

## ***A SNOW WHITE KISS MT.5/7; 18:21-35***

Once Upon a Time #6

◆**Intro:** Patricia L. Miller, a former hospital staff person, writes: While at work in the emergency room, I learned to stop crying at the pain around me. Each day it seemed I was becoming insensitive to people and their real needs. Five years of emergency room exposure had taken its toll. Then God intervened.

◆I was taking information for registering a young woman who had overdosed on drugs and had attempted suicide. Her mother sat before me as I typed the information into the computer. The mother was unkempt and bleary eyed. She had been awakened in the middle of the night by the police to come to the hospital. She could only speak to me in a whisper. Hurry up, I said to myself, as she slowly gave me the information. My impatience was raw as I finished the report and jumped to the machine to copy the medical cards. That's when God stopped me -at the copy machine.

◆He spoke to my heart so clearly: You didn't even look at her.He repeated it, gently: You didn't even look at her. I felt his grief for her and for her daughter, and I bowed my head. I'm sorry, Lord. I am so sorry. I sat down in front of the distraught woman and covered her hands with mine. I looked into her eyes with all the love that God could flood through me and said, "I care. Don't give up." She wept and wept. She poured her heart out to me about the years of dealing with a rebellious daughter as a single mom. Finally, she looked up and thanked me, the coldhearted one with no feelings.

◆My attitude changed that night. My Jesus came right into the workplace in spite of rules that tried to keep him out. He came in to set me free to care

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again. He gave himself to that woman through me. My God, who so loved the world, broke that self-imposed barrier around my heart. Now he could reach out, not only to me in my pain, but to a lost and hurting woman.

◆ Citation: Patricia L. Miller, adapted from Pentecostal Evangel (10-15-00), pp. 9-11.

◆ Patricia was learning about mercy. In our study of the Beatitude that Jesus preached in his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that mercy is more than a once-upon-a-time fairy tale.

### ◆ **1. What is mercy?**

◆ A. Well, lets begin with what mercy is not.

◆ 1) Mercy is not giving what I don't want anyway. For example, one might readily agree that all the brussel sprouts in Indiana ought be donated to the hungry in Nigeria! That might be a pleasing idea, but that wouldn't be mercy.

◆ 2) Mercy is not the same thing as general kindness. Lets say you hear of someone who's had a series of tragedies: lost their job, wrecked their car, run out of money –and you decide to go to bat for them. You find them a car, you help them apply for a job, and loan them a few dollars. That's good ol' fashioned kindness. Mercy is something different.

◆ 3) Mercy is not the same thing as grace. See, grace is giving what one doesn't deserve. Mercy is not giving what one does deserve. Not getting a licking for playing badminton with the goldfish is mercy. Getting another goldfish is grace. Not going to hell is mercy. Going to heaven is grace.

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◆B. Mercy is giving in the face of taking. So you helped the fellow out two, three, four times –and how does he repay your kindness? He uses the car to shop lift a few items from the local Walmart. He helps himself to a little more of your cash when you are not looking. He doesn't show up for the job you got him because he went drinking all night. Basically he's hurt you. He's used you. He's spurned you. And you still try to help him. That's mercy.

◆ Just read Nehemiah 9:26-31: ““But they were disobedient and rebelled against you; they put your law behind their backs. They killed your prophets, who had admonished them in order to turn them back to you; they committed awful blasphemies. So you handed them over to their enemies, who oppressed them. But when they were oppressed they cried out to you. From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies. “But as soon as they were at rest, they again did what was evil in your sight. Then you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies so that they ruled over them. And when they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven, and in your compassion you delivered them time after time. “You warned them to return to your law, but they became arrogant and disobeyed your commands. They sinned against your ordinances, by which a man will live if he obeys them. Stubbornly they turned their backs on you, became stiff-necked and refused to listen. For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you handed them over to the neighbouring peoples. But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.” Nehemiah 9:26-31, NIV.

◆C. Mercy is repeating treating with merit in the face of demerit. Mercy has an element of forgiveness involved. cf v 35

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◆ This is how Jesus summarizes his parable on mercy in chapter 18:

*“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.” Matthew 18:35, NIV.*

◆ So while pity might be merely the emotion of feeling bad for someone down and out, kindness is pity plus action to help them, and mercy is pity + action when a wholly different action is deserved.

◆ Let me try to illustrate from when our children were younger. Lets just say that sometimes the typical serenity of our home was shattered by a piercing howl of, you guessed it, a young boy. (We have a little plague that reads “A boy is a noise with dirt on it.”) Well, if you’ve spent any time in a household of boys, you know that they like to wrestle, fight and be generally irritating to each other for no apparent reason. This can go on for hours until they either get tired, or someone gets... hurt! When this happens the supposedly heretofore innocent party feels obligated to pound the other one with a deserved vengeance. But if they are not big enough to do so, there is another effective option: the howl.

◆ The well-pitched and perfectly times howl is exceedingly effective with agitated parents nearby. It is designed to respond to something like a minor fingernail scratch from your opponents pinky, yet evokes mental images for people in adjoining rooms, of dripping blood and fractured body parts.

◆ Now it will not surprise you that after a while the parent might just become pitiless. That is, she rolls her eyes, rises slowly from her desk to dutifully go and see what happened. But when she walks into

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the room to find that indeed her son is doubled over in pain, and blood adorns the furniture, she becomes suddenly able to “pity the foo’.”

◆ You’ve told them 100 times someone would get hurt. You’ve grounded them countless hours for rough-housing in the house when they should have been rough-yarding in the yard! But they did it, and they got hurt, and you still rush to their side in compassion to help heal them. That’s mercy.

◆ **2.** Did you know that God loves mercy? **You and I were meant to fill the world with mercy.**

◆ Jesus says some hard things in the the next chapter in the Lord’s prayer. Maybe you remember how it goes: “forgive us our debts, ...*as we forgive our debtors!*” Shortly after that he says this:

◆ *For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matthew 6:14, 15, NIV).*

◆ This means then, that Christians, God-followers, of all the people in the world, are to

- ◆ offer forgiveness,
- ◆ seek reconciliation where there is a rift in a relationship,
- ◆ politely serve a person who has disregarded you
- ◆ return good for evil (another definition of mercy).

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◆ It’s a tall order.

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### **◆3. How can I become merciful?**

◆A. To be merciful, I need to feel mercy. That my friends is why we pray and confess our sins. That is why we come here to remember what Jesus has done for us. We cannot be merciful without the practice of remembering mercy given us, just as we cannot keep God's law without constantly staying in touch with his grace. To be merciful I need to regularly ponder the mercy shown me.

◆ I think this is what the unmerciful servant failed to do. Out of sight, out of mind. No careful thinking. No meditation before God on the meaning of things that happened to him.

◆B. As Christians we deal with the adulterer knowing there is an adulterer in us. We deal with the one tempted to homosexuality knowing there is one easily tempted within us! We have mercy on the thief knowing there is a thief within us. We are patient with the addict knowing there is an addict inside us. The same sin "genes" live in everyone of us.

◆We don't condone the sins. But we don't hate the sinner, for we are sinners too.

◆We don't ignore the sins with the popular catch phrases, "Hey, I don't judge." or "If it works for you, fine." No, we appeal to our friends just as we appeal to ourselves, "Turn your back on evil no matter how good it feels. Turn to God's better way in faith."

◆When we invite someone to worship with us in God's house it is with the same intention that we come. "Come and see how when we get close to God we find power to chose what is upright and healthy

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in the world. Come and see how we find God rubs off on us, and things get better!”

◆ We sing the songs about mercy. About how he carried us over the lava of our addictive sins to the shores of heaven. About how he broke us free from the bars of our personal prisons that we were powerless against. That we knew were wrong, but still we couldn't manufacture repentance.

◆ The way to become merciful is to practice appreciating mercy we've received.

◆ Sometimes, like the unmerciful servant, we treat the master like the “Big Cheese we owed a few bucks to”, when in reality it was 10,000 talents (talent = 20 years of a day laborers wages. 200,000 years worth of pay he owed! At minimum wage 1 talent = \$333,000! Multiply that by 10,000 you get \$3.3 trillion!)

◆ C. What mercy have you received? Mercy all originates with God, you know.

◆ Your parents continue to treat you with love and generosity even though you constantly act like you deserve everything they give you and you never say thanks?

◆ Your boss has cut you a break beyond policy limit on being late. You should have lost your job by now?

◆ You cheated on your wife and she didn't leave you, or cheat on you!!

◆ You swear at your spouse, yet your spouse pleads with you for polite affection?

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◆ **Conclusion:** Try to notice the mercy God has afforded you because a person in touch with a merciful God becomes a mercy-filled person. Have you found yourself overly judgmental, short, insensitive, hard, quick-tempered, critical? It's a dead give away that mercy is an area of potential growth! The good news is that God in Jesus Christ is constantly inviting us back in step with him, back in touch with him.

◆ *Turn to me and have mercy on me, as you always do to those who love your name. (Psalms 119:132, NIV).*

◆ God never gives up on his kids. He is never pitiless. He always has mercy waiting for you.

◆ If you are not one of his kids here today, come join his family! If you've never admitted that you can't be merciful on your own, bow and ask Jesus to have mercy on you, and forgive your sin. He will, you know. And then you will be the eternal recipient of mercy (we don't get the punishment of hell we deserve), AND the recipient of grace (we do get the heaven we don't deserve)!

◆ *Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. (Isaiah 55:6,7, NIV).*

◆ Listen to me and don't let the devil interrupt: as often as we seek the Lord he has mercy. As often as we forsake our sins, he has mercy. As often as we turn to the Lord, he is there with open arms. Come and be refreshed in the waters of mercy and you will then find it easier to get someone else wet as well.