

The Model of Missionary Mercy, Part 3

Luke 9:51-56

We are returning to the text that we started last week, Luke 9:51-56. We're studying in Luke 9:51 following. This is Jesus, the model of missionary mercy. So let's look at our Bibles and read the 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. And 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."

Jesus showed us, first, that mercy is characterized by firmness. It's not the word you would typically expect to follow, mercy, but here it is, "Jesus set his face." Mercy is characterized by firmness. That is to say that true mercy, biblically defined mercy, is a God-centered mercy. It's not man-

centered. It's primarily God-centered, and then it looks outward to man. And God's mercy is not a matter of simply fixing superficial problems. It's not simply a matter of solving temporal issues. God is concerned, of course, about all of our pains and our sorrows, which is why he placed upon Christ, Isaiah 53, all our griefs, and he carried all our sorrows.

Listen, divine mercy doesn't stop at the surface. It doesn't just merely look at the complaint and the presenting problem. Divine mercy goes to the root and the heart of the problem, the heart of the matter. Divine mercy looks at the person as a person and doesn't just throw money at a presenting problem. Divine mercy truly cares. Divine mercy looks past whatever is presented and says, what is the real issue? How do I really help this person?

Divine mercy requires investigation and time. It looks at the person begging for change at the freeway off-ramp and realizes that money may, indeed, support an enslaving, life-destroying habit. And the drug and alcohol habit that started many years earlier when the person turned to a substance to numb whatever pain it was, rather than to turn to the true and living God. The Bible calls that sin. And that's the route that this person's sin went. We don't condemn the sinner; we weep over

that person. We're concerned, truly concerned, feeling great compassion for his or her condition. We see in front of us the degrading effects of enslavement to sin. And so we talk with the person about the Gospel. Why don't we do that over a hamburger to relieve some immediate physical need? Sure, if the situation permits.

We act in mercy when we think from a God-centered, not a man-centered perspective. We realize that divine mercy did not stop with us until sin was condemned, until death was dead, conquered in the cross. Divine mercy doesn't stop until we are truly and wholly sanctified, and divine righteousness prevails forever. That is what Jesus had on his mind as the days drew near for him to ascend back to heaven. His ascension, as we said, it would be immediately preceded by rejection, then death for sins, then the burial of his body, and then his resurrection in triumph. And he had to steel his spine, he had to set his face like flint and fix his will on journeying to Jerusalem.

Jesus here is irreversibly resolved. He's inflexibly rigid about this matter. He is firm about the true demands of mercy, and he's not going to settle for less than final judgment on sin, the death of death itself. He's also firm, as we saw last week, about the divine time frame of mercy. He's not going to be

budged off into a, a man-centered time frame, man's demands. He's going to follow the leading of the Spirit of God. He's also firm, here, about the future needs of mercy as he's here preparing his Apostles for their future administration of God's mercy in and through the ministry of the church.

As we said last time at the very end, God sent forth his Son, didn't he? *Apostello*, to send forth. Jesus sent forth others. He started with his Apostles. Literally, they are the sent out ones. And we, too, beloved, today are sent out by extension, because of Jesus' Great Commission. We are sent out to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe everything Jesus commanded. This is a mission of mercy; that is what we're doing here as a church.

Are we concerned about physical problems? Are we concerned about clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, giving water to those who are thirsty, visiting those who are in prison? Absolutely. But let us never forget what explains all of that is a need for forgiveness, for reconciliation with God. And that comes only through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's what Jesus is firm about here, and we, too, need to be firm about that issue.

These are ways that we need to grow if we're to follow Jesus' example as a missionary of mercy. We've seen the firmness of Jesus' mercy. Now we're going to see the kindness and meekness of his mercy. Mercy is characterized by kindness, by kindness. Jesus' firm resolve, it anchored the mercy of Christ deeply into the sovereign purpose of God, that decree to save sinners. And the firm resolve of Jesus' mercy became a foundation for showing kindness and consideration to people. That was his launching point. The starting point is the firmness of mercy, a stability that then he could then show kindness.

We can see this in the text here. Those who are merciful don't force themselves upon others. They just trust God to open the way before them. Look at verse 52, Well, "When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem." He's firm, here, in the sovereign, saving purposes of God, and so he sets out and, verse 52, "he sent messengers ahead of him who went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make preparations for him."

Now it's obvious even on the surface, here, that Jesus is showing kindness and consideration toward this Samaritan village that they're happening upon. He's being thoughtful, here. He's recognizing the burden of hospitality that he is requesting of

them. Think about it. He's, he's asking for room and board for at least himself, his Twelve, that's thirteen grown men. Some of these guys are strong, rugged fishermen. They eat a lot. Probably other disciples accompanying them as well. This would have stressed the resources of any small town or village, and he's being thoughtful, here. He's being kind and courteous to these people.

Listen, mercy, this is how we think about it, too, mercy is kind, isn't it? Mercy is considerate of others. And just stop and ask yourself for a second. You, we tend to think pretty well of ourselves, don't we? Oh, yeah, I'm a nice guy. I'm kind. I'm considerate. Are you? Are you? At every turn, think about your reactions to people. Are they filled with kindness? Are your thoughts filled with kindness toward other people? Or do you go through life thinking everyone owes you something? Are you polite? Are you well-mannered? Are you thoughtful?

As Christians, we should be, the most kind, of people. We should be, the most considerate. We should not look at anybody through human prejudice, through appearance. Look at people as people. After all, just look at our Lord, here. The merciful show of kindness, consideration, common courtesy. You might say mercy treats people with good manners. We act like gentlemen. We

take on the role of playing, always with people, the gracious host. No matter where we are, we're on God's property, aren't we? And so we, representing God on God's property, we're the gracious host. We show hospitality to all no matter where we are.

When we extend kindness, when we show consideration, we put ourselves in, in the position, though, of being taken advantage of, don't we? Are you willing to risk that? Are you willing to trust the good providence of God to direct your path? Will you navigate through life calmly, by his good and wise providence over your life, even using the rejection and the impoliteness of others to direct?

This becomes even more, more remarkable here in our text when we stop to recognize that Jews and Samaritans actually hated each other. They hated each other. And so what Jesus is doing here, it goes way beyond expectation when he shows consideration for this Samaritan village. Jews and Samaritans would find Jesus' behavior, here, remarkable. This deep-seated, historic animosity between Jews and Samaritans meant for his fellow Jews, like the twelve Apostles traveling with him, they would see this as a remarkable kindness, and they might even think of Jesus, here, as being just a bit naïve. I mean, Jesus,

these are Samaritans! Don't you know what you're dealing with, here? This is nothing remarkable for Jesus, though.

What sets you apart from everyone else in the world is when you love not your friends, not when you love nice people, not when you love people who go out of their way to show every consideration for you. And listen, in a, in a world like ours, in a capitalist economy, where consumer is king, and everybody is trying to fawn over you, to get your dollars into their pockets. You're treated, marketing gurus tell us, they set up, set up all kinds of ways to find, ways to flatter you, to make you feel good about yourself. They do it in the restaurants, in the stores, and everywhere else, and we've come to expect that.

Listen, love is not when we smile back at them. Real love, true Christian love, is when you love your enemies, when you love those who hate you and scorn you, despise you, when they look at you and say, the earth would be better off without you, when you love those people, when you show mercy and kindness and courtesy, and others-focused consideration. That's how Jesus is thinking as he approaches this Samaritan village. He's concerned about finding a place for rest, for nourishment, for his traveling party who are weary. But even that concern is not



single-minded and single-tracked. He's also concerned about those who might accommodate their needs. He's thinking about everyone.

This is normal thinking for Jesus. He doesn't look at people through the prism of ancient prejudices and racial bigotry. He doesn't make superficial judgments based on appearances, based on perceptions. Jesus has God's interests in mind, first, and then he thinks outward from there. And he knows God loves all people, and God extends mercy every single day to all people.

That said, we need to realize that Jesus is, here, not naïve. He knows the reception they're likely to receive, here. He knows that there's no love lost between Jews and Samaritans. He knows that there's no compassion shared between them, no kindness. This attitude went way, way back, both sides claiming historical and theological justification for their embittered hatred of one another. The animosity between Jews and Samaritans only deepened with time. Hostility between them became imbedded in both cultures, practiced by both as a matter of religion.

So don't get the idea that Jesus went skipping down the path to this village with sort of this naïve, pollyannish belief in the inherent goodness of all people. Oh, these Samaritans

will tap into their natural kindness, because they're good after all. No, Jesus knew what kind of reception might greet them at the city gate, but he sent messengers anyway.

Now apart from a commitment that he had resolved, firm about showing mercy even as the father in heaven is merciful, why do you think Jesus might have hope, here, that this Samaritan village would receive him and his disciples? What might encourage him to seek hospitality from this Samaritan village? Many in Samaria followed the idolatrous practices of their wicked kings. God was merciful to them even in their wickedness, even in their idolatry. He sent prophet after prophet after prophet to visit them, and men of the caliber of Elijah and Elisha. So you go back in history, and the Israelites, the Jews, looked back at these people as mixed-breed, racially impure and wholly corrupt. It's in their blood. They would say, it's in their DNA to be wicked and rotten.

So bringing this back up to date, back to the time of Jesus in the first century, the land of the Samaritans, it's west of the Jordan River. It sits right in the middle of Israel. You've got Galilee at the top and Judea at the bottom, Samaria right in the middle. Pretty inconvenient for Galilean Jews who want to travel south to worship in Jerusalem, which they have to do

three times a year. Many Jewish pilgrims refused to go through Samaria. They said, we're not going. We're not going through that corrupt land. So they opted, instead, for the less convenient route by far, going to the east of the Jordan River. That required two river crossings, dangerous, took weeks. Other Galilean Jews, though, decided to take the risk, and they journeyed through Samaria. That direct route only took three days. But it was a risk.

When you look back at John 4:9, now we make sense of how the Samaritan woman asked Jesus, "How is it you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" Even in asking the question, you can hear just a subtle reference to that racial hostility. She describes herself not as a Samaritan woman, but rather as a woman of Samaria. He, just a Jew. She, a woman of Samaria. She wears her prejudice on her sleeve, and her response to Jesus, it's subtly but noticeably it's a bit prickly, just a bit snarky. You think she's trying to get out of giving him a drink of water? Notice how Jesus looks past any slight. He looks past any insult. He responds in kindness and mercy, verse 10, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that's saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

It's a metaphor, right? He's offering her eternal life. That's what Jesus is doing here, and by being direct, going to the heart of the issue, he's bypassing her prejudices, he's going deeper than physical needs and cares, he's ignoring any flippancy or insult or intent to derail the conversation. With a heart full of kindness and compassion for this woman, he seeks to minister to her deepest need. In kindness he comes to her as an agent of God's abundant mercy. He doesn't treat her like a representative of the opposing tribe. He doesn't treat her like a member of a rival religious group, a cult, an aberration. He's treating this woman like a woman, like a person in need. He treats her like a person precious in God's sight, in need of saving grace.

Jesus exposes the extent and consequences of this woman's sin in verses 17-18, and again, notice how she tries to dodge and deflect, verse 19-20, "The woman said to him, 'Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet'" like, how does he know my past? "'Our fathers worshiped on this mountain,'" Mt. Gerizim, where there used to be a temple there, remember? You Jews destroyed it, "'but you say that in Jerusalem, that's the place where people ought to worship.'" "

Look at what she's doing, right? She's trying to avoid the light that Jesus just shined on her life. She's bringing up history, theology. But she doesn't understand even that, does she? She doesn't understand what she's saying. She thinks it might be useful at the moment to get this Jew off her case, though, so she all of a sudden becomes a, an astute theologian; let's talk about history. Let's talk about theology. Let's talk about my concern with you Jews.

Again, Jesus, here, he doesn't get into a debate about Mosaic authorship or authorship of historical books or the Psalms or the Writings. He doesn't talk about any of that, does he? He doesn't talk about the prophets. Bypasses the controversy in verses 21-24. He extends mercy to her, even revealing to her in verses 25 and 26, revealing to this woman, who is resistant from start almost to the very end, that he is the Christ of whom she has heard.

Now she gets it. God's grace has come to her. Her eyes are opened, her heart is opened and alive, and she takes off. She runs back to her village, read the ensuing conversation between Jesus and the confused disciples like: What are you doing here? Why, why are you talking to this woman, when we got stuff to do! What are we doing in Samaria, anyway?

Just one thing to note on that section. Jesus speaks, there, about missionary concerns in verse 35, "Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes. See that the fields are white for harvest." They look across the fields, the disciples, right then, and they can see these Samaritans running from the town of Sychar, running toward him. Look at verse 39, "Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me all that I ever did.'" So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them. And he stayed with them two days. And many more believed because of his word."

The Samaritans are ready to believe in him. They're ready to receive him. They're not responding in historic hostility. They show an unprecedented level of hospility, hospitality and kindness, respect and regard. And his disciples, he and his disciples, stayed there for two days.

What changed? What transformation? What melting away of all rivalry and tension and opposition and hostility? It all started because he cared for a person as a person. He ignored the historical animosity. He ignored the cultural prejudice, the theological rivalry. He refused to fear any potential harm from Samaritan hostility. Remember, he's been firmly fixed in divine mercy, and he's able out of that position to extend kindness to

a people who are historically, culturally, theologically hostile. Jesus shows us how to be missionaries of mercy. He treats these Samaritans as they are, they are people in need of salvation.

Beloved, is that how you look at people? Because I hope you're making a connection in your mind, seeing a parallel between Jews and Samaritans of Jesus' day and the historical, cultural, theological conflict that exists today between Christians and Muslims. Will you treat the Muslim and the Buddhist and the pagan and the vegan and the secular humanist and the LGBTQ advocate, or any other political progressive, will you treat that person as your neighbor? Will you treat that person as someone needing mercy and kindness and salvation? That's what Jesus did.