

The Model of Missionary Mercy, Part 1

Luke 9:51

The theme of mercy, compassion, all those are connected to the attribute of God called the attribute of goodness, the goodness of God. An extension of the goodness of God is the love of God, that attribute of God, and flowing out of the goodness and love of God is God's mercy, his grace, and forbearance, and patience, mercy being that attribute of God that is demonstrated toward those in desperate, desperate need. So if you have your Bibles, you can turn to Luke's Gospel and find your way to Luke 9:51. We'll begin by reading Luke 9:51-56, that's our, our text.

"When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. When his disciples, James and John, saw it they said, 'Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?' But he turned and rebuked them and they went on to another village."

And as we join Jesus on his journey to Jerusalem, he is looking ahead, has his eyes set on what will happen in Jerusalem. That is, the rejection by the elders and chief priests and scribes, which he predicted back in verse 22 of this same chapter, followed by his death by crucifixion, but that is not the end that he has in view, just the rejection and his death by crucifixion.

He looked beyond his atoning work to the triumph of his resurrection, followed by his ascension into heaven, his joyful return to the father, to sit down at the father's right hand. All that is going to take place when Jesus reaches Jerusalem, that final destination, his rejection, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. And these events, all those events, involve some incredibly profound and significant themes in Scripture.

This is the fulfillment, all that Jesus has his eyes set on in the future, this is the fulfillment of an eternal decree. A decree that was made before time began, before there was ever a heaven and an earth; before there was anything material, before anything existed in time and space, when there was nothing but God. This decree that was made, this decree, what he has his eyes set on. What he's accomplishing in his death, burial,

resurrection, and ascension, will fulfill God's eternal plan of redemption, will seal the destiny of the elect, will glorify the wisdom of God by accomplishing both the perfect, uncompromising justice of God and at the same time extending the saving mercy of God.

So the theme of the text this morning is mercy, the mercy of God toward those who are in need. The mercy of God toward those who are lost, to those who are in darkness, to those who act out and speak out of the ignorance of unbelief. Those kinds of people are represented here in the text by the Samaritans. But apart from the kindness of God our Savior, you and I need to realize, this is us.

These Samaritans and their rejection of Jesus Christ, this is us. And what James and John have proposed about the snuffing out of their life isn't entirely wrong. To reject the eternal Son of God? Beloved, you and I, before God was gracious to us in time and space, this is us, rejecting the eternal Son of God. We deserved judgment for that act. We deserved judgment for our sin and our rebellion. But God extended mercy, mercy to us.

Naturally on our own we are disinclined to receiving Christ. We're all trapped in, before his grace, before his kindness, we're trapped in our bitterness. We're blinded by our

prejudices. We act according to old grievances. We exhibit petty jealousies and silly rivalries. And so these Samaritans are us folks, they're us.

Just notice, though, how Jesus treated their offense against him. Instead of exacting judgment, which they and all of us deserve, Jesus actually advocated for the Samaritans here. He sued for mercy, for peace, for patience, for toleration, for the sake of an eventual, realized peace. He sees, Jesus sees their present ignorance, and while he does not excuse them, here, but he has compassion on them. And he is the one who will accomplish that greatest work, taking care of their most profound need. And one day, it's actually in the text according to the timing of the text, it's one day very soon. It's not long from now he's going to send Spirit empowered missionaries to them, so that many of these Christ rejecting Samaritans will turn to God in faith, they will find forgiveness, they will find eternal salvation. Isn't that better by far?

This has been a major theme in Luke's Gospel from the very beginning. It's the theme of the book of Acts as well. Both Luke and Acts tell the story of God's mercy. Divine love that's extended to guilty, suffering sinners by the means of those who are sent by God as missionaries. Luke actually began his

narrative, telling the story of God's mercy, beginning with the very first missionary that we see in the text, which is who? Jesus Christ, sent to us. And Luke starts telling the story about that missionary, prepared, being sent by God, even before he was born. The story of divine mercy started back in Luke chapter 1 in the annunciation narratives, announcing the coming of Jesus the Messiah.

When God sends his mercy, it's not an abstract, disembodied concept. Notice that. He doesn't send mercy as an abstract principle taught and advocated by some guru in weird clothing, as some kind of ethical ideal we all must strive for. When God sends mercy, notice that he sends a person, flesh and blood. He sends not just a person he sends an infant, born in a normal human way. He sends a helpless babe, laid in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes. It's the very picture of God's tenderness in his mercy. That child grew from infancy into childhood and then from childhood into manhood, experiencing all the things that we experience in life. When God sends his mercy, he sends his one and only Son, not abstracted, but incarnated. His favorite title Son of Man, Son of Man.

If you haven't been following along in your Bibles with me, what Chapter 1, 2, 3, 4, now it's time. Turn to Luke 4:14. I

want to show you as he commences his ministry and see how the Son of Man, how this preacher of divine mercy, sent to show divine mercy, how he entered into a ministry of mercy. Again, as we said, we're leaving the first section today of Luke's Gospel. The theme of that section has been the introduction of God's mercy in Christ. Holy angels announced the coming of Christ, miracles of power, supernatural acts of mercy validated Jesus as the Christ that was truly commissioned by God. And then God revealed Jesus' identity as the Christ of God to his chosen apostles, to his disciples.

This is Luke's plan in the beginning of this Gospel, his first section, Luke 4:14 to 9:50, to announce, introduce, validate, and identify as, Jesus as the true Christ of God. This is the one that God sent into the world to show his mercy. It all started in Galilee, announced first in Jesus' home town of Nazareth. Look at chapter 4 verse 14, "Jesus returned," returned from where? "from the wilderness," where he just basically sabotaged the devil's intent to derail him from his mission. "So he returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee. And a report about him went out throughout all the surrounding country, and he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. And he came up to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he

stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him and he unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'"

The very next phrase in Isaiah, "and to proclaim the judgment of vengeance of God." He stopped there, he didn't proclaim it, he did not read that. It says "he rolled up the scroll," verse 20, "and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' Everyone spoke well of him, marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth."

Sadly, these Nazarenes, his own people, rejected him. So Jesus established ministry headquarters in Capernaum. He still had a mission of mercy to accomplish. The people of Capernaum, not Nazareth, but Capernaum, they would become the beneficiaries of these gracious words. They would marvel at the power of his preaching, the glory of God in his works of mercy. They and so

many others in and around Galilee would become both witnesses and beneficiaries of divine mercy.

And as we review the chapters, you can track along with me in your Bibles, we can, we can track the nature and the character of Jesus' mission of mercy. So follow along in your Bibles, just scan the pages. In chapter 4 you can see that after this event, they come down into verse 31. And Jesus shows mercy to a man who is possessed by an unclean spirit, casting out the demon. He also, next, heals Peter's mother-in-law of this debilitating fever. By the end of that day, word has gotten out, and he is healing everyone who's brought to him, who are sick with various diseases. He's casting out demons from many.

Flip over into chapter 5. Jesus shows mercy to a leper. He actually cleansed the man, doing what no one would do by touching him. That's unheard of. It shows mercy. He heals a paralytic, next, with a word. He calls this despised tax collector Levi to personal discipleship. And then he eats with all of Levi's socially unacceptable friends.

Chapter 6, Jesus shows mercy to a man with a, a withered hand, starting in verse 6 and following, a man who was unable to work, a man who was ostracized by the Pharisees and the scribes and Jesus shows mercy. He calls the Twelve of his disciples to



be his apostles in verses 12 through 16. That's an immediate mercy to those twelve men, but it's a far-flung, far-reaching mercy to us, to the church. And then Jesus teaches. He delivers the Sermon on the Mount, laying down principle after principle of divine mercy. "I say to you who hear," verse 27, "love your enemies." That's mercy. He says, "Love your enemies," verse 35, "and do good. Lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great. You'll be sons of the Most High, for he is kind," or merciful, "to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful as your father is merciful." Incredible mercy!

Chapter 7, Jesus shows mercy to the dying servant of a Roman centurion. That's incredible mercy because these Romans are the occupying force in Israel. He doesn't take political sides, there. He shows mercy. He sees the transcendent principle, and he loves this Roman centurion. He loves him, shows mercy.

Next, he raises the only, one and only son of a widow, a desperate widow. Bereaved of her husband and about to be bereaved of her son, she has been bereaved of her son, he died. He stops the funeral procession in progress and he does again what no other person would do, he touched the bier, the funeral bier. He stopped the procession, and he raised that son from the

dead. An insignificant little village called Nain, we would never know about it except for what he accomplished there. At the end of the chapter, he shows mercy again. He receives the worship of a forgiven woman. He accepts her whom all others had rejected. In mercy and kindness he received her to himself. He identified with her rather than with the guests at the table.

Chapter 8, we see Jesus showing mercy to fearful apostles, verses 22 and following. He calms a raging storm on the Sea of Galilee by commanding the wind and the waves, using power, again, to show mercy. He casts out, next, the legion of demons from the Gerasene man, and then he extends mercy even further to the entire region of the Decapolis by sending that man back as a missionary to take good news to his own people and in mercy, Jesus raised the one and only daughter of Jairus and his wife from the dead. While he was traveling along the way to their home, he stops to pay attention to a woman who's been suffering from a twelve year hemorrhage. And he shows mercy to her, too.

In chapter 9, the chapter we've been studying Jesus shows mercy to all of Galilee. At the very beginning, he sends out the twelve apostles to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal. In mercy and compassion, Jesus feeds five thousand men, women and children besides. And then as we've seen most recently, Jesus

cast out the demon of the one and only boy of a devastated father, literally giving this boy back to his father as in life from the dead. Restoring not only life but relationship.

That's mercy, mercy after mercy after mercy after mercy. Just the first section in Luke's Gospel. It is the story of the magnanimous, supernaturally powerful mercy of God toward the desperate needs of suffering people. That's what makes the lesson in Luke 9:51 to 56 so important for us to hear. As we said, James and John, in Luke 9:51 and following, they're ready to nuke a Samaritan village. And they're asking permission from Jesus, thinking this is his heart. They expect a, yes, answer. They failed to recognize that he is the very model of missionary mercy. He embodies, incarnates God's mercy. He's been sent on a mission of mercy to manifest the nature and the character of divine mercy to those who are in such desperate need. And then he's commissioned these men to show mercy as well, and what do they do?

So let's talk about that. These apostles obviously, they desperately needed this instruction. But what about you? What about me? If we can go back and get into the minds of these first century men and then, when we're honest in assessing ourselves, in thinking about our thoughts, in coming to stop and

analyze and assess our own judgments, our attitudes toward people, we come to see how seldom we show mercy. We come to see how often harshness, and impatience, and selfishness, and intolerance, how often that can be our first instinct as well.

The lack of mercy has its source in pride, for those who show no mercy, those who are unsympathetic, who lack empathy and compassion for others and fail to pursue it, that's a clear sign of ugly, small-minded pride. And where pride is embedded deeply in the heart, self-focus dominates the thought life, self-concern dominates the life. There is no mercy. Folks, we can be like that, can't we? We have to root out pride from our hearts and kill it. We need to see it for the deadly cancer that it is, which means we've all got a lot to learn about mercy, don't we?

My introduction took all the time. But that's okay because verse 51 is, really, a pivotal verse in understanding the rest of the story. Mercy is characterized by firmness. Mercy is characterized by firmness. That might not have been the word that you called to mind as you thought, "What goes in that blank?" You might have thought mercy is characterized by softness or flexibility. Not here. Not now. We'll get to those qualities in a second or next week, I guess. We typically think of mercy though as, we don't typically think of mercy as

something firm, something rigid, something hard, and inflexible, but that just shows us how we don't always think biblically about virtue.

We tend to feel our way to what we think is true, rather than reading God's Word and thinking his thoughts, which are the essence of truth. So we need to scrap our preconceived notions about what we think mercy is. Scrap our preconceived notions about we think love is. We need to go back to Scripture and see what God tells us. So look again at verse 51, "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem." That verse paints a picture of firmness. It paints a picture of resolve. To set one's face to do something, that is an idiomatic phrase in this culture. The verb that Luke uses there, *sterizo*, it, it denotes stability, lasting, long term fixedness. It denotes solid, solidity, strength, particularly when facing difficulty.

In fact, as one author put it, "It is precisely in the midst of the worse difficulties that changeless fixedness must be shown." That's Jesus, here. Knowing what awaited him in Jerusalem, Jesus has set his face to go to Jerusalem. He more than anyone knew what suffering, what difficulty, what deadly painful hostility would meet him there and so he steeled his

spine, he set his jaw, he leaned into it. And he was resolved, he was determined, he was rigid and inflexible about accomplishing his mission, especially in view of all the pain and the danger that faced him. This is a manly quality, to face danger, difficulty, suffering, never shrinking back, but always facing forward, always leaning into it, hitting it head on.

Here's Jesus, verse 51, he's on the march. He's heading to Jerusalem. He's fixed, he's resolved, he's uncompromisingly firm on where he's going, about what's ahead of him, what he has to do. Nothing will deter him. What we need to see is that this rigidity, this resolute attitude, it is borne, here, out of a deep commitment to this divine mission of mercy. This is his commission, which is, from the very beginning, it is from God and the reason he's teaching us. Now, can you guess, right, to send us, we're Christians, this is what we do, we go out. We're sent, commissioned by God. We need to realize that we, you and me beloved, we, we are his representatives taking the mercy of God to all those who need it, and there are so many who need it.