceeding great reward.

One of the chiefest of the rewards is the presence and comfort of the Holy Spirit, living and manifesting the glory of God to us. Again, if I may quote Thomas Watson, he says, “You shall be overpaid with overplus; for a wedge of gold which you have parted with, you shall have a weight of glory.” He says, “For a cup of cold water, you shall have the rivers of God’s pleasures which run at God’s right hand forevermore.” You will say, why then did Jesus not say that they shall be *rewarded* with mercy? Instead, He says, “they shall *obtain* mercy.” He doesn’t use the word reward in this Beatitude. That is to assure and to comfort His people of a graciousness in the promise. When His people consider their own works of mercy, they see their own failings, they see their own shortcomings, for who can show mercy and perfection? Who can be totally genuine and pure? Who can be totally God-focused in the exercise of mercy? Therefore, to comfort also His followers, His disciples, that even though they face their own imperfections in all what they do in the exercise of mercy, Jesus reassures them, “Blessed are the merciful”—even if it’s not perfect—“for they shall obtain mercy.” That’s why the great Puritan Thomas Watson, which I have quoted several times in this contribution, is so correct when he said, “Those are best prepared to obtain the greatest mercies that see themselves unworthy of the least.” “Blessed are the merciful.” Well, may God bless these teachings and comfort us with His gracious love. Thank you very much.