

It's a little bit of a hard transition and pivot here, but I think it's. This question I want to ask you is going to get us into the headspace to kind of hear maybe our beatitude this morning and what it means to live the blessed life according to Jesus. And so the question is this. Is there anybody in your life that you have a hard time showing kindness to?

Is there anybody in your life that you have a hard time being gracious towards?

It could be the person who hurt you in some way. And the thing that they did to you. It may have already healed a little, but it just left a scar. And every time you see that scar, you feel that scar. It kind of brings up that hurt again.

And you just. You have a hard time thinking that you're ever going to be able to see that person and be kind to them, let alone gracious to them. Maybe the person is a spouse. You used to feel love, but now you feel indifference at best and maybe contempt at worst. And you just have a really hard time being kind to even your spouse.

Maybe you have a hard time being gracious and kind to a group of people who are not like you, who aren't from where you're from, who don't vote like you vote, who don't think like you think you have a hard time being gracious towards those who don't believe the things that you believe.

Maybe you're like me, and the person that you have the hardest time being kind to is yourself.

Like, I would never talk to somebody the way that I talk to myself. Maybe you feel that way. It's much easier for me, maybe you, to forgive and be kind to others. But, boy, you can replay that thing that you did 50 years ago, and it brings you right back into that moment like it was just yesterday, and you just beat yourself up over it again and again. And so the person that you have the hardest time being kind to is you.

As you think about who that person is, I want to share three stories with you this morning that. That I think will serve as a. A picture and a window and a mirror. As we look at our beatitude and we start to see what the blessed life looks like according to Jesus. If you have a Bible or Bible app, you can turn to our text, our main text, kind of anchor text for today.

We're going to be looking at a couple, but it's Matthew, chapter five, verse seven. That's where we're going to find our beatitude for today. And I don't know if we might be able to get the lights up just a little bit so that we can see the text when we get to it. Matthew, chapter five, verse seven. And our first story that I want us to look

at, kind of as a picture of our beatitude, is Exodus chapter 34.

In Exodus chapter 34, Moses is on top of Mount Sinai for the second time to receive the ten commandments. Again, the first time, it didn't go so well. He received them and on the set of stone tablets. But as Moses was walking down the mountainside with them, he looked and he saw the Israelites were worshiping this golden calf. They didn't know where he had gone.

They didn't know what had happened. And so they're like, let's just pool all of our gold together and create a God like the others that we can see and that we can worship. And when Moses sees this, he throws the tablets down on the ground, and he's like, we can't even keep the first one. Like, God has just given these to us, and we have already broken the first one. But God, in his grace and his kindness, he invites Moses back up to the mountain, and he graciously renews his covenant with them again.

And he wants Moses. And Moses wants maybe a little bit of assurance, like, who is it that is going with me? I want them to know who's going with me. And so God wants Moses to know more about who he is, his character, his attitude, his actions. And so this is what we read in Exodus chapter 34.

Starting in verse five, we'll have the words up on the screen. Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name. And that phrase, his name, it's not just, what do we call him? It is a name is, like, wrapped up. Who is Hedgesthe.

And this is who God says that he is. He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. So when God wants us to know who he is and what he is like, this is the picture that he gives us. And he goes on and he says, yes. And he also does not leave the guilty unpunished.

He punishes the children and their children for the sin of their parents to the third and fourth generation. And so there is a just aside to the character of God. But what he wants us to know, first and foremost is, is that he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. And this picture that he gives Moses of who he is is a picture that is reprinted all throughout scripture. It is the most quoted passage of scripture in scripture.

The second story is found in the New Testament, Matthew, chapter 18. And Jesus is telling a story about this man who owed the king a debt that he could never pay, maybe even in a few lifetimes, could never pay it. And in this surprising twist, the king decides to cancel this man's debt, and he decides to set him free. And with this new lease on

life, having been forgiven of so much, you would think that this Mandez would take the forgiveness that he'd received and go and give that to others. But that's not what he does.

He doesn't respond in kindness. Instead, the man goes to someone who owes him a very little amount of money, especially when you consider the maybe lifetimes of money that he owed the king. It's maybe a couple of days of wages. And he goes and he roughs them up, and he demands to have his money. I want my money now.

And the guy's like, I don't have it. I don't have it. And so the guy says, this guy, remember, who had just been forgiven of so much, says, hey, throw this man in jail until he's able to repay me. And this gets back to the king. And Jesus says this in his story in Matthew 1832, then the master called the servant in.

You wicked servant. He said, I canceled all the debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?

The third story today is about this incredible lady named Corey. Ten boom.

Corey's family was arrested by the Nazis during World War two because they were hiding Jews out in their home, trying to protect them from the Holocaust, they were betrayed, arrested, and sent there themselves. In 1944, Corey and her sister Betsy were sent to the Ravensbrook concentration camp. And after suffering in these horrific conditions, Betsy was eventually killed. But Corey, due to a clerical error, happened to be released back into freedom. And Corey would take this newfound lease on her life, and she would begin to preach throughout the world.

She would preach in churches. This message of reconciliation and forgiveness for those whose lives have been ravaged by her faith in Jesus gave her compassion and courage to preach the gospel to others.

And that was put to the test the Sunday morning after preaching, when she came face to face with the SS guard who would watch her and her sister shower.

He was an officer at the concentration camp, and after preaching at the church in Munich in 1947, this is what she describes happened in her book, the hiding place.

She says, he was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. He came to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. How grateful I am for your message, he said. To think that as you say, he, Jesus has washed my sins away.

His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often the need to forgive, kept my hand by my side even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me. I saw the sin in them, she says, I saw the sin in my own heart as I'm looking at this man who had sinned so much against me. Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him.

I tried to smile. I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him.

Give your forgiveness. And this is what she says happened next. As I took his hand, the most incredible thing happened from my shoulder, along my arm, and through my hand, a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

And so what do these three stories have to do with one another? I think that they come together to teach us about what the blessed life looks like, according to Jesus. He says this in Matthew, chapter five, verse seven. I want you to invite you to read this out loud with me. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Let's go back to Exodus chapter 34, because I think that this passage gives us a picture of what the mercy looks like that Jesus is talking about here when he calls us to be merciful. Exodus chapter 34 gives us a picture of what mercy looks like. The Bible says that God is love. But what does that mean? How do we define love?

Well, God defines it for us. And in Exodus chapter 34, we see a robust definition of what God's love looks like. The hebrew word for abundant in love is hesed, and it's used to describe a person whose love is generous and loyal, who is gracious and kind. And it's a word that is so rich in meaning that one english word doesn't fully capture what the word hesed means. But in this passage, fortunately for us, it is surrounded by all of these other words that help us understand the complexity of it.

It paints this clearer picture of the way that God feels towards you, and so he feels compassion towards you. It's this word that means to feel something deep within your, literally deep within your bowels, deep within your gut, is that feeling that you get in your stomach. When you look at someone that you care so deeply for, that maybe you had just met them, but there was something about them or their story or what they were going through that your heart ached for them. That's hesed love. That's the compassion of hesed love.

That's what God feels towards you. And you probably know what it's like to feel that towards others.

On Wednesday, Wednesday I had the opportunity and blessing of

preaching a funeral for a relatively young man. He passed away. He had five kids from upper high school through late twenties.

And as these young men and women got up and they shared about their dad, I felt this aching in my belly for them, like I would have done anything to take their pain away. I just met them, and yet I just hurt deeply for them. I wanted to just take that from them. And I think that's how God feels towards you. It's how God feels towards me.

There's an aching in him to show you love and to take away your pain.

Exodus 34 goes on and says that God is gracious, that he owes us nothing, and yet he gives us everything. He is slow to anger. It's another really interesting word picture. The phrase literally means God is long of nostrils. Think about what happens when you get angry.

Your heart starts to flare, your breathing shortens, your nostrils start to flare out.

But if you're slow to anger, when you get upset, you take deep breaths, you control your breathing.

And so for God to be slow of anger or long of nostril means that he is patient with you. His anger does not easily flare up against you. As John Mark Comer puts in his incredible book on Exodus 34, God has a name. He says, you can make God mad, but you really have to work at it.

And all of this helps us understand God's love towards you. His hesed love that is compassionate and gracious and slow to anger. It is abundant, it is faithful. It is an overwhelming and never ending love. And what's interesting is that when the Greeks came to the old testament and they wanted to translate it from Hebrew into, into Greek, they came across this word hesed.

And the word that the Greeks used to translate the hebrew word hesed is the word elios. Can you guess what it means? It's the same word that Matthew uses twice in our passage today. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

So Exodus 34 is a picture of God's merciful love for you, the story that Jesus tells in Matthew 18. Then we move from this picture now to a window we look through this window of God's Elias, and I think we see why it's so difficult for us to be merciful to others.

The main character in Jesus story had just received this incredible amount of grace. He had been forgiven of a debt that he could never repay. He had experienced compassion and grace and patience and mercy, but he had a hard time showing that kind of mercy to someone else. And if we're honest, we do too.

I think that there are several reasons why it is hard for us to take the mercy we have received from God and give it away to others. We are afraid that if we show mercy, then we are just going to be taken advantage of. We worry that being merciful might be seen as weakness. It might make us more vulnerable to being hurt again. We withhold mercy because we're.

We're in this, like, self protection mode where we just want to protect our hearts. And sometimes we refuse to show mercy because we want to control the outcome, or we want to be the ones that are seeking justice. We want the person to pay for what they have done. And mercy feels like letting them off the hook. It feels like just allowing them to escape the consequences of their actions.

We want them to feel the same kind of pain that they inflicted on us. And so oftentimes, instead of showing mercy, we make ourselves the judge, the jury, and the executioner of justice.

I think all of these are valid concerns. But when we withhold mercy from others after experiencing the overwhelming mercy that God has given us, we lock ourselves up in a prison of our own making.

Even though we have received God's mercy and his freedom, we don't experience the blessing of it. I believe that we struggle to show mercy to others because we don't fully grasp that mercy is about freedom, both for the one who receives it and the one who gives it.

Which is why Corrie ten Boom's story holds a mirror up to my own life, and maybe yours as well. It holds a mirror up to our hearts, and it makes us reflect on our willingness to show mercy and kindness and grace to people who have hurt us. Corey had experienced the elias of God, his compassion, his grace, his loyal love. And after facing her captive that day, she had a decision to make. Am I going to take the mercy in me and allow it to flow through me?

The answer was yes.

And she was shown a mercy on the other side of that yes that she would not have experienced apart from being merciful.

And when we show mercy to others, we receive the mercy of freedom from bitterness and anger and revenge. The weight of unforgiveness that so many of us carry around it is lifted and we receive the mercy of healing in our own hearts.

And that doesn't mean that there's not wisdom sometimes in creating healthy boundaries around people who have hurt us or that we just forget what the other person did. This verse doesn't resolve that tension, and so we're kind of left to wrestle with it in light of

other passages. But what Jesus wants us to know is that the blessed life belongs to those who are merciful, because in their life, never ending waves of mercy will crash up against the shores of their life.

So who do you have a hard time being gracious and kind towards being merciful towards? I wonder how your life would be different if you take the goodness of God's mercy that you have received and you give it away to that person. Think about the freedom that you would experience from that kind of mercy.

I don't think that this is something that we can do on our own. I've tried. Maybe you have, too. You and I, we cannot muster up enough strength and courage to forgive those who have hurt us. That's why I believe that showing mercy is an act of faith rather than will.

It's an act of faith knowing that we can trust God with the pain that others have inflicted on us and that he alone is the just judge. And the truth is, we cannot be merciful by trying harder. We can only do it by surrendering more of ourselves over to Jesus, inviting the mercy that we have received from the father so that we can give it away to others and experience the blessing of his mercy even more in our life.

And so this morning, as we close, we're going to do what we've been doing all throughout this series and come into a time of prayer. So I invite you to just get a little comfortable right now.

We've been doing it differently every week. This week I'm going to read the first part of the prayer, and then we're just going to kind of sit and pause and reflect on those words and maybe how we've seen this play out in our life, and we'll do that three times.

So thank you, Jesus, for showing me such great mercy.

Remind me of those moments. Now let's take a few moments to pause and reflect and listen to those times when God has shown us his mercy.

Thank you for leading me into freedom through your mercy and for loving me unconditionally.

Second part. Lord, search my heart and mind and shine your light on those you are calling me to extend mercy, too. And let's just pause and reflect and listen. Who is it that the Lord brings to your mind right now?

I release my complaints and forgive them, placing my pain in this person into your hands, Father.

And finally, Father, I have held grudges, sought revenge, and judged others in my pride. Forgive me for those times when I have not been merciful.

Reflect on those words now.

Soften my heart, Lord, help me to forgive myself, release my offenses, and be gracious to others. And pray this out loud with me this morning. Holy Spirit, make mercy my way of life, Jesus, help me to live every day as a reflection of the mercy I have received from you. Amen. And when we receive God's mercy, it softens our hearts and it makes us merciful to others.

And as we give mercy to others, we get to experience God's mercy in new and deeper ways than we ever could imagine. And we've already come to this time of communion where we reflected and we remembered the sacrifice of Jesus that made God's mercy possible. But today, as we close out our service, I just wonder if maybe you need someone to pray for the ability of God's mercy to flow through you to that person in your mind. And if so, we'll be up here. We'd love to pray with you about that.

Or maybe you are ready to take a step of baptism. We have some more baptisms even today. And you're ready to surrender and lay down your life to receive God's mercy, to receive his grace, and to start walking in the freedom that he has for you. Why don't you stand with me, and I'll close this in a word of prayer. If you have any decision to make or you need anything this morning, please let us know.

Jesus, thank you for your grace and your goodness. Thank you for your mercy. That overwhelms us. Oh, and, Lord, my prayer is that we will take this mercy that we have received, and we will give it away to others. And that, Father, as we do, we will experience your mercy in ways that we couldn't have imagined otherwise.

Experience your freedom and your compassion and your goodness, Lord. And may that be our way of life. Until the day when you return or call us home and we get to be in your presence, Lord, we long for that day. But until then, give us what we need to be able to live and walk the blessed life here and now. In Jesus name.

Amen.