

## “A Mission of Mercy”

Luke 9:51-56

Last week we gave attention to the highest virtue of Christianity, humility. Jesus is our example, for although He was fully God, He humbled Himself by putting on flesh in order to go to the cross, as the Lamb of God, making the once for all payment for all sin, by the perfect sacrifice of Himself (**Philippians 2:5-8**), “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Jesus was the supreme embodiment of God, yet He came as the Humble Servant of God, and therefore, we also are to exemplify humility in and through our lives, for this honors and pleases God.

**Matthew 5:5**, “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth,” (**Luke 14:11**), “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted,” (**1Peter 5:6**), “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.”

**James 4:6**, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” **10**, “Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”

Jesus gave an example of greatness (**Matthew 18:3-4**) by taking up a child in His arms and saying, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Today we are going to look at the true mission of the Messiah, God’s Son, Who came to earth on a mission of mercy.

**Read Luke 9:51-56...** I think it is interesting and somewhat disheartening that humility is a dying attribute in our culture, and because of that, mercy is also an endangered virtue. We see this played out every day in every way, and it isn’t getting better. But as Christians, children of God, witnesses of Christ crucified, resurrected, and coming again, we must earnestly display mercy in a world where mercy is desperately needed.

Both the Old and New Testaments praise the worthiness of mercy. Mercy is lovingkindness, it is unmerited kindness given to one who is in need of generosity, compassion, grace, forgiveness, charity, sympathy, etc.

It is said that God is both loving and just. If we only received His justice, we would have no hope, for only eternal condemnation would await us (cf. **Romans 3:10-12. 23; 6:23a**). But God is merciful, sending His Son to proclaim the message of forgiveness and eternal life, and then to make full payment on the cross for all sin, be buried, and then to rise on the third day to demonstrate His sovereign authority over sin, death, and judgement.

God is indeed a merciful and loving God, having forgiven us for our sins and granted us eternal life with Him, all this made effectual through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God’s Son (cf. **Romans 3:24; 5:8; 6:23b; 8:1**).

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God is the God of Truth, but He is also the God of Love, and so He is Merciful.

**1John 4:7-8**, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

**Psalms 86:15**, “But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth.”

**2Corinthians 1:3**, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.”

And so, as Christians we should exemplify God in us (**Luke 6:36**), “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” We are to show lovingkindness toward those who are in need; we are not to withhold loving compassion and care, but are to give it freely and generously.

**1Peter 4:8**, “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.”

**James 2:13**, “For judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.”

Back to our text, **Luke 9:51...** As I mentioned last week, Jesus’ Galilean ministry is about over, and he will soon be heading for Jerusalem, for the last time, where He will be put to death in about six months. Jesus’ personal ministry to the people was coming to an end, the focus now is the cross and resurrection (**Luke 9:51a**), “when the days were approaching for His ascension [lit. *lifting or taking up*]. Luke goes on to say (**Luke 9:51b**), “He was determined [lit. *set His face*] to go to Jerusalem,” this expresses Jesus resolve and single-mindedness of purpose to complete His mission in Jerusalem: bringing forgiveness for sins and eternal life through the sacrificial death of Himself; for although none of us are deserving of God’s mercy, God is merciful to those who believe in Him (cf. **Hebrews 11:6**).

**See again Luke 9:52-53...** This is rather surprising that Jesus would choose to go through Samaria, for most Jews would go out of their way to bypass traveling through that land. In fact, most Jews traveling south from Galilee to Judea would go east and cross the Jordan River, then head south to Perea, and then again west across the Jordan at Jericho. Most Jews didn’t want to defile themselves by going through the land of the despised and ceremonially unclean Samaritans.

Hatred between Jews and Samaritans was fierce and long-standing dating back to the days of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob). Jacob had twelve sons, whose descendants became twelve tribes of Israel.

The tribes of Israel divided into two kingdoms. The northern kingdom, called Israel, established its capital first at Shechem, a revered site in Jewish history, but later established its capital at the hilltop city of Samaria.

In 722 B.C. Assyria conquered Israel and took most of its people into captivity. The invaders then brought in Gentile colonists from Babylon and surrounding areas (cf. **2Kings 17:24**) to resettle the land. The Gentiles brought with them their pagan gods and idols, which

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the remaining Jews began to worship alongside the God of Israel (cf. **2Kings 17:29-41**), many of the Jews intermarried with these Gentiles (**Ezra 9:1-10:44; Nehemiah 13:23-28**).

Meanwhile, the southern kingdom of Judah fell to Babylon in 600 B.C. and its people, too, were carried off into captivity. But 70 years later, a remnant of 43,000 was permitted to return and rebuild Jerusalem.

The Samaritans who now inhabited the former northern kingdom opposed the repatriation and reestablishment of the nation of Israel.

The orthodox, full-blooded, monotheistic Jews detested the mixed marriages and worship of their northern half-breed cousins. So walls of animosity and bitterness grew for the next 550 years, with the end result being a deep hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans.

The Jewish leaders during the time of Christ retained a hatred for the Samaritans, just as the Samaritans did for the Jews. In **John 8:8** the religious leaders called Jesus a Samaritan, expressing their scorn and disdain for Him.

In **Luke 9:53**, Jesus sent some messengers ahead to find a place for Him and the Twelve to rest on their journey to Judea; but notice their request for food and lodging was rejected, “because they were traveling toward Jerusalem” no doubt, to worship at the temple.

The Samaritans had no place to worship, as their temple had been torn down by John Hyrcanus, a member of the Hasmonean dynasty, a priestly family that ruled Judea from 152 to 63 BC. He became high priest in 135 BC and between 111-105 BC, he enlarged Judea's borders through a series of military campaigns, destroying the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim and imposing Jewish laws and circumcision upon the inhabitants.

The Samaritans of Jesus time refused to recognize the Jerusalem temple as a proper place of worship, and therefore they refused to provide food and lodging to Jesus and His followers.

**See again Luke 9:54-56...** James and John consider the Samaritan refusal to provide food and lodging an insult to the Lord, so they ask Jesus if they should call down fire upon these Samaritans and destroy them.

Interestingly, Elijah had used this method of destruction in that very same region, when King Ahaziah (8th century BC) of the northern kingdom of Israel had sent a company of men to arrest Elijah and Elijah called down fire from heaven that incinerated the soldiers (cf. **2Kings 1:9-16**).

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Jesus rebukes James and John, and no doubt the others who didn't understand the ministry of mercy that the Son of God had come to fulfill; and the message they would proclaim long after Jesus was gone (**John 3:16-17**), “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.”

Jesus came to save lost sinners, even those who were hostile toward God and God's people, of which the Apostle Paul was one of the worse (**1Corinthians 15:1-7**), “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; **8-10**, “and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”

**1Timothy 1:12-17**, “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Prior to Paul's “come to Jesus meeting” on the road to Damascus, when he was converted to Christ, if he had died he would have gone to hell; but God is all-knowing, fully aware of all those who will come to Him.

I believe there were Samaritans at that time, living in the village that refused food and lodging to Christ and the Twelve, who would one day believe and receive Christ as Lord; and so, Jesus rebuked the Twelve (**Luke 9:55-56**), “‘You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.’ And they went on to another village.”

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It was not time for judgement to come upon those in that village, Jesus showed mercy on them, and He clearly demands that His followers also show mercy on those who have not yet believed. We must be purveyors of the Good News, that Jesus Saves Sinners!

Mercy is at the very heart of the Message of Christ, and may you never forget that you, as a child of God, are a recipient of God’s marvelous, merciful, lovingkindness that has come to you through Jesus Christ the Lord, and your main purpose for being alive is to tell others about God’s Son who came to save them, so that they can live for Him, now and forever, as Paul so clearly expresses, (**Galatians 2:20**), “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”

God’s people are to be humble people, because apart from Christ we have nothing to boast about; and for that reason, we ought to be merciful toward others, just as God in Christ has been merciful to us.

**Ephesians 2:1-10**, “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

**Micah 6:8**, “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

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