

26/08/2007

Rev Robert Denham

The Christian smiled as the invitation to speak came. The people in the group had tried hard not to give an invitation. But it just slipped out. As they stood at the party, talking about their week, it just happened to slip out. The erring person bit their tongue as soon as it was said, for they knew what was coming.

All it needed was that one careless mention and he was off. His mouth raced into action sprouting the Bible's position on homosexuality. He reminded them of Sodom and Gomorrah. He waxed long and hard on Romans 1, where it says God's wrath is being revealed against all the ungodliness of mankind, so much so that God has handed over man to lust after other men. He vexed their battered ears, and pounded his fist, and ended with a call to punish all gays and lesbians, wanting damnation for them, and praising God that he was not like them, and that he was straight and faithful.

Yet his praising of God was done with puffed out chest, raised voice of near pride, and an eye in the mirror congratulating himself on good morals and a fine speech to boot.

Down the road, near the back door of an unkempt church, a gay man sobbed as he reflected on his problems. He looked at the sad, battered church, and thought how much it was like his life. He prayed silently, "God have mercy on me. I am a sinner."

Jesus told a story like that. He spoke of a Pharisee and a tax collector. He declared that God heard the tax collector not the Pharisee, and declared him forgiven and justified.

How merciful are you?

When you see people hurting, do you feel for them, or do you think "SUFFER!"?

When you have a drunk approach you for money, do you want to help in some way, or do you want to get away in case you catch something or are hurt, or it will cost you?

When you see people unemployed, do you care or think the people must be bludgers or deserved it?

When you see the starving millions of our world, staggering around with pot bellies, arms as thin as McDonald straws, flies in their weeping eyes, & without much clothing, do you thank God for Australia, but not cry out for mercy?

How merciful are you?

Jesus said in Matthew 5:7 *Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*

In Matthew 25, in the parable of the sheep and the goats, what was the obvious difference between the sheep and the goats? Can you remember? We may want to think it is by whether there was faith in Jesus or not, but Jesus does not say that.

He has made the final judgment on a slightly different basis in that parable, yet it is in line with the rest of the Bible.

The distinctiveness of the sheep, those who do truly believe, is their mercy. It is the putting of their faith into action. It is the fruit of their faith in Jesus, so that they will act more and more like him.

It is not a judgment based on works, but on the fruit of faith, which shows itself in godly merciful lifestyles.

Jesus said *Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'* Then the righteous will answer him, *'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'* The King will reply, *'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'*

*Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick & in prison and you did not look after me.'* They will also answer, *'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, & did not help you?'* He will reply, *'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for 1 of the least of these, you did not do for me.'* Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

Are you merciful to people? Are you gentle, kind, helpful, and ready to help? Or are you uncaring, callous, hard-nosed and overly dogmatic in your relating to people?

Matthew 5:7

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Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy.  
Let us take some time to pray quietly now, asking  
for God's Spirit to make us more merciful.