



The implications of blessed are the merciful (eleemon) in matthew 5:7 as practiced in the African society

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Received 20 Feb 2023; Accepted 3 Mar 2023; Published 15 Mar 2023

Abstract

The implications of blessed are the Merciful (eleemon) in Matthew 5:7 as Practiced in the African context. A hermeneutical an exegetical analysis of the text was carried out and its implications in the African society were carefully examined. The focus of the paper was to draw attention of African Christians to the teachings of Jesus on the moral laws as against the concept of reciprocity of love within their society, which according to them is returning the good done to one back to the doer directly or indirectly. The concept of cause and effect is very prominent in this society. The application of the findings of this paper the meaning of the Aramaic word "Chesed" will help the People in African society to restore the dignity of true service to humanity through obeying the teachings of Jesus.

Keywords: blessed and merciful, jesus, african society,

Introduction

The teaching of Jesus on the Beatitudes is one that is centered on moral laws of their time, which provide a good guide to humanity. The Beatitudes are in the opening section of the Sermon on the Mount, the longest ever recorded teachings during the lifetime of Jesus Christ while on Earth. The teaching presupposes that as humans, we could need help from one another. There is an African proverb which states;

If one's back scratches him or her he turns to someone else to help him Scratch the place (Ibo Proverb).

Matthew's illustrations of Jesus show the Messiah as a person of action in word and in deed. His presentation in this gospel alternates between the sections of action and that of teaching. This is the mark of a good teacher, like Jesus Christ. According to Edersheim ^[1], when Jesus prepared to teach His disciples the Kingdom principles, they were not presented in a form that was ambiguous, but rather in a familiar method to encapsulate fresh ideas in them. He observed that what made the new teaching unique was not only the application of the old forms or format, spoken in the old language that the people were used to, but rather, the ideals of what Jesus taught was in contrast to the old order of teaching on Judaism.

The underline reasons why Jesus taught on these unique issues in the Beatitudes appears central to Him. There was no doubt that their religion provided efficient and skillful teachers ^[2]. However, being the Lord of the universe makes the difference. Most probably the quality of moral livelihood of their religious leaders left much to be deserved of them, because it lacks merit in their observation, hence Jesus new emphasis on addressing the problems created by the lapses in their moral laws.

For a society with that high level of strict religious observation and yet people still take the laws into their hands of cause, cannot be compared to that where anarchy is the other of the day. This will eventually lead to a total disregard to the rule of

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law and consequently graduate to a society where people are living in a world like there is no one else.

This teaching of Jesus on the Beatitudes is mostly needed in the underdeveloped world where subjugation, suppression and humiliation of their fellow humans are the order of the day. That is why we have lords and subjects no wonder the human right abuse is worse off in the African society. It is further worse off among the political elites, where there is victimization, intimidation, assassination, etc.

It is on this note that this study has set as its agenda to address and to draw people's attention to the teaching of Jesus on Blessed are the Merciful. The problems this paper intend to solve are,

- To make people to appreciate and learn to show mercy to one another,
- To restore the moral dignity of man through obeying God's moral laws of being Merciful.
- To ascertain whether the word Merciful was used in its proper meaning.

The methodology adopted for this study include a hermeneutical an exegetical analysis of the text, while other additional materials were sourced from Journals, Bibles, Books, the print media, internet and through personal interviews which of cause served as primary source.

Definition of terms

Blessed

The word blessed (makario in Greek) while the verb in Greek is (eulogeo).

The Greek word makarioi is an adjective that means "happy" which in English refers to chance, good luck. This could also be seen in words like happily, happiness. According to Robertson, it appears that English has ennobled "blessed" to a higher rank than "happy ^[3]."

Clarke Adam on his own summaries the word blessed as was

used by Christ, meaning happy as one who is not under the influence of fate or chance but rather controlled by an All-wise providence God that is there to achieve His divine glory [4].

The Encarta dictionary state that the word blessed mean happiness or having good-luck [5].

The researcher on his own stand by the position held by these renowned Greek Scholars that the word blessed means happy.

Merciful

The concept of "mercy" is expressed in Greek mostly through words derived from the root *ele-* (such as in the familiar liturgical phrase "Kyrie, eleison"),

- The noun *eleos* is best translated "mercy" or "compassion," since it normally expresses positive feelings toward someone; the translation "pity" is not good, since "pity" in English often implies looking down on someone less fortunate, feelings of superiority that are not part of the Greek concept of *eleos* [6].
- The verb *eleeo* might literally be translated "to mercy" or "to compassion"; but since it is not proper English to say "I mercy you" or "You compassion someone", we need to employ helping verbs to translate this Greek verb into English: "to have mercy or compassion" or "to show mercy or compassion" or "to be merciful" [7]. This study agrees with the submission of scholars that the word mercy means to show an act of kindness, compassion to any one in need irrespective of tribe, religion or tongue.

Exegesis

The Sitz-Im-lebem of the Sermon on the Mount otherwise known as the Beatitudes traditionally was conducted in an unnamed mount probably located on the northwest of Sea of Galilee. According to Matthew's account, the great multitude Jesus attracted came from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, and Judea and beyond Jordan. Thus, "seeing the multitudes he went up to a mountain" Matt.5:1.

The direct application of English dictionaries in trying to obtain the true meaning of the key word "Mercy" is of limited help in understanding this word merciful in a true biblical sense. In

English, the word "mercy" is normally used to mean showing compassion, forbearance, pity, sympathy, forgiveness, kindness, tenderheartedness, liberality or refraining from harming or punishing offenders or enemies. These synonyms give us some insight on this word; but they all express how a merciful person might act. However, none of them specifically pictures what Biblical mercy is all about, because the scriptural concept is virtually untranslatable into a single English word, hence it puts the none Greek reader into the problem of what to do next or to resort to the alternative [8]. Furthermore, the Greek word *eleemon*, means essentially the same as its English counterpart, "merciful." However, in all likelihood Jesus spoke in Aramaic, and the idea behind His statement about mercy came from the Old Testament-that is, from the Hebrew-usage and teaching. The word He preferably used was the Hebrew and Aramaic word "*chesed*" (refers to someone in trouble) [9]. It is with this emphasis that William Barclay's *Daily Study Bible* commentary on Matthew regarding the word: According to him, this does not mean only to sympathize with a person in the popular sense of the term; it does not mean simply to feel sorry for someone in trouble. The true meaning of *Chesed*, which the English misrepresented by a mere act of mercy, however the true meaning of "merciful" is the ability to get right inside the other person's skin until we can see things with his eyes, think things with his mind, and feel things with his feelings [10].

Clearly this is much more than an emotional wave of pity; this demands quite a deliberate effort of the mind and of the will. It denotes a sympathy which is not given, as it were, from outside, but which comes from a deliberate identification with the other person, until we see things as he sees them, and feels things as he feels them. This is *sympathy* in the literal sense of the word; however, *sympathy* is derived from two Greek words, *syn* which means *together with* and *paschein* which means *to experience or to suffer*. *Sympathy* means *experiencing things together with the other person*, literally going through what he is going through [11]. This crucial understanding of the true meaning of being "Merciful" is one the missing gap this paper is trying fill.

Table 1: The occurrences of the greek word mercy and their likes in the new testament [12]

Greek	English	Grammar	Meaning	Mark	Matt	Luke	Acts	John	Paul	Cath	Rev	Total
(ELEEO)	Eleecō	Verb	"to have mercy, compassion"	3	8	4	0	0	12	2	0	29
(ELEOS)	Eleos	Noun	"mercy, compassion"	0	3	6	0	0	11	8	0	27
(ELEEMOSYNE)	Eleēmosynē	Noun	"alms"	0	3	2	8	0	0	0	0	13
(OIKTIRMOS)	oiktirmos	Noun	"sympathy, mercy"	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	5

It is wordy of note that the word mercy or compassion was never found in the book of John gospel; however, a similar idea that expresses such as "love one another" was used. This could be established through the analysis carried above. The composition of the beatitudes in itself shows a special work of art, a well-crafted gem to start the Sermon. They were carefully constructed in accordance with precedents in Jewish literature, the closest models being Sira 14.20-27 and the Qumran text 1 QH 6.13 [13].

Matthew 5:7 Maktirioi Oi Oielehmones Hoti Elentnsontai Elentnsontai (GMT4).

Matthew 5:7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. (Mat 5:7 NAS).

This form of repeated couplets is common in Jewish religious literature. The two lines of the couplet balances in various ways, sometimes positive and negative ([Blessed is the man who seeks wisdom] with a pure heart, and does not slander with his tongue [14], or complementary in some way; in the case of

Matthew the balance comes from each quality and the reward for it.

The ensemble of Matthew's Beatitudes is knit together by the line 'the kingdom of Heaven is theirs' at the beginning and end of the whole, which gives the sense to the whole composition. At the end of each quatrain comes the other keyword, *dikaiousu*, 'uprightness' or 'justice', a concept which was central to Matthew's ethical concern [15].

The tense and sometimes the sound of the verb of reward also serve as a balance to the concept: Other examples are;

- Verses 2 and 6 both ending with a future active verb with object
- Verses 3 and 7 both ending with a future passive verb ending [16].

Comparism between the sermon on the mount in matthew and luke gospels

In the different presentations by Matthew and Luke Gospels the following observations were made;

- Luke Sermon on the Mount appears to have been held in an unidentified location or plain Luke. 6:17 whereas that of Matthew was held in a Plain Matthew 5:1.
- Furthermore, the person under reference in Matthew is in the 3rd person plural while in Luke it is in the 2nd person plural.
- Similarly while the Beatitudes in Matthew was centered on spiritual qualities that of Luke was on Physical and material things [17].

Ingratitude, meekness and merciful acts

The world in which we live show the qualities of its nature, it is unmerciful. The world prefers to insulate itself against the pains and calamities of others. It finds revenge delicious and forgiveness tame and unsatisfying. The mercy Jesus teaches is not humanly derived. This occurs, not because we merit mercy by being merciful or forgiving of others, but because we cannot receive the mercy and forgiveness of God unless we imbibe it through exemplary living [18].

Recognizing God's mercy is a key element in motivating our expressions of mercy. Too many people today, even in the church, possess a "welfare mentality." They go through life with little or no gratitude, thinking they deserve the handouts of governments or those assistances from private citizens. Ingratitude is vital to understanding this because, as long as one is unthankful, and appreciative in what others have done to help him in one stage of life or other, his thoughts will continue to deceive him [19]. A merciful person is sensitive to others' needs and takes action to supply them. An ungrateful person, though, insulates himself from others' pains because he is too focused on his own perceived miseries; still owe humanity a duty to care for others in need.

The practice of mercy in the African society

The art of showing mercy or being sympathetic in the Africa society has been misunderstood to meaning paying back, retaliation or being reciprocal in action, this is contrary to the teachings of Jesus on showing mercy. The mosaic law of "an

eye for an eye, tooth for tooth and like for like" appears to be the other of the day [20]. Furthermore, Africans believe in remembering those that helped them during the rainy day and cannot throw away valuable gifts to one who never assisted him or her in life. Doing the contrary is like throwing away a valuable to the dogs [21]. Among other Africans believe that mercy is not for dash. Mercy should be shown to one that covered his nakedness and not a free for all things [22]. From this interview granted by another Ghanaian Bishop, who believes that some people cannot receive mercy because of their evil doing [23]? This paper is encouraging African Christians to come alive and abide by the teachings of Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount which is based on the moral laws.

Relationship between Blessed and Merciful

The relationship between Blessed and Merciful was giving in this teaching to produce a strong bond too hard to be broken, but this is there for effective execution of this divine act. While from the Greek, Blessed means happy or happiness, and Mercy are giving of help to one in need without any attachment to it. In the Beatitudes, Jesus gave the pattern to follow through His teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. It is in the performance of the act of mercy that the doer will experience fulfilled, joy and happiness. However, it is unfortunate that no one who practices tooth for tooth or an eye for an eye that will receive such as a fulfillment.

It is important to note that showing the act of mercy is done on behalf of God and he alone should receive the glory. However, it is unfortunate that people are celebrated, praised for doing act of mercy in our African society. It is wordy of note that Jesus was very careful in His choice of these words of Blessed and merciful, the motive behind this act of mercy should not be influenced. A proper observation of these rules will rule out tribalism, religious inclination, ethnicity, political attachment and others interferences that could hamper the effective execution of this divine mandate.

Interviews granted for Africans to express their acts of mercy

In an interview conducted for twenty-five (25) Africans from various tribes at different places and time. Questions on the African concept of showing the act of mercy was posed to them independently and their response appeared simultaneously into four groups:

According to Asawofile and his group of six others, their answer was, "Favour is usually shown to the one who remembered them on the raining day, we do not throw valuable things to anybody, and they further quoted Jesus case of not giving what is holy to the dogs [24]." In her view along with four others, they observed that, time of showing mercy is when you remember those who gave you a helping hands when the person was in dear need [25]."

For Jumbo and three other respondents, "they believe that favour or the act of showing mercy is not for dash, it is giving to the one who covered ones nakedness" According to them, they claim that it is even worse in the political class where positions are given through god fatherism [26]. Five others used

the idiom of "if you scratch my back and I scratch your back [27]." There is the group that believes that people suffer because of their evil doings and should be allowed to suffer till they die.

Discussion

The study examined the implication of Blessed are the Merciful in Matthew 5:7 in the African Society. Firstly, from the Greek understanding of the word merciful as was taught by Jesus and what is practiced within the African society appears to be at variance with each other. They do not seem to have a meeting point. It appears as if they have resorted to practicing the word according to their own understanding instead of getting to know the true meaning and the right application of the word. Secondly, from the teachings of Jesus, it is crystally clear that the issue of merciful is service directed to God, and not to any specific person that we owe a favour as it is practice in Africa. Thirdly, the practice of mercy in the Africa society is worse off within the political class. Those in political office prefer to die in office and when situation began to go against them, they prefer to hand over to either their children or to their close relative. It appears that at the heart of African mercifulness is greed. It is expedient that practicing this concept will help to bring a change in behavioral pattern that could propel a better service delivery to humanity and to God's glory. Finally, Africans should come of age by learning to appreciate one another, by living by the teachings of Jesus on being merciful to one another. It is a service initiated and directed by God where ethnicity, tribes and tongues have on impact.

Recommendations

As a result of the study carried on this paper, the researcher wish to make the following recommendations:

- African Christians should learn to practice the true teachings of Jesus through the show of a deep seated or rooted love or sympathy to one another irrespective of the personality of the person.
- Christians should live and practice the true and the original meaning of being merciful and not to allow sentiments to dragged one into the meaningless abuse words
- African Christians should carry their brothers along in every sector of human endeavor without any sentiment attach.
- Africans Christians should be transparent in their services to humanity
- The concept of tooth for tooth or an eye for an eye should die naturally among Africans Christians as this is not a Christian ethics.

Conclusion

The seriousness of the teaching of showing mercy to one another is a unique importance. Christians must not underestimate the value of this teaching on being merciful. Mercy begins with the way we feel about others or toward each other as one moves about on our earthy journey of merciful acts. The too much focus on one's self does not allow much room for a humble, kind and compassionate thoughts for service for others. The principle advocated by Jesus on being

merciful has no similarity. It is not given within the imagery of sowing and reaping, but of reciprocity, which shows reward more strongly as well as a more direct involvement by God. This is against the African Christian mentality of tooth for fat. Jesus plainly asserts that the merciful are blessed, but there is much more to mercy. Proverbs 21:13 gives us a practical example of this principle of Jesus teaching; "Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard."

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