

**Lutheran Vespers, Sometime during 1947-1948**  
**Recording #9**  
**KVNU, 610, Logan, Utah**  
**Rev. Harold Brauer, speaker**

Gracious God and Lord, bestow thy blessing upon this brief period of devotion today and make it a blessing to all who hear it. Give to those who are listening in whatever their needs may require, all according to thy will. We ask it in Jesus blessed name. Amen.

Dear friends of the radio audience. Perhaps one of the most beautiful chapters in the whole Bible is First Corinthians chapter 13, and that beautiful hymn upon charity or love. Many when they read this chapter are filled with admiration for its matchless beauty and why men continue to admire it is because the man who composed it was himself a man of love, of charity and of mercy. It was St. Paul the apostle to the Gentiles. But Paul had not always been such a man of mercy and charity. At one time he was a very cruel persecutor of Christian men and women. At one time he had been a bloodthirsty, cruel monster who's delight it was to hail men and women into court and have them thrown into prison. Yes, he assisted in having them stoned to death for no greater offense than that they prayed to God in the name of Jesus Christ,

But a great change came over this cruel and bloodthirsty man. The bitter hatred was taken from his heart and he was made a loving, merciful and charitable disciple of the Lord Jesus. What was it that caused this change in this man? That which changed the cruel persecutor into a merciful, loving and kind friend, brother and helper is the truth contained in the words which we shall consider today. This truth presented here has not only rocked this change in St. Paul, it has done this for millions of others. This truth has done more than anything else to take from this world, its cruelty and hatred and to put in its place, love, charity and kindness. This truth which has such power tells us about the blessed merciful in the Beatitude from Christ's Sermon on the Mount, which reads: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

I am fully aware of the fact that the opinion of many is that they are merciful by nature. They think that love and kindness lives in us by nature, but God speaks differently in his Word. By nature man is selfish and loveless and if left to develop that inborn or hardhearted, coldhearted and wicked as he goes along, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.

This detestable sin lives in the heart of even the youngest child. Who has not seen it crop out in small children? As soon as a child is old enough to pull its father's or mother's or an older brother's or sister's hair, and it finds out that it causes pain, it has delight. Or if it strikes someone with a hard object and sees that it hurts the individual, the child will enjoy to keep on striking with the object and inflict more pain. And these children as they grow up without training do not become better, but become worse and worse. If they weren't left to express their natural desires, this natural craving to harm others would become stronger and stronger.

In grown-ups, too, there is a pronounced lack of mercy and love. You tell some people about all the blessings you enjoy and you will not find them rejoicing but sorrowful that they are not the ones who enjoy those blessings. We hear much about charity in our day. In some cases people who have become rich at someone else's expense, perhaps only by paying their employees the lowest possible wages, will try to hide their sin and to appear very charitable and merciful by giving those from whom they have indirectly gotten their riches a rather generous Christmas gift or by giving large sums to charitable institutions. In this way they hope to be admired not only as successful and powerful men but also as charitable and gracious and merciful. Let us not be too harsh though. That is not true in all cases but only too often it is true.

We also know that if a man or woman becomes guilty of some action which the world also considers disgraceful, the world will never forgive them, but delights in pointing its finger at them or giving them questioning glances as long as they live. It is for that reason that such people who want to outlive such a disgrace are usually advised to move into another community where their disgraceful action is not known. These things simply give us a picture of man's heart as it is by nature altogether loveless and without mercy.

But there is a cure for this cruelty, this coldheartedness. This remedy is not in us. We cannot warm our cold hearts of ourselves. In order to make our hearts warm with love and mercy, we must go to the fire of mercy and love which blazed from the heart of the Lord Jesus, which shone from the heart of the heavenly Father when He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

When we hear this Gospel that Jesus died for us on the cross, that the Father sacrificed the best and dearest that He had, His only begotten Son, for us, and when through this Gospel of faith in Christ and his redemption is engendered in our hearts, than with this faith there enters also charity and mercy. That is the fountain from which we can draw mercy and charity. That is the only fire of love at which we may warm our cold hearts. The only thing which can make the hearts of men merciful is the mercy of God given us in Jesus Christ. It was this that changed the heart of Paul, and it is this that still makes men kind and merciful. There is no other source. The only source of mercy is the love of Jesus Christ revealed in the Gospel.

If our hearts, if we are Christians, have been renewed by this heart renewing gospel and yet because of the old Adam still clinging to us, our hearts are often as evil and bad as the hearts of others. Our sinful heart is still inclined to rejoice in the misfortune of others. And when we hear of the good fortune of our neighbors, we only too often wonder why that could not have happened to us. Or when we have wronged someone and hurt their feelings by unnecessary and harsh words or by rude and thoughtless actions and we make a plea for their pardon, we expect them to be ready to forgive and forget. But when we have been wronged by the thoughtless words or actions of others and they begged for our pardon, how slow we often are to assure them of our forgiveness and how hard it is for us to forget.

Or if by some ill fortune by the permission of divine providence, we are in danger of suffering hunger and exposure due to a lack of proper food and clothing, how eagerly and anxiously we would look for others to relieve our need and help us in our distress. But when we see others in physical need and distress, how slow we often are to do all we can to help them. Or if our home has been stricken with sickness or sorrow because of the loss of a loved one, how anxiously we await the words and deeds of kindness and sympathy from our friends and neighbors. And yet how reluctant we often are in speaking words of comfort and doing deeds of kindness, when our friends and neighbors are suffering from sickness or sorrowing over the loss of a loved one. Yes, when we are in some kind of physical distress how we long for the mercy and kindness of others and how we do appreciate it. But how sluggish we often are in showing the same mercy and kindness to others.

Let these things suffice to help us to recognize our lack of mercy and kindness toward our fellow men. And recognizing this sin let us repent of it. Let us acknowledge it to God and let us rejoice that Christ has died also for this lack of mercy, this lack of love and of kindness on our part. Let us in confident faith, look to the cross of Christ our Savior and let us pray God that he may by his example create in our hearts through mercy and charity. If we feast our souls on God's love and mercy in Christ Jesus, our hearts will be warmed with mercy and love toward our fellow men.

In the Christian there is at least the beginning of imitating God's mercy. Only the Christian can truly pray: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." The very prayer in which we ask for mercy teaches us also to render the deeds of mercy. May God increase our faith in His mercy and thus make our hearts ever more merciful. For if the beginning of a truly merciful heart is made in us by faith in Christ, then we shall be truly blessed.

But what is the blessedness of those merciful? Jesus says in the words that we read before: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." But how is this, many people ask? If they are merciful, are they then not as God would have them be? If they are merciful, why need they then obtain mercy? Let us remember that although the merciful Christians have obtained mercy, forgiveness and kindness and kindness has actually begun to take root in their hearts, yet this renewal within them, this new growth of love and charity is still imperfect and insufficient. Hence, even the best of these merciful Christians must say: "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags."

And because they are still in many ways guilty of a lack of mercy and kindness, they are still daily in need of mercy and forgiveness themselves. And that is their blessing. They daily and richly obtain mercy. For all his shortcomings, defects and sins, whether committed by thoughts, words, or deeds, whether they are sins of commission or sins of omission, the Christian obtains and has forgiveness with God.

God daily and richly forgives all sins to all believers. He does not deal with them according to His justice, but according to His grace. With them God deals as a loving Father. The weaker and more wretched one of his children is, the greater is the love,

attention, mercy and goodwill which the Father bestows upon it. These Christians do not ask God for what they deserve and merit. They ask God every day to be gracious to them. And praying God for mercy and forgiveness, they have the blessed assurance of forgiveness in Christ. Yes, they shall obtain mercy.

And if God is so merciful to forgive them their many sins, will He not be merciful to them also in their earthly concern? If that pure and holy God who hates sin above all things, daily and richly forgives them all their shortcomings, will He not also grant them that other mercy? Will He not lead and guide them? Will He not deliver them from all evil? Will He not guard and protect them against all danger? Whatever may trouble them, whether sickness, enemies, slander, hatred, or persecution, and though the cross be ever so heavy and their misfortune appear ever so cruel, they shall obtain mercy. Their faith in their eternal inheritance will be guarded. They will be led, not according to their own counsel, but according to God's wondrous loving and merciful counsel and will finally be received into glory. Oh, how blessed beyond all comparison, blessed beyond all other people, are they who know that they shall obtain mercy.

Let us pray. Merciful Father in heaven, in Thy love Thou hast prepared forgiveness for us in the sacrifice of Thy son. Make us more conscious of the greatness of this, Thy love, so that we may not only obtain mercy from Thee through faith in that Savior, but that we may also learn from Thee to show mercy and kindness to our fellow men. Keep us in Thy love for thy Son, our Savior's sake. Amen