

Living Christ's Mercy

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn to our Bible readings now for this morning. You will find that in Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 5. If you have one of our visitor's Bibles, then that should be page 809 in the Big Blue Bibles.

And as you know, if you've been here the last week or two, we've started a series on the Sermon on the Mount. And we are looking for these first few weeks at the beginning of that, where Jesus, at the end of Matthew, Chapter 4, calls his disciples.

And at the beginning of Chapter 5, gathers them together on the mountain, the place of revelation, rather like Moses. But here is one far greater than Moses, not receiving from God messages to pass on, as he is told, but giving himself authoritatively as God's final revelation on this earth in the person of God the Son, the words of grace and truth from his own lips.

So in lots of ways, really rather like a Sunday morning service in many churches, where the disciples, the followers, those committed to the Lord Jesus Christ are gathered around his word. But always there are others visiting, others listening in, others exploring, wanting to know what it is that Jesus is all about, what it is that Jesus teaches about his way of discipleship.

[1 : 24] Well, that's probably all of us here this morning in different ways, just like on that mountain when they heard these words. So let's listen to Jesus' words in Matthew, Chapter 5, then, reading verses 1 to 12.

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up on the mountain, and when he had sat down, his disciples came to him, and he opened his mouth and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you, and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

[2 : 45] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Amen. May God bless to us this, his word.

Amen. Well, please do turn with me to the passage we read in Matthew chapter 5. And we're looking particularly this morning, really, at the second half of these Beatitudes, verses 6 to 10 or 6 to 9, and very especially to verse 7, Blessed are the merciful.

Once again, we are going back to basics. Like the great golfer, who knows that he's never going to go on in the game, he's never going to get anywhere, if he allows himself to forget the basics, which are at the very heart of the game of golf.

You know, things like the grip on the club, the stance of the feet, things like the way you swing the club. Things that even a mature, experienced golfer at the top of his game knows that he has got to keep in mind and keep going back to those basics if ever he's going to go on.

Well, how much more do even mature and experienced Christians need to keep going back to basics? Never lose sight of the things that are the very heart of our Christian faith and discipleship.

[4 : 15] It may be that you feel this is a bit basic for you. It may be you feel that you have been at the top of your game for a long time in your Christian walk.

Well, that is wonderful, and I rejoice if that's so for you. But let me just say that the mark of a real champion and the mark indeed of a real Christian disciple is that they're never too proud to go back

to basics, to the fundamentals, because they know that it's there and it's only from there that they will ever make any progress.

So we're going back to our teacher. We're going back to our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and we're saying to him, Lord, teach me your way. Teach me how to be a Christian.

Teach me the shape of real Christian discipleship. And here in the Sermon on the Mount, that is exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ is doing.

And as we began to see last time in this beginning part of the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, we begin to get a portrait of real Christianity painted for us by Jesus.

[5 : 23] And it's a portrait that turns out to have a lot of real surprises. Jesus is proclaiming the coming of the everlasting kingdom of heaven. And it's breaking into this world with his coming and in his presence.

And so he begins in chapter 5, verse 3, to tell us to whom this glorious kingdom will belong, who will have privileged entry into the kingdom of heaven, into the presence of the King and the Lord of the universe for all time, for all eternity.

Well, the first beatitude gives us quite a surprise. It is not, says Jesus, to the spiritually rich.

Rather, he says, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. This kingdom belongs to the bankrupt, to those with nothing to offer to God and who know they have nothing to offer.

To them alone, says Jesus, can come the blessing of his kingdom. It's not for the happy and the carefree. No, he says, verse 4, it's for those who mourn.

[6 : 31] Blessed are those who mourn, who know the crushing reality of their own sin and who take it seriously and who weep because of it. It's not the kingdom for the mighty in the world's eyes, verse 5, for the self-assertive who take control of their life and destiny, who would force their way into this kingdom.

No, says Jesus, blessed are the meek, those that God has humbled, perhaps very painfully indeed, so that they've buried all their pretensions and they've bowed humbly to God's grace alone, realizing that they cannot control their destiny, but their destiny is totally under another's control.

And so it's not, says Jesus, for those who are satisfied with their own performance, their own pedigree, verse 6, but rather it's those who realize their great poverty and their emptiness of everything that really matters.

And so they hunger, they thirst after God and his righteousness. That's what they long to receive and they know they can only receive it from him. And that's the way, says Jesus, the only way into the kingdom of heaven.

The entrance to real Christian discipleship is all about finding God's grace through the Lord Jesus Christ. There's no other way to begin, according to Jesus.

[7 : 56] And note the progression. Admitting absolute poverty before God, not asserting your own wealth, and then weeping over your own sins and shortcomings, not taking refuge in your goodness, and then submitting meekly to God's control, not demanding your own autonomy, and then longing, above all, to be right with God, to receive and to be filled with what he alone can give, what you can't extract, the rightness of a relationship with him.

That is turning our whole world's thinking absolutely upside down, isn't it? It's the very opposite of the way you get on and go up in the kingdoms of this world.

Imagine going to a job interview with a CV like that. You'll never get the job if you interview like that, will you? If you say, well, here's a whole load of reasons why I just am not fitted for this job.

I don't deserve it. But would you give it to me just, you know, as a favor? You won't get coached that way, I don't think, in this world.

That's madness, isn't it, to our world? It baffles our world. And that's why our world cannot understand the kingdom of Christ. That's why our world hates the kingdom of Christ.

[9 : 20] But in God's kingdom, the way of life is death. In God's kingdom, the way up is down. Because that is the way of discipleship with Jesus Christ.

It is the way, says Jesus, of the cross. Jesus tells us that his life sets a pattern for the life of every single one who will follow him.

And that pattern is all about death to this world. An inward death to everything that is the way of our world here.

Now, the world can't see that, of course. The world can't understand that, can't comprehend it. And therefore, the world hates that kind of talk. But God sees it, and God cherishes that. And he blesses it. Because the great commandment, you see, of God is that we are not to love this world. We are not to love created things as though they were ultimate things.

[10:25] But we are to love God, the creator, with all our heart and all our soul and all our mind and all our strength. And that is real righteousness.

That's what God desires to see in his kingdom. That is what he wants, the true love of his people's hearts. But that's an inward thing, isn't it?

God can see it. But it's very wrong to think of it as just an inward thing. Because, in fact, that is not so. And the whole point of Jesus' teaching about real righteousness is that real heart love for God, when it is real, will be visible.

And in a real sense, the way into the kingdom of God is invisible. It's all about a change of heart, an inner change by God's grace. It's about finding God's grace through Jesus Christ alone.

And there's no other way. But that always will result in something that is visible. That entrance into the kingdom always shows in abundant evidence of the grace of God spilling out into this world through lives that have been truly changed by his grace.

[11:45] Because real grace is, in the end, always visible. It is lived out in this world. And so a true entrance into Christ's kingdom always leads to true evidence of kingdom life.

And those who find God's grace in Christ will always show the fruit of that grace displayed in their lives which have been changed. That's the teaching of the Lord Jesus. And you can see that the next four Beatitudes speak of what is actually supremely visible.

The first four of those Beatitudes speak about an attitude to God himself. And they all reflect a true inward love for God. But these second four are actually revealed in attitudes and in affections towards others.

Because Christ is quite clear that true love for God in heaven will be visible in true love for our neighbor here on this earth. And the first and the really great and visible evidence of kingdom grace in God's people, says Jesus in verse 7, is mercy.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. As basic to Christian discipleship as finding God's grace is living God's mercy through Christ.

[13:07] Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. And yes, Jesus is actually saying that only the merciful will receive the mercy of God.

Can't get out of it. He is not saying, however, that being merciful somehow merits God's mercy to us or earns God's mercy. No, of course not.

What he's saying is that being merciful is the true badge of membership of his kingdom of grace. It is evidence that a real entrance into that kingdom has been made.

Because hearts have been transformed truly by the spirit of the God of grace. And mercy, says Jesus, is an invisible but unmistakable sign of inward transformation.

People who have truly known God's mercy will exhibit his mercy to others. It's a spot diagnosis. Anybody who's studied medicine, who's at medical school, will know that that's what you get in medical exams, isn't it?

[14:12] So if I say to a 50-year-old medical student, well, here's a lady, she's 38 years old. Let me tell you about her. She's sweating a lot at rest. Look at her palms, they're really quite red. Have a look at her eyes, they're bulging.

See, her eyelids are all retracted. Take her pulse. It's racing. Have a look at her neck. A bit of a swelling there in her neck. Now, what's the diagnosis? I should have.

He's got it right. Well done. You'll go far. Thyrotoxicosis due to Graves' disease. The eyes. If I show him a man who's 80, let's try another one.

He's got a male of flush, a pink flush on his cheek. And you look at his chest and there's a thin line across this side of his chest. You take his pulse. It's all irregular. Atrial fibrillation.

Put your hand on his chest. There's a parasternal heave. Have a listen in. There's a loud first heart sound. There's an opening snap. Mid-diastolic murmur. Now, mitral stenosis.

[15:16] Try again. And what about the scar? He's had a mitral valvotomy 50 years ago because he had rheumatic fevers. Oh, boy. It's a spot diagnosis.

We won't do any more. But you see, these things are clear, visible signs of inward transformation. In these cases, obviously, they're pathological transformations.

You don't want those kind. But here, it's the opposite. You see, Jesus is saying a visibly merciful nature is a clear sign of inward transformation of the heart.

Transformation of another sort altogether. The work of the Spirit of God. The transforming work of the grace of God. Working a holy new life through his great mercy.

His mercy to bring righteousness and peace into your life. And it will be visible in a merciful spirit. What is mercy?

[16:17] What is being merciful? Well, what it's not, what it's not is just some kind of natural characteristic about your personality.

Something about your temperament. It is certainly not a sort of lacks anything goes attitude that says, Oh, well, just be permissive. Just let anything go. Well, it cannot be that, can it?

Because God himself is the ultimate standard of mercy. And God takes sin and righteousness very, very seriously. Now, mercy. Mercy is a settled attitude of the heart.

That reflects the heart attitude of God himself. Mercy is related to God's grace. It's subtly different. The grace is what deals with sin and guilt.

Grace is what brings God's pardon, God's cleansing to us. And mercy is what deals with the miserable consequences of sin.

[17:15] The distress. The misery that is a result of sin. And mercy shows pity. It shows a desire to bring relief, to bring help, to bring cure. To the mess that's caused by sin.

That's true mercy. It's a fruit of grace. It's a fruit of grace at work in particular situations where sin has brought its mess and its misery to bear in the lives of men and women.

As it always does in the end. What a great need there is in our world for mercy. Our world is full of misery.

It's full of mess as the consequence of sin. The miserable results of sin are just around us everywhere in our world, aren't they? As we were praying on a global scale. We see it. We see it acutely at the moment in the misery of all of these refugees fleeing from Syria and the dreadful fighting.

We see it in so much of the famine and the destitution that there are in parts of the world. Which are much, much less to do with so-called natural disasters than they are to do with wars and civil strife and corrupt rulers.

[18:24] We see that mess plenty, don't we, in the personal level. Everywhere today. In the pain and the distress that there is so often from broken relationships. Marriages and families that are ruptured.

The loneliness, the misery, the economic stress that that so often causes. We see it, don't we, even in unruptured relationships. Whether it's in the home, whether it's at work, whether it's in business, whether it's national level, wherever it is.

Even unruptured relationships are full of mess, aren't they? Just because we're all fallen people, we're all full of flaws. There's no such thing. There's a perfect harmonious relationship on this earth. And so there's such a desperate need in this world of ours for mercy. And for people of mercy. To bring help and relief and succor and cure to the mess that is everywhere in our world because of human sin.

And mercy, says Jesus, is the first visible mark of true righteousness. How often people totally misunderstand that word righteousness, don't they?

[19:40] They think immediately of sort of moralistic and religious things, institutional things. But listen to Jesus. True righteousness, God's righteousness has nothing hard about it, nothing sanctimonious, nothing moralistic about it.

Jesus' righteousness is full of mercy. Mercy is the inevitable outward fruit of a heart that has been made right and true with God.

It's the outward face of inner righteousness, if you want to put it that way. It's the face that is visible to the world and is felt by the world around, of the righteousness of God in the changed human heart.

As I said, the first four Beatitudes are Godward. They're towards God. Only God sees our heart.

And only He knows if it truly is poor in spirit, if it's mourning for sin, if it's meek, if it's hungering and thirsting to be right with Him.

But these next four are visible, aren't they, to other people? I think the Beatitudes have a symmetrical pattern. You can see that the first one in verse 1 and the last one in verse 10 are

corresponding.

[20 : 54] They're both in the present tense. They're the only two that Jesus says both are now recipients of the kingdom. And they're both actually to do with being humbled, being humbled before God and being humbled in the face of men.

And the second and the fifth one are also corresponding because those who mourn for sin are those who do find peace with God. And therefore, they'll be people who seek peace with others. And the third and the sixth similarly are related. They're both about meekness, openness, sincerity before God and therefore purity and sincerity in heart towards people.

And I think it's no accident that right at the very heart of these Beatitudes are two about righteousness and mercy. Because these things are the things that lie at the very heart of God's requirement for man.

Love to God with heart and soul and mind and strength. That is the true righteousness that God wants. And love to man, love to your neighbor as yourself.

[21 : 58] Well, that's mercy, isn't it? It's no accident that it's these two commands that Jesus himself says sum up all the law and the prophets. The whole law and the prophets hang on these two things.

Love to God and love to your neighbor. In fact, in another place, Jesus explains and expands that great commandment by giving a vivid example of the mercy that always flows out of a real love for God himself.

You might remember we looked at it some months ago when we were studying Luke's gospel in Luke 10. You might want to look at it, Luke 10, 25. But a teacher of the law, do you remember, asks Jesus a question.

What do I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus says to him, well, you're a teacher of your law. What does the law say? Well, it says love the Lord with all your heart and soul and mind and strength and your neighbor as yourself.

And Jesus says that's it. That's right. Do that truly and you will live. Have that real and true relationship with your God and you will find life in him as he's promised.

[23 : 04] But the man asks him, do you remember, well, but who is my neighbor? See, he answers Jesus with an answer of religion. Not about relationship with God.

Who is it that I need to love like that? Or more importantly, perhaps he's wanting to know who are the ones I don't have to love like that. You remember how Jesus answered him? He told a story, the story of the good Samaritan.

Jewish man beaten up on the road and then a teacher of the law, a priest and a Levite. They who believe the law and who teach God's law for a living, they come past.

But they go past on the other side. And then a Samaritan who was a despised half-breed foreigner. He's the one who comes and helps him.

This enemy on the road and he pays for him to be looked after and he gives open-ended care. And then at the end of the parable, Jesus says to the man in question, not, not, who is your neighbor?

[24 : 06] It's often misunderstood that way and it's given as though Jesus is making the point, well, everyone's your neighbor. That's not what Jesus says. It's not his point. Now his question was, who proved to be a neighbor?

A real neighbor? In other words, which of these showed himself to be truly obeying God's law, truly keeping the great commandment of God, truly and completely from the heart, loving God and loving his neighbor?

And the man's answer to Jesus, rather sheepishly I'm sure, the one who showed him mercy. See, the one who truly loves God, his heavenly father, inwardly, with heart and soul and mind and strength, is the one who shows mercy.

Not those with all the outward trappings of religious correctness, even if they are expert teachers and theologians of the law. Not those.

But according to Jesus, anyway, those marked by mercy, by God's own heart of abundant mercy, flowing out to assuage the consequences of man's sin and mess and terrible mistakes.

[25 : 30] It's the one who is truly living Christ's mercy who shows the signs of that true inward transformation of heart that has been found by God's true grace.

And that's the visible sign that tells the divine physician the spot diagnosis of the true state of the heart that's within. Because it's the faith that truly loves this God of mercy that is the faith that truly

saves.

And it's the righteousness full of mercy that is true righteousness, that is true right with Godness, which is what righteousness just means. And that's another surprise, isn't it?

Because this kind of righteousness is the very antithesis of the kind of righteousness that the religious person, that the moralist thinks about, the Pharisees of Jesus' day, or indeed many, many of us still today.

Because many, many people today still are just like the Pharisees, even if they don't think they're religious at all, because every one of us has our own kind of righteousness, and you can have that without being remotely religious at all.

[26 : 46] It'll just depend on your particular political or social flavor, what your form of righteousness is. You can be a moralist of the right. Let's call it the Daily Mail moralist.

Well, you'll scorn spongers, you'll scorn scavengers, failures, good-for-nothings. You'll probably pride yourself on your own hard work and your sweat and your achievements and your self-made situation.

Well, if you're like that, it's easy to be unmerciful, isn't it? Because you think that mercy will never be something that you need. Pride in our own moral achievements can so easily make us judgmental of others, can't it?

It's a danger. So often when people harbor that attitude, they have no conception that actually they owe all the good things that have come to them in life to the grace and the mercy of God and the providence of God which has blessed them in life in ways that it hasn't blessed many, many others and that but for that grace of God, that person they despise could so easily be them.

Isn't that true? But there's also the moralism of what you might call the left or the liberals. In fact, very often, I find that's much more snide and ugly and sanctimonious because it harbors that attitude of progressiveness and liberalism and so on.

[28 : 15] How closed-minded those of the so-called open-minded elites seem to be very often. Just as judgmental, often even more viciously judgmental of anybody who's not like them or anybody who doesn't share the latest fashionable political and social mores.

Isn't that right? It's amazing how closed-minded so many of today's open-minded progressives actually prove to be. Often they're just as vicious and intolerant and pharisaical.

So there can be no mercy, can there, for somebody who politely declines to promote political slogans on cakes, for example, that they don't support.

There can be no mercy for somebody like that because the progressive moralist will push them all through the courts, paid for with public money, hopefully. There can be no mercy when somebody from the despised, so-called privileged classes falls into some kind of moral failure or even these days just has an allegation made against them of some kind of sexual misconduct, often from way in the past.

No, the liberal, tolerant, progressive press will be baying for their blood, won't they? Even if that person's dead and can't defend themselves anymore. See, it doesn't really matter what our politics are, what our social stripe is, what our particular brand of that kind of thinking is.

[29 : 42] We're all, by nature, manifestly and mightily unmerciful people. And that's because we haven't grasped the reality of where we all stand before God, before our maker, before our judge.

That every one of us is inwardly bankrupt before him. Every one of us in desperate need for mercy because of the mess that we've made of our own sin, whether we're blind to it or not.

And none of us has any might in God's sight or any meekness. Just emptiness of all that really matters. Emptiness of all the real righteousness that God wants from us.

Because we think deep down, whatever we might say, we think deep down that actually it's not mercy from God that we need. It's really, well, it's his congratulation and it's his praise that we ought to have.

And we can be so unmerciful. That's why we'll be unmerciful people. But you see, when someone has really seen the truth of where they stand with God by nature, when they've been genuinely humbled and broken, wept bitterly over their sin and their failure and their mess, and they've received the wonderful blessing of God's grace, when they have received that word blessed, accepted, made to belong to the glorious kingdom of God, when somebody knows that all of that, all of that has come only from God pouring out his grace and mercy into their heart, then mercy surely cannot but overflow from their heart to others.

[31 : 32] It must overflow, mustn't it? Because God's mercy in Christ is so great and so vast and so expansive that it can't possibly be contained if it truly has been poured into your life from heaven.

Hearts that have been so cleansed by God's grace, well, they're made pure, verse 8, so that the meekness of humble sincerity before God works a transparent and a pure honesty of real relationship before human beings.

and those, verse 9, who are truly sons of God will be peacemakers like God. They will show their father's love for reconciliation because they're people who, through mourning for their own sin, they have found comfort and peace with God and so they long to deal with the consequences of sin and bring, once again, peace in the fractured relationships of men and women.

You see, the way into God's kingdom is through the humbling of the cross applied to our lives through Jesus Christ.

And the way on in his kingdom is marked by grace flowing out of our lives, lives that have been crucified with Christ, lives shaped by the cross to weep for sins and life that flows from heaven's perfect way having been poured into us, the way of true love to God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and that will flow out visibly with fruits to others.

[33 : 11] Which one proved his heart truly belonged to the Father in heaven in that story, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort so that he loved him truly with his heart and soul and mind and strength.

Jesus said, the one who showed mercy. Blessed are the merciful. Those who have known a Father's mercy. Those who love mercy.

And so share that mercy with others. So let me ask you this morning, is that you? Are you merciful? Is there pity? Is there Christ's pity in your heart for the mess, for the havoc of sin and its consequences in this world, in the wounded lives, the needy lives of people who have been felled perhaps in life by their own folly, their own stupidity, their own lack, their own fecklessness? Is there pity enough to get your hands dirty to actually help bring healing, bring cure, bring the balm of the Lord Jesus into lives that are a mess like that?

Maybe a good test of that is to ask yourself the question, well, are you the kind of person that someone who made a terrible mess in their lives could actually come to and talk to and feel that they would find mercy when they've failed, when they've sinned, when they're overcome by shame and grief and misery?

[34 : 39] The gambler or the drinker who's lapsed again and feels utterly defeated or the man who's battling with his addiction to pornography or to homosexuality or something else like that that made him fall badly and he feels dirty and he feels hopeless and he feels ready to give up.

Could that person come and talk to you? Or the young woman who's eaten up with a dark secret that they've had an abortion and it's eating away at them and they can't tell anybody and they feel, well, I could never truly be a Christian because of that and what's happened to me?

Or the married man who's had an affair and he's ruined not only his marriage but his family and his kids hate him and won't have anything to do with him and he just can't bear the pain of it and it's making him bitter and twisted and sad and utterly miserable.

Or the person who in their own Christian ministry feels so conscious of the lack of all the qualities that they really need and ought to have and ought to exhibit and feel a total fraud as though they should just give up.

And could someone like that ever come to you knowing that they would find in you not someone to berate them in anger but someone to be with them in their agony?

[35 : 53] Not someone to wag the finger at them in superiority but somebody to weep alongside them in solidarity and sympathy. Would someone in that situation who just doesn't know where to turn and who fears that they couldn't really open their heart to anybody but could they say but I know I could go to him I know I could speak to her because I I sense I know that they they really would be merciful.

You maybe needed never needed that yet in your life but I can tell you I'm very thankful to God for people who have led me and have spoken the word to me to whom I've known that I could go with mess and find mercy are you merciful?

Would the would the people who came to Jesus gladly knowing that he would receive them would they come to you could they come to you and find someone who would bear their burdens not someone who would tie up heavier burdens and put them on their shoulders and do nothing nothing

to lift them.

Another good test is to examine your own reactions when you hear about somebody who has fallen somebody who's disgraced themselves maybe quite publicly and do you rather relish it do you rather delight in it do you say well I knew that was coming I've always said they were a fraud that's exactly what they deserved or are you sad and sorrowful do you think that is a tragedy that is just terrible and do you say Lord but for your grace that could have been me will you protect me will you save me from that blessed are the merciful says the Lord of heaven and earth to all those who would be his followers mercy doesn't come cheaply it costs doesn't it it's hard it costs time and money and a diversion from many carefully laid tidy plans for the Samaritan to do the work of mercy it costs doesn't it in terms of getting yourself dirty into the dirt and a mess that surrounds the sin in people's lives that are messed up and that can sometimes mean that you will be misunderstood you'll be scorned you'll be sneered at by those who are more tidy in their religion very clean and very proper and don't get touched by mess that's what the priest and the Levite didn't want wasn't it didn't want to be sullied by another man's mess and dirt and uncleanness there's plenty of folk who want to be in Christian ministry and service of various kinds who won't do that either they're very tied up with theological tidiness and correctness they can't cope with untidiness with chaos my friends this world is full of untidiness and chaos and mess and mire and if you don't want to have your conscience tainted with anything like that with people who aren't quite right with situations that aren't quite right you'll find it very very difficult ever to be in places where you can show the mercy of Christ just like the

Pharisees who said well we would never eat and drink with sinners like that we would never go near a mess like that but Jesus would he went into the mess to bring his mercy his mercy led him out of the glory of heaven into the filth of a stable full of dung and into the middle of a probrium to be an outcast in society and into the shame and the nakedness of death stripped naked on a cross in the middle of a rubbish dump outside the city in the place of filth such was the richness of the mercy of God to us in Christ are we merciful are there visible signs to one another and to the world of an inward invisible transformation of our hearts by the grace and mercy of God are there signs of his mercy in our life you remember too there was once a woman who was roundly criticized for pouring out expensive ointment on Jesus feet and wasting it totally and it happened in the house of a prominent religious man a church leader called

[40 : 49] Simon and outwardly he very much looked the part and in the world's eyes he was a top man with God he was a well known elder he was respected in the church and the community alike whereas this woman who gate crashed his meal she was a notorious sinner everyone knew it she was the lowest of the low but Jesus absolutely shocked them he offended every single person in that room when he said to them it was she who was the one who was acceptable and righteous before God and not that prominent church leader how did Jesus know that she was the one whose heart truly loved God with all her heart and soul and mind and strength and not that church leader how did he know that well listen to what Jesus said you Simon gave me no water for my feet no oil for my head no kiss of warm greeting but she she hasn't stopped wetting my feet with her tears she anointed my feet with valuable ointment she hasn't stopped kissing my feet and humbling herself before me that's how

I know that she's received God's forgiveness her sins which are many are forgiven for she loved much you can see that over love it's overflowing out of her it's a visible sign of the inward transformation of the grace that has touched her life and so it is with mercy a merciful spirit is a cardinal sign that God's mercy has been poured into our human heart it just can't help flowing out to others and that's why Jesus says blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy living Christ's mercy is living the life of those who have truly found Christ's grace amen let's pray heavenly father how we thank you for the depths of your mercy towards us and for your son the Lord Jesus who came into the middle of our world of mess and into the depths of the mess of our lives to touch our hearts to change them and to transform them to be like you help us we pray to truly love you the God of all mercy with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and may the reality of that love be seen and felt and heard and touched as we live Christ's mercy in this world so help us we pray in Jesus name amen listen