

The Model of Missionary Mercy, Part 4

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."

So we've seen mercy characterized by firmness, verse 51, mercy characterized by kindness, verse 52. Number 3, mercy is characterized by meekness. Mercy is characterized by meekness. Meekness is not a virtue that you notice when everything is going well. Meekness is not a virtue that you notice in people

when everybody's nice to them, when they're getting their way. Meekness requires trial, difficulty, insult, injury and then you get to see the patience, forbearance, long-suffering spirit of mercy.

So God set up a little test for the disciples, set up a little test, one that involves significant insult. In response to Jesus' kindness and consideration, verse 53, it says, "The people did not receive him because his face was set toward Jerusalem." Jesus sent an advance party to make preparations, but when the Samaritans learned about the intention of this group of Jews, that they're on their way to Jerusalem to attend the Feast of Booths at the Jerusalem temple, no less, and by the way, our temple is sitting wrecked on a hill back here because of the Jews, so they refuse hospitality. They close their doors, close their gates, and say, no! Keep walking.

Now is that rude? Yeah, it's rude, absolutely it's rude, especially in an ancient Near East context where hospitality is a universal characteristic of their kindness in every land. And when hospitality is refused like it is here, they are sending a message. They're signaling rejection; they're rehearsing that ancient opposition, and they are intentionally conveying insult to these Jews.

Look, how do you react to insults or slights or impolite behavior? How do you react? Some of us can't even handle when a server at a restaurant is churlish and rude, timely with our order. Some of us would have that impudent person fired! Get her out of here! Get him out of here! Others may not go that far, but they'll take time to write a negative review on social media, destroy that restaurant's reputation, warning others of the terrible treatment they endured at this establishment. Please don't go there. How dare they!

It's pretty weak, isn't it? Pretty weak. Especially in light of true wrongs, true insults, true persecutions. Beloved, persecutions like our brothers and sisters in Christ are facing all over the world, the kind of hostility and unkindness, not just rudeness, but physical danger, threats, persecutions, suffering, and even death. What in the world are we doing complaining about little points of rudeness toward us, and not even because of Christ, just because that server, whoever it is, woke up on the wrong side of the bed, and we get to be the target of that?

Yea, the Samaritans have been rude, here. They have been discourteous, wrong, insulting, and especially when you consider who Jesus is. I mean, we're not Jesus. So anything we get by

blo, by way of blow-back from the world, whether it's for the sake of Christ or just for the sake of the fact that they're being not nice to us, look, if the truth is told, we deserve so much worse, don't we? In fairness, could God send us to hell for our sins? Yes! Anything short of that is mercy.

But he, this is the Christ of God. This is the ruler of all creation, and Jesus is here over, willing to overlook it; he's willing to overlook this. Why? Because he realizes that these people, not these Samaritans, but these people, are trapped in ignorance. They're stuck in small-mindedness, of ancient rivalries, old grievances. They're still arguing over land, placement of temples, water rights in wells, mountains, priority of relation to the Patriarchs and promises. They're in exactly the same spot as the woman at the well, aren't they, when Jesus first met her.

So Jesus is willing, eager to show them mercy, to react in meekness, not at all in vengeance. Samaritans, here, they're not rejecting Jesus because they know who is really is, because there a Christ-rejecting people in any informed sense. They're just ignorant. And so Jesus, on this mission of mercy, he is meek in his mercy. He is meek in his kindness. He's willing to let that insult go. He's not going to take this personally.

Besides, he's on a divine timetable; he needs to get to Jerusalem.

So as Jesus walks away, as he continues down the road, the disciples, James and John, ready to take up the offense, they're not going to let this go, verse 54, they're, they're out there already, writing their negative review on Yelp. "When Jesus' disciples," verse 54, James and John, "saw it, they said, 'Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?'" You can't fault these guys for lacking zeal, can you? Make no mistake, when they suggest this course of action, they're speaking with all sincerity. They're not joking. This is not hyperbole. This isn't a metaphor. They're ready to nuke the village and turn it into a pile of burning rubble. It's not an ignorant zeal and passion. They truly believe that Christ's permission is going to result in fire falling from heaven.

Why this course of action, though? Why fire from heaven? Where'd they get that idea? Well, there are several reasons for that. Obviously, they'd recently seen Elijah with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Elijah was a prophet that went to the northern kingdom of Israel. That's Galilee territory; that's their home ground and Samaria. When Elijah confronted King Ahab and the Baal worship, he and his wicked wife Jezebel were

promoting in the land, remember Elijah was the one who called down fire from heaven to consume the prophets of Baal. Severe judgment.

It's probably not the incident, though, that they're thinking of when they're thinking about calling down fire on the impoliteness of this village. Back in 2 Kings, if you're reading through again, daily Bible reading, you've read through this, King Ahaziah of Israel, he'd taken a nasty fall in his royal palace. And this palace, if you'll note, was in Samaria. So as he lay sick from his injuries, Ahaziah was worried about the outcome of his injuries, and he sent messengers to go "and inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this sickness." Thorough pagan, isn't he?

God sent Elijah to intercept the messengers of the king of Samaria and to tell them, "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron? Well, now, therefore thus says the Lord, 'You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.'" Messengers returned to Ahaziah the king, said, "Here's what the prophet said," and then they ducked. King got mad. He sent captains of his military with fifty men to arrest Elijah, bring him in as a captive before the king. He's going to

put him in bars, make a public mockery out of him, this king living in Samaria.

Remember, he's a forerunner to the present Samaritan hostility. He is ready, here, to insult the man of God in a significant way. He didn't intend to receive Elijah with respect and regard, oh, let me hear more from the God of Israel. No. He's going to show him the utmost disrespect, ready to haul him in like a common criminal. So it says in 2 Kings 1:9-13, he sent fifty men. He sent a captain of fifty men, and fifty men, a detachment of soldiers to arrest Elijah. Captain said, "Elijah, come down, submit to the arrest," and Elijah said, "If I'm a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." You know what happened? Fire came down from heaven and consumed the fifty.

Happened a second time, same thing, only in the second, the second captain sounded even more demanding, more insulting. Fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty as well. The king seems willing to keep on sending his captains and his soldiers into the fire, so he dispatches a third detachment, another captain, another fifty men. This last captain said, Huh. I think I'm going to take a different approach. Second Kings 1:13, Captain came, fell on his knees before Elijah, entreated

him, "O man of God, please let my life, and the life of these fifty servants of yours, be precious in your sight." Well, that man lived, along with his fifty. Finally, a little respect, right? Just gotta burn a few people up, and you get a little respect around here!

Now, if you don't see the parallel, James and John sure did. They know that the one who is greater than Elijah is walking with them. He's the leader of their party. He has come, showing remarkable con, condescension, unprecedented kindness. This is how they respond? This is how you react to this kindness and consideration from the Messiah himself? How dare you! Again, you can appreciate their zeal.

It's an interesting way that they ask for Jesus' permission "Lord, do you want?" It's the word, want. "Do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" They fully expect Jesus to grant permission, that he wants that, too. They believe that they know what he wants at this moment in the face of the Samaritan insult. They really believe that they have God's interests in mind, and Christ's interests in mind.

After all, didn't Jesus just say, not, Luke 9:48, "Whoever receives this child in my name receives me?" The Samaritans hadn't received the children Jesus sent to them, the messengers

who came in his name. So they didn't receive them; they didn't receive Jesus. They didn't receive Jesus; "they don't receive the Father who sent him," either, and they don't receive the father. Burn 'em at the stake!

So James and John intend to incinerate the Samaritans, nuke the village for the offense of not receiving the messengers, not welcoming Christ, not showing hospitality to Christ. They assume Jesus has the same sentiment. But think again. Think again. James and John should probably have taken notice of Jesus' physical posture at this point, his physical orientation. What do I mean by that? Look at the final two verses, 55, 56, "Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went on to another village." Jesus turned. He turned. Why did he turn? What does that tell us? Tells us that Jesus had already been walking away. He'd already been moving on.

They could have discerned what he wanted by his reaction to the Samaritan insult, that he just kept moving. He took that as a divine direction. Oh, not this village, God. Okay. I'm walking on to that village. So he's walking ahead of them, and he has to turn around to talk to them. So he's not making a big deal, here, out of their refusal to show hospitality. He's not demanding personal respect. He's walking away. That told them

what he had wanted. That told them everything they needed to know about what he had wanted. He wanted to move on.

When Jesus did turn around, verse 55, it says, "He rebuked them." Very strong word, there, *epitamao*, to strictly, negatively appraise somebody, to, to charge them as being blamable. In some contexts, it has the added sense of, of an injury that assesses a penalty to them. Boy, strong reaction, here. Why such a strong reaction? Because evidently, Jesus knows that there are some in this village who would one day be counted as children to be received, kingdom citizens to be welcomed. And short of that, even if there are no elective God in that particular village, you know what else he thinks? Now is the time of mercy, not judgment. First advent, mercy. Second advent, plenty of time for vengeance and judgment. Now, it's mercy, mercy, mercy, mercy.

James and John unwittingly, in their own zeal, they could potentially threaten the safety of some of the elect in this village. We know from John 6:39 Jesus is very serious about keeping all his elect safe to the very end. "This is the will of him who sent me," Jesus said, "that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day." And he is going to keep his word. Praise God! Any threat to the safety

of his elect, whether in this village or anywhere else, receives a stern rebuke from Christ. How unfitting, isn't it, that it's two of his Apostles, the foundation of the Christian church, that are threatening the safety, potentially, of the elect. No wonder he delivered such a stern rebuke, to teach us all a lesson.

So in the meekness of mercy, Jesus absorbs any insult. He resigns himself to the fact that he's not going to be received by this village; they're not going to be refreshed from their weariness. Verse 56, "They went on to another village." Probably an indication that they left Samaria altogether, went back into Jewish lands, maybe even traveled as far as Perea, other side of the Jordan River.

Mercy cost him, didn't it? It cost him refreshment and rest. It cost him nourishment, and not just his own personal nourishment, maybe he could accept that, but he's a leader. He's thinking of people around him who are going to suffer as well. Think about you in your own family, caring for your children. Yeah, you can endure a lot, but what about for the kids? What about for the grandkids? Jesus is thinking like that. Cost him. Inconvenienced him along with all of his party.

But listen, that's what the meekness of mercy is willing to endure, and especially in the interests of mercy and divine salvation. It's not just the Samaritans in this village that rejected Jesus, is it? All people did. "Jesus was in the world," John 1:10-11, "the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, his own people did not receive him."

Look, Jesus faced rejection from all people, Jew, Samaritan, Roman, everyone, us. Started in his hometown Nazareth. Those he thought were friends and neighbors, they're ready to throw him off a cliff by the end of the day. He's later rejected by the Gentile Gerasenes, Luke 8:37. Galileans eventually turn their backs on him as well. Here it's the Samaritans. Soon it's going to be the leader of the Jews who are going to reject him, not in ignorance like this Samaritans, but in full knowledge, seeing all of his miracles, seeing his acts of mercy, knowing his teaching. Whether in ignorance or knowledge, as the commentator Ellis said, "Jesus goes to the cross rejected by all."

It's through this Man of Sorrows, who's acquainted with grief, that God demonstrated his saving mercy, purchasing the salvation of all the elect, which includes both Jews and

Samaritans, and some of us Gentiles as well. Turn over to Acts 8:4 as we wrap up. You're no doubt familiar with Jesus' words to his Apostles, Acts 1:8, "You shall be my witnesses." Says, "You're going to receive power from on high when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and," where else, "Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Well, that happened in Acts 8:4-8. It says, "Those who were scattered," it's from the persecution in Jerusalem, "they went about preaching the word. And Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds," look at this, "with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip. When they heard him and saw the signs that he did, unclean spirits crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. And so there was much joy in that city."

Wow! Good thing we didn't nuke the village! In the sovereignty of God, there's no way, though, that their misguided zeal could thwart his will. Christ, whom God sent to show mercy, it's a God-like mercy that's firm and kind and meek. And that mercy triumphed over judgment. Beloved, that's the mercy we need to follow. That's the mercy we need to extend to others. Mercy

requires a firmness, a God-centered resolve to show true mercy, biblical mercy, which is God's mercy. When mercy is man-centered, it amounts to little more than the futility of social work without Christ. But anchored by the firmness of mercy, that God-centered resolve, mercy extends outward in an attitude of kindness to people, actions of tenderness and gentleness toward people in true spiritual need.

If God is at the center of our thinking, we act toward people with his interests in mind. We can be kind because it's not our initiative. It's not our will being done; it's his. We're, we're just agents of his mercy. And finally, when that firm resolve causes us to extend out in kindness, and our kindness is rebuffed, when our kindness and consideration toward others is returned with insult or even injury, mercy reacts to negativity, rejection, hostility, not in an attitude of vengeance, but an attitude of meekness, forbearance, long-suffering.

We're not out there trying to win arguments with people, dominate them. We're not trying to force an immediate change of heart. And we're certainly not going to seek vengeance when wronged. We're patient with people. We allow God's Spirit to do what only God's Spirit can do, and that is regenerate the heart,

change the nature, quicken the will, and grant faith to believe. That's meekness: recognizing that God is in sovereign control, and we are vessels of his mercy.

Grace Church, can we do that together? Can we do that together, here in our city, in our region, becoming God's missionaries of mercy to our city, region, state, beyond? I pray we do that, carry out our mission of mercy. Let's pray.

We ask for your help, Father, to, to do that's, to do what is humanly impossible to do. The Samaritans rejected Christ, and it was in their nature to do so because they didn't believe. James and John wanted to burn up the Samaritan village. It was their natural inclination based on rejection and insult. Father, we're no different. We have within us, in our natural condition, we want to exact vengeance right away. We have critical judgments, we have deep-seated bitterness. Father, let us repent of all those things. We pray that you would help us by the Spirit to examine ourselves, to uproot every bitterness and, and kill it, that we would destroy every prejudicial attitude, every bias, and never regard people according to the flesh, but to consider people as you do, as sinners in need of salvation.

We love you. We thank you for what this passage has taught us, and we just pray for your grace, by your Spirit, by your

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Word, to help us to obey, to be pleasing to you, that we would be sons of the Most High, who is merciful to the ungrateful and the evil. We pray that by doing this, many would be saved and sanctified. In Christ's name, amen.