

Series: The Blessing

December 1-2, 2018

## **Title: Mercy**

### **[Slide 1]**

**Text: Matthew 5:7**

## **Starry Night**

### **The Starry Night:**

#### **[Slide 2]**

In June, 1889 Vincent Van Gogh created a painting titled "The Starry Night." In the painting a village lies peacefully beneath a night sky blazing with light. The crescent moon sits in the upper right hand corner of the painting. Venus, the Morning Star, shines above the horizon.

Van Gogh never thought very much of the painting. Little did he know, but this painting would become in many ways his legacy, His "Mona Lisa"!

Artists know that for maximum impact, you want to put complementary colors next to each other. Complementary colors are colors that sit opposite each other on the color wheel. Mix them together and they cancel each other out. But when you put them next to each other, they make each other shine.

The deep blues of Van Gogh's night sky and the vivid yellow/orange of the moon and stars are complementary colors. Put complementary colors next to each other and they make each other shine. That is the reason that Van Gogh's starry sky seems to explode with light.

### **The Fifth Blessing:**

The Fifth Blessing that Jesus pronounces reads like this:

#### **[Slide 3]**

*Matthew 5:7 NIV*

*"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."*

What is interesting is to compare it to the Blessing that comes right before it:

**[Slide 4]**

*Matthew 5:6 NIV*

*"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."*

The Fourth Blessing encourages us to long for justice. The Fifth Blessing encourages us to show mercy.

**[Slide 5]**

Complementary virtues. Like a dark blue night sky and blazing yellow/orange stars.

You can only see true Justice if Mercy is right beside it. You can only see Mercy if Justice is there to make it shine!

**The Good Samaritan****A lawyer's question:**

So what does it look like to put Justice and Mercy side by side?

One day a lawyer – think "Justice" – asked Jesus a trick question about how to attain eternal life. Jesus directed him back to the OT law and asked him what was written there? The man replied that we should love God and love our neighbor.

In reply Jesus said: "Do this and you will live."

But that wasn't good enough for the tricky lawyer:

**[Slide 6]**

*Luke 10:29 NIV*

*But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

That's how it works when all you paint with is the deep blue of Justice. You end up splitting hairs, trying to pin everything down so that *you're always right*.

Mercy and love are messy. Just who qualifies for such preferential treatment? And doesn't Mercy muddy Justice and turn it into a dull grey?

### **A Merciful Samaritan:**

Jesus answered with a story. It was a story about a man who was going down the 18 mile road through the wild wastes between Jerusalem and Jericho. He was ambushed by robbers, stripped, beaten and left for dead.

Two religious leaders came along – a priest and a Levite. These were the men who served God in the Temple. They were the gatekeepers of Justice itself. To get to God you had to go through them. But to do their job they had to remain ceremonially pure. And that meant no contact with corpses. So when they saw the man lying by the side of the road, they crossed over to the other side and went on their way. After all, it was the *right* thing to do.

Then along came a hated outsider, a Samaritan. There was no love lost and plenty of blood shed between Jews and Samaritans in those days. When the Samaritan saw a Jew lying on the side of the road, he could have easily excused himself from getting involved. After all, it would have been the *right* thing to do.

But that's not what he did. Instead, he determined to paint blazing stars of Mercy on the somber night sky of Justice and religious purity.

### **[Slide 7]**

*Luke 10:34-35 NIV*

*"He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expenses you may have.'"*

### **Jesus' question:**

When he finished the story, Jesus asked the lawyer a simple question:

### **[Slide 8]**

*Luke 10:36 NIV*

*"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"*

It was not a question of, "Who is my neighbor?" but rather a question of "How can I *be* a neighbor?"

The lawyer gave the only answer the story would permit:

*Luke 10:37 NIV*

*The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."*

*Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."*

## **Mercy**

### **What God requires:**

The lawyer's question is one all of us must answer: "What must I do to attain eternal life?" "How can I truly be right with God?" "How can I know that I will live forever in God's restored Creation where there is no longer any evil or injustice?"

The prophet Micah posed this very question when he wrote:

### **[Slide 9]**

*Micah 6:6a NIV*

*With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God?*

Will he become right with God if he gives extravagant offerings and makes excruciating sacrifices? Can he ever *earn* God's approval? Is there a way to become perfect in God's eyes? The answer, of course, is No.

Instead, Micah answers his question with these words:

*Micah 6:8 NIV*

*He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you?*

*To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

Not Justice or Mercy, but the two together: the complementary colors of the very character of God Himself! That is what God requires.

### **God's Masterpiece:**

We were called to be God's Masterpiece in His world. The steady rhythm of our lives is to be characterized by striving to walk humbly with God on a straight and just path. That is the night sky painted in rich shades of blue.

But the truest mark of God's character in our lives will be found in the extravagant splashes of Mercy that blaze out of that night sky. After all, it is through God's love and mercy that He is remaking His Creation.

As James reminds us:

### **[Slide 10]**

*James 2:12-13 NIV*

*Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.*

*Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

### **Mercy:**

We live in a world consumed by moral outrage. Voice after voice cries out for justice. People who disagree with each other can no longer even have a civil conversation. Our society hungers and thirsts for justice, and keeps coming up empty. New sinners are sniffed out and punished. New movements promise to eradicate human sin, but crash and burn.

No amount of painting the sky with darker and darker shades of blue will bring the reformation we long for. What is needed most of all is for brave people to dip their brushes in the blazing yellows and oranges of God's Mercy, and to then light up that night sky with the Morning Star!

### **[Slide 11]**

That is our mission: To be star painters in a dark world. It starts at home, at work, at school. The secret weapon against injustice is not more rules or punishments. It is to offer a way out of injustice, unforgiveness, resentment and bitterness by being the first to show mercy.

Act justly and love mercy. And remember that in the end Mercy triumphs over judgment.