

## Merciful Like Your Father

Luke 6: 36–38

A daughter joyfully went to her mother and said, “I’ve found a man just like Daddy!” Her mother replied, “So what do you want from me, sympathy?”

Last week’s text concluded with Jesus’ challenge to His disciples that we become just like our Father in heaven. “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” These words serve as a transition between what we explored last week and what we will consider this morning. Recall that Jesus taught us that even sinners love those who love them, will do good to those who do good to them and will even help out a buddy if the risk is minimal. But, God is “kind to the ungrateful and wicked,” so if we really want to resemble Him, which is what it means to “be sons of the Most High,” we must venture into that awkward realm of loving the unlovable.

This morning, we are going to look at three specific expressions of the mercy of our Father as we consider what it means for His children to be merciful, just as He is merciful.

### I. Your Father Is Gentle with His Assessments (36, 37a)

... <sup>36</sup>Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

<sup>37</sup>Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.

#### A. To What Is Jesus Calling You?

Isn’t it odd that people who do not trust the Bible still have a favorite Bible verse? “Do not judge. In their minds this verse is the ultimate zinger that renders any Christian a hypocrite if he dares to suggest something is sinful or to voice concern over the moral decay of the culture. Jesus said, “Do not judge,” they are all too happy to remind us. Hence, we find ourselves having to define what Jesus could not possibly have meant in order to unearth what He did mean.

Jesus did not mean that we can never make ethical or doctrinal evaluations of anything or anyone. Anything God has called sinful stands judged already, so whenever we assess a personal choice or value-neutrality to something He calls wrong, we have already usurped His judgment with our own. Judgments are a part of life. In a few verses, Jesus will tell His disciples that a tree can be known by its fruit. He is speaking of comparing the source of a teaching with its product. Paul told one church, “Test everything” (1 Thessalonians 5:16). Similarly, John taught, “test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1). These injunctions require judgments be made.

Jesus was speaking of the loveless, knee-jerk judgmental nature that so often, too often, attempts to pass itself off as God-pleasing religion. This was the spirit of the Pharisees, and it is a spirit of many who have survived the Pharisees through the ages. It smacks of the self-righteousness that can suck the life out of any community of faith. It specializes in the hastiest of judgments on the slightest of evidence. It is harsh in that it always tends to ascribe the lowest possible motives to a person. It dares to do something that only God can do and that is to read another person’s heart.

When we lovingly challenge a brother who sins, our gentleness can open a door to helping him overcome his sin. But, when we think we have his heart and his hypocrisy all figured out, we slam shut all such doors. Many Christians pride themselves on a willingness “to speak their minds” or “to tell it like it is.” Jesus is telling you that your mind is not so bright that speaking it constitutes a public service. In regard to “telling it like it is,” only God really knows “how it is” when it comes to the motives and intentions in the hearts of others. This is why Paul warned us:

<sup>1</sup>Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. – Galatians 6:1

Do not “condemn.” This second word has to do with exerting law and personal rights. It means to demand the stiffest of penalties, disregarding all extenuating circumstances. It has to do with demanding what is due you without regard to the other person’s pride, needs or other obligations.

A harsh, critical and merciless spirit will come back on you – on earth as in heaven. In the realm of heaven, a gracious nature reflects that you are “a chip off the old block” in regard to your heavenly Father. A graceless nature reflects that things do not add up, no matter how much you insist you love God. On earth, you may receive just about as much grace and patience from others as you dish out. If your nature is to judge harshly, try never to stumble. People will line up to judge you harshly. If you are stingy, try to never need anything. If you cannot extend the benefit of the doubt, avoid being in any position where you could use the benefit of the doubt.

## **B. Jesus Brought Heaven’s Mercy in this Matter Down to Earth**

Zacchaeus was a filthy-rich tax collector. When Jesus came to his town, Zacchaeus, a short man, climbed a tree to catch a glimpse of Him. Jesus called to Zacchaeus, inviting Himself to dinner.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”  
– Luke 19:7

The people’s hatred of tax collectors coupled with their own sense of self-righteousness convinced them that Zacchaeus was unsalvageable. But, the Reader of hearts recognized an empty life behind the trappings of wealth. As an authentic gesture of repentance, Zacchaeus offered to reimburse fourfold anyone he had cheated, and Jesus announced to the crowd:

... “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup>For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” – Luke 19:9, 10

## **C. Have You Any Doubts about Your Father’s Gentleness?**

In one of David’s most beautiful psalms, he wrote:

<sup>8</sup>The LORD is compassionate (merciful) and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

<sup>9</sup>He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever;

<sup>10</sup>he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. – Psalm 103:8

God made a covenant with the nation of Israel in which He promised to bless them if they obeyed Him and punish them if they did not. The terms were spelled out in advance, and Israel embraced them. But, many times, God did *NOT* exert His rights. He did *NOT* punish His people every time they broke faith. Skeptics of our faith point to some alleged severity of God in the Old Testament, but David knew better. He saw how God seemed to prefer *NOT* to deal with His people on the basis of cold, unyielding covenant. He sensed that God understands our weakness and that He mercifully endures them and takes them into account more than we can ever know:

<sup>13</sup>As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;  
<sup>14</sup>for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. – Psalm 103:13, 14

## **II. Your Father Is Genuine with His Absolutions (36, 37b)**

... <sup>36</sup>Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

... Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

### **A. To What Is Jesus Calling You?**

The forgiveness in view here is not simply that “kiss-and-make-up” reconciliation that allows friends and loved ones to move on after some unpleasant bump in the road. God does bring about reconciliation, and we must work for it as well, but here, “forgive” refers to a prerequisite to full reconciliation. It means “to loose” or “to free” someone from something that obligates them to you. To forgive means to cancel a debt, whether that debt is a loan, a legal restitution imposed by a judge or something of yours that they broke. Of course, in the Christian experience, many times, no money or other commodity is involved. The forgiveness that starts the work of reconciliation may simply be the release of someone from the chains of your bitter grudge.

“Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” God does not forgive the unforgiving. That’s a troublesome notion. It sounds a bit like we must win God’s forgiveness by extending forgiveness to others. Now, we can all agree that God has no interest in our phony forgiveness of others, that which is on the record, but does not reflect how our hearts still seethe at the sight of them. So, does one’s willful, obedient act of forgiveness, even when his heart is resisting the notion, open the door to God melting his heart toward another? Or, does God first have to transform the heart so as to enable a person to truly forgive? Different people give different testimony. Who am I to declare either/or on the matter? Suffice it to say, eventually, our hearts need to reflect our Father’s heart.

However, Luke does not limit this equation, “forgiveness yields forgiveness,” to our relationship with God. If, as a habit, you operate in the realm of forgiveness, people will tend to extend forgiveness to you more freely. Unrelenting harshness, on the other hand, yields harshness.

### **B. Jesus Brought Heaven’s Mercy in this Matter Down to Earth**

On the night Jesus was born, a host of angels sang:

<sup>14</sup>“Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” – Luke 12:14

The angel’s song spoke of heaven and earth meeting in the Person of Jesus. Because God’s favor (or grace) rested upon mankind, heaven’s peace has come down. God’s “release” and the peace that accompanies that “release” become recurring themes in Luke.

In another story unique to Luke, Jesus was a guest in the home of a proper religious man, a Pharisee named Simon. Simon seems to have been checking out rumors that Jesus was a prophet. A woman known to be a sinner barged onto the scene. She washed Jesus’ feet with her tears. She wiped them with her hair. She poured perfume over them. All Simon could conclude was that Jesus was not a prophet. No prophet would let such a woman near Him. But, the Reader of hearts saw a soul that was weary of the life she had forged for herself. Jesus gently rebuked Simon for his harshness before assuring this woman of God’s release from her sins and sending her away in peace.

<sup>48</sup>Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." – Luke 7:48

<sup>50</sup>Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." – Luke 7:50

### **C. Have You Any Doubts about Your Father's Genuineness?**

Return if you will to that powerful Psalm 103:

<sup>11</sup>For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;

<sup>12</sup>as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

– Psalm 103:11, 12

God sets our sins aside "as far as the east is from the west." Realistically, we are only in the process of being reconciled to God, for we are not as much like our Father as we will be. But, that prerequisite step of release stands completed. We have been loosed from the chains that bound us, forgiven the debt that held us. Never lose sight of what a debt that was! No biblical author describes the severity of our plight before the grace of God quite like Paul.

<sup>1</sup>As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins ... we were by nature objects of wrath. <sup>4</sup>But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup>made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. – Ephesians 2:1, 4, 5

### **III. Your Father Is Generous with His Assets (36, 38)**

... <sup>36</sup>Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

... <sup>38</sup>Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

#### **A. To What Is Jesus Calling You?**

Mercy means rendering gentle judgments and extending genuine forgiveness. Mercy is also generously sharing what you have with others who are in need? What assets are we called to share if we are to live as reflections of the mercy of our Most High Father? Everything that we have freely received from the hand of God, He calls us to freely share. That includes physical assets of money, food, home and time. It includes the less tangible assets of self such as our attention, our thoughts, our prayers our emotional investment and our empathy.

With whom are we to share? Obviously, we must provide for our own, but there is no unique kingdom virtue in that. Even sinners do that. In fact, Paul writes that to fail to care for one's own renders a man "worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8). We have a responsibility to the needs of our fellow-Christians, but sinners can also rise to the occasion and care for those closest to them. We must give when our neighbor is in need and we must give to the children of want, but non-Christians do these things too. Perhaps, the one target for our generosity left that can really distinguish as "sons of the Most High," is to reach out to our enemies. That remains a work in process for most of us. Still, a basically generous spirit captures the attention of others. It certainly captures the attention of heaven, "for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Jesus describes the return on generosity as poured into our lap, pressed down, running over and shaken together. The Jew wore a long, loose cloak secured by a belt or sash around the waist. This robe could be pulled up through the sash, so that the excess fabric formed a pouch in which to carry all sorts of things. Essentially, Jesus is saying that if we display a spirit of generosity, our pockets will be stuffed. This is not about giving to get rich. Rather, it is about being rewarded with God's pleasure as well as with the gratitude of others. Look out for others. Others will look out for you.

### **B. Jesus Brought Heaven's Mercy in this Matter Down to Earth**

Luke records one of the Lord's strangest parables. A certain manager was not a very good manager of his master's accounts receivables, so the boss had to let him go. Before he was out of work, he collected on his master's debts, but at a great discount to the various creditors. He then wrote the debts off the books. He did this to buy gratitude from others who he hoped would care for him later. The creditors were happy, and even the master was impressed at the man's shrewdness. Jesus was not suggesting that we buy friends by illegally cooking someone else's books. His point was simply that money has a certain power to secure the gratitude of others, and when properly used, the gratitude of heaven. These were rascally characters not to be imitated, but they understood the power of money to secure the appreciation of others. Jesus concluded:

*"... For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. <sup>9</sup>I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings." – Luke 16:8, 9*

### **C. Have You Any Doubts about Your Father's Generosity?**

An old man had hearing problems for years. After decades of denial, he finally went to the doctor and was fitted for hearing aids that allowed him to hear perfectly.

A month later he went back to the doctor, who said with a smile, "Your hearing is 100 percent. Your family must be very pleased."

The old man replied, "Oh, I haven't told them yet. I just sit around and listen to their conversations. I've changed my will three times!"

Our Father hears well and He sees well. It's incredible, when you think about it, that He still desires to be generous toward us. His one expectation is that we will reflect His generosity to others.

Paul was raising money from the Gentiles in Corinth to assist Jewish Christians in Jerusalem who were enduring famine. He refused to use his apostolic authority to compel them to give anything. God desires the gifts of sacrificial hearts far above the proceeds of strong-armed collection tactics. But, Paul pulled out every when addressing the hearts of these Corinthians. He appealed to the need. He appealed to their own desire to excel in divine grace. He mentioned that the Macedonian Christians, who were poor compared to the Corinthians, gave beyond their means. He challenged them to prove their love for God and for their fellow-men. Paul didn't compel them to give X-amount of funds by pulling rank on them, but he spoke quite aggressively to their hearts. Some modern Christians would have called his methods "guilt tactics."

But the fact remained; they were a blessed people in a world of need, and so are we. Ultimately, Paul appealed to them, just as his words still appeal to us, on the grounds that we are the greatest recipients of mercy in the cosmos. We stand in Christ because of our Father's generosity.

*... <sup>9</sup>For 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*