

## The Model of Missionary Mercy, Part 2

Luke 9:51-56

June 9, 2019

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. Jesus, the model of missionary mercy. As we studied last week, we see that Jesus came to show mercy. God sent him to show mercy. Jesus came to show mercy, to minister God's mercy to a people in need. He ministered to many immediate physical needs, as we know, as we just sang about, but he went further, as we learned last week. He went further, deeper, to heal the deepest needs of the soul, and he did that in his preaching.

And in his preaching, he showed us that sin is the source of all sorrow. He showed us that transgression is the reason for our alienation from God and isolation from men. He showed us that iniquity is the cause for all our uncleanness, every

impurity. And so if we're to receive the fullness of God's mercy, it has to go beyond the physical, the outward, the temporal. It has to go deep, profoundly to our souls. We need to be forgiven of all of our sins.

And that's why, as we saw last time in Luke 9:51, "Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem." So let's look at our Bibles and read the text again this morning as we begin. "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."

We said that in that text there are three characteristics of mercy, and we covered the first one last time. As the model of missionary mercy, Jesus showed us first, first point in your outline, it should be written in there in your bulletin, in all,

and everything filled in for you, but 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.

As that great chapter demonstrates, though, most clearly, our griefs and our sorrows have come into the world because of sin. Our own griefs and sorrows are often because of our own sins. Worldly, social-justice kind of mercy, it gives money to the guy, say, begging at the freeway off-ramp. It gives clothes, gift cards, or whatever. And as soon as that worldly-minded do-gooder and that homeless guy part ways, what happens? That guy

takes whatever gift was given to him and turns it into cash. Clothing, gift cards, groceries, it all becomes a means to a different end, buying alcohol or drugs or whatever.

Is this every single time? Am I condemning every person that sits at a freeway off-ramp? No, most certainly not. But is it most of the time? Is it often? Yes, often. Don't take my word for it; ask anyone in law enforcement what they think because they've heard it all. Every panhandler, every person living on the street, they've heard every story. I just moved in. I don't have the check, yet. Need a little grocery money for my family, just to feed my family. I just need money for a bus ticket to get back home; I'm stalled up here and need to get back to Denver. I heard this one at the hospital just the other day, I was up here for my chemo treatment and ran out of gas. Could you spare a little money so I can have help to get back to my granddaughter? Oh, it pulls at your heart-strings, doesn't it?

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.

Two more characteristics of mercy we want to study. 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.

Number 2, 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. He's simply practicing in his life what he always practiced and what he taught back in Luke 6:27-28, "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you." And this in verse 31, "As you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. If you love those who love you, if you do good only to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? How are you different from anybody else? What credit is that to you?"

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.

So Jesus said, Luke 6:35, "Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great. You'll be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful even as your father is merciful."

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?

Remember the woman at the well? Let's turn over to John chapter 4, John chapter 4, and you just get a fresh perspective on that encounter. And as we skim that chapter, John chapter 4, we'll see, here, why Jesus might have had some hope about their reception here. We're also going to glean some insights in this chapter about Jewish-Samaritan relations that'll help us to

understand what's happening in our text, in Luke chapter 9.

Follow along as I read in John 4:1 and following.

"When Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John, although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples did, he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. And he had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there and so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour."

Love that little insight into Jesus' hu, full humanity, right? Look at verse 7, "A woman from Samaria came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. And the Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?' For," note the parenthetical comment, "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans."



Interesting comment, isn't it, by the author of John's Gospel, the narrator, who is John, right? The one who wants to call fire down. It was John writing this. His comment should make us pause and ask, why don't Jews have any dealings with Samaritans? What's going on there?

Many of you are reading through your annual, our annual Bible reading program along with the rest of our church. In our Old Testament reading, where are we? Kings, right? We're in Kings. It's the time of the divided kingdom. David and Solomon have died. Their lineage continues in the southern kingdom of Judah, but there are ten Israelite tribes who rebelled from the southern kingdom and followed Jeroboam, a slave, and became the northern kingdom of Israel. And the kingdom of Israel started in wickedness and blatant idolatry, and it continued that way all the way until its end in exile.

It was King Omri, he's the father of wicked King Ahab, of Ahab and Jezebel fame, bought the hill of Samaria. Omri bought the hill of Samaria according to 1 Kings 16:24. He bought the hill of Samaria, and he fortified it. That means he built a wall

and put towers up there. He called the name of the city that he built Samaria.

Samaria became the new capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel. Samaria rivaled Jerusalem in the southern kingdom of Judah. That city, Samaria, rose to such prominence that people would refer to the northern kingdom of Israel simply as Samaria. The city stood for the whole nation. It's kind of like people around the world might talk about Wash, in Washington, in Washington, referring to Washington D. C., but it refers to all of our country.

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, as we are reading in our daily Bible reading. But these wicked kings, the apostate priests that served the kings, the rebellious people that refused to listen to the Lord after repeated warnings, God finally judged the northern kingdom. They were conquered by Assyria, carted off into exile in 722 BC.

Now to settle the land that he just conquered, Sargon II, the king of Assyria, he incentivized the migration of people from the east, people who lived in and around the ancient city of Babylon, the Assyrian capital, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, Sepharvaim, and he gave them land deals, encouraged their migration to go and settle the recently vacated city of Samaria along with its surrounding towns and villages.

Smart move on his part to resettle this historically rebellious region with people would be sympathetic to Assyrian rule. Those people could go into Samaria, into that historically rebellious area, and serve the king of Assyria, serve Assyrian interests. They'd cultivate the land, they'd ensure its prosperity, pay their taxes. They'd make Samaria a reliable strategic partner and stronghold for Assyria in the land of Palestine. You can read about that whole project of repopulating in 2 Kings 17.

These Assyrian migrants, though, they were idolatrous pagans, horrendously idolatrous. 2 Kings 17:31 says, "The

Sepharvites burned their children in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim." Those are the people who moved to Samaria. They intermarried with the indigenous Israelites whom Sargon had left behind. They shared some of the same idolatry, the same customs, the same detestable practices. And it's their offspring that became known to us as Samaritans.

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.

By the time of the decree of Cyrus, Jewish return to the land in 536 BC, the Samaritans opposed and harassed the returning Jews at every single turn. You can read about that in Ezra and Nehemiah. There were taunts, jeers, threats of violence, strategically targeted bribes to stop the work on the temple and the wall, slanderous accusations, letters written. These Samaritans were incessantly hostile, always opposing, opposing, opposing.

But in spite of the Samaritan opposition, strengthened by the prophets, by the Word of God, Malachi, Haggai, and the rest, the Jews finished the temple in Jerusalem. They finished rebuilding the wall surrounding Jerusalem. They reinstituted sacrifice, they reestablished the practice of Jewish law, Jewish custom.

And now these Samaritans, in response to the construction, the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem, you know what they do? They build their own temple, their own temple on Mt. Gerizim. It was a deliberate rival to the Jewish temple and a return to an ancient instinct to reject anything Jewish, to reject any worship that's centered in Jerusalem.

Why Mt., why Mt. Gerizim? Because that's where, according to Moses in Deuteronomy, after entering into the Promised Land, Joshua was to assemble half of Israel on one mountain and half on another and recite things back and forth. You remember this? Half the people were to assemble on Mt. Gerizim to recite the blessings of God for obedience, and other half was to assemble on Mt. Ebal to recite the curses of God for disobedience.

So the Samaritans, by the way, they only accepted the Torah. They said everything beyond the Torah is a corruption of the text. They only accepted the Torah, the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. They accepted that. And in trying to one-up the Jews, they built their temple on a more biblical location, Mt. Gerizim, the God-ordained mountain of blessing. It's right there in the text. They're trying to claim biblical, historical priority over the Jews. They're trying to keep their own people from going back to Jerusalem to worship in Jerusalem at the new temple. They're trying to perpetuate the rivalry.

So that helps you see why in John 4:9, "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans." They are an impure, mixed-race people, vile offspring of Israel's apostates left in the land, and pagan idolaters from outside of the land, Gentiles, *goyim*. The Jews cursed the Samaritans in their synagogues during their daily prayers.

Can you imagine that? Can you imagine if every Sunday we got up here and prayed prayers of imprecation and curse on people from other countries? Wouldn't that be weird? It's only weird to us because we understand the mercy of God, that we are those cursed people. They would curse the Samaritans in prayer, asking God, get this, asking God to never allow a Samaritan to enter into eternal life. Hatred!

On the other side of this feud, Samaritans found plenty of reasons to hate Jews. Ezra 4:1-3, the Samaritans came to offer help in rebuilding the temple. "Let us build with you, for we worship your God as you do, and we've been sacrificing to him ever since the days of Esarhaddon, the king of Assyria, who brought us here." Sargon.

Sounds innocent enough, doesn't it? They're claiming to worship the same God. This is the original ecumenism. We're all of one, we're all one people, we're all children of God. In fact, we're your brothers. Let us help you. The governor, Zerubbabel, perceived their motives, and he refused this partnership. "You have nothing to do with us in building a house

to our God. We alone will build to the Lord, the God of Israel.” No partnership with idolaters. That was a right move. That was a good move. But that became fodder for the feud, adding insult after insult.

Later on, it was John Hyrcanus, the Maccabean ruler, he also served as high priest, he came to Mt. Gerizim in 112 BC, obliterated the temple, turned it into rubble. Didn’t do much to improve Jewish-Samaritan relations.

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. You took your life in your hands. William Hendrickson says, "So implacable was the resentment of Samaritans toward such Jewish pilgrims that instead of showing hospitality, they would hinder the travelers in every way, even to the extent of actually murdering some of them."

Josephus said much the same thing. He also said that the route to Jerusalem through Samaria was the quickest. He also said that Galileans often took the risk, but when he sent his friends through Samaria, having a bit of money, he took every precaution to ensure their safety. He says this, "I also sent 500 armed men with them as a guard, and I then wrote to my friends in Samaria to take care that they might safely pass through the country." Pretty severe hostility.

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. He's offering her life! Well, she doesn't know what he's talking about, so she runs back to familiar ground. She goes back to the Pentateuch, verse 12. She's claiming priority of Samaritan

ownership of the well. Again, Jesus, he sees her spiritual dullness; he overlooks any historic dispute about well ownership. It's just a distraction from what he really wants to tell her. Look at verses 13-14, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, whoever drinks of the water I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

But when she still isn't getting it, Jesus helps her to recognize that her needs go far deeper than physical thirst. They're far more serious than physical labor she might need to draw water out of a deep well. Her problems are not Samaritan-Jew in nature. Her needs are moral. Her issues are spiritual, and they have to do with the living God.

And so Jesus says to her, verse 16, "Go, call your husband and come here." It's not a low blow. He's not being unkind to her. He knows she's had five husbands, and the one she's now living with is not her husband. She's an adulteress. He knows that. He's drawing it out. He's looking past the superficial

presenting problems to get to the real need: forgiveness of sins.

Listen, if someone were to stick their hand in your face as you're walking down the street and demand from you some kind of offering for them so they don't have to work, but they can go buy more beer or drugs or whatever, and you looked at them square in the eye after a little bit of conversation and said, "Listen, your problem isn't needing food or groceries or a trip back to wherever. Your problem is sin. You're out on the streets. I don't know what circumstance brought you here. I'm not condemning that. But your problem is sin, and what you need is eternal life. Are you interested? Because I've got the message. 'Silver and gold have I none, but what I do have I give you.' Let me tell you about the Christ who saved me from my sin."

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 hospitality, 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.



Well, this early example of Jesus' kindness as we look back, go back to Luke 9, Luke 9:52, Jesus had every reason to lead with kindness and consideration and courtesy toward this Samaritan village. So Jesus sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered into a village of the Samaritans to make preparations for him. He refuses to entertain prejudices. Alfred Plummer said, "Some Jews taught that a Samaritan's bread was as defiling as swine's flesh." Jesus is more than willing to eat their bread. Anchored by a firm resolve to show the deepest mercy, Jesus is now eager to show kindness to these Samaritans, too.

So we've seen mercy characterized by firmness, verse 51, mercy characterized by kindness, verse 52. We'll wrap this thing up with a final point, 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 Baalzebub, 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 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.