

3) THE MERCIFUL

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Matthew 5:7

1) You cannot experience mercy unless you show mercy? People may be merciful to you, but if you cannot show mercy to someone else, how can you experience the mercy others are offering to you?

2) The less mercy you are prepared to show, the less mercy you will inspire in others around you. You live in a larger circle of 'hard-heartedness' as Jesus accuses the religious leaders of his day of doing. To what extent are we the authors of our own fate when it comes to mercy?

Genesis 32:3 – 33:11

Jacob has been a manipulating schemer toward his older brother Esau. Now, after many years, the consequences of his actions are about to catch up with him. He has robbed Esau of his birthright and blessing. Esau has had to make his success on his own. And now, he is coming to meet his brother Jacob after all these years in strength. What should Jacob anticipate? What does Jacob deserve? What is the mysterious wrestling match he has with the angel of God all about? Is it his guilt? Is it his fear that what he deserves is finally catching up with him?

But what does Jacob experience? He experiences the forgiving mercy of God, and he experiences it from the least likely person he'd ever expect it from: Esau. And Esau is so transfused with love that he doesn't even understand why his brother is concerned or apprehensive. He is genuinely glad to see him and embraces him fully without reserve. How rare is this in life? Isn't it more common that we remember our hurts and nurse our grievances? Isn't it more common that we hold on to things and over the years, they become more entrenched in our hearts? What happens with Esau that his initial anger and hate toward his brother becomes totally forgotten and only love arises in his heart?

Matthew 18: 21-35

The king and his servant. The servant is forgiven an astronomical sum of debt that he could never hope to repay in a lifetime. But he cannot forgive a miniscule sum owed to him by a fellow servant. This, according to Jesus, is how it is with us. If the King is like God and we are like the forgiven servant, how do we evaluate our relationships with others with whom we have some grievances? If we actually accepted that God forgives us a debt we can never hope to repay ourselves, how can we hold anything against

anyone else? But if we believe that our debts are negligible or easily paid back with our own efforts, than we are also less forgiving of those around us who cannot pay their debts to us. To commit a sin against someone is to become indebted to them in moral terms. There are sins of commission and sins of omission.

What debts do we owe to God, to others? What debts do others owe us? Do we treat others as God has treated us? Do we show mercy? Is debt a helpful way of thinking of our sin toward others or before God? Is our lack of integrity, honesty or truthfulness with ourselves a sin before God? This also leads to next week's study on 'purity of heart.'

FOR NEXT WEEK: Read Matthew 5:8 – Purity of heart. Also read Isaiah 6: 1-8 which is about Isaiah's call, and Matthew 17: 1-8, the story of Jesus' transfiguration.